

SNOW REPORT

HOTHAM ... 23cm

Lifts: 3/13

Conditions: Big D, Summit trainer and Summit quad are open, the first time the resort has offered skiing and boarding on the first day of the season since 2000. Lift tickets will be reduced.

Inside run: Opening-weekend ball Velvet and Vodka. Dinner Plain is celebrating its 21st birthday at the DP hotel tomorrow night. DJ Eddy will be at the General Store hotel on Sunday night.

MT BULLER ... 25cm

Lifts: 5/25

Conditions: Free skiing and boarding on Bourke St and Baldy. Summit and Kophlers will be open with reduced prices.

Inside run: Deputy Premier John Thwaites will officially open the season. Street party starts at 4pm tomorrow with a fireworks and light show after sunset. Winter Olympics gold medallist Steven Bradbury will MC the Black Cockatoo Ball on Sunday night.

FALLS CREEK ... 28cm

Lifts: 4/14

Conditions: Gully and Falls Express are open for sightseeing rides. Boardwalk and Mousetrap is open for skiing and boarding. Towers, for intermediate riders, is being assessed. More than 10km of cross-country trails are groomed, including Nordic Bowl, McKay Loop and High Plains road to Langfords gap.

Inside run: Film Fest @ Falls is in its fourth year, with a \$30,000 prize pool in the short-film competition. Highlight will be an anniversary screening of *Dogs in Space*. Special guest Richard Lowenstein will introduce the film. Funk band Bomba will be at the Man Hotel tonight and Sunday night.

MT BAW BAW ... 1cm

Lifts: 0/7

Conditions: Snow about the higher elevations for sightseeing and snowplay.

Inside run: Cocktails, games for the kids, dinners, barbecues and a live band tomorrow night.

LAKE MOUNTAIN ... 0cm

Conditions: No snow.

Inside run: Drop of Scotch two-piece acoustic band will play at day visitor centre tomorrow. Retail and bistro open daily. \$2 parking fee until further snow.

MT BUFFALO ... 1cm

Patchy sightseeing and snowplay. Buffalo officially opens on June 30. After the bushfires that destroyed Cresta Lodge there will be no downhill skiing and boarding. There are toilets and a shelter at Cresta, where tobogganing is on offer. Cross-country skiing will be available as in previous years. Dingo Dell cafe will be open for food, coffee, toboggan and snow-gear hire. The Dingo Dell tube park will operate, depending snow conditions.

For 24-hour snow, road, weather and event information, ph: 1902 240 523 (55c a min incl GST) or go to www.vicsnowreport.com.au and subscribe to the Victorian Snow Report for free daily email updates.



Diff'rent slopes

The rivalry is white hot between the Aussie and Kiwi skifields, writes **Rachael Oakes-Ash**

ASK a Kiwi about skiing in Oz and they'll laugh from the belly.

One look at the big mountain peaks of New Zealand and Australians know why.

But though 50,000 Aussies cross the Tasman to schuss the slopes, few New Zealanders come our way.

Those Kiwis haven't done their figures. Australia has the longest ski run of the two countries — 5.9km at Thredbo in New South Wales. It also has the largest commercial ski area, Perisher Blue's 1245ha across seven peaks.

When it comes to vertical, however, the Kiwis have us beaten.

Turoa's 722m of vertical on Mt Ruapehu in the North Island beats our best, Thredbo's 672m.

And Mt Hutt (683m) and Treble Cone (700m) in the South Island still beat Australia on vertical.

The average hectares of skiable terrain in a ski area is a different story.

At New Zealand's top seven commercial fields' — Treble Cone, the Remarkables, Coronet Peak, Mt Hutt, Whakapapa, Turoa and Cardrona — skiable areas average 397ha. But Australia's top five — Thredbo, Perisher, Hotham, Falls and Mt Buller — average 540.

The average Australian ski area is 26 per cent larger than the average Kiwi ski area.

You can spout figures back and forth across the Tasman, but the ski experience speaks to individuals.

Those who prefer European-style skiing choose Australian fields for their mountain villages. All the main ski fields offer ski-in, ski-out access to ski runs from accommodation and bars.

Falls Creek, possibly the prettiest ski village in either country, is



Blue ski mine: (above) being above the treeline means some amazing views from the Remarkables.

Lovely descent: (left) a perfect corduroy-groomed run at Falls Creek rates among the prettiest of any of the resorts.

pedestrian-only and Mt Hotham village is on top of the mountain. The first run down is to get to the first chairlift.

Visitors to Queenstown and Wanaka in New Zealand's South Island are surprised to find their ski area of choice is 25 minutes to more than an hour's drive away.

A drive on precarious unsealed mountain roads (except Coronet Peak) is not for the fainthearted. The payback is that guests in both places have a choice of four or more skifields each morning.

For apres ski lovers, Queenstown is the clear winner. It has 120 licensed establishments in a square kilometre and many are open until dawn. Other ski towns need not apply.

Skiing through trees is part of the Aussie experience, but in New Zealand the runs are above the treeline.

Gourmet foodies might prefer

Australia, where award-winning dining exists on the runs and in the villages. In New Zealand, it's best to pack your own lunch.

But Treble Cone does deserve applause for its catering, with daily specials, fresh produce and even gluten-free options.

FOR intermediate skiers, the skiing is similar in both countries. Thredbo and Hotham-lovers argue the pitch of Funnel Web and Mary's Slide is steeper than Whakapapa Pinnacles, the Remarkables' Finger Chutes and Treble Cone's Motatapu Chutes, but they are not groomed — if you can ski one you can ski them all.

New Zealand has more challenging off piste, accessed by traverse or hike from the commercial ski boundaries.

If you don't want to walk, there's heli skiing. The Southern Alps of

New Zealand extend for 550km and are accessible by chopper. You don't have to be an extreme skier to heli ski, either.

Then there's glacial skiing, cat skiing and the quirky club fields of New Zealand, where guests are given chores and everyone pitches in when the last rope tow closes for the day.

A day-lift pass in Australia ranges from \$90 at Hotham and Falls and \$95 at Perisher. In New Zealand it starts at \$71 (\$NZ80) at Mt Ruapehu to \$88 (\$NZ99) at Treble Cone.

Australia's response? Andrea Binning, world champion extreme free skier, is a Hotham devotee.

Mt Buller is favoured by our Winter Olympic medallists.

And the first non-European to win an FIS World Cup was an Australian, Malcolm Milne in 1969.

Enough said.