

"There is still snow, there was a top up, and there are plenty of beds in September issue"

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The steak knives are free:

"You could see the snow on Hotham from the air in May." That's what I wrote in the last journal. So much promise. The base that your editor championed turns out to be a lot of water which made the snow want to disappear. Gosh, skiing in OZ prepares shy, young people for a lifetime of disappointment. Perhaps the only good thing about the mountains, is that in 2100 when Port Phillip Bay is lapping the base of Feathertop, the lodge will have sea views.

The snow seemed to build up quickly enough, then just didn't go anywhere but away. It was replaced regularly enough in small doses but the big dump eluded us. It threatened...and then rained...or even in July north winds brought weather that was far too warm. There was never quite enough snow to open Blue Ribbon until the very windy days in late August but the top parts to the run could be skied in late July and early on it was groomed.

Did anyone really care? Of course not; skiing in OZ is not for the faint hearted or the easily depressed. It feeds the pathetically optimistic and your editor is firmly in that camp. If you seriously want to ski you learn the trade at Hotham dodging rocks, creeks, trees, making compulsory turns and avoiding certain damp or death in the creek and periodically travel abroad.

This year the skiing shouldn't have been as good as it was. It never made a metre depth but in late July and early August there was skiing as good and as challenging as it gets in Coles Bowl, Gotcha, One Tree and any number of runs feeding off the trail out to Spargo's and down into the little valleys feeding the Mary's Slide home trail. In Heavenly Valley Purgatory Gully (Peach Bowl when it's full of wind-blown snow) is fantastic.

Ginny Spring's head-first display off the edge of Mary's Ridge, pirouetting around rocks on her helmet and coming up close to feet first just as she entered Coles Bowl, is not easy to top but there were some solid performances from Alexandra Whelan and James Hulance who mostly remained vertical.

One could, predictably, only describe Tim Chalke's regular work on the hill as committed, capable and diligent; his silence after your editor headed uncomfortably towards the creek commendable.

And there's still about the same amount of snow now here as there was in late July. On Sun Run it's nearly a metre of the man-made stuff and elsewhere on the groomers there's still plenty for man, beast and children of varying sizes and parentage.

The rally cross (is that what you call it?) trail attracted keen interest and the terrain park on the summit looked better than I've seen it for years. On bad days, and there seemed to be a few in late July and early August, the best runs were in Zirky's cafe and some members found their way "off pissed" in the bar.

Len Allen was certainly found in Zirky's cafe for his morning break. At 84 Len has set a cracking pace in endurance skiing and has become a role model for many members. He and I spent an hour and a half working over The Drift, Sun Run, Sundowner and Imagine.

In the lodge we saw superbly cooked lamb and crème caramel, bewitching lunchtime pasta, Ginny Spring's chicken pie, pavlova and Meg's sticky date pudding to die for all in the space of a few days. Roast pork with crackling has been seen several times. Tim Roger's scrambles were constructed with elegance. Chad Orr's beef was seared in flames on the barbecue. James Tait's amazing knife sharpening device possibly renders Neil Stabb's excellent efforts on the grinding wheel redundant. The Champagners were genuinely impressed.

And in all of this the members and guests, with national duty in mind, set about reducing the surplus of wine from every part of the country such is the spirit of fairness in the club.

Forget the accommodation and steak knives deal, take advantage of the uncertainty the season offers and match it with the certainty of a good time at the hut.

There's still plenty of snow and the spring season also offers the chance to explore the other side of Loch, (on downhills or cross country), Australia Drift all the way down and Hamburger Hill. You have to ask Tom Nairn about that one but basically you climb out just near the slope coming up to the top of Gotcha Chair. There's also Leigh Heard's annual pilgrimage to Loch and to Dinner Plain for lunch, by foot, on skis or by bus with or without NEW Ugg Boots.

Alternatively, Ethan Orr demonstrated the fundamentals of fort construction with an escape tunnel during early August and this option is very tempting for September. Follow the Orr-Petersens and fill the hut with kids in September. It's a terrific sound.

Lodge leadering (v): The Spa

Your scribe has barely heard from Ian Coppock since 2007 when he rudely, and uninvited, not only drank his (Coppo's) bottle of excellent red but shared it with everyone within pouring range. It was a low act, but a sharing one. In August poor Coppo arrived on the mountain anticipating a spa but found it not working at all. In times of trouble like this, "Who you gonna call? Your editor, obviously. Not a ghost buster in sight.

For some reason this was the season for turning off the spa – either at the switchboard, the plug near the dispensing pump of the switch on the wall near the door to the spa. It was also a season for not checking the levels of chemicals in the reserve drums. It's when the chlorine or the acid or both run out that you see what they do. At first your scribe thought that the smell coming out of the spa was a (rotting) student who had been left in there after student's week. It couldn't have been Andy Moffat because he was still in Europe somewhere with the Australian Chamber Choir. Tom Paton and Cam Johnston (Jr) neatly sorted that spa matter. Then later, the spa was drained for the Champagners and a few too many switches turned off and perhaps not enough on. Or perhaps they were turned on and off by different people. Hence Coppo's dilemma. Anyway, it can all get to be a bit of a jigsaw. In general it all seems to work if you follow the directions or find an engineer.

A disaster at the beginning of the season

Early in the season the sprinkler system malfunctioned. Water poured into the club while no one was there from a broken sprinkler pipe in the recreation room.

The mountain folk were monitoring water usage and in the middle of the night knew that something was amiss. They isolated various parts of the mountain and piece by piece identified Ormond as the problem. Downstairs was awash, the recreation room a mess. All the carpet downstairs had to be lifted, the bunks and wardrobes dismantled and reassembled; the whole thing dried out. Magnificently, the recovery was organised by Stuart

Watson, insurance covered the damage and the lodge was ready for student's week.

And during student's week, in what has to be a first, somebody took it upon themselves to swing by the sprinkler pipe in the upstairs ceiling. Mercifully the water had not been turned on after the earlier debacle. The committee is dealing with the matter. It has been repaired – by Stuart and others.

The lodge is getting tired

Rohan Hodges did a terrific job fixing the oven that was down for the first part of the season, the dish washer again and the hot water boiler in the kitchen. He also identified, (on a rainy day) the possible underlying cause of the broken pipe that caused the lodge to flood early in the season. Stuart Watson completed an electrical overhaul, repaired the sauna (with Tom Nairn on a rainy day) and we have repaired the boilers for now. These are all signs that the lodge is due for a major renovation. Andrew Robson, Tim Rogers and Michael Rodd suggested a master plan for the lodge be developed so that as equipment, (boilers, ovens, dishwasher etc.) wear out that they are replaced in advance of the renovation but with equipment consistent with the plan. President Meg Casey is looking for feedback from the members about how they see the club and what renovations they think are appropriate. The committee will be developing a process for this during 2009-2010.

The carpet is an embarrassment and in the short term we need a big rug for near the fireplace. We also need, for safety, a new balcony. The bunkrooms 3&4 have never been renovated and it is time possibly for that. The boilers probably need replacing and we need a new roof. The strammit ceiling has to go. Some cladding to cover the awful grey brick outside would be a plus. Some hate our dated vertical panelling. There are lots of things – a new kitchen perhaps. In time it will all be prioritised but we expect things to happen in 2011.

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