

The Victorian Alps

Mr. R. M. Bowie writes us an acceptable few paragraphs, which are printed below, concerning the early days in the Victorian Alps. Mr. Bowie says: "I knew and admired most of those whose names I mention, for the most part, now gone hence."

About 40 years ago the Victorian Alps were known and visited by only a few enthusiasts, who paid regular pilgrimages to the higher peaks every summer. Mounts St. Bernard, Hotham and Feathertop, being on or near to the Bright-Omeo coach road, were easy of access, though most visitors were content merely to drive over, staying a night at what used to be known as "Bousteads."

About this period there was formed in Bright what was known as the Alpine Club. Several local gentlemen who had tasted of the joy of mountaineering got together and compiled a small guide book which, while describing only the most prominent peaks and plateaus, was wholly reliable.

Doctors Wilkinson and Fred Bird, Justice (afterwards Sir Hartley Williams), Captain Monash (now Sir John), and not forgetting Staker, the Flinders Lane traveller, were amongst the few founders of this pioneer Club, members of which spent many an enjoyable camp-out on the high plains. The only track then known to Mount Buffalo began about 16 miles up the Buckland River. It was steep, rocky and difficult, for both men and horses, and one had to have at least a week in order to be assured of a reasonable time on the Summit.

During one of these visits a party was fog-bound for several days. Their position was almost desperate, as provisions were low, and anxiety on their behalf was being experienced by those below at their prolonged absence. Observing cattle on the plains with Porepunkah brands on them, one of the party undertook to try and find a way down by the route the cattle had made their way, and was so successful that he arrived at the base on Eurobin Creek in a couple of hours. This at once made the ascent of Mount Buffalo a much easier task.

Funds were collected to blaze and roughly form what was to be known as "Staker's track." For over 20 years this track was much used by all who would brave the difficulties and dangers of the seemingly inaccessible Buffalo Mountains. Messrs. Carlyle and Manfield undertook the guiding, catering and provision of tents and horses for intending tourists, who now began to come in increasing

numbers. These guides, both having been miners in Kiandra, understood the use of skis and toboggans, which they provided for those who bespoke winter trips, and many availed themselves of the opportunity to enjoy Alpine winter sports in ideal conditions. The skis were home-made, from split woolly butt or mountain ash, the toe bend being formed by boiling the lath for some hours, binding the first 18 inches and keeping it in position by a rope. The ski was then placed in the chimney to dry. These were very serviceable, indeed, and many a snowfield was negotiated thus shod.

There was little or no attempt at ski-running as a sport until the Victorian Government made the famous road available in 1908. From that date onwards the sport became an institution, and experts were forthcoming who taught beginners the art of ski-running. The various Governments of Victoria and N.S.W. would do well to encourage the winter sports on Buffalo and Kosciusko, as it has been found that once one has tasted of the joys of this cleanest and healthiest of all sports they invariably come again and again when conditions are favorable.



A JUMP TURN OVER A CORNICE.