

Memories of Geelong Water Ski Club
David Beretta 11-10-2021



I first became aware of Geelong Water Ski club when watching a Gala Day procession in which were four ski boats on trailers being towed by the latest cars, they looked really great.

My next contact was when I was asked to scuba dive for a watch dropped by a member in the river at the end of Wilson road.

The club bought a portion of land which is our present club site from Mr. Guy Raymond who owned all of what is now the St. Albans housing estate, it was then St Albans Stud farm .It was famous for horse breeding and stabling the great "Phar Lap" for a short time also "Russia "who won the 1947 Melbourne cup.

Kevin Bell and other members built the club house, it was on steel stilts and was not bricked in until just before Joan and I joined in 1970.We were welcomed into the club by President Albert (Slim) Batty and wife Bev, who became our best friends.

Our son Mark was four years old.

Slim took over as President from Steve Kittelty half way through his year as president.

With Slims guidance we connected the club to town water about two kilometers from the Stud farm gate house in Wilson road. We also connected hot and cold water to shower and sink in club kitchen.

The club had a toilet block but no septic tank. There was a Sunday morning chore that everybody tried to avoid, that was emptying the cans into a hole dug down the southern end of the block, this needed a person on each handle to carry, there was a bit of dry reaching from some faint hearts.

I installed the septic tank, toilets and basin.

As there was no mobile phones at the time, Slim organized for a phone line to the club for safety and security.

It was at this time the club had its only fatal accident when a boat towing barefooters rounded a bend at the southern part of the river and ran over the top of a boat driven by a father teaching his two children to ski, killing the father. The coroner found a case of mis adventure.

The property known as the jump block came up for sale and was purchased by the club.

The late Laurie Smith worked at the construction of the Animal Health Laboratory and was able to provide us with enough concrete to pour a large slab on the shore of the jump block for a boat ramp it was intended that after curing it would be slid into the river. Sadly on the day of launching, it was pushed slowly in by an excavator when it took off and was never seen again. Slim through his business supplied the club with the steel club house stairs, slalom tower and stairs and steel jump tower also many steel rail wheels for jump moorings, he also built the jump all free.

The club had many evening barbqs.as fund raisers. Slim would supply a semi-trailer as a band stand in front of the club it became a very popular social event held on a Saturday night and drew large crowds. Slim and I spent these nights crowd controlling and stopping gate crashers climbing in for free.

The club hosted a National titles on the mile and the presentation night.

The club hosted and still does many successful tournaments and ski schools.

The club hosted many international skiers over the years it started off with Mick Hazelwood Great Britain. Sammy Duval. Camille Duval from USA and many more.

All these skiers in the early days were hosted at members' homes, this gave our skiers a great opportunity for coaching.

Our first boat was a Lewis hull timber clinker with in board Ford motor, it had a very high wake. It was not popular with other members as it would send a large wake across the river. We then bought a Geelong made fiberglass boat of unknown name. Then a Pride Fury with Hundred and twenty horsepower

Mercury motor, it threw a locknut out through the side casing, costing a lot of money which Merc were not interested in. We then had Skicraft boat "Hi Ho". Mark started skiing at four before he could swim, it was my job if he fell in to swim to him, he was always ready to go again before I got to him.

Sunday afternoons after happy bbq lunches skiers seemed to get braver it was an occasion of such that John Barrett and Bob Appleton were towing Rodney Baker a daredevil physio on a parachute down through the jump course when Joan yelled out they are going to kill Rodney who at that time was fast approaching the power cables over the river fortunately at the last moment they eased off enough to lower Rod just below the cables before picking up speed.

We purchased an ascending parachute, it was a very hair raising flight above the river. We then used it on Corio bay, and most members had a fly. Laurie Smith arranged with the annual raft race on the mile to do a ski demonstration prior to the race, part of which I was to tow George Lewis who was a great barefoot skier down the river on our parachute with the rafts being organized to leave a path clear mid river for the tow boat. I was to start at the Shannon avenue end and tow George through to Moorabool Street. As I took off with George in the air, we rounded the bend and headed down stream only to find the rafts had not cleared a path, I had to stop causing George to drift into the rear of a woolen mill, after we recovered a somewhat dazed George we made our way to Moorabool street for our final show which was to power at full speed up river to the rafts with George and our observer holding a smoke flare out each side of the boat. With the parachute on the floor we had not gone far before George yelled out he had dropped his flare, I said that was ok and we proceed with one, only to be told it was not overboard but in the boat, I turned and saw this large orange glow through the parachute and on the floor of the boat beside the fuel tank, I stopped the boat which then disappeared in orange smoke, I tossed Mark over the side fearing the boat was going to explode, fortunately George managed to pick it up and throw it over board. This episode drew a bigger crowd than the raft race. This was one of the many amazing adventures I had with George. One of Georges great acts was to jump off the Swan Street bridge at Moomba and barefoot away. George and I would take a number of canoe trips down from our club to Barwon Heads over time, this would entail over turning the canoe with lots of arguing. George was a great coach and taught many juniors, I also obtained by barefoot badge from him.



Mark and Chris Beretta with Peter Smith about 1982.

Our sons Mark and Christopher learnt to ski and were coached trick skiing by Frank Swain the father of Austin and Murray who were great skiers. Frank was also a very good skier in his own right. He started Mark and Peter Smith into tournament skiing taking them to many state tournaments before Joan and I could go as I worked weekends. Many of our members skied on the mile in Geelong, on one occasion Gil Gordon took off strapped to an ex air force parachute having scooped up a dog running along the bank with his owner only to hear it yelping as it fell past him into the water. One year we had a record flood which swept the jump away, when the water subsided we searched for it all the way to Barwon Heads to no avail. We were able to get a light plane and searched for it, finding in a paddock at the rear of Leopold, when the weather warmed up and the ground dried we were able to load it onto a truck and get it back to the club for repairs. I spent a lot of hours maintaining the jump and relocating it after floods. In the early years the slalom course was anchored on the river bed with concrete mooring blocks, this was not accurate for tournament skiing and it was then surveyed along the bank with posts and wires were fitted to take each buoy, this made it very accurate and up to world standards. I recall spending many ours in scuba gear trying to line up the old system. On one occasion we were towing a mooring

block into position on a raft with Ian Fisher on board when the whole lot slipped tossing Ian in and disappearing under, we all thought this was funny until sometime went by and he never surfaced, we were starting to become very concerned when over near the bank some bubbles were seen and Ian crawled up the bank, he then told us he could not swim.

We had a cantankerous neighbor who did not like skiers, we tried to be as neighborly as possible even giving him access to our water supply during a drought. The club built a security high fence around the boundary and approached him to pay half of the cost of a standard rural fence which he refused and then built a rural fence right beside our fence all the way round. Slim Batty supplied a steel structure at the slalom course and a prefab cabin was placed on top, which still exists today. Slim also supplied the jump tower. Because of the amount of vandalism the club built a concrete bunker to store equipment, it was fitted with a roller door, the door lasted about a week before it was forced open and destroyed. Alan Smith who modernized the slalom course with the wires and I built in place a heavy steel outer door and then replaced the roller door which I think is still in place today. Items that were stolen before were aluminum boats and outboard motors. One of our members was motoring down the southern end of the river and came across a group of campers with one of our stolen boats, he was on his own but told them it was our boat and he took it back, very brave indeed. On another occasion the police with a diver and a tow truck arrived at the gate and stated they were diving for a stolen car, after retrieving about six cars they gave up. I do not know if they found the one they were after.

Before the river was closed due to possible collapse of the concrete Aqua duct it was possible to ski all the way to the first breakwater and around Goat Island.

Our club as a fund raiser would host a group of uni students for a "learn to ski day". One group arrived and we proceeded to coach beginners and others who knew a little about skiing a young man who was conspicuous by his bravado when his turn to ski told our crew he knew all about skiing, before taking off we instructed him we would be turning around the island and to keep in the wake or on the inside of the river as we turned, he told us he knew all about turning and not to worry so off he went with a great wave to all the girls. Sadly as we turned around the island at slightly slower speed for his safety, he decided to pull hard, this shot him across the river and he hit the bank, he did not let go and was spun on the end of the rope until the boat could stop as could be imagined this created a fair amount of gravel rash which we treated back at the club. I think sadly it would have curtailed his plans with the girls.

Mark progressed over the years to be a very good skier, he skied in international events, spent a year on the American ski circuit and coached a group of Japanese skiers in Japan, he also skied in Moomba and also done the public address at many tournaments worldwide.

Christopher our second son was also a very good skier who skied in Nationals. He enjoyed the social side of skiing and skied for the uni teams also giving him access to snow skiing. He was defiantly a social skier.

Paul our third son was born eight years after Chris, he learnt to ski but was not very keen, he drove pickup boats at Moomba, nationals and other tournaments before becoming a very good equestrian rider.

Joan became a very good three event judge, she was one of the top three trick judges in the world at her time.

She judged Moomba for many years, world titles in Sweden, London, Singapore and USA. She was coopted on to the world tech committee by Robert Corsen.

I became an event judge but not good at trick judging then in time chief.

So this is my rambling story of the early days of Geelong Water Ski Club, Joan and I are both life members and we both have a very spot in our hearts for the wonderful times and memories.

Sadly I am amazed the club never acted on my written request to remember the wonderful contribution Slim Batty gave to the club.

David Beretta

David Beretta

- Vice President 1972 to 1976
- President 1979 to 1982
- Captain 1983 to 1985
- Committee member at various other times
- Judged many tournaments including
- Assistant Chief Judge at the 1988 Junior World Championships in Australia
- Chief Judge at the 1992 Junior World Championships in Columbia
- Judge at the 1993 World Championships in Singapore.
- He was made a life member of the club.

Joan Beretta

- Judged many events and was known for her exceptional trick judging skills

- Judge at 1983 World championships in Sweden
- Judge at 1985 World Championships in France
- Judge at 1987 World Championships in England
- Judge at 1992 Junior World Championships in Columbia
- She was made a Life Member of the club.