

Mt Mawson Ski Patrol Annual Report 2017

With nine weekends of tow operations, ending with remaining skiable snow, it was a good year. Perhaps too good as major lengths of rope on Rodway and Mawson Tows were buried, taking a lot of work to free most weekends. Patrol frequently helped with tow operations. Still, it was fun usually due to the excellent snow cover enjoyed after helping. Rodway ran early in the season, but soon succumbed to excessive snow. Many skied the Golden Stairs and, some, skied straight through the bush from Mawson to near Urquhart. The latter a rare possibility.

Earlier in the season, so deep was the snow in places, channels over 1 metre deep had to be cut along Mawson Tow to allow a safe skiable line up the tow because the pulley arms and rope could not be raised further. This was time-consuming, so delayed a few starts. Icing was another issue on a couple of days. Patrol helped with all this. Most weekends were immediately preceded by wild weather, this extended well into several Saturdays. On one occasion, a patroller was blown nearly 30 m from the Mawson offload.

With the large amount of snow hiding rocks, accidents were very few. The main accidents related to some heavy face-plants, a skier tripping and running into a tow pulley, boarders hitting a pulley on University Tow and one having a bloody accident at Rodway (when not operating). Other persons were witnessed running into University Tow pulleys, but did not want help. Over 17 incidents were attended, but only 7 required and received significant attention by patrol.

Apart from the collisions with rock or infrastructure, the main other issue was several people looking for warmth. This was hard to help. HQ was frequently near 0° C. One tow operator received a bad cut in the lip area when his spade unexpectedly bounced into his face. Stitches were required. One patroller sitting near a pole on Mawson Tow with adjustment tools, not in a run, was struck very hard in the left shoulder and body by a heavier boarder who lost control on steep ice. The extent of injury was not immediately evident until hours later when arm movement was grossly limited.

There were no arranged or immediate evacuations due to incidents, although at least three had to self-evacuate rather than ski on. Patrol assisted one injured non-local depart the mountain at the end of a day.

The patrol micro-HQ suffered greatly from a further decrease in electrical power to heat, and poor ventilation. Moisture, hence ice, quickly built up to provide an indoor skating rink. Prolonged dampness led to more buckling of the inner wall panels. Our transceivers (radios) have suffered so greatly from the constant high relative humidity in the MMSP HQ container, they are now useless. The removal of the airlock meant up to 35 minutes to free or thaw the door surrounds, key hole and tumblers to access the HQ on several occasions. A genuine test of problem-solving when first met. The colder than usual late winter and most of Spring prolonged the icing issue for more weeks than an average year would.

We were most fortunate to receive a costly gift of a light-weight rescue sled / akja from Raoul Picot who owned and ran a ski patrol equipment sales business, and ski patroller. The sled is much easier to move around than the older heavier akja's with untrustworthy handle attachments. The new sled has a built-in weather protection cover which proved useful / essential most days. The main precaution is not to drag the sled over rock, dirt or gritty snow.

Due to health and other issues, the patrol was overwhelmingly present as Paul Vince, Liz Koolhof and Andrew Davey. Just as well as Andrew and Paul have some very useful tow skills. Two other patrollers also have various good tow-related skills: Craig Larsson and George Brettingham-Moore. Unfortunately Craig was out of action due to hip replacements for the season as an active ski patroller. He made appearances late in the season to help as feasible, and for exercise. Our Medical Officer, Dr Stephen Webber, fell afoul of influenza which, sadly, took him out of action when excellent skiable snow and rostered.

This year was a recertification year. Twelve certified, but somewhat fewer could patrol this year. With the sudden and unexpected start to the season, there was only one patroller available the first weekend of tow operations. It was most fortunate that the season was no earlier than it was as Andrew had had to recover

from a lung infection, pneumonia then influenza. We trust next year will be easier for us with two of the newly certified closer to the skifield, and Craig back.

We note the recent appearance of a large hole below our HQ container and concrete slabs in the Dobson car park. They herald the intended replacement of former Sitzmark, more appropriate space for ski patrol / STSA generally. We so look forwards to this. Quite some work may be required to get a new HQ fitted properly.

I thank all those who patrolled this year or otherwise helped. More thanks are due to those few (3) who turned up to many extra days when needed – most weekends as it happened. Even more thanks to those who went a step further to help with tow duties while on patrol. Perhaps tow-rope splicing, the electrical safety circuitry and diesel motor use should be introduced to potential patrollers?

Special thanks goes to Paul Vince who certified as a ski patrol trainer / assessor – well done! This consumed a lot of his time for a while. He also supplied his boat's gas cooker so we could make hot drinks – much appreciated on the several cold wild days.

Dr Andrew Davey (Ph D),
President