



Australian Alpine Snowsports History Association

Newsletter issue no. 5

July 2021

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President's Update

Welcome to our fifth newsletter of the Australian Alpine Snowsports History Association (AASHA). I particularly would like to welcome members who are new to AASHA.

So far 2021 continues the extraordinary situation we found ourselves in for the November newsletter. The COVID-19 pandemic has and still is affecting every aspect of our lives. With hindsight it is not surprising that nearly two years from the first signs of disease we are still facing constant uncertainty regarding potential restrictions.

AASHA's main activity each year is our annual conference which we all look forward to as an opportunity for networking and catching up with like-minded colleagues. Last year, we postponed to April 2021 and then again to November 2021.

You will read in the Falls Creek report that once again given the circumstances it is best to re-schedule. Hopefully vaccination rates can increase sufficiently over the rest of the year to avoid the need for lockdowns and restrictions in 2022. We will wait until we have a higher degree of confidence before proposing a new date.

Now for some other news. I am incredibly pleased to report that our [Facebook group](#) continues to attract new members. There are now 262 members, an increase of 44 since November.

The Committee has not needed to meet due to the postponement of the conference, but anticipate that we will do so in the next few months as we get more confident that Falls Creek will proceed in April 2022.

The Committee has had a resignation from Peter Southwell-Keely who had the role of observer. Peter has been a valuable member of the committee but will continue to be involved with the Perisher Historical Society. The rest of the Committee remains as it was. I would like to thank Peter for his contribution to AASHA.



The 2021 Committee

President:

Genevieve Fahey, NAMA Mt Buller

Immediate Past President:

Alan Fredericks, Thredbo Historical Society

Secretary:

Chris Brangwin, Perisher Historical Society

Members:

Karen Smythe, Falls Creek Historical Society

Jason Nightingale, NAMA Mt Hotham

Michael Wadsley, Ski Club of Tasmania

Jamie Lawrence, Northern Tas Alpine Club

Jenni Cole, Disabled Wintersport Australia

Graeme Holloway, Thredbo Historical Society

I would particularly like to thank Alan for suggesting that we put out this mid-year newsletter to keep in touch and update you with the current plans for the conference. I would also like to thank him and Jeanie Watson once again for taking on the task of producing the newsletter – it takes considerable time and effort for which we are very grateful.

Genevieve Fahey – President

Thredbo Historical Society

Well known for his entrepreneurial skills, Graeme Holloway was elected President of the Thredbo Alpine Museum at the society's Annual General Meeting in November 2021 after Alan Fredericks stood down after 12 years guiding the organisation. Graeme is not new to the role, having been president for 10 years before Alan came on board.

The Museum's original collection of donated memorabilia was mainly due to Graeme's passion for the preservation of objects associated with the snow sports industry. He is now working towards achieving the goal of a permanent, purpose-built structure in which to display the entire collection. In the first six months of his presidency, he has directed the renovation of the current premises below the Kosciusko Room of the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and overseen the installation of Randy Wieman's extensive photographic images on three monitors in the Museum.

*Christina Webb –Thredbo Alpine Museum
Administrator*

QUICK QUIZ



In which country, state, province or territory would you find these mountains?

- 1 Blue Mountains
- 2 Green Mountain
- 3 Red Mountain
- 4 Black Mountain
- 5 White Mountain
- 6 Brown Mountain
- 7 Purple Mountain
- 8 Grey Mountain
- 9 Azure Mountain
- 10 Rainbow Mountain

Answers on page 12.

Australia's oldest living Olympian

Frank Prihoda, Thredbo Legend - 100 years on

Frantisek (Frank) Prihoda was born on 8 July 1921 in Prague, Czechoslovakia and became a companion to his sister Sasha who was a couple of years older. Frank's first love was sport and athletics, especially running. At 13 or 14 he became more interested in skiing and participated in his first ski race which came to an abrupt halt when his thick glasses froze over, and he couldn't see the course. At races whenever the sun shone his times were good, but Frank's greatest handicap in ski racing was his poor eyesight.

Frank took ski training seriously and to stay in top physical form in summer he would go rock-climbing on the cliff faces in 'Cesky Raj' (Czech Paradise).

From 1936 he trained with the

Czechoslovakian Ski Federation squad until 1940, after which all ski training activities ceased. Frank and Sasha continued to ski illegally, and nobody could stop them because they were privileged members of the Ski Federation Squad. During the war, Frank had to work in his parents' factory, which manufactured artificial flowers. Once his parents died, the ensuing responsibilities gave him little time for ski race training.

Frank Prihoda was one of the small band of people who escaped Europe after World War II and eventually wound up in Thredbo. He escaped with Karel Nekvapil, the husband of Frank's sister Sasha, and it was co-ordinated with the escapes of Sasha and of their friend and fellow skier Tony Sponar. The Communist government having cancelled all passports and closed Czechoslovakia's borders with its western neighbours, subterfuge was needed to get out.

Sasha had an excuse for being outside the country (she was a member of the Czechoslovakian women's Olympic team competing in Switzerland) and Tony, a member of the men's team, was able to convince the authorities that his portable ski lift would be of value in the team's training activities at St Christoph – but Frank and Karel had to use a more dangerous means of escape. They risked armed border guards while crossing on skis from Bohemia to Austria through a forest and over a frozen lake.

In Austria after a very nervous few hours, their escape remained incomplete: they had to avoid detection by the Russians because they were in the Russian occupation sector.



Frank Prihoda and Christine Davy - recipients of the Snow Australia Medal for Alpine Skiing - June 2020

Nothing was easy about all this, and at one stage they were detained and had to bribe with 10 US dollars – a very considerable sum – a local chief of police to be allowed to get to Vienna. Eventually they made their way there and to St Christoph where they joined Sponar as had been planned in Czechoslovakia. The pair helped Sponar install and operate his jeep-based ski lift, on a site that had never previously had uphill transport facilities, and they remained in nearby St Anton for about three months.

After departing St Anton Frank and Karel made it safely to Belgium where they stayed for several more months. In due course Frank secured a berth on the *Cyrenia*, a Greek passenger ship bound for far-off Melbourne. He arrived in early 1950. He soon found work in the manufacture of artificial flowers, a field that he and his family had been involved in back in Prague. For a time, he considered getting into the mining of mica, which was used in insulating electrical installations, but his investigations in the Australian interior suggested that that would not be particularly lucrative.

In Czechoslovakia Frank had been a competent skier, having taken up the sport in his early teens. Big sister Sasha was a significant influence here. By his own admission he was not outstanding on skis – his poor eyesight was a serious problem, especially in bad weather – but he stood out on the slopes of Mt Buller which he skied for the first time during his second Australian winter. Regarded by the locals as an expert, he did some informal coaching, and he enjoyed the social life of the Melbourne University Ski Club and the other alpine clubs and their lodges. The Victorian ski fields were taking off at this time, the state government having allowed the development of private and club lodges since 1948 – unlike NSW which lagged on this particular score.

Frank also skied in the Victorian, NSW and Australian ski championships and came to know the racing areas of the Australian ski fields well. Performing effectively in racing mode, he won selection in the Australian team for the 1956 Winter Olympics at Cortina d'Ampezzo for the slalom and grand slalom events. This earned him and the other four skiers on the team a long trip away, including time in Zurs, Austria for training before the Games proper. Their trip was subsidised to a degree, but the members had to pay part of their way. Frank's knowledge of the world of skiing and his proficiency on the slopes marked him as suitable for administrative activity as well.

In 1958 he was asked to become the chairman of the Race Committee of the Victorian Ski Association, which required him to organise races on Mt Buller. This meant setting courses, organising gates and marshalling the small armies of volunteer gatekeepers and timekeepers and all the paraphernalia that goes with them such as radio and field telephone communications. Before long, he became the President of the Association, an unusual distinction for a recent migrant but a clear recognition of his familiarity with and understanding of the skiing scene. Much later, he became involved in seniors' racing and participated in it both in Australia and on his periodic return visits to Europe.

In 1974, Frank left Melbourne and became a resident of Thredbo where he soon became a significant identity. From the start he involved himself in the life of the village, ran a gift shop, became a foundation member of the Thredbo Historical Society and in 2000 had pride of place in the carrying of the Olympic Torch in Thredbo. Sasha also carried it there. Much respected as an elder citizen of the village, Frank had the honour of lighting the

cauldron on the Village Green where the torch burned for a night before resuming its journey to Sydney. He served as a long-term committee member and vice-president of the Thredbo Historical Society and gave it much of his time. He also provided sound advice as to the courses of action it should take, for example in developing the museum.

Always well regarded, he became one of the first life members of the Society.

Chas Keyes and Jerry Krejzar

Falls Creek Historical Society

I write to you from Falls Creek on this wet windy, slightly snowy day from the warmth of the museum. The warmth not only comes from the heating but also from the guests that are walking in and the gratefulness that we have that we are open to visitors.



As I write this Sydney is about to go into lockdown and it reminds us of how fragile life is now with COVID. We are celebrating week three of the season here in Victoria and enjoying the smiling faces on the children as they glide down Wombat's ramble in front of our space.

We are open, we are welcoming our visitors, but we are COVID safe. Well, as COVID safe as we can be. Volunteers are masked up, QR codes are on the doors, COVID Safe Plans have been written, Lemon

Proof spray is on hand for high touch points and there are limits on the number of people that can come in. But we are open.

Projects are continuing, our oral history project, recordings of some of the legends, pioneers and all-round village champions are continuing. Seven are in the bag and the list is ever growing of more potential candidates. We can't wait to see them in the museum. We are moving into the 21st century.

For now, we have the AASHA conference on hold, the uncertainty around hosting it is still there. The rules on how many people can come and go and how many can meet in a space are always evolving and changing. For now, we are keeping in touch with the committee and will let everyone know as soon as we know what is going on.

We look forward to seeing you all very soon – for now, keep warm and keep sanitising.

Karen Smythe, Falls Creek Historical Society

National Alpine Museum Australia - Mt Buller

NAMA has been busy over the last eight months despite the difficult situation Victoria has often found itself in with ever-changing restrictions associated with the pandemic.

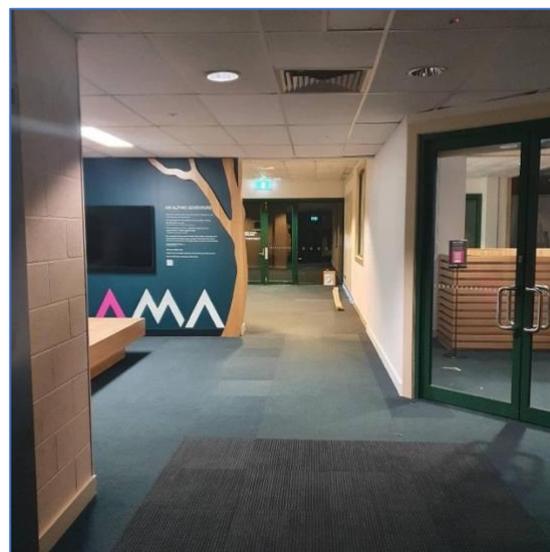
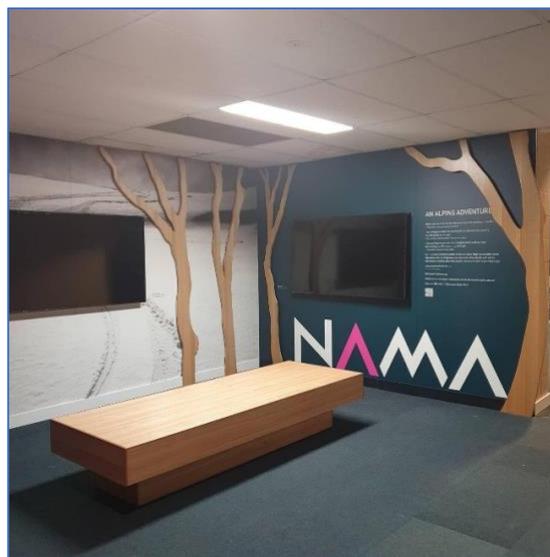


A decision was made to remain closed over the summer/autumn period due to ongoing COVID issues and the need to devote time to the planning of the renovations. All processes took longer than expected. We were unable to have the planned working bees due to COVID and the actual building process was made more challenging due to the additional processes required to undertake works in a COVID safe way.

We welcomed a new Treasurer, Neil Bower, to our committee. Neil has a background in banking and will be a valuable addition. We also welcomed Jon Hutchins who will be known to many of you. He will represent Mt Hotham and brings his invaluable alpine experience.

Several projects have been completed or ongoing:

- Extensive alterations to our museum space in the Resort Management Boards building on Summit Road. The entry on Level 6, the foyer space and internal space on Level 1 have both been dramatically remodelled to create a vibrant and modern entry experience for our onsite visitors. The floor space in the museum has been increased by about 35%.
- The new museum logo and colour palette has been applied to the new spaces adding to the reinvigorated look and feel. Our website, Facebook, Instagram presence now all have the new logo and colour palette.
- eHive and Trove – the work on cataloguing the collection continues with more items awaiting uploading. There are now approximately 17,000 items available for anyone to explore.
- The agreement with the resort management board has been signed and will be in place for the next three years giving NAMA security of location and some associated funding.



The entry on level 1 and the foyer space to the right of the entry door.

Genevieve Fahey, NAMA Mt Buller

Perisher Historical Society

The ongoing problems of Covid-19 continue into the 2021 snowsports season. The Annual Dinner had to be cancelled once again, as it was in 2020. However, the annual 'Hello in the Snow' event is currently planned for 10 August 2021 during the Perisher XC Week, providing an opportunity for PHS members and the cross-country community to meet.

The lockdowns in both Victoria and NSW have had a significant effect on the resorts, and on many businesses and snow sports participants, and we can only hope that season 2022 will be more settled.

After taking the initiative to establish the PHS in 2005, Pam and Philip Woodman stood back from their respective roles as Secretary and President at the AGM held in April 2021. They have provided immense time, energy, and leadership over the years, and were awarded Life Membership, together with Peter Southwell-Keely, at the AGM. Both Philip and Pam remain active as members, with Philip continuing as a Committee Member filling the new role of Past President. Chris Brangwin also retired as a Committee Member but remains active on a subcommittee and continues his previous role as PHS nominee representative to AASHA.

The new Committee comprises:

President:	Ashley Blondel
Vice President:	Peter Southwell-Keely
Past President:	Philip Woodman
Secretary:	Dianne Cree
Treasurer:	Raylene Jarvis
Committee Members:	Donald Johnston and Jan Glover
Ex Officio Members:	Peter Brulisauer (SVP Vail Australia and COO Perisher) and Marion Battishall, NPWS.

PHS efforts have been concentrated on a new website that was launched in January 2020, with the aim of providing a comprehensive way to access, research, study and display the Perisher Range area's history.

There is a wealth of information, stories and images available, and with more being discovered and learnt about, the website is constantly evolving and improving. At the heart of the site is the eMuseum, a virtual museum that contains the articles, stories and histories of the Perisher Range.

A new feature recently introduced is the "TimeLine", an easy way to see at a glance the key historical moments arranged in date order. There is a [high-level history timeline](#) as well as other timelines for specific areas and people.

Launched in July 2021 is the new bookshop, enabling the online purchase of printed books, including *Hotel Kosciusko* (Donald Johnston), *Highway to Heaven* and *Out on the Tops*

(Peter Southwell-Keely), and *Australian Skiing: The First 100 Years* (Wendy Cross). This will soon be expanded to include eBooks, which will be able to be ordered and downloaded.

PHS Newsletters, from the Summer 2008 edition to the most recent, are available for viewing/downloading. There's a recently added index for each newsletter, enabling browsers to see the key stories and articles in advance.

The PHS has a large library of historical information, and not everything is online. One of our projects is to develop a list of available resources, in effect a bibliography, which will be published on the website for use by researchers and contributors, or anyone simply interested in our shared history.

Chris Brangwin, PHS Nominee Representative

Unsolved mystery: the origins of Tasmanians' love of skiing

Thanks to his skis, Roald Amundsen became the first man to reach the South Pole. But did those same skis also play a key role in getting Tasmanians to go skiing?

Few ski historians would dispute the fact that naturalist Gustav Weindorfer, de facto custodian of the Cradle Mountain area, was the first to use modern skis in Tasmania when, in 1914, he skimmed across the valley near his Waldheim Chalet home on a pair he'd made himself. It is also accepted that – as far as is known – no-one else went skiing in Tasmania until 1922, when Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau Director Evelyn Emmett and two mates went to Mt Field National Park to try out a pair of skis brought back by Emmett from a trip to the Hotel Kosciusko the previous year.

From there, the Tasmanian story is less clear-cut. It is known that sometime between 1921 and 1923, multi-talented Hobart architect/surveyor/engineer HR "Mr Hutch" Hutchison began making skis in his back garden, for family and friends, with the first of them tested on Mt Wellington in July of 1923, just a couple of weeks after *The Mercury* reported that a small party led by Evelyn Emmett had tried out a half dozen imported pairs at the same location. *The Mercury's* report on the July expedition claimed the



*Roald Amundsen in the Antarctic.
Did his skis inspire Tasmania's
first skiers?*

home-made skis used on that occasion were “copied from those imported by the Bureau” but, given the short timeframe, this seems highly unlikely.



Amundsen's ship, The Fram.

So, what did Mr Hutch use for a template? This is where the great polar explorer might – or might not – have played a part.

When I began writing *Australian Skiing: The First 100 Years*, I accepted information given to me by Mr Hutch's son, Robert, that his father based his backyard creations on a pair of skis brought to Hobart by local resident Cicely Travers as a souvenir of a trip to Finland. Robert's account was backed by Miss Travers' niece, Donnee and both said that the instigator of Mr Hutch's ski-making project was family friend Leicester McAulay, who visited Switzerland in 1921 and later spotted Cicely Travers' skis in a shed at her home. But what I did not know at the time was that Geoff Chapman, another Hutch family friend, had written in an article published in the 1931 *Ski Club of Victoria Year Book* that: "... the early

ski [sic] were copied from a pair of famous Amundsen's that were left behind after his return from the Pole."

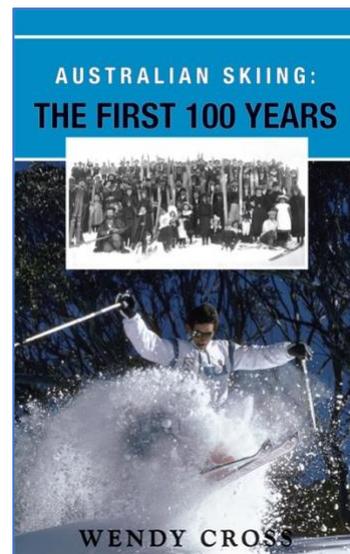
An account written just nine years after the activity it describes would seem to carry far more weight than personal recollections many decades afterwards and it has been suggested that Mt Hutch probably saw skis on Amundsen's ship, *The Fram*, while it lay at anchor in Sandy Bay but only "official" visitors were allowed on board and there is no record of Mr Hutch being among them. However, on March 19, two days before Amundsen left Tasmania for Adelaide to commence a national lecture tour, Hobart booksellers Propsting & Morris announced a window display "Courtesy of Captains Amundsen and Neilsen of the Fram", which included skis and other equipment "Direct from the South Pole". Mr Hutch's office was just two blocks away. Unfortunately, what happened to the skis once the display ended is not known.

In another twist to the Tasmanian skiing story, it is also possible that Hutchison saw Gustav Weindorfer's skis – though not on snow – during the 1915 Christmas holidays when he, along with statistician Lyndhurst Giblin and lawyer William Butler, set out to determine the height of Barn Bluff, near Cradle Mountain. They stayed overnight at Waldheim Chalet. Three months later, a different party which included Evelyn Emmett also stayed briefly at the chalet and *The Mercury* subsequently published an article by a reporter who accompanied the publicity-savvy Tourist Bureau chief which mentioned "a neat pair of 'skis' hanging from the ceiling of the accommodation hut." Theoretically, Mr Hutch would also have seen them during his visit earlier but a paper about that trip, written by Hutchison, Giblin and Butler for the Royal Society of Tasmania, made no mention of them. In any event, several more years passed before either Hutchison or Emmett were inspired to take to the slopes.

The question therefore remains: did a pair of skis brought all the way from Scandinavia to the opposite end of the world as mere souvenirs seed a new sport in Australia's island state or was it an altogether different pair of Scandinavian skis – ones which carried their original owner all the way to the South Pole?

Many thanks to Michael Wadsley for his substantial contribution to this article.

Wendy Cross, Australian Ski Historian



Wendy's book,
*Australian Skiing:
The First 100 Years*

The Australian Ski Corps in Lebanon in WWII - 80 Years Ago

From the archives and library of the Thredbo Alpine Museum

In 1941 Australian troops formed the majority of the British and Commonwealth forces taking part in their invasion of Vichy French held Syria. The Australian 7th Division consisted of the main Allied force in the bloody five-week campaign against Vichy French, French Colonial and French Foreign Legionnaires. The hilly and difficult terrain and conditions providing excellent defensive position. Within the mountainous area inland from

the Mediterranean Sea the high Country of Syria and Lebanon is regularly under snowy conditions during the winter months. The Australian command realising the need for some form of mobile infantry in snow country, formed the nucleus of a ski patrol from Australians with experience of skiing. Volunteers were sought within the Division.

The Australian Corps Ski School was set up in the Taurus Mountains of Lebanon in the famed Cedars, where troops were trained in the art of combat on skis. Coordinated by Signal Corps Major Robert Watkin Savage who was presented with the challenge of sourcing accommodation and equipment including locally made ski boots and food, ski instructors were selected by 1936 Winter Olympian Major James Riddell from the first group of 200 volunteers from the AIF 7th Division. It was intended that these men would teach the next ten and so on.



*Members of the Australian Ski Corps training in Lebanon.
Photo by Frank Hurley.*

The clothing included a white camouflage cape, a white battle jacket, white windproof trousers tied at the ankles over army issue trousers and a peaked white cap. The wide skiing stance was adopted to accommodate a heavy rucksack and a rifle.

Accommodation at Hotel de Cedars was rigorous, having been an abandoned monastery without beds and during an initial ski school training month, there was a very heavy three-week long blizzard and food supplies ran low as the precipitous mountain roads were closed and the supply lorries became buried in the snow en route.

The instructors also included "Mountaineer" Australian downhill champion Sergeant Derrick Stockdale from Ski Club of Victoria; Hotel Kosciuszko ski instructor Sergeant John Abbottsmith; "Ace Instructor" Sergeant Lindsay Salomon an Australian downhill champion from Albury Ski Club; "Ski School Sergeant Major" Sergeant Quail from Cooma and a Cavalry Regiment member; Norwegian born Sergeant Francis Due; Lieutenant E.D Mills from Tasmania and langlauf champion; Chaplain Chas Parsons of the Torch Bearers Ski club; "Dangerous Dan" Bogong High Plains Rat Lieutenant McGaw of the Ski Club of Victoria; Captain Rod Strang of the two Victorian University Ski Clubs, Captain E R Lawson from the 2/3 Machine Gun Battalion and Captain Ronald Rupert Mooney.

It is thought that over highly skilled 15,000 soldiers passed through the ski school which was disbanded in June 1942 and their mountaineering skills were no longer needed. Many were sent to the Kokoda Trail instead.

In the "1967 Australian & New Zealand Ski Year Book", Major T C Paynter of the British Army and instructor to the Scottish Lovat Scouts (1956), author of "The Use of Ski and Ski

Troops in the War”, wrote “... In the Middle East, the Lebanon Ski School was started in the early days of the war by Major J Riddell, with the intention of preparing skiers for the Italian campaign. Later Major John Carryer of the New Zealand Army became chief instructor and carried on from 1943 to 1945. Many thousands of men passed through this school which was also a valuable rest and recuperation from the rigours of the campaign in North Africa.”

At the conclusion of his article, “The Use of Ski and Ski Troops in the War”, Paynter notes the ski soldier is only of use to secure the high points which dominate the landscape. His main disadvantage being that he leaves a spoor behind him. Therefore, troops moving on skis must be prepared to operation in conditions of weather and visibility which would keep any sane man within his hut or tent ... Nevertheless, the success of the mountain skier in war depends very largely upon his endurance in the face of really and conditions ... There is very little romance in mountain warfare: it is a very hard business.”

References

“The King of Hotham – My Father”, Gillian Salmon, 2013 pages, pp.80–106.

<https://www.snowsbest.com/anzac-australia-ski-industry/>

1957 Australian and New Zealand Ski Year Book, p.21.

Christina Webb –Thredbo Alpine Museum Administrator



QUICK QUIZ ANSWERS

1. NSW;
2. Vermont, USA;
3. British Columbia, Canada;
4. ACT;
5. New Hampshire, USA;
6. NSW;
7. Ireland & Jiangsu Province, China;
8. British Columbia, Canada;
9. New York State, USA;
10. Peru (*see photo above*), China, USA, Canada.