

The Tin Hut Expeditions of 1926.

GUNGARTAN'S HALFWAY HOUSE.

(By R. H. Allen and J. W. S. Laidley.)

The expedition from Kiandra to Kosciusko is now an accomplished fact. But before the journey had been actually made it was the theme of much speculation, conjecture, discussion and experiment. And nothing in all the preliminary debate loomed so prominent as the stage to Gungartan.

So important was this section considered that several journeys were made along portions of the route, and a trip herein described was made from the hotel direct on ponies and on foot. Finally the journey which aimed at Kiandra from Kosciusko in 1926 finished at Gungartan.

When the trip was first mooted there was no hut, properly speaking, at Gungartan. It was on a summer exploration ride from Kiandra that Dr. Schlink noticed a tumbledown shepherd's hut at the head of Finn's River. The significance of this was quickly seen and Mr. Litchfield, the owner of the snow leases in that part of the country, was approached in order to obtain permission to render the hut fit for habitation. He proved both interested and generous, and with his invaluable help a small but strong and weatherproof hut was erected within a few hundred yards of the old site.

It was really the building of this hut which turned the Kiandra-Kosciusko project from an impossibility to a perfectly feasible proposition. Before, there was a distance of about 35 to 40 miles between Betts's Camp and the Farm Ridge Huts; now, this distance which includes the highest and most difficult part of the trip, is divided into two by the Tin Hut which is situated about half-way between the two points previously mentioned. This hut was completed in the summer of 1925-26.

The projected excursion from Kosciusko to Kiandra entailed some preparatory arrangements. First of all, every hut was stocked with food and blankets—no small task considering the roughness of the country—and for this we owe many thanks to the late Mr. Chester Foy for all his work in making arrangements for the stocking of the huts at the Kiandra end.

Secondly, an expedition was made to the Consett Stephen Pass by way of the Blue Cow Creek and then home by Pounds' Valley and



LOOKING WEST FROM CONSETT STEPHEN PASS INTO THE VALLEY OF THE GEEHI.

Spencer's Creek in an effort to discover the best route across the Snowy River and on to the Main Range. The Spencer's Creek Crossing was found to be the best, however, and it was here we crossed on the trip to Tin Hut.

Thirdly, an expedition was made to the Tin Hut from the Hotel Koseinsko by the shortest possible route. This was undertaken with the idea of establishing a short line of retreat from the Main Range in case of emergency. That this emergency was actually to arise was not seriously considered at the time; but as it did arise I propose to consider this expedition in slightly more detail. Mr. Reid, Dr. Laidley and Bill Hemmings, their guide, left the hotel on ponies on Tuesday, August 3rd, at 10 a.m. An easy ride of six miles down a well-made track which lay along the banks of Diggers' Creek, brought them to the Snowy River at Island Bend. Here the river becomes wide and fairly shallow, and is intersected with several small islands. The river was crossed without difficulty, and the party then followed up the left bank of the river till they approached the junction of Finn's River and the Snowy. Here the sides of the gorge became less steep and the western side was climbed. This proved a very stiff pull of about 1,200 feet, and brought the party to a small snow-covered plateau which lay about 400 feet higher than the hotel. Looking south and west from here, Finn's River could be seen winding up a long valley with the Gungartan Range overlooking the valley from the south.

From here onwards the snow was deep, and the ponies were left at a small bark hut which Hemmings said was called Reid's Hut. The party then proceeded on foot up Finn's River valley. The snow was deep and a two hour's walk, climbing all the time, led them to the very source of Finn's River. Here, just on the tree line (after a short search), the Tin Hut was found, at about 2 p.m. The aneroid showed a height of slightly over 6,000 feet. Several feet of snow were piled up against the hut door, and there was no spade handy to remove it with, but Hemmings managed to undo the catch on the door and they pushed it open and fell into the hut with the avalanche of snow. In the hut, two things were at once apparent. One, there was very little food; and two, the fireplace smoked badly. Otherwise the hut was apparently weather tight, and its value as a refuge was evident. After lunching in the hut the party set off for home at about 3 o'clock. The return journey was uneventful, the hotel being reached at 7.30 p.m.

The party which set out for Kiandra consisted of Dr. Schlink, Dr. Fisher, Dr. Teece, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Moulden and Mr. R. H. Allen. Messrs. Alastair and Leslie Stephen accompanied us from the hotel to Betts's Camp and then beyond the Snowy River into the Pounds' Valley. We left the hotel in style—eight of us in the waggonette—at 3.30 p.m.

on Saturday, August 7th, the day after the Club dinner. That wasn't really the reason for the waggonette—we had to take that or walk and carry our skis almost as far as Smiggin's as there was no snow at all for the first four miles or so. We reached the snow in due course, and then skied the rest of the way to Betts's, arriving in the dark at about 6.30 p.m. Sunday fortunately was a fine day—almost the only fine day we had last year—and after an excellent breakfast we started off about 8.30 a.m.



REMOVING OUR SKIS FROM THE WAGGONETTE NEAR SMIGGIN'S HOLES.

The first mile or so of the journey was level, easy going along the main road to Charlotte's Pass until we turned to our right down Spencer's Creek Valley. From here to the Snowy River is about two miles was slightly down hill, but the going was very rough. Being a bad year for snow, none of the creeks were covered in and we had to edge along the side of the valley picking our way past the protruding rocks. This valley is very much exposed to the prevailing wind, and what little fresh snow there had been was blown away leaving large patches of ice. Actually the Snowy is some 700 feet lower than Betts's Camp, but it was quite impossible under these conditions to get any running at all; in fact it was only with difficulty that we were able to prevent ourselves from skidding sideways and falling every few yards. We reached the Snowy about 9.30. Here the party

had its first setback. Owing to the mildness of the winter and the lack of the usual quantity of snow the river was not frozen over. However, we were not altogether unprepared for this, and had included in our packs a pair of fisherman's waders, and Mr. Gordon donned these and offered to carry us all across. Dr. Teece was the first person to trust himself to Mr. Gordon, and he was rewarded for his pluck by being



CROSSING THE SNOWY ON
THE TIN HUT TRIP.

Dr. Lennox Teece, Mr. W. A. Gordon (in waders), and Dr. Schlink.

deposited in midstream bestriding two rocks about six feet apart, and it was only with great difficulty that he was rescued from this awkward position. Fortunately for the rest of us, however, while all this was going on, Dr. Fisher had not been wasting his time. With his customary astuteness he had discovered an extremely thin ice bridge a few yards higher up, and rather than risk being carried across we followed him and arrived on the other side quite safely.

The crossing took much valuable time in the best part of the day,

and it was not until about 10.30 a.m. that we were ready to proceed on our journey. From the river we followed Pounds' Creek along the valley, and after about a mile of level going we started the long steep ascent of nearly 2,000 feet at Gill's Knobs. From this point to the top of the range the going was quite different from that on the other side of the river. Pounds' Creek Valley is well sheltered from wind, and there had evidently been a fresh fall of snow quite recently. The going became very heavy, and we sank right over our boots in the soft snow which together with our heavy ruck sacks made the climb very tiring. Not wishing to tire ourselves out so near the start of our long



CROSSING THE SNOWY. THE THIN ICE BRIDGE

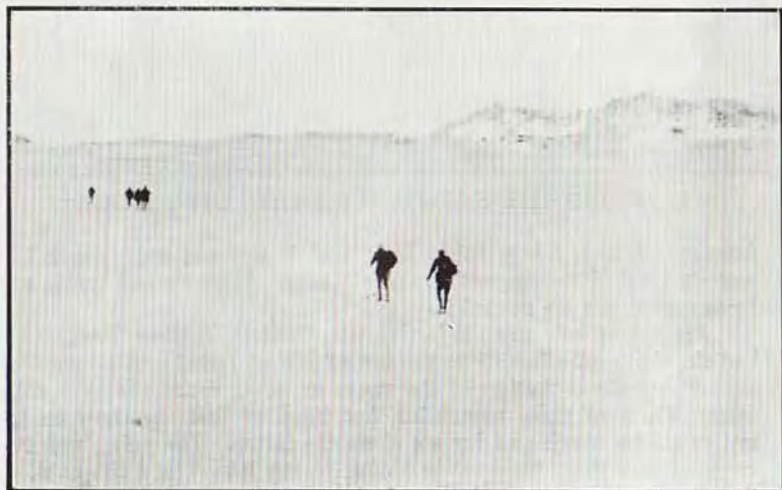
journey we took things fairly easy, and it was not until about 1.30 that we reached the summit of Gill's Knobs. Here we had lunch, and I can assure you we needed it.

From here our next objective was Consett Stephen Pass. We had the choice of climbing to the top of Mount David and Mount Tait and skiing along the top of the range or going round the very steep eastern faces of these mountains, but thinking that the snow on the top would be rough and icy we chose the latter. The going was still very soft (at times we went in almost to our knees) and the angle of the slope so precipitous that we had one or two unpleasant moments wondering if there would be a bad avalanche.

However, we managed to get round quite safely, although the



LOOKING UP POUNDS' VALLEY FROM A SMALL HILL NEAR THE SNOWY.



THE PARTY NEARING THE SUMMIT OF GILL'S KNOBS ON TIN HUT TRIP.



LUNCH AT GILL'S KNOBS.

Mr. W. A. Gordon, Dr. Lennox Teece, Mr. Leslie Stephen, Dr. Eric Fisher, Dr. H. H. Schlink.



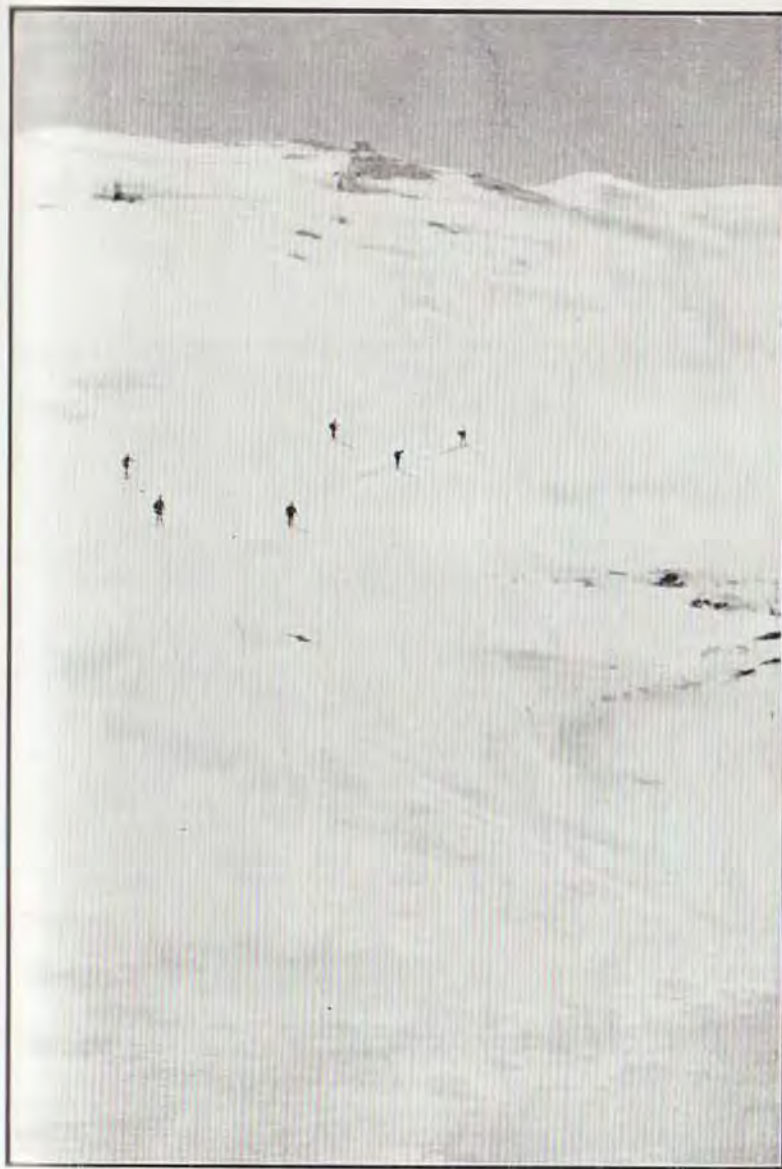
Dr. Lennox Teece, Dr. H. H. Schlink, Dr. Eric Fisher, Mr. Arnold Moulden, Mr. W. A. Gordon, Mr. R. H. Allen.

snow frequently gave way under our skis and we slid down three or four feet. From there on the going became much better, and we had quite a pleasant run down to the pass. This pass lies at the head of the Guthega River and separates the more northerly Granite Peak Range from the higher and more massive part of the range which contains such peaks as Tait, David, Twynam and Kosciuszko itself.

From here we climbed again on to the top of the Granite Peaks Range and made towards the pass at the head of White's River watershed. Here we made a bad mistake. Again wishing to avoid the bad ice on the summit, we decided to run down a little and go round the edge of the range where the snow looked much better. However, in trying to circumvent several nasty looking gullies we allowed ourselves to get into some very difficult skiing country below the tree line and eventually found ourselves almost at the bottom of White's River Valley which necessitated a very considerable re-ascent to the pass. Although we had descended nearly 1,000 feet we had had no good running at all. Once we got below the tree line the country was thickly timbered and the boughs of the trees were so low that they continually caught our bulging ruck sacks and threw us over backwards. We were beginning to get tired, too, by this time, and the energy and annoyance of having to get to our feet again and extricate our ruck sacks from the boughs of the trees did not improve matters.

While in the White's River Valley we came across six or eight fat bullocks travelling in the same direction as ourselves, and these animals, much to our astonishment, proved far better ski-ers than we were; at any rate, as far as climbing was concerned. They started level with us and, although they sank up to their bellies in the snow, they beat us to the pass by about ten minutes. How on earth they can live up on the mountains in winter I cannot imagine, but they looked in extraordinarily good condition and when we last saw them they were heading for the Dicky Cooper Valley right into the blizzard that shortly afterwards so rudely interrupted our intended trip to Kiandra.

Leaving White's River Pass behind us we had to climb still further to Gungartan itself which forms the northern wall of the pass. The snow here was much nicer; in fact the going was quite good, but it was six tired men who reached the saddle of Gungartan with about half an hour's daylight to spare, and before we were able to get a sight of the hut, which we knew was not far off, the strong south-westerly wind which had been making all day brought up a fog in a few minutes and we were unable to see more than 50 yards. I don't know what the others felt when the fog appeared, but I know I began to wonder seriously what it would be like to sleep out on the top of a mountain in mid-winter. Three of the party knew the way



STARTING OFF FROM GILL'S KNOBS ROUND THE EASTERN FACE OF MOUNT TATE.

in summer, but the country looks rather different when covered with snow and in a thick fog. However, the knowledge which Drs. Schlink, Fisher and Teece had gained on the summer trip stood them in good stead, and they kept us on the right track until the fog lifted for a few minutes and we saw the hut just in front of us on the other side of Finn's River Valley.

On a fine day we would have had an excellent run from the saddle of Gungartan to Tin Hut, but in the fog we had to pick our way slowly and carefully, as the country was quite unknown, and we might easily have gone over a precipice or a cornice. As it was we very nearly had one serious accident, when Dr. Fisher, who was in



THE TIN HUT AT GUNGARTAN.

front at the time, only just managed to stop with the toes of his skis balancing on the edge of a huge cornice which lies along the northern face of Gungartan. However, nothing serious happened, and Tin Hut was reached without further trouble just as it became really dark. Fortunately Dr. Laidley and Mr. Reid had left the spade outside when they were at the hut the week before, and we soon dug the snow away from the door and let ourselves into the hut. The hut is a solidly built, but not very beautiful, erection, made of galvanized iron and lined with wood and measuring inside about 10 ft. x 12 ft. It has, or it had last year, a door, a hole in the wall covered

over with sacking for a window, and a large open stone place for a fire at one end with a chimney attached. The chimney served no useful purpose, but none the less it was there. The furniture consisted of one chair made of pieces of wood and sacking and a few wooden boxes. There were also a few other odds and ends, amongst which the most useful were 24 blankets, a horse rug, a few carpenters' tools, an axe, a bucket and half a candle.

Our first thoughts were naturally for a good fire and some hot food and drink, and we immediately set out to see what could be done about it. There was a small supply of firewood in the hut, and with this we soon had a fire going. Within five minutes of lighting the



IN BED IN THE TIN HUT.

fire the hut was full of smoke, and it remained more or less so for the three days and nights we were there. However, for the minute, we were far too hungry to worry about the smoke, and, by wearing goggles to keep it out of our eyes, we set about preparing our meal. There was no water near the hut, so to get anything to drink we had to melt snow. We don't know whether any of our readers makes a hobby of melting snow for water, but can assure them that it is a most trying proceeding. Not only does it take quite a long while to melt a bucket full of snow, but when it's all done you only have about a teaspoonful of water! In order to make sure that we had fairly

clean water to drink, we arranged that the snow on one side of the door was to be the water supply, and the other side was to be the rubbish heap, and if anyone threw the rubbish on the water supply there was going to be trouble. Well, apart from the smoke and the water, everything else went well, and in due course we sat down to a large meal.

All this time the weather had been getting worse, and by 7.30 the wind which had been increasing ever since 4 o'clock, was blowing a gale with squalls of driving snow and sleet, and though we had been optimistic up to now we began to realise that there was every chance of our having to remain where we were for another 36 hours, and, as we were rather tired and we only had half a candle to last us as long as we were there, we decided to go to bed. We draped ourselves over the floor space and spent as uncomfortable a night as we expected. The floor was very hard and the snow and sleet and wind beating against the roof and sides of the hut made such a row that, even had we had beds to lie on instead of the floor, I doubt whether we would have been able to sleep much. Next day the weather was, if anything, worse, and to leave the hut was out of the question, so there was nothing for it but to see what we could do to make the hut more comfortable and prepare to stay there another 24 hours. Every time we opened the door the fire showed its disapproval by smoking so much that you couldn't see the person sitting next to you, and when we shut the door it smoked considerably less, but then we were in complete darkness. In fact that's how we spent most of our time—sitting bolt upright in empty boxes, either in thick smoke or complete darkness, and I may say we found the darkness preferable; firstly, because it didn't hurt our eyes like the smoke, and secondly, because the only literature we had to read was a small piece of the "Temora Mail" dated August, 1924, which we found in the hut.

We had brought with us a loaf and a half of bread, but, having no idea that we would be more than one night in Tin Hut and being hungry and greedy, we ate practically a whole loaf for dinner the night we arrived, and we had to keep half a loaf for the rest of the journey in case the weather improved and we were able to go on, so by lunch time on Monday the bread question was getting acute. By the third evening we were getting fed up. The weather was still as bad as ever, and it was quite impossible to go out except to get firewood, and we simply had to do that. We made one attempt to get a little exercise, but before we had been out five minutes our faces and hands and feet were numbed with cold and we had to go back to the smoke and darkness.

We had sat for two nights and two days with nothing to do and nothing to read, and hadn't even been able to look forward to the next meal, because we only ate a few slices of neat bully beef and sausage

twice a day—in fact it had begun to get so monotonous that the two days seemed more like two weeks. When on the Wednesday morning the weather, though better, was still too bad to go on, we decided to try and get back to the hotel by the way which Dr. Laidley and Mr. Reid had been the previous week, because even if the weather cleared we had not sufficient food left for the trip. Having made up our minds to make for home, we gathered together all the remaining food, put a few sausages in our ruckers, in case we lost our way and couldn't get to the hotel that night, and made a pretty good meal off the balance. Dr. Laidley and Mr. Reid had left a rough map of the track



Dr. Schlink, Dr. Eric Fisher, Dr. Lennox Teece, and Mr. Arnold Moulden with a week's growth of beard, on the snow line on the way back from Tin Hut.

in the hut and, after examining this carefully, we left the hut about 10 a.m.

We proceeded down the Finn's River Valley for some way until we got below the snow line, and then carrying our skis we set out to find the short cut to the Snowy River, which according to the map should have brought us out somewhere near Island Bend. After some slight difference of opinion as to the correct route, we were fortunate enough to find Reid's Hut, and here we were able to deposit our skis in comparative safety. From here we made a precious descent over



ISLAND BEND, WHERE WE CROSSED ON OUR RETURN
FROM TIN HUT.

very rough country to the Snowy River, meeting the Snowy at a spot which we at once took to be Island Bend, owing to the fact that there was an island there. As a matter of fact we were wrong, but it looked as good a spot as anywhere else to cross (they all looked equally unpleasant) so we proceeded to take off everything below the waist, and tying our boots round our necks and putting our trousers in our rucksacs we waded into the river. There isn't much to say about the crossing except that the river was about twice as cold and twice as wide and twice as deep as it looked from the bank, and the stream ran so fast that it was quite hard to stand up. Actually, the river was about 30 to 40 yards wide, and it was nearly up to our waists in the deepest part. It took about 10 minutes to cross, but we all arrived at the other side without mishap, and it wasn't long before we had a large fire going.

As soon as we were dry and warm we ate the rest of our food, and leaving the Snowy at about 2.30 we soon found the main track from Island Bend to the hotel. The rest of the going was plain sailing, and a weary but happy band of unshaven looking ruffians arrived at the hotel at about 5 o'clock and the bar about 15 seconds later.