

## *Bogong High Plains & Falls Creek Skiing History*

### **A Man of the Mountains** — *Martin Romuld*

"I think that credit for much of the background work in the initial development of Falls Creek should be given to *Martin Romuld* for his early encouragement and appreciation of the beauty of the high country and of skiing!" *Fred Vines*, member of *Bogong Ski Club* in the 1940's.

Born near Trondheim, Norway in 1905 Romuld began skiing at an early age. By the time he was six he was competing in various ski events but it was in ski jumping that he competed at the National level. Romuld studied civil engineering in Trondheim but with the Great Depression affecting Norway, he decided to emigrate, arriving in Australia in Melbourne in 1931. While working there, he returned to competitive skiing. For the next few years he was to dominate both State and National jump and langlauf events while great rival, Tom Mitchell, consistently beat him in the slalom. He was considered "one of the best ski jumpers the country has ever seen and one of the best all round skiers for his day." (*Australian Ski Year Book* 1988).



In 1934 the editor of *Victorian* fortunate, from several Romuld as a member. Firstly during the past season by he will be successful in were further indebted to him for Buang for the jumping course. the plan and profile of the new jumping hill, together with the solution of its engineering problems."

*Ski Year Book* wrote "We are aspects, in having Mr Martin he brought honour to the Club winning Australia's most National Champion, a title which retaining for many seasons. We his splendid work at Donna Mr Romuld was responsible for

In June 1936 Martin joined the *State Electricity Commission (SEC)* as resident engineer based at a hydro-meteorological station (built in 1933 and later known as *Wilkinson's Lodge\**) erected just downhill from *Wallace's Hut*. Martin's off-sider, *Joe Holston* lived nearby in another hut which burned down in October 1940. (AGL workers report finding the ruins of a hut not far from the old SEC Hut after the 2003 bush fires). However Martin primarily skied alone, measuring flow rates and recording snow depths. At times additional workers would assist in the measurements and it was many of these SEC workers that Romuld taught to ski - it appears he inspired many would be skiers. Interest in skiing was such that in 1940

discussions about forming a ski club were held in his cottage and later the same year SEC workers based in Bogong village formed the *Bogong Ski Club*.

Martin skied extensively over the Bogong High Plains on day trips extending from Mt Hotham to Mt Bogong. *Andy Broad*, in the November 1936 edition of *Schuss magazine*, wrote about joining him on a tour.

“we decided to call in on our old friend, Martin Romuld who is stationed at the SEC’s cottage. Martin is very fit, enjoys every bit of life on the plains, and is very pleased with his job. On the jump which he has already built at the rear of his cottage he has covered 128 feet (39.014m). He has also a slalom course set down the Middle Creek Valley.

During the afternoon he took us for a tour along Rocky Valley, towards Mt McKay. After running over it, Martin claims that Mt McKay possesses the finest downhill course he has ever seen in Australia, the descent being 3,000 feet to the snowline. This mountain also has ideal slalom courses, in addition to possessing a natural jumping hill. There are quite a number of adjacent slopes suitable for racing. When one hears an opinion such as that expressed by a skier of the calibre of Martin, it is wondered why our racing skiers claim that conditions on the plains are too flat for racing.”

In the five years he was based at the S.E.C cottage Martin was to have a great influence on the aspiring skiers of the day, who were no doubt impressed by his “steady upright stance” and the fact he skied “without any flamboyance or obvious effort.” *Julian Newton Brown* pays further testimony to his prowess.

“At one time *Bill Kent Hughes* (later Sir Wilfred) was touring the High Plains and met Martin at Wilkinson’s and asked him how long it would take him to get to Hotham and back. Martin said about six hours. Bill considered that impossible and bet him a dozen bottles of beer he couldn’t do it in the time. Martin set off immediately and returned with an item from Hotham as proof in 5 hours 45 minutes.”

This unofficial record still stood in 1970. (One can’t but wonder what time our current ski champions would take for a Wallace’s Hut - Hotham return - on classic waxing skis!)

In 1941 Martin joined the Royal Australian Air Force and after the war skied mainly at Mt Buller. He maintained his involvement in competitive skiing as an official. It was from participating in his first ski jump event at Falls Creek in 1958 that *Julian Newton Brown* became friends with Romuld.

The **Falls Creek Museum** has (in storage), by courtesy of *Newton Brown*, the wooden skis used by Romuld on his High Plains rounds. A pair of his jumping boots are also held by the museum.

In recognition of **Martin Romuld's** contribution to skiing on the high plains, the new **Prinoth BR 350** cross country grooming machine purchase in 2015 that now does such a great job on our cross country trails has been named after him. •

Actually, the article was written by Diana Patterson, an ex-board member at Falls Creek who was very involved in the early setting up of the museum. Diana has also led a couple of expeditions to the Antarctic. Could you credit Diana with the story, the museum with images and This Week for supplying the material.

*The **Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club** would like to acknowledge the writer of this article Diana Paterson (ex-board member Falls Creek Resort Management and a big player in the setting up of the Falls Creek Museum. Also thanks to the Museum for the two photos and to Ken Bell of 'This Week in Falls Creek & Mount Beauty' Newspaper for supplying the material.*



*From left: Martin Romuld, Herb Kendall & John Martin outside Wilkinson's Lodge\* on the Bogong High Plains*

\*Wilkinson's Hut was built for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria in 1932 as a permanent residence for the snow research program manager, who was the resident engineer of the Kiewa Hydro Electric Scheme. The hut was owned briefly 1946-1958 by the Ski Club of Victoria / Victorian Alpine Club and renamed *Wilkinson Lodge*. In 1958 it was sold to the Melbourne Bushwalkers Club. It was accidentally burnt down on 17th January 2004. It was located at Wallace Gap on the Bogong High Plains