

McNamara's Hut Rebuild

The original McNamara's Hut was built in January 1955 by "Roney" (John Meighan) McNamara, "Jack" (John Kevin) McNamara, "Little Mick" (Michael Francis) McNamara and "Bill" (William John) Toland. It was used by "Roney" Mac and the Naughton's of Cobungra Station, as they shared the Buckety Plain Run. The McNamara's arrived in the district in the 1850s and were related to the Gray Family, the original selectors of Cobungra Station.



The hut site is Buckety Plain north of Bundarra River and the original hut was destroyed by fire in January 2003. The Mittagundi Outdoor Education Centre, which is a non-profit organisation who operate special programs for kids, have used McNamara's for over 30 years as part of their program and this was a great loss to them.

Left: The original McNamara's Hut. Photo: David Oldfield.

This is the story of the long and winding (and at times tortuous) road to the reconstruction of McNamara's Hut at Buckety Plain.

The construction conditions were quite onerous because the site is in the National Park – everything from sanitary to environmental issues, to a record of every person and vehicle had to be detailed prior to entry. The people from Mittagundi were heavily involved in the reconstruction, doing all the preliminary work, under the guidance of Graham Fall and Jim Findlay.

This project took almost 12 months to organise. The Building Surveyor issued the permit on 22 March 2004, and with Mittagundi collecting all the required materials and arranging transport to the site, they were well on the way to completing the laying of the foundation rocks. The only really big question was "How to get 40 tonnes of 11 metre logs from the bush to the hut site in time for construction, when they won't fit on one log truck"!

Dianne Carroll sent out a request for volunteers via email and on ABC radio. This was a great success and by the end of March there were more than 15 willing workers signed on and even a builder from Castlemaine was coming! Our thanks to 4WD Victoria for their ongoing support, especially in forwarding the request for help to their members. Mick Vanderzalm (HMO Heyfield) arranged a donation of Tea, Coffee, and Sugar. Graham Fall would be onsite for the construction, along with Jimmy Findlay during the Easter period and Stretch and Keith from the Lang Lang boys.

The work site was strictly for the self-sufficient, BYO everything (except toilets) including energy, elbow grease, muscles, humour, hammer, axe, or favourite shovel. All workers had to sign the register upon arrival and before they commenced any work.

The transportation of those logs is story in itself, told here in Dianne's own words...*"logs being harvested at Dinner Plain/Hotham had to be transported to Swifts Creek Mill. I rang DSE Bairnsdale, who referred me to Swifts Creek, who referred me to Tambo Logging, who referred me to the log truck owner - a call to his place found he was camped in the bush, his driver, also not at home - so back to Tambo Logging, to get a message to the log truck owner to see if he would take the logs to Glen Wills instead of Swifts Creek. Knowing the cost to Swifts Creek was \$1200+, which I managed to get for nothing, I rang Mittagundi, to confirm it was OK to offer \$100 to \$200 for the extra distance.*

Finding Pete Christensen (at Mittagundi) was away rang Jim Findlay, who gave the OK, then back to Tambo Logging to advise the offer. The logs would need two loads, and after checking with Graham Fall to get right measurements Tambo Logging had to re-harvest. Had the 40 tonne of logs going to Glen Wills but no machinery to get them off the truck. Rang several farmers but tractors were too small, so finally got onto the Mine and they had an excavator to do the job (again no charge)." All this for some logs - well done Dianne.



Above: The new McNamara's Hut nearing completion at the end of Easter 2004. Photo: David Oldfield.

April saw the foundations completed and Mittagundi along with the kids and Graham Fall put the base logs in place. The logs were placed over Easter and the plumbers from Yackandandah took care of roofing iron and capping, a company in Wodonga donated the 10kg of roofing nails and Mittagundi had the iron for the chimney. Dianne Carroll donated the doors, and the father of a Mittagundi "kid" made the windows.

In May, HMO Group Leader and member of the North East Freemasons Task Force Barry Hazeldine lead a party to complete the weatherproofing on the weekend of 1st & 2nd May. In spite of unfavourable weather reports the party of nine, including Bob Johnstone, HMO Bogong and Graham Fall arrived at McNamara's progressively from Friday 30th April morning until after dark.

The task was to make the hut weatherproof before the real onset of winter (although one could be forgiven for mistaking May 1st for July). This work involved building the chimney, digging a run off drain around the hut, hanging the rear door made at Mittagundi and making and hanging the front door.



These seemingly simple tasks were not made easy by sub-zero temperatures for most of Saturday, made even colder by the wind chill factor and constant snow showers. The team could only work outside between the snow showers, so they finished the flooring and skirting and laid the rock foundation for the fireplace, which was later concreted.

On Sunday morning the sun appeared early and there was no wind. This allowed the completion of the drain and chimney, hanging doors and clean up. The job was done.

Some of the small crew that put the finishing touches to Mac's over the weekend of 1-2 May, pictured from left-right Roger Sievwright, Bob Johnstone (HMO Bogong), Patricia Porter, Michael Porter, David Kearney, John Cleland, Barry Hazeldine (HMO Group Leader) and Geoff Payne. Photo: Barry Hazeldine.

But the story isn't finished yet ...Job done and Barry and the team left the site at 2pm on Sunday afternoon. In four vehicles, two with trailers they got within 15kms. of Falls Creek; then 35-40 knot winds, blizzard conditions, snow drifts over 18 inches deep, and with an invisible road they were forced to turn around, which was a problem in itself, particularly for the trailers. Once turned around they decided to go home via Mitta, having to traverse Mt. Wills where more snow was encountered, although not nearly as bad as that on the Alpine Road. Barry was finally home sometime after 8pm and very tired.

This ends the story of the completion of the re-born McNamara's Buckety Plain Hut, and we must thank the many people who contributed – far too many to list individually, but we know who you are and another hut rises from the ashes thanks to your efforts. Special thanks to Barry & his team and Parks Victoria for permitting its reconstruction.



Right: McNamara's Hut nestles amongst the trees on a snow covered Buckety Plain, 2 May 2004.

Photo: Barry Hazeldine.