



"Nurungi"

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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MEETINGS
General Meetings
2nd Wednesday of month
(except January)
at 7:30 pm in the
City of Canada Bay
Museum
1 Bent Street, Concord
9743-3034

Executive Meetings
4th Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Museum
(all members welcome)

Walker Estates Committee
meets when required.
Bob Jones, 8765-9347

Tours Organiser
Sandra Elliott
9797-1040
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Museum Committee
meets irregularly at the museum
For details contact
Lorraine Holmes, 9743-2682

Oral History Committee
Betty Fletcher, 9713-1384
Julia Stewart, 8765-9067

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**CITY OF CANADA
BAY MUSEUM**

1 Bent Street, Concord

**Open Wed & Sat
10am to 4pm**

No.169

May/June 2010

The Australian Ski Corps in Syria

Excerpts from a letter from Major R.W. Savage, the original commander of the 1st Australian Ski Corps School, published in the Australian and New Zealand Year Book, 1942.

"...Now for the Ski School, the most interesting job I have ever had in the Army. The idea of Ski Troops was discussed by the "powers that be" for some time and the opportunities for training in the snow-clad Lebanons and Anti-Lebanons were not to be missed. I came into the picture in early October when I wrote for the General Staff a five page report on ski equipment, in which I briefly discussed training and suggested several names such as Tom Mitchell, Jack Thomas and Derek Stogdale as possible instructors.

I then forgot about ski-ing except to send home for my boots in anticipation of some weekend ski-ing on the mountains behind Beyrouth. Early in November rumours began to circulate about ski troops and about the middle of the month I was appointed Commandant of the 1st Australian Corps Ski School.

Certain preparatory work on accommodation and instructors had been done by Major William Robertson, MC, a Liaison Officer on Corps staff, who had done some ski-ing in Switzerland. He and I were given the job of obtaining equipment, selected staff and getting the show going. The first task was suitable instructors — some hundreds of names were submitted in response to a Corps Order asking for those with ski-ing experience but when the list was examined most of the comments seemed to be "One week Kosciusko" . . . After considerable travel and time the following were selected.

Major Jimmy Riddell . . . Vice Captain of the last British team at the Olympic Games and so was appointed Chief Instructor . . . He was very bucked about being associated with Australians.

Ern Mills . . . a farmer in Northern Tasmania and for many years the Tasmanian Langlauf Ski Champion . . . He thought and wrote deeply on ski tactics and equipment but through it all he showed the vices of a Langlaufer . . . he was the inventor of the Mills Lebanon Langlauf Binding which was a very simple binding working on a new principle.

The last officer-instructor was Lieutenant

McCaw known as "Dangerous Dan" or occasionally "The Great McCaw"! He was a Bogong High Plains "Rat" who would rather live in a hut than a place with "mod cons."

In addition there was Captain Rod Strang, who combined the art of an M.O. with that of an excellent skier. He demonstrated his capabilities by connecting with a rock and then sitting up in bed and putting two stitches in his own knee.

Also the last and most important, Adjutant and Quartermaster Captain E R Lawson from the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion. NOT a skier but he fell from grace and skied towards the end. Had the most unenviable job of managing two unmanageable establishments.

Amongst the Sergeant Instructors were Derek Stogdale known to the remainder of the staff as "Mountaineer". He was the Australian downhill champion and an executive member of the Ski Club of Victoria, where he is also a test judge. He was once known to fall.

Another was Sergeant Johnny Abbotsmith, only a youngster who was the most useful member of our staff. He was an Instructor at the Hotel Kosciusko for about five years and in Canada for two years . . . He knew all about the repair of skis and making of waxes and was a first class instructor.

The School Sergeant Major, Sgt Quail . . . was also a good skier. He should be, since he hails from Cooma. The remaining Sergeant Instructors were Sgt. Salmon from Albury Ski Clu, Sgt. Due, a Norwegian with the AIF, and Staff Sgt Davis.

After we had selected our team, a message was received from powers higher up that ten



Bulletin Board

Wed. 9th June: Trish Skehan will be telling us about her involvment in producing a book about Lerryn Mutton, former Mayor of Concord, member of State Parliament and WWII Pilot.

instructors were being forwarded. We waited, wondering who these additional ten might be for we were quite satisfied with the team we had selected. When they arrived we found a selection of Olsens, Petersens, Nilsens and others with Scandinavian names who could hardly ski, let alone instruct. One had not skied for ten years.

Concurrently with the selection of staff we commenced the purchase of equipment. Ski-ing is comparatively new in Lebanon, it being started by the French about ten years ago. Three shops in Beyrouth sold skis and accessories as a sideline so we interviewed the lot and bought what we could. Then we placed orders for the balance to be obtained locally. The suppliers had difficulty in speaking English so I spent days with an interpreter plus an English-French Dictionary trying to explain just what I wanted. A certain number of imported skis were purchased, including some Erikson, but most of the training skis were manufactured locally from beechwood.

The following uniform was finally decided upon and made locally. Close fitting cloth ski cap with a large peak to protect the eyes. Hooded windjacket reaching to about four inches above the knee. Windproof ski trousers gathered at the ankle. Three large pockets. Good ski boots of local manufacture, reinforced at the instep, strap over the foot. Unscoured wool gloves and windproof over-mittens, and finally, and most important, a three pocket, metal framed rucksack of the Bergen pattern.

This was my greatest triumph, for the "powers that be" first considered the use of the ordinary square military pack. I had a rucksack made in Beyrouth and used for the shoulder straps the web cross braces from the military equipment and the web waist belt as the combined breech strap and tummy band. This enabled ammunition pouches to be carried on the front of the body as part of the rucksack equipment. I then loaded the rucksack up to forty pounds weight and had various senior officers carrying it around to show how much better it was than the ordinary square pack. Result was that the rucksack was officially adopted as part of the ski outfit.

The next requirement was text books and technical information. Permission was given by the Kosciusko Alpine Club to reprint their handbook "Frozen Lessons" so a new foreword was written and the whole handed over to the Map Printing section, a most efficient organisation which photographed each page, made blocks, and produced the

first five hundred bound copies in four days. It was known as "Ski Training Pamphlet - Part I".

With the equipment position in hand the Instructors, under Major Riddell, went up to the School for a preliminary course before the main body of students arrived.

The School was situated at a height of 6,500 feet in the Lebanon Ranges near the famous Cedars of Lebanon. From the Beharre the road, which has only been built since the last war, is cut into the mountain side for five miles until it reaches a broad shelf three thousand feet below the crest of the Lebanon range. On this shelf which covers about ten square miles, is situated two skiing hotels (one of which was taken over by the Ski School) and a French Ski Barracks. About five miles from the School was the Col Anita through which the summer road runs to Baalbeck. Immediately behind the School is the Quornot Mountain which rises to a height of ten thousand feet and from which one can get a down run of three and a half thousand feet. The floor of the shelf is undulating and gives runs up to the three hundred feet. Except for the Cedars which are all in one clump, there are no trees but plenty of rocks . . .

A few days after Christmas the road was opened for a day, only to close immediately after the worst blizzard experience in the Middle East for twenty years. We were completely cut off for seventeen days and snow even fell in Beyrouth and Tripoli on the sea shore . . . The cold was so intense that the pipe at the reservoir, about two miles away, froze. With the failure of the water supply, the heating and sewerage systems at the Hotel ceased to function and, to cap it all, the lighting system failed at the same time. However, we sent out a party to find the reservoir, which they did, and with blow-lamps we freed the frozen pipes and everything came right again.

Then the food and fuel ran short, but by this time five hundred wogs were working on the road, endeavouring to get it open and the vehicles could get within four miles of the School, so we man-packed the rations in from the trucks. When the road was finally cleared to the front of the School, the snow was found to be fifteen feet deep and three ton trucks were completely hidden in the snow cuttings.

After the blizzard, and before the road was open, it was necessary to evacuate a number of casualties by sledge down the five miles of mountain-side to the ambulances. The sledges were improvised, two being made from

sheets of corrugated iron turned up in front and two were made from old skis. During the first course, we did about eighty miles of sledging of this nature and we learnt a lot.

There is little else I can tell, except that the "powers that be" were the finest staff that I have ever worked under, and they gave me a free hand and supported me to the hilt. The team of officers given to me as instructors and staff were as happy a team that one could wish to have - possibly because, with the exception of the Adjutant, they were bachelors. Shortly after the first course finished, instructions were received that the officers on the staff were to rejoin their original units immediately. The reasons for this order will be apparent to you all by the time this letter is received. And so ended my association with the first Australian Ski Troops ever raised."

(Note: This was originally printed in "Syrian Christmas Holidays 1942" by Chrissi Webb and later printed in the Friends of Thredbo Newsletter)

Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones

Every artist messes up canvas at one time or another. Every accountant uses a pencil with an eraser. Consequently, you cannot allow your mistakes to master your mood and cause you to lose enthusiasm. Begin to program yourself positively. You cannot surrender leadership to your past failures. You must take a positive attitude towards them for they can prove to be wise teachers.

The person who never makes a mistake is the person who is a total failure, for that person never tries to do anything.

Affirmations for today . . .

My mistakes only prove to me that
I'm not a total failure!
I did not fail to try!
I did not fail to dream!
I did not fail to decide!
I did not fail to make a commitment!
I did not fail in courage!
I will not fail to learn by my mistakes.
I will not fail to make corrective
changes in my life.
I will not allow my mistakes to cause
me to take my eyes off my goal.
I will turn my stumbling blocks into
stepping stones.

By Robert Schuller

My mother told me: Don't have hobbies; hobbies cost money. Interests are quite free.

Where Mountain Breezes Bring Health

by "E.L."

(Published in "The Katoomba Daily", 1935)

Stand with me on Leura or Springwood Railway Stations and watch a little scene frequently enacted there, all through the year.

Scene the first: a white-faced, wistful, debilitated little group of children alight from the train from Sydney. A few weeks pass; and on to these platforms troop another group of children entirely: quite different in appearance from that first pathetic little band – fat, rosy, strong, full of life and spirit. Oh, yes; another group of children entirely awaiting the train for Sydney. But look closer – they are not a fresh group at all; they are the very same children who de-trained a few weeks ago! It seems impossible that a transformation like this could be wrought in such a short time. What wonder-working, miraculous agency has been active to turn weak little folk into such splendid specimens of sturdy strength?

Come for a visit to "Shuna" at Leura and "Juong" at Springwood, the two Junior Red Cross Mountain Homes maintained by the J.R.C. for delicate sons and daughters of soldiers, for the answer to be supplied. We will go to "Shuna" first, for by so doing we will visit the very first Preventorium ever to be opened in Australia! This home, lent to the Junior Red cross by Dame Eadith Walker, was opened by the young Society to receive delicate children of soldiers nearly twelve years ago in 1923. Since that day it has always been full of little children receiving their childish right of health and happiness at the hands of the Junior Red Cross. One thousand and twenty-seven of them have been received at "Shuna" in these 12 years!

We pass up the steps to the wide verandah surrounding the home: see the little row of beds, each with its own gay rug to keep little folk snug in the rigours of Mountain nights, so that the life-giving Mountain air may work its magic by night as well as day. Playing happily in the garden are about twenty little girls, some of them full of life, others, the newer arrivals, thin and sometimes listless, but keenly anxious to join in all the fun, as far as they are able. Before very long they, too, will be full of life and vigour.

Into the long living-room we pass, with its large open fireplace, its shelves of books dear to children's hearts, its special little chairs, for smaller folk. In troop the children to dinner – of course, after little hands have been well

washed first - and how heartily sharpened little appetites make short work of that well-cooked, daintily-served meal, with its nourishing custard puddings, its health-giving vegetables, and the glass of milk for each little guest. Every child is encouraged to drink a pint of milk a day, in addition to the quantity in the puddings, etc., Matron tells us, so it is no wonder that increase in weight is a weekly story registered on the scales. But we must not spend all the time with the girls, though we could linger for a long time in the happy surroundings of "Shuna" – well named indeed, for we are told the name means "Happiness".

A two-mile run out of Springwood and we come to "Juong", another appropriate bit of nomenclature, for the word is the aboriginal term for "Little Brother". "Juong" with its gay garden, its wide sleeping-out verandah, with another row of comfy little beds, cosily-rugged and inviting. From the adjacent play-room come happy, boyish shouts and, through the door, and into the paddock at the side, race some fifteen little boys. Some, as the girls at "Shuna" were, are not very equal to strenuous play yet awhile; others, who have been at the Home for several weeks, are normal species of high-spirited sturdy boyhood. It is hard to realize that every one of these vigorous lads only obtained admission to "Juong" by producing a certificate from a doctor, urging the necessity of a Mountain change as the only chance of his restoration to health. Such a certificate is required from each child taken in the Junior Red Cross Homes, for which there are always long waiting lists of sick and delicate children.

"Juong" made available to the Junior Red Cross by trustees of the Mary Dewar Estate, has its doors wide open for delicate little children of soldiers for about eleven years and 867 of them have found health and strength there. As at "Shuna", the regime of bracing Mountain air by night as well as by day, plenty of appetizing, nourishing food, and the daily pint of milk, transform all delicate lads into vigorous ones, a-brim with boyish high spirits, very quickly. Delightful bush picnics and bush walks fascinate little city dwellers, and no wonder, with happy days full of enjoyment at both Homes, that there is generally a wistful longing to stay longer when a return home, to make way for some other delicate little child, is foreshadowed.

Great excitement will reign at both "Shuna" and "Juong" before long, and the children fortunate enough to spend Christmastide at these Homes will spend a wonderful time. Friends of the Junior Red Cross and children of the Junior Red Cross Circles in the Mountain districts provide good things in the way of Christmas cheer, every Christmastide, which is always memorable for every child at the J.R.C. Homes. Father Christmas, too, never fails to pay a visit to them, and for some of those little guests of the Junior Red Cross it will be the first time that they have found Santa Claus' magic gifts at the foot of their beds on Christmas morning! Poverty and sickness are often-times all that these shadowed little lives have known at the great festival of childhood.

(Note: following the death of Dame Eadith Walker "Shuna" was bequeathed to the Junior Red Cross. Unfortunately, in 1957 "Shuna" was destroyed by bushfire.)

Volunteers' Afternoon Tea

Unfortunately this event, which was held in conjunction with National Volunteers' Week, was not as successful as we had hoped - probably due to the very short notice. However, those who managed to attend spent an enjoyable few hours at the museum and were entertained with a slide show demonstrating the many ways in which our willing band of volunteers have helped over the years with both the Walker estates and the museum.

It was a light-hearted display showing just how diverse are our requirements but also outlined the money spent and the time put in by our small band of volunteers.

Money spent at Yaralla to date . . .

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Timber shed | \$52,359 |
| Toilet at rear of Mansion | 396 |
| Four Winds Fountain | 57,878 |
| Squash Court | 28,097 |
| Cattle Ramp | 1,671 |
| Gardeners' Shed | 2,173 |
| Dairy Building | 1,210 |
| Balustrade area | 17,160 |
| General work (approx) | 7,000 |
| Grant Total | \$167,944 |

Approximate man(woman) hours (Yaralla) - 6,500 to date.

This does not include volunteer hours at the museum - still to be tallied

Yaralla Open Day

Once again, this was a resounding success. Due to some good publicity we took 400 bookings for the day. In addition we had at least 100 others who came through the gates on the day prepared to just be taken around the grounds.

The display of old cars around the driveway, the band playing on the green, and presence of the Concord Garden Club as well as Wildlife Rescue group with their menagerie all helped to make the day an even greater success.

Our profit for the day was \$7,700 - the second best day we've ever had. All money raised from these events is put to good use in preservation and restoration work on the estate.

Many thanks to all our wonderful volunteers - you are the ones who make the event such a success.

These Open Days are our main means of letting the world know of this wonderful legacy of the Walker family to the State of NSW and, hopefully, ensuring the preservation of the Walker estates for future generations.

We would welcome any suggestions for improving these Open Days in the future, particularly if we are no longer able to have access to the main building once the facility re-opens.

Sandra Elliott

Museum Committee

This committee will now meet regularly at the museum on the second Wednesday of each month.

We need to be working on our Business Plan and Strategic Plan covering our aims for the next five years to enable Council to finally grant our lease for the museum building.

As well, we need to make plans for future events to try to encourage more people to visit the museum.

We also need to start sorting and cataloguing our artefacts so that we know where to find objects for future displays.

This committee is NOT an elected committee but one made up of people interested in the many facets of running a museum.

We need volunteers with many different skills and knowledge to invest so that our museum can continue to be the excellent facility it is and a great asset for the City of Canada Bay.

Can you please spare a couple of hours a month to help us?

For Your Diary

Wed. June 9 - General Meeting
Wed. June 23 - Executive Meeting
Wed. July 14 - General Meeting
Wed. July 28 - Executive Meeting
Wed. Aug 11 - AGM and Elections

Volunteer Mike Fisher

Mike has a great love of Yaralla and, of his own volition, has undertaken the task of restoring the trill trickling down into the pond in the sunken garden at Yaralla and restoring the circulation of the water in the pond.



He is also keen to see the garden restored to somewhat of its former glory.

Thank you sincerely, Mike. You are a truly valuable volunteer.

Hazel King

... is another great supporter of our work at Yaralla, never failing to come along and bring friends with her to our Open Days.

She is the daughter of Albert Hill, Head Gardener at Yaralla who designed the Sunken Garden for Dame Eadith in 1934.

Hazel is one of Australia's foremost and respected horticulturalists with many years' experience in the industry. She is currently leading a tour to visit gardens in England.



Hazel, at our recent Open Day, admiring the work on the Sunken Garden and the trill.

From the Secretary's Desk

New Members: Welcome to Marilyn Wentworth-Perry, Valerie Hill and Hazel King - our newest members. We hope to meet up with you in the very near future.

Our "Trip Down Memory Lane" event for Seniors' Week proved to be a great success with over 50 people being entertained by a slide show of old photographs of Concord and Drummoyne. They evoked many memories and much discussion.

Old photographs of the areas: Do you have any photographs tucked away that you could share with us? This programme has proved so successful that we'd like to expand it even more. These could be photographs of your family, your home, school days, sporting events, your social activities or community events. We don't need you to donate the photos if you don't want to part with them, but we'd like to be able to copy them into our archives.

Group Visits to Yaralla. We are regularly asked by various groups such as a Probus, Bus groups, etc. to be given tours of Yaralla grounds on week days or weekends. These are a good source of income but we need guides and Devonshire tea helpers who can come for a couple of hours on these occasions. If you can help with this please contact Sandra Elliott (details on front page) to let her know what you can do and what days you could be available.

Strathfield Historical Society is seeking old photographs and movies on the Strathfield area. Can any of our readers help?

Annual General Meeting will be held at the Museum at 7:30 pm on Wednesday, 11th August. This is a very important meeting as the various office bearers will present their annual reports, including the annual balance sheet.

At this meeting all positions are declared vacant and nominations are called for members to fill the various positions. We urge you to give serious consideration as to people you might like to nominate for these positions or, indeed, to nominate yourself. New blood is needed to bring new ideas to the new Society year. Why shouldn't it be you?

Assistant Secretary: One position that needs to be filled is that of Assistant Secretary. This is not an onerous position - I desperately need someone who can write letters, make phone calls, etc. on my behalf as well as to learn how the Society operates so that some of the load can be taken off my shoulders. If you've had some experience with office work it would be most helpful but, if not, just a willingness to learn the simple tasks. Won't you please put your hand up when nominations are called?