

2023 BSAR Annual Report

Bush Search and Rescue Victoria



Monica Chapman and Rod Costigan, Conveners

The 2022/23 reporting year was a period of record demand for BSAR's services, complicated by the continuing disruption of COVID.

Bush Search and Rescue Victoria members contributed a total of 489 search and training days from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 including 301 search person-days and 188 training person-days. BSAR had 226 members available for call out on 31 March 2023.

Administration and Governance

Face to face Committee meetings resumed in May, but have suffered a degree of disruption from scheduling clashes with other tenants of the Community Centre and an ongoing period of adjustment to the now high demand for remote access to meetings.

Two long standing members of the Executive (a working group supporting the Conveners), Duncan Brookes and Chris Jarvis, were thanked for their contributions and are congratulated for 12 and 6 years respectively in that role. Their departure creates an opportunity for new blood at this level.

Like most volunteer organisations, BSAR continues to face the challenge of finding volunteers for new or incidental roles and understudies for incumbents in important ongoing roles. Efforts have been made to share opportunities to present to clubs and publicly (at an event to occur April 2023) with experienced members outside the core group of long standing committee members.

In pursuit of leadership renewal objectives, training in Field Organiser skills has been provided to a large cohort of experienced members and our method of selecting a Field Organiser for each call out has changed to a method designed to share experience in the role as evenly as practicable.

Searches

Bush Search and Rescue Victoria participated in the following eleven search and rescue operations from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

- **Anglers Rest, May 2022.** 11 members travelled. 58yo man was found before arrival.
- **Dinner Plain, May 2022.** 22 members attended over 4 days. 70yo man was not found.
- **Flinders, June 2022.** 10 members attended for 1 day. ~30yo man was not found.
- **Mt Skene area, October 2022.** 1 day. 11 members assisted with evacuation of a 62yo walker on the Alpine Walking Track
- **Neerim South, October, 2022.** 20 members attended for two days. Missing 24yo woman was not found.
- **Merrimu Reservoir, December 2022.** 4 members attended. Missing 73yo woman found her own way to safety.
- **Toorloo Arm near Lakes Entrance, December 2022.** 13 members attended over 3 days. 75yo man not found.
- **Chetwynd near Casterton, January 2023,** 8 members attended. 76yo man found and evacuated.
- **Newlyn near Daylesford, January 2023,** 10 members attended. 37yo man found elsewhere
- **Mirboo North 1, March 2023.** 14 members attended.
- **Mirboo North 2, March 2023.** 8 members attended.

For more details see: <http://www.bsar.org/searches/>



Line searching at Toorloo Arm

It is worth noting that the 2022/23 reporting year experienced a record 17 call outs (six resolved before BSAR's direct involvement) and a record number of 12 searches/rescues.

A contributing factor was the re-creation of BSAR North East as an active arm of BSAR after a seven-year hiatus. Sheepy Sanders of Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club has driven this process with active support from several Melbourne and NE members. It happens that none of the NE call outs have led to members getting into the field, but this has been a welcome opportunity to bed down the new NE systems.

Training

4-5 June 2022 – Training Weekend Fryers Range

Sixty BSAR members and prospective members attended the main training weekend in the Fryers Range. The training included participation in a VRA rogaine on the Saturday followed by workshops on Sunday. Workshops began at Fryerstown and continued at an Essendon Scout hall. They covered topics including; stages of a search, search techniques, radio procedure, basic GPS use, hypothermia treatment, and the SMEAC briefing format.

Training organiser Lachlan Shield overcame some exceptional challenges leading up to the event and on the weekend itself, including his own COVID isolation. Rodney Polkinghorne, Kirilee Chaplin, Ben Cebon, Steve Denness, Jane Frisken, Robert Springer, Eugen Kyoznin, Tim Chiu and Peter Chen assisted, many at short notice, to make the weekend a successful one.

23-24 July 2022 – Steep Snow and Ice Training Weekend

After a few years break, SSI training resumed and 28 members participated this year.

This year's training focused on core skills set to ensure safe movement over snow and looking after ourselves and our team members. Buller Resort management closed off sections of steeper terrain to enable us to work in safe conditions. Valuable time was spent to enable members to test themselves self-arresting, working avalanche transceivers, probing, digging pits, extracting patients, and patient management.

VicPol SAR members provided oversight and training support. Ambulance Victoria also contributed to a valuable part of our training with hypothermia and patient management included.

Thanks to all BSAR members who helped with the running of training including Braeden Hyland, Eric Krista, Peter Campbell, Kirilee Chaplin and Meagan Butler.

Field Organiser Training November 2022 and March 2023

In response to a number of recent call outs for which no experienced Field Organisers were available, two one-day Field Organiser training programs were held in the reporting year.

Across the two occasions, 23 members received training.

Topics covered everything from the BSAR call out to arrival at the command post. Training included search task planning with scenarios and assigning tasks to search groups.

Police SAR covered topics including; VicPol Emergency Management model: MP reported, initial actions, decision to call BSAR; FCP, IPOCs, EMTs etc. Mobile phone tracking, drones and a tour of the Rescue Coordination Centre.

Duncan Brookes organised the events and received assistance on the day from Merv Trease and the Conveners. We thank Police SAR for providing the premises and instruction.

Other BSAR Events

BSAR members who attended the annual Members' Night in October enjoyed a fascinating presentation from members of the Victoria Police Air Wing. In view of the exceptional quality of the presentation, attendance by only 20 members was disappointing, perhaps reflecting a post-pandemic reluctance to attend functions in person.

A new members introduction night was held in March.

Presentations

Special thanks to BSAR members who presented to three clubs in the reporting year:

- 1st April - Waverley Bushwalking Club – Robert Bicknell, Rowan Jennion
- 4th October - Peninsula Bushwalking Club - Rowan Jennion
- 26th October - Melbourne Bushwalkers – Tim Lenders

Website

Like many organisations, BSAR members need to be privy to information that is not appropriate for public display or is distracting from the core messages that we would wish the public to focus on.

A team of Monica Chapman, Duncan Brookes and Tom Walker have added a members only area to the BSAR website. Much of the material previously publicly available has been moved into that area.

While the team working on this were not tasked with revision of content or design, a considerable amount of work on content and design was necessary simply to divide the material and represent it in an ordered fashion.

A new working party will be formed to undertake ongoing review.

Manuals

BSAR has three core procedural documents. All are overdue for revision.

Work has commenced on two. The PLO Manual has been updated by the Police Liaison Officers under Merv Trease's leadership. Duncan Brookes is engaged in preparing a draft revision of the FO Manual.

Equipment

The Victorian Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) provided BV with a 2/3 subsidy for the purchase of BSAR safety clothing for members.

There was minor spending on search equipment for maintenance only.

COVID-19

While the administrative load imposed by COVID has settled down, the pandemic continues to impose some constraints both on administration and on operations. We are doing all we can to work back towards normal operations as soon as we can.

Membership Systems

It was reported in the previous annual report that BSAR has begun transitioning to a new membership and event records system. The Membership Secretary, Chris Jarvis, continues the substantial project of adapting D4H with an MS Access utility to carry on the functions that are outside D4H capabilities.

Summary

Operationally, this was a very active year for BSAR with ten searches and one rescue.

We thank all BSAR volunteers including searchers, Committee, Executive, Police Liaison Officers, Field Organisers, Group Leaders, Peer Supporters, Club Delegates and others assisting in various ways for their ongoing contributions to Bush Search and Rescue Victoria.

We thank the broader Bushwalking Victoria community, the BV Board, Victoria Police Search and Rescue Squad and Emergency Management Victoria for their much-valued support of Bush Search and Rescue Victoria throughout the year.