



Echo from the Mountains

Victorian High Country Huts Association Inc - A0043804Y

A Quarterly Newsletter Volume 15 Number 3 September 2017

A Cautionary Note

Winter started early with a heavy cover of snow on the Alps even before the roads were officially closed after the June Queen's Birthday weekend.

It is Spring but the high roads are not yet open, and we have an unusual situation. Despite the extraordinary amount of snow in the ranges, there's been so little rainfall that the bush is dreadfully dry and even before the ski season ended we have had our first bushfires.

The recent fires in the Buchan / Timbarra area caught VHCHA Volunteers and members of the public in a situation requiring urgent evacuation as fires closed in quickly. There were no injuries from this fire but it has burned more than 5500ha of bushland. (See Shannon's story on Page 3)

It doesn't bode well for the summer ahead.

Please be extra diligent, even early in the season, if you are planning on heading out into the bush. Make sure you have communications, a fire plan and keep an eye on the weather. It is in this season when the landscape and the weather looks so benign that it is very easy to get caught out. As always - be prepared.

Stay safe but get out there and enjoy our beautiful country.

Happy Reading

Sue Paterson - Newsletter Editor

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Annual General Meeting

Firstly, I'd like to thank everyone sincerely for supporting us throughout what has been a busy, productive and, at times, challenging year. Much has been achieved, and we couldn't have done it without your help.

We would like to enthusiastically invite you to our 2017 Annual General Meeting. This year we are holding it in Omeo, in the heart of our beautiful High Country. Please consider getting involved with the Committee, there is always opportunity to have your say and help steer our Association into the future.

Location: The Omeo Soldier's Memorial Hall

Address: 179 Day Avenue Omeo 3898
(next to the Shire Offices)

Date: Saturday 18th November 2017

Time: 2.00pm

We would love to see and catch up with as many of you as possible, so if you can come please let me know by email at secretary@hutsvictoria.org.au or by calling me during business hours on 03 9686 6496.

We will have lunch at the Golden Age before the AGM, so if you would like to be included, please let me know so that I can make the appropriate booking.

Once again, thanks for your work, support and friendship this year. We look forward to seeing you in November.

The Minutes of the 2016 AGM, Financial Statement and proxy forms are attached with this newsletter.

Stephen Renfree - Secretary

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:

Emily Becher	Terry Torrison
Darren Russo	Ken Westley
Gregory Rand	Francis Silke
Bendigo Four Wheel Drive Club	Vincent Brouillet
Paul Kikidopoulos	Ricky Goral
Trevor Mason	Marcus Crellin
Dandenong Ranges 4 Wheel Drive Club	

Guy's Hut Straightens Up

Guy's Hut is located up on Bryces Plain in the Alpine National Park, Victoria. It sits about 1 km from the Bryces Gorge carpark just off the Howitt Road.

Commenced in 1939 and completed in the early 40s by Jack Guy and Denny Connolly, the hut is of horizontal log construction, with no windows. The front door is next to the stone lined fire place, laid to protect the timber from catching alight. Inside there are a few benches and a larger bench that makes for a wonderful place to roll out your swag when the weather outside forces you to find shelter.

On Friday, 9th February, we arrived to set up camp, help unload the mules (actually we just watched), took a quick stroll out to survey the building, work out some final details and take some photos in the fading light. After a good chat back at camp with (then HMO) Peter Page on the next days plans, it was time to meet a few new volunteers and then we all sat around the fire contemplating life - as you do.

Saturday morning, we started with our usual safety briefing. We covered all the risks, discussed the procedures around winching walls and also the pack mules and the loads they carry. Interestingly loading pack animals is very technical, all the pack saddles are weighed to ensure balance and the technique for lifting the packs on and off without the other falling to the ground. The mules' safety was paramount.



Jo Kasch and mules. Photo: Allen Skilton

The Wollangarra mob started to set up their space, barricading the work site as the tools they use are very sharp. The rest of us started our walk out. Peter Page stayed to help process timber and to manage visitors, I really think he wanted to learn more about those sharp tools.

Out at the hut the aim was to straighten the hut, to save it from collapse. The walls on the chimney end had started to crank over and were heading downhill. We needed to clamp the walls so we had control over it, once this was done winches were added to take the load. At this point we disconnected the walls from their existing vertical posts. On closer inspection we found they were all in danger of failing due to the rot at ground level.

With new posts fitted and vertical we started the process of winching the walls into their original position.

We had people on all corners watching the building, reporting anything like excessive movement. Fortunately nothing dramatic happened other than the groaning the walls made as we forced them back straight. One wall was cranked more than the other, we stopped at that point, fixed the wall to its new vertical post then disconnected the internal winch leaving the main winch holding the uphill wall.



Winching the wall. photo: Allen Skilton

With everyone back into position we slowly added pressure to the remaining wall. She resisted our efforts till a crowbar shifted the chimney structure, some more groaning till we were happy with what we achieved. With the pressure off, the walls just settled like they had always belonged, the building was at rest.

It is always important when working on these buildings to ensure there is a complete understanding of what is likely to happen before it happens, monitor everything while it's happening and knowing when to stop within the limits of the buildings design.

With our great team working hard, we dug new post holes into some seriously hard rock that was either removed with great effort or chiselled to form a hole big enough to take the post.



Wollangarra crew hauling a log. Photo Linda Barraclough

Guys Hut Straightens Up Cont:

The Wollangarra kids worked solidly processing timber logs and then carrying the finished posts the 1 km out to the hut. They continued to sing and joke whilst us older members were exhausted just watching.

During the day, we had a lovely visit from Cath Noble, a member of the Guy family, Cath's daughter Sue Noble and her two daughters, who also rolled up their sleeves and helped tirelessly. We had 3 generations of Guy descendants on site.



Allen & Janet Skilton with Cath Noble, Sue Noble and her daughters. Photo: Linda Barraclough

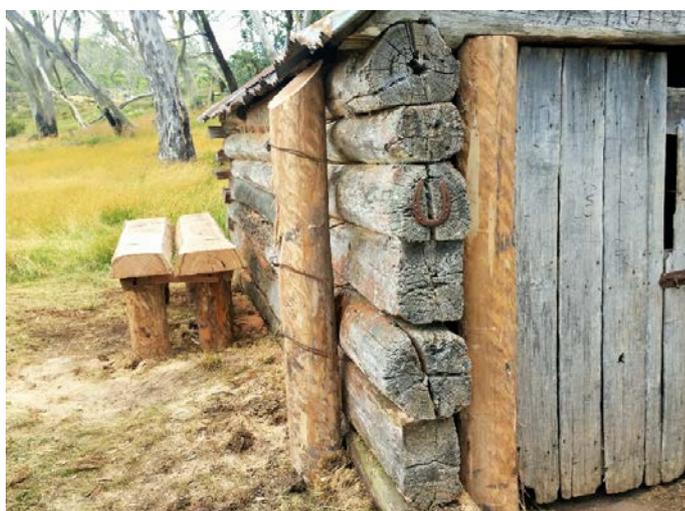
Sunday saw the last of the tidy up jobs, floor stones were reinstalled around the posts, the fire place stones loaded back, the wire fixings completed. Some practises on the coach knot came in handy, it's one skill worth learning. The last of the timber for the outside bench arrived and the work started fixing it into place.

During this time, the mules carried all our equipment back to camp. Jo and John Kasch donated their time, mules and skills that goes with these magnificent animals, making many trips back and forth every day.

Peter Page continued with the very last job, replacing the solid timber bench located on the south wall outside the hut. When we started to disassemble the old one it fell to bits in our hands. It held on till the very end. Now we have a new one that will serve well into the future.

Time for farewells to all our new friends and to those we know so well and headed for home.

Report: & Group Photo: Allen Skilton



New posts and bench. Photo: Peter Page



Timbarra Fires - Why We Need Emergency Plans!

Over the weekend of the 23rd of September, Shannon Peters and her team were involved in an emergency in severe conditions. Here is her story:

We were working at Glenmore Huts, above Buchan and the day had started normally. The sky was blue and the air was clear. The day was forecast to be hot but there was no fire danger at all, and certainly no evidence of one.

The day before I had gone into the DELWP Office in Bairnsdale to sit with Brian "Gus" Gustus (DELWP, Nowa Nowa) and write out our respective communication and emergency plans. We make new plans every working bee, even though they are all pretty much the same. The actual JSA (Job Safety Analysis) is done on site but the emergency plan is something we do a couple of days before, to get organised. It includes things like the phone number for the nearest bush nurse, you might need it one day.

We had knocked off and were about to sit down to a fantastic camp oven roast lamb when the trunk phone, on loan from DELWP for use in an emergency, started to ring. It was Gus, informing me of a fire in the Timbarra Valley. He said we may see or smell smoke and to be on high alert. At that stage, we couldn't see or smell anything but as night began to fall we spotted a red glow over the trees to the south of us. We began to pack our gear just in case and within an hour the red glow had doubled in size.

I called through to DELWP on the trunk and asked for advice. I was told to get my team out as the fire was out of control and a south westerly wind change had the blaze heading straight for us.

We put our evacuation plan in motion and started to head down the hill. Our orders from DELWP were to take the Timbarra Road out as it was the quickest exit out of the bush. This meant heading towards the fire. By the time we reached Gillingal Station we were driving through thick smoke and ash was falling heavily, we could see the blaze roaring up the ridge line to the west of us, eucalyptus fireballs were jumping through the tree tops. A DELWP Vehicle was pulled up at the entrance to Gillingal. We were informed that the Timbarra road was an inferno and we couldn't get out that way, we would have to turn back and head over Gelantipy. DELWP would follow us out.

With the fire blazing up the ridgeline we had just driven below we now had to turn around and race the blaze to get above that ridge before it beat us there. The next 20 minutes were interesting I can tell you! I can't even begin to explain the atmosphere, not a word was spoken on the UHF while we wound our way back up the hill through the smoke. We made it above the ridge line but that didn't mean we could relax, the wind was blowing embers and ash for kilometres and we had to simply keep driving and hope they didn't start another fire further ahead.

The next few hours saw us winding our way up the mountain in terrible conditions, navigating skinny tracks heavily inundated with fallen timber with the red glow intensifying by the hour. By time we reached Gelantipy the smoke had eased a little but it was a short lived. When we reached the top of Buchan we were driving through more

smoke and as we rounded a corner we could see the blaze roaring across the top of the Buchan Valley. Our plans to find a place to roll out a swag in Buchan were quickly scrapped and we drove through the night to home and a comfy bed.

Planning for an emergency can have you thinking "It'll never happen to us" and that way of thinking needs to end, because emergencies are exactly that, unplanned, unexpected and very dangerous. My emergency plan had all the Trunk Phone numbers and their extensions to respective vehicles. It had dot points for little things like checking the weather and drinking water, things I would have forgotten otherwise. It had everything I needed in one place to refer back to.

The whole point of an emergency plan is to gather all the information you might need in a calm environment so that in the event of something like this all the thinking and planning has been done and now all you need to do is gather your team and follow the plan.

It was a long, tough night and I felt like I was either driving through ash and smoke, staring at flames on the ridges or talking to someone on the DEWLP trunk, but during the entire evacuation there was not one instance when I felt like I was unorganised and in trouble. I put that down to a carefully thought out emergency plan and having the ability to keep a cool head under pressure. It does however beg for a few rhetorical questions for anyone heading into the bush

- Do you have an Emergency Plans?
- Do you have a Communications Plan?
- Can you keep a cool head in a serious situation?
- Do you have the ability to lead others out of a dangerous situation safely and efficiently?

I thank DELWP for providing fantastic support in a severe situation and everyone involved for diligently following orders and staying calm, I couldn't imagine volunteering in the bush with a better bunch of people!

As the newsletter goes to print, the Glenmore Huts are so far safe but the fires are still not controlled. Our fingers are crossed for them.

Report & photo: Shannon Peters

HMO Areas 1/2 - East Gippsland/Dargo



Timber Prepared for Cope Hut

One of the great reasons to be involved with restoring heritage buildings such as our Alpine Huts is the chance to learn skills that are no longer as widely understood as they once were. The recent timber splitting work party held as part of our commitment to Cope Hut was an outstanding example of how volunteering to help with something like hut maintenance can take you on a journey of learning that you otherwise may never have experienced.

Cope Hut, whilst looking well superficially, is in a dire state structurally. Our works at the first work party were guided greatly by the existing conditions report provided by Parks Victoria but we discovered issues not immediately apparent and not yet documented. The west wall of the building has suffered over its long life from water ingress that has caused significant rot in its structural frame. The wall, under the weight of its own materials as well as annual snow loads has bowed out significantly, restrained largely by the corrugated iron wall claddings. We came to quickly understand that we need to strip the claddings and rebuild the wall as a priority to ensure the integrity of the hut for years to come.

The wall frame though is not built from off the shelf studs. The original carpenters of this Architect designed lodge, the first public structure on the High plains designed for (Ski) Tourists, have worked with split timber studs of native hardwood for the main frame, inserting sawn Oregon frames for the joinery elements of windows and doors. In keeping with our intent to retain the heritage of the building in every way, we need to replace the frame with like timbers, one of the great challenges of our work on treasured buildings like Cope Hut.

Our great fortune is that we have an expert in sourcing and working with bush timber in our midst, Jimmy James Findlay of Cheshunt. Jim very generously agreed not only to provide timber from his beautiful farm at Cheshunt that could be split to give us the materials we need. He also undertook to do the job as a training workshop that would give people an insight into the process of how the old timers tackled exactly the job we had in front of us.

VHCHA assisted with the purchase of a saw log to split into floor planks whilst Jim dropped red stringybark logs off his property for the stud frame timbers. An enthusiastic party of 18 volunteers, some travelling from great distances, assembled for a really productive day of debarking, swinging hammers, driving steel wedges and broad axing timber faces.



We even made a little time for some instruction in splitting timber shingles just because we could.

Our crew was a great mix of skills, with neither gender nor inexperience holding anyone back from having a good go. The day was punctuated by the catering team and lots of easy conversations amongst everyone involved. Our entrenched ethos of being highly productive and having a good time while we're at it continued even below the snow line. By days end we produced the timber we need for our work in November when we return to Cope Hut with little difficulty.



Many thanks go to our host, mentor and inspiration, Jimmy James. I can't imagine how we could approach these jobs without Jim's energy and enthusiasm. Similarly, Rob Humphrey and Mick McInerney filled the breach yet again to cater for great smokos and lunch that provided for our mortal needs. Pat O'Donohue and Andrew Hooke gave up their time on Friday to assist Jim in preparing for the workshop and helped lead the different groups through their tasks on the day. Parks Vic maintained their ongoing support for our efforts by providing our tucker, special thanks goes to Kev Cosgriff at PV Mt Beauty.

We can now look forward to the snow melt and another big effort for the "Menzie's of the High Plains" in Spring.

Report: Lachie Gales



Action Photos: Sharyn Chambers.

Group Photo: Allen Skilton

2018 Calendars Order Yours Now

Each year the publication of our latest calendar is awaited with great excitement.

Which huts will be featured?

Whose photos made the grade?

Over the years our calendars have become collectable items.

Maybe you would like to order multiple copies - 1 to use, 1 to save and more to gift to family and friends. Before we know it Christmas will be upon us and here's a perfect present for anyone who loves huts, history, the bush or hiking.

Whatever your reason for loving our huts, place your calendar order now.

Online orders from our shop at

hutsvictoria.org.au/shop/



Also available in our shop:

Stubby holders

Caps

Bumper stickers

Cloth badges



Call Out For a New Secretary

Hi Everyone,

As many of you already know, I have made the difficult decision not to stand for the position as VHCHA Secretary at the forthcoming AGM.

The main reason for this decision is that I need to give my business the same commitment as I expect from the people who work with me. Whatever media propaganda you might have read to the contrary, it is a tough world out there and I need to throw myself into it, boots and all.

Legally, our association cannot exist without a secretary. So it's really important that someone puts their hand up and takes on this role. It's not especially onerous and you're surrounded by wonderful, generous people who will help you through the things you don't understand.

When I started four years ago, I didn't know the first thing about it. But once I got into it and began to understand the role, I grew to thoroughly enjoy it. I loved being a part of something as incredibly important as the VHCHA, and I truly loved spending time with you all. Yes, it is incredibly rewarding. Yes, I will miss it.

Anyone considering stepping into my sweaty shoes can be reassured that I will help them through the early, transitional days. Most of all, they can be confident that a bunch of committee folk and HMOs will welcome them with open arms. The best way you can get to know people in an organisation is to contribute, and I've gotten to know a lot of wonderful people over the last four years.

Incidentally, I'm not leaving the Association and I'm hoping to stay on the committee where President Allen is threatening to get me involved in specific projects.

Thanks for reading this, and thanks for considering taking on the role.

Stephen Renfree

August Special General Meeting

The Special General Meeting was held in Erica on the 26th August at the Erica Memorial Hall. Thanks to everyone who was able to make it down for the meeting to ensure we had sufficient members for the vote to proceed.

All changes to the model rules were voted in favour.

The amendments provided clarity on who could become a member, and the processes to make an application to become a member, the objection process and the inclusion of electronic communication as acceptable means.

Also added to the rules is the provision to nominate and award an Honorary Life Membership to the Association.

If you wish to read the rules in their entirety a copy of the new rules, along with the old rules, can be downloaded from the Forms section of the website

hutsvictoria.org.au/forms-and-downloads/

Ritchies Hut Gets a Flash Flush

The latest edition of News From The Alps has a feature article about the brand new loo that has recently been installed at Ritchie's Hut on the Howqua River.

Waste Management is a serious issue in all Parks areas and maintenance and/or removal is often a very tricky exercise in areas without road access, as is the case here.

The original Ritchie's Hut burned down in the fires of 2006-07 and was rebuilt over the summer of 2008-09 by VHCHA with the support of Parks Victoria, many community groups and volunteers. At the time a new pit toilet was dug. That loo has now reached the end of its life and unsealed pit toilets are no longer acceptable in the Alpine area.

Parks Victoria Senior Ranger Fleur Smith describes the process of research and planning for a shiny corrugated iron, sealed and vented loo that came in a flat pack and could be helicoptered in and assembled on site. The design has a "dunny" that can slide over two separate pod tanks. These tanks can be swapped and airlifted out annually.

The full report is in Newsletter #59 | 2017

<https://theaustralialps.files.wordpress.com>

All previous issues of News From The Alps are available online for your reading pleasure. You can also subscribe and have the next issue delivered to your email box.



It's a complex business to get it right, and every loo has its quirky aspects like this new addition that recently flew in to Ritchies Hut in Victoria's Alpine National Park.

We Need a Hand

If you are keen to get your hands dirty and join in the works that will continue in spring and into 2018 now is the time to get in touch with the HMO and register your interest. The following works are currently being planned.

AREAS 1& 2 East Gippsland / Dargo - Stage 3 works planned for **Glenmore Huts** later in spring 2017, planned works at **Turntable Huts** in spring 2017, hmo1@hutsvictoria.org.au

AREA 3 Licola - Kellys Hut major historical works are being planned for future, **Millers Hut** works planned early 2018, **McMichaels Hut** working bee late 2017, hmo3@hutsvictoria.org.au

AREA 4 Baw Baw – Looking for a caretaker group for **Junction Hut** and **Goonans Huts**, expressions of interest to hmo4@hutsvictoria.org.au

If you desire to get involved in other HMO regions please contact the HMO in the area of your interest. All contact details on Page 8.

For safety and logistical reasons, most work parties do have a maximum size. However, if you have a particular interest in an individual hut, please make contact with the HMO. Sometimes they have sufficient workers and sometimes there's room for more hands to help, but don't miss the chance to help if you can.

Donations keep us working

Donations from individuals and organisations make an enormous difference to our ability to work on huts. We are masters at recycling however there is always some materials that need to be procured and all donations go directly towards hut projects.

We gratefully acknowledge the following for their support:

Shez Tedford	Kevin McDonald
Tim Davies	David Featherstone
Ian Parsons	Barb Brennan
Kevin Hall	John Morrow
Kellie Doering	David Wareham
Geoff Giles	Jerry Gregg
Nigel Bryer	Bernie Sambell
Geoffrey Paton	Keith Oxenbould
Ken Couch	Terry Torrison
Colin Ritchie	Barry Earl
Jeffo Genn	Mark Guest
Paul Kikidopoulos	Justin Celentane
Forte Stambanis	Ricky Goral
Robert Clifton	Michael Scala
Trevor Mason	Lance Boagey
Shannon Hunter	Michael Cooke

HMO Contact List

Huts Maintenance Coordinator Wayne Peterken hmc@hutsvictoria.org.au	
Area	Huts Maintenance Officer
1 East Gippsland	hmo1@hutsvictoria.com
2 Dargo	hmo2@hutsvictoria.org.au
3 Licola	hmo3@hutsvictoria.org.au
4 Baw Baw	hmo4@hutsvictoria.org.au
5 Marysville	hmo5@hutsvictoria.org.au
6 Buller	hmo6@hutsvictoria.org.au
7 Howqua	hmo7@hutsvictoria.org.au
8 Barry Mountains	hmo8@hutsvictoria.org.au
9 Hotham	hmo9@hutsvictoria.org.au
10 Bogong	hmo10@hutsvictoria.org.au
11 Dartmouth	hmo11@hutsvictoria.org.au
12 Davies Plain	hmo12@hutsvictoria.org.au

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, Wayne will respond or redirect enquiries to the appropriate area on your behalf.

Hut Maintenance Officers Required

Interested in becoming a Huts Maintenance Officer for an area? There is a vacancy in Area 8: Barry Mountains for a HMO and now is a great time to join the maintenance group and share the challenge and rewards.

The HMOs are the key hands-on people that regularly get out and check on the huts, then plan and coordinate works that need doing. Does this sound like you?

Contact: Wayne Peterken at hmc@hutsvictoria.org.au

Follow us on FACEBOOK to
find out more about HUTS

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



Contacting us

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Newsletter Contributions:

Please send stories preferably by email as a "Word document" (doc or docx). When sending photographs please don't include them in the text document but attached them as a separate .jpg or .pdf file, to editor@hutsvictoria.org.au.