

# 40 years and no plans to stop

By ALEX CRAIG

OUTDOOR school recently took the opportunity to acknowledge one of its long-serving teaching staff, Russell Bellingham, who has recently arrived at his 40th year in the teaching profession.

Coming from a farming background in Gippsland, Mr Bellingham qualified to teach geography and history and had his first experience as a PE teacher while working at Red Cliffs near Mildura.

While he was working at a holiday job as a ranger at Wilson's Promontory, he heard of a school camp near the foot of Mt Buller and applied to work there.

"I spent three years living in the Mansfield area and liked it very much," Mr Bellingham said.

"Then in 1981 I got a full-time relieving position with six months at Bogong and six months at Rubicon school camps.

"I remember it well because it was the last really big snow season: only the tip of Wallace's Hut could be seen through the snow."

After a year's leave without pay spent at a winery near Mildura and milking on the family farm, he fi-



**MILESTONE:** Teacher Russell Bellingham was congratulated for his long service by Outdoor School principal Tony Keeble and his wife Anne Bellingham.

nally got full-time work at Bogong school camp, where he has been ever since.

Mr Bellingham said that he prefers the part of education where people get outside the normal school environment.

"I like to see kids striving to be the best they can, which is something we try to encourage," he said.

"The Outdoor School runs two very distinct programs, the summer program and the snow program, and enjoyment of skiing

is a great part of that.

"I prefer to be outdoors and on the move, which is a large part of my job."

Until recently, Mr Bellingham has seen little change in the young people he has taught for so long.

"I believe that kids need meaningful, purposeful and challenging activities," he said.

"Lately kids have seemed to be changing – perhaps due to technology their physical capacity has been reduced a bit, and I think it's

important that they stay connected with the real world.

"On some of our longer trips, such as 5-day bushwalks, some of them struggle, but their ability to cope improves over the period."

Asked about his future in teaching, Mr Bellingham says that he has no immediate plans to retire.

"I don't see retirement, sitting around at home or in coffee shops as a goal, but I suppose I have to be realistic," he said.

"I have no plans to change anything in my life at the moment.

"This area, the High Plains and the skiing, they get into your blood.

"It's my and my family's connection to the area we live in that is an important part of my life."

A spokesperson for the Outdoor School said that over his 40 years teaching Mr Bellingham had spent 32 of these being an integral part of the Bogong School Camp, Bogong Outdoor Education Centre and the Outdoor School community.

"Russ continues to be an exemplary teacher for our school and his vast experience has continued to provide thousands of students (around 10,000) with outstanding learning opportunities."