

PERISHER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 14 Winter 2015

Notes from the President

There has been plenty of action during the summer months.

Collaboration

In mid May the Thredbo Historical Society (THS) hosted the second annual gathering of alpine historical societies. The objective is to enable the various societies to work as a collaborative group for the mutual benefit of all. This has been an early desire of Perisher Historical Society (PHS) and has been embraced by the Thredbo and Mt Buller societies who have driven this forward.

An umbrella group is now established, provisionally known as Australian Alpine and Snowsports Historical Association (AASHA). The spirit of cooperation and collaboration has been embraced by all who have attended the two meetings, who represent all the Australian alpine areas, including Tasmania, and skiers from South Australia.

An immediate benefit of this cooperation was provided at the recent auction of Neville Locker's significant collection of memorabilia. PHS, Thredbo and Mt Buller were able to join as a consortium to pool funds with the view to purchasing some important items to ensure that they remained in the public domain. Graeme Holloway (THS Past President) attended the auction at Adaminaby and successfully bid for a number of items. These will be held

in common and circulated periodically.

Sydney Drinks

Again PHS was delighted to join with Thredbo to jointly host an evening held at the Royal Australian Historical Society's wonderful premises in Macquarie Street, Sydney. A short film by Charles Anton's son and a panel discussion with three of the Hughes family provided an insight into the construction of the mountain huts Kunama, Northcote Tow, and Albina, and the tragedies that later occurred, as well as the very early development of Thredbo.

Collection

The society has been the recipient of numerous items including 8 and 16 mm film which is being digitally converted.

We are keen to find both 8 and 16 mm film projectors to enable us to view films before conversion.

PHS People

Libby Anderson has relinquished her position due to the pressures of visiting family scattered around the globe. We are most grateful for her assistance over the past three years.

We are delighted to have Peter Southwell-Keely join the committee and the wealth of knowledge of the area that he brings.

Jan Glover has joined the



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workers assisting in all sorts of ways but especially with coordinating the newsletter layout. Jan is an accomplished photographer with artistic flair and a KAC member since she was in her crib.

Narelle Irvine answered my bleat for assistance with the website. It is great to have her on board. The momentum is palpable.

Our book – *Highway to Heaven* – has sold out (well nearly).

Second edition is being printed and should be here mid-July. Apparently the author is delighted.

Thanks to all for your continuing support.

Philip



New Members

We extend a warm welcome to the following

David Arnott
Birubi, Dinner Plain

Trissana Ski Lodge, Perisher

Warren Peck
Anton Huette, Australian Alpine Club Mt Hotham

Cliff and Helen Brake
Karralika

Kevin Hardy

50th Anniversary Celebrations

PHS congratulates the following clubs and their members in celebrating their fiftieth anniversary. They were all first occupied in 1965.

- * Avalanche Alpine Club
- * Guthega Ski Club
- * Kalymaro Ski Club
- * Kunapipi Ski Club
- * Narraburra Ski Lodge
- * Redwood Lodge
- * Southern Alps Ski Club
Charlotte Pass
- * Valhalla Lodge

Congratulations also to Perisher Manor, formerly The Valley Inn, which opened on 10 July 1965 and has been providing food, beverages, beds and happy times for thousands of skiers over that period. If only the walls could talk.



From the Australian Ski Year Book 1966:

“The big progress item of last winter at Perisher was the opening of The Valley Inn. The location and facilities of the new hotel had the effect of knitting the valley together, both in a visual and active sense. The Valley Inn became Perisher’s third modern hotel.

The large bars and bistro made the new hotel a natural gathering place for the area’s population.

Sixty guests and a staff of twenty-five are accommodated in the new hotel. The bistro seats 300 people, the restaurant 80 and the lounge bar 80. The building is decorated with a sense of alpine ruggedness and contemporary design. A mural of the alpine flowers of the Kosciusko region lends a brilliant touch to the comfortable lounge bar.”

A comment on dates: Whilst there are a number of dates that could be used (e.g. formation, incorporation, commencement of construction, etc.), PHS has adopted the year of the first winter occupation as it provides consistency.

Dates for your Diary

Hello in the Snow

The PHS is planning their informal get-together in Perisher during Nordic Week in August.

Please join us in the bar of Marritz Hotel from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm Tuesday 4 August for drinks and nibbles.

Perisher Cup 2015

Saturday 19 September



PHS Annual Dinner – a night at the movies

Held at Marritz on the Sunday of the brilliant Opening Weekend at Perisher this year, the PHS 8th Annual dinner was a great success. After pre-dinner drinks, guests were treated to a delicious meal, followed by some wonderful old movie footage presented by Warren Peck, with his first-hand commentary.

Warren, a foundation member of Warrugang and the Australian Alpine Club, who has been skiing at Perisher annually since the 1950s, put together a fascinating survey of skiing in the area from the 1930s and '40s up to the more recent Dash/Jump for Cash events at Perisher. Styles of skiing and ski wear have certainly changed over the years. Scenes of skiers riding the rope tow at North Perisher in the 1950s caused much hilarity. It was quite a challenge, especially for beginners, but better than walking up the slope.

The ingenuity and determination of early skiers was illustrated by a segment showing the construction of Illawong Lodge and the bridge that links it to the slopes of the Main Range. All material had to be rowed across Guthega Dam before being hauled up to the site on the Snowy River.

Many thanks to Warren and to Simone Beilicz, Chef Jay and the staff at Marritz for another memorable dinner. Thanks also to Jan Glover (photos) and Dave Woods (video) for recording the event.



Kevin and Lucy Blyton, Nan Adler



Jenny Owens, Matt Lyons



Elaine Doswell, Warren Peck



Nadia Johnston, Chris Anthony



Frank Zipfinger, Philip Woodman



Kevin Hardy, Pam Woodman, James Daniel



Warren Peck shows historic films



Marion Murri, Toni Sarri, Anne Collet

Below: Margaret Dennis, Ray Killen, Dorothy and Peter Stitt, Fay Pendergast



Wragge's Hut

by Wendy Cross

Scratch the surface in the right spot on Mt Kosciuszko's summit, and you might uncover a bottle containing a report, written in January 1892 by Adelaide businessman and philanthropist Robert Barr Smith, about his ascent of Australia's highest mountain.

Barr Smith was accompanied on the Kosciuszko trip by Adelaide University's revered foundation Professor of Anatomy, Archie Watson, who in 1867 had helped Alexander Black (later Victoria's Surveyor-General) build the summit cairn. Five years later, Barr Smith provided the initial funds – 150 pounds – to establish a weather station very close to the spot where he buried his message in a bottle.

The weather station, later known as Wragge's Observatory or simply Wragge's hut, was the brainchild of the eccentric Queensland Government Meteorologist, Clement 'Inclemency' Wragge.



Clement Wragge circa 1901



Wragge's Hut circa 1898

In December of 1897, before the hut was built, Wragge installed a number of scientific instruments and left three volunteer observers, his nephew Bernard Ingleby, Basil de Burgh Newth and retired shipmaster Charles Iliff, to take readings throughout the summer. They lived in an 'Arctic' tent until mid-February, when the camp was ripped apart by a ferocious storm, forcing them to retreat to Jindabyne.

The New South Wales Premier, George Reid, then agreed to provide 336 pounds for construction of a permanent building on the observatory site and a Cooma firm completed the work in May of 1898. Ingleby and Newth returned to their posts as weather observers but Iliff was replaced by Danish-born Harald Jensen.

Jensen provided a detailed description of the hut, and life on the roof of Australia, in an article first published in *The Lone Hand* of 1 June 1909 and later reprinted in Klaus Hueneker's book *Kiandra to Kosciusko*,

published in 1987.

According to Jensen, it had originally been intended to build the hut of granite quarried on the spot, but this idea was abandoned because the approach of winter meant that water used in the mortar would freeze, thereby ensuring the building's collapse in spring. Weatherboard was used instead, to erect a hut with two rooms each measuring 3.3 m by 2.7 m, a flat galvanised iron roof well bolted down, a large stone fireplace and three windows of inch-thick glass fitted with storm shutters. Granite boulders were stacked against the external walls.

The hut was equipped with two primus stoves, kerosene and ample firewood carted to the summit on bullock drays. The men wore sheepskin coats, fur hats and gloves and thigh-high gumboots and were well-supplied with high-carbohydrate food and drinks but no alcohol. Their sleeping bags were similar to those used by the famed

Norwegian explorer, Fridtjof Nansen, and Ingleby had additional warmth supplied by his St Bernard dog, Zoroaster.

By mid-June, the hut was completely buried by snow, with access via a snow tunnel that had to be shovelled clear non-stop during exceptionally bad weather. The men excavated two other tunnels leading to the woodheap and the frozen meat store but did not realise until spring arrived, that Zoroaster had also tunnelled into the butcher's shop.

The scientific instruments had to be read regularly throughout each 24-hour period but when the weather was fine, Ingleby, Newth and Jensen also found time to enjoy skiing. As Ingleby wrote, they "...raced wildly down the mountain side like dogs let loose from the chain....we had many a terrible 'buster' before we became experts."

The three weather observers even went skiing on moonlit nights, and Ingleby described the obvious danger of this activity as lending "a special charm". But far more dangerous were the monthly trips to Jindabyne via Friday Flat to post the scientific data to 'Inclemency Wragge' in Brisbane and bring back mail and supplies. At various times, almost every observer over the five-year period of the observatory's operation had a near-death experience en route.

The hut was improved in 1899 by the addition of the sloping rooftop entry chute which gave it its unique appearance. Ingleby and Jensen had resigned to pursue other interests but Newth was joined by Leslie Burcher and later, Wragge's eldest son,



Wragge's Hut, summer 1899

Egerton. Another of the Wragge boys, Rupert, also spent a few months at the observatory.

A total of 14 volunteers served as observers on Kosciuszko's summit but, in early June of 1902, the NSW Government advised that it could no longer provide finance for maintenance beyond July 1. Wragge appealed in numerous Eastern States newspapers for private funds to continue the work but nowhere near enough was subscribed and in mid-July his staff vacated the premises. Most of the scientific instruments and some of the stores were eventually retrieved but much, including

what Wragge described in both *The Brisbane Courier* and *The Telegraph* as "a unique little library" was left to rot.

Wragge's hut was then maintained by the NSW Intelligence Department (which became the NSW Tourist Bureau in 1915) as a summer shelter. After the Hotel Kosciusko opened in 1909, summer picnic parties on Kosciuszko became popular, with fashionably attired men and women conveyed to the summit by coach to sip tea and nibble cakes in the sunshine, oblivious to the bush rats occupying the old building. In 1910, Kosciusko Alpine Club



Tourist party to Wragge's Hut

members Herbert Schlink, Oscar Paul, John Cosgrove and Arthur Pitt posed on the observatory roof for a photo taken as proof of their successful winter ascent of Kosciuszko.

Wragge's hut burnt down some time between June 1913, when it was seen intact by ski tourers on nearby Mt Etheridge, and April 1914, when a writer using the nom-de-plume Vesta described a trip to the summit on horseback for an article published in *The Queenslander* on 11 April. In

it, he said "Wragge's Hut, the remains of which can be seen, was destroyed by lightning on Christmas Day" but did not explain how he was able to fix the date of the fire so precisely. However, other visitors to Kosciuszko later that year noted that the building no longer existed.

A century on, no trace of Wragge's hut remains. But does Robert Barr Smith's message in a bottle still lie somewhere on Kosciuszko's summit? The truth is, nobody knows.



The Schlink party at Wragge's Hut, 1910.
State Library of NSW.

Snowfields colder than Antarctica

By BRETT de VINE

AUSTRALIA recorded its lowest temperature yesterday - -23°C - a mark well below the average in Antarctica for this time of year.

The mercury fell to the new low at Charlotte Pass in the Snowy Mountains about 2am and prompted even seasoned snow dwellers to complain about the cold.

Residents and workers at Charlotte Pass told of their eyelashes sticking, clothes turning to ice and instruments malfunctioning in the extreme temperatures.

Bureau of Meteorology spokesman Steve Simons said the conditions were due to clear skies, light winds and a high pressure system over south-eastern Australia.

Mr Simons said because Charlotte Pass was situated in a valley, cold air rolled down the mountains and sat in the small village, creating colder temperatures than on some of the highest peaks.

The previous low, also recorded at Charlotte Pass, was to -22.2°C on July 14, 1945.

Mark Robinson, who operates the snow-making machine at the pass, was transformed into a walking snowman as he braved the conditions.

"Some water from the machine sprayed into my face and my eyelashes instantly froze together. I couldn't open them," he said.

"The water also froze down the front of my suit and it turned to ice.

"I certainly have never felt that cold since I have been here."

Joanne Mills, who works at Charlotte Pass Village, said an instrument used on one of the snowmakers to record temperatures went haywire.

"The graph went right off the page once the temperature went below -10°C . It just plunged that quickly," she said.

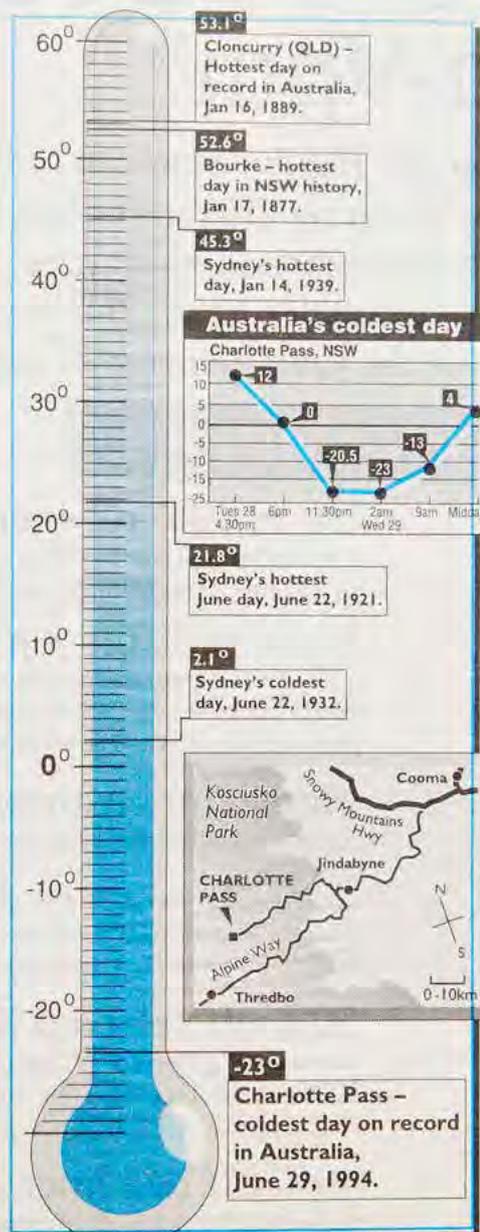
"According to our other instruments it reached -23°C about 2am and did not get back near zero until about midday."

Meanwhile, at the Federal Government's Casey station in Antarctica, meteorologist Neil Adams said his colony was experiencing "quite warm" conditions - the temperature was around -6°C yesterday.

"But -23°C is pretty cold for even down here. The average temperature for this station in June is about -10°C ."

Mr Simons said: "Obviously the Snowy Mountains, because of the altitudes, is the coldest area in Australia.

"A combination of the high pressure over the area, very light winds and clear skies are perfect for these sort of temperatures.



Charlotte Pass

June 29, 1994

coldest day

on record

in Australia.

-23°C

Cutting from the
Sydney Morning Herald,
courtesy Bob Dix.

Alpine Bindings

by Peter Southwell-Keely

A recent death notice for amateur historian, Alan Andrews, described him as a cross-country skier. These days, a person reading those words would think of someone using very skinny, probably edgeless, skis with New Nordic Norm bindings, soft, slipper-type boots and skiing on prepared, groomed trails. That does not at all describe Alan Andrews, who rarely, if ever, skied in that fashion. Alan was a ski tourer, always off-piste, who used alpine touring skis with bindings that could be adjusted for walking or climbing and also for downhill skiing.

This description of Alan stimulated the present article which is a summary of the way alpine bindings have changed through the years. It does not claim to be completely comprehensive and is simply my view.

Skiing in Australia began at Kiandra in 1861, and until 1909, Kiandra was the only place in the country where skiing occurred. The skis were made from mountain ash and the bindings were a simple leather strap into which one kicked one's boots. Hence the skis were known as Kiandra kick-ins. The size of the strap could be adjusted by leather thongs in the middle. There was nothing, other than the strap, to hold the boots in place. This type of binding continued to be used in Kiandra until the 1930s.



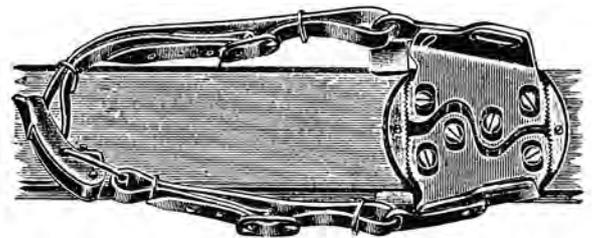
Kiandra kick-in skis owned by Phyllis Dowling

The Hotel Kosciusko at Diggers Creek opened in 1909 and for several years the traditional Kiandra bindings were used. The first European binding seen at the Hotel Kosciusko in 1913 was probably the Norwegian Huitfeldt, developed originally in 1894 and subsequently modified several times. The malleable iron toe-piece was passed through a mortise in the ski and bent up on both sides. The holes in the sides of the toe irons held a leather strap which passed over the instep of the boot, holding it in place. The mortise in the ski also took the leather heel strap. A third leather strap passed over the instep of, and underneath the boot, holding the heel strap in place. Although very popular for some time, the malleable iron toe-piece tended to move and the bindings became loose. Also the heel strap tended to wear badly through movement in the mortise.

An improvement on the Huitfeldt was the Alpina which possessed much stronger toe-irons which were readily adjustable to any size of boot. The toe irons were fixed to the upper surface of the ski and not through a mortise. The heel straps were fixed to metal hinges on the toe-irons so that practically no wear occurred on the leather.



Huitfeldt binding



Alpina Binding



The Unitas Binding

The Unitas binding was similar to the Alpina but with the distinct advantage that one could alter the binding without removing one's skis. This was very popular during the thirties.

After the Second World War, when imports from Europe were erratic and ski equipment in short supply, Bill Kenyon of KAC made a binding in Australia which was modeled on the Unitas which he called the Bogong binding. Bill sold his bindings for 2-3 years in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Arthur's Pass, New Zealand.

I have included a photo of a modern Targa Telemark binding to show that it is really only an update of the Alpina, Unitas and Bogong bindings.



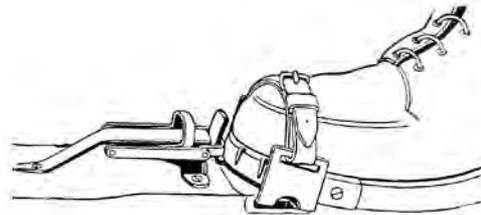
Bill Kenyon's Bogong binding



The author's Targa binding

A different type of binding which was very simple and very popular in Europe was the B.B.B. A metal clip was screwed to the ski in front of the toe iron. The clip engaged with a hook that was screwed to the toe of the boot. When the lever of the clip was adjusted into position, it drew the boot forward into the toe iron.

None of the bindings mentioned thus far restrained the heel of the boot to the ski. This is understandable as there were no ski tows until the 1930s and skiing involved a lot of walking along the flat and climbing hills as well as going downhill. Hence the need for free heel movement. This all changed with the introduction, in 1932, of the Kandahar binding.



The B.B.B. binding



The Kandahar binding

The Kandahar binding was a real game changer in several ways. It was the first binding that could be adjusted to allow free heel movement for walking and climbing and heel restraint for downhill skiing.

Instead of a leather strap around the heel, the Kandahar used a steel cable that was attached to a forward-closing, highfield lever in front of the toe iron. The highfield lever contained about five different positions for the cable allowing plenty of adjustment. The cable contained a steel spring behind the boot and did not stretch like a leather heel strap thus allowing tension to be retained.

The steel cable was led around the boot via two sets of guides (downpulls) on the sides of the ski. For walking and climbing the cable was confined to the forward set of guides, allowing free heel movement. If the skier wished to ski downhill, he/she would lead the cable through both sets of guides, thus firmly holding down the heel of the boot on the ski. In the Kandahar binding

illustrated, the forward and rear cable guides are closer than they would normally be, probably because the boots were very small.

The Kandahar binding remained a firm favourite for over 20 years, its only drawback being that it was not a safety binding.

The first safety bindings appeared during the fifties and used a cable and downpull configuration like the Kandahar. They differed in having a toe piece which could rotate sideways and a highfield lever that would open when excess pressure was applied to the heel cable. This allowed escape from sideways and forward falls.

The Marker Simplex, which appeared in 1953, was one of the first of the sideways-opening toe pieces and is shown combined with a cable attached to a backward-closing Tyrolia highfield lever that is held in place by a small hook over its tip. This restraining hook is connected to a spring that, under excessive heel pressure, pulls the hook over the end of the lever, releasing it and, with it, the heel cable.



The Marker Simplex toe piece, cable and Tyrolia highfield lever



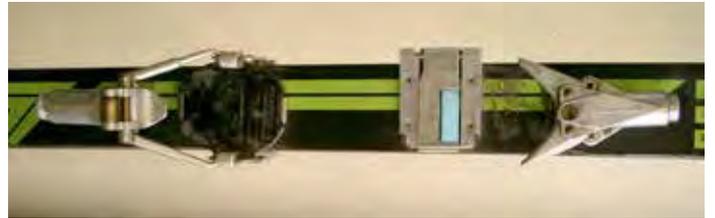
The Tyrolia toe piece, cable and Salomon highfield lever

A similar arrangement is shown for a Tyrolia toe piece and a forward-closing Salomon highfield lever. In this case the cable is attached to a spring device within the highfield lever. When subject to excess pressure, the spring device would click backwards and release the tension on the cable, allowing the heel to release.

Later in the fifties, Marker decided to abandon the cable and introduced a turntable for the heel but the boot was restrained by a longthong leather strap and could not release in a fall. Marker did not introduce a safety heel release until the mid sixties.



The Marker Simplex toe piece and turntable with longthong



The Look Nevada toe piece and Grand Prix heel piece

The Look company introduced its rotating Nevada toe piece in 1950. By 1962, it had modified the original toe piece and added the Grand Prix heel piece. This Nevada system (illustrated) was the forerunner and prototype for many bindings that followed. The 2014 Salomon binding is clearly derived from the Look system.

This brings us back to Alan Andrews who was a ski tourer. I do not know which bindings he used so I have illustrated touring bindings with my own. The binding is shown in the walking/climbing mode. The manufacturer is Emery, a French Company, which has used, essentially, the Look Nevada system.



The Salomon binding, 2014



Author's Emery touring binding in walking/climbing position

Lou Vozab

by John Davis

Lubor Vozab (known as Lu or Lou) was one of the many unrecognised pioneer workers involved in the early ski resort development in NSW. Lu was quite a character, friends with all he met except Park officials, and a member of the group affectionately known as 'the mad Czechs'. Sadly he passed away on 9 January this year, aged 87.

Initially, a job with a hydrographic company contracting to the Snowy Mountains Authority brought Lu to the area. He joined the Ski Tourers Association (now Australian Alpine Club) and was involved in building Kunama and Albina Lodges and the Mt Northcote ski tow.

After a couple of years as manager of Albina Ski lodge, where conversations with his imaginary friend Max alarmed some visitors, he moved to Perisher Valley for a stint as co-manager of Warrugang Lodge. One of his partners in this venture was Merv Burrows and their tenure was legendary in the Valley for the mayhem and the fun had by all.

In 1963 the Australian Alpine Club asked Lu and his wife to open and manage Perisher Huette, their new lodge in Perisher. After two years Lu, knowing his obligations to Dawn and the difficulty of raising a family in Perisher Valley in the crazy sixties, reluctantly said good bye to the mountains and settled on the hills at Katoomba.

Pat and I have many happy memories of Lu's sense of fun and disdain for authority. We



first met him at the Chalet in 1955. Lu was bunked down at the weather station but always seemed to be involved in the activities of our group, which included Adam Zapenski and Dawn Bullman, Lu's future wife.

Lu was a pretty good skier and in 1962 won a Golden Eagle in the speed event held on the Main Range near Kunama. The new Mrs Vozab promptly got herself a Golden Eagle, no mean feat as only 14 Golden eagles were ever awarded.

The Saturday night schnitzel at Warrugang incorporated one of Lu's legendary pranks. One poor unsuspecting guest would receive a wettex, cut to shape, coated with egg and breadcrumbs and lightly browned in olive oil. Naturally locals and any members from the previous week would be in on the joke and had a riotous time watching the poor victim, too embarrassed to complain, trying to eat their schnitzel. Wettex came in many colours and it was particularly amusing to watch the diner cut into a light blue or bright green 'schnitzel'.

Unable to cut himself off completely from the snowfields after his move to Katoomba, Lu included a jigsaw postcard with a snowfield scene in the range

of souvenirs he was creating and selling. Corny but a good seller – you wrote on the card, pulled it apart, put all the pieces in an envelope and sent it off to family or friends who had to put the jigsaw together to read the message.

One souvenir that Lu desperately wanted but didn't ever get was the mile peg three miles from the summit of Mount Kosciuszko. He was always crooked on me for having the last mile peg on the Kosciuszko Road – K1 on one side and J30 on the other. These posts were made of solid concrete, with as much buried below the ground as showing above. K1 was mine, K2 was gone but K3 was still there. Traffic was no longer permitted beyond Charlotte Pass, so mile posts were obsolete and a blot on the landscape.

Lu packed a wheelbarrow and some tools into his car, drove through the Park entry gates late at night, on up to Charlotte Pass, parked near the barrier and headed off in the dark towards his goal, 3 miles away. Somehow he got the post out and with guts, sheer determination and strength managed to get the heavy, unbalanced load back to the Pass just as signs of dawn were in the sky. Unfortunately a Park vehicle arrived as he was loading his prize into the VW. Exhausted, Lu was unable to answer any questions about what he was up to and took off down the mountain, only to be met by a road block set up by the Park and the local cop. The Park confiscated the mileage peg and no charges were laid but the cop later admitted he was secretly overawed by Lu's feat.

Postscript: Ruth Lyons (Lu's daughter) provided the photo and the following words about her father.

"I think my father had some of his happiest days in the Snowy Mountains. My sister and I have very fond memories of skiing with Dad: "follow me", he'd say to us, as he disappeared over a precipice. You'd be hard pressed to describe Dad as graceful, except when he was on skis. To watch Dad ski a slope, was like watching a butterfly delicately, but purposefully, alight at each turn, then with a slight movement carry on to the next - truly poetry in motion."



Perisher in the Sixties

PHS has been given permission to reproduce these black and white prints from the Powierza collection. The photographer, Joe Gois was a member of Warrugang Ski Club and these images have been scanned from his fine darkroom prints.

It appears that they were taken in the late 1960's. These and other images will be added to the photographic collection on the PHS website.



Corroboree Lodge far left, Eiger Chalet in the Centre, Rock Creek on the right



Back Perisher



Ku-ring-gai Lodge far left, Telemark Lodges centre with Sundeck Hotel on the hill behind, Cronulla Lodge far right

Perisher in the Sixties

Images by Joe Gois, from the Powierza collection



Above: The Roman Catholic Church



Mt Perisher Chairlift - note the queue of skiers straggling up the hill

Below: Centre Valley (note the Clipper Tours bus)

