

Frank Hussey - Thredbo 'Good Times' in the 70s

This story starts a little over 50 years ago - so some of the details may be a little sketchy especially around the dates. The names have not been changed to protect the innocent. Not that I recall anyone being innocent at Thredbo.

I wasn't born with skis on; my mother would vouch for that. But I did start early as Canadian winters, especially in Ontario are long and cold with heaps of snow. In my mid-twenties I was working at Grouse Mountain in Vancouver and spent weekends at Whistler and later Whistler/Blackcomb. Skiing on the coast you learn to ski in some very trying conditions and working as a ski patroller you need to ski regardless of the conditions. The worst being what they call 'Sierra Cement'.

One year I was hiring for the pro patrol at Grouse Mountain and had an application from an Australian ski patroller. I thought that would be like a Canadian surfer! Honestly, I didn't know they had snow in Australia let alone resorts. My curiosity was peaked and his CV was interesting so I arranged for him to come up for a test run. That is how I met Ed Cross. The conditions were terrible with a foot of fresh wet snow, so I needed a steep slope to even get moving. I chose a steep gully and said follow me. To my surprise he did and was right behind me making figure 8s.

I hired Ed and we became friends and he regaled me with tales of skiing at Thredbo which at times had similar conditions to Canada's west coast. Sometime around 1970 we had a terrible snow year so Ed and I went south to Arapahoe Basin in Colorado. A-Basin is a little over 13,000 feet in elevation and the snow was dry and deep and the mountain steep. We were hired as professional ski patrollers and reveled in the steep and the deep.

At the end of July, we were driving back to Vancouver and stopped at the Los Angeles airport to see the new train that serviced the airport and surrounds as I thought it might have an application in ski resorts. Ed was talking to one of the agents at Qantas who was raving about the season at Thredbo. To make it a short story we grabbed our ski bags and luggage, pooled our money and bought tickets to Sydney. After a few weeks working in Sydney, we had enough money for a flight to Cooma. I think we arrived at Thredbo with about 12 dollars between us.



Ed Cross skiing



David Pohl, George Weiss, Ivana Borsky & Ed Cross



Ed Cross skiing nude for a movie

Ed was taken back on the volunteer ski patrol and went skiing and I got a job washing dishes for my dinner. Sadly, I only lasted one night and decided I would rather starve. But I had a lift ticket and next

day went skiing on a perfect snow day. Half way through the day I was on the Crackenback chair sharing my seat with Lifts Manager John Olsen. On the way up I shared a short version on my CV and how I got to Thredbo. John said why don't you follow me around as I may have a job for you on the mountain. What followed was the craziest afternoon of skiing I have ever had.



John Olsen



John Olsen explosive snow control on the bluff



Merritt's Creek Cross

Bear in mind that I did not know my way around the mountain. At the top station we were joined by five 'lifties' who were moving around doing relief and fixing ramps etc. John took off left down the bluff and as we picked up speed he shouted, "Don't slow down"! I stayed at his side as we went over a ridge that was scoured by wind like a crevasse. The lifties hesitated and ended in a heap in the wind scour. We crossed under the chair and over to Kareela and John took me straight over the roof of Kareela. Fortunately, I did not slow down and the other side was very steep so the landing was gentle. I did have my heart in my mouth the whole time. Next was the crossing to Merritts and we had to swing off a tree branch to get across the creek. Happily, the rest of the afternoon was a mountain tour in ideal conditions. The next day I started working for John as a relief operator and spent a month skiing from station to station.



Frank Hussey jumping Kareela Hutte



Frank Hussey skiing



'Lifties' skiing

By mid-season I knew my way around and had met most of the characters at Thredbo. I was asked to a meeting with Mike Matthews of Lend Lease to discuss setting up a Professional Ski Patrol to supplement the Volunteer Ski Patrol. This was to provide a reliable mid-week coverage complimenting the volunteer patrollers available during weekends and holidays. The starters were Ed Cross and I plus two local lads who worked on the volunteer patrol Tony Weaver and his mate Bob Rogers. Sadly, Tony perished in the 1997 landslide. Later we were joined by Californian Jerry Shirley a very experienced skier and patroller. I

returned to Thredbo for another 8 seasons alternating the Canadian (Grouse Mountain) and Australian (Thredbo) winters skiing 11 months of the year.

There are a couple of Thredbo “characters” that really made an impression on me. John Olsen that I mentioned, Leonard Erharter and Arnold Konrad. I was going up the Merritts chair one morning and could see a skier coming down through the deep crud like it was a foot of dry powder. I knew how deplorable the snow was having hardened overnight on a slope that few ventured on. It was Lenny as Leonard was affectionately known or at least referred to. I must admit I struggled to follow in his tracks and immediately developed a healthy respect for his skiing abilities. There after I tried continually to emulate his style which seemed totally effortless in the worst conditions. Lenny was Mt Supervisor among other things, and he was hard to work for. I learned a lot from him about keeping the mountain in top shape. Filling in holes with branches and covering with snow, shifting snow from drifts to runs and lift lines and slope grooming – manually. With only one old Nodwell Trackmaster for slope grooming we did a lot of ski-packing the slopes – day after day! Lenny was also keen on the trips to Dead Horse Gap that started with the old Trackmaster. I remember skiing down through the trees with Lenny, Arnold and John looking for new runs on what is now the Bluff and Cannonball.



Erol Hanlon at the Basin T-Bar ? Arnold Konrad, Leonhard Erharter & John Olsen Nodwell Trackmaster to Dead Horse Gap

I think Arnold provided a level of calm to the slopes and the ski school. Not much flustered Arnold. He was like Lenny, a beautiful skier and set a benchmark for other instructors. Eventually I started teaching on weekends under Arnold’s direction. I was lucky to be given mostly private lessons with capable skiers. My future wife Susan was working for Arnold on the NASTAR ski racing program. Susan and I were later married on Vancouver Island and returned for one final season at Thredbo around 1979.



Helmut Stein, Heinz Muckenschnabl, Arnold Konrad ? Susan Hussey & Glenn

Tommy Tomasi & Frank Hussey

The other person who influenced my skiing was Tommy Tomasi. Tommy was at one time I believe the fastest man on skis. Skiing with Tommy and conversations about the mechanics of skiing started me

thinking and a book called How the Racers Ski was an epiphany. In hindsight the Austrians were way ahead and this was probably why Lenny and Arnold skied so well.



Erol Hanlon, 'Amigo' & Frank Hussey



Wayne Stinson



Wayne Stinson & 'Lifties'

There are many others that conjure up fond memories of Thredbo including Ron Finneran (now that is another great story), Wayne Stinson, Erol Hanlon, Ludwig Rabina, George Weiss and George Freuden, Peter Wright and Gary (the Difel) Bergman, Jimmy Rose, Jerry Shirley and Horst Hutchhausen. I might have to do another article or two.



Peter Wright in the Thiokol



Erol Hanlon & Jimmy Rose



Susan Hussey

Frank Hussey