

By the start of the 50's the Victorian economy was moving quickly and the development of the Kiewa scheme was following this. Membership of the club was still restricted to employees of the SEC Kiewa area and there were about 75 members. The club had two lodges, a bank balance of £131.3.1 and was investigating a club vehicle to make it easier to get people and their gear to the lodge.

The state of Victoria was desperately in need of more electrical power so the pressure was on to complete the Hydro scheme. At this time the Kiewa area had 3500 construction workers racing to complete the scheme. All this was hit hard by Federal Government cutbacks in August 1951 resulting in a drastic cutback of workers in Kiewa. The club survived this and remained one of the supporters of social activities in the upper Kiewa so much so that the 1951 club ball had to restrict numbers to 200 men (10/- each) and 150 ladies (5/- each). Things were different in many ways in the 50's.

Private cars were not common and skiers were reliant on various ways of getting up to ski. The SEC owned the road and restricted access past the gate on the outskirts of Mount Beauty to keep the road clear for heavy construction traffic. The club using a combination of SEC vehicles and private operators, which took them as far as possible in the conditions, solved this. Often the transport made it to Howmans's Gap or even as low as Turnback Creek, after that the walk up the road to the lodge. By 1952 the club was negotiating the purchase of a vehicle from the SEC to use for transport of members to Falls Creek. The sum of £120 was set aside and a truck (the Blitz) was eventually purchased from the SEC in May 1955. a further £20 being spent on little luxuries like seating, ski racks and general repairs. This was operated by the club until running costs made it a burden on the club in 1960 and it was deregistered and sold for £50.

Before this the transport on a typical weekend meant catching the 9.00 am bus from Mount Beauty on the Saturday morning as far as Howmans or even Falls Creek, walking in with your perishable food and then if you had any energy left skiing for the day. A good day was two runs down the frying pan. On Sunday you ski for the day then leave in time to catch the 4.00 bus from Howmans.

David Sharpe ¹ describes Club life in those days.

"In those days you could not purchase food on the mountain and you had to order it through Loon`s store at Bogong who packed it in crates for delivery to the lodge before the snows arrived. In this way you prepared for your weeks skiing in May so that when the time came to go you only had to carry in your perishables and personal items because there was still no way that you would know how far you had to walk until the big day came. This walk could be as short as just from the main road in the village or as far as from the sawmill below Turnback Creek or further in a `good` year.

In September 1955 David together with Kath and Moira Steele set out from Howman's Gap at 10.30 to make good progress and arrive at the lodge by 12.30 in time for lunch. Their food was not to be found anywhere, it had been consumed. It turned out that the previous week had been the intervarsity ski races and a group who had been staying in Bogong had got their food 'mixed up' and had of course eaten it all to save taking anything back. However a group like this would not let them down and with the help of the Jim Curtis the members pulled together and helped the Sharpe group out. The food boxes were stored in the ceiling of the lodge and in the searching to find their food Kath made the rather embarrassing mistake of putting her foot through the ceiling and down into the men's toilets.

Their stay in the lodge was not to be a quiet one however as they had for company a regular visitor, Father Kelly from South Australia with a group of about 30 girls. David notes that 'on the Wednesday the girls left midday, so did all the rest except Brain, Barbara and Janet. Had a colossal meal and relaxed in quiet for the first night since the girls had now gone.'

Until the electricity reached Falls Creek in 1961 all fuel for the winter had to be on site before the road was closed, this included fuel for the Donk which generated enough electricity for lighting and wood, heaps of wood for the stove, hot water and the living room fire. One of the big pre-winter tasks was splitting and stacking of the firewood. The club would organise a couple of truckloads of wood to be delivered on the road outside the lodge and the club would muster as many people as possible the next weekend to manhandle it into the lodge. It was hard work and even the children were roped into the human chain to move the wood. It is little wonder that one of the firm stipulations for the new lodge was no open fireplaces, well that's what those who manhandled the firewood said even though there were still others who "liked the look of an open fire".

Falls Creek was changing quickly by the late 1950's. The club bought the building from the SEC for £250 in 1956 and by 1957 was able to change the membership rules so that people from outside the SEC could become members. The club supported the formation of a group to run the Falls Creek Village ski tow and assisted with accommodation for the operator.

This was the era when interclub ski competition was at its peak. The club was a founding member of NEDSA, the North Eastern District Ski Association which was formed by clubs at Falls Creek and Hotham. The most active members included Bogong, Wangaratta SC, Myrtleford and other community based clubs. Championship events were conducted either at Falls or Hotham and trophies were awarded. The club still holds some of these trophies; NEDSA was disbanded in 1971 because other avenues for ski competition were becoming available.

The club was one of the original members of the Victorian Ski Association (VSA) in 1955 and competed in the interclub races both at the local level and the finals. The club held our own club races in the frying pan area. C grade a slalom event from the raceline down, B grade from the flat half way down to the right of the summit run and A grade from the top near the present day Cabbage patch. These races were run until the late 60's and despite later efforts to revive club championships have been lost as part of the club activities.

By the end of the 50's club members were becoming concerned about the state of the lodge. The building had served the club well during the development years but it was never intended to last more than a few years during the war and it certainly was never designed for harsh alpine conditions. People were beginning to expect more than two shared bunkrooms and toilet, shower rooms that often froze in a cold spell, just

Consolidation in the 50's

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when you need a warm shower. The lodge heating and cooking was still dependant on wood fires if the duty persons did not get them lit in time it was a cold night. Older members talk of the strong club spirit of those days, fighting the common enemy of cold and non-functional equipment. Perhaps there is a good side to every challenge.

In 1959 the club had decided to offer the building for sale, this was to raise money for rebuilding, possibly on a new site in Falls Creek. The building was offered for sale at £4000 but there were no takers so a new building was deferred in favour of some refurbishment.

At the end of the 50's you could join the club for £2.2.0² or £1.0.0 for associates (does this mean women in 50's terminology?) and your annual subs were the same amount. Junior members were charged the magnificent sum of 10/6d³.

This time the village was just beginning to grow, the management committee was formed and there still was no water supply, electricity or sewerage. Bogong clubhouse was still fairly isolated; Albury SC was the nearest building down the road and all downhill skiing was in the bowl area.

¹ David is former SEC Kiewa employee, enthusiastic skier and former President and Secretary of the club

² Read this as two pounds, two shillings or in the quaint terminology of the day 2 guineas.

³ Read as ten and sixpence.