

Our Backward State

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AFTER ski-ing in New Zealand it is more than ever brought home to me that Australia, and most particularly N.S.W., is lagging far behind in the development of the snow country from a ski-ing angle, and not only in what has already been done, but in any constructive plans for the future.

Leaving out of consideration the N.S.W. Government's completely negative attitude to the sport and the fact that it sits on its monopoly of the snowfields like a broody hen on a china egg and with approximately the same result, it may be worthwhile contemplating some of the steps necessary to developing the Kosciusko area as a first-class ski-field and potential tourist centre. When I say first class, I visualise as an ultimate aim a resort which would provide slopes served with ski-tows and of a sufficiently high standard for inter-Dominion contests, which in time would be extended into Empire Winter Games. Contests against teams from other countries would provide ready-made advertisement if we had ski facilities here sufficiently attractive for this free advertisement to be effective. If not, then no coloured pamphlets, or anything else, are going to bring tourists to our snows.

First of all, careful and expert attention

should be given to the entire area, a decision made as to which locality would most fruitfully repay development and an all-out effort be concentrated there. The major consideration must be terrain. We want the best, that is the steepest and longest slopes, with the greatest area and variety possible. The choice of locality must of necessity be restricted by two considerations, the most important of which is weather and consequent snow conditions and the other accessibility.

The next step would be to provide the site with a summer road and, of course, it is desirable that this road be kept open in winter. However, this is not absolutely necessary, at any rate in the early stages. There is no winter road to Hotham, where all victualling is done in the summer. Winter transport is by horse with the last part on ski. While not advocating this, it is possible to make a start under such conditions and to make a start is all important. I am sure that most people would undertake a walk if they found at the end of it adequate accommodation and the best ski slopes well provided with ski tows. One thing my trip to New Zealand made very clear to me, and that is put up a good ski tow and the people will flock to it

regardless of any other consideration—I might go so far as to say, put up a ski tow and the rest will look after itself.

I would like to see the N.S.W. Government relax its present policy—who would not, I guess—and encourage clubs and approved organisations to form this alpine village. In Victoria there are ten club lodges going up at Buller and about six at Mt. Hotham, some already completed, a very promising nucleus for villages to come. Up to date, in this State, the store of enthusiasm and energy generated by the ski-ing fraternity has been strongly discouraged instead of being turned to account. Let the clubs build their lodges, let private enterprise build. If the way was made easy, thinking here mainly of the construction of roads, there would be no lack of capital. I visualise a number of small lodges belonging to clubs, a small chalet, perhaps a number of cabins with a central restaurant, which would provide cheap accommodation. As the years go on, sports shops, restaurants, more chalets and more cabins. The real musts are the best slopes and ski tows. The Hamilton tows, used so effectively in New Zealand, are simple in design and construction and 100 per cent. efficient.

Last winter the Government scheme for a village at Smiggin's Holes had considerable publicity. What has Smiggin's Holes to offer? There are no slopes above nursery standard and if the paper and plaster plans displayed at the Education Building ever materialise they will only produce a holiday camp for snowballers. It has been said that Australia has a greater area of snow than Switzerland. Surely this conjures up possibilities, but if we ever hope to attract overseas visitors to our snows we must offer the best we have. No skier who has skied either in Europe, America or New Zealand would be attracted to a holiday at Smiggin's Holes, even if the name is changed to Sunrise Valley.

There are several possible sites I would like to mention.

The Lee-Northcote basin is sheltered and provides a semi-circle of slopes of up to 1200ft. very suited to ski tows. It is only divided from the Lake Albina Valley by a saddle. This valley would be equally worth consideration and, in addition, it commands the 2000ft. run off Townsend into the Northcote Canyon. These easily linked areas could be reached by a subsidiary road off the Hotel-Summit road. The floor is enclosed by very steep slopes, should be sheltered from the prevailing westerlies and almost invariably provides good snow.

Equally promising is Pound's Valley high up under Mt. Twynam and commanding all the slopes off that mountain. This would necessitate a road down Spencer's Creek.

Then there is the Thredbo Valley behind the Chalet. This, though little known from a ski-ing point of view, deserves some attention as it may well provide the very thing we seek. I have been down its steep slopes on several occasions, but unfortunately only in an exceptionally heavy snow year. The thing that struck me most was that while fog and wind made the day too bad for the Range, the Thredbo Valley was still and sunny, and on another occasion I found powder snow there when the Chalet slopes were wet sog. I have had 2600ft. of continuous downhill over there, but the question is, what are conditions in average or lean snow years. It should be worth investigation, for even without accommodation there this valley could provide a much more sheltered and accessible downhill course than anything at present available from the Chalet.

There are many other places and none could be better than White's River with its lovely 1000ft. all-weather wood-runs, but they are all far from existing roads.

The main thing is that, whatever the obstacles, if we ever want to have worthwhile ski-ing in Australia and ski-ing as a potential tourist attraction we must open up the good slopes. Even if we start in a small way, let us start in some place that has a future.

