

Twelve Years of New South Wales Ski-ing

By V. G. Wesche

MR. PERCY HUNTER as Editor of the first (1928) number of the *Year Book* has put on record much early personal history of Kosciusko. Such articles as that quoting Kerry's account of the first winter ascent of Mount Kosciusko, and those containing his own personal reminiscences, provide excellent material for a history of Australian ski-ing. One day, Mr. Jamieson will oblige. Meanwhile a few notes on the last and most active decade may not be out of place at the present period.

Any interest in history arises from a comparison, conscious or unconscious, of the past with the present. This then-and-now contrast was forcefully brought home to the writer by the sight of Charlotte's Pass on the second of a series of fine days last August. The steeper parts of the slopes were scored everywhere with the marks of high-speed Christianias, tracks that would have completely bewildered the occasional summit visitor who traversed the Pass in 1928. The change can be summed up in a phrase—development of technique, and it is proposed in this article to trace this development. Whether Dr. Schlink's 1930 plea for "a sane balance between technique and touring" has been deserved is a matter for consideration, but there can be no doubt as to the advance in the former branch.

Organised ski-racing without doubt played a large part in the development of technique. Perhaps under this heading should be included our contact with skiers with European training, for it was in facing that we saw them at their best, and in the excitement of a race that the locally-trained learned to follow their example.

I am glad to be able to look back upon a club race on the Kerry in 1926; glad and thankful. It was a handicap in the best athletics tradition. There was one scratch man, a few of us on five yards, some on ten, and the duds spread out in a line on twenty yards. Inevitably, one of the beginners fell after about fifty yards, and the resulting carnage was ghastly. The scratch man made a wide detour around the stricken field and won easily.

The pistol, however, soon gave way to the stop-watch, and by 1930 we find the Ski Council of New South Wales holding its first four-event championship, and the long triangular battle between the candidates, the elements and the officials had begun. There followed several years of organisation of courses, rules, flags, stop-watches and inter-State competitions for the official, and steadily improving racing by the competitor, culminating in the inter-Dominion contest of 1937 and the visit of the well-known Dartmouth team from U.S.A. In 1940, I should mention, Australia had available a women's team of undoubted international standard.

To return to 1926—the standard of ski-ing was definitely low. Dr. Schlink of the S.C.A. was a master of the now popular stem technique and the K.A.C. could produce a Telemark or two, but these were exceptions. In 1927 there appeared a nuggety little Norwegian with wide shoulders (to our amazement we found that he used them for going along the flat), who was to be an inspiration in langlauf and jumping for some years, but sound tuition in downhill technique did not come until the Kosciusko Ski School was organised under Skardarasy's master touch in 1935.

George Aalberg's first appearance was typical. He had built a small jump on the side of the Kerry and we were all assembled to watch. Down the scrub-

covered hill he came, round some rocks, through some suckers, straightened up and "youmped" about twenty metres. His reception by a local stable-hand was also typical. "By cripes, they ought to cross him with a rock wallaby and sell the pups!"

So we come to 1929. In that year John Collins made his appearance from Europe. It was he who one snowy day in July collected a bundle of poles and flags, and set, near the Lower Kerry, Kosciusko's first slalom. Collins won the 1930 four-event championship of Australia, but was overshadowed in 1931 by another keen four-eventer, the enthusiastic Sverre Kaaten. From then on things went ahead quickly in the racing department. T. W. Mitchell arrived from Europe and with him came an advance in slalom, the four-event controversy, the Peace of Geehi and inter-State racing. Technically, Mitchell has to his credit the winning of every Australian championship slalom for which he has entered since 1931. It is of interest to compare the Downhill—the winners from 1930 being Lang, Mitchell, Kaaten, Kvist, Mitchell, 1935 abandoned, Johnson, von Glasersfeld, Doran, Stogdale, 1940 abandoned. We might have expected to see the name of George Day, but it only appears as a winner of the Slalom in a restricted field in 1938. His best performance was probably his second by two seconds to Skardarasy on the Townsend Course in the 1936 Open Downhill.

The Open Championship conducted at the October holiday week-end by the K.S.S. and S.C.N.S.W. must be mentioned. The meeting commenced in 1936 and took the place of the abandoned Millions Club Derby. It has invariably produced high-class racing in which the leading amateurs get a chance of trying themselves out against the ski teachers.

Any notes on racing must take into account the Summit Trophy, an annual competition for the fastest time over the distance of 34 miles from the Hotel to the Summit and back again, or Chalet-Hotel-Summit-Chalet. Many difficulties attend the competitor. It is very difficult to get a moon and snow conditions, and it needs a lot of skill and perseverance to do the course in anything near six hours. I have tried. With the exception of Gelling's run of six hours nine minutes in 1929, six and a half hours was not broken from the start of the race in 1914 (Dr. Schlink and party fifteen hours fifteen minutes) until 1938, when the record of six hours one minute was made by K. Breakspear.

In retrospect there is ample evidence that those individuals—one might mention specifically Laidley, Gilder, Alexander and Annabel—who undertook the trials and tribulations of conducting meetings may feel that their labour was not in vain. There will always be a racing fraternity for it is in the Australian character to take to competitive sport. Even if many of the old hands are dropping back into their clubs to enjoy a little mild touring, younger ski-racers will be coming forward, and the Council and the clubs will, I trust, see to it after the war that the experience of the last ten years is not lost.

Test rules adapting the S.C.G.B. tests to local conditions were drawn up in 1929 and have provided a consistent incentive to better technique, especially in the beginners. In 1937, after much controversy with Victoria, new qualifying tests were introduced to accord with the Arlberg teaching of the Ski Schools, and in 1939 A.N.S.F. tests were finally agreed upon, our old friend the Telemark having been a major bone of contention. Victoria will not consent to State bodies appointing suitable ski-teachers as fully-powered judges. You can look up the various sides of the controversy in the *Year Books*.

Some 200 candidates in all have passed the third-class test in New South Wales from time to time.

The Ski Club of Australia can justly claim the credit for the early touring done in the Kosciusko district, and it must be remembered that huts

were scarcer and the terrain comparatively unknown when the White Hats made the first trip from Kiandra to Kosciusko. That was in 1927, and the party consisted of Drs. Schlink, Fisher and Laidley, and W. Gordon, accompanied by W. Hughes, of Kiandra. In 1928 two parties from the same club visited Jagungal, and in 1929 the traverse was made by Dr. Teece's party, again accompanied by W. Hughes. This expedition made the trip from Kiandra to the Tin Hut between 2.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. on the same day.

With the building of the Chalet in 1930 touring ceased, and it was some years before the tumult and the shouting—particularly the latter—of Chalet life drove the more hardy or thrifty folk out on to the range again. True, in 1932, the indefatigable Gordon for the first time on ski climbed Mount Bimberi in the Federal Territory, and there was a spring trip to the Tin Hut, but that was all.

During these years, however, Gilder, of the Millions Club, had collected in summer trips much useful information about the huts of the Main Range, and, an important step, White's River Hut was built. In 1934 the Millions Ski Club got into its stride, Gelling got to work, and the story of how he with Dr. Telfer and Aalberg safely spent two nights in bad weather on the way from Kiandra marks the beginning of a renaissance of touring. The following year we find Mawson's Hut appearing as the principle base of what are becoming known as Main Range Rats. Telfer and Gilder used it on their second Kiandra-Kosciusko trip. Gilder's party pioneers the now well-worn track into the Range, via Snowy Plains, and Mitchell leads a party of Victorians into the Chalet from the west, via Pretty Plain and Mawson's. With the advantage of the foregoing exploration, in 1936 Moppett and Moriarty of the K.A.C. and Miss Trimble defied the storm gods by taking ten days over their trip from Kiandra.

In 1937 we find completely new ground being broken by Moriarty, Parle and Wightman, who made an extended trip to the Grey Mare, via White's River Hut. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell have since climbed the Grey Mare from the Gichi Valley, and good ski-ing grounds were reported by both parties, though at present rather remote from the east.

About this time the value of White's River Valley as a ski-ing ground was beginning to be realised, and the K.A.C., by arrangement with the owner, spent a considerable sum of money in adding to and equipping the hut. This movement to the north was followed by the erection under the enthusiastic guidance of Moriarty, of a modern Betts' Camp known as the Alpine Hut, in the Bull's Peak area. The way "in" to this hut is by way of the old Grey Mare Mine road, over Nimmo and the Snowy Plains. From there it is an easy and pleasant two-day trip along the Range, via the Tin Hut—once built by the S.C.A., as the only shelter between Pounds' Hut and Farm Ridge—and White's River Hut to the Chalet. This trip from the north and others have been done so often in the last few seasons that it may be forgotten that their comparative ease and safety is only made possible by the enthusiasm of those who located the existing huts and lent their aid to the erection of others.

These notes, I hope, bear witness to a fairly high standard of service to the sport in the past. Those in control, when we settle down again, must see to it that they go on from where we left off.