

Celebrating 50 years

Of The Arlberg Ski Club

Excerpts from a speech by Laurie Holloway for the 50th Celebration.

Illustrated with photos from Neil Murdoch

From the late 1950's a group of Rover Scouts were organising ski trips to Whakapapa, staying in the Owhango scout den. In the summer of 1960/61 returning from a World Rover Moot in Melbourne on the JVO (Johan van Oldenbarnveldt) the idea of setting up a club on the mountain was discussed. Approaches were made to the National Parks Board and yes they had sites available. A trip was organised to meet the Park Ranger who showed off two sites, one half way up the mountain and probably "preferred by more active skiers". A second, 50 meters west of the current site was chosen for its convenience.

Ken McDonald, John Waters, Kevin Crookes, Tony LeGrice, Alex Weir and Laurie Holloway formed a committee and went about the process of starting the club. They ran an ad in the 8 O'Clock (a Saturday night sports paper) that received a number of enquiries.

With the scouting connection they proposed being the 'Baden Powell Ski Club' but were unable to get approval and thought it might limit the membership drive so chose 'The Happy Valley Ski Club' after the valley behind the club. To open a bank account a common seal was needed so one was made and used. Later they were told they had to be incorporated to use it. It wasn't until 4 Sept. 1964 that we were. Alex designed the lodge, it was approved by the parks board and they set about attracting members. A difficult task as many people were reluctant to join until there was something on the mountain. Over the summer of 1963/64 a group went to the mountain for one week to create the platform for the lodge. The Parks board indicated there was a power cable in the way so after consulting with Alex a site 100 metres to the west with the building rotated 90 degrees was set out. Crowbars, picks and a petrol breaker were used to level out the area for the water tanks etc. They "came to the conclusion that some of the rocks were rather large and fairly stubborn. To our rescue came Roy Turner who was able to set some charges and blast the rock to a manageable size."

(Ralph Lendrum recalls that some leaking sticks of Gelnite were found on the shelves some time later. They were given back to Roy Turner and some special chemical was needed to clean the shelves.)

A price was agreed and a contract signed with Lockwood for the building although the club wasn't sure they had sufficient funds to pay on completion. There were a good number of energetic members on board and things started to fall into place but more money was needed. It was suggested that Sir William Stephenson be approached to become club patron and maybe act as guarantee for the bank loan. "For some reason he declined. But he did suggest we apply to the Golden Kiwi for a grant. We did that and received a grant of £12,500. Sir William was on the grants board."

Members paid a joining fee and were invited to pay £20 debentures (equal to an average weeks pay) to assist with funding. "Rumour has it there are still some in the accounts."

The agreement with Lockwood was that we would construct the foundations and that they would erect the lodge with our work parties and their supervisors.

"We set to with work parties staying in the Taupo Ski Club lodge." Profiles were erected, the building was set out, footings excavated, reinforcing placed and concrete mixed and laid.



Figure 1 Profiles set, excavation is under way. 27 Feb 1965

Block laying was a new experience for the crew, it looked pretty simple so away they went. The only trouble was the footings were not quite level. To our assistance came the contractor constructing the loop road, who had a large D8 bulldozer. He had prior experience and told us just to proceed and by varying the mortar joints it would eventually come right. This did not work and you can still see today where the blocks have been cut to overcome the problem. The blocks were filled and the only thing left were the foundations for the jack studs.

"We poured the concrete for these, last thing one weekend, only to find on our return the following weekend that the concrete did not set as it had been too cold. We pulled it out and mixed it again with hot water from Taupo Club and everything was fine."



Figure 2 Block work progressing. The water tank is below the central steel beams. 19 April 1965



Figure 3 Lockwood Progressing. An empty Salt Ridge in the background 15 May 1965.

The Lockwood duly arrived, the floor was laid by some of the members who were able to take time off during the week. Then the walls were completed to roof level one weekend. The Lockwood Supervisors took off on the Sunday morning as a punch up had occurred because one had taken a liking to a member's girlfriend. Luckily Ken McDonald and Laurie were able to sort replacements from Taupo to continue with the construction.

"It was also found that the end wall by the toilets was out of plumb and our assistant with the D8 bulldozer connected his winch to it and straightened it up."

Once the building was completed members with the appropriate experience completed the fit out. Wally Loveday the metalwork, Laurie precut the bunks. Lots of members assisted with painting and purchasing mattresses and appliances using all sorts of their contacts, "it was great."

Laurie was on site for 12 consecutive weekends, and regaled us with some white out and snow bound trips up the hill. Happily there were no injuries.



Figure 4 Outside Wall up 16 May 1965

Somehow the bills were paid and on the weekend of July 24 and 25 1965 the "Happy Valley Ski Club" lodge was opened. Chief Ranger Mr Mazey and invitees from around the mountain formed a standing room only crowd. "We all had our fingers crossed that the floor would hold up and we would not end up in the water tanks below"



Figure 5 Testing the lounge floor on opening Weekend 24 July 1965

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Figure 6 The crowded lounge on Opening Weekend

"It was a great achievement by all the members at the time, we had a lot of fun, and I certainly believe that with all the current regulations what we achieved would be very difficult to achieve today."



Figure 7 Early 70's view of the lodge with Junior races in action.



Figure 8 Snow cat at The Crater Lake 10 Oct 1965