

Sybil Elyne Keith Mitchell, [OAM](#) (1913 – 2002)

Born on 30 December 1913, Elyne Chauvel, the daughter of Sir Henry George (Harry) Chauvel, Commander of the WW1 ANZAC Mounted Division Light Horse Corps, was educated at St Catherine's School, Toorak, and was a keen horsewoman.

Elyne Mitchell's love of skiing and the Snowy Mountains began shortly after her husband, Tom Mitchell taught her to ski soon after their marriage in 1935 when she came to live with him on the Mitchell family cattle station 'Towong Hill' near Corryong. One of her earliest ski experiences in 1936 was to ascend on horseback and skis, the western face of the Main Range, starting at the Geehi and finishing at Charlotte Pass – a formidable challenge for a novice skier.

In 1936 at Mt Ruapehu New Zealand she won her first international ski race. In 1938 at Bannf, Elyne won the Canadian Downhill Skiing Championship. In 1941 she was the first woman to descend on skis, the entire western face of the Main Range. In 1948 Tom and Elyne managed to drive a motor vehicle from their Towong Hill property, up over the main range to Charlotte Pass, before the Alpine way was built. The trip of 122 kilometers took 5 days.

Summer and winter forays into the mountains prior to Tom's departure for Singapore with the 2nd AIF, 8th Division in 1941, provided Elyne with material to begin writing "Australia's Alps" which went to print in 1942. In the book she noted that "The valley of the Crackenback below Dead Horse Gap is one of the few places in our hills where a small alpine village would not be incongruous." During her life, she was to write 36 books including the Silver Brumby series and other fictitious works also set in the Snowy Mountains around the Thredbo valley and the Cascade Hut. Her last major work was 'A vision for the Snowy Mountains' printed in 1988.

Tom and Elyne were regular contributors to the Australian Ski Year Book. As a POW, Tom set up a ski club in Changi, and until his return Elyne ran the Towong Hill property by herself. They had four children - Indi, Walter Harry, Honor and John – and it was the dearth of suitable reading material for Indi aged 10, that led Elyne to begin writing the Silver Brumby stories.

It didn't take long after the development of the village, that Thredbo became the centre of Elyne's world and she became a frequent visitor to Thredbo and always skied with Leonhard Erharder. Honor said "For Elyne, skiing was like a dance in which she strove for the perfect style as taught by the Austrian ski instructors." Walter Auer spoke of skiing to Dead Horse Gap with Leonhard and Elyne who skied in front with Leonhard so she could film.

Elyne came to enjoy the advantages of road access and lifted uphill transport when her children were young. As the children were educated by correspondence, Elyne was able to bring them to Thredbo during the week for skiing. Honor recalled that in the 1960s her mother took them skiing 3 days a week, plus school holidays. The family were members of the Ski Club of Australia.

Albert van der Lee described Elyne as always available to help with advice and supply information when called upon, always looking at the best in other people, and tremendously courteous to all with whom she came in contact with. In one of her articles, she not only thanked the staff at Thredbo for "their unfailing help and courtesy" but she even expressed her thanks "for the beautiful

skiing". Elyne's articles about Thredbo published in 'Walkabout' in 1968 and 1969, provided the resort with much needed publicity.

It was the kindness of friends, acquaintances and chairlift operators who made it possible for Elyne to ski as long as she did into her 80s. At the age of 86, she still rode once a week on her beloved horse Dolly. Elyne died on March 4th, 2002. Elyne Mitchell - a significant Face of Thredbo.