



Meeting challenges



*Thredbo KT Village
Department
November 1974*

*Christina Lodge, destroyed
by fire in 1976 - now the
Southern Alps Ski club —
Photo 1968*

Late in 1974 I joined the KT Village Department. This was a department of three - Supervisor (Mr Fred) Fred Nysten, Gerry Hoffman and myself. We inspected and maintained the village roads and car parks, the water supply, the sewerage system and the rubbish tip at Friday Flat.

We also cared for the Village Green and the duck and trout ponds.

Twice a week during summer at two o'clock, Gerry or I would feed the trout. In reality it was,

for the most part, the many tourists - watching and then joining in - who fed the large trout.

Three times a week, we inspected the old water supply dam for Thredbo Village, which was approximately 100 metres above the Alpine Way.

Once a week we walked the water courses throughout the village and cleared them, because after a storm, and at the end of winter, there would always be a large amount of leaf-litter and other natural debris banking up there.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
December 1974

Friday Flat*

From the Alpine Way, the first entrance to Thredbo Village from Jindabyne is via Friday Flat. From the turn-off there is a slight decline and after a few hundred metres the road swings to the left.

At this point on the right-hand side, and just out of sight was the electrical sub-station, fire trailer, rubbish tip, sewerage farm and storage buildings.

The sewerage farm was cleaned and washed down and inspected daily, a routine which included checking the chlorine gas bottle pressures. It is worth remembering that, while in summer only one to two hundred people lived in the Village, during winter numbers increased to three thousand - putting the sewerage farm under strain. Wear and tear, however, means that breakdowns can occur even out of the peak season.

On Christmas morning of 1974 around eight o'clock I remember I placed a frozen chicken in the oven on the lowest heat. I then drove the Haflinger to Friday flat to check the operation of the sewerage farm. The wild ducks knew I was alone as they did not fly away. If I had company the ducks would always fly off immediately. As I inspected the main tank I noticed the sweep arm was not turning. The

electric motor was working - which meant the drive shaft had broken. I notified Fred Nysten. The Kosciuszko Thredbo maintenance chaps arrived. We drained the tank into the holding pond.

We continued until the work was complete. We were too busy to notice the smell or the muck, and after a good hose down (with our clothes on) we felt much better. In my flat, I stood under the shower for ages, fully dressed - then I remembered the chicken! It had been in the oven for more than ten hours, but was absolutely delicious.

A few days later found me covering the holding pond with soil, slowly pushing large amounts of dirt in front of the bulldozer. The work was incredibly slow. Finally the area was covered. As I reversed, the bulldozer started sinking. It settled a metre down, on the bottom of the pond. I had another long shower!

Next day a D8 bulldozer that had been clearing rocks from above the middle slopes arrived. With two large planks and a long heavy chain, the small machine was easily lifted and pulled out of the 'bog'. No one volunteered to help me clean the machine, so it was another extra long shower.



*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Winter 1975*

*Kassbohrer Pisten Bully
Merritts — Photo 1974*

I still kept up my connection with the KT snow grooming team.

In the winter of 1975 an experimental snow grooming machine 'The Mole' arrived for 'on snow' assessment. It was manufactured by Mole Engineering of Melbourne. The Village Department was asked to evaluate the Mole. Mr Fred, Gerry and I were the machine operators. We tried it on the lowest section

of middle slopes (out of the ski line for even the worst skiers) and we found that driving on grass or snow the steering was always slow to respond - and each time we drove the machine a mechanical part would always fail. Compared to the Kassbohrer Pisten Bully (see picture above) purchased the year before, the Mole could not match the new standard. The method of snow grooming was changing.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Winter 1975*

*Centre, the start of the
main car-park Photo 1968*



In winter during a normal weekend it was usual to have fifty to sixty buses and hundreds of cars in the parking area.

On a long weekend and on the weekends at the peak of the winter season, Mr Fred would direct the parking of near to one hundred buses in the main car park. In the meantime, Gerry and I directed the parking of the other vehicles and controlled the traffic flow. Parking extended out from the main Village car park, along the side of road and into the two outer car parks - and parking continued on along both sides of the road, finally spilling into and filling the large Friday Flat car park. The traffic flow into Thredbo Village continued until noon. In the afternoon around four o'clock the traffic would start to flow out of the Village. By six

o'clock, if the weather was fine, the peak of the traffic had moved on - all heading home. If the weather was poor, directing traffic out of the village could last many hours.

We were pleased to be the first face of Thredbo, sharing with each driver and the passengers the latest lift, snow and lodge information - answering hundreds or more likely thousands of questions. On most occasions, Mr Fred, Gerry and I did it well.

When it snowed we cleared the Village roads using the International tractor with its 10 foot hydraulic blade and snow chains on the rear wheels. The green Dodge truck cleared the road from the Alpine Way entrance at Friday Flat to the Thredbo Alpine Hotel.

The Dodge tip-truck was an old truck which had been worked very hard.

In May 1973 or '74, the front bumper bar had been removed and replaced with a large heavy steel frame. The tip-tray hydraulics were altered to lift and lower the fixed, angled, wide blade attached to the steel frame.

The weight of the frame and the blade made the truck front-heavy. Exactly what was required to clear the car parks and roads of snow. It had also made the truck in some weather conditions difficult to drive.

The windscreen wipers were next to useless in bad weather. When it snowed the blades slowly cleared two small semi-circular spaces on the windscreen. In a heavy snowfall, I would have to get out of the cabin every few minutes and clear the windscreen with my hands.

At night on low beam the headlights only just illuminated the road. But the slowly revolving orange light on top of the cabin at least warned drivers of the snow-clearing vehicle. And the tail and stop lights did work.

I enjoyed the challenges of driving the Dodge truck, but it made me aware of how bad most drivers are in poor weather conditions.

I found the International Tractor the easier vehicle to drive - with its fully adjustable clearing blade: angle right or left, lift up or down.

The enclosed cabin was comfortable with a good view, and heat drifted up from the diesel engine. The warning light flashed and the headlights were fair.

In theory It was simple: put it into gear, adjust the hand throttle, sit back and steer.

The tractor cleared a section of Friday Drive starting at the turn off to the Thredbo Alpine Hotel, along Diggings Terrace to the three way junction (now called Bela's Corner) .

Clearing the road down Banjo Drive and along Bobuck Lane, with cars parked illegally on the side of the road, was a nightmare. Sometimes I would push snow around a car to protect it from damage. Next morning the driver would have to dig the compressed snow away from and out from under the vehicle. And usually the driver would curse the snow-clearing machine operator, not realizing it had been done in their best interests.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Winter 1975*

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Winter 1975*

*Bobuck Lane corner
— note the safety rail —
Photo Sept 2009*



In Bobuck Lane, a little past Bimbadeen Lodge the road drops away quickly - with a sharp U turn, down a steep hill. At this point I would always hold my breath as the camber of the road was not good. A few timber bollards marked the edge of the road, so I always created a barrier of snow on the bollard side of the road - to stop cars from sliding off and dropping into the Thredbo River many metres below.

The round trip of the village took just over one hour.

One night while driving the tractor a lady came out from a lodge near Snowgoose. 'Please stop!' she called. 'What's wrong?', I asked. 'I thought you would be cold. Please have a sip of port.'

So from then on. at every third circuit of the village she would be waiting to hand me another thimble of port.

Thank God, the snow stopped falling four or five hours later.

Not all risks on icy roads are safely negotiated; some result in tragedy.

Thredbo KT Village

Department

Sunday July 6th 1975

At approximately 7pm I walked into the Schuss bar to have a drink with my friends.

I had just finished clearing the roads of snow throughout the village, a long day driving the Kosciuszko Thredbo (KT) green Dodge truck, snow chains on all wheels and a fourteen foot blade.

The Thredbo Alpine Hotel duty manager Jacques Merkus called me aside.

A man and teenage girl had just walked into a lodge.

Their bus had crashed on a sharp corner on the Alpine Way one to two miles from Thredbo Village towards Dead Horse Gap.

Search and Rescue Volunteers were being notified.

The Search and Rescue siren was not used, so that only rescue crews would be at the accident site.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Sunday July 6th 1975*

The rescue effort swung straight into action.

7.10pm: Three Kosciuszko Thredbo maintenance crew, Frank Davis, Lance Jarrett and Eric Thomas, selected then loaded equipment on to the snow-clearing truck.

The equipment included two-way radios, tool boxes, crowbars, shovels, block and tackles, rope, oxy-acetylene cutting equipment and tarpaulins.

7.20 pm: the truck was loaded.

Standing in the tray of the truck were 10 or 12 ski patrol members and other volunteers. As I drove to the Alpine Way via Friday Flat I could not believe the change in driving conditions. An hour earlier I was clearing the road of snow. Now the night was sparkling clear and cold.

Grinding along the Alpine Way in the lowest gear and with snow chains on all wheels. I found myself driving on long sections of black ice.

A number of times I had to lower the blade to stop the truck from sliding off the road. Staying upright on the road required all my concentration.

The driving conditions were the most treacherous and dangerous I have ever encountered.



*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Sunday July 6th 1975*

Photo 1975

In the background the Thredbo Alpine Hotel

*Thredbo
Sunday July 6th 1975*

Arriving at the accident site we saw a police vehicle and the 'weekend stay' ambulance for Thredbo were in attendance.

Climbing down from the truck the search and rescue volunteers slipped over due to the black ice on the road. The same ice that doomed the bus. It had come around the first corner at low speed, but then at the second corner it had rolled - many times down the steep, tree-covered embankment.

We still did not know many passengers were on the bus. As the rescue volunteers climbed down the hill, I stayed with the truck so I could help the injured when they arrived. I drove the truck to the edge of the road to try to illuminate the accident site but the truck headlights were useless.

A four wheel drive vehicle stopped at the accident scene.
He was driving home to Khancoban.
'Can I help?', he asked.

With his help, two aircraft landing lights were removed from his vehicle. And we could, with their help, at last light up the crash site. By this time the rescue volunteers and injured bus passengers slowly started to appear by the road side.

Those with minor injuries were transported to the Thredbo Alpine Hotel.

The seriously injured were taken by ambulance directly to Cooma hospital.

Snowy bus crash: 2 killed, 4 hurt

POLICE PRAISE TWO NURSES

From JACK WATERFORD

THREDBO, Monday. — "She's a very plucky girl; those people who survived probably owe their lives to her", Sergeant Jim Evans, who directed the rescue operation said today of the girl who made her way into Thredbo to get help for the crash victims.

The girl, Miss Dianne Dower, a trained nurse, was thrown from the bus near the top of the slope but was not hurt. She ran about 3 kilometres on the icy Alpine Way in falling snow to get help.

Although a DMR truck and grader were some distance behind the bus when it crashed, the rescue party hurriedly organised from Thredbo was the first to the scene and quickly began giving help to the injured.

Miss Dower rested yesterday at the Redbank Lodge in Thredbo and was unwilling to talk to reporters.

A resident of the lodge said "She was very

nurse, said she was the "luckiest of the lot".

"As we went over, we started rolling . . . about five or six times, I think", she said.

"All the windows went, although the bodywork of the bus stayed intact. There was a lot of screaming, and some people went out of the windows.

"Only a few people were in the bus when it stopped rolling. "I tried to check some of the passengers . . . those thrown out were most badly hurt. It was very cold and we all were shivering.

"I got a log off a lady and tried to help some other people. It seemed ages before anyone came along, but they were very good.

"The driver was very good too, helping people.

"I can't get over how lucky we are. It is really incredible".

Thredbo
Monday July 7th 1975

The Canberra Times

Thredbo
Monday July 7th 1975

The Canberra Times



Miss Dianne Dower sips hot soup in a Thredbo lodge after helping to rescue people from the crashed bus.



Miss Marilyn Calway, 19, of Drouin, Victoria, one of the injured passengers of the bus.



The tourist bus which crashed off the Alpine Way on Sunday, killing two people.



*Thredbo
August 1975*

*The Alpine Way foreground
the accident corner —
Photo 2008*

Within a week of the accident, buses, trucks, caravans and trailers could not use the Alpine Way from Dead Horse Gap to Khancoban. (See photograph opposite of the new sign).

Three weeks after the accident my mother was travelling from Melbourne to Thredbo. At the accident corner she too lost control of her vehicle, when the car slewed sideways due to black ice on the road.

Her car came to rest against the inside gutter of the road after having done a 360 degree spin.

For my mother, sister and her friend a frightening experience.

Twelve months after the bus accident a safety barrier was installed.

The bus accident – the immediate legacy: the road sign at Dead Horse Gap and eventually a sealed road to Khancoban



Living in extreme conditions never meant we became blasé or ever began to believe that the unexpected couldn't happen.

I remembered from my days in the KT Maintenance department - only a year or so before the bus accident - another of my experiences as a volunteer - one that left a lasting bitter taste.

It had been a fine Saturday afternoon when I heard the Village siren. It was after four thirty as I ran to Valley Terminal, the Merritts chairlift had just started and was running on low speed. I soon found out a skier was overdue. He had been reported as skiing in the Merritts area. Within a few minutes I heard the radio call. 'We have found the skier - just before Creek Station'. (Creek Station is just over the hill, but out of sight from Valley Terminal - the next and last station is Merritts) The chairlift stopped for about five minutes. It restarted and within minutes, at Valley Terminal an akja rescue sled was unloaded from the chair lift. Two of the mountain staff had found him. The patient was quickly taken to the medical centre (Located on the east end of Valley Terminal). Tragically there was to be no happy ending; the medical staff felt that the patient had passed away, even though the physical changes did not strongly confirm this. However, around

a quarter to six the skier was placed in the ambulance. The driver who I knew, asked me, and Elgie (one of the lift staff) to come along, to continue CPR until the ambulance reached the Cooma Hospital. We kept trying. But well before Jindabyne the signs were obvious - a life had been lost.

I asked the ambulance driver to let me off at Jindabyne; they continued on to Cooma. The night was dark, still and clear. For the next two and a half hours I stood on the side of the road trying to hitch back to the Village - and I froze. I tried to flag down the few cars that passed by, but the cars that did stop were all going the Perisher area. I finally arrived in Thredbo Village around nine thirty.

I changed my clothes then went to the Keller Bar; I just wanted to be with my friends. That night I was not charged an entry fee to the night club. A mate shouted me a drink; I had a sip or maybe two, then felt a light tap on the shoulder. It was the ambulance driver and Elgie. The people around us stood and stared at the unusual public embrace of three males. With all the noise of the music and people around us, in our embrace all was quiet, as we thought of the dead man and of the pain the Doctor's family would be going through.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department*

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Department*

At the end of the winter season in 1975, Fred Nysten (Mr Fred) the KT Village Department supervisor asked me to drive the small John Deere bulldozer from the top of Crackenback to Valley Terminal, so that KT Maintenance Department could remove the cabin top and change the bulldozer's wide winter tracks to the normal tracks.

Driving the bulldozer was always great fun, until this day. I was driving it slowly down the steep slope with the blade low to the ground, the engine in a low gear and the revs low. I checked that the gate cover was clipped in place to stop the short gear-lever from jumping out of gear. Opposite Kareela Hutte, with no snow cover, the ground had become very rough. Even in low gear the bulldozer was bouncing all over the place. All of a sudden it took off down the mountain. I froze, the noise of machine was incredible as it increased speed down the slope. Without thinking I dropped the blade.

THUMP! I was covered in a shower of dirt as the bulldozer stopped. I sat there for a few minutes. This had frightened hell out of me. I checked the controls and found the gate cover was open, allowing the lever to jump out of gear. When I arrived at Valley Terminal, I apologised to Mr Fred for scarring the mountain. A few weeks later I was operating the bulldozer at the Friday Flat rubbish tip,

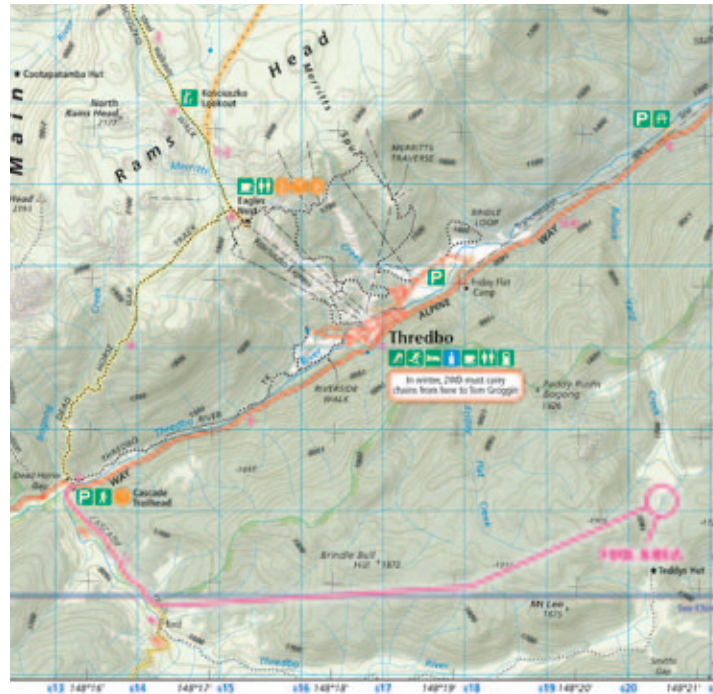
covering the waste with a layer of soil. The afternoon before Gerry Hoffman who also worked for the Village Department, had been concerned with the unusual number of mice at the tip. When the dozer pushed the soil, it was normal for the machine to sink down slightly while it compacted the rubbish beneath the tracks. As I reversed the machine, however, a small hole appeared in the ground. Within thirty seconds, a hundred, a thousand, then thousands of mice covered the ground - running up and over the bulldozer, into the open cabin and over my face, my hair, my hands, arms and legs - thousands of them! Screaming, I shut down the machine and jumped from the bulldozer, making all the noise I could. In the fifty metres I ran, I had removed my shirt and whacked my trousers many times. Ten or fifteen minutes later when I started the bulldozer only a few mice shared the cabin. I radioed Mr Fred and he and Gerry arrived with the solution. We made holes in the ground, then poured kerosene into them. The wind was blowing down the valley away from the Village, so the kerosene was lit. I am sure in that late afternoon Fred, Gerry and I were not happy with the outcome. I believe each of us might have hoped for a better solution. But how can you improve a rubbish tip? We were doing our best, what else could we do?

1975 had brought us up against the facts of life and death several times. The volunteers were always in the front lines of the Village's defences. Winter had its tragic losses, but summer also saw the Village itself as a potential victim of fire.

A strong northerly wind made Australia Day 1975 hot and unpleasant. Around 5pm the Village siren sounded and a small group of men gathered at Valley Terminal. A local Kosciuszko National Park ranger briefed us on a fire three to five kilometres south of Thredbo Village, that had possibly started from a lightning strike. He asked for volunteers.

'We're not standing here to be sunburnt,' one wag said.

A short time later our fire fighting equipment of beaters, bush rakes and knapsacks had been loaded onto the tray of the Kosciuszko Thredbo Haflinger. And we began. I sat in the tray of the Haflinger, my legs dangling over the back of the small vehicle. The Kosciuszko Thredbo Toyota four-wheel drive carried the other chaps. We drove towards Dead Horse Gap, then along the Cascade trail. Just before the ford we turned south-east. Within twenty minutes due to the boggy ground, the Toyota could go no further. The Haflinger itself had rolled once, throwing me off the rear of the vehicle. So the going was slow as we pushed the vehicle through the boggy ground; or lifted it up and over the



A section of Kosciuszko Alpine Area.

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tussocks. The hot north wind continued to blow. In the last hour the Haflinger had rolled over twice. We stopped to assess our situation. We could smell a fire but couldn't see any smoke - and sunset was less than an hour away. We all agreed that a team of three should check out the fire area, with the others returning to Thredbo Village. Tony, a volunteer ski patrol member, Frank Davis and I continued on to fire area.

*Thredbo KT Village
Department
Australia Day Sunday
January 26th 1975*

*The purple line indicates
the approximate journey to
the Fire Area*