

The Lake Albina Project

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LAKE ALBINA, nestling below the frowning glory of Townsend's northern spur and overlooking the gorges that plunge down thousands of feet to the Geehi, has appealed to many skiers as an ideal site for a chalet. True, when blizzards rage it is storm tossed and bleak, for prevailing winter winds surge through the valley with the fury of a thousand demons; but when the sun shines and the winds are stilled, here are perfect slopes and perfect snow—a skier's paradise.

It is not surprising, then, that lovers of

our Alps like George Day and others of the ilk have dreamed of a shelter in this valley of wild rugged beauty. Indeed, the Ski Council some years ago advocated the erection of a Memorial Hut in the vicinity, and the Safety Sub-committee (at late as May, 1950) was urging the Trust to provide such a shelter—stressing its value from the safety angle apart from rendering more accessible this excellent ski-ing terrain. Then in October last, Charles Anton gathered about him a band of keen main-rangers, meeting for the first time on 12th

October, 1950. At this meeting the Kosciusko State Park Trust was represented by its Vice-Chairman (Mr. D. S. Mulley), The Government Tourist Bureau by the Secretary and Director (Mr. Harold Best), the Ski Council of N.S.W. by the President (Mr. C. A. Alexander) and several other members; present also were George Day, Ken Breakspear, Venn Wesche, not to mention many who have played an active part in skiing since the days when the Main Range was out of bounds to all but the hardest of tourers.

Support for the project was unanimous and, from what Mr. Mulley said, the meeting felt confident that it could look forward to practical assistance from the Trust, a confidence that has proved well founded.

Finance was arranged by the payment of £25 per member, and when the inaugural meeting of Foundation Members was held on 10th November, 1950, the site had been tentatively chosen; and plans prepared by Dudley Ward and a Constitution drafted by Colin Broad were tabled. At this meeting, the Ski Tourers' Association came into being, elected its office-bearers and immediately got down to business with the object of commencing building operations on 4th December, 1950.

Members elected to Office were: President, Charles Anton; Vice-Presidents, Ken Breakspear and Dudley Ward; Hon. Secretary, Margaret Anton; Hon. Treasurer, Robert Ward; Committee, Marie Gelling, Tom Deamer, Don Richardson, R. Raubitschek and Jack Solar; Trustees, Colin Broad and Robert Ward.

The original plans for an eight-bed structure, estimated to cost £1500, have grown to provide for 16 bunks; foundations are of local granite rising probably 10 to 12 feet at the lowest corner, and timber frame prefabricated design for the main building, which is to contain comfortable sleeping quarters, storage and drying space, and many worthwhile amenities. The estimated cost has, of course, risen proportionately.

There have been many difficulties, and further difficulties lie ahead; and many might reasonably argue that the project was implemented with too much speed, that the motto should have been "festina lente." Be that as it may, a choice had to be made between the realisation of the project for the

coming snows and the delay which must necessarily have been concomitant with more extensive preparation and advance organisation. An election was made in favour of the first alternative, and the project was therefore launched with what might be termed meteoric speed, having in mind the tremendous difficulties attendant on labour, transport, materials and general control from so remote a centre as Sydney. The question of pin-pointing the site was one not easy of solution. On the western side of the valley there was abundant stone lying about (an important factor), but satisfactory water supply was lacking and, being on the lee of the spur, heavy snow-drifts and nearby cornices could be expected in winter; the eastern side, on the other hand, while lacking free stone in any quantity, had the advantages of reasonably good water supply, a wind scour in winter which would keep the chalet free of snow banks and thus provide easy access, a position that allowed the long axis to face north and thus give maximum heat absorption from the sun, and one which commanded a glorious view of the mountains. Other important factors, such as nature of foundations, were considered and discussed at length and the die was cast in the favour of the eastern side, involving the erection of flying foxes of a span of 650 feet to transport stone, and consequential additional labour costs, etc. These and many other problems have had, and will have, to be met, but the foundations are now nearing completion, prefabricated sections have been constructed and are awaiting transport to the site and the Committee is hopeful that its strenuous efforts will be repaid by completion within the time limit it set itself.

The Kosciusko State Park Trust is affording valuable assistance through its works manager (Ray Ainsworth), stone mason (Jack Piazzo), and in other ways. John Wilson was placed in charge of building operations on the site and voluntary, semi-voluntary and fully paid labour have been utilised in hauling stone and operating the flying foxes.

Many administrative details have yet to be worked out, such as the supply of fuel and emergency food, booking rights and accommodation charges.

But despite the many and varied problems and difficulties inherent in such an

undertaking in the heart of the Alps, it is confidently hoped that, when winter comes, the valley will contain a small chalet sitting

cheekily by the shores of Lake Albina—a tribute to human effort among those mighty crags and dark gorges.