

Bogong Bias

By P. E. Hull.

This article draws a picture of Bogong for those who go only to Hotham or Buller. Bogong should not be confused with the Bogong High Plains nearby, of entirely different character and separated from Bogong by a 3,000 ft. valley.

Ski-ing at Bogong is just as good if not better than Hotham, and the cabin is well-placed. A drop in the scale of comfort is inevitable compared with properly staffed, well kitched chalets. However, the Memorial Hut at Bogong is warm and weatherproof, with water on tap, hot shower facilities and plenty of wood nearby. The trip in or out can be arduous in bad weather, so all parties should have a good proportion of experienced skiers. Food must be sent up by packhorse before April 15; later may mean a two-day packing trip, with double charges. Food should be in standard kero. cases for easy slinging on pack-saddles; perishables in tins (perforated, if desirable) against rats and mice. Cases should be strongly strapped to have some chance of remaining serviceable should a horse slip and roll on his freight. While Dudley Walker is in the A.I.F., Wally Ryder, also of Tawonga, is carrying on with packing.

Last winter, our rendezvous was the friendly Bogong Hotel at Tawonga in that unspoilt paradise, the Kiewa Valley. Next morning we rode along Mountain Ck., to climb The Staircase spur and ski over the summit of Bogong and down to the Cleve Cole Memorial Hut in Camp Valley. We rode a couple of miles farther (mainly along the flat) to reach the snowline rather than going to Hotham by Bon Accord spur. Lunch at Bivouac Hut at about the same altitude as Bon Accord Hut, with about the same chances of riding a few hundred feet higher. The Ski-climbs up Staircase and Bon Accord are equal in vertical height, 1600 ft., though The Staircase climb is not broken by a level stretch as on the Razorback. The summit crossings of Bogong and Hotham seemed about the same—Bogong takes nearly an hour in bad weather, but has been done in 25 minutes.

The runs down are about the same too—Bogong has 450 ft. of schuss, not too fast to take straight with a pack in any snow except ice, finishing right in

front of the hut-door without any poling across the flat as at Hotham. The average party would leave Tawonga after breakfast and arrive at the Memorial Hut between 3.30 and 5, according to snow and weather.

First day in, after unpacking, we launched the less-skilled ones down the practice slopes outside the door. Next day we climbed to Tadgell's Point above the Hut, an easy 500 ft. on skins. South-east from here lies Haunted Gully, facing south, bounded on the west by Horse Ridge and on the east by the spur on which the hut is built.

Malcolm McColl ran first on the S.E. ridge, then Mary Wallace, Laurie Henshal, and I followed, and Sam McKay brought up the rear. Mac checked to get a sight below before he dove over into the vast inclined amphitheatre. He was still hidden when I swung hard right off the ridge, but a moment later a tiny black speck shot out onto the steep side of the far ridge and the sun made diamonds in the long spume of powder that trailed as he turned down towards some hidden gap in the snowgums far below.

My eyes were wet and the wind was howling rather pleasantly in my ears as in turn I side-slipped after the long open traverse and turned downhill to follow Laurie's series of rhythmic christies in the steep glade that made the last couple of hundred feet through timber to the creek. We checked the baro.—750 vertical feet of descent.

A drink from the creek out of Mac's hat was very good down there in the warm sunshine, as we donned skins and stripped off sweaters for the climb out. Mac took a sight of the last schuss at 27 degrees, and we set off up the timbered centre ridge, averaging 24 degrees. We climbed out into open country just below our turning point off the ridge halfway in the first run. This time, it sure made you feel "cribbed, cabined and confined" to feel the tree-trunks a couple of yards from your heels as you swished from side to side; the narrow lane wriggled like a snake's back, sometimes went several ways at once, but no-one took a penalty and we finished schussing a snowbridge over the creek fifty yards from our first run.

Sun was at zenith, and we were fairly dripping when we reached Tadgell's Point for a final run before lunch. The ridge ran slower because of the sun, but the snow changed pace in the south-facing funnel, there were several wobbles in the tracks where they led off to the right and I had "spaghetti legs" towards the end of the 27 degree glade, but it was unanimously voted best run of the "morning", then after 1 p.m. We made the long climb to the pole-line and put our ski together for the eastern schuss to the hut. The natural speedometer of screaming wind and watering eyes flicked to 30, 40, steadied, then died away in the glorious sensation of a long christy that stopped three feet from the porch.

The whole party made a trip out to West Peak, about equal in distance to Loch from Hotham chalet. Regretfully we passed many north and south-facing gullies, but we had some glorious sights of the Plains, Fainter, McKay, the Razor-back, Feathertop and Hotham across the Big River valley. At West Peak itself we seemed on the edge of the world, looking down to all the low country at the head of the Klewa Valley. A fog came up and, swirling around us one minute, blotted out everything and the next let the view in again. We followed the poles back to the summit, where the fog lifted to give us a tempting sight of Cairn Gully at the head of the great basin between the summit and the East Ridge.

The light was poor but the run was well worth while, about 600 ft., all well over 20 degrees.

We skied many other long slopes besides and, regretfully, left many more unskied. Sometimes we wished we hadn't to cook our own meals. But we fed on the fat of the land. Sometimes we missed the comfortable beds of Hotham, but were always warm at night: when we threw a party we didn't have to squash into a tiny bedroom, and always the whole house attended. We ate when it suited our plans, and lacking a tempting super-heated lounge we were out again after one cigarette. So we packed more feet of downhill into our day. We lived in each other's pockets. Knew each other better. We are going back to Bogong.