

A Day's Ski-ing on the Muniong Ranges

The following very interesting description of a day's ski-ing in the Muniong Range, the name given to that portion of the Main Divide running northwards from Mount Kosciuszko, is from the pen of Dr. Schliuk, who made the excursion with Dr. Eric Fisher, and Mr. Richard Allen.

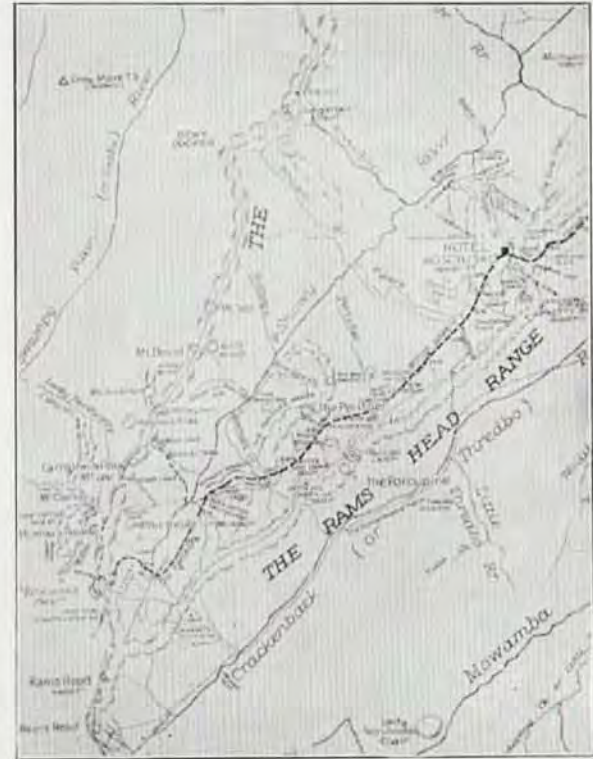
"We spent the night at Betts's Camp, having skied up from the hotel on the previous afternoon. After an early breakfast, all being ready, we fasten on our skis, and with a wave to the camp cook are off for the day. As we have a big day's effort before us, we take the climb to Charlotte's Pass quietly, but, as the heat of the sun has not had time to soften the frozen surface of the snow, travelling is excellent, and each lunge of the skis carries us half a ski's length without effort, just as a boat travels between strokes.

"Arriving at the top of Charlotte's Pass, which separates the Camp Valley from the Snowy River Valley, we behold one of the finest views on the whole of the mountains. On the opposite side of the Snowy Valley, the first ten miles of the Muniong Range forms an amphitheatre of jagged and irregular peaks which pierce the sky line, and appear in the early morning sunlight as if their rose-tinted bases are capped with gold dust, which as the day advances becomes transformed into heaps of sparkling diamonds.

"We propose to travel along the very crest of this ten-mile section from Mount Kosciuszko to Mount Twynam, but before reaching it we must run down into the trough of the Snowy Valley and then climb several thousands of feet on to the Townsend Saddle, at the very base of Kosciuszko itself. The distance across is about six miles, and the climb is long and tedious.

"However, as we reach the crest of the Saddle, we are rewarded by another exceptional scene. Beyond Wilkinson's Valley, which is one of the sources of the Murray River, stands the inspiring and precipitous Mount Townsend, 7,300 feet high, from the southerly aspect, of which the Abbott Range trails away towards the Victorian border, and fades into the densely wooded Murray Valley. Eighty miles further on are seen the snow-capped Victorian Alps, with Buffalo, Hotham, and Feathertop prominently standing out. It is beyond my pen to describe the beauty and grandeur of this view. After taking several photographs, which unfortunately are but poor reflexes of the actual in that they fail to show up the marked contrasts between snow, wood, and sky, we proceed to travel along the crest of the Main Range, with its many humps and elevations which might be likened to the vertebral column, with its numerous spinous processes.

"First we climb over Mount Northcote, and then traverse a tongue of the range on to Mount Clarke, around the steep side of which we had to skirt in order to reach the continuation of the crest of the range as it extends northwards. This is one of the most difficult sections of the Alps to cross, and might better be classed as moun-



MAP SHOWING MOUNT KOSCIUSZKO PLATEAU AS FAR AS WHITE'S RIVER.

taineering rather than ski-ing. The steep, almost perpendicular slope of ice extending from the summit of Mount Clarke to Lake Albina, 1,200 feet below, was covered with a layer of soft snow which allowed us to chop the edge of our skis in sufficiently to obtain a grip, but then only after several hard side stamps of the foot. So difficult was the going that it took us over an hour to do less than 100 yards. Every now and again it looked as if we were going head over heels

into Lake Albina, 1,200 feet below. Once we thought Dr. Fisher had really gone, as both his skis slipped sideways, but fortunately as he fell hard in towards the slope, he dug his right elbow deeply enough into the snow to prevent his sliding down. He was unable to obtain a grip with his skis, and had to hang by his elbow for twenty minutes until we were able to dig a series of steps above him and so render him assistance. This is the only part of the Australian Alps where



LOOKING AT BETTS'S CAMP
FRONT DOOR.

you need an ice axe, and where the skiers should be roped together. It was extremely dangerous, and we were pleased when we had extricated ourselves, and were once more on the crest of the Range.

"We still had many difficulties to contend with, as the wind had blown away all the soft snow and the top was a sea of ice knobs, which necessitated great care to prevent our bindings from being cut to pieces. However, it was worth all the effort and danger to see the Northcote Canyon walled in by cliffs of ice thousands of feet in height,



BETTS'S CAMP.



KNOBS OF ICE ON THE MAIN RANGE.

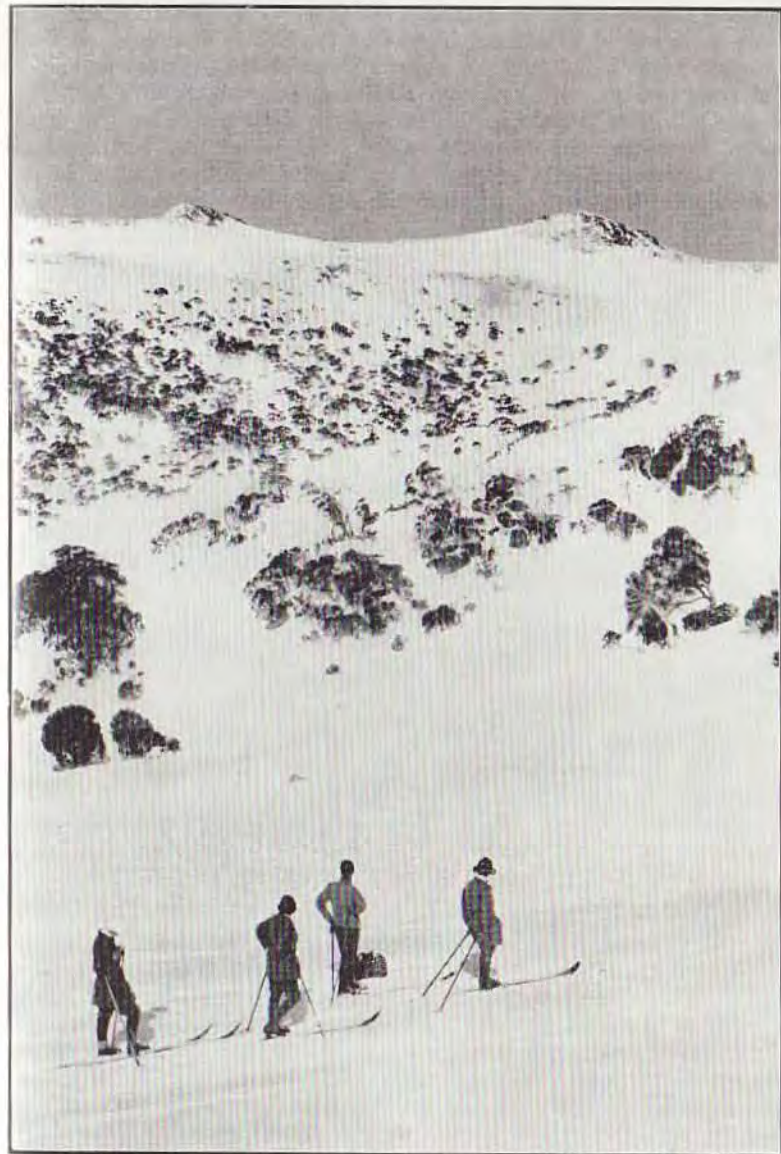
as well as to view the Snowy Valley and the Monaro and Riverina Plains from the top of the Main Divide. We made our way over Mount Lee to Carruthers Peak, down past the Blue Lake, and then up again to the top of Mount Twynam.

"We had travelled nearly ten miles along the crest of the most interesting part of the Muniong Range, and saw views which are beyond my power to describe. While on the top of Twynam, lost in contemplation of the wonder and beauty of Watson's Crag, the Razor-back, Mount Anderson Spur, Mann Bluff, Mount David, and Gill's



THE BLUE LAKE AND MOUNT TWYNAM FROM CHARLOTTE'S PASS.

Knob, clouds and fog were beginning to appear, beautiful and awe-inspiring, but also dangerous, so we decided to leave the crest and run down to Pounds Hut, near the junction of Spencer's Creek and the Snowy River, a three-miles non-stop run, except when we fell. This is the most sporting and thrilling run of the whole Alps. In these three miles we dropped 2,500 feet, and as you will understand there was little time to enjoy the scenery, all attention had to be given to our legs as we stemmed, telemarked, and christianaed to find the best and safest gradient. What we would take 2½ hours to climb, we accomplished under ten minutes. At times the speed must have approached 50 miles an hour. As ski-runners, we are always looking for long and fast slopes, but after that run we admitted to each other that we had



MOUNT STILWELL, NEAR CHARLOTTE'S PASS.

had enough of the down grade. Our legs were trembling, and we were quite out of breath as we reached the Snowy Crossing. A few hundred yards' climb and we were at Pounds' Hut, where our faithful cook met us with hot soup and other delicacies. We had arranged with him to come to this camp from Betts's, a distance of four miles, as we thought we might be too tired to get any further that day. However, after a good meal, we decided to return that night to Betts's, as it was bigger and more comfortable than the Pounds' Hut.



THE RAZOR BACK SPUR FROM MOUNT DAVID.

"There were two ways, one across the Ranges, involving a steep climb, and the other along the valley of Spencer's Creek, which does not call for so much effort. Two of us, revived by the excellent meal, decided to go across country, so off we went, steadily climbing through dense timber, and as we paused for breath, we looked back across the Snowy River to see the Range we had left bathed in a glorious sunset, in which molten gold and verdant green played as important a part in the color scheme as the usually prevailing reds. The deep Guthega River Valley, winding its way from the Snowy up to the Consett Stephen Pass between Mount Tait and Granite Peaks gave a

Carruthers
Peak.



The Summit,
Mt. Kosciuszko, 7300 ft.

THE VIEW FROM CHARLOTTE'S PASS.

perfect transformation scene of spectral colors. So enthralled were we that we forgot the approaching night, and arrived at the top of the Perisher Range in the darkness.

"There are three valleys leading down to Betts's Plain from the crest of this Range. In daylight, the Camp can be seen from the saddle of the middle valley, 500 feet below, and it is the best and safest valley to run down. In the darkness we could not see the Camp, but ought to have been able to see the light shining from one of the windows which faces this valley. We saw no light, so thought we had struck the wrong valley head, and for half an hour we climbed along the crest. Eventually, after much side-stepping, we reached another valley head, but still no guiding light was to be seen. Wearying of groping about, we decided to chance it, and down we went through the darkness at 20 miles an hour, heart in mouth for fear of striking a rock, or falling into an open creek. Fear spoils a good half mile run, but we got down safely, and as we ran into the open plain we saw the lights of Betts's.

"The first valley was the right one, but we were on the saddle before the Spencer Creek travellers had arrived to light the lamp, which accounted for the light that failed us.

"Weary and tired, with an appetite that would do Gargantua credit, we reached Camp. We had travelled a round trip of 25 miles, and climbed about 3,500 feet during the course of the day. We can truthfully say that every mile of the journey provided us with some thrill or other. It is a trip to be undertaken by fairly competent skiers, but our advice is to hurry up and become competent ski-runners, so that you might be enabled to behold the wonders and glories of the Australian Alps at their best."

British skiing is said to have improved out of all recognition since the war, and the improvement is due in the main to the intensive development of tests and to the modern method of teaching.

"To excel in racing a man must possess not only courage and endurance, but great judgment, a knowledge of snowcraft and a good eye. He has to pick a line while travelling at high speed, thread his way among trees and shoot gaps with only a few inches to spare. Like all great sports, skiing and ski-racing force a man to study nature in one of her many moods. The racer must master the subtle humors of the snow, must learn to diagnose its pace, texture and consistence, when travelling at forty miles an hour."—Arnold Lunn.