

Victoria — Review of the Year

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THE winter of 1946 will probably be remembered for heavy snow as long as the previous best within ski-ing history, 1927. At the June holiday week-end, when people are usually praying for the first fall, snow blocked the Buller road well below the old Chalet site, and the Hothamites went up the Bon Accord spur in true winter fashion, or skied more than twelve miles up the Omeo road. Through July the weather map showed an almost continuous series of lows coming over, the while Old Man Winter was very busy in the Alps laying down feet of snow to previous records in inches. Approximately twenty-five feet is reported to have fallen at Mt. Bogong in one fortnight, while at Buller ten feet piled up within a week. Small wonder that the women's championship meeting at Hotham was abandoned, and that the entries for the S.C.V.'s annual photograph competition were lower than usual. Snow—fog—snow, between the two ski-ing was rather hard to enjoy in July—for once there was too much of a good thing.

August was little better—at Ben Lomond, the Tasmanian championship field spent nearly as much time looking for competitors and others who had become "slewed" in the local variety of blizzard, as in racing. People got slewed crossing Little Styx, on the Giblin, coming up Misery, and going around the Thirty-second. I got slewed myself trying to find the jump—beats me how the jumpers didn't get slewed between the inrun and the take-off! The style-judging had to be done in sections, because no one judge could see the whole of the inrun, take-off, and outrun—the fog was too thick.

In September the rains came, but not for long. Three feet of snow went in one night at Hotham. After three days people went out and skied in desperation—some even went down the Bon Accord to pack in meat—the Chalet threw a fancy-dress party, and that fixed it. The oldest resident was seen sitting dazed in a corner, mumbling in his zeard, "getting to be nowt but another ruddy Buffalo." But new snow fell that night and life began again.

November the Davenport could still be skied from the top of Higgle non-stop to the

bushwhackers finish on the shoulder by the creek. Australia Drift was full and there was a large field for the Spargo Cup. Christmas had not seen the last of the drifts. On the whole, skiers would have preferred less snow and more ski-ing.

New names in the local geography of Hotham acquired during 1946 were Hangman's Drop, and Kemp's Cascade.

Hangman's Drop is a very steep slope at the south-west end of Higginbotham, named during Cup Week-end, when it was first brought to popular notice. It can be found off the ridge directly by the swinging road-sign at the far end of Higgle from the Chalet, known as "The Gallows."

Kemp christened his Cascade in September. It is at the foot of Mary's Slide on the Lock ridge, where a 30 degree slope falls sharply out of a little hanging gully straight into the creek-bed. The day was a frosty one, and the snow, spring stuff, frozen. The creek below the gully was open. George took it straight on his chest for the last twenty yards, and went in at high speed with a hearty "plop." As I came around the corner he was struggling to his feet, and the accompanying female had already fled out of ear-shot.

The equipment situation eased a little in 1946, but ski and bindings were still very hard to get. Boots were virtually impossible, and the second-hand prices were, in consequence, fantastic. Clothing, however, was in moderate supply, also locally made waxes. Books on ski technique from overseas began to reappear on the shelves. Despite several strong rumours, the locally made laminated ski has, so far, failed to put in an appearance. Perhaps, now that the Davis Cup has left us, the tennis racket manufacturers will not be so busy—squash rackets have been virtually unobtainable because the tennis boom has absorbed all racket-making capacity—and at last one of them may turn to laminating ski as well as rackets. Here's hoping, anyway! If data is needed, there should be plenty for the asking, as a result

of the American research associated with the equipping of their Army Divisions for mountain warfare.

Jumping is in the doldrums, in Victoria at any rate. Lack of proper jumping-hills is the main cause.

The Donna Buang inrun and take-off platforms are decayed and disused. Before they had reached that sorry state, workmen had robbed them of their planking—robbed to form boxing for a public lavatory—admittedly a fine stone lavatory!

Buller's jump-hill, too, needs attention. Small wonder then that our few jumpers have little opportunity to practise, except in the actual events at State and Interstate championship meetings.

A ski-jumping club was in existence before the war, but so far as is known has not yet been revived. There is a definite need to push harder for the facilities that must precede any widening of interest in jumping among the new skiers. Without a good selection of jumpers the Victorian team will always have an uphill fight in the Interstate matches, even if it can lead in the other three events.

Jumping, more than any other branch of ski-ing, has a future as a spectator sport. It was the first to draw crowds in America, long before downhill became popular. It is to be hoped that the advent of such a keen jumper as Bill Harris as manager at Hotham Chalet will do much to encourage jumping there, and in the State. Bill has jumped 30 metres.

Highlights of the S.C.V.'s year were the attainment of one thousand members, the change of meeting-place to the roomier Assembly Hall, in Collins Street, the resumption of racing in somewhat difficult conditions, and the start of building operations for the Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge at Mt. Buller. Hut bookings were a record. Membership stood at 1046 at the end of 1946. The subscription was raised to one guinea a member by the annual meeting of 1946, with husband and wife paying 1½ and juniors ½-guinea. A paid Assistant Secretary has been appointed to cope with the increase in work resulting from the club's growth. Plans for 1947 include the erection of a temporary hut on the War Memorial Club House site

at Falls Creek, on the new Kiewa Road to Bogong High Plains.

The 1946 Annual Meeting of the S.C.V. approved the S.C.V. Committee's recommendation of the site for the War Memorial Club House at Falls Creek on the Bogong High Plains, not far from Mt. McKay.

The Committee wound up its campaign for the selection of this site with an impressive review of eleven pages in the November issue of "Schuss." The story was very well illustrated with maps and pictures, the whole a happy augury for the improved magazine that is promised as a part of the fruits of the members' decision to raise the annual subscription.

There was no opposition at the meeting to selection of the Plains site, in fact Hotham, suggested several years ago, was not even mentioned. The minority, who had asked consideration of that alternative then, were not vocal. The S.C.V. executives are universally admired for their resilient enthusiasm and appetite for hard work; approval of their recommendation for the Club House site was a measure of the confidence of the general members in their judgment and admiration for their efforts. It was probably the most momentous decision in S.C.V. history, a courageous decision to pioneer new country so far as chalets are concerned, country that is probably, at the moment, unfamiliar to a large percentage of the S.C.V.'s thousand members.

Popularising of the McKay area should bring new mountains, such as Spion Kop, into the list of "musts" for the downhillers, and will complete the trinity of well-developed alpine ski mountains, Buller, Hotham, Plains.

Bogong still stands aloof, undeveloped and waiting, but there will be many who will not be sorry for that. It would be a pity if there were no first-class ski mountains left in Victoria to which those with the urge for solitude and trackless snows could retreat. It is all the more appropriate for being our highest mountain.

Mt. Erica Division of the S.C.V. had a very successful season, increasing interest being shown in the Baw Baw and adjacent snow-fields. The Division ran eight trips during the winter, apart from numerous private

visits by members, and by skiers from Melbourne only 100 miles away. Skiable snow was available until very late in the year. The Division's Hut on Mt. Baw Baw was well used. Some of the regulations for use of this hut are interesting. A booking system is in operation, and "gate-crashers" may be evicted by those officially booked into the hut. The man with the key is in charge, collects fees, and sees that the rules are observed. Firewood must not be cut in the hut (always a temptation in bad weather). Those who have disobeyed rules may be refused future bookings.

The main downhill runs are a thousand-foot run on the east face of Erica, and a 600 ft. run from a ridge between Baw Baw and Phillack into the Tyers River. However there is plentiful touring in the thirty square miles of plateau at an average elevation of 4500 ft. with peaks at 5000 ft.

Wangaratta Ski Club has built, at St. Bernard, the first of a series of three club cabins. The site is a convenient one for week-end trips from Wangaratta, as it is close to the road. Although blocked to cars, the road has proved easy for Eric Hoy's Bren Carrier, with exhausts reversed, to act as deicers for its tracks. In light seasons this cabin should be easily accessible to cars, apart from the possibility of the road being cleared permanently when St. Bernard's Hospice is rebuilt. Wangaratta reports a very successful first post-war year and a great revival of interest in skiing in the district.

The Bright Ski Club was re-formed in 1946 with seventy-three members. It was founded in 1936, but was only partly active during the war. The main aims of the club are to get young people on to the snow as cheaply as possible and help them to buy their own gear. During 1946 season they ran a bus-trip to Buffalo every Sunday at a cost of 10/- a head with an average attendance of between 30 and 40. The club has some ski, but the rest are hired at Buffalo, and senior members supply tuition. In all, twelve week-end trips were made in 1946 winter.

The Alpine Club of Victoria completed its second year with a full winter spent in its own ski lodge on Mount Higginbotham

(Hotham). Two members of the club were chosen as Captains of the Victorian Men's and Women's Ski Teams for 1946.

The Lodge, which was completed just before winter, was greatly admired by the many visitors from the Hotham Heights Chalet nearby, social calls being the order of the winter. The experiment of stocking the Lodge with supplies of food and accounting for them on a usage basis proved satisfactory, supplemented by fresh food sledged in each week from Harriettville by Eric Johnson. Gathering of wood during the continued bad weather proved burdensome, and arrangements have been made to have a good stack cut for the coming winter.

Working-bees have been conducted through the summer on the plumbing and internal carpentry. With the help of the Forests Department, a suitable variety of Spruce was selected, and a first instalment of young trees planted near the Lodge. Well-matured snow gums which grew nearby were killed as a result of the 1939 fires.

First tests of the novel oil-fired water heating system were satisfactory. The design was evolved by one of the club's engineer members.

Correspondence on a variety of matters between the Alpine Club of Victoria and its namesake club in England, that original which gave life to the whole sport of mountaineering in Europe, revealed a common interest in emergency Alpine communications. From England the Alpine Club advised that it has a First-Aid Committee of Mountaineering Clubs that has developed an extensive rescue scheme, but has been greatly hampered by inadequate communications. The A.C. of Victoria sent details and references of the scheme developed by Don Bennett, its first president, which was adopted by the S.C.V. for emergency communication by short-wave radio in the Victorian Alps. The A.C. of Victoria did a great amount of work in the initial stages of the scheme, and their financial support was responsible for the launching. Since then the scheme has been literally an one-man show—Don has averaged at least three nights a week for the last eighteen months, spent working on the modification of the Army sets purchased through the Disposals Commission. He is chairman of S.C.V.'s Communications sub-committee.

Qualifications in force for Rover Scouts before they are accepted for winter trips to the Scout Hut on the Bogong High Plains are interesting. Applicants must have completed three summer trips, preferably two hikes and a working-bee, and must also attend an instructional week-end at Warburton as well as at least two practical week-end ski-trips. The compulsory week-end course includes instruction in ski-ing, cooking, hut life, and organisation of parties. The Rover Scouts are planning the erection of a Memorial Chalet on a three-quarter block of land about 1½ miles from Warburton, at an estimated cost of £1200. The land has already been purchased.

The Bogong Ski Club was formed, as I suppose a good number of clubs are, after a fireside discussion, the length of which was only exceeded by its enthusiasm. Martin Romuld's S.E.C. Cottage on the Bogong High Plains was the scene, and the actors were: Martin Romuld, W. Godfrey, W. Morgan, C. Wheeler, and A. J. Keeble. Following this a general meeting was called at Bogong township, in July, 1940, and the club was formed, taking its name from Victoria's highest mountain.

Its membership grew from a modest 20 members in 1940 to over 70 members in 1946, when a full programme of racing events was contested. W. Nelson won the Club Championship, being placed first in Slalom, Downhill and Langlauf. P. McCashen won the B-grade Championship with first in Slalom and Downhill, and second place in the Langlauf. The club has a hut on the Bogong High Plains near the Ruined Castle.

Organised ski teaching came back into the picture in Victoria for the 1946 winter. Lindsay Salmon at Hotham, and Maurice Selle at Buller both ran their own ski schools throughout the season despite the handicaps of prolonged bad weather.

Selle was the modest centrepiece of an unusual incident near Cow Camp. Ski-ing down from the summit of Buller, he was carrying a child on his back to speed up the trip through bad weather. Just before reaching the flat at Cow Camp, in poor light he ran into an unexpected basin and fell heavily forward, driving the tip of one ski into his face. Despite very painful lacerations, he

completed the journey with his passenger before receiving first-aid.

The road from Tawonga came nearer to the foot of Bogong in 1946. It was extended from Cooper's about one-and-a-half miles towards the Staircase Spur, where it turns away to the ranges opposite. The dense growth of saplings on the Staircase above the Bivouac Hut, which has been a most unpleasant barrier in heavy snow conditions, was last year cleared by the Public Works Department, so that a broad track now exists up the crest of the spur. The Summit Hut on Bogong was buried early in the season by very heavy drifts. It has been buried in previous heavy seasons, but this time the exceptional depth of snow apparently created pressures which resulted in some general movement of the snowcap on the summit ridge. When the Summit Hut reappeared in the Spring it was found to be badly crushed, the heavy internal bracings being splintered. It will probably have to be rebuilt.

The declaration by the S.C.V. Committee, in "Schuss" of August, that Bogong had been placed out of bounds because of exceptionally heavy snow conditions, broke new ground in the sphere of club responsibility for the actions of members.

The shouldering of responsibility for the "vetting" of hut and other bookings, and thus by implication interfering to some extent with the liberty of action of the individual, was one that gave rise to some discussion at the time of the 1943 tragedy on Bogong. Though no major decision was taken then, it had been for long the practice to advise particular persons that they were considered unfit to attempt a particular trip. Indeed, such a weeding out is one of the reasons underlying the universal system of ski tests.

This time S.C.V. went the whole hog, no doubt with the 1943 tragedy in mind, and skiers were advised through "Schuss," in heavy capitals, that no matter how well equipped they must not visit Bogong until further notice. The ban applied for the whole of August.

The facts given by Gibbs, S.C.V.'s Subcommittee Chairman, in a later issue of "Schuss" do show that exceptionally heavy

snow fell on Bogong, so much so that the pole-line connecting the Staircase Spur with Camp Valley via the summit ridge was buried and rendered useless as a guide in inclement weather. Huge cornices ran from one side of the ridge to the other, completely changing the normal face of the mountain. Closing this approach was undoubtedly wise, even if Gibbs' own party, had successfully negotiated these exceptional conditions. Though not mentioned in "Schuss," the ban was intended only to apply to the exposed Staircase Spur-Summit Ridge approach, as the sheltered Tee Spur approach was considered likely to be in a safe condition for those familiar with it.

What are the future possibilities and implications of the banning of mountains? What an excuse it would be for the prolonging of one's holiday to be able to say to the irate boss on return: "But I couldn't descend—the approach was banned!" If banning becomes a practice, eventually one of the great array of those doomed to be permanently unversed in the finer points of ski mountaineering may attack the club for letting him get into a jam by not banning a certain mountain! And even the old "Brute-Force" club may arise again in new guise—the "Banned-Mountains-Only Club."

The fiercely controversial question of parallel or stem, now applied even to the beginners' schools, received much space in the Australian ski monthlies, "Schuss" and "Snow Revelry." Overseas the issue seems to have become almost a personal one between various teachers. Shades of the telemark-christiania controversy of a decade ago, when the Alberg-stem-christy teaching was new!

The argument waxed hot and strong in those days, until the growth of the ski-lift habit spoilt it by producing a race of downhillers who actually preferred to christy on hard ice rather than run in the untracked snow alongside the deep hard grooves worn by the sheep-like patrons of the lifts.

Seems to us that the earlier answer applies now—it all depends—you telemark when the snow is suitable, ditto the stem-christy, and ditto the parallel turn. If the snow has that gluey quality, surely a little bit of stem first

will make it easier for even the most rabid parallel-merchant to get his turn going. If the snow be hard and easy, use of preliminary stem may be classed as mere habit. Peter Lunn's classic "High Speed Ski-ing" devotes no less than 14 pages to exactly that point, "Choice of Turn."

Pinnibar (Y.B. 1940, p. 73) is about to be tamed! A road is being constructed from the Omeo-Corryong Highway which will eventually extend beyond the summit of Pinnibar into Gibson's Hut, where there is fine ski-ing country. When the road is complete it will be possible to journey from Sydney to Pinnibar in less time than for the journey to Charlotte Pass.

This and other roads planned to be constructed on the N.S.W.-Victorian border will, as Tom Mitchell puts it, mean that before long it may be possible to ski in N.S.W. in the morning and in Victoria in the afternoon (or vice versa) without using an aeroplane.

If the Omeo-Hotham road is cleared of snow during the winter of 1947 it will be one more tribute to the effective work of our public administration, in the shape of the Country Roads Board of Victoria. Omeo people, led by Cliff Bant, have agitated for this for some time. Effective liaison with the ski clubs directly interested in Mount Hotham (Alpine, University, Telemark and Edelweiss Clubs, and Omeo Division of S.C.V.) was maintained by Bant. Representations in Melbourne were accorded a sympathetic hearing by the C.R.B., leading to a request that the Board should consider a snow-ploughing project for the coming winter. Tasmanian experience was quoted to show that, in certain conditions, a heavy truck with a blade could be satisfactory. The Omeo road was described as sheltered and comparatively free from cuttings—a less difficult problem than the clearing of the Harrietville-Hotham road.

The benefit to the general public of opening this road would be quickly shown in increased road traffic. Championship Ski Meets at Hotham would have a real crowd to watch them. Many Gippslanders would make weekend trips to see the experts in action on snow as well as just to see the unique scenery of our Alps in winter. For the first time the

man-in-the-street would really see what snow looks like from the top of a mountain, not just low down on a forest road.

The Melbourne Press gave generous space to ski-ing matters last winter. If they be the mirror of public opinion, ski-ing is growing fast out of the woolly-cap-Buffalo-snow-baller concept once so firmly held by the man in the street, who now has some inkling of it as a fast and skilful sport. More power to their columns!

Government-baiting and the decrying of inactivity, or of restrictive activity, of various governmental departments is an ancient sport, and one greatly practiced in Australia. We have often criticised the lack of appreciation, among our chosen leaders, of the tourist possibilities associated with the development of ski-ing in Victoria and other States of the Commonwealth.

Yet, if the critics (and we have been among them) would but pause to reflect, they would find much that is worthy of high praise in the quiet work performed by our public servants in the Railways, Public Works, Forests Departments, and Country Roads Board. Ski-ing has much to thank them for.

Take the work of the Railways at Hotham as an example. They developed the Bon Accord approach, an immense improvement over the long St. Bernard traverse. They brought out Austrian ski teachers who revolutionised the average downhill standard within three years. In face of unusual difficulties they rebuilt the Chalet within five months of its destruction in the January, 1939, bushfires. They carried on through the war despite staff shortages and supply troubles, which were greater by far than those which caused many a city or coastal guest-house to close. They allowed the Chalet to be made the base-station, and donated an expensive steel aerial mast for it, in the Emergency Radio Communication scheme fostered by Don Bennet. And last, but not least, they extended the hand of friendship and co-operation to the clubs granted sites for their ski lodges on Hotham.

Typical of this good feeling between the Railways and the various ski clubs was the informal party which genial Bert Keown, Railways Chief of Refreshment Services, threw in January this year so that the clubs

could meet the new Manager of Hotham and his wife, Bill and Popsy Harris.

Hotham is probably very small cheese to the many other ramifications of the Railways Refreshment Services, and in comparison probably costs an entirely disproportionate amount of administrative effort. One suspects that it is in no small degree due to the keen personal interest of Keown and his lieutenants in ski-ing that Hotham's affairs have been as beneficially directed as they have from the skiers' point of view.

Improvements at Hotham for 1947 will include a substantial increase to the water supply. Approval has also been given for the work of extending the Chalet to its planned size of 80 guests, but this work is "on the ice" until the current shortage in supplies for the building of homes has eased. Limits hitherto imposed on the size of guests' "laundry" may be removed this season.

One point which is being given some thought is the scale of comfort that should be planned for in the future. The Railways would like to hear the views of those who class themselves as regular Chalet patrons. A cross-section of the opinions of patrons would be helpful on such matters as the number of private bathrooms (if any) to be provided for guests who can afford the extra tariff that would be necessary. Another item of the future on which the wants of patrons should be made known is the question of private, or rather separate, bedroom accommodation compared to cheaper dormitory accommodation—how much should there be of each?

The welter of applications that are rumored to have been made for hut sites on Mt. Buller is a hearty sign of the growing interest in that mountain. When these have been sorted out and sites granted the mountain should fairly hum with building activity. The diversity of the applications leads to the thought that the successful applicants should form some sort of representative body to act for them in relations with the Forests Commission, Country Roads Board, and other Governmental authorities, and in generally ensuring the proper development of ski-ing facilities on the mountain, and the preservation of natural flora and fauna from man's destruction. Co-ordinated effort could achieve much more for the same expenditure of time and energy.