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Mountain Journal

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In memory of my mum, Marion Beovich.

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If you would like to contribute a story or images for the website or next year's print edition, please get in touch.

All of Australia is indigenous land, and Mountain Journal acknowledges this fact.

The Australian Alps covers the traditional Country of the Bidawal, Monero-Ngarigo, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung, Mitambuta, Ngarigu-Currawong, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Wurundjeri and other peoples.



CONTENTS PAGE

- 3 Introduction
- 4 Fire – updates on life in the Pyrocene
- 7 News from home – environmental updates
- 14 Around the campfire – some chats with mountain people:
Giving back to the mountains
- 38 Mountain Culture
- 46 Offtrack - pack rafting the Dargo River

Introduction

While 2022 feels like our first ‘normal’ year since the pandemic started, the ‘new normal’ of climate change has become incredibly obvious over the past few years. After a horror summer over 2019/20, fires burnt in the northern hemisphere through their summer and into winter, with fire authorities in places like California warning that they no longer experience fire seasons, and that large fires can occur year round. In the 2021/22 southern summer, much of the east coast was hammered by terrible floods, and WA faced an awful fire season. Here in the south the mountains were green, although in lutruwita/ Tasmania a series of fires burnt in World Heritage Areas in the west of the state, sparked by lightning and flourishing in the dry conditions.

In early 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its updated report on the impacts of climate change on natural systems and people around the world. It contained dire warnings for Australia, highlighting the threats to our mountain forests, from Snow Gums and Alpine Ash to the Gondwanic remnants of ancient forests that are holding on in the high country of Tasmania.

2022 has been a year marked by awful conflict and violence, like Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine. In the face of climate chaos, social conflict and war, it can be hard to hold on to hope. The first edition of Mountain Journal magazine focused on where we are, and profiled the aspirations of a number of First Nations with connections to the high country. We thought that with the second edition we’d focus on some of the many good people doing good things for the mountains and the human communities in and around the Australian Alps and lutruwita/ Tasmania. The core theme is Giving back to the mountains.

We hope it inspires you, reminds you of the basic goodness of people, and motivates you to get involved in looking after the mountains. And check the final story, about an epic packraft descent of the Dargo River for a bit of inspiration and a reminder of the wonderful landscapes that make up our Australian mountains.



Fire - living in the Pyrocene

IPCC report has clear warning about the Alps

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report was released in early 2022.

It reinforces what we already know about the current and future impacts of climate change, and the core message is that further climate change is inevitable, with the rate and magnitude of impact largely dependent on the emission reduction pathways that we choose. Time is running out if we want to act and avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

The report says “the scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.” The chapter on Australasia has a considerable amount of detail on likely impacts on mountain areas of south eastern Australia and lutruwita/ Tasmania. It warns of warmer temperatures (in Australia average temperatures have already increased by 1.4°C from 1910–2019) and snow pack has been in decline since at least the 1950s.

It notes that the extreme fire weather experienced in 2019-2020 was at least 30% more likely due to climate change.

More droughts and extreme fire weather are projected in southern and eastern Australia.

There was an increase in the number of extreme fire weather days from 1950 to 1985 compared to 1985 to 2020, partly attributed to climate change.

There have been more dangerous conditions for extreme pyro convection events since 1979, particularly in south-eastern Australia.

Multiple wildfires in short succession are resulting from increased fire risk conditions. There has been an increase in lightning-ignited landscape fires along with the contraction of slow-grow-

ing, fire- sensitive temperate rainforest species (for instance, Pencil Pine) due to warmer and drier climates. This has resulted in population collapse in some areas and severe range contraction.

Prolonged winter drought will mean shifts in dominant vegetation, with a decline in grasses and an increase in forb and shrub cover in areas like the Bogong High Plains.

There will be changing interactions within and among three key alpine species related: the mountain pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*), the mountain plum pine (*Podocarpus lawrencei*) and the bogong moth (*Agrostis infusia*).

Reduced snow cover will lead to loss of snow-related habitat for alpine zone species.

There is risk of transition or collapse of alpine ash and snow gum woodland, due to hotter and drier conditions with more fires.

There is a shift in landscape fire regimes to larger, more intense and frequent wildfires over extensive areas.

Snow pack is in decline and this will continue. At Spencers Creek (NSW), annual maximum snow depth decreased 10% and the length of the snow season decreased 5% during 2000–2013 relative to 1954–1999. At Rocky Valley Dam in Victoria, annual maximum snow depth decreased 5.7 cm per decade from 1954- 2011. At Mt Hotham, Mt Buller and Falls Creek, annual maximum snow depth decreased 15% per decade from 1988-2013.

The report notes that Australia’s ski industry is very sensitive to climatic change, due to reduction in snow depth and the length of the snow season. Skiing faces significant challenges from climate change. Current snow-making technologies are expected to sustain the industry until mid-century. However, with warmer winter temperatures and declining water availability, snow-making is projected to decrease to half at most resorts by 2030.

ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/

Fire and the ‘new normal’

As we enjoy winter, now is the time to think about next summer and the fires that may come after two wet, mild years. There are many things we need to do to be ready for the climate change driven fires of the future. Here is one of them: Victoria should set up a volunteer remote area firefighting team, which can work alongside the government paid fire crews. This would increase our capacity to stop lightning strikes from turning into massive blazes. It's a good idea. It just needs a bit of political will and money to make it happen.

Having crews trained in remote area firefighting will increase the number of firefighters available in bad fire seasons like 2019/20, where hundreds of lightning strikes caused small fires that went on to become massive blazes.

We know that these more regular fires are leading to the collapse of snow gums and alpine ash across the Australian alps. We need an urgent intervention by the state governments of NSW and Victoria so we can fully understand the scale of the problem, and how to respond to it.

Friends of the Earth has already done work on this and makes the following suggestions:

The best option if we want to head off this collapse of

the snow gum communities is to exclude fire as they recover from previous burns. This will require:

- A rapid ecological assessment of the threats posed by fire and dieback to snow gum communities.
- Ongoing funding for Forest Fire Management Victoria, including additional funding for remote area firefighting teams.
- Continued support for air capacity to fight fires, including establishing a publicly owned air fleet, as was recommended by the Bushfire Royal Commission. This is the responsibility of the federal government.
- Creation of volunteer remote area firefighting teams in Victoria, as NSW, the ACT and Tasmania have done.

- A commitment to ensure we have sufficient fire fighting resources to protect fire sensitive communities like alpine ash, snow gums, alpine peatlands and rainforest even during summers like 2019/20.

You can add your voice to these proposals here. https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/snow_gum_petition. Please log images of local loss of Snow Gums due to fire on this facebook page (including details on where the images are taken). facebook.com/snowgumcitizenscience



News from home – environmental updates

Some environmental news from the last year.

Mount Roland cableway

Good news. Mt Roland is a beautiful mountain in the north of lutruwita/ Tasmania, visible from the tourist town of Sheffield. In 2021, the Mount Roland Cableway Company abandoned its proposal to build a cablecar up the face of the mountain, citing the uncertainties created by the COVID pandemic. This is a welcome respite from at least one of the proposals for inappropriate tourism developments in reserves that are currently being considered across the state.

Rifle Range – Maggs Mountain

Last year the Kentish Rifle Club proposed the construction of a rifle range on Sustainable Timber Tasmania (Forestry Tasmania) land near the summit of Maggs Mountain in the Mersey Valley near the northern end of Lake Rowallan.

Although not in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), shooting would at times have been audible on both the Arm River Track and the main access track into the Walls of Jerusalem. For this reason the proposal was opposed by local conservationists, which led to the rejection of the Development Application by Meander Valley Council. The rifle club commenced an appeal against the council rejection but has recently withdrawn it, so the peace and quiet of two major access tracks to the TWWHA is preserved.

The ultimate restoration project – bringing a lake back

50 years ago Lake Pedder, the heart of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and a national park, was flooded, for the creation of a 242 km2 storage lake contributing to the Gordon power scheme. The original, 10 km2, Lake Pedder was an Australian natural wonder with the same significance as Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef. Its defining feature was

a pink quartzite beach spanning nearly 1 km along the ancient, glacial outwash along the lakes eastern shoreline.

It was the controversy behind the flooding of Lake Pedder that initiated the founding of the world's first 'green' political party, the United Tasmania Group.

In the midst of a global climate and biodiversity crisis, as the dam walls reach the end of their average lifespan, a window of opportunity has opened for the restoration of Lake Pedder. The Restore Pedder campaign is lobbying the Australian Government to nominate Pedder as a flagship project in the United Nations decade of ecosystem restoration, 2021-2030.

It is possible. In 2020, a team visited the Pedder impoundment, sending a Remote Operated Vehicle submersible 14 metres into the waters below to the site of the original Lake Pedder, which found that the sand dunes and beach remain intact. The same year an ecological scoping study was completed, which highlighted the biodiversity benefits that would occur if the dam was removed.

And no, the lights in Hobart won't go out if Pedder is deflooded. Lake Pedder can be restored without compromising the state's clean energy security. The impoundment contributes 57 megawatts (MW) to Tasmania's power. By comparison, the new Cattle Hill and Grandville Harbour wind farms produce 154% of the energy Pedder can. A small 60-70 turbine wind farm can compensate for any lost power. Tasmania can achieve a renewable energy/low emissions future, restore our wild places, and fix our mistakes of the past.

In an age of dam decommissioning and a dire need for ambitious large scale ecosystem restoration projects, Lake Pedder can be a symbol of hope to the world, demonstrating that we can turn the tide of destruction to live in balance with nature.

LakePedder.org

Dargo High Plains

As we reported last year, a precious remnant of unburnt forest on the eastern side of the Dargo High Plains is in imminent danger of being logged. What makes this place so special is that it sits within the headwaters of the upper Little Dargo River and is completely free of roads. It has survived recent fires in the area, but will be devastated by the plan to cut 11 coupes within the upper valley. This could happen as soon as spring 2022.

A spirited campaign by locals and environmental campaigners has seen the state's logging agency (VicForests) announce that it will not proceed with controversial plans to push a logging road through a section of the Alpine national park. Now the call is focusing on getting the remaining coupes removed from the logging schedule. This is an unusual campaign because it draws together a mountain grazing family with environmental campaigners. The Treasure family have grazed cattle on the Dargo High Plains and surrounding areas for five generations. Christa Treasure talks about the historical and cultural significance of the area to her and the Treasure family and how logging will devastate this history. Christa says: "Our aim is to stop the devastation by VicForests of the Little Dargo River Catchment. In this beautiful valley is one of the last stands of old alpine ash in the Timber Release Plan (TRP). The family has conserved this area for the last 140 years, it is our homeland.

"Emily and George Treasure ran a store and a post

office here and had 3,000 miners on their books. "The Valley has been untouched by fire since 1921 and recently fire dribbled over the edge of the Long Spur, only in a few places. The Valley has been untouched and creatures undisturbed since the mining days except for the few stockmen on horses using it as a short cut to the Long Spur and Shepherds Plain to muster and take cattle up to the Omeo Plain paddock.

"The Mailmen's Track crosses the Little Dargo River in steep and isolated terrain. It was put in to have a safer track below the snowline for the mailmen on horseback delivering mail from Harrietville across the Dargo High Plains to the mining town of Grant.

"The Government must take the logging coupes in the Little Dargo River off the TRP. This valley is pristine and staggeringly beautiful".

In the autumn of 2022, a section of the old Mailmen's Track was recut so groups could reach Fred's Flat and the Little Dargo River. Friends of the Earth hosted a walk in to the river which allowed the first group to get into the headwaters of the river since the early 1900s.

Search facebook for Save the Little Dargo River for more information.
melbournefoe.org.au/the_little_dargo_a_pristine_catchment_threatened_by_logging

There is a petition here.
melbournefoe.org.au/protect_the_little_dargo



Protect Our Winters back in the game

Over opening weekend in June, Protect Our Winters is organising gatherings across the resorts to draw attention to the need for all governments to take decisive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to 'save winter'.

After a couple of quiet covid lockdown influenced years, POW is back, doing its best to mobilise the snow sports community.

Each event will feature a gathering of locals, unifying the voice of the snow sports community in calling on the federal government to increase its ambition to tackle climate change. We will meet, join together to take a photo with our demand for action, then tag in the Prime Minister and other politicians. It will be a quick, fun gathering.

protectourwinters.org.au



Josh Fletcher, lead advocate
POW Australia



Mt Hotham community supports climate action, 2019

Could the Australian Alps be any cooler?

Words and images Stephen Curtain

In one sense, the Alps' above-ground white stuff is a crowd pleaser for so many riders and sliders, whether front or backcountry. Equally, the Alps' green-season vibes imbibe bliss.

But how cool, in temperature, are the Australian Alps? Even one of the COVID-era temperature guns provides the answer. Anywhere in the Australian Alps that is mainly undisturbed and in its natural state will do - from Baw Baw or Lake Mountain down south or somewhere along its boomerang-shaped arc northward to Kosciuszko and further to Canberra's alpine outskirts. But more on that later.

Several years ago, I started interviewing alpine ecologists, soil scientists and soil microbiologists for various film projects. Pre-COVID, this included the remarkable Dr Alec Costin AM for an Australian Alps water documentary. Alec is 96 'not out' at the time of writing (Easter 2022). Since he started his restoration work in the 1950s, Alec shared that the Alps are 'soil mountains', in some instances tens-of-thousands-years-old and whose slowly-accumulated soils can be metres deep. Incredibly, Alec and colleague Dane Winbush performed soil and snow samples on snow-

shoes used, reportedly, by Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition party.

Around the same time, deep-diving into this underground kingdom with soil microbiologist and climate scientist (and old-school ski tourer) Walter Jehne reveals that in a teaspoon of healthy soil, there can be 10 billion living organisms, yet we only know about one per cent. The below-ground white stuff—fungi and their networked filaments of hyphae—is 25,000 km long in a cubic metre of healthy soil. Check out more soil goodness in this issue with Hotham snow-grooming legend Greg O'Donohue.

It's this living microbiology underground that enables and regenerates life above it and, as it turns out, the water cycle, natural landscape cooling and more. This fascinating blend of soil microbes, worms, bacteria plus old-fashioned photosynthesis (add sunshine, water and CO₂) and stored soil carbon creates this planet's living skin—known as the Earth's soil carbon sponge. Sponge? Yep, because healthy soil creates a Swiss-cheese-esque structure that's up to 60 percent open voids of space. It's this space or 'in-soil reservoir' that can hold vast amounts of water naturally,

safely, everywhere.

Soil carbon is a powerful part of this equation. For every one percent increase in soil, it can hold up to 120,000 litres a hectare. An IUCN 2020 report describes that by increasing soil carbon by 0.4% a year can increase stored water in soil by 37 trillion litres across the world.

Alpine wetlands and peatlands make up a tiny fraction of the Australian alpine landscape, yet these carbon-rich islands within an island of alpine bioregion are this continent's slowly pulsing, cleansing 'kidneys' that protect and supply life-giving liquid downstream. If you were to point a temperature gun at these soils, it'd read 20 degrees or less. Grab that temperature gun and try it for yourself. Conversely, bare, dry soil at lowland elevation can be as hot as 70 degrees Celsius. Or city concrete.

So could the Australian Alps be any cooler? Quite simply, yes. Simple but wise human ecological land management steps are, well, pretty cool. What might blow your mind is by understanding and re-applying this natural cooling process Alps-wide, might we be able to extend the duration of white-season snow-cover?

We can cool landscapes everywhere when we understand, respect and reapply Nature's processes, someone once said.

Where too much information is overload, an acronym

saves the day for me:

EARTH can be defined as:

Earthy, ground-vegetated soil is naturally
Aerated and active biologically that
Retains water to safely
Turn down
Heat.

Even better, we decided to make a short six-minute film called Kosciuszko: the liquid heart of the continent at <https://vimeo.com/584522269>, part of an hour-long documentary that is near completion with a focus on alpine wetland regeneration.

You could say I'm a big fan of the Australian Alps. Funnily enough, the Australian Alps are a 'big fan' for us, naturally cooling itself, Country and all her inhabitants, humans included. Turns out, when we listen, we can help.

When not filming Bill Barker and Buff Farnell throw an 80-kilogram rescue dummy from Mt Hotham's cliffs for a new backcountry safety film for the Australian Ski Patrol Association (see article in this issue), Stephen Curtain prefers to place cucumber slices over his eyes and recline. He is an ecologist, cinematographer, field guide and skier.

For more information, please see ecosaustralia.org and regenerate-earth.org



Soil mountains winter



Soil mountains winter

The strange land of the 12 Mile Hill

A report from Lisa Roberts about a visit to a recently logged area on the southern end of the Dargo High Plains.

We watched the mist come out of the forest over the hill and race across the cleared smashed country and fall when it reached the trees on the other side. Up here, the trees call in the clouds and the clouds drop into the trees and this is where the water comes from.

On the 12 Mile Hill the habitat didn't get lost. In 2018 it was willfully destroyed by the Government logging agency VicForests. You won't see this old mountain forest again and neither will those who come after you.

Despite the ecological catastrophe of the 2019-20 Summer bushfires which burnt through 1.25 million hectares of forest in East Gippsland, hundreds of coupes and 20,000 hectares of forest including key unburnt refuges are scheduled for logging in East Gippsland.

'We grow it back', Vicforests claim, yet an independent report finds that 30% of coupes have failed to grow back. Regrowing a natural complex forest ecosystem from such wounded land is fraught. If trees do grow back, it's not 'like for like' - it's a highly flammable, water hungry monoculture of single preferred species, unlikely to survive bushfires, deer or drought.

Further up the mountains, on the edge of the plains, Vicforests logged 700 hectares of unburnt forest at the old Jones Creek mine and smashed a road through Alpine tree frog sites to get there. In 1911 the Waterworks Trust shut down the Jones Creek goldmine because it sluiced into the creek and polluted the Mitchell River all the way to Bairnsdale.

Over the next range, the plains fall east to the Little Dargo River, another 700 hectares of forest both

sides of the river is scheduled. One coupe in this cluster was logged and burnt in 2020, but the rest of this forest won't fall without a fight.

Up here in the Little Dargo, the Dargo, the Wongungarra, the Wonnangatta, the Crooked and Mitchell River catchments are old mountain forests that call in the clouds. These forests create the rain that flows into Gippsland Lakes, redgum plains and 22,000 people living downstream. Up here, the trees call in the clouds and the clouds drop into the trees and this is where the water comes from.

12 Mile Hill: Gunnai Kurnai Country on the Dargo High Plains road north of Mt Ewen, south of the Dargo High Plains.

Photos November 2021

Lisa Roberts is a photographer who chases disappearing trees. Recent work with text by Louise Crisp includes Coupe Portraits: Walking the Damaged Forests of East Gippsland (Gunaikurnai Country) cordite.org.au/chapbooks-features/coupe-portraits

1: After the Logging. Failing to regrow Victoria's native forests. Margaret Blakers, 2021 environmentvictoria.org.au/2021/11/30/after-the-logging-failing-to-regrow-victorias-native-forests/

2: smh.com.au/environment/conservation/graziers-and-greenies-unite-in-drive-to-save-the-forest-20210312-p57a0n.html

3: 2019 study finds Melbourne loses 15 billion litres of water annually from logging the catchment Modelling water yields in response to logging and Representative Climate Futures. Chris Taylor, David Blair, Heather Keith, David Lindenmayer sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969719328712



Around the campfire

Some chats with mountain people

This year we thought we would focus our stories on people who are actively doing good in and for the mountains. This is just the tip of the iceberg: there are the park rangers, the weather forecasters, the fire tower watchers, the garbos and mechanics and road clearers who keep the resorts open, the snow makers, and all the folks who keep the mountain communities open and thriving. But this is a start.

For many more stories and profiles please check here themountainjournal.com/interviews-profiles

The ski patroller

Peter Robinson

Peter is a ski patroller at Mt Stirling in North Eastern Victoria.

How did you get involved?

I skied as a kid, my parents taught me, and so I spent a fair bit of time skiing with my family and friends. In 2019 a friend dragged me along to Mt Stirling to volunteer with the ski patrol. I quickly realised it was a great way to ski a lot, and to learn from people who are more skilled than I was.

What is involved in ski patrol?

You are the ambassador for the mountain. You spend a lot of time just talking with people, offering them information, keeping them safe and intervening when things go wrong. Mt Stirling is different to most resorts in that there are no ski lifts or accommodation. It's a cross country/backcountry mountain, so the way we operate is different to downhill resorts, particularly when searches are required. This becomes a team effort as it's a big mountain with a lot of trails and rough terrain.

Because of the mountain's terrain, mostly Alpine Ash and Snow Gum, there are a lot of trails to keep open and so we often get involved in track work, removing fallen trees and making sure the tracks are safe and

skiable. We are increasingly more involved in summer activities, such as mountain bike events and these trails also need to be kept clear. How many patrollers are there?

There are about 5 paid patrollers and 20 active volunteer patrollers on average. What does an average day on the mountain look like?

It will start with a briefing and a run-down of the intentions forms that we ask people to fill out, so that we have a good sense of where people are or where they are travelling to. This is usually followed by a training session in the morning such as First Aid or equipment use.

Then patrollers will begin moving about on the higher and lower trails throughout the day. I personally like to spend the day on and around the summit, skiing my way up on the skins or, on a good day, I get a lift up on the skidoo. While on the summit I will spend time talking with people, checking conditions, making sure the tracks are in good condition and rendering first aid assistance if required.

We're the last people off the mountain and so we tend to follow the last group of day trippers down. Generally, we encourage people to leave the summit area by 3pm so they can be back at Telephone Box

Junction (TBJ) by 4. Then we will do a check of the car park and look for any stragglers who are not yet accounted for.

We may also drop in on the campers. We know all the good camping spots and will often check with groups as we head off the hill.

Do you have many searches?

In spring, when there is more sunlight, people tend to stay on the mountain later. That can be an issue if we don't know where they are. However, most people know what they are doing and we have a well-marked trail network, so it's generally easy to find people if they do get disorientated.

What do you love about patrolling?

The lifelong friends I have made who I love skiing with for pleasure as well as while on patrol.

The many epic days of skiing. These are days where you do lap after lap of Stanley/Dugout Bowl and your legs are so trashed you can barely ski back to TBJ. Regularly patrolling on Mt Stirling means that I have also intimately learned about the mountain. I know all the secret tree runs and where the snow is best. For me it also led to paid work on the mountain. I know various people who started here as patrollers and went on to work on other mountains. Additionally, my lifelong journey in the mountains has led to my involvement in the Victorian Backcountry Festival, Bush Search and Rescue, and my leadership role in Scouts Australia as the State Leader for Alpine Activities.

What do you love about Mt Stirling?

When the conditions are good it's the best place to learn backcountry skiing. When you talk to backcountry skiers you realise that so many of them started at Stirling, going on to bigger mountains, but they always talk about their love for the time spent at Stirling.

I love the change that I am seeing as well. Nowadays, it's not just skiing. Most people on the mountain in winter are not traditional cross-country skiers. More are up in the summit zone, on telemark alpine touring or split boarding gear. It's a mixed crowd, which means it's a cool place to go backcountry and meet people who are happy to share tips and experience. During mid-week the mountain is often dominated by school groups and it is great to see the next generation giving it a go in the bowls and runs that the mountain has to offer. I am loving introducing my daughter Charlotte to the mountain at present. It's

also an easy place to camp during the snow season with lots of great spots to put up a tent. Mt Stirling really is awesome and the place to be there when the snow season is at its peak.

How can people get involved in ski patrol?

They can contact the mountain and then come along to pre-season training. For the first year they will be paired with a more experienced patroller and build up their training and knowledge. After the first year, they will continue to 'learn on the job' as every day is different.



The groomer

Greg O'Donohue

Greg is a well known local at Mt Hotham, who takes meticulous care of the cross country trail network.

I was a sickly child. My mother, a nurse, thought that I wouldn't survive infancy. At an early age I began learning about soil and soil biology, although without real understanding until many years later. My understanding increased when I learned that the nutrition in our food has been declining for over 100 years. Illness plagued my youth and early adult years leading me to seek medical treatment and life in Melbourne.

Once I thought that my health issues were resolved, I jumped at the chance to move to Hotham and clean toilets at Zirky's. Glorious Hotham sunrises became highlights of my days and skiing became my life outside work. After a couple of seasons, I started managing a Lodge and skiing everyday. As my skiing improved I became involved in the Ski Patrol and the Hotham Nordic Ski School. I really started learning how to ski then. In '87 I started going to the northern hemisphere for more and sometimes better snow. I was hooked and not looking further ahead than the next ski season. At the same time, I was frustrated with instructing, on sometimes awful Australian snow. This, and my efforts on the newly constructed Wire Plain trails lead me towards grooming. I found that, as rewarding as instructing was, I could actually

do more for all levels of skier by grooming. Sometimes the money was even better. I didn't know what I'd let myself in for though, as the trails had been roughed in and still needed a lot of work.

In the '90's I got work grooming trails at a major US Cross Country resort and my life returned to back to back winters. Another health issue put an end to northern winters and I got a fire spotting job for a couple of summers before getting full time work at Hotham. I became the Fire Control Officer for Mt Hotham Alpine Resort among many other things. My great regret is that I was never able to make the trails into what I knew that they could be - great to ski on with minimal snow levels. I kept learning about soil, water and climate and ended up spending two summers in Antarctica working for the Australian Antarctic Division as an Aircraft Ground Support Officer. I spent some time grooming runways, refuelling planes and helicopters while supporting scientists and learning.

Once back at Hotham I became sick again and was made redundant then rehired the following week as a casual. I had a big challenge learning about my illness and overcoming it over the next years. Researching my ailments led me to some parallels between human health and soil health.



Ecosystem restorers

Bev Lawrence and Aviya Naccarella

Bev and Aviya have been working together at Mt Hotham on the environment program run by the Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board (MHARMB).

Bev: MHARMB is responsible for protecting the environment at Mount Hotham. The environmental team work on projects ranging from pest predator and weed control, revegetation, native fauna monitoring, citizen science, as well as waste and sustainability projects. Some recent highlights include the restoration of an old quarry site on the side of Mt Little Higginbotham, creating additional boulderfield habitat, increasing vegetative cover and food resources for the Mountain Pygmy possum, and the installation of a waste sorting station at Hotham's waste transfer station, enabling recycling to be more efficiently sorted and contaminants easily removed.

What motivated you to do this work?

Aviya: I became interested in alpine ecology at university, intrigued by the unique adaptations of both the native flora and fauna to the extreme climatic conditions. This passion led to an honours project researching snow gums across Hotham and Falls Creek. This led to me to my work as an environmental officer at Hotham and the opportunity to contribute to conservation projects in the Alps.

Bev: I started doing part time work on alpine grasses with Liz MacPhee at the Tobacco Research Station. The Research Station would eventually become what is now the Victorian Alps Nursery. Liz is a horticultural scientist who was also working on the germination of Australian alpine shrubs. Collecting shrub seeds on Mt Hotham for Liz proved to be the start of an on-going passion for the incredible variety of plants we have in our Australian Alps. I was fortunate to be offered the opportunity to work full time in summer on the emerging environmental programs on Hotham. Till 2020 I was working full time in winter as a paid ski patroller. After 2020 I was full time on enviro work.

What sustains your enthusiasm for the work?

Aviya: Whether it is planting a shrub to provide food resources for Mountain Pygmy-possums or waking up before dawn to count moths it's the interactions with

our native species that sustains my enthusiasm. I am also passionate about sharing my own enthusiasm for our unique ecology with the public, whether it be through talks, citizen science projects, or simply a conversation on the trails or in the lunchroom with colleagues.

Bev: The variety of work I get involved in. Everything from setting up erosion control on job sites, advising building contractors on best environmental practice, getting injured native animals to proper care, giving enviro talks to school students, the involvement with visiting university researchers, weed control, the planting of the full suite of alpine plants, the sometimes crazy steep, rocky slopes we plant into. A highlight was spending a week in the fire helicopter GPSing willow across the high country, and of course meeting the Pygmy possums when biologists Ian Mansergh then Dean Heinze came to Hotham for monitoring.

What are you most proud of achieving in your work?

Aviya: I am most proud of producing a Flora Guide specific to Mount Hotham Resort. The Guide provides visitors and locals with information on common indigenous plant species and Traditional Owner plant uses shared by the GunaiKurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation. The booklet is available on the Mount Hotham website.

I am also proud to have been part of a collaborative citizen science project with Falls Creek Resort Management Board and La Trobe University – the Alpine Snowpatch Vegetation Monitoring Project. The project aims to collect long-term visual data to monitor snowpatch formation and melt at two individual snowpatches at Mount Hotham and Falls Creek Resorts. If you're interested in getting involved visit the project page on BioCollect - biocollect.ala.org.au/acsa/project/index/975595b3-f675-44da-8117-6727a230044b

Bev: Seeing sites we have planted thrive and grow. It takes time, as alpine plants generally grow slowly, this being part of their strength. Seeing the food waste program continue to grow. The compostable coffee cup and lid project moving towards completion. Having more of our Hotham community becoming



aware of doing things better in the waste space. Lots of questions about how they can divert from landfill. Better options.

What do you love most about the work?

Aviya: Having the opportunity to work with alpine flora and fauna and collaborate with other organisations on conservation projects that work towards building resilience of our alpine ecosystems. Working at the Victorian Alps Nursery is also a huge highlight of my role, being able to see a plant through its life cycle from collecting seed to propagating to planting is especially rewarding.

Bev: Seed collection: time to really look around at this amazing workplace. The people I work with and laugh with. Apart from the plants – the animals! The possums of course- what not to love, the lizards, frogs, snakes, birds. I had a Rakali (water rat) swim towards me through a puddle, looked like a little otter. Made me smile despite being totally wet, cold and muddy at the time. The early morning Bogong Moth monitoring – hearing dingoes call as the sun rises – magic!

Mount Hotham flora guide.
mthotham.com.au/summer/walking-hiking/hike-hotham/mt-hotham-flora-guide

Martin Chalk

Martin has been a member of the National Parks Association of the Australian Capital Territory [NPA (ACT)] for over 32 years.

Upon his return to Canberra in the early 1990's he struck out into the hills. Martin recalls:

"My first trip was a solo one based on a somewhat sketchy description of the route to Hospital Swamp in Namadgi National Park. My earlier training as a navigator in the RAAF paid dividends when staying on my selected route. But that aside, I was hooked".

He later joined guided walks with the NPA (ACT) to get familiar with terrain and destinations and then turned to leading walks. Then, in the winter of 1998, he was invited to a meeting to consider undertaking some rehabilitation work in Namadgi National Park.

"A group of 20 or 30 people gathered in a cramped room on a June night to be advised that a commercial pine plantation located in the Gudgenby Valley, central Namadgi, was to be removed and the area rehabilitated to native vegetation. This meeting was the birth of the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group (Gudgenby Bushies) and I have been a member since that day. The pines are long gone and the area now more closely resembles an open-woodland common to most valleys in Namadgi. We continue to assist the natural recovery process.

"Little did any of we Gudgenby Bushies know that that things were about to change".

A long period of joyous and rewarding travels throughout Namadgi and Kosciuszko National Parks came to an abrupt end in January 2003 when the Millennium Drought announced its arrival with weeks of devastating bushfires. The next year or so allowed unobstructed, if not dirty, walking to destinations formally 'protected' by 1-metre bush. But the need to help in the recovery process was clear.

Shortly after the fires were extinguished, the NPA was asked by the ACT Parks Service if it would be able to help in recovery works for Namadgi National Park. "In the meeting between the Parks Service and the NPA I was asked if I would coordinate the NPA's involvement. My positive response was never in doubt".

"Nineteen years on, my team of volunteers continues to contribute to bush regeneration both in the reserved areas of the ACT and those in surrounding NSW".

"This work has been the most rewarding I have done. The love of conservation work shared by the volunteers is boundless, as is their willingness to answer the call for one day a month of hard graft. After years of walking in the mountains, it's a privilege to give something back."

npaact.org.au



The activist

Chris Schuringa

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got involved in forest activism?

I come from a social work/youth work background and have long had a passion for working with people. I'd done a lot of hiking and travelling through forests in lutruwita/Tasmania but didn't know anything about native forest logging. Through my travels I met people who told me stories of spending cold days and nights sitting up in tree-sits and putting their bodies on the line to defend forests under threat from being logged. I was totally in awe by what I heard and it had a big impact on me and I started looking for pathways to do the same back in Victoria.

I ended up at one of the Friends of the Earth Forest Collective meetings and haven't turned back. That was nearly 5 years ago.

What motivates and inspires you?

A lot of what inspires me are the people involved in the forest movement. The dedication and passion people have blows my mind. It feels like you really belong to something big and special. There's certainly a lot of heart break and anger as well which is a motivator. When you visit and walk through the forests, and see the animals that live there on a weekly basis these areas become part of you. Seeing them destroyed starts to feel really personal and definitely spurs you on.

It's the beauty of the forests and the strength of our communities that inspires me the most.

What sort of things are you doing to protect the forests?

There's not much I wouldn't do to see our forests protected. I've sat in trees, stumbled down steep gullies in the middle of the night looking for wildlife, put up wildlife cameras, and sat on the side of logging roads for hours on end.

Why are the forests of East Gippsland so special?

I fell in love with the forests of East Gippsland – on Gunnaikurnai, Bidewell and Ngarigo/Monero country when I first visited nearly 5 years ago. There are few places in the world you can go to see such a diverse landscape. Coastal forests, warm-temperate rainforests, lush cool-temperate rainforests, giant old trees, wet forest gullies, mountains, valleys ... It is truly one of the most incredible places.

After seeing the impacts of the 2019/2020 fires on many of the places I love – it's pretty heart-breaking knowing many more areas are still up for logging. Rest assured there are many folks still fighting for the protection of these areas – through citizen science, direct action, blockading and more. Since the '80s and '90s people have dedicated their lives to see these forests protected. Until all native forest logging has stopped in Victoria we'll keep fighting. Geco.org.au



Phoebe Roberts

Wildcare Tasmania

“When passion and responsibility are linked, an opening is created for innovation and something gets done ... this translates into excitement and results, or put another way – having fun doing something useful.” Harrison Owen.

Wildcare Tasmania is a powerhouse team of volunteers and donors caring for Tasmania's wild places, wildlife and cultural heritage. They offer inspiring volunteering opportunities in beautiful places, working in close partnership with the Tasmanian government, Councils, and private landowners.

With over 60 groups across the State, the work of Wildcare groups varies but one constant remains - when people take responsibility for what they care about, you get inspiration linked to practical results.

Meet Phoebe Roberts – a climber of mountains, adventurer and lover of all things wild. She recently volunteered with Wildcare for the first time. This is her story:

Phoebe Roberts

Injuring my knee at the beginning of 2021 and being forced to slow down has given me time to think about our wild places and the impact we have on them.

I knew there had to be a way I could get involved to help say thank you and put my little bit back into this beautiful state I love to explore.

I had already heard about Wildcare and the great work they do, so after going to the Wildcare Expo in Hobart I decided that I wanted to do my bit and help where I could.

In December, I took part in my first day of track maintenance with the Friends of Mount Field. We worked on the Old Pack Track in Mt Field national park and I met some wonderful people whilst doing it!!

Afterwards, once we had all finished and had said our goodbyes, I ducked up to Pandani Grove for a wander and fell in love with all the scoparia out in full bloom...

I'd have to say, spending time with the wonderful group of volunteers from Friends of Mount Field has certainly given me a whole new appreciation of our tracks. Seeing just how dedicated the whole team were only made me strive to do more!!!

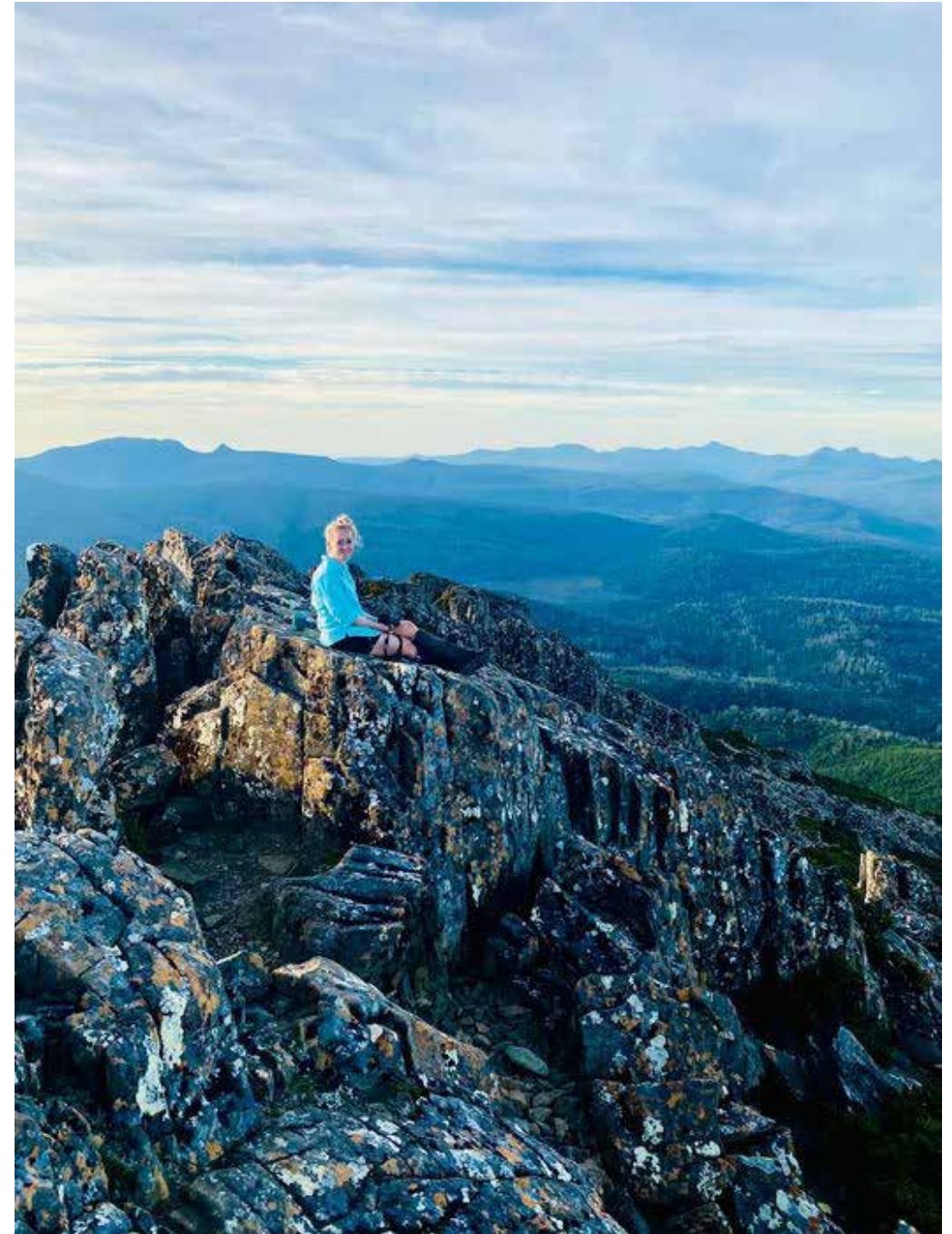
One thing, however, that I have often noticed with volunteer groups in general, is how they often lack younger volunteers and are made up of the older generations. These amazing people have been committed for years upon years and it baffles me that the younger generation just haven't gotten involved?

So with all this, I am glad to say that I've booked in for more this new year with the team at Mount Field and I'm so keen to get involved!

I urge you, if you've ever considered helping out but didn't know how to get started then this is one great way for you to do your bit in our world...

This is a big “THANK YOU” to all the paid staff & volunteers that take time out & help look after our wild places, I know I appreciate it.

wildcaretas.org.au



The researcher

Emma Elizabeth Sumner

There is a vast amount of research carried out across the mountains, by students at universities, research institutions, and government bodies. Most of this work is invisible to the public, yet it is vital to help us understand threats to the environment and ensure we can plan for an uncertain future. Emma Elizabeth Sumner is studying a PhD at Deakin University and explains some of what research in an alpine environment involves.

How did you come to be doing a PhD on plants in the mountains?

During my undergraduate degree at La Trobe Uni, we had some really great lecturers that held a field trip up in the Mount Hotham area. It was the first time that I'd visited the Australian Alps and I found the landscape really impressive. It was fascinating to see these big expansive mountains and plains with hardly any human infrastructure, and plants and animals making a living in these really extreme conditions. I was hooked! There are also a lot of really interesting research questions you can explore in the mountains because of the steep environmental gradients and high plant diversity.

Tell us about your research. What does it involve/ where is it located? What are you seeking to learn? My research is focused on how alpine plants respond to heatwaves and drought - climate extremes that are predicted to become more frequent in the Australian alps. While we know Australian alpine plants are incredibly frost hardy, not much is known about their heat tolerance, or how drought might alter high and low temperature tolerance. I focus on a suite of alpine plant species growing across the Bogong High Plains and in Kosciuszko National Park: species like *Poa fawcettiae*, *Grevillea australis*, and *Ranunculus graniticola* to name a few. Much of my research involves imposing drought and heatwave treatments in the field and/or in the glasshouse and then measuring thermal tolerance response. To measure thermal tolerance I expose plant material to a series of extreme temperatures (using a series of freezers and hot water baths) and then I determine which temperature causes irreversible damage. I'm also interested in how plant thermal tolerance changes throughout the year, and along elevational gradients. What do you love most about your research?

There's a lot to love about working in the mountains. I've enjoyed getting to explore some really remote places that I wouldn't have otherwise seen, especially around Kosciuszko. Spending a lot of time traipsing around the mountains from the very start of spring when the snow is just beginning to melt, right through to winter has also been wonderful because it's given me such a great appreciation for the flowering sequence of different species and the variability in climate conditions that plant and animal life have to deal with.

When you think of the future of mountain environments in the context of climate change, what impacts do you think you will see in your lifetime? Climate change will definitely have some serious implications for alpine ecosystems. Most Australian alpine plant species are incredibly tolerant to extreme conditions – they inhabit areas with really unpredictable climate conditions which select for robust traits like high thermal tolerance, for example. However, I think we'll likely see less frost tolerant, taller and more competitive species expand their ranges up into the higher mountains as strong climate filters like snow cover and frost relax. Ultimately these range expansions will be to the detriment of more specialised and less competitive species that have strong ties with snow and snowmelt patterns.

While climate change is definitely a very important threat to alpine environments, I think the threat of invasive species, particularly weeds like ox-eye daisy and hawk weed and big ungulates like horses and deer are already having a huge impact on the plants and animals in alpine ecosystems and it's something we can actually control at the state-level. I've seen an incredible amount of damage from horses and deer in the bogs and wetlands near my study sites just in my short time working in the alps, so I can only imagine the scale of damage across the entire landscape. These animals thoroughly trample sphagnum peat moss and vegetation in bogs which takes a long time to recover. This also impacts habitat for animals like the broad tooth rat (which is an unfortunate name for an adorable chubby native rat). These impacts will likely continue to alter the alpine ecosystems we know within our lifetime.



The communicator

Jonica Newby

When I went to my doctor a couple of years ago and asked for my first ever prescription for antidepressants, she was really surprised. Especially when I revealed what had brought me to this crisis point. It was love ... for snow.

You may wonder how I fell for snow when I tell you I grew up in WA – more famous for its sharks than chalets. But my fairy tales were full of snow. Enchanting me with their sparkly, magical stories of wardrobes that open into Narnia or heroic hobbits braving treacherous alpine peaks.

Fast forward: I grew up, moved to Sydney where I became science reporter for ABC TV's Catalyst program, and childhood infatuation grew into a full blown passion when I discovered Kunama Nam-adjì (in Ngarigu): also known as Australia's Snowy Mountains. I had all the symptoms of a crazy crush. Yes, I was that girl; internet stalking Thredbo, boring my colleagues describing its gorgeous crystal crusted peaks, its wombat snow caves, its snow gums twisting in glowing jewel colours beneath ice covered leaf chandeliers. I even dreamed about snow.

Over time, I have come to realise that just as we are primed to fall in love with people, we are primed by our biology to fall in love with places. Why? Because we evolved to love the elements of life that matter most to our survival. The late great biologist / philosopher E O Wilson coined the term Biophilia to describe our innate urge to love certain living things or natural settings. Indigenous Australians understand this deeply, the roots of connection to country reaching back millennia. But we all feel it intuitively, all have special beach-towns or farms or forests we love. That love is there to make us protect our homes, the landscapes on which we depend. I've come to call them "heart-places".

I'm a science reporter. I don't know why I thought snow would be magically immune to climate change – denial I guess? But in 2018, after a year deep dive researching what was going to happen to snow worldwide and here in Australia, something in me broke. I started to cry, no longer able to ignore the science. If we don't find the will to rapidly reduce carbon emissions, then our magical snowscape might

Photos Mandy Lamont

... melt away.

That's what propelled me into my doctor's office. I was suffering a new phenomenon called Climate Grief.

But take heart – in my case, climate grief for snow was the reality face-slap I needed. As I walked out of the doctor's, a pocket full of antidepressants, my life changed direction.

I've spent the last few years on a personal quest; asking wise people how do we live a good and happy life under the weight of this knowledge? It became a book: *Beyond Climate Grief: a journey of love, snow, fire and an enchanted beer can*. And paradoxically, it filled me with inspiration, laughter and – frankly – hope.

And a mission. I now look constantly for what I can usefully contribute to climate action – and that includes giving talks and educating people about the snow, and the best psychological strategies for transforming climate grief into courage and optimism.

Our mountains are full of people who've had the wake-up call I've had and are determined to turn this around. The firefighters, the back-country guides, the educators and the rangers all giving back to the mountains, doing what they can to protect the place we all love. I'm so proud of them, so proud also of the businesses going carbon neutral, the resorts switching to renewable power.

My mountain heart-place gives me so much; renewal, soul-food, and fun! I love the thrill of the ice-winds, the wildness of the storms, the sparkle of a back-country day on Ramshead Range with friends.

But that love also asks something of me. It asks that I never turn away in denial, and keep taking whatever action no matter how small to ensure our heart-place survives.

That's how you get beyond climate grief.

Oh – and I never needed those anti-depressants.



The community builder

Anne Chiew

What was your path to the mountains?

Most people get into snow via family holidays when they were young. I didn't see snow until I was 25, which is a painful time to learn and fall down on a snowboard - plus the body takes longer to heal. I managed to inherit a massive group of snowboarding friends through my partner at the time, and most of our holidays involved snowboarding either in Hotham, Falls or Japan. In the early days, my love of the mountains was about doing as many lifts as possible. First and last lift. Fanging it down the mountain as fast as you can. And then enjoying the fun late night ski town life.

Today as I enter my 40s, my relationship with the mountain has really changed. I prefer the quiet, slowness, stillness and solitude of the backcountry. Initially I started splitboarding to fill in the gap between powder days. Now I think of backcountry and splitboarding first, and how lifts fill in the gaps. I love skinning past gumtrees that have been there for hundreds of years. I think about the history it's been through. The people and wildlife they've seen walk past them or enjoy their shelter. The weather and bushfires it's had to endure and yet it still stands tall and proud in the mountains.

What do you love about skiing/ backcountry/ the mountain community?

100% the people. Everyone is so supportive, friendly, willing to share their knowledge, time and connections. There is no or little ego. So much patience showing a newbie like me the ropes. I love that the mountains have this magic effort in attracting like minded people to gather and enjoy the mountains together in whatever shape their body is comfortable with.

It doesn't matter what the sport of choice is: skiing, snowboarding, backcountry, trail running, mountain bike riding. Since moving to Bright last year, everyone I've met that has a special connection to the mountains has welcomed me with open arms. I won't be moving back to the city anytime soon. I have a mountain family here now.

Stoke is high this week as we can see snow up the top of hill from down here in Bright. Bring on winter. I have purchased every season pass possible. Tell us about your involvement in the Victorian back-country festival

I participated in the 2019 BC Festival and absolutely felt at home instantly with everyone I met. I want these people and activities in my life all the time. My cup was getting filled.

I am planning to get into event management so when VBCF were looking for festival volunteers in early 2020, I instantly contacted Cam to introduce myself. With Covid at its peak, we knew 2020 festival wasn't gonna happen so I convinced a bunch of folks who haven't ridden with me before / worked with me before to lead and run the online VBCF zoom program which turned out to be a success. We had 3 webinars running simultaneously, streaming to Zoom and Facebook Live at the same time, booked 19 volunteer speakers, produced over 12 hours of content, 4 moderators hosting the program, live interactive chatrooms and QandA forums.

Once I proved my ability to run an event, Cam let me take charge of the 2021 festival. Hundreds of hours was put into leading and organising IRL Hotham VBCF. We pushed it into the eleventh hour but eventually had to cancel when Victoria wasn't opening up travel for Melbournians.

This year we are confident the festival will go ahead. Not only are we going to resurrect the 2021 plans, but we are planning much more. There will be alpine skiing and splitboarding tours, educational and inspiring speakers, a film night, outdoor bar, demo village, competitions, interactive safety workshops, snow camping and much more. So save the date and we hope to see all lovers of the mountains up at Hotham on September 2nd to 5th 2022.



The fire fighters

The Mount Hotham Dinner Plain brigade of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) is a diverse group of mountain lovers who face both the difficulties of fighting fire in a snow covered resort town, plus often month long wild-fires in summer.

Terry Crisp

Captain, Mt Hotham Dinner Plain fire brigade

I joined the Mount Hotham Dinner Plain CFA in 2012. At that time, I was living at Hotham and working in Bright. I was approached by the winter commander Brett Boatman. Like most members of the public I thought I knew what was involved in being a member of the CFA. Of course, it is always more than that. Training and familiarisation with the equipment required to operate in an Alpine environment and the unique risk profile that comes with a ski resort. Looking back, it is hard to remember what my motivation was at the time. As best I can recall, it was a desire to be involved in local community service. How many of life's endeavors and passions have seemingly humble beginnings?

I suppose the most lasting memories hinge around two subjects. First, the members that I have had the pleasure and privilege to work with over the years and those that have been mentors for me. Most notably the former long serving Captain, Larry Doyle, but there have been many others over the years. Second is the memories that relate to the Fires and campaigns that I have been a part of. The first was soon after I joined in 2013. This was my "baptism of fire" as to what was involved in an Alpine fire campaign, and it is not all squirting water on a fire. There is a considerable amount of logistics and planning involved.

The second campaign was the fires of 2019/2020. Dinner Plain was impacted during that event as was a significant portion of Victoria and indeed the Country. This campaign stretched our resources to the limit as

there was not much in the way of support available as there was such a demand on resources statewide. We survived and did not suffer any losses to life or property so I guess all's well that ends well, although there was at least one day that I would rather not do again! Winter brings with it a far greater population to Hotham and Dinner Plain and this increases our risk profile. Chimney fires are a regular occurrence, as is the occasional house fire. We also respond to motor vehicle accidents in our area.

I have had the privilege of being the Brigade Captain for the last three years and have enjoyed the role. However, at times the administration load can be considerable. For the last four years I have been away from Hotham over the summer season and have returned as needed for major events. I am very lucky to have such a good team that are at Hotham and Dinner Plain that can carry on the necessary functions over the summer period.

My other roles at Hotham have been centered around the Ski Industry. Three years as a Snowsports Instructor followed by eight years as a volunteer for Guest Services. The last two years have been in a paid role with Guest Services. I particularly enjoy the aspect of helping people get the most out of their winter holiday. During these years my wife Rowan and I have managed accommodation for the ski company as well as a private lodge. The people we have met in CFA, as Lodge Managers and through the ski company are what has made the whole experience so special and rewarding.



Chris Lewczynski

Volunteer firefighter

Why did you sign up? What motivated you to join the CFA?

I grew up in Hertfordshire, just north of London. Originally I came to Mount Hotham in 2009 as a ski instructor and, I had no perception of CFA or how firefighting in rural areas is a volunteer lead organisation. The fire station at Mount Hotham is about 200 m away from my work and I noticed the tracked fire appliance Mount Hotham had and was impressed by the unique bits of equipment they had for firefighting in snowy conditions. Still, I had no idea all the members were volunteers. After a couple of seasons, I realised that a few of my colleagues were members of the brigade and I asked about what it was like.

They explained to me about the CFA, how everyone at Hotham was a volunteer and what it was like being a firefighter. I was quite taken aback, at home in the UK I'd seen news footage of the bushfires in Australia, but I hadn't realised how it was such a community lead emergency response. After that, I got introduced to the Brigade Operations Officer, he explained the process to becoming qualified and after attending a couple of nights I decided to sign up and volunteer.

What do you enjoy about being involved?

The most enjoyable part of being a CFA member has been learning new skills and feeling like you are giving back to the community. When I first joined, just looking at all the equipment and controls on our firefighting appliances was quite intimidating. However, all our members are really supportive and

the training was great and I was able to become proficient at operating our unique firefighting appliances.

However, the best part of joining the fire brigade was something I didn't foresee, getting the opportunity to meet parts of the community I would probably not have met before and making new friends. The CFA at Hotham is a diverse bunch, with members from different professions, backgrounds, ages and reasons for being on the mountain. This summer I moved to Myrtleford and I started training and turning out to incidents with the Myrtleford brigade. They were really welcoming and it was a great way to quickly meet people in the community.

What are the practical issues that come from fighting fire in a snowy environment?

Firefighting in the alpine regions can be challenging in terms of the elements, terrain, conditions and remoteness. Just staying warm at incidents can be a challenge, you could be fighting a house fire but have water freezing on your helmet. At Mount Hotham and Dinner Plain we are responsible for a wide variety of tourist accommodation, from large concrete apartment blocks to lodges that were built by members over 50 years ago and an airport. During winter, many of these are only accessible over snow. At Mount Hotham and Dinner Plain we're lucky to have some great specialist equipment such as a new tracked firefighting appliance, skidoos and tracked Can Am support vehicles. All of these allow us to respond in all weather conditions and over complex terrain.

The Guides

We all love getting out into the wild country. For many of us, our first trips into the big outside are with guides who can lead us through the experience safely and give us the skills we need to head out on our own.

Mattie Gould Desire Lines Cycling Club

I'm Mattie.

I like riding all types of bikes, on all types of terrain, loaded and unloaded. The Jagungal Wilderness is my favourite place to explore by bicycle.

Last year I took my six year old on his first bike camping trip. It was mostly hike-a-bike. I chose an unknown route I hadn't reccy-ed first. The weather was pretty terrible and we arrived at camp near dark. We ate lukewarm pesto pasta. It was fantastic.

Less than 18 months ago, I created Desire Lines Cycling Club. Initially I thought the website would become a community fed resource of bikepacking and adventure cycling routes around Australia. Instead, it's shifted focus to become a place to share stories, a place to celebrate small feats of achievement (some long, some short) and a platform to help good people

share the power of cycling, often for the very first time.

Since launching the site, I've published over fifty stories from regular mountain visiting cyclists from Australia and New Zealand; interviewed a few homegrown makers and created a community that celebrates inclusivity.

I love seeing contributors growing in confidence, meeting fellow riders through the site and waking up to a fresh adventure delivered to my inbox.

But mostly I enjoy seeing people enjoying the places one reaches by bicycle.

On Instagram
@mattiejgould and Desire Lines is @desirelinescc
desirelinescc.com.au



Dave and Pieta Herring
Alpine Access Australia

Pieta and Dave are much loved members of the Australian backcountry community. They have followed their love of snow, skiing and mountains across many continents.

We met through mutual friends in the late 80's. We both had grown up near the Snowy Mountains and skied since we were little kids. Dave skied as a youngster at Kiandra, Pieta was in the Perisher Racing Club. When we met, we had both recently returned from stints working in resorts in Colorado.

We started out in business on the waterfront on Pittwater. Bought our first house and had a couple of kids, Georgia and Byron – now in their 20's.

When a guy walked in and wanted to buy our business in 1995, we took the opportunity to move to Milton on the NSW South Coast, as we both had spent our childhoods holidaying in the area and were keen surfers.

With Dave's experience in the shipwright business, it wasn't a hard transition to making handcrafted furniture.

As members of Canberra Alpine Club, we spent a lot of time at Perisher, making sure our kids caught the ski bug just like us. Every few years we would return to North America. One day we tried Japan, and were hooked on that place. Particularly the daily pow.

Through this period, Dave took on a role as a voli ski patroller and at this time he also got himself some ski touring gear and started venturing into the backcountry. He eventually made the transition from patroller to backcountry guide in 2010. Backcountry skiing was really starting to grow in popularity overseas but was still a very small segment of the industry in Austra-

lia. People were also starting to get trained up in avalanche awareness elsewhere, and after Pieta and Dave did their AST1 and 2 in Japan, they saw a need for more Aussies to get educated, particularly before they headed to the northern hemisphere.

Initially using foreign Avalanche Canada instructors, Dave and Pieta are now accredited Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) instructors themselves, and Alpine Access (AAA) is a licenced Avalanche Canada AST provider running courses in NSW and Victoria. AAA now employs a team of Australian instructors who also have their CAA quals, and who guide clients on backcountry ski, snowboard, mountaineering and camping tours. AAA is also an ambassador for Arc'teryx Australia/NZ.

AAA has had a proud association with Mountain Safety Collective since the beginning, and we are really pleased to see how far this organisation has come with a winter backcountry conditions report and avalanche forecast now being put out daily. This makes our job in teaching avalanche skills and backcountry safety that much easier. Dave and Pieta are committed to enabling young people coming up through the backcountry guiding ranks in Australia to have pathways for honing their skills and knowledge, based on world's best practices.

Spreading the word on safety in the backcountry is a priority, and some of the initiatives we are involved with are backcountry info nights, the annual Arc'teryx Backcountry Weekend, the Victorian Backcountry Festival, and facilitating a CAA professional level one course in Australia.

alpineaccess.com.au

Jill Lyall

Jill, 28, is a wilderness guide based in lutruwita/ Tasmania, and is a member of the Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association (TWGA). While guiding seems like a glamorous job, its hard work, both physically and emotionally. This profile on Jill was written as a collaboration between Jill and Adrien Butler. Thanks to the TWGA for permission to reprint this profile.

Where did you grow up and where you call home now?

I grew up on a farm in Western Creek under the Western Tiers, these days I live near Nunamara just outside Launceston on a bush block.

What was your first ever memory of adventure?

I very clearly remember climbing Mother Cummings with my family, I think I was four but I may have been a little younger. My mum was carrying my younger sister in one of those huge old fashioned baby backpacks. I remember being in awe of my mum carrying that backpack because my little legs were giving out on me.

When you're away from Tasmania what scene do you picture when you think of Tasmanian wilderness?

It would probably be a tie between wild west coast with moody skies and tannin-stained frothy oceans, or a Walls of Jerusalem - Scoparia filled gullies, glassy lakes and tarns and epic views/clouded in. Maybe a mix of the two with the southwest mountain ranges!

Tell us about the places you have guided

I started on the Overland Track before branching out to wider expedition trips throughout Tasmania. I also made a few Cameos in the NT on the Larapinta for one season.

What's an adventure on your wish list?

I've been dreaming of a big bike packing trip across a continent, but the continent of choice keeps shifting!

What's your favourite thing about guiding culture?

A sense of community with a bunch of diverse and wonderful people. Every time you do a trip with a new person it's like speed dating a friend. Most of the time you come away having made a connection that's well beyond surface level.

Do you have a memorable guest experience?

I had a cracker guest on the Larapinta who was a yoga teacher in training but also a shaman and fortune teller all wrapped up in a Yorkshire accent. She was so positive and stoked to be there and had plenty

of odd analogies along the way. On the last morning we climbed Mt Sonder and she ran us through a bizarre sun salutation on top of the mountain as the sun rose. The cool thing was all the guests went with it, embraced their odd co-walker, and enjoyed the stretch

What do you hope the Tasmanian guiding industry will keep doing in the future?

I hope the guiding industry will keep its rebellious streak. Where we work makes it almost impossible to just see nature as a commodity, that gives me (and probably others) the confidence to speak up. Whether that's reminding guests about climate change or talking to company leaders, government etc about dubious actions in our wild places. I hope Tassie guides keep drawing from our wild workplaces and get real windy when necessary.

If you had only one outdoor adventure you could do this year - what would it be?

A long bush walk linking a few big tracks down the southwest. If it can only be one make it as long as possible.

What do you love most about the Tasmanian wilderness?

I love how it's like stepping back into a time we almost can't fathom. Aboriginal Australians talk about deep time, and you can feel it. The trees are ancient both in physical existence and evolutionarily. Much of it hasn't seen more than the odd footprint. When you're out there and take the time to just observe where you sit, you change how you view the world, you don't get a choice.

The TWGA

The Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association is a representative body for people working as guides in the Tasmanian nature-based tourism industry. Its mission is to:

- Have a say in shaping a sustainable tourism industry in Tasmania.
- Advocate on behalf of members in relation to employment, careers and working conditions.
- Help cultivate and celebrate Tasmania's unique guiding culture.

facebook.com/Tasmanian-Wilderness-Guides-Association-100260831532635/
tasmanianguides.org/



A company gives back

Bright Brewery

Bright Brewery was born in 2005 from a passion for well-made beer, a love for the town of Bright, the pristine alpine environment, and the adventurous outdoors lifestyle that the High Country provides.

From day one, the Brewery has been driven by its values, which were instilled by founders Scott Brandon and Fiona Reddaway - to be authentic and sustainable in all that they do, and to embrace active lifestyles, celebrated with great beer.

To this day, these values form the backbone of Bright Brewery.

In 2020, Bright Brewery launched a partnership with Protect Our Winters Australia, collaborating on POW Pale Ale - a beer to help change the world.

A fresh, fruity and easy-drinking pale ale that has become synonymous with the mountains, part-proceeds from every POW Pale Ale sold goes directly to POW to help protect the unique Alpine environment and to help encourage positive action against climate change.

"Our partnership with POW is very important to us," Brandon said. "We're committed to doing our bit for the natural environment. We want to look after the mountains so our staff, our local community and visitors can enjoy them. And so our kids can enjoy them into the future, too."

But the POW collaboration is just one example of

how this regional brewery is working to reduce its environmental footprint.

"We are about to add another 177kW of solar to our brewery," Brandon said. "This is in addition to the 50kW of solar at the venue."

These solar panels will completely offset the company's power usage, making it 100% energy self-sufficient.

But being active and sustainable does not only refer to physical activity or environmental sustainability, as Brandon explains.

"We work really hard to be active in our local community, and to help create a sustainable community," he said.

Bright Brewery has a charter to support local, and it prioritises local events, organisations, individuals, groups, and charities across a huge range of activities. It supports the local trail-running chapter of Trails and Ales, the local Women's Mountain Biking group, the Alpine Cycling Club, the Autumn Festival, the Myrtleford Bowls Club, and many more.

"But even more importantly than all that, we try to support the community by offering a place for them to gather, for groups to meet, for cyclists to enjoy," Brandon said. "The Brewery is literally in the heart of Bright and we take that very seriously."

brightbrewery.com.au



Mountain Culture

Print

Walkers Journal

Ellie Keft

Inspired by travels around Australia, Walkers Journal is a digital and print publication that shares curated stories for people who are passionate about nature, exploration, food and architecture.

Walkers Journal is a passion project brought to life by the creators of green magazine, Tamsin O'Neill and Tom Bodycomb, and showcases a mix of Australia's iconic places as well as some of the paths less travelled. From a diverse community of contributors, it features walks along coasts, through mountains and outback deserts-capes, as well as a range of unique urban walks.

Walkers Journal is published quarterly by Green Press P/L and is distributed as a subscription service, offering both digital and print subscription options.

walkersjournal.com.au



Snow Action

Producing a snow focused magazine in a small market like Australia is hard work, and always a risky venture. But Snow Action's awesome 2022 issue is on sale nationally from early June in newsagents. It has a great collection of in resort and backcountry adventures, lots of eye candy, and some great stories from overseas. Grab a copy and support your local snow media.

snowaction.com.au

Gatherings

The Victorian Backcountry festival

After two disappointing winters, where the Backcountry Festival had to go on line, we are excited to announce that planning is well underway for a big gathering at Mt Hotham this year.

The 2022 festival will happen over three days in early September (2, 3, and 4). It has been extended to three days to allow people to attend more tours and workshops.

The festival will be similar in format to previous years – with a great touring program, workshops, a fantastic speakers program, and demo village. And, of course, the outdoor ski in bar on a hilltop. Many local businesses will be providing tours, food and venues. Alpine Access Australia will be offering avalanche safety courses.

There will be lots to do for non skiers and riders who just want to enjoy being in the mountains.

The Festival aims to provide an introduction to the ever-growing range of backcountry activities, while making it more accessible to the general public and educating them about mountain safety. It will be a family friendly, welcoming and inclusive event. This is a 100% volunteer run event, by the community for the community.

backcountry-festival.com



Film

Message of the Lyrebird

This took years of work, talking with lyrebird enthusiasts and following this elusive bird through many forests. The film is finally out, and producer Mark Pearce says 'Lyrebirds hold the history of the forest in their song... but are they now singing the sad story of human encroachment?' The film takes us on a magical journey through Australia's forests to understand the sophistication and complex artistry of the lyrebird. Mark hopes that it will lead humanity to a 'deeper understanding of the natural world'. It is definitely worth a watch.

Please meet Simon the Rescue Dummy

Australian Ski Patrol Association (ASPA) provides SnowSafe basics for the 'zero to hero'.

The Australian Ski Patrol Association has re-vamped its SnowSafe campaign, including a new backcountry safety film that features an unlikely hero—Simon the Rescue Dummy. While the SnowSafe website brims with must-know information before you head 'out the back', some of the film's presenters share some of their hot safety tips here.

Bill Barker, Australian Ski Patrol Association (ASPA), Mt Hotham Patrol Director

Hot tip: know how to read and predict the constantly changing snow conditions. It was great to be able to shine a little focus onto a skill that is critical for a safe day in the hills but it is often overlooked and takes many years to master.

Although the 'Misreading the Snow Conditions' section of the film is not as obvious or dramatic a hazard as cliffs, cornices, avalanches or whiteouts, it is the number one cause of accidents in the backcountry. Launching into a pristine-looking slope only to be surprised by bullet proof ice or breakable crust has seen many great skiers and boarders come unstuck, suffer serious injuries and endure very long extractions. Learning how, why and when the snow

surface changes will not only help to ensure you have a safe day in the backcountry but will also lead you to the best turns. Snow geeks always find the deepest powder!

Cari Ah Sam, Australian Ski Patrol Association (ASPA), Mt Hotham

My partner Danny is the 'promising' young actor who depicted our hypothermia patient during the making of this film. This segment had me reflecting on prevention and treatment of hypothermia.

I have spent over 10 years working as an outdoor guide and outdoor education teacher, which has required me to complete a number of Wilderness First Aid courses and training for emergency response in remote areas. For this reason, when initially patrolling I had difficulty changing in my patient treatment to not focus so much on exposure as usually packaging and transport could be performed pretty efficiently, and quickly see a patient in the hands of the Mount Hotham Medical Centre. Yet preparing for this film had me coming full circle again. With such a well facilitated and serviced resort close by it can be easy to forget we are in a pretty remote alpine area. Spring bluebird hikes in the backcountry shoulder-





Is all the learning, practice and preparation worth it?

100%



ing much of Hotham's resort boundaries could see you with a friend falling behind at the end of a long day out, cotton hoodie wet from sweat, dehydrated with still many kilometres to go. Hot tip: Stay alert to ensure you and your mates come home safely.

Buff Farnell: adventure skier

Every snow-slider on skis, a board or other contraption at some stage looks down a slope away from the safe haven of groomed snow and says 'I want to go down there'. This is backcountry and its fun and contains adventure. With all the new skis, boards etc which are wider and also better at uphill travel, we can all now enjoy fresh snow and adventure away from the masses.

But with that comes the responsibility to look after yourself and your snow buddies when away from the close help of ski patrol in a resort.

I always remember my first time skiing on rental cross country skis as a grom with my Mum and heading down a bowl when I saw a mound to jump off. So of course I yelled out to Mum I was going to send it and skied down, aired the hump then took off my skis and hiked out.

I found out the soles of the boots would not grip as I hiked out. I got freaked out and had to use the tails of my skis to dig steps to climb out. I learnt my first backcountry lesson the hard way.

Many times that's fine, but sometimes uncontrolled slides happen and are one of the less talked about ways of getting into real trouble out back. Dealing with ice on the hike out, deep snow, getting way sweaty, getting cold are all part of being in an uncontrolled environment, that's also steep and is in a constant state of flux—freezing, thawing, holes develop, etc.

Even intermediate snow-sliders now head backcountry and this short film with key information from ski patrol, search and rescue, police, ambulance, ski/outdoor guides, and freeriders is a great way to run through your knowledge and planning and look at many of the things that can go wrong—so you can avoid them and avoid the need to ring 000.

Some things are common sense, but in the mountains and in snow and ice there are so many factors that change from what was yesterday a perfect pow-covered, smooth, steep slope you ripped then skinned out of, to the next day a rippled, icy face that will need crampons to ascend. Think of it like the difference between a swimming pool and a surf beach.

My hope is that this film will help you travel safe and enjoy rad times in the alpine snow environment. See you out there.

Stephen Curtain, cinematographer/director/editor:

Matt O'Keefe from Falls Creek Ski Patrol started the 'ball rolling' on the idea for a film in 2019 with most of the film production occurring in winter 2021.

Despite border closures, fickle weather and COVID lockdowns, the film was a pleasure to produce with grateful thanks to ASPA ski patrollers of course first and foremost:

Peter Mowbray, Bill Barker, Cari Ah Sam, Matt O'Keefe, Jo Winter, Michael Wyss, Leo Lambers, Ross Alexander, Rosie Joshua, Antonia Murphy, Natasha Pritchard and David Kuhn.

The film is indebted to a 'cast of thousands' who came together at relatively short notice to make the film sequences happen, again with kind thanks:

Marcus Warner from Bright alpine SES loaned Simon the rescue dummy.

Everest summiteer Tim Macartney-Snape whose advice to show hazards upfront in the film made complete sense. Greg Paul from Victoria Police Search and his team together with ASPA trainers on Mt Buller during a training scenario added realism and wise words.

Danny Foster plus hot tips from Kelly Van Den Berg, Lisa Forsterling, Francesca Smee, Buff Farnell, Cam Walker, Anne Chiew, Michelle Forrer, Chris Epskamp and Julian Atherstone.

Snow sliders Nick Byrne, Sally Horwood, Evie Nowicka, Joshua Kynaston, Scott Brandon, Ross Walker, Meridee Love and their children plus support from Tali Walker, Falls Creek Resort and Hotham Resort Management Boards, Parks Victoria, The Lodge and Eumarellah Lodge at Mt Hotham plus Paddy Hoy, Jo Shemesh's spectacular Tasmania footage and Kosciuszko NPWS.

snowsafe.org.au/videos

Things we love

The Hub. A social enterprise café based in Dinner Plain. It was established to foster social change. It is a cafe, has e-bike hire, and offers space for yoga, pilates, a gin and whisky bar, and community events. The team at The Hub strive to improve the health, social and mental wellbeing of the Dinner Plain and Mount Hotham community.

facebook.com/thehubdinnerplain



The Alpine nursery. The Victorian Alps Nursery produces plants for rehabilitation and restoration projects at all major Victorian alpine resorts, Dinner Plain, Mt Buffalo and the Alpine National Parks and the Kosciuszko National Park. It is based in Ovens in north east Victoria.

rmb.mthotham.com.au/Our-Services/Victorian-Alps-Nursery

Everest Sports. Small operators in outdoor and backcountry gear have had a tough couple of years. While shut down of resorts was good news in terms of sales of backcountry touring gear, long lock downs hurt 'brick and mortar' gear stores. Everest Sports, tucked in to the main street in Bright, offers a fantastic range of gear and excellent knowledge of the local terrain.

everestsports.com.au/

Mountain Sports Collective. What's not to love about MSC? A backcountry community initiative – the brain-child of Simon Murray – MSC provides backcountry safety updates on a daily basis during the winter months. Simon's maps are legendary, as are the 'Slay Academy' camps that run most winters.

mountainsafetycollective.org

The 10th Mountain Climate Project. The 10th Mountain huts are a remarkable network of backcountry huts spread through the mountains of the Rocky Mountains of Central Colorado. They have long been famous among backcountry skiers and riders. Last winter they launched a climate project.

'Climate change is our greatest planetary threat, affecting all species and ecosystems. We're at a critical junction, and the actions we take in the next decade will affect everything. For the 10th Mountain Hut Division Hut Association, our greatest threats are decreased snowpack, increased fire danger, severe weather, and vast landscape changes'.

They are working to reduce the carbon impact of their hut network, they are looking into ways to make local forests more resilient against insects, drought, and wildland fire, and encouraging the hut community to use its voice for climate action.

huts.org/Community/climateProject.php



Solar panels installed on the Betty Bear Hut by 10th Mountain Climate Project

Basecamp café at Guthega BASECAMP Cafe at Guthega tomorrow. This food outlet hasn't operated for at least 25 years.

facebook.com/basecampcafeguthega

Snow dog travel. Run by Hamish Macphee, Snow Dog provides transport services to Mount Buller, Mount Hotham, and Falls Creek. Hamish is a keen backcountry skier and can get you to any trailhead or mountain that you're planning to explore.

snowdog.com.au

AAWT Track Angels. Walking the Australian Alps Walking Track is a dream trip for many. But the logistics can be hard, especially around organising food drops. This is a group where non-commercial volunteers who wish to be Track Angels (TAs) for the AAWT can post their offers to help walkers on the track, and walkers can link up with Track Angels. TAs might be involved in helping walkers place and retrieve food-drops, and may also, provide transport for walkers to and from the Track. Find them by searching Facebook groups.

Offtrack

Victorian Alps Packraft Expedition

Content by Daniel Sherwin. Intro by Kelly van den Berg.



From the source of Dargo river near Mt Hotham, four mountain adventurers hiked, bushbashed and white water rafted their way 120 kms through some of the steepest, most remote and beautiful country the Victorian Alps has on offer. There were raft punctures, sketchy swims, dangerous strainers, painful portages and snakes, but the crew also encountered some of the most epic, continuous, technical and exhilarating white water that made this an adventure to remember.

The Team

Daniel Sherwin - splitboarder, packrafter and outdoor adventurer

Claire Gilder - climber, bushwalker and packrafter

Kelly van den Berg - backcountry guide, splitboarder, packraft and adventure enthusiast

Paddy Howlett - outdoorsman, adventure racer, white

water kayaker, packrafter and ultra endurance bike packer.

Once a week during winter, we drive east on the Great Alpine Road, past the evocatively named corners and viewpoints of the Hotham ridgelines. On a sharp corner under Mount St Bernard stands a plaque marking the site of the historic hospice, here is the junction of the bridge trails that linked the goldfields of Omeo and the Dargo Valley. The Dargo High Plains Road (closed in winters) now services this route and the sign to Dargo beckons as we sail past towards cosy fire-warmed lodges. On days when the west face of Hotham is stripped of its winter habit of low level clouds, we venture out on splitboards and skis to play in the bowls and gullies of the Dargo River headwaters. Occasionally, in pursuit of longer descents we find ourselves stranded on the collapsing

snow banks of the river or knee deep in its freezing waters.

When packrafts became widely available, I dreamed of skiing to the snow line and swapping my splitboard for an inflatable boat to follow the melt south to the eponymous Dargo itself. La Niña and a bare calendar brought a rare opportunity to attempt the river during the festive season of 2021. By mid morning on December 27, we sardined into a car for the shuttle from Dargo, via the Swifts Creek Bakery. With our last pastries and cold drinks consumed, we don packs, pose for the obligatory group photo and set off along a sunny alpine ridgeline. Heavy packs take their toll as we hurdle and limbo our way through snow gum debris before deciding to set a falling traverse off the ridge to the bottom of the valley. We choose a northern face, hoping for sparse vegetation and few-

er blackberry bushes but are quickly disabused of the notion of any travel away from the fall line. Despite our best efforts, we find progress faster than 1 km/hr impossible. Fighting through steep undergrowth and ash deadfall, we eventually reach the river just before sunset at a narrow floodplain. We make camp here, amongst the head high grass, disappointed to have covered less than half the anticipated distance for the day and discouraged by the low flows evident in the river. We set off early the next morning. The Dargo River has yet to gain sufficient volume to float, so we continue downstream on foot. Our progress is marked only by the susurrations of the verdant grass forest and explosions of pollen and seed, as we disturb laden flowers and spikes. The river numbs our feet as we cross from bank to bank searching for the path of least resistance, following deer tracks and avoiding the increasingly common blackberries.



As the day wears on, we're grateful for the cool respite of water against the heat of summer. Progress remains extremely slow and my optimistic prediction of transitioning to boats by lunchtime is proven incorrect. By late afternoon and a solid 10 hour day, we have reached the Brocket mining ruins and elect to camp early again, rather than chance the encroaching dark in the gorge.

After portaging a set of sieves directly downstream of the ruins, we transition to our rafts and get underway. The river burbles happily away in typical alpine fashion, never really pooling nor presenting horizon lines. Dams formed over decades of trees swept together force numerous portages but, whilst in the flow, we sweep along with minimal effort and in near silence. The flora this far up remains unaffected by the most recent bushfires and deer are common sights. In a dark corner of the gorged landscape, we startle an unseen sambar; its alarm honk nearly causes me to capsize. A brief stop at the Mayford 4 wheel drive crossing allows Paddy time to charm ice-cold beers out of some surprised prospectors; we drink them on a small pebble beach downstream, as we dry our sodden layers by the campfire. Spirits are higher the next morning as we push off, with the walking and worst portages behind us. We jostle each other as we settle into our boats for a long day, paying little attention to the small shelf in the water ahead which hides a captive branch. Moments later, most of us are swimming and the cleanup of the nautical yard sale begins. The river keeps falling away at a moderate rate, yielding mile after mile of wave

trains interspersed with steeper grade 3 boulder gardens. We work as a team, hopping from eddy to eddy, keeping close together to ensure any loose boats can be recaptured before the river whisks them away. Coupled with the first day's section, this is the longest continuous whitewater any of us have seen. By the end of the day, the requirement for unfaltering attention to the river means we find ourselves suffering some mental fatigue but all are deliriously pleased with what the river had given us today.

Breaking camp on the final day takes little time and we ease back into the river as the first birdsong of the day rings out. We quickly make our way through the last of the swiftwater, safely past Harrison's Cut and on to the gruelling flatwater paddle to Dargo. It is New Year's Eve and the temperature in Dargo will reach 35°C by mid-afternoon. Helmets are discarded for hats, as we drift downriver past huge blackberry fortresses guarding the banks. Closer to civilisation, we find plum trees crowding the banks and fill our helmets with the fruit, staining our hands and mouths with juice. The heat becomes oppressive, stifling all sound bar the occasional splash of a poorly caught stroke and wilting the vegetation until the air hangs redolent of wild mint. And so, withdrawn into ourselves, replaying the trip or planning post-paddle degustations, we float into Dargo and the raucous welcoming parade of New Year's revellers lining the shallows. We had made it; from the source of the Dargo river down to the Dargo Pub. It certainly was a terrific way to end 2021.