

# **The Thredbo Valley (Kosciusko) – A Contrast**

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During the winter of 1946 there was more snow at Kosciusko, and less fine weather, than you would think possible. Even the days that passed for fine were too unsettled for trips over the exposed tops of the Main Range. So, being disappointed in that direction, we looked for prospects elsewhere.

The valley of the Thredbo, lying at the very back door of the Chalet, has always been

neglected by skiers in their anxiety to reach the distant and exciting western slopes of the Range. This year the same conditions that prevented us from going out there, were ideal for the Thredbo, for the south-east slope, by which we would descend into this deep sheltered valley, would be protected from the weather, while, owing to the unusually heavy falls of snow, the ground

would be well covered down to the river itself.

So it was in theory, and on a morning when the weather, at best, looked only just good enough, we set out to put it into practice. We went round into Trappyard Creek, climbed out to the left, and made our way along the top until we reached the edge of the valley. Travelling was easy, partly on account of a strong wind, laced with snow, which blew us merrily along. If the ominous ease of our outward journey aroused misgivings, they were not voiced, for after days of groping round the Chalet slopes in a blizzard, none of us wanted to turn back.

Looking down into the valley we could see a few hundred feet of open slope, and then timbered spurs and gullies, but the day was not clear enough for a comprehensive view. At first the snow was good, but down among the trees, it became increasingly wet and clogging. The timber, which appeared very tight, opened out sufficiently as we picked our way down, and we had some good wood running until the snow became so wet that our skis stuck fast.

Now indeed things were bleak. We were out of the wind, certainly, but the snow had almost turned to rain, and as we huddled in a thick clump of Snow Gum, eating the snack we had taken for lunch, we got wetter and wetter, and the cold seemed to eat into the marrow of our bones.

Even the climb out was not enough, and we were still only luke-warm, as we clambered on to the top and met the gale. It was snowing hard now, and visibility was reduced to a minimum. The icy driving snow bit like a myriad savage insects, and without goggles it was impossible to open your eyes, while with them you could see nothing through the plaster of ice that formed on the glass. With the rise in altitude the temperature dropped, and our wet clothes froze. It was hard work forcing a way into the wind, but despite the exertion we grew colder and colder, and it was a sorry procession that finally reached the Chalet.

Rebuffed by this experience my next excursion did not take place until Spring, and then only as a second thought. We started for the Range, but from the top of Charlotte's Pass we could see fog clouds billowing up over Carruthers and Twynam, and starting to make their way down towards the Snowy River. So we ran back down the Pass,

and climbed up the woods, taking a direct line for the Thredbo, from a point between the summit of the wood-run and Mt. Stillwell. This entailed crossing a shallow valley—the head of Wright's Creek, which is generally known as Trappyard Creek—before we were onto the fall into the Thredbo itself.

On this side the day was still and brilliantly sunny. We schussed down a gentle incline over windblown snow to the trees, and looked down into the great valley, at the bottom of which we could just define the course of the river among a maze of heavily timbered spurs and gullies.

We started down the glade before us, and after a short distance ran out left on a long traverse. And so we went on down weaving our way through the snow gums, always bearing slightly left as the lie of the land led, and always allowing ourselves to be carried downwards.

On the point of a wide ridge we had some open running through dead snow gum, then there were tight belts of young trees, and as we squeezed through narrow openings, we received swishing smacks from their leafy branches. Once the corniced edge of a ridge gave us a little schuss down into a shallow gully.

The snow, which on top was inclined to be crusty, grew rather heavy as we went on down, until we ran out on the side of a ridge and found spring snow. This ridge led to a natural clearing, in the middle of which were two clumps of mountain ash. The snow had thawed from about the trees, leaving them on two islands of brown grass, in the clearing of snow. The trees were lovely, and we considered boiling the billy there, and sitting on the grass in the sun to eat our lunch, but we knew we could not be far from the bottom of the valley. We went beyond the clearing to have a look, and found ourselves among the tall trees, on a steep slope that led directly down to the river. On this shaded slope the spring snow made excellent running. The trunks of these mountain ash were soot black from a recent summer fire, and it was possibly this fire that had cleared the undergrowth, and so opened our way down, for we went dodging among the straight tall trunks until we were right in the bed of the river, 2600 ft. below our starting point.

Leaving our skis to dry in the sun, we picked our way upstream through the low



brush until in a bend we found a place to boil the billy.

The winter landscape had vanished. Down here it was still and sunny, and the tall heather bush, and undergrowth, was warm and dry. The air was drowsy with Spring, and the scents of the bush, flavoured now and again with a whiff of smoke from our little fire.

At our feet the river ran crystal clear over a pattern of stones, while beyond the opposite bank, forest trees grew on a small flat, where the brown winter grass was just tinged with green. Odd pockets of snow lying among the driftwood and heather were trespassers from another world, and even their presence made

it no easier for us to believe that, but a short time ago, we had been in their white world.

We lay on our backs with closed eyes, or opened them to watch puffs of cloud blown across the blue sky above the valley. The cloud banks from which those puffs detached themselves would already have possession of the Range.

Climbing out we could see the clouds coming over thick and fast, but it was not until we reached the very top that we were into the fog and met the wind. Later we learned that the weather had been bad on the Range all day, and that several parties that had gone out there, had temporarily lost their way owing to the lack of visibility.



Entrance to Bett's Camp, 1946.

Photo, G. Short, S.M.H.