



Echo from the Mountains

Victorian High Country Huts Association Inc – A0043804Y

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome to the second year in the life of the VHCHA. 2004 started with the Pioneer Workshop in Omeo over the Australia Day Weekend (see full report and pictures in middle pages) as a celebration of and tribute to the people who were affected by the January 2003 fires.

Although our amazing Australian bush recovers very quickly the scars of the fires of 2003 will be evident for many years, and long after the bush has recovered and homes (& huts) re-built the memory will stay forever for the bush people.

We all know people with vivid memories of other Victorian fires like 1939, 1967, 1983, and of course we'll all remember 2003. Events like the VHCHA Inaugural Bushfire Australia Day Weekend Revival provide an opportunity for us to remember in a positive way, by acknowledging what has gone before and learning skills to enable us to re-build.

Newsletter Contributions

The members' newsletter of the VHCHA is to be published quarterly – March, June, September & December. Editorial deadline is the 15th of the previous month. In time we will offer members the opportunity to place commercial adverts in the newsletter but for the time being any member who wishes to advertise an Alpine related event or activity for a non-profit organisation may do so.

TO ADVERTISE OR TELL US A STORY CONTACT:

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PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT

- The Workshop and Hut Construction at Omeo was very successful – see separate report in this newsletter.
- The Website has been upgraded – still more work to be done and as a communication tool expect it to change from time to time.
- Units and assignment of caretaker groups is ongoing. If you are thinking of adopting a hut visit our website and contact the appropriate HMO. See back page of this newsletter for contact details for HMOs and their coordinator Barry Hazeldine.

- Caretaker's handbook has been printed and is available from your local HMO.
- Action on huts approved for rebuilding last year through Parks Victoria has to be postponed until the grazing licences are sorted out.
- Good news – after 12 months of negotiations rebuilding McNamara's Hut at Buckety Plain is approved. Organisation for this hut is underway and it is hoped that construction will begin prior to winter this year.
- Sad news - we lost Wilkinson's hut 3 weeks ago; on preliminarily talks with Parks Victoria we will not be permitted to rebuild it. This is a great loss as Wilkie was a pioneer skier and photographer of the High Country Region.
- We are in negotiations with Parks Victoria to rebuild Roper's in the spring even though this is one of the grazing licence huts. It is used extensively by bushwalkers.
- The Alpine Advisory Committee meets soon and we need to ensure requests required to go through them are tabled at that meeting, as it may be six months before they meet again.
- Parks Victoria and Department of Sustainability & Environment recently requested submissions to tender for the Assessments of the Huts as part of the Fire Recovery Program. Graeme Butler and Associates were awarded the contract and have requested my services to assist on the historical aspect of the report. Prior to committing myself I sent an email to our committee members and HMOs to ensure they were happy for me to accept the job and didn't see it as a conflict of interest. All responded positively and agree that it will be beneficial to the VHCHA. So over the next 6 months I will be assisting in the report. If you have relevant historical information about any huts it would be greatly appreciated. The last report was done 15 years ago and due to lack of time was not as well researched as it could have been. This is an opportunity to correct errors, add vital information and ensure the report is as accurate as possible. The final report will become part of the future management and recommendations in the Alpine National Park Management Plan.

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PIONEER WORKSHOP Australia Day Weekend, 24-26 January 2004

From Dianne Carroll – roving reporter, major player and chief organiser...

“The Australia Day weekend in Omeo was a major success and holding the Pioneer Workshop, incorporating the construction of a new hut proved to be memorable.

People travelled from as far as Townsville and one even flew home from overseas to photograph the results. A variety of people joined forces to construct the new “Roughriders Hut” in just 2½ days, whilst others joined the workshops. Then we had other people who just looked on in amazement as over 70 volunteers set to work.

The Workshop

Graham Fall, Ron Alcote and Jerry Gregg attended the workshop to explain, demonstrate and assist with their unique skills. Graham Fall explained the use, maintenance and operation of a diverse range of pioneering implements. During his demonstration, it was all tools down on the hut construction and everyone listened, somewhat in awe. As Graham explained each implement, the city carpenters were sure to be thinking that the inventor of the electric tools was “God” himself!



Ron Alcote is the last Sleeper Cutter officially registered (and still is). He is amazing to watch and can use a broad axe like a chef can use a paring knife. During the weekend he broadaxed the mantle piece from the raw log to the finished product and it now sits proudly in the “Roughriders Hut”. Ron is well known and was involved with making the sleepers for the Walhalla Railway line which has recently reopened.
Photo at left – Ron in action.

Jerry Gregg has done a vast amount of adze work over the years and has contributed much to the Kosciusko Huts Association. Jerry showed his skills and explained the process of adze work while many listened intently and enjoyed the wonderful stories he had to offer.

A whole lot of people involved with the workshop were able to test their skills and with the guidance of Graham and Jerry set to with the morticing axe and started on the post and rail fence. The end result now stands proudly adjacent to the hut and looks a picture.

The “Roughriders Hut”

Starting with raw logs 3ft through, Lucas Sawmills arrived with two portable spot mills to cut the weatherboards and internal structural timbers. Starting at 6.30am on the Saturday, they had all the timber cut by 10am. Volunteers then moved the timbers to the constructions site like marching ants. *Photo at right – portable sawmill from Lucas gets a workout.*



The Northeast Freemasons Task Force arrived a day earlier and along with Peter and myself marked out the site and got things prepared for the weekend. The “Lucas Boys” arrived, but we were still awaiting the logs, which were obtained via the DSE and cut and transported by Gill Parker of ORC Logging Contractors.

At 5pm Friday evening the truck arrived and all we had to off load them with was a tractor...well the first one came off OK, but the following two caused some drama. The workers pushed, tugged, swore, cursed, sweated and still the logs would not budge...in the mean time I was ringing any and everyone to try to get additional machinery, but no one was home. While I was convincing a chap at Ensay, who had just got home from Omeo, to come back and help us, the workers had a bright idea. They put an endless chain around the log on the ground and 5 minutes later the 2nd log was off followed quickly by the third log. Saved the man in Ensay a trip!

In the week leading up to the event, Peter and I went out and hand picked the rocks for the chimney and collected the brickie sand from Swifts Creek – both donated by Richards Quarries. The corrugated iron was donated by Dungy Plumbing and came off the original Foard’s Building in Bairnsdale. We went to pick it up but it was too long, so it was transported to Omeo by Grinters Transport. The capping for the roof and additional iron was donated by Mike and Judy from up on the hill. At the last minute we realised there was no window, so after a tour around asking for old windows Sandy of the Manse B & B came to the rescue and we obtained two of the original windows from the Manse (built in 1872).



PIONEER WORKSHOP Australia Day Weekend, 24-26 January 2004

The roofing nails were donated by Peter McNamara, with additional ones being donated by Omeo Rural Hardware. The construction nails were donated by Stretch from the "Lang Lang" group. Glenn and Judy Marshall donated the cement, with several other offers to do the same coming after the Marshall offer was accepted (thanks to those people too).

The poles were sourced from trees burnt in last year's fires and many volunteers got black barking them. Enough were obtained to do the roof structure in poles – but when the chippies saw the quality timber coming from the "Lucas Mill" they soon changed our initial plans – and all this before 8am.

Due to the amount of timber cut for the Hut, our initial timber source for the Workshop was cut short, so a team had to head bush for some more. Those that remained had postholes to dig - 24 of them! The ground was hard and the soil like concrete, fine and powdery. After about an hour and a half, and knowing what was ahead we called in the local contractor, Marty Smith, who had them all dug in about 10 minutes...I have never seen so many relieved faces.

By morning tea the poles were in and the construction was well underway. And the rest just kept happening, by Saturday night the iron was on the roof and then those that were still fit enough headed for the dance at Benambra, others chose to dance in their swags.

The dance was enjoyed by all, with the local CFA raising \$1200 for the evening (we sold about \$200 worth of raffle tickets for them on Saturday). Turned out the band was distantly related, so I asked them if they wanted to join us around the campfire on Sunday night – also that there was a camp oven roast on the menu for \$10 a head - they agreed and paid the \$10 each too.

Sunday saw the weatherboards and the chimney constructed, the doors made and erected, the windows inserted and the capping go on the roof. It was all systems go and those that were not assisting with the construction were testing their newly taught skills on the new post and rail fence, while others were on shovels and picks.

Sunday night roast was served and the "Ken Forster Band" began to play – having arrived with amplifiers, mixers and the works. President, Fiona Magnussen made a speech, I presented the President of the Omeo Rodeo Committee, Ron Connley with a plaque for the wall of the hut and then my Uncle Charlie Rundell and hubby Peter gave the crowd a few songs.

When the lightning came, the thunder roared and the heavens opened to welcome rain the music continued under cover in the Rodeo Food Shed.

Monday saw the final touches and by 11.30am the chimney was completed, the broad axed mantel-piece erected, the rubbish cleaned up and the tools packed...then Gordon was given the honour of lighting the fire.

The Roughriders Hut (*photo at right*) has been constructed on the Omeo Rodeo Ground and has been donated to the Rodeo Committee to commemorate their 50th anniversary, which will be held on Easter Saturday. It is in an ideal position that will attract visitors to the region and be a fantastic promotional tool for the VHCHA. There are many people who have heard of the huts, but would never be able to access them for many reasons – now they can.



Horsehair Hut

A crew, lead by Vicki and Ken of the Range Rover Club, got together on Saturday and with staple gun, whipper snipper and white-wash, headed out to do some finishing touches and a clean up at the hut. The timber is now weathered and looking great and the grass has grown! Any future visitors may like to throw in the whipper snipper and clear a bit more grass – we don't want to loose this one!

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all those that attended, you all know who you are and as Projects Manager, I could not have asked for a better crew. To think so many people can work so well together and achieve so much in such a short time is an organiser's dream come true. To have such a success makes all my time and effort worth while, and to think in 50 years, our children and grandchildren can visit this hut and know that we contributed to building it. For those who would have liked to attend, but due to circumstances couldn't, thank you for your emails, phone calls and letters of support. Your moral support has also helped the VHCHA thrive and achieve all it has done in the last 12 months."

Editors Note – Our thanks to Dianne and her husband Peter for their passion and untiring efforts on behalf of the huts and the VHCHA.



HUTS MAINTENANCE OFFICERS

The Huts Maintenance Officers, known as HMOs, are the lynch pin of the VHCHA charter. Our Huts Maintenance Group Leader is Committee member Barry Hazeldine. This is his story...

"My interest in Bushwalking and Huts started almost 20 years ago after an introduction to the pastime by an old mate, and now veteran Bushwalker Tony Bridge. Since that introduction I have walked a large portion of the Victorian Alps and visited a number of huts.

My interest in renovating and rebuilding huts started after listening to a local ABC Radio interview with a Parks Victoria Ranger. During the interview it was mentioned that Parks lacked the resources, mainly labour, to maintain some of the cattleman's high country huts. I remember thinking at the time that the organisation to which I belong, Freemasons Victoria, would have members with the skills and talent to take on a renovation project.

I first made contact with Peter Jenkins, Ranger in Charge at Bright who introduced me to Chris Mercier, a Park Ranger, and together we planned the renovation of Weston's Hut. When I say "we planned" I refer to our group the North East Freemasons Task Force, which is a local offshoot of the larger Statewide Task Force.

Having no building expertise myself, the technical and physical building skills came from within the group and it seems to work. Since Weston's we have renovated Dibbin's, Roper's, Edmonson's, Mount Wills and Wallace Hut. We were also involved with the VHCHA in the rebuilding of Horsehair Hut and recently the Roughriders Hut at Omeo."



From l-r, Roger Sievwright, Gordon McKissack, Bob Johnstone (HMO Bogong), Barry Hazeldine (HMO Group Leader), and kneeling Graham Fall (expert in pioneer tools) – beside the new Horsehair Hut.

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CONTACTING US

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www.vhcha.org.au

WE ARE ALL "FRIENDS"

VHCHA has been recognised by Parks Victoria as a "Friends" type of group and we are listed in the "Volunteers" section of their website www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/1volunteers.cfm.

We have also joined the Friends Network www.home.vicnet.net.au/~friends which "provides a means of communication between the hundreds of Victorian community groups which support conservation reserves, natural areas, historic places and indigenous flora and fauna species" to quote from their newsletter, which you can view on their website.