My title – and that of this journal – is borrowed from an autobiography by the great Arnold Lunn, founder of skiing as a sport in Switzerland. He tells us that its publication synchronises with his skiing golden jubilee in 1899. This conference is not far past my golden jubilee as a skier – my first serious ski trip, aged 9, was to Mt Feathertop in 1947, the year before Lunn’s book was published.1 Dad gave Mountains of Memory to Mother in hospital in 1949, and I read it soon after she brought the new baby home. I was hooked on the mountains already.

The conference calls, inter alia, for papers to address the question ‘How do we identify heritage values in mountains?’ I will use the diverse lives of my family, over 100-odd years and five generations, in ‘the experience of living, working and playing in mountain landscapes’ in Victoria, New South Wales and occasionally Europe, to illustrate some of the heritage values which are inherent in our mountain landscapes and ski resorts. These values, and their tangible physical expression in the mountain environment are often overlooked in the rush to preserve the natural world in its pristine, ‘untouched by human hand’ form.

Skiing is thought to have had its origins in Scandinavia over 4000 years ago, for tending herds, hunting game and travelling in winter. Organised competitive and recreational skiing didn’t begin until the nineteenth century – in the 1850s in Norway, later among goldminers of California, Kiandra in New South Wales and Mt St Bernard in Victoria.

‘Those who are born and bred among the mountains accept with composure their heritage of beauty, and those who never see the hills do not realise all that they are missing’. Some who are introduced to mountains in their childhood or youth become passionate about the annual pilgrimage to the snows, and at home live ‘with months of gnawing homesickness for the hills’.2 Love of mountains is a strange disease, which strikes some members of a family, but leaves others untouched. Arnold Lunn’s father was struck in mid-life. He became a passionate aficionado of the Swiss Alps and, to ensure he could afford to spend the maximum time there, started a tourist bureau specialising in alpine holidays for clergymen and their families. Consequently, his son virtually grew up in Grindelwald, where he first put on skis as a child. Arnold Lunn became the father of ski racing in Europe. His son Peter became a British champion downhill racer. My mother, travelling with her father D.B. Ferguson in 1903, met Arnold Lunn in Murren, where he had organised the first world downhill ski championships two years before.

This history of skiing and mountain life is very personal. It tells of my family’s affliction by the mountain disease. My parents’ mountain memories permeate this story and have deeply affected all of us, down to the fifth generation now skiing with us (Grandpa and Grandma), and even influencing where we live. Mother, who first visited our present mountain home at age 82, in the early stages of dementia, could not remember what day it was, but when I pointed out the alpine peaks on our horizon, she could still tell me of her adventures there in her youth. Recently I found a small album of her most precious photographs. These, besides photos of Dad on the snow and elsewhere, included her other love, the Austrian ski instructor Franz Skardarasy, who worked at Mt Buffalo in the late 1930s. Franz later had a part in my life and in my daughter’s, and he has a significant place in the history of skiing in Australia. It would have been impossible to produce this story without the hundreds of photographs, cuttings, letters, certificates, pamphlets, books, journals and diaries found among my family papers, an extraordinary archive taking up at least a hundred metres of shelf space in our library.3 I dedicate this ‘memory of mountains’ to my parents, Joan (née Ferguson) and Neville Haughton, who had the foresight to keep all their papers, even the ephemera.

Figure 1 Will Ferguson’s photo of friends skiing at Mt Hotham in 1899. (Author’s collection)

Mt Hotham 1899: William Hamilton Ferguson

My family’s interest in mountains began more than 100 years ago. Among family records, I discovered a photograph of skiers at Mt Hotham taken by Great-uncle Will in 1899. William Hamilton Ferguson was a surveyor and geologist with the Geological Survey of Victoria, producing beautiful maps of large areas of the State and finding the first dinosaur fossil to be discovered in Australia. He loved the Victorian mountains and named several. Like many explorers, his glass plate camera and tripod went everywhere with him. Throughout 1899 he was working in East Gippsland and no doubt took his camera on a winter trip from the Omeo goldfields to Mt Hotham. Here he recorded people on skis, and probably tried them himself. Will’s photograph is the earliest recording I know of any recreational skiing on Mt Hotham itself. Mt St Bernard, nearby, was visited in the 1880s, but I have seen no photos preceding 1911.

Mt Aconcagua 1905: David Buchanan Ferguson

A few years later, Will’s young brother David (DB) Ferguson was employed by H.V. McKay at his fledgling Sunshine Harvester Works in Ballarat. The family had barely settled there when they were uprooted in 1903 and sent off to Argentina to develop a
South American market for McKay harvesters. In March 1905, DB set off on a business trip to Chile, an epic journey by train and coach across the Andes. DB was no photographer like his brother, but his series of wonderful letters to Will and his two sisters at home have been carefully preserved, along with many others sent from around the world for the next 40 years.

His first Chilean letter, titled ‘In this chapter David crosses the Andes’ describes the trip from Buenos Aires across the pampas to Mendoza, then by narrow gauge rack railway to the head of the River Mendoza. Near Puente del Inca a man got on the train who had been trying to scale Mt Aconcagua [6960 metres] & nearly perished in the attempt. His hands and feet were frost bitten & his nose & ears ran blood’ ...

At noon we had the only view of Mt Aconcagua that is obtained on the trip. We were lucky to get a clear look. It is a terrible big mountain - with great glaciers on its sides and many sheer precipices of thousands of feet. It is about 21,000 feet high [sic] - but we were already 9,000 feet above sea level ourselves.

At the head of the river the passengers changed to horse-drawn coaches for the trip over the Bermejo Pass to the Chilean railhead:

Nearing the top we went between walls of solid ice or frozen snow. It was a beautiful day .... Am told it is rare to get such a passage. Right on top is ‘El Christo de Los Andes’ an immense bronze statue of Jesus Christ, on the border line between Chile & Argentina.

DB was mightily impressed by his first alpine experience and thereafter, in his many world trips, sought out mountains and alpine scenery. Although he never skied himself, he always encouraged his daughter Joan’s enthusiasm.

Snow sports: 1920s and 1930s

My father’s family joined the Ski Club of Victoria (SCV) when it was founded in 1924. Its first annual report includes a full page advertisement for ‘SNOW SPORTS EQUIPMENT and FASHIONS – at MYERS’ with a charming drawing of a model wearing the latest ladies’ ski fashions. In another package was a c.1926 photo of Grandma Jessie Haughton at Mt Buffalo, posed on a toboggan, and wearing a very similar outfit. The children were encouraged to take up skiing as a sport, and Neville’s first big ski trip was with Ivanhoe Grammar School (escorted by their enlightened Headmaster Mr Buckley) to Charlotte Pass Chalet in 1927. In a postcard photo of himself on skis, sent to a friend, 15-year old Neville is wearing his school blazer, tie and cap with the breeches and leggings he usually wore for horse riding.

Neville’s older sister Vera, already a trained nurse when he was still at school, was a strong and enthusiastic skier. We have a lovely photograph of her in 1930, teaching her little sister Jessie (the youngest, then 7) to ski. Vera wears 1930s high ski-fashion woollen trousers, bum-freezer jacket and a tricot headband with an SCV badge. Jessie is on skis made for her by Neville, with a leather strap across the toe-iron bindings and leather straps that clamped around the heels. She wears a short overcoat and thick woollen gaitsers, strapped under the boot soles and with buttons all up the sides.

In 1930 Neville was in his first year at Melbourne University and organising a trip with friends to the new SCV Cope Hut on the Bogong High Plains. I found a file with letters, a typed list of the contents of a Standard Tin of stores to be sent up to the High Plains in April, an invoice from a Heidelberg grocery store with a list of additions to be sent up with the rather Spartan SCV diet (note: 5 dozen eggs at 9 shillings and 7 pence and Keepeg, an egg preservative at 1s 9d), a detailed travel itinerary from Melbourne via Bairnsdale, Omeo and Fitzgerald’s Hut, a budget and list of expenditure, and an SCV certificate for passing the First Class Jump Test on the High Plains, 20 August 1930.

Neville soon joined Melbourne University Ski Club (MUSC), with childhood and new friends, many of whom remained his friends all their lives. Some of the best died in World War II, some became my mentors and friends as I grew up. In 1931 his friend Ivor Whittaker beat him in the Club’s Osborn Trophy at
the first MUSC races at Hotham, Whittaker recorded their adventures in the pen-and-ink *Hotham Herald*, which was framed and hung in every house we lived in. (Whittaker was one of those who died. Neville was more fortunate – he survived, and as an Australian artillery officer, he even managed to fit in a few months with the British Ski Troops in the Lebanon in c.1941.)

Keen skiers in those days searched for any way to improve their style out of season. The Haughtons’ home on the steep hills of Eaglemont (a Melbourne suburb) was then surrounded by open paddocks, and the SCV experimented with grass skiing, and ski lessons for beginners. I thought this a table and often wondered how they could slide. I still don’t have that answer, but found cuttings from a newspaper feature, showing young Jessie on skis, Neville being towed behind a motorcycle and Vera crouched in a racing position, wearing skis, stocks, boots, leggings, a frock and pearls.

In 1932 Neville was back at Hotham for the third MUSC championships and the first inter-varsity races, against Sydney University. Neville seems to have been an official for the inter-varsity races, but was highly successful in the MUSC championships, winning the four-event Faul trophy for slalom, downhill, jump and langlauf (cross-country). He was there to meet Vera when she arrived at Hotham to prepare for the first women-only winter crossing from Hotham to the Bogong High Plains with two friends. This was a notable achievement and was re-recorded in a newspaper feature in 1982, 50 years later.

**Travelling to the snow: 1930 to 1960**

Getting as far as Mt Hotham Chalet could be a major ordeal in the days before snowploughs. It involved a train trip from Melbourne to Bright, a charabanc or car trip to the snowline, which could be miles below St Bernard, then on foot or ski, carrying all your luggage on your back, for at least six miles up hill, down dale, and around the steep and often icy face of Mt Blowhard, following the snow pole line over the summit of Mt Hotham. If you were lucky, the sky was blue and sunny, if not, there could be blizzards and zero visibility, and you carried reels of string to find your way from snow pole to snow pole. A few years later, it was possible for a large party to by-pass the dangerous Blowhard crossing by riding horses from Harrietville, up the Bon Accord Spur to the snow line, then walking along the Razorback and thence over the summit again to the Chalet. One had to be tough and determined. One could travel from the south, but this involved a longer train ride to Bairnsdale, a much longer and rougher car trip via Omeo to the snowline, and a very long, less dangerous, walk in. This situation prevailed well into the 1950s, when I began skiing at Hotham with Dad.

**Mt Buffalo chalet life**

The Mt Hotham experience contrasted starkly with the fashionable holiday resort at Mt Buffalo. Grandma Jessie visited the Chalet several times in the 1920s, with her beautiful and chic oldest daughter Eugene, a notable horsewoman, but never a rough’n’tough mountainy type like Neville or Vera. At Buffalo, one dressed for dinner – long frocks and dinner suits. Skiing was just one of a number of outdoor pursuits that included horse riding, tennis and gentle bush walks. Aunt Jessie remembers a trip in 1936 with Grandma Jessie, escorted by my mother - then still Miss Joan Ferguson. Young Jessie, aged 13, was very proud of her special pink evening.
dress, but mortified to be told by Joan that her dirty fingernails didn’t match the dress. Here the glamorous Austrian ski instructor, Franz Skardarasy, first entered our lives. Mother kept in touch with him throughout World War II (he was in New Zealand) and visited him at his hotel in Zurs in 1957. I skied with him at Zurs in 1983, and our daughter, Little Jessie, skied with him in 1992 (he was then 84 and still a consummate charmer).

Mt Buffalo could on occasion cater to the rough’n’tough brigade. The University Ski Club, (MUSC until 1934), organised a club trip to the Horn Hut in 1939. Joan and Neville took young Jessie along and she remembers her dear Brv carrying her pack when she struggled on the seven-mile walk on skis: “The Railways ... undertook proving and far exceeded expectations. Arriving at the Chalet, the advance guard was greeted with several enormous wicker hampers containing crisp, white table linen, china and cutlery as well as food. There was much weeding out as only the bare essentials could be carried in rucksacks to the Hut.”¹⁴ I was 18 months old and left at home with a nanny.

Figure 4 Top – Neville, Joan & Bess botanizing, New Years Day 1935, Bogong High Plains. Below – Neville & Margret set off for Mt Feathertop in 1947. (Author’s collection)

The mountains sans snow

Spring, summer and autumn could be wonderful times at Mt Buffalo, with wild flowers, splendid scenery, formal dining and dances, but after World War II the dress code was relaxed. I remember a family trip in 1946, when tweed jackets were OK for dinner, but there was still a fancy-dress ball (me and my brother, aged 3, dressed as an Arab and his donkey – I was the donkey). The Bogong High Plains were a favourite place for camping in summer. Joan and Neville (both Agricultural Science students) and a friend spent the whole summer vacation in 1934/5 wandering around the Plains with a packhorse collecting botanical specimens for Joan’s thesis on the flora of the High Plains. Joan and Neville even spent their 1936 honeymoon on horseback, travelling from Merrig, near Mt Buller, across the mountains to Mt Bogong. In the 1950s they did another horseback trip together, to explore Wonnangatta Station, in the southern reaches of the Alps, and several times the whole family (six of us by then) spent the holiday season on the Dargo High Plains, looking after Jack Treasure’s house and cattle.

Summer lodge building was important to club skiing after WW2. Dad (Neville) helped build USC Lodge at Mt Hotham (1949) and the first USC Cabin at Mt Buller (1950). As a teenager in the 1950s I tagged along to USC Hotham with a boyfriend/club member, helping with painting and plumbing and, even then, cooking for the troops. Work parties continue and our son Simon recently built a retaining wall outside the Hotham Lodge.

Skiing unto the fifth generation

My initiation to the rough’n’tough school was a trip to Mt Feathertop on horseback from Harrietville in c.1947 with Dad. We loosed the horses at the snowline to find their own way home, camped in the Feathertop Hut until our food ran out, and walked back to Harrietville. In 1850 I stayed with Dad at the new Hotham Lodge in its first season. In later years I did the arduous trip into Hotham many times, in the days when if you wanted to ski downhill, you had to climb uphill. I was very glad when ski-tows were invented!

I met my partner at Mt Buller in 1960. He joined USC then, and the club community became like an extended family to all of us. I finally joined the club in 1998, with two of our children, Simon and Little Jessie, and celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the USC Hotham Lodge – and my 50th Anniversary at Hotham – by cooking (with Simon’s help) a special dinner for the full Lodge party, including two of our grandchildren. We presented a framed photograph of Joan and Neville, at Charlotte Pass as captains of the 1936 Melbourne intervarsity team, to be hung in the Lodge.

My partner Carl Doring wrote this postscript to my paper:

Mountains are not just big rocks, they are focal points for memories of people who lived, worked and played there. When you think about conserving mountain heritage, do not just think about the landscape, flora, fauna and man-made structures. Think also about collecting, conserving and commemorating those intangible and fragile memories that give mountains their cultural meaning.

Endnotes
2 Lunn, Arnold. The Mountains of Youth, Oxford University Press 1925.
3 My presentation was illustrated with about 120 images, mostly from our family archives. For the publication, many illustrations have been omitted and the text shortened.

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