



Bush Search and Rescue Victoria

Monica Chapman, Convener

The 60th anniversary year marks my last as Convener and I have thoroughly enjoyed my years in this role. Many changes have challenged our team this year. We have a new name, Bush Search and Rescue Victoria, and a new logo, rapid response/limited numbers and cold case callout policies and our first handful of individual members.

The new name was approved in July 2008 followed by a New Name Usage Protocol adopted in September, with the new logo selected in February 2009.

In September 2008 came the exciting announcement of a successful application through Emergency Management Australia for federal funding from the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund. We received \$31,087.10 for our recruitment and training project.

Since then the Committee has busied itself in utilising the funding. New GPS units, avalanche beacons and emergency shelters have been purchased, training in the use of this equipment has been undertaken and additional activities are planned, a new recruitment brochure, advertisements and banners have been obtained, and first aid subsidies have been allocated. Purchase of caps and vests are in progress.

We gratefully received a number of donations this year. From Melbourne Bushwalkers and CAEX clubs were donations of \$500 and \$260 respectively. The largest donation ever to be received came from family and friends of Warren Meyer in Australia and Canada. They generously gave over \$11,000 which allowed a major purchase of the bulk of the new GPS units and all our CB radios.

David Kneen stepped down from his Field Organiser role in December 2008 and thanked for his contribution to BSAR in that capacity over the past few years.

From 25th-28th March, members scoured the often dense, damp understorey of the tall forests in the large-scale search for 57yo Warren Meyer who went missing from a four-hour bushwalk in the Dom Dom saddle area. A total of forty-four members, from various clubs, responded to three callouts over the four days of the BSAR commitment. Members line-searched the looking for any signs of the missing person. In the later days of the search BSAR leaders managed combined BSAR/SES or BSAR/CFA line-search groups.

On 26th-27th April, BSAR were again requested to assist to search for Mr Meyer's body. This was our first "Cold Case" callout. As it happened, Police

had raised the possibility of cold case callouts earlier in the year with the BSAR committee, and there was in-principle agreement for it to occur, but procedures for cold case callouts had not yet been finalised and were fine tuned as a result of this callout. Nine members assisted with further searching, but again, no trace was found.

Most recently, on the weekend of 4th-5th October, 12 members carried out further searching for some trace of Mr Meyer, but again no sign. This callout was the first time our new model GPS units were used intensively. They proved their worth in the fine navigation required when line searching in difficult terrain.

Seven members from BNSC, WOA and AlpineSAR participated in the evacuation of an injured kayaker on a rugged and isolated section of the West Kiewa River on 15th September. The group left Mount Beauty early to begin the descent from Dungeys Track to the river in daylight. The kayaker was successfully evacuated by helicopter a few hours later and the group returned to Mount Beauty. Had the stronger winds forecast for later in the day come early, helicopter evacuation would not have been possible and a long stretcher carry would have been required.

There was no New Year partying for 15 members who brought in the new year with a trip to the forests near Lorne in search of two young men on 31st December 2008. Four teams were deployed late afternoon and camped out overnight. After an early start New Year's Day, one team located a campsite and found them roughly 300m away at their second campsite. The missing men were both in remarkably good condition having taken the advice from local Police during an earlier mobile phone conversation to stay in one place. They had also constructed a good shelter. After sharing some food and drink, three BSAR teams walked them though the bush navigating back to the Sabine Falls Road to meet their waiting parents and the media.

On 3rd November an alert was sent advising of two missing walkers at Wilsons Promontory. The missing pair were found shortly thereafter.

A successful Police Liaison Officer/Field Organiser training workshop was held on 10th May.

The Steep Snow and Ice Practice, held on 19th-20th July on Mt Buller's West Ridge was attended by 13 members. The group walked up the West Ridge in knee-deep snow, camped out and continued in very wet conditions next day. The dryland session on procedures and expectations of gear and briefing from Police SAR ahead of the weekend was well worthwhile.

Margaret Maxwell and John Baillie attended parts of the Emergency Management Conference - Rescue 08, held on 29th-30th July and the Lost Persons Workshop 31st July.

The training in the Brisbane Ranges on 6th-7th September was attended by 52 people with over 20 new members coming along. It incorporated a 12-hour rogaine and VRA gave great support with our participation as did the Police SAR Squad who contributed to sessions on Sunday.

Six members updated or upgraded their first aid qualifications during 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 contributions to our training activities plays a valuable role in maintaining the good working relationships between the organisations. They also provided 12 pairs of scrub gloves and safety glasses for our members in the north-east as well as additional numbers for use by Melbourne-based searchers.

The Police Bands Complex in Northcote has proven to be a good departure point for searches and training activities.

Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) continued to provide funds to Bushwalking Victoria for BSAR administration and operations.

Behind the Log (BTL), our main communication means with each member, has again been ably produced by Editor, Ren Millsom. Ensuring our newsletter reaches members has continued to be a joint effort between Cheryl Walker and Jenny Sykes.

After many years in Rik Head's capable hands, the new BSAR website went "live" in September. Constructed and mainly kept updated by Peter Campbell since then, it has the capacity for others to have authorised access so as to spread the workload in future.

Membership Secretary, Cheryl Walker continued to improve the management of the membership and SMS lists. Cheryl stepped down as Minute Secretary in September and Committee agreed the task would be done on a rotation basis from November, unless another person volunteered.

Equipment Officers, Chris Jarvis and John Baillie, had a busy time with the significant amount of new equipment obtained during the year and equipment management was identified as requiring improvement. Equipment stored at Northcote was insured for theft due to security concerns at this site.

The 279 dedicated people involved in BSAR make it a truly unique volunteer group. The support from 23 clubs and 3 individual members contributed 222 searchers and 61 club contacts to help maintain our specialised service.

The estimated number of volunteer hours contributed to BSAR operations totalled 5,314 for the year, significantly higher than last year due to the number of searches, additional training activities, new policy development and significant administration activity with respect to our new name, logo and EMA grant management. This highlights the substantial contribution made by all involved.

The first two individual members of BSAR were approved at the May 2008 meeting and the total number currently stands at three with another two applications currently in being processed. It is hoped that the new brochure and advertisements, increased visibility at searches, through banners, caps and vests, will lift our profile to increase membership.

Rik Head was approached by Bushwalking Victoria to prepare a document covering various communication systems for bushwalkers. The document entitled "Communications for Bushwalkers" was released in February 2009 on the BWV website and has been very well received.

An application was submitted to the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund for 2009/2010 for purchase of radios, conduct of radio training and for digitising BSAR records.

I sincerely thank everyone involved in the BSAR team, especially the Committee, for their great support over the past year (and the decade before). It has been a privilege and a pleasure to have served as Convener with such a supportive group of people. I would long ago have left the role had it not been for your encouragement, understanding, shared wisdom, generous advice and friendship.

I also take this opportunity to thank Senior Sergeant Barry Gibson and members of the Squad (past and present) for their tremendous support during my time as Convener.

I leave the Convener role in the good hands of Frank Zgoznic and I wish him the very best for the remainder of our 60th year and into the future. I look forward to my continued involvement as a Field Organiser and Delegate.

As always, BSAR benefits from the efforts of many who enable the provision of this unique community service. Keep up the good work.