

Rik Head

Ashburton, Vic

Born: 25th April 1946

Patrol: Mt St Gwinear



Summary

Rik has volunteered in rescue and search roles for 45 years. He has been a leader in the development of the organisation and of search practice and capacity. He initiated technologies and strategies to improve outcomes for lost persons. He is highly respected for his inclusive leadership style. His contribution to Ski Patrol, Bush Search and Rescue and Alpine Search and Rescue in Victoria is virtually unparalleled in terms of his enduring contribution and the level of his initiative.

Background

As a young boy growing up on a farm in Seymour, Rik was a Scout and amateur radio enthusiast. He belonged to the local St John's Ambulance group as their radio person and drove the local ambulance on a voluntary basis on alternate weekends when the paid person was rostered off.

While Rik was studying Engineering at Monash he joined the Monash Bushwalking Club. He continued with his St John's work, training members in radio technique and sorting out radios for different brigades. Rik had been introduced to skiing as a child and was one of the young people who helped to build a ski lodge on Mt Buller with Wesley Old Collegians. He joined and qualified as a member of the Mt Buller Ski Rescue Team when it was being formed (1965). Ski Rescue, as the group was known, ran the Ambulance on the mountain and Rik was very involved in this as well as the radio system for the patrollers.

Rik was very involved in Village searches when kids and others were lost as well as Mountain searches. His wife, Mary, remembers that there were many nights at Buller that she waited for many hours while Rik was out on searches for people who had headed downhill from the summit in 'Buller Fog' and ended up near the Howqua River at the bottom. One time he found two young girls wet and cold down there and so lit a fire for them in the rain. They waited all night and then the girls were winched out by helicopter in the morning. Rik was left there until nearly nightfall because the weather closed in again.

Rik became interested in Nordic Skiing in the 1970s as a consequence of his experiences searching in snow. He set up the Victorian Nordic Rescue Service, with the inaugural meeting taking place on Wednesday 26th September, 1979, and organized many practice weekends, working very hard to instil and maintain levels of competence in all members for their own safety as well as for the public. Rik was widely considered by other members as the stalwart, showing strong commitment when member numbers waned and continuing to drive the development of training, coordination with other Search and Rescue groups and organisation.

Over the years the Search and Rescue field became more coordinated and organised. Stronger links with the police developed, coordination with other bushwalking clubs eventuated in the formation of Bush Search and Rescue and international links were forged as well. Rik has been one of the Australian representatives on the International Federation of Ski Patrollers (FIPS) and has travelled, largely at his own expense and time, to meetings in France, USA and Canada. He was part of the team that organised the Congress at Mt Buller in 2003.

Rik wrote a computer search software package which he gave to the Police and which is still in use. It gives searchers an idea of the likelihood of human survival and takes all the parameters of weather, fitness, food, weight, age, etc. into account.

During searches Rik has always been very aware of the relatives of lost people and their emotions and has had to have some very difficult talks with them. Patroller/searcher education and wellbeing has always been at the heart of Rik's involvement in these volunteer activities. Because of this Rik set up the Peer Support Group which is now available for anyone who participates in volunteer search and rescue and/or ski patrolling.



This award for meritorious service was awarded by Alpine SAR to Rik in 2009