



Bushwalkers Search and Rescue ~ Annual Report 2007-2008

A retirement and new initiative, new appointments, relocation, four searches and three practices filled the Bushwalkers Search and Rescue (BSAR) year and keep members busy.

In May 2007, Neil Weatherill retired from BSAR after 18 years of service. Neil was Police Liaison Officer (PLO) and Minute Secretary for the duration of his involvement for which BSAR is very grateful. A presentation from BSAR and Police SAR was made on 27th July.

Also in May BSAR appointed two new PLOs and a new Field Organiser (FO). Chris Jarvis left his FO role to take up a PLO position. Also appointed as a PLO and making a return to BSAR was Neville Byrne. John Baillie was appointed to fill the FO vacancy. John, a regular contributor at meetings and training, was also appointed Assistant Equipment Officer earlier in the year.

The Police SAR Squad had regular representation at Committee meetings and the November meeting was held at the Squad's premises in Williamstown. Meeting attendance by a member of the Squad and their involvement in training contributes significantly to maintaining good working relationships between the organisations.

At the request of Police SAR, the BSAR Committee agreed try to provide small numbers of searchers rapidly to assist with initial reconnaissance searching. Only small numbers would be required at this early stage, as Police SAR would still be gathering information. Such a callout would be conducted using SMS and email with a PLO coordinating responses.

An initial draft **Rapid Response Policy** for this new initiative was discussed at the July meeting and a Working Group established to refine it and make a recommendation to the September meeting. The Gwinear search however provided an unexpected trial of the draft policy and raised numerous issues, not the least of which related to searcher safety and logistics. The policy was further clarified and approved in November. Since then, the King River search has opened discussion on a "**limited numbers**" call-out and the Rapid Response Policy is being reviewed in light of this option.

Sixteen BSAR members responded to the search for a 19yo Scottish tourist, William Bliss, who became lost on 3rd April 2007 in the **Sabine Falls** area north of Apollo Bay. A search by more than

40 Police, SES, Parks and other volunteers was organised on 4th April, but he was not found and BSAR was called out that evening. BSAR groups were tasked to search rough terrain along Smythe Creek. The lost tourist was found within 30 minutes of BSAR deployment, having walked out onto a road.

On 21st August 2007 Police SAR made a request, acknowledging it was outside established guidelines, for a small group of searchers at short notice to find 15yo Sam Fink at **Mt St Gwinear**. He became separated from his school group and despite teachers, Parks staff and local Police conducting an immediate search, wasn't found. The weather was windy and drizzly, and the boy was also known to be asthmatic. The Police Dog Squad, SES and Red Cross also attended. Twelve BSAR members were deploying just after midnight when a Police search party found the boy. He was hypothermic, but otherwise unhurt. A BSAR group was redirected to assist and some two hours later, after rewarming, the boy walked out with his rescuers. Most BSAR members returned home later that day after a few hours sleep. The Police had initiated a further full callout for later that day for up to 40 searchers with ski or snowshoe experience. This was cancelled at 0130 hrs, but twenty-five members had committed to attend.

A 33yo man disappeared near Whitfield in the **King River** on 7th December 2007 after his 4WD broke down on Wild Horse Gap road. Fourteen BSAR members joined the search on 9th December. Police SAR requested a limited number of searchers as all had to be transported to the search area by 4WD. The missing man was attempting to follow the King River in steep and rugged terrain down to Lake William Hovell. Two BSAR teams prepared for overnight searching with a third group held in reserve. The first BSAR group was en route to the search start point when the man was spotted from the helicopter. Fortunately he could be winched out otherwise it would have been a very tough, two-day bush slog for the BSAR members to assist with the rescue.

A BSAR member from Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club, being the only member available, was teamed up with three local Parks Victoria staff to assist in the search for a 54yo woman on the **Bogong High Plains**. Penny Craig was attempting a multi-day, solo walk starting 11th February at

Brandy Creek Track, Mt Hotham. It is believed she became disoriented near the top of Paling Spur and phoned for help. By the time the limited callout came it had been raining overnight and the Police Air-Wing was unable to access the area. She eventually made contact with a Bright SES group coming up Paling Spur.

Some 51 BSAR and Police personnel participated in the very successful **Dryland Training Day** at the Police Academy on 2nd June. This training specifically targeted new members and provided more advanced training for experienced members. There was very positive feedback on the sessions.

On 21st and 22nd July, 23 BSAR members, three from Police SAR and four members of Warrigal SES completed the **Winter Weekend Practice** at Mt St Gwinear. Conditions were cold, clear with no wind, but plenty of snow. The weekend gave new members insight into how an actual search evolves and how physically fit one has to be. The more experienced members had the challenge of looking after a "patient" overnight and an evacuation the next day.

The **Steep Snow & Ice/Backcountry Ski Skills Practice** was held at Mount Hotham on 15th and 16th September. Ten BSAR members and five Police SAR members attended. The practice included roped travel, load testing of a snow stake belay anchor and a ski deadman anchor, and an introduction to using avalanche beacons. Bill Barker from Mt Hotham Ski Patrol briefed the group on recent rescues and spoke about avalanche hazard control and risk areas. Members then practiced hauling in a steep, gully system. On Sunday, groups were provided with ski instruction. The hospitality and assistance of the Mount Hotham Ski Patrol and the support of Mount Hotham Skiing Company and Mount Hotham Resort Management were important contributions to the success of this practice.

Only three BSAR members updated or upgraded their first aid qualifications during the year. Subsidies are provided to encourage members to obtain, update or upgrade first aid qualifications.

For around thirty years BSAR had the privilege of utilising the facilities at Police Transport Division in **Dawson Street, Brunswick**. This support included the provision of transport and most importantly, drivers, to search areas, and secure parking during call-outs. Since around 1999, equipment storage facilities were also provided, making loading the bus in the early hours of the morning very efficient. The staff at Dawson Street are thanked for the many years of support. On 24th November Dawson Street formally ceased to

be BSAR's prime rendezvous point, being replaced by the Police Bands Complex in **Green Street, Northcote**. A shipping container was made available for equipment. The new venue worked very well during its first use in early December for the King River search and staff at the new site have been most welcoming.

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) continued to provide funds to Bushwalking Victoria for BSAR administration and training. The department's financial support is greatly appreciated.

Behind the Log (BTL) remains the key means by which information is provided to each BSAR member and to clubs. Ren Millsom capably produced and edited the two issues during the year. Distribution of the newsletter was a joint effort between Rik Head, Cheryl Walker and Jenny Sykes. Thanks to Ren, Rik, Cheryl and Jenny for their part in ensuring that BTL kept members informed.

Cheryl Walker, from the VNPA Bushwalking and Activities Group, was appointed as **Membership Secretary** in September 2007. Cheryl has settled into the role and managed the task of coordinating and updating the list very well. She has also made changes to formatting to improve the list's effectiveness for PLOs. Thanks to Rik Head who was Interim Membership Secretary from November 2006 and assisted Cheryl to get started.

Various members of the BSAR Committee took **minutes** until July 2007 when Cheryl Walker offered to also take on this responsibility. Thanks to all who undertook this task during the year.

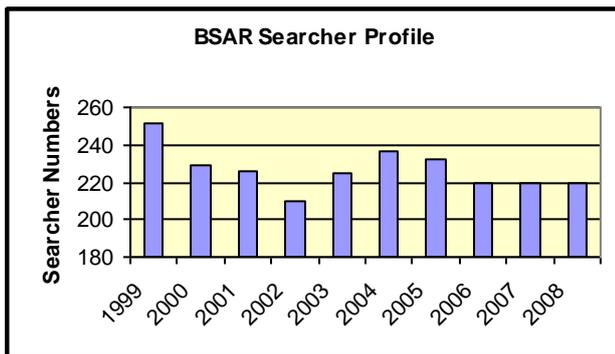
Rik Head ably managed and regularly updated the **BSAR website**. Thanks Rik for a job well done.

The 2006 **equipment** review recommendations were revisited in light of the move to Northcote. BSAR Equipment Officer, Chris Jarvis, together with newly appointed Assistant Equipment Officer, John Baillie, assessed all BSAR equipment and storage requirements. The BSAR Committee approved further recommendations for equipment disposal, purchase and storage and implementation is underway. The old snowshoes were well received by Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club (BNSC) for display in its clubrooms. BSAR also received safety glasses and scrub gloves courtesy of the Police SAR Squad. New CB radios, complete with storage case, were purchased during the year to supplement Police communications. Thanks to Chris and John for all their hard work on the equipment front.

The 274* dedicated people involved in BSAR are what make it unique. Twenty-four clubs

contributed 220 searchers and 61 club contacts to help maintain this specialised, volunteer community service and are to be congratulated. Estimated volunteer hours contributed to the running of BSAR totalled 3,180 for the year, significantly higher than last year due to the number of searches, an additional training activity, equipment reviews and relocation, new policy development and significant administration activity. This highlights BSAR's substantial contribution to the Victorian community.

During the past ten years BSAR has witnessed fluctuations in searcher numbers. The last three years have been stable, but how will BSAR maintain its momentum in the future? With an aging membership profile, BSAR needs to recruit new, younger members. The individual membership option now available with Bushwalking Victoria will hopefully see a rise in numbers. BSAR also intends to lift its profile and has applied for a substantial grant from Emergency Management Australia to assist with recruitment and retention of members.



I'd especially like to thank the BSAR Team, particularly the Committee, for providing such wonderful support, not just during the past year, but for the past decade. I would not have managed this long without their generously given time and contributions.

I also take this opportunity to thank members of Police SAR and look forward to ongoing, close collaboration and mutual support.

As always, Bushwalkers Search and Rescue benefits from the efforts of many who enable the provision of this essential community service. I look forward to celebrating BSAR's 60th year commencing in August 2008.

Monica Chapman
Convener, Bushwalkers Search and Rescue

** Note: Figure is a little lower than previous years due to a calculation error. This did not impact on searcher numbers.*