

Kosciusko Cavalcade

V. G. Wesche

I HAVE a feeling that a mass of pent up enthusiasm, such as exists to-day for ski-ing, will not always be content with Plans for Alpine Villages. Before long there will be adequate accommodation at Kosciusko, nationalised or not, and then many things will be different. While it is not all too remote therefore, let us glance at the records of the past twenty-five years or so.

In 1919 the Kosciusko Alpine Club published the first ski-ing annual edited by Percy Hunter. Those were the days when the fall from Daner's Gap to Piper's Creek was described as a "beautiful glissade," when the "Championship of Australia" was a race up the Kerry to the Plains of Heaven, to Daner's and back down the road, when Dodd's Hotel announced Dinner at Night and the latest improved septic tank, and McNaughts sold a ski boot for 22/6.

Chaps, too, were tougher in those days. The run from the Hotel to Bett's Camp, announced the Editor, with a rest for lunch and a run home in the afternoon, was becoming increasingly popular with Club members. The Editor also indulged in some interesting reminiscences. Of a personality among those present at the opening of the Hotel in 1909 he wrote "He was here, there, and everywhere, and his boundless confidence and bonny smile gave heart to many a first-attempter." We should have more of the same touch nowadays. The personality, by the way, was Dr. Schlink, third president of the K.A.C., and president for many years now of the Ski Club of Australia.

In this annual also is preserved Charles Kerry's own account of the first winter ascent of Kosciusko in 1897. The trip was made by way of the Thredbo Valley. From Friday Flat up to Merritt's Lookout took the party five hours climb through undergrowth and new snow. They made the summit by 2 p.m. I regret to say that the report goes on, "The return was easy. We sat on our skis and tobogganed expertly down slopes that had taken much labour to conquer in the morning."

In the 1920 issue we have a picture of Miss Margaret Allen (now Lady Gifford), on her winning run to the Summit. In fact the female skier is now generally making her

presence felt and Miss Hope Meek wins the cross-country handicap.

A Few Words about Dress are therefore in order, and we learn that the proper costume for a serious lady skier consists of coat, skirt and knickerbockers. The skirt however may be left behind, and as to the last mentioned, "wherever there is actual tendency to knock-knees, however slight, the knickers should be made to hang over at the knees. This can be done without giving them any semblance to bloomers."

In 1920 also we find the significant words, "We now want a hut at Charlotte's Pass." We got it ten years later. Never underestimate the power of the press!

The story of the mid twenties is not clear, and it is not until the first issue of the Australian Ski Year Book in 1928, that we get any reliable record. In 1925 Percy Pearson was still singing "Tit-Willow" in the Hotel ballroom, and winning Alpine Club races. In the previous year Dr. Ashleigh Davy ran the Summit Race from the Hotel to the Summit and back in 9 hours 46 minutes, a time which he and Arnold Moulden reduced by an hour and a half in 1927.

The Main Range at this time, began to receive its first attentions. The Tin Hut was built by the Ski Club of Australia at the head of Finn's River in the summer of 1925, and the first winter traverse from Kiandra to Kosciusko was made in 1927 by Dr. Fisher, Dr. Laidley, W. A. Gordon, and Bill Hughes.

In the late twenties appeared two personalities who had considerable influence on the development of local technique, particularly in cross-country racing and jumping—George Aalberg and John Collins. The former, a Norwegian, could float through the air, or skim across the flat, with the greatest of ease, and it is a pity, though to his credit, that, as a professional, he never timed himself over the Summit Trophy course.

Collins had learnt his ski-ing in Norway and Switzerland while at Oxford University, and was the first person to set up pairs of flags at Kosciusko as an introduction to the Slalom. He recorded 1 hour 6 minutes for the Bett's Camp-Hotel race in 1929, won the first timed descent at Kosciusko (the K.A.C. downhill from the Gates of Heaven to the

Golf Course), and remained our leading all-rounder until the advent of Sverre Keaten. Cam McFadyen, whose name first appeared in club racing in 1919 continues to be mentioned in the records, and the writer puts in a modest appearance.

About this time Mr. Stewart Jamieson became known to skiers, not as yet in any administrative or editorial capacity, but as the author and leading exponent of that most spectacular of ski-ing falls, the Imperial Jamieson. (An upward, forward, and downward movement, of very satisfying symmetry, a full description of which is to be found in Year Books of the time.)

In 1928 occurred our first, and so far only ski-ing fatality at Kosciusko. Evan Hayes and Laurie Seaman were caught by a sudden change in the weather apparently while at the Summit. They separated—possibly Seaman had left his skis lower down—and perished during the night, Seaman among the rocks where the Seaman Hut now stands, Hayes on the south side of Rawson Pass. We have been fortunate that this is our only Kosciusko tragedy to date. Various people have unwillingly spent the night in the snow, but they have either been prepared for such an emergency, or the weather has been fine. The writer himself played a somewhat discreditable part in leaving two friends with no experience of the terrain to find their way from Piper's Gap to Betts' Camp one foggy afternoon. Having failed to reach their destination, they started a fire with a pair of celluloid goggles and spent a safe, if smoky night. What hurt most, we suspect, was that a columnist of the day reported in his paper that Mr. Rothe had successfully ignited a fire by the use of his celluloid collar.

The year 1928 had seen the first step in the organisation of ski-ing on a wide basis, the formation of a Ski Council of N.S.W. comprising representatives of the K.A.C., S.C.A., the Millions Ski Club, and the University Ski Club. Mr. Percy Hunter was elected president, and the writer became the honorary secretary. Rules for tests and racing followed, and in 1930 were held the first Amateur Championships of Australia (sic). T. F. U. Lang (S.C.G.B.) won the Downhill and Langlauf, Collins the Slalom, and McFadyen the Jump. The events were held at Charlotte's Pass—have I mentioned that the Chalet appeared in 1930—and Piper's Gap. In a review of that meeting by Dr.



Winter's End

L. Green

Laidley is to be found the following contribution for the Unheeded Warnings Department, ". . . and many heart burnings, both on the part of competitors and officials will be avoided if our time-keepers are selected early in the year, and show sufficient interest to familiarise themselves with their work before the next series of races commences."

In this year Les Holden pioneered air transport to the snow, flying a party of eight to Berridale in the Canberra, a single engine plane. Possibly the account of the trip back in bad weather, via Goulburn and Nowra, did not help to make this method of travel very popular, for landing facilities have not improved much in the intervening seventeen years.

Stewart Jamieson's editorship of the Year Book, led in 1932 to the inclusion of Victorian, New Zealand, and Tasmanian sections, and a start was made on its way to becoming for a time one of the world's best ski-ing magazines. The opening of the Chalet at Charlotte's Pass meant the introduction of professional photographers, and we get some worthwhile results from Messrs. Ford and Fishwick.

T. W. Mitchell came back from Europe in 1931, and the impetus was immediately felt. The "Peace of Geehi" and the formation of the A.N.S.F. were largely the result of his efforts, while in the 1931 championships he won the combined Downhill and Slalom trophy. With Kaaton and Collins as competitors a good standard in racing was set.

in spite of poor weather. Kate Moore, as she then was, won the Women's Championship. A new development was a hastily organised inter-State competition won by N.S.W. by 2 points from Victoria, who sportingly agreed to being represented by a team with one member well below standard. Until recently I still had the insignia of the N.S.W. team, an armband with a design in lipstick, drawn by the present president of the A.W.S.C., Mrs. V. G. Wesche. At this meeting also, Lennex Teece established his reputation as a referee who knew his own mind. (Chorus of competitors, with variations, "We can't race in this weather, Lennox." Lennox, with no variations: "The race will commence in three minutes.") O! si sic omnes!

The 1932 Year Book showed an increasing editorial interest in European ski racing—even an article on the sport in Russia—and contained the third report of the Wanderers' Ski Club. Apart from an ascent of Mt. Bimberi in the A.C.T. by W. A. Gordon and B. Osborne, touring had not yet made a comeback, and the accent was still on racing. The first properly selected inter-State team went to Victoria in 1932, where they were beaten at Hotham. The team consisted of Wesche, Kaaten, Sodersteen, J. Pattinson, Annabel, Utne, and Gilder. In the Downhill run on the Varsity Drag, Kaaten beat Mitchell by one fifth of a second. Other recollections of Hotham include the N.S.W. team putting on all their clothes to go to bed in Mr. Spargo's attic bedroom, my first experience of Begg's Bath, and a whale of a party in the Harrierville pub, after a cold wet drive down from St. Bernard.

It was in the N.S.W. trials held prior to this meeting that Billy Pattinson, then aged twelve years, made two jumps of 25 metres, and came second to the Norwegian trained Utne, while on his own Township Hill at Kiandra in the same year he won the Downhill from G. Doran and W. Patrick in 17½ seconds.

While the incentive of competitive skiing was bringing about a general increase in the standard of the sport, an event took place which in another sphere has proved an even greater influence on technique. In 1933 the Kosciusko Ski School was started with George Lamble as instructor, and the foundations laid for Ernst Skardarasy's advent.

Touring had not then been revived to any extent, though skis were used on the Barrington Tops, for the first time in that year, by Gillings and other members of the Northern Ski Club, and an article by Colin Gilder in the Year Book on the location of various huts along the Range, pointed to the emergence of the Main Range Rats.

In 1936 we had a representative, George Lamble, in the F.I.S. Championships at Innsbruck. The Downhill was held on an icy course inadequately covered with snow, and the following account by a spectator (Arnold Lunn) of Ruud's crash, is worth retelling.

"Now comes Sigmund Ruud, skiing as Norwegian jumpers ski. He tries to traverse at a fantastic speed, his steel edges fail to grip, he slips sideways at a speed faster than most straight schusses, strikes a tree stump, is hurled into the air, down a steep slope covered with almost everything but snow, and performs five somersaults, striking the ground again and again with his head."

Incidentally he suffered no serious injury. I have seen the foot of Little Austria, where George Day took off into the top of a gum tree, and I saw Suzanne Williams sail over a cornice and drop twenty feet on to the Blue Lake, but Ruud's sounds the best.

To return to our highlights of the local picture. There is increasing activity in the mid thirties, to be read of in the Year Books. The 1935 issue, incidentally, contained 300 pages, and all of them art paper. Ernst Skardarasy's personality and teaching proved a great advantage to N.S.W. skiers, and the standard steadily improved. In 1937

Middy Sun
C. Jackaman



New Zealand sent a team over, and made a triangular match with the Americans from Dartmouth—Dicky Durrance and the two Bradleys. Rigid bindings were new to us then, and the sight of Durrance diving through the Slalom flags, apparently followed by his skis, made a deep impression. The Townsend Downhill course was used, and the winner's time, an Austrian named von Glasersfeld, was 2 minutes 44 seconds.

Next year a nightmare became a reality. The Chalet caught fire not long after midnight, on the night of 7th August, 1938, and was burnt to the ground. The K.A.C. were in residence at the time, and under the direction of the Club captain, John Douglas, made an orderly evacuation into the cow shed. Apart from the Chalet cat, Prince, who firmly refused to leave his old home, the only casualty was the over strain suffered by Mr. McNeil of the "Sun" in skiing back with his dramatic photos of the blaze.

Next year a new Chalet was built by the

Railways Department, and the first ski lift in Australia was installed. For a year or two we used it happily, and the beginners were noticeably quick in learning with its assistance.

Elyne Mitchell at this time began to follow Tom's lead in exploration, and the term "Western Faces" becomes prominent. Hitherto most of the Main Range enthusiasts had restricted their activities to the uplands, but the improvement in technique, and the arrival of a great all-rounder in Colin Wyatt, led to the exploration of much of the steep country to the west. This combined with the establishment of the Alpine Hut on the Brassy Mountain by Ken Breakspear and other touring enthusiasts of the K.A.C., has led in recent years to the exploration of much new country in the Grey Mare-Jagungal area.

These are some of the highlights as I see them. There are other angles, and other memories are needed to fill in the picture. Over to you!