

Dan Verrall

Big Smile, Big Heart

by Chic Scott

Summit Series 2023





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Dan Verrall: Big Smile, Big Heart

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Introduction

I first met Dan Verrall in the autumn of 1974. He had just arrived in Banff and was hanging out at the Alpine Club office on Banff Avenue, and so was I. We actually met at the log home that Ron Langevin was building on Glen Crescent. Dan was volunteering his services to help Ron with the project. That was the way it was with Dan – he always pitched in. That winter, we likely shared some ski tours and pot luck dinners with the Banff Section of the ACC.

Ten years later, I was privileged to share Christmas dinner with Dan, Val, and Jasmine at the Canmore Clubhouse. Dan and his family had just moved in as custodians and about a dozen of us went sledding on the hillside in the afternoon, and later sat down to a turkey dinner in the big kitchen.

In the late eighties and early nineties, I was one of those penniless mountain vagabonds who hung out at the clubhouse, exchanging a little work for

free accommodation. I was making my way as a mountain adventurer and a writer. Dan and Val were always so warm and welcoming during this difficult time in my life.

I volunteered with Dan on hut work parties, always marvelling at the magic touch that he had with volunteers, and I went skiing with Dan – a Wapta traverse on one occasion, and another time he introduced me to the great ski potential in Chickadee Valley.

For four decades I watched Dan's family grow, and I watched Dan mature. He went from the Jack-of-all-Trades to the Master-of-all-Trades, and from the young mountain apprentice with the big smile to the elder statesman of our mountain community.

And now it is a great pleasure to see Danny honoured as Patron of the 32nd annual Mountain Guides Ball. He has earned it well. A gentleman who has made only friends in his path through life, he has helped thousands of people enjoy our mountains safely and comfortably. All these years, he has been dedicated to The Alpine Club of Canada and to his family who are all grown up now.

It has been my great privilege to write Dan's Summit Series biography, the 27th in the ACC's series, and to help share his wonderful story. In his quiet and humble way, Dan has become one of the most respected and loved members of our community, and I am so honoured to have shared a small part of my life with him.

— Chic Scott
Banff, Alberta

Dan Verrall and
Chic Scott.



Cover: Dan Verrall. Photo Chic Scott

Title page: Dan Verrall ski touring in Chickadee Valley. Photo Chic Scott

Back cover: Dan Verrall skiing in Chickadee Valley. Photo Chic Scott



Danny's Mother and Father

Dan's father, Peter Verrall, was born in Guildford, Surrey, England, on January 31, 1924, and grew up in a middle-class family with one older sister. As a boy and young man, he was greatly influenced by his maternal grandfather, Priestly Prime, who was a Minister in the Unitarian Church and preached a philosophy of non-violence.

In the early years of the Second World War, Peter was studying at University College London, but the bombing was intense and the different faculties were relocated to safer locations throughout Britain. Peter was moved to Wales, and it was here that he developed a love for mountains. Because of the influence of his grandfather, Peter chose to be a conscientious objector during the war and did home service.

After the war, Peter joined a Quaker group called the Friends' Ambulance Unit, and traveled to China to distribute medical aid. China was in desperate need of help, having suffered eight

Top left: Dan's Father, Peter Verrall.

Top right: Dan's mother Liu Lung Jian. Photo is from the book "A True Friend to China, the Lost Writings of a Heroic Nobody", collected and edited by Andrew Hicks.

Left: Volunteers of the Friends' Ambulance Unit delivering medical aid in China.

Below: Some of the men and women working with the Friends' Ambulance Unit in China. Dan's mother, Liu Lung Jian, is sitting, second from left and Dan's father, Peter, is sitting in the middle of the middle row.



years of occupation by the Japanese and was now engaged in a civil war. It was here in China, while doing humanitarian work, that Peter met the woman who would be Dan's mother.

Dan's mother was born November 30, 1923, in the city of Shu Cheng, in the province of Anhui, in northeast China. Her family name was Liu, and her given name was Lung Jian. This was Anglicized as Jean.

Jean grew up during the difficult war years, but during the relative peace that followed 1945, she managed to complete her studies at the National Southwest United University. Following this, she too joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit, as a translator, and it was here that she met Peter.

In 1949, when Mao Zedong's communist forces took over China, both Peter and Jean were forced to leave the country and managed to escape via boat from Shanghai. They left separately and traveled across the Pacific Ocean to North America, then by train across the continent, eventually ending up in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Jean had learned that St. Francis Xavier University offered a program in international development. She wanted to study here, and her intention was to return afterward to China to help her people.

In Antigonish, Peter and Jean were reunited, and were married on September 11, 1950. A son, John Adrian Verrall, was born a year later, on September 21, 1951.

Peter had enrolled in an undergraduate degree program here, as well. He was a brilliant student, earning the highest marks in the entire province of Nova Scotia. It is presumed that Jean did enroll in the international studies program but it is likely that having a child would have derailed her plans. It is not known whether she graduated.

During his studies, Peter had taken a course in geology and fell in love with the science. After his graduation, he was accepted to do a Ph.D. in geology at Princeton University in the United States, and by the spring of 1952, Peter, Jean, and baby John were on the road west to the Horseshoe Hills of Montana, where Peter would conduct field research. When this was completed, the family moved to Princeton so Peter could complete his course work and write-up his thesis. It was here

Top: Peter and Jean Verrall in Antigonish.

Bottom: Baby Daniel Verrall





that Daniel James Verrall was born on October 15, 1953.

When Dan was not yet one-year-old, the family moved to Trinidad in the Caribbean. Peter had been offered a job by a division of the Standard Oil Company of California (later to become Chevron) in Trinidad, and it would be here that Dan would spend his early childhood.

Top left: The Verrall family in Princeton, USA.
 Bottom Left: Dan and his mother Jean in Trinidad.
 Above: Dan (standing) and John (driving) in Trinidad.
 Below: The Verrall family in Trinidad.



Tropical Paradise

Trinidad was a tropical paradise. Dan and his family lived a few kilometres outside of the capital, Port of Spain, on La Horquette Valley Road, in a modest bungalow with a verandah. They had servants – a nanny, a gardener, a maid, and a live-in cook, all part of the ex-pat lifestyle that they experienced there. The staff became like members of their family, and their children became Dan and John’s playmates.

“To me,” Dan remembers, “it was a tropical paradise of fruit trees, mangos, bananas, cocoa plants and even avocados. It was an idyllic place to be a kid.”

When they were old enough, the boys went to Dunross Preparatory School, in Port of Spain, driving in each day with their father who worked in town. It was a British-style institution with a rigorous curriculum, so the boys were taught well. The family had a small motor boat with a cabin on it that they would take out on the weekends, so the boys grew up playing in the water.

Dan’s mother Jean did not work, but stayed very active: she was a seamstress and tailored men’s suits; she was a painter, and she was a weaver and had a loom. For Dan and John, “She was mom. She was always there.”

Jean was also an excellent cook, and the family ate both English and Chinese meals. And they entertained a lot – cocktail parties and dinner parties. Although they had a cook, Jean would do most of the planning and preparation for the parties. Peter was an elegant host and would greet the guests at the door, kissing the women’s hands.

Peter got a month of paid holiday each year so the family took long trips. On three occasions, they went to England to visit relatives. Once they took a boat across the Atlantic and twice they flew, via Gander, Newfoundland, or via the Azores.

One year, Peter took the family to Guatemala and Mexico. In Guatemala, they visited Lake Atitlan, and in Mexico they did a motor trip from

Mexico City to Acapulco. Along the way, they found themselves in a hotel with a giant pool that had a ten-metre diving platform. Dan and John had a dare to see who could dive off it. John went up first, looked at the long drop, but did not have the nerve, so he jumped off. But when Dan went up, he looked and waited and screwed up his courage, then looked again, then after about fifteen minutes he dove off the platform into the water below. “When Dan sets his mind to something,” John recalled, “he’ll do it.”

Trinidad and Tobago gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. Because of this, there were changes in the oil industry that led to Dan’s father leaving Trinidad. According to John, “We left because the job wasn’t there for my dad anymore.”



The Verrall family arrived in Calgary in the middle of the winter of 1961-62. From Trinidad, they had flown first to England, where Dan remembers celebrating a belated eighth birthday. It was full-on winter in Alberta when they stepped off the plane. John explained, "We came here in February... so we learned quickly."

"He was a genius at using volunteer labour."

—Keith Webb

In Calgary, the oil industry was booming and many big discoveries were being made. Peter, who was a structural geologist, was engaged with fieldwork during the summers in northern Alberta, the North West Territories, or the high Arctic. Winters were spent back in Calgary, where he would analyse and process his findings.

Peter and Jean bought a house in southwest Calgary overlooking the Bow River in the Spruce Cliff community. They were unable to move in for a few months, so during that time, they lived in the Wales Hotel, located in the heart of the city. Dan and John would catch the #21 bus in the morning, carrying a sandwich prepared by the hotel restaurant, and ride to Spruce Cliff Elementary School, which was located near their new home. They were both good students having received a solid grounding in the Dunross Preparatory School in Trinidad.

Peter had chosen Calgary for his new posting rather than somewhere in the United States to be close to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. During

The Verrall family in Calgary in the mid-sixties.



this time in Calgary, he would become an enthusiastic climber and devote much of his energies to The Alpine Club of Canada.

But Jean was lonely in Calgary. She had left her family behind in China, and, apart from cousin Lily, who lived in New York, would never see them again. Mainland China was closed off to the outside world and would remain so until after her death. Jean was a very affectionate and loving mother, however, and her family was all important to her. John remembered, "Basically we were her life."

After a couple of years, the family moved to a new home a few blocks west, in the Wildwood Community, nearing the edge of the city. Dan attended the Wildwood Elementary School while John had now moved up to the Vincent Massey Junior High School. It was at Wildwood Elementary that Dan met Jason Edworthy, who would become a lifelong friend and companion in adventure.

Dan later wrote about his introduction to the mountain world:

"I was about 12 years old, attending junior high school in Calgary. My father had become very involved with the Calgary section [of the ACC], and as part of his role as chairman, he was host to the special guests that were invited to present slide shows at the monthly meetings. Once we had the privilege of hosting Dr. Thomas Hornbein who, in the previous year, had made the first ascent of the West Ridge of Mount Everest with Willi Unsold. After his presentation, that I was able to stay up very late on a school night to go and see, I was in awe. I did not know at that time, but this feat was considered to be one of the most significant climbs in the history of high altitude mountaineering. Tom brought myth and reality together for me, and inspired me to see this activity that took my father away from us most weekends from a much different perspective. I was just getting to the age that my father began to take my brother and I into the mountains to ski, hike, and scramble. At that time, I met his mountain family and friends,

people like Jim Tarrant, Bob and Marj Hind, Richard and Louise Guy, Bruce and Marg Fraser, and many others that I am still able to connect with every year at the Guides Ball and other ACC functions. This mountain community has remained strong through the years, and I feel that the camaraderie of this group has never faltered in all this time."

In junior high school, Dan and John developed an interest in skiing. On the weekends, they would go with their father to the Happy Valley Ski Resort, just west of Calgary, and rocket down the slopes. Skiing became a passion for Dan that has lasted to this day.

John recalled that he was always, bigger, stronger and louder than Dan. He played team sports like football and rugby while Dan took up individual sports like gymnastics.

"As we were growing up I would always pick on him. In Grade 10, he started doing gymnastics and weight training. We were fooling around in Killarney pool, and I was pushing him and he whipped around and caught me with his elbow on the side of my head and broke my ear drum. And from that day on he was my best friend. I didn't pick on him any more..."

Both boys were honours students, and at one time in high school, Dan served as vice-president of the student council. "Dan was quiet," confided John, "but he was friends with everybody. He was always the social convenor in our group. He was the outgoing one."

It was in high school that Dan became involved with like-minded friends in mountain pursuits. A love of downhill skiing was the main connection, but this soon grew to include hiking and mountain climbing. The group of friends included Eric Geisler and Jason Edworthy, who were schoolmates, and Keith Webb who lived on the north side of the city. Keith explained, "Skiing gripped me and Danny and some other mutual friends. Danny



Left: Junior high school photo of Dan.

Right: High school photo of Dan.

was going to school on the other side of Calgary, and we got together to go skiing." The boys even formed what Keith called a "pseudo fraternity," called Sigma Kappa Iota, which was really a ski club. To this day, Dan and Keith are still friends with half-a-dozen of the members.

And they went climbing too. Dan wrote, "Eric's father Brad took a few of us on a mountaineering trip into the Bugaboos. That was my first big mountain experience! It was also my first hands-on experience with crevasse rescue. Luckily no one was injured."

"During those years a few of us got part-time jobs working at the original Hostel Shop down on Kensington Road. It was where all the climbers of the day would gather, and many would work there to be able to acquire equipment, to plan adventures, and to be part of that growing community of mountain climbers. Through the Hostel Shop, I also met Mike Bourns and Ann Rooney. Jason, Mike, Ann and I had a very memorable trip, or I should call it an attempt, to climb Mt Forbes. I think that the experience taught us all a great deal, mainly that great friendships are often forged through shared misery."

Dan's mother Jean became sick only a few years after moving to Calgary. Although Jean and Peter hid the truth from the boys, she had developed stomach cancer. For about five years, she slowly deteriorated. It was a very difficult time for Jean and also Dan suffered. By the late sixties, John was away at the University of British Columbia, while Dan, who was in Grade 12 and still at home, helped care for his mother. Jean died January 23, 1971. She was only forty-seven years old.

"Dan radiates a kind of peaceful energy."

—Leslie Nicholls

On His Own

Danny's world changed when his mother died. His father had lived with the prospect of Jean's death for several years, and according to John, now that she was gone, "he was ready to get on with his life." John was hooked up with his high school sweetheart, Sharon, and they had married and moved to Vancouver. Very quickly, Dan's security of home and family had vanished, and he was mostly on his own.

In the autumn of 1971, Dan enrolled in a three-year Environmental Studies program at the University of Manitoba. According to Keith Webb, "Danny was already fascinated by architecture." This was a unique program: most universities in Canada offered a five-year program in architecture, but the University of Manitoba offered a three-year program, which would lead to a bachelor's degree in environmental studies, then the candidate could do a further three years and receive a master's degree in architecture.

For the first two years, Dan lived in residence on campus, and for the third year he shared an apartment with a classmate in one of Winnipeg's older communities. Years later Danny wrote, "The landscape there made me long for the mountain world that I had left behind. My summers were spent

back home in Calgary, and I began to get involved with climbing with friends who shared this interest with me. Our adventures at that time were incredible. We survived the many mistakes that we made and luckily learned from them. We got ourselves into amazing places and started to develop a sense of comfort and self reliance in being there."

On the summer weekends, Dan sometimes travelled to the Columbia Icefield, where Keith was driving a sight-seeing snowmobile on the Athabasca Glacier. On these visits, they climbed the classics: Mount Athabasca, Mount Andromeda, and Mount Columbia. Later, when Keith and Jason Edworthy worked for Environment Canada at the Peyto Glacier Research Station, Dan spent his weekends there, volunteering his efforts and climbing the peaks on

the Wapta Icefield. Other classics climbed during these summers were mounts Lefroy and Victoria, and the Aemmer Couloir route on Mount Temple with Ann Rooney. On the July 1st weekend, Dan and his pals would hike to the Upper Victoria Glacier on Mount Victoria for the annual Prune Pickers ski race.

But Dan's best climb during these summers was Mount Assiniboine, in 1972 with Keith Webb.

Dan had visited the mountain in the past with his parents, so he knew it well and wanted to climb it. He and Keith made three attempts on the mountain before they reached the top. During the climb, they had a disagreement as to the route. According to Keith, "Danny wanted to not pay attention to the guide book and I did want to pay attention to the guide book." They made the summit, however, and were elated.

"It was a big deal when you are a teenager."

Top: Dan on the summit of Mount Assiniboine.

Centre left: Jason Edworthy

Centre right: Mike Bourns

Below: Mount Assiniboine. Photo Kathy Madill-Scott





Dan graduated in the spring of 1974, but chose to take a year off before continuing his studies in architecture. Instead, he decided to spend some time in the mountains and moved to Banff. Here he connected with The Alpine Club of Canada.



He later wrote, "In those days the national office of the ACC was located in a very small, converted apartment on the top floor of the White Block on Banff Avenue. If you blinked, you would pass by the nondescript entrance that led to the stairway to the upper floor. A small wooden sign by the doorway was all that indicated the presence of this office, where two very wonderful ambassadors of the club worked their wondrous. Ev Moorhouse and Judy Linkletter kept the club together, performing the many onerous tasks that fell onto their desks."

Above: The Dave White block on Banff Avenue where The Alpine Club of Canada office was located during the seventies. To reach the office, which was on the second floor facing the street, you entered a small door at the right hand end of the building and climbed the creaky stairs. Photo from the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, V688-pd1-20.

Left: Young Dan on a mountain top.

The club had a much smaller membership then, but the amount of work that Ev and Judy managed to accomplish for what the club was able to pay them showed an incredible dedication. At the same time, they maintained a wonderfully welcoming atmosphere towards anyone who would find their way to the office door. I was one of these people. I felt so welcome that I soon found myself filling in where and when I was needed. I was the official stamp licker, Gestetner crank turner, and office renovator (although I almost lost the job after I painted the wooden toilet seat bright red). I also became involved with the Banff Section of the ACC, participating on climbing trips, socials, and week-long ski touring camps."

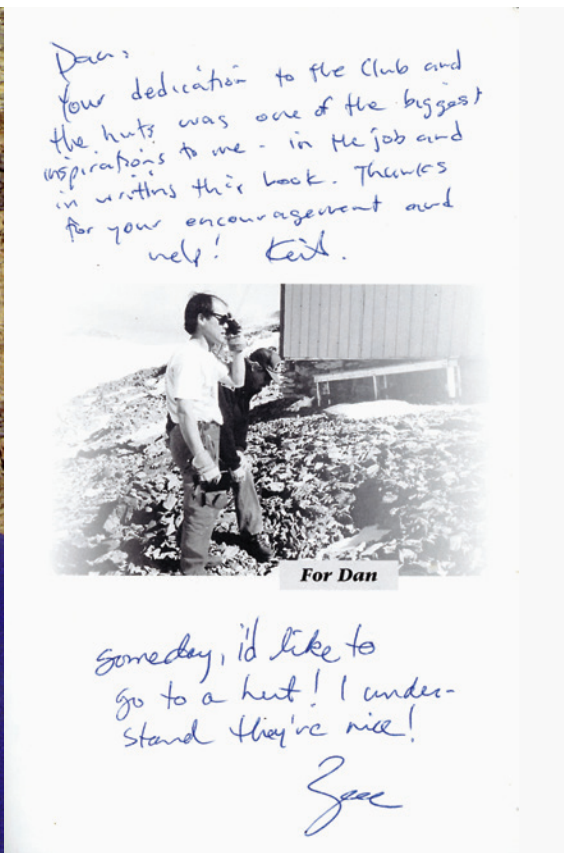
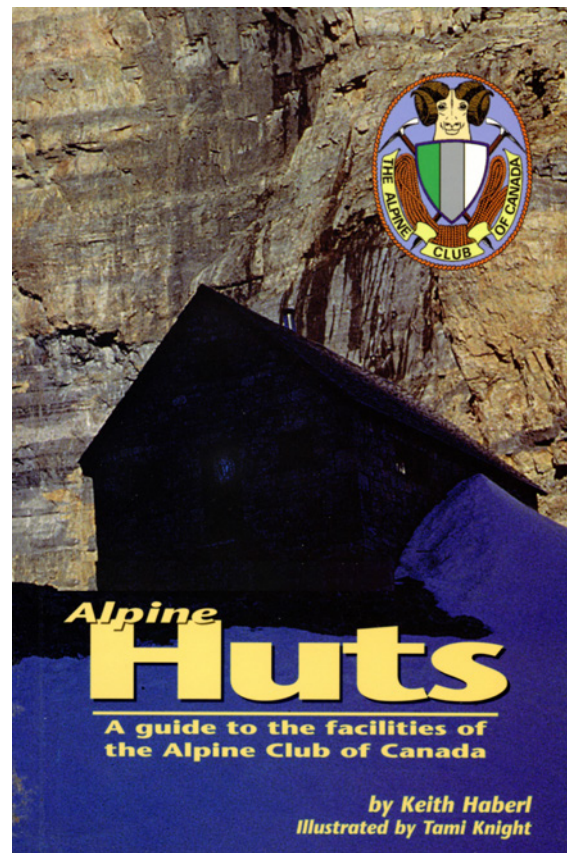
That summer, Dan officially joined the ACC as a Junior Member and attended the club's big camp at Mount Robson. Here, he met the mountain guide, Don Vockeroth, with whom he made an attempt on the south side of the great mountain, but the weather was poor and the group was turned back.

During this year in Banff, Dan made many

new friends in town, like Ron Langevin, who was building a log house on Glen Crescent. Dan peeled logs and did other chores for Ron, and often joined him and his wife Marlene and their five children for dinner. Dan was a master of making friends.

At the ACC office, Dan helped with the many chores but one of his most important duties was in maintaining office morale by fetching ice cream cones from Len's confectionary.

It was a fun year, and Dan had begun to create a new "family" for himself in the mountains, but he had wanderlust and in the spring of 1975, set off for Europe.



In 1995 The Alpine Club of Canada published the first edition of *Alpine Huts: A guide to the facilities of the Alpine Club of Canada*. The author dedicated the book to Dan in recognition of his contributions to the club.

Europe

In the summer of 1975, Dan spent seven months in Europe. He flew to England in April with his dad where they visited with family for a week, then travelled by train to Luxembourg, where they joined up with an old family friend from Trinidad, Jeanne Sheriff.

The three of them travelled south by train, down the boot of Italy, and across on a ferry to Greece. Here, they explored the island of Corfu and around the Peloponnese for a couple of weeks before ending up in Athens, where they parted ways – Jeanne going to the island of Rhodes and Dan and Peter returning by boat to Italy. Peter then returned to Canada, and Dan set out to explore the Continent.

Dan recalled, “I had a Eurail pass and a hostel membership card, so I rode the rails and often took overnight routes and slept on the trains, waking up in a different country every morning!”

Most of these travels were in the south of Europe, but as his Eurail pass was about to expire, Dan headed north to the Scandinavian countries. In Norway, he ran out of money and got a job on a farm, milking cows and bringing in the silage. He made enough cash to enable him to get back to his relatives in England. Here, he worked for a month doing “robotic” work in an electrical

motor manufacturing plant. With the money that he earned, he purchased a good quality touring bicycle and pedaled from the Lake District in northwest England to northern Scotland, then back down again to Brighton on the south coast, then north to London.

By October, the weather was turning colder, and Dan made plans to return home to Canada. Before that happened, he met up with his father, who was in England for a short time.

Peter was en route to Tehran, where he was being sent to head up the structural geology department for at least two years. Dan discovered then that his father had sold the family house that he had helped him to build on an acreage west of Calgary. Most of the contents of the house were sold, as well, including many things that Dan had treasured. It was an unexpected turn of events. When he did return to Calgary, Dan was now truly on his own with no place to call home. That is when Banff and the mountains became his home.

“For Danny bonding with people is most important. Bonding with his family.”

–Keith Webb

Gary Wills after traversing Mount Tasman, seen in the background.



Back to Banff

In Banff, Dan made many friends and created a new life for himself. He would live here for almost ten years. He was soon renting a basement apartment on Grizzly Street from Wim and Petrie Pauw, while doing electrical work with Wim at Henry’s Electric. Wim was in the process of buying the business from Henry Ness, so Dan had two bosses: Wim and Henry. Wim was a very flexible employer and allowed Dan take long periods of time off, often working for six months then traveling for four or five months. Over the next few years, Dan would make a number of long trips and adventures.

In early 1978, he spent five months travelling in New Zealand. One adventure he had there was the traverse of Mount Tasman. He and his Australian companion, Gary Wills, spent a night on the summit and watched the sun set below one horizon, then watched it rise the next morning on the other horizon, all made more beautiful by a full moon and a clear sky.

While in New Zealand, he met glaciologist Gerald Holdsworth, who was doing research on Mount Logan in the Yukon. This encounter, at the Plateau Hut on Mount Cook, led to a job the following spring with Gerald.

That spring and summer of 1978, he climbed Logan via the King Trench Route, and spent several weeks on the high summit plateau using echo sounding equipment to determine the places where the glacier ice was deepest.

Two years later, Gerald and his team succeeded in their ultimate goal of drilling the ice core. Due to the weather, the cores had to be stored in an ice cave until they could be retrieved and flown out the following summer. So, in 1981, Dan climbed the mountain again with Gerald, Mike Demuth and Martyn Williams via the East Ridge, and

Top: Camp on the summit plateau on Mount Logan.

Bottom: Dan and his team mates stand beside the Heliocourier aircraft on the summit plateau of Mount Logan. (l to r: Mike Demuth, Urs Kallen, Dan, Gerald Holdsworth)



spent a couple of weeks on the summit plateau where he assisted in the ice-core retrieval. This was accomplished with a Heliocourier, a specially equipped airplane that could land at 5,300 metres on skis.

Dan's climb of Mount Logan via the East Ridge was his most serious to date. This route is technically difficult and rises almost 4,000 metres from the Hubbard Glacier to the East Peak.

The East Ridge of Mount Logan rises almost 4,000 vertical metres from the Hubbard Glacier to the East Peak.
Photo Chic Scott

On this trip, Dan succeeded in standing on the summit of Mount Logan, the highest mountain in Canada at 5,957 metres.



During these years, Dan had other big adventures, most notably in 1979, with Neil Colgan, Brian Rose, Chris Espinel, and Doug Brown, when he traveled to Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador, and climbed the great Andean peaks Chimborazo and Huayna Potosi.

Every time Dan returned to Banff after one of these adventures, he would get his job back at Henry's Electric. Eventually after about four years of doing this, he started to think that it would be worthwhile to get a trade, so he signed up as an apprentice electrician. He challenged the first two years of the program, and they also gave him credit for his university degree. But he did the last two years of the electrician's course, and in 1983 he received his journeyman's ticket.

And in the summer of 1979, Dan became a Senior Member in The Alpine Club of Canada. His nominators were Keith Webb, Jason Edworthy, and Jim Murphy.

133 Muskrat Street

In the spring of 1979, Dan moved into a house at 133 Muskrat Street in Banff. His housemates were Heather Dempsey, who worked at the Park Information Centre, her boyfriend Keith Webb, and Tony Reed, a river-rafting guide. This house would be Dan's home for five years, and would become a gathering place for a group of young friends for almost a decade.

The two story, cream-coloured house was owned by Banff landscaper Guenther Boehnisch. When Heather and Tony Reed had first rented the house the year before, it was unfurnished, so they scavenged. "We found stuff at the rummage sale," Heather recalled, "and went to the dump to get crates. So it was pretty bare bones."

Dan was good friends with Keith from his Calgary days and would drop by often. According to Heather, "Dan just had this positive attitude. He knew he was going to live there. He was there at the right time – we needed a roommate."

133 Muskrat Street was one of those Banff homes that had good vibes and attracted people. Jason Edworthy and Mike Bourns would come up from Calgary and sleep on the floor. "There was always people there on the weekends. Danny was an artist with cooking, and we had these great feasts... and you never knew who was going to show up."

Of course, Danny and his friends went back-country skiing. Keith observed, "Dan was an

The back door of 133 Muskrat Street as painted by Babe Wanamaker. Image courtesy of Heather Dempsey.

The house at 133 Muskrat Street.





1: Chris Cooper, Dan and Heather Dempsey coming out from their adventure at the Elizabeth Parker Hut at Lake O'Hara. Photo Heather Dempsey.

amazing skier. He could ski on anything. Parallel turns on XC skis and low cut boots." Heather, who had recently come to Banff from Victoria, was just learning to ski, and remembered, "Danny included me on ski trips so I learned to ski with him...I remember my first overnight was going to O'Hara with Chris Espinel, Chris Cooper, and Danny."

"It was so cold, thirty below. Danny knew everyone, and I was introduced to all these people." For New Years, 1980, they all went to the ACC hut at Fairy Meadow in the Northern Selkirks.

- When he moved in, Danny got creative with the house. "We had a teeny kitchen," Heather explained, "and a huge dining room in which we had a wall map of the world that took up the whole wall, so that was the highlight of the room. There was a wall between the kitchen and the living room, so Danny went downstairs and brought up a saw and he starts sawing... he's going through the wall paper, and he made this hole, it went down to about bench height so you could sit on it. And it was this huge window, so when you came in the back door, you could see all the way to Muskrat
- 2: In front of the Fairy Meadow Hut at New Year 1980. (Back row l to r: Mike Bourns, Joan Brown, Kent Brown, Pat Comer, Martin "the Brit". Front row l to r: Dan Verrall, Phil Mudry, Chris Turner, Beth Wooley, Louise Klatzel-Mudry, Wayne Leonard, Frances Klatzel, Jason Edworthy.) Photo Heather Dempsey.
 - 3: New Year's dinner inside the Fairy Meadow Hut.
 - 4: At the Stanley Mitchell Hut (l to r: unknown, Sandy Lysenko, Linda Rushlow, Neil Colgan in red vest and Dan on skis.)



Street from the alley, and he put a beautiful piece of finished wood on there, and that was the highlight of our house. Everyone would comment. He finished it, and we put a table there, and that's where we had all these parties. It was just brilliant."

Sadly, in July of 1979, Dan lost one of his best friends: Neil Colgan, with whom he had visited South America.

Neil was beginning his career as a Banff National Park warden and died while on backcountry patrol. Neil's family donated some funds for the ACC to build a beautiful hut in his memory. The hut was erected in the summer of 1982 high in the Valley of the Ten Peaks above Moraine Lake. Dan worked hard on this project with ACC members Eric Lomas and Bernie Schiesser, who had spearheaded this project along with Peter Fuhrmann.

During these years at Muskrat Street, Dan continued to work as an electrician for Wim at Henry's Electric. And he continued to ski and climb in the Rockies. Perhaps it was at this time that he discovered the terrific ski potential in Chickadee Valley in Kootenay Park near Vermilion Pass.

Above: The Colgan family in front of the new Neil Colgan Hut. (l to r: Neil's brother Bryan and his mom and dad, Bryul and Gerry.)
Left: Neil Colgan

Valerie Lynne Cook was born June 3, 1950, in Neepawa, Manitoba. Her family moved to Brandon for a few years and then relocated to Selkirk, which became her permanent home. Her father, Stan, worked as a carpenter for most of his career eventually becoming a building inspector for the City of Winnipeg.

“He was a wonderful father; is a wonderful father. He has been so good to those girls.”

—Val

After graduating from high school, Val went to Vancouver where she studied nursing at the Vancouver General Hospital, receiving her RN designation in 1971. She took a course in labour and delivery, and discovered that she really liked it. This soon led to a job at St. Paul’s Hospital in the labour and delivery department.

In 1977, Val applied for a job at the Mineral Springs Hospital in Banff and was hired, largely because of her maternity expertise. So she packed up her belongings into her little Ford Pinto and drove east. She had never been to Banff before and found that the job was “very cushy.” St. Paul’s had been a big and busy hospital, and the job had been stressful. Banff was much quieter.

In Banff, she skied and hiked, “because that’s what you did,” and in late 1981, she met Dan, and they started spending time together. Dan



remembered, “We shared the joys of hiking and skiing and being in the out of doors. We also had a lot of friends in common.”

Val soon moved in to live with Dan on Muskrat Street, and in the fall of 1983 Val and Dan were excited to discover that they were to become parents.

Jasmine was born July 2, 1984, in the old Mineral Springs Hospital in Banff. After her birth, Dan brought them back to the warm welcome of their Muskrat Street home. Dan explained, “The realization that our new lifestyle was about to require some significant changes gradually brought us to the decision to look for a home of our own. My idea was to bring Val and our new baby up to what I had come to think of as ‘The Promised Land (Yukon and northern BC),’” According to Val, “When Jasmine was five weeks old we packed up everything into our van... and off we went.”

In Haines Junction, they visited friends of Dan’s, Rod and Enid Tait, who had become his Yukon family. Enid took Val and Jasmine under her wing. It was a great relief for Val, who could just relax for a while in a home without wheels that came with running water!

Dan had entertained thoughts of settling in the North, but it was not in the cards at that time, so they drove back south again to Vancouver Island. Here, Dan also scouted for work possibilities, but there were few opportunities so he phoned Wim in Banff and asked if there might be employment for him there. Wim said yes, so Dan, Val and Jasmine got back in the van and drove east across the Rockies.

When they arrived in Banff, the reality was that Wim really didn’t have much electrical work for him at that time. However, he did keep Dan gainfully employed doing carpentry jobs and odds and ends. And during that time, a good friend gave the three of them the use of a small apartment for a short term while they were away. Dan and Val were in limbo and looking for a way to move forward.

The Clubhouse

In the autumn of 1984, Dan and Val had no home, and Dan had no steady job. And they had a young baby to care for. It was then that fate intervened – Danny and Val were offered the job as custodians of The Alpine Club of Canada’s Clubhouse on the eastern edge of Canmore.

They probably didn’t realize it at the time, but the ACC was in a terrible financial position. In 1983, the club had posted a \$20,000 loss, and in 1984, would post a \$53,000 loss. And this was on a total budget of only \$250,000. And the Clubhouse was a big part of the problem. It had lost over \$8,000 in 1983.

The club was searching for a way out of their financial mess, and, at the June 1984 meeting, the board had passed a motion to sell the Clubhouse. Peter Fuhrmann, who was soon to take over as president, and Jim Murphy, who had just taken over as chairman of the Clubhouse Committee, were having none of this. They were going to save the Clubhouse if it was at all possible. Jim wrote, “The only mandate the committee was given was to ‘turn the Clubhouse operations around.’”

Dan and Val had been close friends with Jim and his wife Patsy since their early Banff days. Dan had originally met Patsy in the mid-seventies at the ACC office, where she had worked with Ev and Judy. Jim knew of Dan’s skills and experience, and more importantly of his availability. He figured that it was a perfect fit. So, one day, when Dan and Val were out for a hike with Jim and Patsy along the shore of Lake Louise, Jim offered them the job of looking after the Clubhouse. The job included a place for them to call home.

After taking time to discuss the proposition, Dan and Val accepted Jim’s offer. Not long after, Dennis DeMontigny, who was the previous custodian, was let go, and in late October of 1984, Dan, Val and little Jasmine moved into the recently vacated custodian’s quarters at the Clubhouse.

Their new home was tiny – just one little room with a small kitchen attached. The bathroom was down the hall, and there were communal showers in the basement. “We didn’t have a bathtub,” Val recalled, “but we had a basinet and we bathed Jasmine in it... Danny built a bed that was level with the windows that had storage underneath... and we had a kitchen table and Jasmine slept on the floor. But it was our own place.”

Although the custodian’s suite was tiny, they had the whole building to themselves and a giant back yard. Val remembered, “The first Christmas we had a tree in the living room. We gathered friends and family for dinner down in the main kitchen. At that point it was so quiet that we pretty much had the place to ourselves.”

The first project that Dan undertook when they moved in was to expand the living quarters. Jim Murphy had promised that this would be priority number one when Dan was hired.

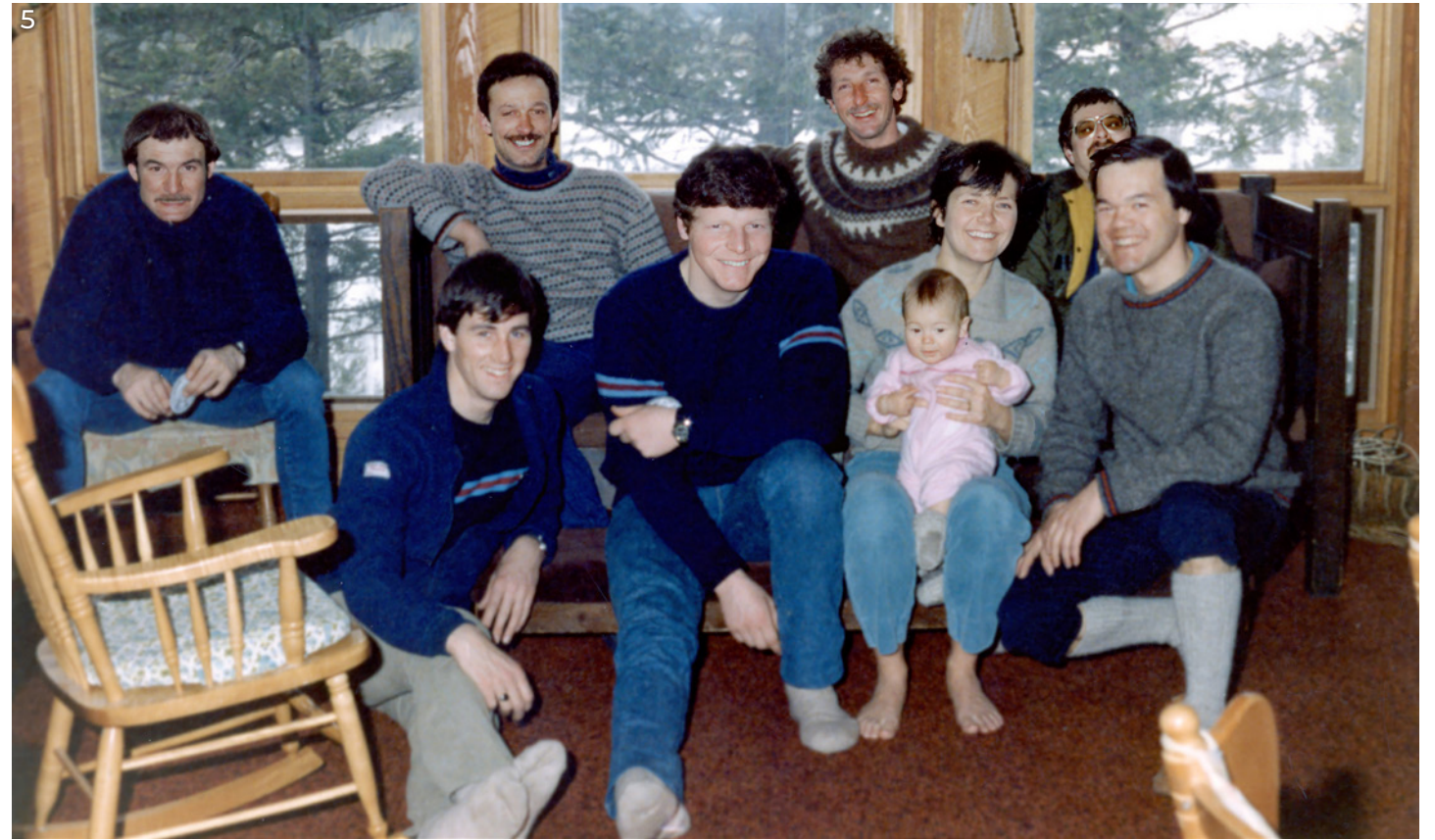
A work shop was set up below the custodian’s suite and Dan went to work. “We added on the bathroom,” Val explained, “which was amazing.”

Danny had trained as a massage therapist and got a job at the Banff Centre on Saturday nights to supplement their income: “So I worked the desk Saturday nights and I had a baby... I put Jasmine in the Jolly Jumper and people would be lined up, and I would be checking them in.”

Dan reflected years later, “When Jim hired me he actually hired the two of us... the amount of work that Val put in looking after things when I wasn’t there was very significant. It has never been recognized.”

Val and Dan’s second child, Silene, was born July 14, 1986, and Dan added on another bedroom. Dan had already added a master bedroom, so “All of a sudden, we had a nice little apartment.”

“It was a wonderful place for the girls,” says Val. “They got to meet all kinds of people... we had an amazing yard... but there were things about it that I didn’t like. At times, it was like living in a dorm with little privacy.”



1 & 2: Jasmine
3: The Clubhouse.
4: Dan, Val and the girls.
5: Dan, Val and Jasmine with members of the Royal Air Force mountain rescue team from Scotland. They came regularly to Canada in the winter to climb frozen waterfalls and would stay for weeks at the Clubhouse.
6: Dan, Jasmine and Silene celebrate a birthday.
7: Jasmine and Silene playing at the Clubhouse.



Dan, Val and Jasmine in their new home.

While Dan and Val were creating their new home and raising their family, they were welcoming guests at the clubhouse. Dan and Val were like old fashioned house parents, and they made sure that everyone felt at home. In Murphy's opinion, "Dan's personality was perfect for Clubhouse manager." Clubhouse usage went up, and within a year the operation was making a profit. In February 1985, Murphy wrote:

"The Clubhouse is here to stay! The Clubhouse

Committee has written this letter in order to update you and your section as to the present status of the Clubhouse. Since November 1, 1984 (new fiscal year) the Clubhouse has earned over \$3,500 more than the same period last year. We are hearing nothing but positive comments from the Clubhouse visitors."

And in August of that year, Bruce Elkin, who managed Yamnuska Mountain School, wrote to ACC manager Dick Latta,

"Just a short note to commend the Clubhouse committee and manager for the great job they have been doing in the last few months. Dan has been great to us. He is very pleasant and accommodating, while maintaining a business-like approach. We appreciate the concern and consideration shown to us by the ACC."

But it was more than Dan's personality that turned the Clubhouse around. It was also the hard work put in by the Clubhouse committee working along with Dan. Spearheaded by club president Peter Fuhrmann, with Murphy, Eric Lomas and Bernie Schiesser, all members of the Banff section, the upgrades to the buildings and grounds proceeded at a steady rate, whether it was the parking area, the kitchen, the lower washrooms and showers, general landscaping around the property and the internal pathways, the installation of

lights in the parking lot, a wood burning stove in the main living room, and an entrance sign for the Clubhouse at the highway. The team also built a sauna in the basement near the showers, and in the Guides Room, they installed a bar and obtained a liquor license. There was even a sewing bee to make mattress covers for the hostel and cabins.

One of the biggest jobs was the remodelling of the Bell Cabin, a large building which sleeps fifteen. Dan and his team brought in running water and a sewer line to the cabin, built a kitchen and dining area, installed washrooms, and made the building self-contained. It has been popular with groups ever since.

Many of these projects were supervised by George Stefanick, an ACC Edmonton Section member. Danny remembers that George was a focused individual and was used to looking after big construction projects. He expected a lot, and "it was sometimes a trying relationship." Meanwhile, Murphy worked hard to raise money to pay for these projects, and he was very successful. Much of the money was contributed by club sections across the country.

In 1987, Murphy wrote, "I can say with confidence that the Clubhouse became an efficiently and professionally run operation within six months of the committee taking over. ... the Clubhouse went from a severe money-losing operation to a state where it could operate on its own without monetary support from the main club."

"Dan Verrall has done a terrific job in running such a successful establishment with the past year's operation being wholly attributable to Dan's efforts."

"In summary of the committee performance, I submit that the mandate given to the committee by the board has been fulfilled. The Clubhouse is now on stable ground and requires very little, if any, management direction other than from the Clubhouse manager himself."

"Although Danny was hired as Clubhouse Manager, he contributed far beyond what was expected of him. The manager position became a way of life for him. At this point, Dan's wife, Val, must also be recognized – it's definitely a team effort at times. Dan has saved the Clubhouse a tremendous amount of money through his expertise in carpentry, electrical work (he is a

ticketed electrician), gas fitting, landscaping, and architecture (his university speciality). Dan's congenial personality has won over many a customer and has developed a warmth to the Clubhouse environment. Dan definitely has served the club far beyond what is expected of him as a Manager and as such should be recognized in a special way. I must say that Dan's enthusiasm for the job has not waned throughout these past years."

In February of 1988, during the Olympics, the ACC rented the Clubhouse to OCO (the Organizing Committee for the Calgary Winter Olympics) for \$70,000. In a deal negotiated by Murphy and Linder Armitage, a Calgary Section member, this money became the seed for the Endowment Fund, which in later years would become so important to the club. According to Dan, it was the biathlon volunteers and officials who stayed with him and Val and the two girls in the Clubhouse.

Although Calgary Section members would often drive home for the night rather than stay over at the Clubhouse, the Edmonton section members developed a close connection with the Clubhouse and would stay when they came to the area.

"We would be their home," said Dan. The section got involved with managing and fundraising for the Clubhouse, and every second weekend the same people would be there, like Eric and Ella Mossman.

Overnight fees for the Clubhouse were still small, and the ACC was still a member's organization. As Dan remembered, "That's why you joined the club – to get great experiences at a very fair price." In the summers, the club rented to groups, such as 'French in the Rockies,' and "organizations got to know that we were available." You could book longer term and you could rent the Bell Cabin and be all by yourself.

The sign that was erected to mark the turnoff for the Clubhouse along the 1A highway.





Silene and Jasmine on the hillside above the Clubhouse.

“He has facilitated hundreds of thousands of people through the huts. He has had an indirect effect on so many people.”

—Keith Webb

The septic and water systems at the Clubhouse were always difficult and gave problems. Dan remembered with a smile, “the original septic field used to be in front of the panabode cabin, where the upper parking lot is now. The field had been having trouble for years when we arrived. It would overflow and freeze on the road. So you would have a yellow glacier down there.

“A number of times I found myself at the bottom of an empty concrete sewage tank. You had to go down there to clean the Bell valve at the bottom of the tank, because that was what was blocked. The tank had to be pumped out by a sewage truck then you clean it up as good as possible.... I’ve had a lot of smelly jobs in my career.”

In 1972, when the Clubhouse was built, the ACC had trouble finding water because they were looking in the area of the Clubhouse building. But they found a good source of water down below the access road, where it turns just before the horse corrals. This source of water gave them a constant reliable flow and good drinking water, but they had to pump it 250 vertical feet up the hill. This involved big pumps and pressure tanks. A lot of engineering was involved, and it has been problematic over the years. So Dan had to deal with water issues a number of times – sometimes it was a pressure switch not working and a couple of times a pipe had burst under the ground. This was always difficult to find, and you had to dig it up

and have it repaired. In really cold weather, there was the danger that the pipes would freeze, so you had to leave a tap running in the Clubhouse. On occasion someone would turn it off with problematic consequences.

Val admits that it was difficult the first few years, adjusting to life with a baby in a new town: “I was pretty lonely. I didn’t have friends with kids who were coming to hang out with me.” But there were good things about the clubhouse. “When people came to visit we had lots of beds. We just put them in a room down the hall.”

Although they didn’t have much money, life was good and the family was all important. “We didn’t go without and we were able to do what we wanted to do. We always managed family life so that one of us would look after the kids.”

Jasmine and Silene happily remember that the Clubhouse was “a big magical playground. We used the entire Clubhouse as our jungle gym. We climbed the wall around the fireplace and were able to get up onto the beams, and we would sit up there. We were both in gymnastics and were little monkeys.”

Dan built a playground outside the Clubhouse, and they had a trapeze and a swing hung between two trees. At Easter time, Dan and Val would hide Easter eggs under the trees and in the piles of pine needles. The girls had birthday parties with their friends in the Bell cabin and sleepovers in the bunks. Both Jasmine and Silene liked horses and visited the horse corrals down the road. The girls also liked to put on theatrical performances in the Guides Room with their friends.

Dan summed it up well:

“Our little home expanded in stages until we had a comfortably sized apartment. Our back yard was the slope of Grotto Mountain, hardly any trails existed there at the time. The view from Shirley’s balcony toward the valley included only one visible house! When the girls reached school age, the bus would come up the road and pick them up or drop them off at the parking lot. After it snowed, however, the buses could not get up the last hill, and we would toboggan down the hill to meet them at the horse corral corner. It was a wonderful, unique environment to live in, not only physically but socially as well. Many of our regular guests became good friends. The memories that I have from this time are unforgettable.”

Facilities Maintenance Manager

In 1990, Dan was offered the job of Facilities Maintenance Manager in addition to his duties as Clubhouse custodian. It was a big job as the club was in the final stages of acquiring many huts from Parks Canada.

Over the years, Parks Canada had acquired the Abbot Pass Hut from the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Peter and Catharine Whyte Hut and the Balfour Hut from the Calgary Ski Club, and The Fay Hut, Colgan Hut, and Vallance Hut from The Alpine Club of Canada. During this era, Parks Canada had felt that these huts were best owned and operated by the Canadian Government, but by the early eighties they realized that this was not the ideal arrangement, and they asked The Alpine Club of Canada to take them over and manage them. In addition, in 1989, the ACC had built the new Bow Hut, a large structure which slept thirty people and had a big common room/kitchen.

So in 1990, when Dan was appointed to his new position, the number of huts that the ACC administered had grown from six to sixteen in

the previous five years. It was now a very big job for the club to maintain, manage, and service all these huts. Dan became the point man, and did much of the work. Meanwhile, he and Val and the girls continued to live at the Clubhouse and take care of it.

Of course, Dan and the family were very familiar with the huts already. One of their first outings to a hut as a family was in 1988 to the Stanley Mitchell Hut when Silene was only two years old. Val carried her in the baby backpack, and Dan pulled a one-wheeled travois with a pack containing most of the food and gear. When Jasmine got tired, she could straddle the pack and hitch a ride. The family loved the hut located in the idyllic Little Yoho Valley. The girls played for hours in the creek that flows past the front of the

“What he did with the huts has enriched so many lives.”

—Heather Dempsey

Jasmine and Silene playing with the Edworthy kids in the creek in front of the Stanley Mitchell Hut. (l to r: Silene, Casey, Tyson, Jasmine and Thomas.)





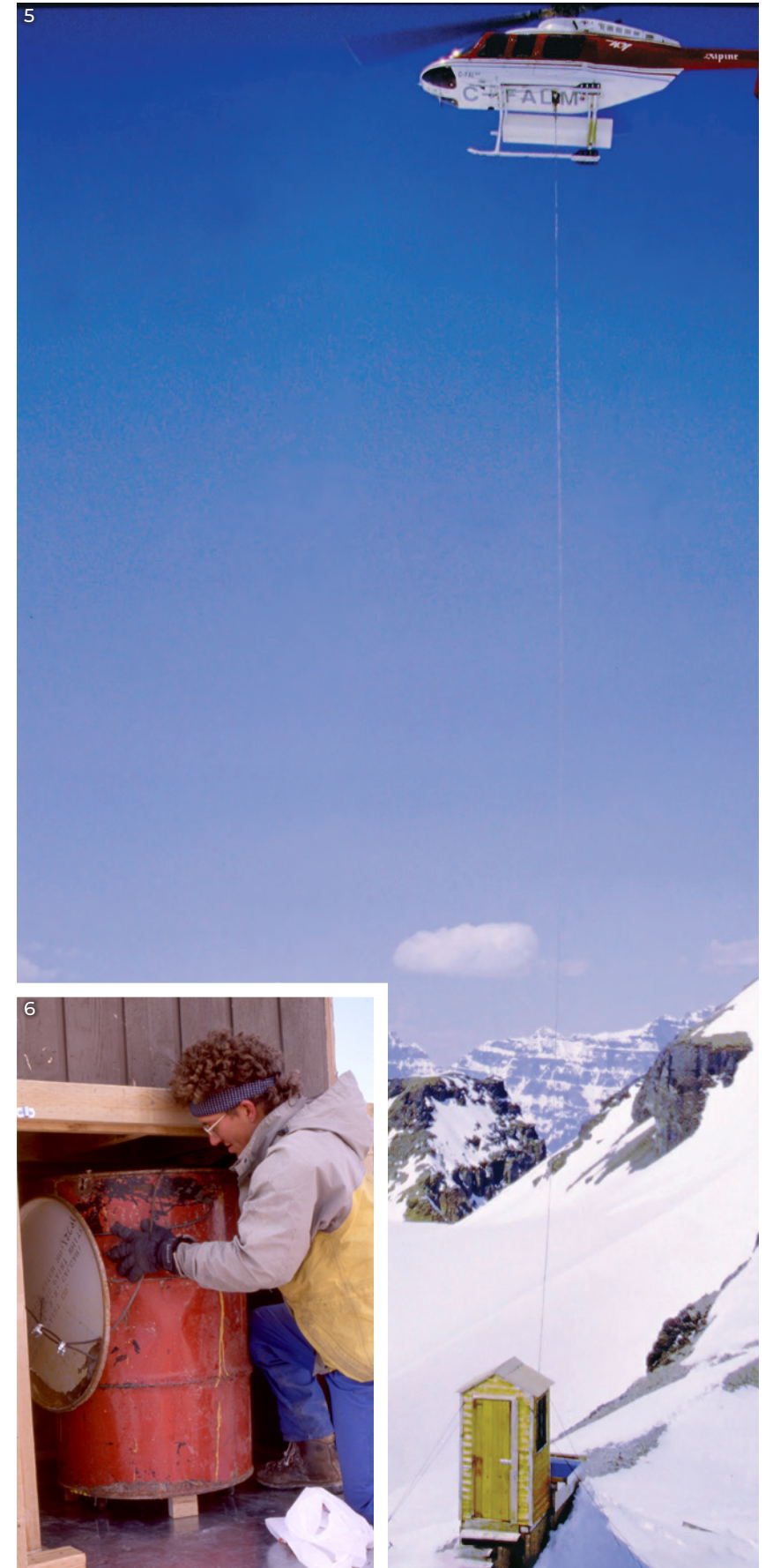
hut, and with Dan, who knew them all, identified flowers. The girls even built a lemonade stand in front of the hut and attempted to sell a cool drink to the hikers passing by.

Another hut they all loved was the Elizabeth Parker Hut at Lake O'Hara. With several other families, the Verralls would go to the hut for an annual clean-up work party at Thanksgiving. There always seemed time to do a hike while they scrubbed the hut into top shape. Then they sat down to a big turkey dinner at the end of the day.

Dan was not the first to serve as the Facilities Maintenance Manager. A fellow by the name of Nil Lauzon had done the job for a short period before Dan. But before Nil, hut maintenance had been done entirely by club volunteers.

When Dan took over, the management of alpine huts was entering a new phase of environmental awareness, and the impact of these huts on the delicate alpine environment became a key consideration. Parks Canada had already begun flying out the human waste from the Wapta huts for a few years, and when the club built the Bow Hut, it was mandated that they would do the same. The Parks Canada outhouse system was not very efficient, and in the winter time, snow would get into the containment area, so during Dan's first years on the job he would perfect the bucket system. John Harrop, an architect who

- 1: Dan and Val on a hike with Jasmine and Silene.
- 2: Jasmine.
- 3: Dan and Jasmine.
- 4: Dan hiking with Jasmine.
- 5: Long-lining an outhouse barrel at the Neil Colgan Hut. Photo John Harrop
- 6: Rob Kozarchuk wrestles with an outhouse barrel.





Dan Verrall (in blue) consults with Huts Committee Chairman Malcolm "Tabs" Talbot (in red) and Dick Howe (in white). Photo Mike Mortimer.

Dan and Val's new house on 2nd street in Canmore.



served on the huts committee for fifteen years, explained:

"Danny basically got the barrel system to work... they were metal barrels at the time... you couldn't buy tops so he had these plywood tops, that were perfectly cut, and the wire cable went through the side of the barrel, up through the lid, then over the top. And as it was tensioned, the

cable pushed the lid down and kept it tight. It was brilliant."

During these years, the huts moved from using white gas Coleman stoves and lanterns to propane. They also moved from using oil heating stoves to wood burning stoves.

These changes made the huts much cleaner and healthier. With the helicopter, they could fly firewood and propane in and fly the human waste out.

After three years on the job, Dan and the family moved from the Clubhouse into their own house in Canmore, and the Alpine Club office moved into their old apartment. The club was in need of additional office space, and the Clubhouse was the obvious place where they could get this space rent-free.

Val was happy to move. "As things got busier and things got a little more detached it maybe felt

less like our home. Once Danny started working the huts, he was away a lot. So that was hard. He could be away five days or a week at a time. And I worried about him when he was away."

Dan and Val had bought a house in Canmore two years earlier and made the decision to move into it. They had called the Clubhouse home for nine years, so the move was a big change in their lives. "Our good friend, Bev Bendell, helped us to pack up and we had lots of help from our Clubhouse friends to make the move."

Dan served sixteen years as Facilities Maintenance Manager, from 1990 to 2006. During this time, there were many work parties, usually one big one each year and several smaller ones. Dan worked closely with the ACC huts committee, made up of a number of very skilled professionals – Malcolm "Tabs" Talbot was a finishing carpenter, Dick Howe a metal worker, Tim Clinton a set designer, and John Harrop an architect, just to name a few of the many volunteers. They undertook work parties on many of the huts, some several times – Elizabeth Parker, Wheeler, Stanley Mitchell, Abbot, Fay, Sydney Vallance, Peyto, Balfour, and Bow. Dan's role was to acquire all the materials required for the work party, and to be in charge of the logistics of getting it all transported to the hut. Most often this was done by helicopter.

Dan recalled that the renovation of the old Fay Hut was especially rewarding. It had been left by Parks for years to become derelict. After a five-day work party, involving eight or nine people, working with a limited budget, the hut was completely reborn: "You walked into this rat infested place and left with a really useable facility, with new windows, a propane set up for cooking and lighting, a new kitchen, new floor, new roof, everything. It was very rewarding".

Apart from the work parties, Dan and his team made numerous trips to the huts to service them with firewood and propane, and to remove the human waste. John Harrop remembered, "He was

Above: The Rocky Mountain Section work party that renovated the old Fay Hut. (l to r: Peter Fuhrmann, Eric Lomas, Hans Fuhrer, unknown, Dan Verrall, Malcolm Talbot, Lilo Fuhrer, Denis Roy, and sitting Al Jaggi and Etta Prenzel.)

Right: Danny at work in Wheeler Hut. Photo Mike Mortimer





always organized. We would be on a service flight, and he would put me helping sling barrels... and he's got a list of things that he has to check – he's doing inventory of shovels, and he's measuring a window that's broken so he can order the glass..."

Stories abound about Dan on these hut servicing and work parties. Harrop recalled, "One day we were flying firewood to Fairy Meadow Hut, and down by Kinbasket Lake, there is a clear cut where Dan had got permission to do salvage logging for stuff that they didn't take away. There were huge trees, 100 feet long, that for some reason were not deemed commercially valuable. He was incredibly skilful on a chainsaw, and he could look at the tree and cut off the length to optimize the load. He could guesstimate this three-foot diameter log, how much length the helicopter could carry. The pilot would pick it up and radio down the weight, and it would be within 100 pounds of what he thought it would be. Once or twice, it was too heavy, and the thing is half in the air and Dan's cutting three feet off the end of the log."

Al Jaggi remembered a work party with Dan at the Scott Duncan Hut. They all flew in with their skis from the Takakkaw Falls parking lot and for several days did their chores. They even managed to squeeze in a ski ascent of Mount Balfour. Then, when it came time to go, they skied down the Daly Glacier to a small lake, took off their skis and climbed up and over a ridge and descended to the base of Takakkaw Falls. There was no trail and no snow, so they bushwhacked. Then, to the amazement of the watching tourists, they waded the deep and rushing Yoho River.

Lawrence White remembered a trip with Dan in the winter of 2004:

"The Club had been working towards removing the old white gas cooking and lighting fixtures in favour of propane. I was the facilities admin manager at the time and saw this as a good opportunity to visit the Sydney Vallance Hut in the winter, naively perhaps as I wasn't much of a skier back then!"

1: Danny at work. Photo John Harrop

2: Danny driving snowmobile to Elizabeth Parker Hut. Rob Kozarchuk at end of tow rope. Photo Chic Scott

3: Danny at work in Wheeler Hut. Photo Mike Mortimer

4: Danny at work. Photo John Harrop

5: Lawrence White and Dan at Yoho Pass after installing the plaque. Photo Lawrence White

"Dan and his assistant manager of the day, Ryan Mazur as I recall, headed off early from Canmore in the club's old green Chevy van. Dan, of course, was carrying the bulk of the load, including reams and reams of copper line to run throughout the hut. While skinning up the Fryatt Valley is fairly benign, especially with little snow, hauling everything up the final head wall is anything but. After our five-hour approach, I was pretty wiped, but we had work to do and only one overnight to do it. Within a few hours of pulling the line and setting the brackets around the hut that would hold it, Dan realized he was missing some key parts, propane couplings, I believe. In any case, rather than writing the trip off, Dan elected to ski back out that night by headlamp! He went all the way to Jasper so as to get the necessary parts first thing in the morning. Ryan and I were stunned. Dan returned mid-morning the next day, finished the job, and we all headed out again. It was incredible to me this level of commitment and fitness."

White described another example of Dan's endurance near the end of his career. "In the summer of 2005, with the approval of Parks Canada, the Alpine Club had placed a commemorative cairn at Yoho Pass to mark the upcoming

"Danny is even keeled and has such a positive attitude. 'Of course it will work out.'"

—Heather Dempsey



ACC centennial in 2006; little Yoho being where we had the very first General Mountaineering Camp in 1906. The stones had all been taken up by helicopter and volunteer masons under Dan's guidance constructed it. However, the large cast iron plaque that would be central to the piece had been held up pending Parks Canada approvals, design, language, and bilingualism; remember, this installation was going to be permanent and had to be right. Eventually the plaque arrived late fall, and rather than charter a helicopter for one item, albeit a 30kg item, Dan elected to hike it up to Yoho Pass on his back. I carried the adhesive glue. He really is a modern day Lawrence Grassi."

Over the years, Dan worked with many volunteers and maintenance staff including a young man from Quebec by the name of Claude Lauzon. Claude had come west to ski and was using the Clubhouse as a base. He had skills, so in exchange for free accommodation, Dan put him to work.

Above: Dan, Val and the girls on Cape Breton Island.

Left: The extended Verrall family (l to r: Val's mom Dorothy and dad Stan, Dan and Val, Dan's step-mother Shahla and his father Peter. Silene, Jasmine and dog Misty in front)

Claude worked very hard, and eventually Dan took him on as his assistant. Claude recently remembered that Dan was happy, tough, and always fun to work with. There were many other young guys who worked with Dan during this time, and they all formed a special bond with him, who was like a father figure to them. Jasmine observed, "We've always had adopted brothers."

And Dan was great with volunteers. With his big smile and his soft, encouraging way, he got the best out of people.

People loved to work with Dan on these work parties. He had learned early on, "You can get a lot done in a very short period of time with hard working people." On these work parties, Dan was the one paid employee, but as John Harrop pointed out, "Never was there conflict with his volunteers. Dan made sure that he worked two hours longer than everybody else."

Dan was always very thrifty. Nancy Hansen, who worked with Dan for many years admitted, "This caused some angst with the board members... they just wanted him to spend more money, but I appreciated it. He always did his best to save money where he could. I appreciated it because I was responsible for all the finances of the huts. He was really clever with how he arranged the helicopter flights, and the order of renovations, prioritizing what really needed to be done and when. I thought that he was really good at his job and he loved his job."

Through all of this time working for the ACC, Dan had lots of time for his family. They travelled to the Yukon one year, and then down to Moab in Utah another. One year, Dan took the summer off, leaving Claude in charge, and the family all piled into a little Nissan car and drove across Canada to Cape Breton Island, camping along the way. Jasmine and Silene recalled that "it was a memorable trip... Dad made some really gourmet camp meals."

According to John Harrop, "As time went on



and his family grew up, Dan learned that he could sometimes step back from the work parties and did not have to be there for two weeks." Dan resigned from his position as Facilities Maintenance Manager in 2006. He felt that he had to devote more time and energy to the new lodge that he and his friend, Chris Espinel, had built high in the Rockies. It had been twenty-two years since he had been hired to manage the Clubhouse and sixteen years taking care of the huts. Danny had been with the ACC for so long that he had given it continuity, and he had played a big role in developing a team to service the huts. These huts have now made The Alpine Club of Canada financially viable, and a lot of this is due to Danny's hard work. According to Harrop, "Dan added huge value to the club."

Recently Bruce Keith, who was Executive Director of the ACC for many years, wrote, "The positive reputation of the club's Canmore Clubhouse and backcountry hut facilities in Alberta and B.C. are in large measure due to Dan's hard work and dedicated commitment to the club and its positive presence in the mountains he loves so much."

When Dan retired he wrote, "I could fill up pages with the names of many people who have made my career with this club such a remarkable one for me. Most of this time I have had the great pleasure to work in a cheerful, positive, and supportive environment. I have felt the rewards of working hard and a great sense of accomplishment from the many tasks that I have undertaken. This has been heightened by working along with the great people who have made up the ever changing staff of the ACC. My co-workers have been a truly awesome group to be with over the years."

An exhausted team of volunteers after a hard day of work at the Fairy Meadow Hut. (l to r: Dave Hough, Dan Verrall, Malcolm Talbot, Tim Clinton, Michel Dupuis, unknown, Doug Sammons and Mike Mortimer.) Photo Mike Mortimer.

"Danny is so convivial, he brings people together."

-Keith Webb and Heather Dempsey)

Talus Lodge



In the early 2000s, Dan had a chance to create a backcountry lodge of his own, and teaming up with his long-time friend, Chris Espinel, he built Talus Lodge. Located in a high alpine meadow along the Continental Divide, the lodge is in great hiking and skiing country, and has a fabulous view of Mount Assiniboine about twenty-five kilometres to the north.



Chris and Dan complemented each other well. Chris, a forester with thirty years of experience with the B.C. government, handled the permitting process, and Dan, with all his years taking care of the ACC huts, took care of the design and construction of the lodge.

The lodge was built in the summer of 2003, and Dan took a leave of absence from his duties at the ACC to work on the project. There were lots of volunteers who contributed their time and energy – Chris would bring his friends in from Invermere, and Dan would bring his friends in from Canmore.

Dan's friend Keith Webb described the building process:

Above: Talus Lodge with Mount Assiniboine in the background. Photo Dan Verrall.

Left: In 2005 Dan invited a group of artists to his newly constructed Talus Lodge. In this painting by Canmore artist Patti Dymont, Dan is trying his hand at painting, sitting beside artist Alice Saltiel-Marshall.

“Dan figured out a route to get a semi-trailer as close as you could to Talus Lodge, driving up the Cross and Mitchell Rivers. Then he ordered his loads for the semi so that the lightest loads were on the top. The helicopter would fly in full of fuel and each load was designed to be exactly... Danny knew exactly what he was doing and had calculated the fuel for the helicopter and the load. The pilot was doing eight-nine minute turnarounds, which was extremely fast, and Danny figured out a landing that allowed the pilot to come in, pick up the load, then descend to make a loop with the load, maximum speed and maximum efficiency... and at Talus, he's landing the loads precisely around the building site, so that there would be hardly any moving of the material. Dan had this unbelievable ability to visualize all of this in advance.

“He put up the frame with no roof then he drew

in where the windows would be, then he found windows in Canmore that were used and were really cheap from a building that he scavenged. Then he put the windows in...

“He was an absolute genius.”

But creating the lodge was just part of the project – operating it profitably would not be as simple. So in 2006, Dan stepped down from his job as Facilities Maintenance Manager at the ACC to be able to contribute more to the operation of Talus Lodge. The ACC, by then, had twenty-four huts and the job had grown. Dan confessed, “The Alpine Club had got so busy... it was a bit of a lifestyle decision too... it was time for a younger person who had that kind of energy...” But despite Dan's efforts and those of Chris, the partnership did not survive, and Dan sold his share to Chris in 2011. It was a very difficult time for Dan.

Dan hard at work building Talus Lodge.



Dan Is Called Back – The General Mountaineering Camp



When asked what he has been doing since retiring from the ACC in 2006, Dan jokingly answers: “Working for the ACC!”

In 2011, the club called upon Dan to organize and manage the General Mountaineering Camp (or GMC). This camp was the first event that the

club organized when it was formed in 1906, and it has been held almost every year since then. The camp is a big deal for the club. It is held each year in some remote part of the western mountains and runs for six weeks. Bringing together all the materials, food, and personnel in a wild and hostile environment is a big job. Brad Harrison had been organizing and managing the camp since the mid-eighties, but when he stepped back from the job in 2011, the club needed a replacement. They called on Dan.

For over four years, Dan did the job. He stepped in to assist Brad’s crew for the Tsar-Somervell camp in the Clemenceau area of the Rockies in 2011, and took over the organizational role from Brad for the Mount Sir Sandford camp in the northern Selkirks in 2012, the camp at



Above: Val and Dan at the Scotch Peaks GMC in 2013.
Left: The Alpine Club’s GMC at Mount Sir Sandford in 2012. Photo Zac Robinson.



Scotch Peaks in the Purcells in 2013, the camp at Frenchman’s Cap in the Monashees in 2014, and finally the camp at the Stockdale Group in the Purcells in 2015. All these camps ran well and were great successes.

Dan explained, “My involvement was focused on the physical setting up and taking down of the camp, and the planning of future years GMC sites with the GMC committee and staff. The on-site operation of the camps was mainly Alison Dakin’s role. Wayne Sobol also became quite involved in this as well.

“Chucky Gerrard started as part of the set up crew, but his skills and personality made him the ideal choice of a person to whom I would transfer my responsibilities to. He soon took over the weekly duties of operating the camp, which left me with the set-up and tear-down duties. When I retired for the second time, Chucky took over my role, and he still, very ably, fulfills this role today!

“I had an amazing experience with the GMC. Our always fantastic crew, the incredible locations that we worked in, and the unique experience

of actually searching out these locations in a helicopter!

“Each summer, we built a temporary summer village inhabited by close to fifty people each week, in a different and remote location every year. We started out and left the sites in more or less pristine condition after six weeks of intensive use – that was our goal.”



Above: The Alpine Club’s GMC at Frenchman’s Cap in 2014. Photo Zac Robinson.
Right: The Alpine Club’s GMC at Tsar-Somervell in 2011. Photo Zac Robinson

Danny Is Called Back, Again — Shadow Lake Lodge



Shadow Lake Lodge.
Photo Zac Bolan

In 2019, just before COVID took the world in its grasp, The Alpine Club of Canada bought Shadow Lake Lodge, in the Rocky Mountains, about twenty-five kilometres west of Banff.

Located twelve kilometres from the highway, it is a full-service lodge, with a central dining cabin and a dozen smaller cabins, each sleeping four.

Running a lodge is a very complex operation and since the ACC huts are all self-service, the club had little experience with this sort of thing. Once again, they called on Danny to help save the day.

Dan agreed to become involved as the interim maintenance manager, and so set out to learn as much as possible about the operation of the lodge from the previous owners, Alison Brewster and Brian Nieuhaus. In 1990, Brian and Alison had obtained Parks approval to develop the lodge from the single log cabin built by the CPR in 1928 into

the complex of eighteen structures that comprise the lodge today. Brian established a propane system that supplied fuel for heating, cooking, and running hot water; a sizeable electrical system with a mixture of solar, small hydro, and diesel generator inputs; a water system that was gravity fed in the summer and hauled water in the winter; systems for providing potable water and waste water treatment; a guest washhouse with hot and cold running water, showers and a sauna to boot. There were a lot of things to get a handle on.

The operation of Shadow Lake Lodge has been a new challenge for the ACC. Originally, the decision was made to run it as a separate entity, and not to use the existing facilities maintenance staff. In the beginning, Dan was involved pretty significantly, but this has gradually changed over the years.

With the involvement of Bill Cardinal and Claude Durupt, who lead the ACC maintenance crew, and Chucky Gerrard who helped for a period of time, and now Tom Fransham, the ACC's engineer-on-call, Shadow Lake Lodge is in very good hands. Dan has been able to step back once again and make guest appearances four times a year to help the lodge staff, led by managers Alex Greenwood and Mitch McNeil, to open up for the operation seasons and close down after the seasons are ended.

The perfect retirement job!

Dan the master chef
whips up a meal at
Shadow Lake Lodge.



Rocky Mountain Section Member

As well as being an employee of The Alpine Club of Canada, Dan was also an active member of the club, putting a great deal of energy into the Rocky Mountain Section (RMS).

Dan served for many years as the trips co-ordinator, organizing a schedule of activities for members, both summer and winter. And, of course, he personally led many of these trips himself. During the years when he and Val served as Clubhouse custodians, Dan handled the equipment rental program for the Rocky Mountain Section. Avalanche beacons, probes and shovels, ice axes and crampons were purchased by the section, then rented out at a nominal fee to club members. Dan also served for one year as chairman of the Rocky Mountain Section, but due to his employment with the club, and the fact that the chairmen of the sections sat on the ACC board of directors, it was perceived that there might be a conflict of interest, and he stepped down.

People like Dan, Bev Bendell, and Eric and Dorle Lomas gave the Rocky Mountain Section a continuity for many years. Rod Plasman, another dedicated RMS member, wrote, "Dan was an employee of the ACC but was also a very active volunteer for the Rocky Mountain Section. He was the organizer behind the section work party that built the ACC trail up Grotto Mountain in Canmore. This trail is now very popular with all mountain enthusiasts. Of all the things that Dan has done for the ACC, what sticks most in my mind is Dan's smile. No matter what was going on, Dan always had a smile on his face. Dan is the epitome of what an ACC member should be."



- 1: Dan is a dedicated ACC member and has led many trips for the Rocky Mountain Section.
- 2: Dan and his dog Misty.
- 3: Jasmine and Silene on a mountain top.
- 4: Val and Dan at Christmas dinner. Photo Jim and Patsy Murphy.
- 5: Patsy and Jim Murphy help Dan carve the Christmas turkey.



Conclusion

Resourceful, dedicated, kind, generous, friendly, genuine, smart, sweet and versatile, Dan is a creative problem solver and has an amazing ability to work with people and bring out the best in them. To some he has a zen-like presence – there is no pretence; he really is that nice. Even when the going gets difficult, he is always smiling. In short, he is a remarkable man.



Dan's wife Val recently said, "When I met Danny, I saw the goodness in him. He was a very gentle and kind person, who would never intentionally hurt anyone. He loves to help people, and he is always happiest when he is doing something for other people."

For forty years now, Dan and Val's partnership has worked well. They have raised their family, and the girls are off on their own. And the girls are adventurous like Dan.

Jasmine studied kinesiology at the University of Calgary then went off to South America. For eight seasons, she worked for Back Roads in France. She recently recalled, "I really think that growing up in a hostel made back packing really easy."

After high school, Silene travelled for a few years then studied interior architectural design at Pacific Design Academy in Victoria, B.C., a profession that she now works at. Both girls still live in Canmore.

Jasmine is with partner Mitch Sharpe, who is the head mechanic for Back Roads, Canada. Silene is married to Sacha Hockenhull, an adventure guide, and they have a three-year old daughter Norah. Silene says that "Dan's a great grandfather. He's very playful and silly. At Dan and Val's home there is this under-stair cabinet that we used to play in as kids, and when Norah came along Dan got all excited and renovated it, painted the inside and made a cute little light switch and drawing board. It is very small and we found him numerous times in there with her, playing, and the door would be closed."

After a long and busy career, Dan and Val

now travel and do lots of family things. But Dan still gets called in by the Alpine Club to answer questions about the huts and the Clubhouse and to troubleshoot at Shadow Lake Lodge. Dan has been, and still is, an essential part of the organization, and it is a fitting tribute that he is the Patron of the 2023 Mountain Guides Ball. Both Jasmine and Silene agree, "We're super proud of him. He was a great dad."

Left: Dan and Val all dressed up and going out to the Mountain Guides Ball.

Below: Dan, Val and Norah. Photo Silene Verrall.

Top right: Jasmine and Mitch Sharpe. Photo Silene Verrall

Bottom right: Silene, Sacha Hockenhull and their daughter Norah. Photo Silene Verrall





Dan Verrall skiing in Chickadee Valley. Photo Chic Scott

The Alpine Club of Canada and the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides are immensely pleased to honour Dan Verrall as the Patron of the 32nd annual Mountain Guides Ball.

Humble, loyal, hard working, resourceful, dedicated, kind, generous, friendly, genuine, smart, sweet and versatile — Dan Verrall is all of these. Even when the going gets tough he is always smiling. Dan has served The Alpine Club of Canada as an employee since the early 1980s and has given continuity to the management of the club. With his big smile and his friendly manner he has made many friends and has contributed to the Alpine Clubs' wonderful legacy. He is the epitome of what an ACC member should be. The very deserving Patron of the 2023 Mountain Guides Ball, this book celebrates his life and his many contributions to the mountain community.



For further information regarding the Summit Series of mountaineering biographies, please contact the National Office of The Alpine Club of Canada.



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