



# Echo from the Mountains

Victorian High Country Huts Association Inc - A0043804Y

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## Time to Look After Ourselves

No one can deny that the start of 2020 has been anything but difficult for everyone.

The fires that started in November 2019 and continued to burn across Victoria, and elsewhere in the nation, devastated vast swathes from Corryong down towards Bairnsdale and far east to Mallacoota. Along the way they have destroyed homes, lives and livelihoods as well as a number of huts. Several of our Huts Maintenance Officers and members have been directly impacted by the fires.

Just as the fires were declared safe a new threat emerged - CoVid 19. It has been months of adjusting and we should all be well familiar with the need to practice social distancing and be diligent with our hygiene practices. Right now rural Victorians are finally able to "let out" to enjoy our wonderful parks and natural areas, while Metro Melbourne is still in the grip of Lockdown 2.0.

With regards the huts, we are currently following the advice from our federal and state governments and our land managers, in particular Parks Victoria. All planned work programs have been postponed until further notice.

Please visit our website at [www.hutsvictoria.org.au](http://www.hutsvictoria.org.au) for updates on planned works.

Whilst we are still grounded from physical works there is a huge amount of planning proceeding for the rebuilds of huts lost through this summer's fires.

I hope everyone has been able to keep well, both physically and emotionally during this challenging time. I am not embarrassed to say that this has been a very difficult time for me and I apologise to all our members for the absence of a March newsletter. For those who don't know me, my husband Stephen and I have spent 5 years as full-time nomads living in our caravan. When everyone was told in March to "go home and stay home" we struggled to find a suitable place to hunker down - expecting to have to stay in place for 6 months. We spent a number of weeks thinking we were safe, only to be told we had to move on again. Eventually we rented a small flat in Paynesville, where we are now.

Please stay safe and well, keep checking up on loved ones, and we look forward to a great huts program next season.

*Sue Paterson - Newsletter Editor*

## Call for Calendar Photos

We may not have been able to do much hut work, but that doesn't mean we will miss out on doing a calendar.

So we need photos. Really lovely photos... of your favourite hut. That's right, the theme for 2021's Calendar is "Your Favourite Hut – your best image".

If we select your shot, you'll receive a free calendar. If we use your shot for the cover, you'll receive two free calendars. Entry is open to all VHCHA members or members of affiliated organisations, and you can submit as many photos as you like, as long as you took them.

Most importantly, you'll be helping to preserve our precious huts through funds raised by calendar sales.

Please email your photos to [calendar@hutsvictoria.org.au](mailto:calendar@hutsvictoria.org.au) by Friday 7th August 2020. For publication they need to be at least 1200 x 800 pixels.

Full terms and conditions have been sent by email.



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## Kelly's Hut Revival

With the long-awaited return to complete Stage 2 of Kelly's Hut, Holmes Plain revival, we were all keen to make a start. After much planning, checking, and double checking to make sure we have all the materials required (it's a long way to Bunnings) the scene was set. The scheduled 5-day program enabled the team to undertake and complete the planned works. We were lucky enough to have access to Surveyors' Creek Camp to recuperate after a long day's work. It was very welcoming after a long day at Kelly's Hut.

As Kelly's Hut has a heritage overlay, a consultant provided a brief which formed the basis of how and what was required to maintain as much of the existing hut as possible without losing its heritage value. Before commencing any work, every piece of timber and corrugated iron was painstakingly labelled and documented, this would ensure that it could be replaced exactly where it was removed from. The time taken at the start, with logging each item either by sketching or photo, allowed us to work on various sections simultaneously without losing our enthusiasm.

Works started on Wednesday 27th November with the outer layers (corrugated iron and timber slab walls) already removed by the previous working party.

The main sections of the roof were then supported with acro-props. New red wood posts sourced from a local timber merchant were scarfed out and rotted bottom sections of the old main posts replaced. Each of the posts were plumbed and tied back into the roof rafters.

Thursday, we were joined by the Geelong 4WD club and some of its members. They were a welcome group of hands and knowledge. The remaining 4 posts were replaced to complete the main section of the hut. The existing stone fireplace had to be partially removed to allow access to the door posts.



Friday was the start of the reconstruction phase with all the old hewed slabs repositioned, in order, and new bottom plates inserted. This was probably the most exciting part of the day. With the posts being replaced and everything square, the walls were all coming

together, and when we left for the day, we could see our hard work paying off!



Saturday, we awoke to Surveyors' Camp covered with a thick blanket of fog. Each day different to the last. With the fog clearing, we continued working on the remaining walls. The main door was remastered and the door posts replaced. This completed the "lock-up" stage. After another full day, we looked back at what we had accomplished and what we needed to do for Stage 3 ... The chimney. This will be a future work party.



On Sunday, we finished off with a lunch and debrief at Surveyors' Camp before the journey home. The high country didn't disappoint with the sun shining and comfortable temps for most of the workparty, only to have snow falling on the first day of Summer. The High Country always seems to deliver the unexpected and that it certainly did.

It was a privilege to have Ian McMichael and his son, Angus, helping us over the weekend. We gained a great insight into the building of McMichael's Hut (a stone's throw from Kelly's Hut) and their time on the land there.



L-R: Warren and Shez Tedford, Bernie (Parks Victoria PV), Wayne Foon (PV), Sue Peterken, Harry Parke (Geelong 4WD Club), Angus McMichael, Ian McMichael, Anthony, Wayne Peterken and Chris Milgate.

## Kelly's Hut Revival cont:

Ian has spent time researching the past and his family. With his connection to the area and knowledge we could have listened for hours. We also had a visit from a retired Ranger Wayne McCallum, who has a great passion for the huts and the area.

Special note must go to Sam (Geelong 4WD) who travelled from Melbourne, arriving at 1:00am, working the following day, and returning for a Xmas function the next day... Dedication!!

A huge thanks to the 5 Parks VicVictoria staff, Geelong 4WD Club, VHCHA members and volunteers who contributed to the success of the working group. Next time you are out and about, take the time to talk to the PV Rangers: they are wealth of information and knowledge of the areas they work, and guess what? They love the high country as well.

Special thanks to Sue and Shez who kept us well fed for the duration.

On a personal note, what an introduction to VHCHA for me! This was my first working group. Can I say what a fantastic opportunity to be a part of regenerating history with like-minded people? If you are thinking of joining or helping on any of the working groups in your area, give it a go. You will not be disappointed.

Article and Photos: Chris Milgate HMO Area 3

## Kelly's Hut Receives a \$7000 Grant from the Premier

Shez Tedford, during an off-chance meeting with the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, requested some financial support for the huts, particularly the Kelly's Hut project on Holmes Plain.

At the Premier's suggestion, Shez followed up and wrote a letter detailing the work she was invested in.

The Committee was unaware of the development Shez was working towards. Since Shez wasn't convinced anything would have come from her letter, she didn't mention it. Some time passed and the Association received an email from the Premier's office asking for more detail on the Kelly's hut project and the VHCHA.

Shortly after sending this detail our President, Allen Skilton, received the offer of \$7000 from the Premier in the form of grant to be used for continuing works on Kelly's hut.

At the time of writing this report the VHCHA is about to receive the grant and the funds will go straight into financing the next phase of works.

Thank you Shez for taking the opportunity and having the courage to ask. As the old saying goes "nothing ventured, nothing gained"!

## The Bushfires and the VHCHA

Bushfires were the feature of summer; raging through New South Wales from September 2019 we were clearly heading into a very nasty time in Victoria too.

We had in place a plan to re-construct Pender's Hut chimney with the help of Swifts Creek DELWP Rangers. During the week leading up to that work party lightning ignited the first fires in East Gippsland on 21st November, on the north side of the Bogong High Plains and to the south of Omeo. It was the first of many summer and autumn projects to be cancelled.

All through December we were monitoring the progress of fires and the positions of many huts. January became a very busy month with fires stretching across the Eastern and North Eastern parts of our state.

President Allen Skilton received a phone call from our HMO Lachie Gales, who when wearing his CFA hat is the Wangaratta Deputy Group Officer, with an invitation to join the daily teleconference with Ovens Incident Control Centre (ICC) and within a couple of days had made a connection with Parks Victoria (PV) to discuss plans for huts at risk.

Our involvement with Forest Fire Management (FFM), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and PV rose to a new level with our involvement at the Ovens ICC's daily meetings during the height of the North East fire. It is a mark of the high level of respect that PV and DELWP have for VHCHA that we were invited to join the ICC teleconference to provide information and guidance.

This culminated in assisting PV to develop a team tasked to review 'at risk' huts based on then current fire predictions and local knowledge. Our PV team leader was able to request additional works on buildings we felt were at risk. The VHCHA data base supplied to PV became a great resource when reviewing huts across multiple jurisdictions. The existing supply of FireZat was deployed to different huts across the high country. This material was purchased after last season's fires and the work the VHCHA did with Parks Victoria at that time. Urgent works using heavy earthmoving equipment cut firebreaks around huts and aerial protection dropped fire retardant chemicals on remote huts where ground access was impossible.



*Photo: Fleur Smith (PV) - Lovick's Hut*

Through Allen's new connection with the Ovens ICC a small team led by Darin Lynch (PV) was formed and they investigated which huts were at risk using the predictive fire mapping that was made available each day.

Arrangements were made for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to collect three rolls of FireZat from Mitchell's hut on the side of Mount Bogong, to be relocated onto the Bogong High plains. Our diggers hiked in and then carried the material out after their air support became unavailable. At that point they understood that another 30 rolls of FireZat was being procured from the United States, emptying the US warehouse of FireZat material.



*Photo: Fleur Smith (PV) - Bluff Hut*

FireZat became the final level of protection after fire breaks, mineral earth works and flame retardants. Our very iconic huts received FireZat wrap thanks to ground crews from the Mt Hotham Resort Management, CFA, PV Rangers, DELWP Rangers, FFM and the (ADF).



*Wallaces hut wrapped.*

With this we were able to have Cope and Faithfuls huts wrapped with the remaining material we had on the Bogong High plains. Prior to this the Falls Creek CFA had already wrapped Wallace's hut with FireZat. Thankfully these buildings never got tested by these fires.

During this time the VHCHA committee developed a comprehensive "How To" document on wrapping huts.

## Bushfires and VHCHA cont:

The wrapping guide was based on intensive testing by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the FireZat company, and was used widely across Victoria during this time.



*Firebreaks being cut around Turntable Huts.*

We were also able to order an AIG (Airborne Information Gathering) Helicopter, part of seasonal firefighting fleet, to complete an aerial survey of Charlie McNamara's Hut and McNamara's Hut Buckety plain.

Spargo's Hut and Derricks Hut were wrapped on the 8th January by the Mt Hotham Resort Management after Allen was able to provide verbal instructions on the process. It was great to see their enthusiasm for the huts.

The whole fire event was very time-consuming, very worrying and stressful but with the help of our HMC, HMOs and the committee we were able to take on this challenge and support each other.

Unfortunately, we did not escape unscathed. Five huts - Wheeler's Creek, Gibson's, Ski (Lind Lodge), Turn Tables and Glen Arte Huts were lost. There was also the woodshed at McNamara's Hut (Buckety Plain) burnt but crews from FFM saved the main building.



*Wheeler's Creek Ruins Jan. 2020. Photo: Steve Wilkinson*

The work will continue with meetings set in place over the coming months to review the work done and what we have learnt during this time. There are also conversations starting on what we will do moving forward regarding the buildings lost.



*Gibson's Hut Ruins Jan. 2020 photo: Steve Wilkinson*



*Ski Hut (Lind Lodge) Ruins Jan 2020*

There are some conversations starting on the what is likely to happen with Ski, Gibson's and Wheeler's Creek huts. Things are looking positive right now. It will take time to put the appropriate plans in place for the rebuilds but with the commitment of the VHCHA and the support of our members and Land Managers we will get there.

The Victorian High Country Huts Association couldn't be more appreciative of the extraordinary efforts of Forest Fire Management, Parks Victoria, the Australian Defence Forces and many individuals who put themselves at risk to protect our precious huts.

It is only because of these combined efforts that more huts weren't lost this season and we thank everyone for their hard work and commitment.

***When a hut is lost and not replaced, the hut's story is in danger of being forgotten. When a hut is replaced, the story will continue.***

## We Did Get Out and About

On a lighter note, before lockdown kept everyone at home, the VHCHA attended a couple of large events promoting the huts and the work that we do.

Wayne and Sue Peterken, and Shez Tedford manned the stand at the Victorian 4WD Show at Lardner Park on Sunday 16th February. On a windy day that kept Wayne occupied holding the marquee down, visitation was high and our small team was kept very busy.



Shez(l) and Sue(r) during a brief lull in conversations.

Photo: Wayne Peterken

Over Labour Day weekend in early March, in conjunction with Jimmy Findlay's Lost Trades exhibit, VHCHA set up a stall at the Lost Trades Fair at Bendigo.

Allen & Janet Skilton managed the stand and report that "Interest was extremely high. We were bombarded with questions and lots of stories were told. We made many new connections with people who shared their histories with these huts. I think I have never talked as much as I have on that weekend. We managed to sell 99% of the stock we brought and were left feeling we could have sold more if we had it." Sales for the day totalled \$1312.

Nearly 10,000 attended on the Saturday alone, with about 8000 through the gates on Sunday.



Early Morning before the crowds. Photo: Allen Skilton

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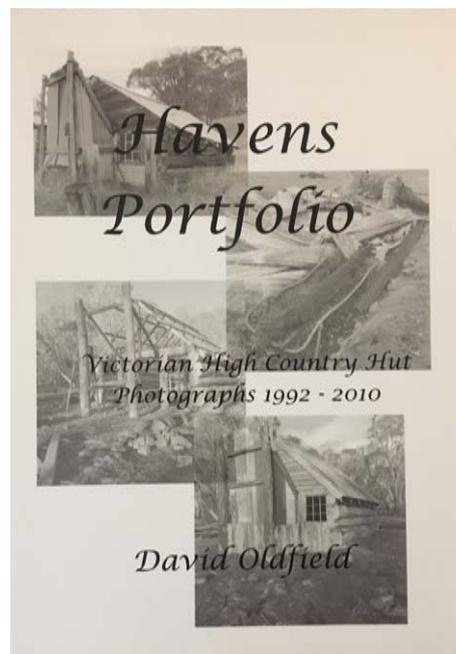
<https://www.facebook.com/hutsvic>

## David Oldfield's "Havens Portfolio" - Limited Offer

Many of you will be familiar with a some of the photos taken by our Inaugural Secretary and esteemed photographer, David Oldfield, who I featured in our 2019 December Newsletter.

David has collated his beautiful Huts photos into a high quality soft cover book "Havens Portfolio Victorian High Country Hut Photographs 1992 - 2010".

David has very generously offered to donate all proceeds of the book to VHCHA which is available through the shop on our website <https://hutsvictoria.org.au/shop/>



For \$45 including postage you can have your very own limited edition copy (only 100 were printed). These treasures are ONLY available through the VHCHA shop, you won't find them in any bookshop so place your order now.

**THANK YOU DAVID!**

**Thank  
You!**

## Welcome New Members

It is always a joy to welcome new members to our Association. We hope you enjoy your involvement in whichever form that may take, from getting down and dirty on a work party, or reading our newsletters and knowing that your membership fee goes towards preserving a part of our Alpine Heritage.

### A hearty welcome to:

Peter Tate	Daniel Dunn
Roland Woodson	Trude Reynolds
Donna Barr	Mark Duggan
David Thompson	Olaf Moon
Dan Brooke	Tim Gates
Claire Noonan	Nigel Paroissien
Rosemary Utber	Luke O'Keeffe
Ron McIntyre	Timothy Behan
Ben Beeching	Leanne Busby
Michael Prior	Jack Bramall
Richard Kraus	Michael Hetherington
Steve Nielsen	Ross Ryan
Anthony Plummer	Rob Warnock
Adrian McDonald	David Colquhoun
Kristian Lofhelm	Bill Jeans
Nigel Swinn	Greg Pelly
Wesley Barker	Monique Redfern
Mike Clarke	David Raeburn
B R Thomas	
Orbost Club Hotel	Contact: Timothy Behan
Mt Buller Motorcycle Adventures	
Contact: David Marsicano	



*Ropers Hut circa 2000 Photo: Keith Oxenbould*

## Your Donations Hard at Work

The 2020 fires have focussed a great deal of attention to the huts of the Victorian High Country. The stories that have been told at both the Victorian 4WD Show and the Lost Trades Festival remind us that so many people have connections to these fabulous pieces of history.

There will be a lot of rebuilding over the next few years and every dollar goes directly to huts works.

### We gratefully acknowledge the following for their support:

John Anderson	Merrienne Rosanove
Kevin Bruce	Dianne Miller
Daniel Dunn	Ryan Osborne
Ron Donaldson	Peter Roper
Owen Lord	Brendan Fitzsimmons
Janelle Andronicos	Mandy McConnell
David Thompson	Bron Smith
Jeffo Genn	Guy Noble
Cheryl Knott	Rosemary Utber
Lenka Juricova	Chris Moorhouse
Trevor Barkla	Ben Beeching
Lynn Pickersgill	Sheridan McLeod
Heidi Peirce	Russell Rogers
Simon Schultz	David Symons
Jimmy Rostlund	Inger Bray
James Robertson	Matthew Bain
Nicholas Skewes	Daniel Dunn
Mike Clarke	Lardner Park Sales
Steve Varga	Chris Watts
Tristan Parker	Patrick Boutellier
Daniel Xuereb	Robert Halley-Frame
Luke Breen	Jayne Webster
Nigel Swinn	Geoff Davison
Mike Clarke	David Cain

## Vale Keith Oxenbould

Keith Oxenbould has been a long time member and enthusiastic contributor to VHCHA. In particular he sent through many photos for calendars over the years.

It was with heavy hearts that we heard he passed peacefully on 25th February after a lengthy illness.

Our condolences to his family.

## HMO Contact List

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Area names are general geographic names only and do not reflect the extent or number of huts in each area.

Existing Hut Maintenance Areas remain unchanged, however your committee has reviewed and re-defined all areas so that there is now a more even distribution of huts within each area.

Changes to areas have been minor, however it may take some time for our hut maintenance officers to become familiar with changes. During the next few months we ask that all enquiries be directed **firstly to our Hut Maintenance Coordinator** at [hmc@hutsvictoria.org.au](mailto:hmc@hutsvictoria.org.au), Wayne will respond or redirect enquiries to the appropriate area on your behalf.

### DONATIONS

We appreciate that there is a great deal of financial stress in the community right now. If you are able, and wish to, you can make a donation or purchase via our online store.

We will need as much as possible in the kitty for rebuilding our lost huts.

The website is

<https://www.hutsvictoria.org.au/shop>

(to make a donation just select multiples of \$5 to make the total you wish to donate).

### Contacting us

Visit our **WEB site:** [WWW.hutsvictoria.org.au](http://WWW.hutsvictoria.org.au)

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#### Newsletter Contributions:

*It's always exciting to receive a member contribution. Do you have a favourite hut story to share? Please send stories preferably by email. When sending photographs please don't include them in the text document but attach them as a separate .jpg or .pdf file, to [editor@hutsvictoria.org.au](mailto:editor@hutsvictoria.org.au).*