

Reflections on Southern Cross Ski Chalet (now Alpine Lodge) and Perisher Range Ministry for the AGM 24 May 2025

What a great place? What a privilege to belong to a Christian lodge in the snow?

I first stayed at Southern Cross Ski Chalet (now SCAL) in July 1965, joining a Youth Department ski week. I hadn't skied before, but I had a self-teaching book with good illustrations on how to do it. I took the book out with me on the snow. Then I took lessons!

I must have got something right, for on the Thursday of that first week we went to Mt Perisher, and I skied down under the double chair. There was no grooming at all on the mountain and stem-christies were the go. My skis were 210cm long, so I rode over the moguls nicely. My skis were given to me by my parents for my 21st birthday. They were mounted on the wall of my attic bedroom for many years, along with posters of overseas snow resorts.

In 1965 I had organized to leave the chalet by the Charlotte Pass to The Alpine Way chairlift but at the last minute it was closed by a blizzard and never opened again.

At that first Southern Cross week, I recall the warmth of friendship and fellowship. I remember the huge log fire, the piano in the dining room and the washing up done in plastic dishes ... often with tepid water. I don't think food safety standards had been invented!

Years went by and quite often I skied at Thredbo but returned many times to stay at the Chalet. I recall setting up a visit with my parents to watch me ski down, with my new skis under the Thredbo Chair, such was my enthusiasm.

Early in the 1970s I frequently joined YATS (Young Anglican Travel Service) groups that were organised by the Anglican Youth Department.

One person in particular I noticed was, Jan Lawry, Jan had managed the lodge in 1971 with Di Bradshaw. Jan and I were married in 1976 and subsequently we often stayed at the Chalet with our two young children: Jenny and Andrew. Free ski passes for 5 years and under made this attractive! For many years we also managed the Chalet as a family over the Christmas/New Year period. Sadly, Jan passed on to be with our Lord in 1998.

At that time things at the resort were simple. I recall Jan Coggins at a T Bar punching my ticket before a ride and being given a free day pass by the company at Guthega for helping to dig out a T Bar for a few hours.

Having served on the board of INF (International Nepal Fellowship) following an expedition to Everest Base Camp, in the early 1970s I was asked to join the board of Southern Cross.

My first impressions of being a director and the "inside" knowledge so to speak, was the dedication and commitment of everyone associated with the place. This was not just an honorary job! This was what life was all about. A ski lodge... how good is that?

People such as Tom Treseder, Jan Coggins, Keith Hansard, Pete Nelson, Bob Forest, Paul Campbell-Allen and so many more came across my path. These guys were as enthusiastic as I was! They were dedicated skiing nuts!

A pioneer spirit abounded. The feeling of, *we can do it!* was in the air!

My colleague Lloyd Bennett, one of the first directors, told me of the working bees in the early 1960s to build the lodge. They would drive down on Friday evening, camp out and return to Sydney late on Sunday after working hard all weekend.

Things moved on and I found myself chairing a committee to commence a schools ministry program through the Youth Department, *Horizon camps*. There was talk of some surplus Snowy Mountains Authority land being available off the Barry Way in Jindabyne.

Youthworks bought 80 acres, and it was then that I met John Cross, accountant and CFO for Youthworks. John's enthusiasm to develop this land was evident and three buildings were constructed. Stuart and Vanessa Herriman were employed year around to manage this new development as well as the chalet all winter. Sadly, Youth Council decided to sell the land and were also thinking seriously of selling the chalet to raise money for the new *Waterslea* development on the Shoalhaven River at Nowra.

The Jindabyne land was sold but I recall myself thinking that it was absolutely wrong to be selling the ski lodge. That is our heritage, one we would never get back.

A few of us came up with the idea of selling rights in the chalet's booking system called the Preferential Booking System (PBS). Money flowed, Youthworks got the money needed and the chalet stayed. Problem solved!

Around 2008 NPWS offered us 8 additional beds and we took an extra 5. Just prior to this we had extended our lease towards Muniong, (our neighbour) and board architect Paul Campbell-Allen guided us through building the addition, which was officially opened in 1990, with a get together in Centennial Park Sydney.

Bookings were originally organized by volunteers such as Jan Coggins then taken over by Youth Department staff, then Faith Oxley until Brian Gaetjens took over this portfolio.

Everyone who came to the lodge in the early years had to stay for a week. Many weeks were almost always filled at the same time by the same people who knew each other well. The depth of fellowship was evident.

During winter 2006 I was staying at the lodge and was often seen phoning a person called Margie Heath of Gunnedah. I discovered (before mobile phones) that the phone cord extended into the kitchen pantry store ... that place was then aptly named *Graham's phone box* by our chef, Faith Oxley. Margie and I were married in 2007.

Margie decided that she would need to learn to ski as it was evident that the lodge and the mountains were in my blood so to speak!

A little later I became one of the chaplains for Perisher Resort, a position which I continue through Sports Chaplaincy Australia.

Margie and I hosted for many years and together with a small team including Lloyd and Isobel Bennett and others, ran services at The Alpine Church. Margie continues to preach regularly and leads often ... as well as baking cookies weekly all through winter. It was decided by the board that lunch on Sundays would only be available at church. What a way to get a congregation? The chef came each Sunday to provide a BBQ ... and SCAL continues providing chefs to cook sausages and onions to this day. The link with The Alpine Church is very strong. The obvious connection is ministry in the mountains.

If I were to sum up one key feature in my reflections over some 40 years, it would be the importance of the lodge maintaining a strong Christian foundation. I can think of 2 or 3 lodges on the Perisher Range that started with a Christian foundation but have watered down their identity. It is essential that our lodge be strongly connected with a Christian Church, in this case the Anglican Church being its founder. Directors come ... directors go but a strong link with the Anglican Church helps to maintain the message of Jesus.

We have an excellent name in the Perisher Valley and beyond. This hasn't come about by chance, but through much effort. I applaud the work of all directors over the many years that I have been privileged to be the Chair.

We are not just an accommodation house. We are a Christian lodge ... a place where together we share the news that the world needs to know, that the sovereign God reigns and His Son offers life to all who accept His offer. This is the message that must remain strongly presented through Southern Cross Alpine Lodge.

The vision commenced in 1962 and continues in 2025. To God be the Glory.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Graham Morrison", with a horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Graham Morrison
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