



## **The Magic Castle**

The chalet in the Snowy Mountains was another plan in the same vein. Sydney social worker, Berry Waterman, had been taking under-privileged children to the Snowy Mountains for holidays for many years. He had to give this up when the costs became prohibitive and was bitterly disappointed. Berry said: "To the child living in the poverty and filth of the inner city slums; to the child whose alcoholic parents beat him daily and leave him to sleep with the dog in the kennel, the Snowy is a magic area."

Apex could not permit such a compassionate idea to go into limbo. What could be done about it? Graham Salter claimed in his final presidential address in 1978 that it was his swan song- but it wasn't. He was appointed chairman of the committee to find a site and build a 24-bed holiday chalet in the Snowy. The scheme was given the code name "Magic Castle".

A suitable site was found at Smiggin Holes and the NSW Government granted Apex a lease. The time schedule for erecting the chalet was a scant eight months owing to the climatic conditions. The raising of the cost of the building, \$125,000, was the least of the committee's worries. All clubs would rally round to provide this amount and Adelong (Zone 2) made the first contribution of \$600.

The hard part was to assemble sufficient Apexians in a somewhat inaccessible area to erect a complex building. Ian French, a former builder and Apexian, was engaged as full-time organiser on the spot. The rest of the workforce were volunteer Apexians, in many cases travelling thousands of miles to spend a weekend or a week on the job. The project got under way on 13 November 1978 and five hundred man hours and one hundred and four sticks of gelignite later the site for the children's chalet was excavated and ready for construction.

Twenty nine Apexians from eleven clubs worked through snow, sub-zero temperatures, rain and finally hot sunny weather to clear immense rocks from the site in three weeks. In 13 back-breaking hours six men poured the foundations on 23 December. A team of brickies and labourers started on 28 December and were ready for the carpenters to work on the frame on 10 January 1979.

Members of the Singleton Club had cut, milled and delivered hardwood for the frame thus saving \$3,000. By the end of March 250 Apexians from NSW, Victoria, SA and Queensland had worked on the castle and it was becoming a landmark at Smiggin Holes. Rockdale donated the roof and Killara arranged for the wall linings free of charge and also chipped in with \$3,750.

More than 530 members from 5 states had worked on the 64-square, three-storey chalet when it was completed in July 1979. Some names should go down to posterity, Ian French dedicated eight heroic months, seven days a week, to supervise and work on this humane scheme, John Taylor of Killara nobly performed the task of keeping up supplies to Ian and at the right prices, Bruce Finlay of Kogarah made his factory available as the supply depot and drove his overloaded three ton truck to the site numerous times. Chris Moss of the Branxton club four times drove the 400 miles to organise a team of electricians to install the lighting and power circuit. He spent the entire Easter weekend on his own putting in the switchboard.



*The Apex Children's Chalet in the Snowy Mountains*

On October 1979 the Apex Children's Chalet was opened by the Prime Minister, Mr Malcolm Fraser. He described the magnificent structure as "a symbol of hope for all the under-privileged children of Australia". Mr Fraser announced that the Australian Government would give \$50,000 towards the upkeep of the "Magic Castle".

Use of the chalet is open to any under-privileged children's organisation to send 24 kids for four weeks in the summer and two weeks in the winter for the holiday of a lifetime ....