

SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF EARLY SNOWY ZONE HISTORY

With the Snowy Zone approaching its 40th birthday in 2015, it is timely to look back over the early part of the Zone's long and proud history, which actually began in 1971.

The first ride

The first endurance ride in what became the Snowy Zone was held on Friday 5 March 1971. Organised by the Tumut Rodeo Club, it covered a 75 mile (120km) course from Huntly Station, on the outskirts of Canberra, to the Tumut racecourse. The course comprised three legs each of about 25 miles (40km), with checkpoints at Brindabella and Bondo. Gordon Kell of Tumut was credited with having the idea, after reading about endurance riding in America. Bill Boyd had a major role in bringing it to fruition.

Offering a cup and \$300 prize for the winner, trophies for second and third place-getters and a special junior prize, as well as the opportunity to participate in a new horse sport, the ride attracted 24 nominations and 20 starters. Though most riders were from the Snowy Mountains, there were five from the ACT and one each from Sydney and the southern highlands. The 20 participants included at least two juniors (Lorraine Danson and Angie Carkazis). This was before the introduction of a lightweight division: horses in the ride had to carry at least 12 stone (about 76 kg).

Huntly Station made its shearing shed and shearers' quarters available as overnight accommodation for riders. The twenty riders were timed out at one minute intervals from 4.00AM by the starter, Jim Alston of Tumut. At the end of the first leg, four or five horses were vetted out at



Neville Clarke and Brownie after winning the 1971 ride.

Brindabella and one was withdrawn before reaching the second checkpoint, at Bondo. Most of the remaining horses were vetted out at Bondo, leaving only six to contest the final leg to Tumut.

Max Webb and Neville Clarke, who led for most of the way, reached the finish line at 12.56.30pm. Max's riding time was slightly faster but his horse was vetted out at the final check, leaving Neville as the winner with a riding time of 6 hours 47 minutes. Neville's horse, a small 15-year-old gelding named Brownie, was judged Fittest Horse. Ross Webb on Stoney finished second (6 hours 59¼ minutes) and Col Adams on Cody third (8 hours 38 minutes). Mick Gavan, believed to have ridden a mare named Julie, finished fourth and Fay Alston on Scout fifth. By 2.50pm, all six riders had reached the Tumut racecourse, from which they proceeded to the showground where the annual show was in progress and where the presentations were held. This was the first ride for both Neville and Brownie and apparently Brownie had no training other than his regular stock work in the mountains near Adaminaby where Neville, from Gundagai, worked. Neville finished the day by competing in the bull-riding at the Tumut show. He

now lives near Tumut and at the time of writing, was "on the road" with 700 cattle.

Nominees, in starting order, with the riding times and results for those who reached Tumut, were as follows (compiled from original ride records provided by Doris Porritt, with horses' names added from published reports¹).

Number	Name	Address	Riding time and place
1	Mike Sutton	Adaminaby	-
2	L.M. Jamieson	Tumut	-
3	<i>Jim Davidge*</i>	<i>Moruya</i>	-
4	Fay Alston (Scout)	Gocup	8 hours 46¾ minutes (5 th)
5	John Danson	Canberra	-
6	Lorraine Danson (Stranger)	Canberra	-
7	M. Gavan	Canberra	8 hours 44 minutes (4 th)
8#	Neville Clarke (Brownie)	Adaminaby	6 hours 47 minutes (1 st)
9	Melba Blundell	Tumorrana	-
10	A.G. (Snow) Miners	Cooma	-
11	Max Webb (Sailor's Image)	Wyangle	6 hours 46½ minutes (VO).
12	Angus Waugh	Coolac	-
13	Colin Adams (Cody)	Sandy Point	8 hours 36 minutes (3 rd)
14	Kevin Jones	Tumorrana	-
15	Ross Webb (Stoney)	Califat	6 hours 59¾ minutes (2 nd)
16	<i>Neil Eveleith*</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	-
17	Les Coulton	Canberra	-
18	<i>Keith Gorton*</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	-
19	Betty McFarlane	Canberra	-
20	<i>Les Hancock*</i>	<i>Londonderry</i>	-
21	Mrs Noel Bottom	Canberra	-
22	Gordon Harris (Patch)	Tumut	-
23	Angie Carkazes (replaced Lex Webb and rode his horse Napoleon).	Tumut	-
24	W.G. Barnes	Exeter	-

*These riders nominated but did not take part.

There appears to be a slight anomaly in Neville Clarke's riding time, though it does not affect the result. If riders started in the order shown, he would have started at 4.07am and Max Webb at 4.10am. If they finished together at 12.56.30pm, their riding times should have been 6hrs 49½ minutes (Neville) and 6hrs 46½ mins (Max).

¹ "Hoofs and Horns", February 1971 (preview) and April 1971 (ride report); "Tumut Times" March 1971.

The first ride repeated

On 23 February 1991, the Tumut endurance riders ran another Canberra to Tumut ride to celebrate the 21st Tumut ride. The first leg (41km) followed Uriarra and Brindabella Roads to the first checkpoint at Brindabella; the second (49 km) finished at Emu Flat, a few kilometres from Bondo; and the last leg (25km) followed forest roads and fire trails to the finish line at Camp Hudson, on the Goobaragandra River about 25km from Tumut.

Despite a thunderstorm that dumped heavy rain on the riders as they crossed the Brindabella ranges and made their way into the first checkpoint, the leaders made good time. Peter Norman on Karakatana Kum Kingdom was first into the Brindabella checkpoint, having completed the first leg in 1 hour 54 minutes – 11½ minutes faster than the shortest time for that leg in 1971, set by Angie Karkazis on Napoleon. Peter maintained his lead and crossed the finish line at 11.38AM, to win the ride in a time of 5 hours 38 minutes, with Jenny Oliver and Karakatana Kyzyl three minutes behind in second place. The remainder of the field came in over the next several hours, the last finishing at 6.23PM. Of the 87 riders who started, 60 completed successfully.

Although the course was different in parts and around five kilometres shorter than in 1971, there were many connections with the original ride. Riders again camped overnight at Huntly woolshed, where they were weighed on the same woolshed scales used for the first ride and were sent on their way at 4.00AM on Saturday by the same starter, Jim Alston. Head vet Jervis Hayes had also officiated at the original ride and at every Tumut ride in between. Three of the original riders – Neville Clarke, Kevin Jones and Lorraine Parker (nee Danson) – took part and all completed successfully. Ross Webb's 10 year old grandson Stuart Webb finished as second Junior.

The growth of endurance riding in the Snowy Mountains

Following the 1971 Canberra to Tumut ride, Snowy Mountain horses and riders quickly established their reputation as endurance champions. From their second placing in that ride, Ross Webb and Stoney went on to win the Quilty in 1971. Stoney, ridden by Ross's son Warren, won it again in 1972, after Ross died in a camp-drafting accident in April 1972. These were the first of several Quilty wins by Snowy Mountains horse and riders, with Jenny Oliver and Glenallan Solomon (Salty) winning three in a row in 1985, 1986 and 1987.

The Tumut endurance ride became an annual event and was named the Ross Webb Memorial Endurance Ride in 1973. Two other rides were soon established in the Snowy Mountains: Tumbarumba in 1972 and Adaminaby (the Kevin Miners Memorial Endurance Ride) in 1974. As those three rides were the foundation of the Snowy Zone, they warrant a closer look.

In 1972, the Tumut ride followed a circular course of about 78 miles (125km) starting and finishing at the Tumut showground. After crossing the main bridge over the Tumut River, riders travelled along the Gundagai and Wyangle roads and through the Billapaloola Forest to Mount Tumorra, reaching an altitude of 4000 feet (over 1200 metres) then back to Tumut via Micalong and Argalong. In addition to the perpetual cup donated by the Tumut Rodeo Club for the first open rider, placegetters received generous cash prizes (\$200, \$50 and \$25 for the first three open riders, \$50 for the first heavyweight and \$20 for the first junior). The same course, with some minor alterations, was used in 1973 but due to increased interest in the sport, the ride was held on a Saturday rather than Friday, taking place on 10 March. In 1974 the base was moved to the racecourse and the course was changed to a cloverleaf of three loops totalling around 71 miles (114km). For the first time, all riders started together, rather than individually as was normal practice in the early years. Though apparently not popular with all riders, those changes made the

tasks of ride officials and vets much simpler. In 1976, the ride base was shifted to Camp Hudson where it remained for many years.

The early Tumut rides were remarkable for the series of wins, against substantial competition and very challenging courses, by the little grey gelding Stoney owned by the Webb family of Califat near Tumut. Stoney, ridden by Ross Webb, won the 1972 ride and went on to win the next three, ridden by Ross's son Warren. Warren Webb, riding a mare named Dolly, also won the two-day, 150 mile (240km) Tumut Sesquicentenary Ride in November 1974. With over \$2000 in prize money and trophies, it was described as the longest and richest ride held in Australia up to that time. Of the 19 horses entered, 10 completed successfully.

Tumbarumba held its first ride on Saturday 27 May 1972. Organised by the local pony club and sheep dog club, it started at the Rosewood saleyards and followed a 60 mile (96km) course to the Holbrook showground, with checkpoints at Copabella woolshed and Wantagong. Doug Webb on Napoleon won the ride in 4 hours 8 minutes 41 seconds. In 1973, the course was a loop of 85 miles (136km) starting and finishing at Rosewood with checkpoints at Tooma and Ourney. The winner was Warren Webb on Stoney, in 7 hours 35 minutes. The ride base was later moved to Tumbarumba racecourse.

The first Adaminaby endurance ride was held on 10 November 1974 and was named in memory of Kevin Miners, a local horseman who had died a couple of years earlier. The Kevin Miners Memorial Endurance Ride was based at the Adaminaby racecourse for several years before moving to Yaouk Bridge on the Murrumbidgee in 1981. Unfortunately, no records of the first Adaminaby ride are available. To celebrate its 10th year, the 1983 Kevin Miners ride was run over a 240km course, from Yaouk Bridge to Camp Hudson on Saturday 10 December and back the following day. Parts of the course were along tracks that had been used by Kevin and Pat Miners to drive their cattle down from the mountains for the winter months and back the following spring. Fittingly, their daughter Janet ("Hoppy") Webb finished the ride as equal first Lightweight. Of the 33 riders that started, only 17 finished, comprising 4/11 open, 0/6 heavyweight, 7/8 lightweight and 6/8 junior). The four successful open riders were Bryan Kidman of Jindabyne on Pigslops, Helen Williams (now Lindsay) on Merrinvale Voss, Darren Bohm on Kelkette Park Izak and Alan Lindsay on Burremah Djerribindo (Bindo). Bryan and Pigslops had also won the Adaminaby ride in 1982, part of a successful 1982-3 Snowy Zone season in which they were placed first open at Jindabyne and second open at Canberra, Tumut and Batlow. Pigslops, owned by Berry McGufficke of Jindabyne, was named because of his tendency to help himself to the scraps intended for Mr McGufficke's pigs.

For a few years, the Snowy Zone consisted only of the Tumut, Tumbarumba and Adaminaby rides but it expanded rapidly in the late 1970s. In 1977, Cooma hosted a 120km ride which was won by Warren Webb on Dolly. This ride, which was intended to raise money for underprivileged children through the Steve Mauger Memorial Fund, was affiliated with the Snowy Zone but appears to have been held only once. A ride at Granya in Victoria, organised by the Upper Murray Horsemen's Association, was also affiliated with the Snowy Zone and ran from about 1977 to 1981. Following an unaffiliated ride held in conjunction with the Jindabyne Bush Races in 1978, the Snowy River (later changed to Man from Snowy River) ride was held near Jindabyne from 1979. It was followed by rides at Canberra (1982) and Batlow (1983).

When the National Capital (Brookvale) ride near Canberra began in 1982, the Snowy Zone had a ride every few weeks through the warmer months, beginning with Brookvale in November, then Adaminaby in early December, Jindabyne in early January, Tumut in February, Batlow in March and Tumbarumba at Easter. (The Granya ride was still scheduled, but was apparently cancelled due to lack of water). All of these rides were at least 100km and some much more: the Brookvale ride was 110km, Adaminaby around 120km and Tumut up to 130km. The combination of distance and terrain made the early Snowy rides very challenging. Riders at Adaminaby in the 1980s were warned that with the course reaching altitudes of 1600 metres, rarefied air and steep climbs meant that a very high level of fitness was necessary in both horses and riders. Sadly, of all the rides that were part of the Snowy Zone in the early 1980s, the Brookvale ride is now the only one still running.

NSW State Championship

The first NSW State Championship was held at Tumut on the Easter weekend (5-7 April) 1985. Organised jointly by the Tumut endurance riders and the Snowy Zone, it was run over a 160km course based at Camp Hudson. Prizes included payment of the entry fee for the Quilty, Shahzada, Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame (Winton to Longreach) and Victorian State Championship rides for the winners of the four divisions and a custom-made endurance saddle for the fittest horse. The ride was won by Jenny Oliver on Glenallan Solomon. That was a very successful year for Jenny and Salty – in addition to the State ride and Quilty, they won the 250km Hall of Fame ride. Earlier in the year, Salty had won the Taralga and Tumut rides with his owner, Don Paton, and the Batlow ride with Jenny.

The birth of the Snowy Zone

Representatives of the Tumut, Tumbarumba and Adaminaby endurance ride committees met at the Royal Hotel in Tumut on 1 August 1975 and agreed to form a regional body named the Snowy Mountains Endurance Association. This was the beginning of the Snowy Zone as an entity rather than just a geographic grouping of rides.

The initial objective of the Association was to provide mutual support for ride organisers and encourage the development of endurance riding by awarding an annual trophy for the Snowy Mountains Rider of the Year. It also established Zone policies and rules for affiliated rides on matters such as riding divisions, entry fees and the nature and value of prizes and as far as possible, sought to streamline paperwork and maximise buying power so as reduce costs to individual rides. Later, it became an incorporated body (Snowy Mountains Endurance Riders Inc) to provide the benefits of incorporation to affiliated rides. The Association was initially funded by a \$50 annual contribution from affiliated rides, and later by a \$2 levy per rider in each affiliated endurance ride.

Jim Alston from Tumut is believed to have been the first President and Elizabeth McCallum from Rosewood the first Secretary. Both served for many years and Jim was presented with a pewter mug in 1983 in recognition of his service to the Zone. Other office holders during the first ten years of the Zone included Snow Miners (who was elected President in 1983), Hector McCallum, Chuck and Marty Stephens, Bryan and Doris Porrit, Colin Kell, Fred Cribb, Jenny Oliver, Brian Smith and Jack Kidman.

The new Snowy Zone

The Snowy Zone entered a new era in 1990, following a decision by NSWERA at its AGM in February 1990 to divide the state into five geographic zones and include representatives of each zone on the NSWERA committee. The new Snowy Zone (Zone 4) extended well beyond the area that until then had been covered by the Snowy Zone. Rides on zone boundaries were able to choose which of the adjoining zones they joined: Canberra, for example, had the option of joining either the Snowy or South Coast. The Brookvale ride had left the Zone following a decision by the ACTERA in 1985 to go its own way but rejoined in 1990. The Wagga ride was already part of the pre-existing Riverina Zone, but joined the Snowy after a few years. The Taralga ride was within Zone 4 boundaries but did not join the Snowy Zone until 1994. During the early 1990s, several new rides started up within the Zone, beginning with Gundagai which ran for the first time in 1991.

Administratively, a seamless transition from the old zone to the new was achieved by extending the boundaries covered by the Snowy Mountain Endurance Riders Inc. to coincide with those of Zone 4 and appointing its existing committee to manage Zone 4. Sue Brooks from Tumut was selected as the first representative of the Snowy Zone on the NSWERA.

In 1990-91, the first full Snowy Zone season after the establishment of Zone 4, the Zone rides were: Canberra (Brookvale) 100km on 4 November 1990, Adaminaby 120km on 9 December 1990, Jindabyne 101km on 13 January 1991, Tumut 115km (Canberra to Tumut) on 23 February 1991, Batlow 100km on 17 March 1991, Tumbarumba 206/82km on 30-31 March 1991 and Gundagai 100km on 28 April 1991.

As well as new rides being added, some old rides in the Zone were modified to increase their appeal to a new generation of riders. For example, the 1993 Tumut ride was run as an elevator – the first ride in that format to be held in Australia – to provide a shorter option for people not confident about tackling a challenging 120km. The Adaminaby ride made the same change in 1994. Rule changes introduced in 1993 also meant some of the old courses had to change to comply with the new maximum leg length. Partly for that reason, the Brookvale ride was reduced to 80km in 1993. Policies on access to national parks and wilderness areas also forced changes by making some of the old mountain tracks unavailable.

The Snowy Zone season, originally based on rides being held in the mountains during summer and autumn, changed to a calendar year from 1994.

Over the 23 years since the establishment of Zone 4, many changes have taken place. Most Snowy Zone rides are now held on the southern slopes rather than in the mountains and most take place from March to October.

Snowy Mountains Rider of the Year

The Snowy Mountains Rider of the Year trophy, a white marble mountain on a green base made by Wagga endurance rider Gerard Kleine, was presented for the first time in 1976. Awarded to the open/heavyweight rider who had accumulated the greatest number of points in Zone rides, it was won by Scott Patton from Tooma, who had been the outright winner of the Adaminaby and Tumut rides and whose horse, King, had been judged Fittest Horse at Adaminaby and Tumbarumba.

The following year, each of the four rides in the Zone (including Cooma) was asked to donate a buckle to be presented to the Snowy Zone Rider of the Year in the Open, Heavyweight, Lightweight and Junior divisions. The Snowy Zone gave a high priority to encouraging junior riders and also provided a separate competition for Lightweights before this became mandatory.

For 1988-89, the last full Snowy Zone season under the “old” zone, the award winners were:
Riders of the Year: Open – Michael Piper (Tumut); Heavyweight – Jack Sims (Tumut); Lightweight – Gillian Petersohn (Jindabyne); Junior – Kelly Horsfall (Cooma).
Registered Arabian Horse of the Year – Gillian Petersohn’s Craiglea Tiki.

In 1992, the awards were further expanded to also include distance horse, distance rider and one horse/one rider in each division. Until then, riders did not need to be financial members of the Zone to be eligible for an award.

Snowy Zone Championships

The inaugural Snowy Zone Championship was held at Bendoc on 27-28 November 1993 in conjunction with the Bendoc Cup endurance ride. The Championship ride was 160km comprising two 80km rides, one starting at midday on Saturday and the other early on Sunday morning. It was won by Alan Lindsay on Burramah Djerribindo (Bindo) in an overall time of 12 hours 40 minutes. Bindo was already 18 years old but was in top form and had won the FEI Classic at The Islands only three weeks earlier. He continued to compete until 1998 when he retired at 23 with over 11,000km to his credit.

The story behind the Snowy Zone logo

The Snowy Zone’s unique ski-ing horse logo was originally developed in the 1980s by Jennie Pheasant (nee Shelton) of Tumut. Jennie had drawn portraits of several horses and one day, Jenny Oliver asked if she could try drawing a horse on skis to use as the Zone’s logo. It has evolved over the years, with more detail being added, but is still based on Jennie’s original artwork.

Jennie took up endurance riding as the result of working as a guide with Talbingo Trails, a Tumut-based business that ran horseback camping trips in the mountains through the summer months. With her mare Mandy, originally one of the trail-ride horses, and later with Mandy’s foal Troika, Jennie was a successful lightweight competitor during the 1980s and 1990s in Snowy and Riverina rides and some farther afield. Her notable achievements include four Shahzada completions (two each on Mandy and Troika) but among her several wins and placings her proudest is finishing equal third lightweight on Mandy in the 1988 Hall of Fame ride.

Looking forward, looking back

The next time you drive past Huntly (between Canberra and Uriarra Crossing) on your way to Brookvale, reflect for a moment on the fact that this is where the first ever “Snowy” ride started. Perhaps another Canberra to Tumut ride could be run in 2021 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first ride and acknowledge Tumut as the birthplace of the Zone. Meanwhile, the Zone’s 40th birthday in 2015 is an occasion worth celebrating.