

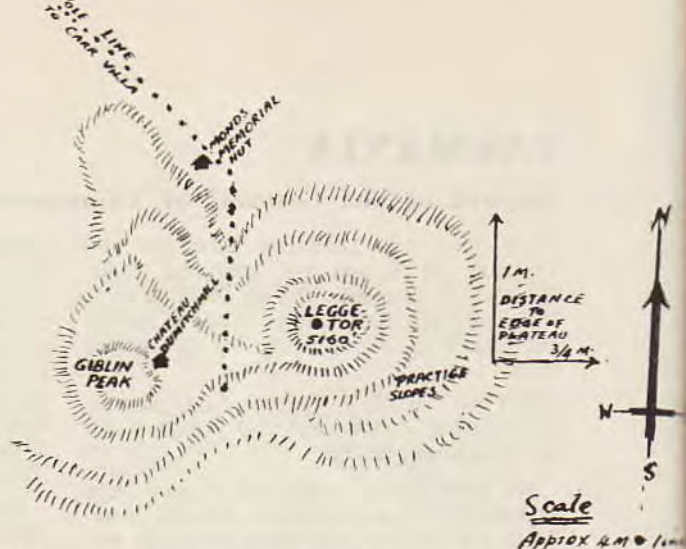
Tragedy Averted on Ben Lomond (Tasmania)

R. R. Vial

DURING the Tasmanian championship meeting last year events showed that there is slight danger of getting lost in the snow provided not one panics—the lost or the searchers.

The championships were held on Ben Lomond in mid-August. Ben Lomond is a plateau 30 miles from Launceston and is rectangular in shape—four miles by eight miles in extent. The sides are precipitous and in three places only are there reasonable approaches to the high ground. On top there are valleys and peaks which in winter are covered with snow up to thirty feet in depth—there are no trees whatever. The highest point on the plateau (and in Tasmania) is Legge Tor—5160 ft., and it was on the slopes of this peak that the races were being held.

On the afternoon of Saturday, 17th August, a large party of skiers were practising for the Slalom on the south-eastern slopes when the weather began to deteriorate, the wind increasing and driving clouds down on the peaks. This is most unusual—Ben Lomond is known as "the fairweather mountain"—so most skiers, who were lightly clad, commenced to return to the huts. There are two huts in the vicinity of Legge Tor—the Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club's "Monds Memorial" Hut, and a hut belonging to individual members of the club, known as "Chateau Dumitchmill." The latter is on Giblin Peak, adjacent to Legge Tor and the near end of the snow pole line, and the Monds Memorial Hut is about 800 yards away on the pole line which leads off the plateau and to a further N.T.A.C. hut "Carr Villa." The skiers turned west from their practice slope till they reached the pole line



and then followed it to the hut they wanted.

In so doing, however, many went astray in the unusual lack of visibility. A count of heads before dinner at Chateau Dumitchmill and Monds Memorial Hut (they are linked by telephone) showed that two were missing, although their packs were in the huts. They were Don Smith (30) and Rex Pelham (23) both of Hobart and members of the Southern Tasmanian Alpine Club. Both were competent skiers and Smith had some knowledge of the mountain, as he had visited Ben Lomond often. It was known they had wind jackets, so the only action taken at that stage was to place beacon lights near the huts. Chateau Dumitchmill has a wind driven electric lighting plant, the propeller of which was making a fair volume of sound in the wind. It was thought this should act as a guide also.

By 9 p.m. there was still no sign of the missing skiers. In case they should have followed the pole line to the other hut, "Carr Villa," a party skied the two miles there in semi-blizzard conditions and returned without news of them. Serious concern was felt at this stage, the danger being that they might try and get to the shelter of the trees off the plateau and come to harm on the precipitous sides with their 1000 ft. sheer drop. Some counselled general search parties forthwith, but the Racing Committee wisely decided that the risk of losing the searchers was too great. Accordingly a small party of the most experienced skiers searched the Legge Tor-Giblin Peak area, but unfortunately without result. This party had considerable difficulty in relocating the huts.

Full preparations were then made for a

general search the next day. Parties of skiers and their equipment were organised for the plateau, and plans formulated for police and public assistance to search the lower ground, with report centres, wireless and telephone communication, medical help, and so on.

The next morning the weather was not quite as bad, as there were occasional breaks in the cloud but, in general, conditions promised to be no better. Whilst the various parties were collecting their gear, one skier went to Legge Tor with binoculars to take advantage of any momentary improvement in visibility. There he met Smith and Pelham and assisted them back to the hut.

The night before the two Hobart men had started back to the Monds Memorial Hut slightly before the others, but in the bad visibility had passed through the pole line. Realising that they had gone too far they retraced their tracks and tried again with no better success. While daylight remained they continued trying to find the poles but they could see only a few yards, due to fog and driving snow. At dusk they retreated

out of the wind to the lee side of Legge Tor, near the afternoon's practice slope.

Appreciating the dangers of wandering about, they dug a hole in the snow with the heels of their ski and, using blocks of snow as walls and their ski and more snow as a roof, they made an effective shelter. One ski was left upright outside as a marker for search parties. During the night they took turns to sleep as they were aware of the risks of sleeping in snow without proper equipment. They had just got out of their shelter on the following morning when they were seen by the searcher on the Tor. Naturally they were cold and tired, but they suffered no serious ill effects, and were soon revived by warmth, massage and suitable food. This was supervised by the doctor present for the racing.

The lesson which this stressed to all those on the mountain was the importance of calm and logical action by both those lost and the searchers. Panic activity by either could have quite easily turned this incident into a tragedy.

Report of Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club.

THE winter of 1946 provided the heaviest snow known on Ben Lomond since the Club began operations on the mountain. Ski-ing snow was available from 1st June until Christmas and large drifts were still lying at the end of January. However, the unpleasant weather and frequent snowfalls during the early months seriously restricted ski-ing activities. Some idea of the snow conditions can be gauged from the damage done to the original section of the Summit Hut through pressure exerted by glacial action which, although relieved by a trench, was still sufficient to move the rear about a foot out of position.

A full racing programme was held during the season and the Tasmanian Championships (of which a report appears elsewhere) were also held on Ben Lomond. The result of the club races were as follows:—

Downhill Championship:—E. D. Mills 1, R. Naylor 2, W. F. Mitchell 3.

Handicap:—S. Tilley, Jnr. 1, E. H. Smith 2, S. V. Tilley 3.

Slalom Championship:—R. Naylor 1, R. F. Tilley 2, H. L. von See 3.

Handicap:—S. Tilley, Jnr., 1, E. H. Smith 2, R. Naylor 3.

Langlauf Championship:—R. F. Tilley 1, E. D. Mills 2, R. Naylor 3.

Handicap:—R. F. Tilley 1, E. D. Mills 2, R. Naylor 3.

Jump Championship:—R. R. Vial 1, R. F. Tilley 2, E. D. Mills 3.

Novice Race:—Shirley Tilley 1, C. Smith 2, S. Tilley, Jnr., 3.

On 1st December a Ski-ing Carnival proved a very successful experiment: fine weather, fast and plentiful snow, the fancy dress worn in some of the events, all combined to provide a true carnival spirit.

The membership continues its slow, but steady, increase: the number now is 111. Members are kept in closer touch with Club activities by a monthly news sheet published under the name of the "Ben Lomond Bulletin."

During the year a number of pleasant social functions took place. In May a Welcome Home Dinner was tendered to ex-service members as the guests of the President, Mr. C. K. Stackhouse. The Annual Dinner and presentation of trophies, both Tasmanian and Club, was held in November.

On this occasion the Inter-Club Trophy, a three foot blackwood Ski, was presented to the Club by the President of the Tasmanian Ski Council.

Congratulations are extended to Vice-President F. Smithies, O.B.E., on the honour conferred upon him by H.M. the King.

The Club's Secretary, R. G. Hall, was welcomed on his return from active service with the R.A.A.F. The Club is indebted to C. R. Smith and E. H. Smith for acting as secretaries during his absence abroad.

The steady growth of the Club and the increasing demand for accommodation have led to yet another extension of the Summit Hut. A large room, a man's dormitory and a work-room are being added at present. When completed the building, which will then provide accommodation for 30, will be known as the "Monds Memorial Chalet," in honour of the Club's first President, the late C. F. Monds.

Communications are also improving. A timber milling company which has been operating in the area, has extended the road about a mile up the mountain. Consequently the distance from cars is less than two miles

The Alpine Club of Southern Tasmania

The best snow in living memory in this Island came to a close in mid-January, 1947, after a season of six months of first-class skiing.

The past year has seen the completion of the Club Chalet at Eagle Tarn, situated at an altitude of 3,600 feet under the eastern shoulder of Mt. Mawson in the National Park. The construction of this commodious two-roomed chalet was made possible by the enthusiasm of all members who back-packed timber and equipment a distance of one mile from the roadhead at Lake Dobson, often under adverse conditions of snow, rain and mud.

In the Tasmanian Ski Championships at Ben Lomond the club team raced creditably, finishing second to the Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club. At this meeting the club lost the services of two members of the team through a misadventure on the night preceding the races when Mr. D. Smith, the club president, and Mr. R. Pelham were benighted at 6,100 feet in a severe blizzard. The lesson of the Cleve Cole tragedy on Mt.

to the Club Chalet (4000 ft.) from which point the remaining two miles to the Summit Hut (5000 ft.) are normally covered on ski. It is hoped that the promised Government road will soon be an accomplished fact, at least, as far as the Chalet. Once again the question of telephone communication has been considered. During the State Championships a telephone line was operated between the Summit Hut and a private hut on top of the mountain and proved extremely useful. However, a link is badly needed between the Summit Hut and the Chalet and even to the settlement at the foot of the mountain. After careful consideration of the recent experiments of the S.C.V. with wireless telephony, an application is being made to the P.M.G.'s Department for a license to operate.

During the year the Club's office-bearers were as follows:—President, C. K. Stackhouse; Vice-Presidents, F. Smithies, O.B.E. and E. D. Mills; Hon. Secretary, R. G. Hall (on active service); Acting-Secretary, C. R. Smith and E. H. Smith; Hon. Treasurer, S. V. Tilley; Committee, H. L. von See, W. F. Mitchell, C. R. Smith, S. Merry and R. Gray.

Bogong was well learnt and they dug in before they became exhausted and survived the night, escaping with frost-bitten feet.

The experienced Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club team taught us lessons in racing technique which will not be forgotten at the next meeting.

In the late spring members were fortunate in being able to receive instruction from Canadian visitors, including the well-known instructor Ray Compton of the Cypress Ski Club, Vancouver, B.C. The Romiger technique, beloved of Canadians, has taken root in this Island.

The snow mountains of the National Park area have given members ample scope to indulge in ski mountaineering and touring. Ascents of Mt. Field West and the subsidiary ranges have left memories of sunshine and storm which add zest to anticipations of the coming season.

Officers of the Club are:—President, Mr. D. Smith, 34 Dynnyrne Rd., Hobart; Vice-President, Mr. L. Saunders, Campbell St., Hobart; Hon. Secretary, Mr. B. C. Johnston, Town Hall, Hobart; Captain, Mr. W. Hamilton, Fitzroy Place, Hobart.