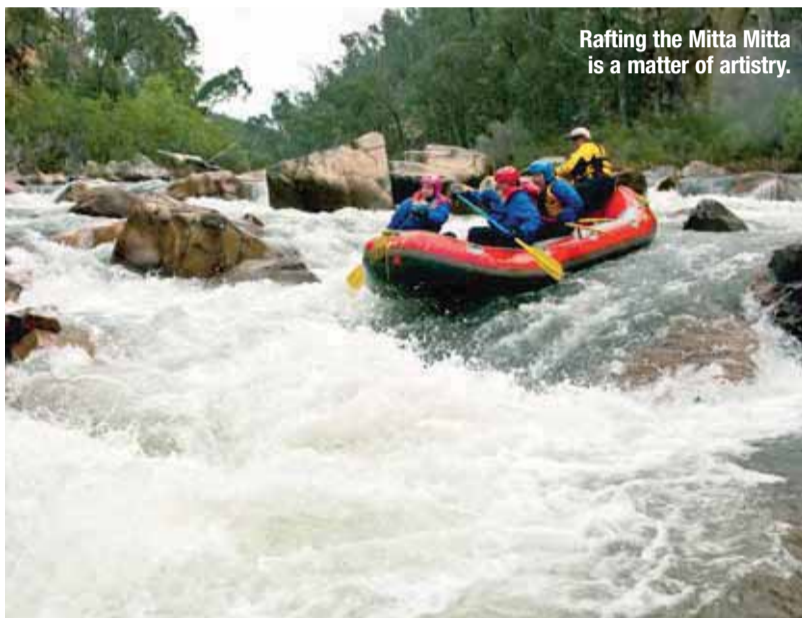


After Hours

The sled dogs are born to run.



Knowing all the dogs by name and face is crucial to keeping them under control.



Rafting the Mitta Mitta is a matter of artistry.

ALPINE ADVENTURE

Forget the skis — Victoria's High Country is an outdoor adventure playground.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY ANDREW HARRIS

FOR a few minutes before 7am, Mount Buffalo glowed pink opposite the five elegant Buckland Studio Retreats, each like a private island in a sea of bushland calm. We viewed the mountain in the Victorian High Country from a distance over a breakfast of free-range eggs and fortifying coffee at the exclusive on-site cafe, in anticipation of getting a whole lot closer to the sheer rockface.

A few hours later, I'm stepping backwards off the edge of Buffalo, a 30m drop to the next ledge. All that's between me and doom is a harness and some ropes arranged by a disarmingly young guide.

I've not abseiled before today, and though by rights I should be afraid, a gentle snow is falling, the view from the mountain stretches for kilometres, and I couldn't be more relaxed. Just as well, because the whole weekend isn't going to be quite as chilled.

"Get ready to forward paddle . . . Forward paddle! One, two, three, stop," yells Linton, our rafting guide. We don't catch the last word. "Stop! STOP!" And we obey,

allowing our bright orange inflatable raft to swiftly sidle by a rock, and into the next patch of rapid.

Rafting the Mitta Mitta River, tucked away in the north-eastern-most patch of north-eastern Victoria, is a matter of artistry. One stroke too many and the work is ruined.

Linton likens rafting to ballet — and when I picture what our movements look like from above, I can see why. We're pirouetting from rock to rock, nimbly dancing from rock chute to rock chute, and

leaping over each rapid. Actually, with four novices aboard, it's probably significantly less graceful.

Skill level, mind you, is immaterial. With a guide as skilled as Linton, any obedient wannabe can get a piece of the action.

Any half-fit human can make the trip, despite the fact that the full-day trip (including a hot soupy lunch among some of the most pristine wilderness in the state) requires the negotiation of rapids ominously named 'Graveyard' and 'Minefield', which are graded

as high as four, with six being the highest grade.

You might even fall in love with the sport — something I unashamedly have done.

Our next adventure is dog sledding. We find our sled-dogs-to-be — yowling, howling, barking and carrying on — on the outskirts of the Dinner Plain village. They're all itching to be picked for our late-afternoon circuit, despite the hard weekend's racing they've just done. According to our driver and navigator Brett, the dogs don't know when to stop running.

Brett knows every one of his dogs by face and name. It's crucial to keeping control over the pack. He's like the team captain, shouting instructions at his troupe, keeping them focused — the dogs might be born to run, to borrow from Springsteen, but they're rather easily distracted by other free-roaming dogs resting from the weekend's racing, causing the sled to veer wildly.

Still, it's all perfectly safe. With reasonable snow cover, the dogs will power you around a 2km circuit under the watchful eye of an overseer on a snowmobile.

I take the highest seat at the back of the sled — the middle passenger reclines between my legs, and the front passenger lies almost flat between the middle set of legs.

Speaking of legs, all those canine limbs must make for quite some thrust. And they do. On Brett's shout of 'Gee!' (commands are in the Inuit language to honour the sport's origins), there's a strong yank and we're off, yowling into the sunset.

The writer was a guest of Tourism Victoria and the tour operators involved.

FACTFILE

Getting there: Mount Buffalo is about four hours' drive from Melbourne, along the Hume Highway, Snow Road and Great Alpine Road.

Mount Buffalo:

The Buckland Studio Retreat is a set of five romantic, standalone cabins with all the trimmings: 0419 133 318, www.thebuckland.com.au

Villa Gusto is a reservation-only, set-menu extravaganza in Australia's only Italian villa, right near the Buckland: www.villagusto.com.au

Omeo:

Rafting Australia runs the Mitta Mitta River rafting out of Omeo, and can arrange abseiling, caving and rock climbing on Mount

Beauty: www.raftingaustralia.com
Snug as a Bug offers homely country accommodation in Omeo: www.motelomeo.com.au

Mesley's Restaurant is Omeo's excellent fine-dining destination: www.omeocolonial.com.au/mesleys.htm

The Albion Hotel at Swifts Creek is a country pub with a gourmet twist, 30 minutes from Omeo: albionhotelswiftscreek.com.au

Dinner Plain:

For more info on Australian Sled Dog Tours go to: www.sleddogtours.com.au
Rundells Alpine Retreat offers cosy, lodge-type accommodation in Dinner Plains: www.rundells.com.au



BY DR JIM LEAVESLEY

19 March 1821

ON this day one of the 19th century's most colourful characters was born. He was a soldier, an explorer, a linguist (he spoke 25 languages), interested in deviant sexual behaviour and a some-time physician. He never qualified as the latter, but by dint of carefully observing medical practices, coupled with the nerve to try them, he was a sought-after medical worker.

Sent down from the University of Oxford for indiscipline, he joined the army, but after writing about the homosexual brothels of Karachi, he resigned his commission in anticipation of dismissal.

In subsequent wanderings he practised medicine with success and relish and dabbled in mesmerism in Cairo.

He kept notes all his life, especially of sexual practices, but on his death his religious wife burned his collection.

20 March 1912

THIS doctor was born on this day in 1912, in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He studied medicine at the University of Virginia, before entering the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, qualifying in 1937. A bright student, he then moved to Harvard to work with Dr Fuller Albright.

He served in the American armed forces from 1943 to 1946, returning to Baltimore and becoming associate professor of medicine in 1966, with a special interest in rheumatology and endocrinology.

It is his 1942 paper for which he is best remembered. He put his name to a syndrome limited to males and characterised by hypogonadism, gynecomastia, increased excretion of follicle stimulating hormone, a lanky build and mild mental retardation. He established that the disorder is the consequence of one or more supernumerary chromosomes.

Answers

*Sir Richard Burton
Dr Harry Kilmelfer*

Wine

Raise your glasses

More than merely a vessel, consider an instrument for the enhancement of your favourite wine.

WE all know the potential of labels to influence our enjoyment of wine. It's as potent and real as the placebo factor is in medicine. But while labels can play tricks on our perceptions, there is another factor more integral to the wine experience — it is, of course, the vessel we choose to drink it from.

Until the mid 20th century, it was as though the glasses were more significant than the wine they contained. European nobility drank wine in ornate glassware blown in Venice or Bohemia. Even mass-produced wine glasses tended to have coloured stems, faceted bowls and etched embellishments.

Enter Claus Riedel, a Bohemian glassmaker and passionate wine lover who noticed wines tasted better from some glasses than others. Prompted by a series of unforgettable French vintages,

Riedel designed a glass perfectly proportioned to bring out the full character of the wine — the iconic Burgundy Grand Cru glass.

Unveiled at the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels, this pure crystal glass was devoid of all ornamentation and colour. It had a flat disk at its base and a slender stem, supporting a thin-walled bowl

inflated to bursting point. It was as a revelation.

Never before had a wine glass retreated to a supporting role and shown such respect to its contents. The design world was in raptures and Riedel was showered with awards. The hand-blown Pokal Hoch, as it was known (and which held 1100mL of wine), took pride of place at

New York's Museum of Modern Art.

While sceptics muttered about 'goldfish bowls', the new glasses simply obeyed a maxim of wine appreciation: big wines deserve big glasses. Riedel spent the next decade experimenting with the size and shape of the bowl, how it controls the release of a wine's aroma, and the impact it has on tongue and palate. In 1973 he unveiled his legendary Sommelier series — a Bordeaux, Burgundy, rosé and white wine



DR PETER HAY

glasses — all hand-blown and still available.

Good glasses do make that much of a difference in enhancing a wine's attributes, though the wine itself needs to be of a superior quality to adequately appreciate what all the fuss is about.

Riedel's son, Georg, now runs the Riedel empire (he calls his glasses 'instruments for the enhancement of wine'). Georg's son Maximilian has designed the O-Riedel glasses, which are stemless and look

more like water glasses. I don't fancy them. To me the stem is as functional as it is aesthetic.

What I won't quibble with is Riedel's philosophy on maximising the experience of wine: "It is very important to see and feel the balance and fineness of the glass. You feel with your hands and lips. The effect of the glass on the wine is as powerful as seeing the label on the bottle." Salute. ●

Dr Hay is a GP in Sydney. He can be contacted at pwhay@chmc.com.au

> wines of the week

★ STAR RECOMMENDATION

1. 01 Brand's Laira Eric's Blend (RRP\$74.99) Named in honour of the first patron of Coonawarra and early custodian of this iconic vineyard comes a fabulous blend of cabernet, shiraz and merlot. Velvety tannins and deft use of oak have combined to produce a beautifully structured wine with intensely concentrated fruit flavours. **91/100**



2. 09 Tyrrells Lost Block Semillon (RRP\$18.99) If you have tried and dismissed young Hunter Semillons due to their lack of up-front character, try this fruit-laden example. It also has a classic rounded palate and generous acidity. A fabulous food wine that can also be happily drunk on its own. **89/100**



3. Freeman Fortuna 2008 (RRP\$25) This is an unconventional white blend of pinot gris, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay riesling and a dash of an obscure varietal called Aleatico. The result is a very textured, aromatic wine with the potential to age gracefully. **89/100**



4. 09 Climbing Sauvignon Blanc (RRP\$21.99) This classy, well-proportioned example from a high altitude, cool climate region is worth a try. It hails from Orange, whose vinous reputation is burgeoning with delicious fruit-driven wines like this, with lively acidity and a textured palate. **89/100**

