

A More Direct Route to White's River

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INTERMITTENTLY the Chalet ski-lift had been persuaded to drag itself into desultory operation, encouraged apparently by a new scheme of feeding it with little sixpenny tickets. Of course, after so many years of climbing under our own steam some of us did not even resent thus bribing the wretched thing. However, the dubious

reward of being stranded in a variety of positions on the way up, and the subsequent opportunity of performing the same turns in the same positions on the same descents, day after day, made me restless and I became an easy prey to Don's suggestion.

It was this—an attempt at White's River Hut from Betts' Camp, via the Blue Cow,

crossing the Snowy River at approximately Perisher Creek near the White's River junction with the Snowy, and then ski-ing directly up White's River from the Snowy to the Hut. The expected difficulties involved at the Snowy would show what measures would be necessary to make this a more direct route than the orthodox ones to the White's River area and the northern part of the main range, particularly from the Smilgin's and Perisher areas.

I remembered the wombat country of thick sapling scrub, boulders, bluffs and precipitous ravines of this section of the Snowy River from previous winter runs off the Blue Cow, from summer fishing down the Snowy and from mustering during the autumn in the lower part of White's River with Ray Adams. But Don enticed us with a picture of an enjoyable lunch sitting on a rock in the middle of the river. He had negotiated the last steep pinch of precipitous scrub after a run down White's Valley from White's River Hut with a party one previous winter and he felt it could be negotiated from our side also.

Our party consisted of Elizabeth, my wife, and the only member of the stronger sex (who completed the endurance test with a pack through all obstacles uncomplainingly for twelve hours on ski), and two hardy young enthusiasts for this sort of thing, Alan Andrews and Kevin Radford, plus Don Richardson and myself.

We chose the first clear day after the the heavy blizzard of last July, which gave deep snow in the lower altitudes. Running off the northern spur of the Blue Cow provided some thrills for the first thousand feet of descent, but the trip along the crest of the ridge was not as fast as the splendid drop straight into Perisher Creek, which I had enjoyed here previously.

The lower we got, the soupier became the recently fallen snow, which had had no previously consolidated foundation that season.

In the timber we ran into the expected porridge and we finally paused on the bluff a hundred and fifty feet or so above the Snowy. It only seemed a good stone's throw across to the clearing over the Snowy on the western side of White's River, a conspicuous landmark for which we were aiming.

But then our real difficulties started. We first tried several routes off the bluff into the Snowy gorge through the thick sapling

scrub. On each occasion we were forced to retrace our steps. It was necessary to remain on ski as the new soft snow was three to five feet deep between the bristling saplings interspersed with rock outcrops where the ground fell away steeper to the river. Our packs did not help matters. Without an axe it was obvious nothing could be done in any direct approach to the river so near and yet so far away.

In this vicinity Perisher Creek drops suddenly with impressive falls about fifty feet high. It appeared possible to descend on ski from the bluff to the area below the falls, as the scrub here appeared more negotiable, and then to proceed down the clearer bed of Perisher Creek to the Snowy River.

However, it took us from one p.m. to three p.m. to negotiate this hundred feet of rock outcrop, bunched saplings and deep and treacherously sliding snow and then to climb out the opposite side of Perisher Creek, up an almost vertical ice bank, followed by much difficult threading through close scrubby saplings.

At three p.m., at last out of the timber, we thankfully dropped our packs and boiled a billy.

It was still apparently only a hop, step and jump across to our promised clearing, with Disappointment Spur lowering mockingly over us in the lengthening shadows. White's River Hut was also much closer to us than Betts' Camp. Nevertheless, at that late hour, the vote was to return up Perisher Creek to Betts' Camp.

The climb out was made in a quickly falling temperature, our headlamps shining on the snow crystals. At the top, we found our skins too solidly frozen to our skis to remove at Perisher Gap. A frustrating push down to Betts' after twelve hours of scrub-walloping and climbing with packs was indeed a disappointing finale.

In retrospect, my personal conclusions are that easier snow conditions would probably permit one to remove and carry ski and with the aid of an axe (or better, with a track cleared during the summer) this route to White's can be made quite negotiable. But for the small Snowy gorge section, the approaches to the Snowy from both sides offer excellent ski-ing in winter snow conditions.

Of course, a suspension bridge over the Snowy River gorge in this vicinity would be an ideal and not impractical solution. From



On the Northern Slopes of the Blue Cow. Disappointment Spur in the Middle Distance.
A. Andrews

the Smiggin's-Perisher area this would open up a large new section of the Kosciusko State Park for both winter and summer use and give direct access to some of the best parts of the main range,

But then, of course, this is New South Wales, where the State-monopolised snow-fields are sadly underdeveloped and where, notwithstanding the people's birthright of mountain recreation, blessed are they that expect little.