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Red Cross Ski Patrols

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Ski Patrol

THE above title brings into ski-ing something new in organised large-scale first-aid and safety measures. At the present moment, as far as I can ascertain from Red Cross Headquarters in Melbourne, nothing else on similar lines exists in Australia. Of course, in overseas countries such as Switzerland and Canada this patrol system is part and parcel of ski-ing and has been so for many years.

The start of such a system in Victoria came about more by accident than design and happened in the following way. While on a week-end visit to Mt. Buller, I was approached by Maurice Selle, well-known instructor there and now manager of the S.C.V. Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge, who asked me to see into badge design for a small local patrol he had organised. This design incorporated the Red Cross insignia and as such official permission had to be obtained from Red Cross before it could be used.

This liaison brought about several conferences between myself and Red Cross, who were tremendously keen on the idea. They could see the latent possibilities involved and offered to supply first-aid equipment, etc., to this original ski patrol on Mt. Buller.

Red Cross then called in the S.C.V., as controlling body of ski-ing in the State, and the patrol formation went a step further. A meeting of interested parties was called during the winter of 1950, such as it was. This meeting decided to form four ski-patrol companies, namely, Buller, Bogong, Hotham and a reserve company, Melbourne. A super-

intendent was elected to each company and over all a commandant. This position was given to Derrick Stogdale—present president of the S.C.V. He has put in a huge amount of work on the project and for that matter still is. He obtained the winter first-aid manual of the Canadian body and completely revised it to suit Victorian conditions.

The guiding hand behind all our work so far is that of Mrs. Mackay, Victorian Divisional Commandant of Australian Red Cross. I would like to offer sincere appreciation for everything she has done in putting this Ski Patrol system on such a sound basis.

To date, because of its earlier formation, the Buller Company has been the active field company. On several occasions last winter they rendered rapid and valuable assistance in any case of injury that occurred. Being actively concerned in one rescue operation, I would here like to give a resume to show how the patrol works.

On a bad day in September with rain and zero visibility on the mountain, people were confined to lodges. At one of them, irked by the inactivity, a girl set out for a short walk before lunch. She soon became lost in what was to her unfamiliar terrain. At 3 p.m., as she had not returned, two patrols of two men each set out with walkie-talkie radios. Maurice Selle, with his intimate local knowledge of the area, set off along the summit pole line watching for footmarks deviating off in either direction.

I, with the other walkie-talkie, set out to search the cabins in the Cow Camp area in case the girl had taken refuge in one of

them from the rain and fog. In constant radio contact with the other radio, I had completed this section of the search and was heading towards the Boggy Creek fall.

Shortly afterwards, Maurice reported hearing a coo-ee in this region and soon announced the location of the lost skier. She was saturated and frightened and had suffered scratches and torn clothes from scrubby snowgum growing thickly nearby.

On receiving the good news, I proceeded back to the lodge and had a hot bath and a hot meal waiting when the rescue party arrived half an hour later. The value of the radios is inestimable and we plan to have all patrols duly fitted with them. The time saved by the other party or parties out, who can be immediately recalled, is alone enough to warrant their inclusion.

Many more such instances can be related from this area, but time and space do not permit. The above was quoted to show what could have happened had not the trained ski patrol been available.

Now, to get on to the actual working of one particular unit—the Melbourne Red Cross Ski Patrol Company. The office bearers are superintendent, secretary, treasurer and also, on the administrative side, are sub-committees such as, social, equipment, publicity, etc. The social sub-committee is running functions to raise funds for such as the radios mentioned. Already, a successful barbecue has been held and other functions are on the agenda. The equipment section will see to the field kits, etc., to ensure smooth operation in emergency. Such gears as stretchers, crutches with ski stick baskets attached, etc., have been made in readiness for the coming season.

Publicity is in close liaison with Red Cross and already several broadcasts in their weekly sessions have been made. Articles are being prepared by this sub-committee for publication in the Red Cross journal "Activities" to let the outside world know about this new phase of Red Cross work.

As in most Red Cross companies, before a shoulder flash insignia can be worn, the wearer must pass at least two examinations. To adhere to this regulation it was decided that trained personnel in the ski patrol must

pass the St. John's Ambulance or equivalent test and also the A.N.S.F. 3rd class ski test. In quite a lot of instances, a patroller without the latter could be more of a nuisance than a help.

With the first-aid classes in mind, the Melbourne body has arranged to commence these early in February, 1951, so that by the time winter comes the members will be proficient in this phase.

Besides the above classes, lectures are being arranged on the angle of prevention of accidents and all other safety measures.

The badges are similar for all companies, the only exception being the name of such company. The design incorporates a Red Cross emblem on a green background with the words "Melbourne" Ski Patrol. These are easily recognisable and will be prominent on all Victorian snowfields this winter. Another symbol of recognition to be used by ski patrol members on duty will be the Red Cross pennant to be worn on a ski stick near the top.

The Bogong Company, first started by Ray Meyer and now in charge of Bob Hymans, is well under way and meets with full approval of the S.E.C. This area will probably be one of our most active in the ensuing years because of its gigantic skiing potential. The patrols will be in attendance during the coming championship there this season—just in case!

Hotham at the moment is a bit of a problem. This is because of the lack of residential patrol members in this remote area. In the meantime, the affairs of this company will be handled by the Melbourne section.

Finally, any person who has the misfortune to be injured, lost or in any distress whatsoever in the snow country, can approach anyone wearing the patrol badge with confidence. These patrollers will be only too pleased to help in such cases.

If any reader can enter into this sphere of activity we would be pleased to hear from you and, if necessary, to train you for patrol work. It will be an interesting part of skiing administration and one in which any skier should be only too happy to participate.

the sub-committees who control racing, social activities and so on. They are the people who do the work—for you. They run races, print journals, persuade governments to allow ski villages to be built, build ski-tows, prevent vital access roads being closed; they do a tremendous amount of work so that you and they can ski.

Why do they do it, particularly in the face of lethargy and often hostile criticism from the multitude, the socially unconscious? There are two main reasons—firstly, because they have sufficient initiative and energy and secondly, because of a fairly unselfish love for ski-ing. It is true, of course, that these people who do all the work like doing it—to a certain extent. It would be idle to deny that around these jobs a very pleasant social background is woven and that this compensates partly for the tremendous amount of work done. But the pity is that so much work is left to so few. In some cases ski politicians spend up to forty hours of their leisure time each week on ski government. Think what monetary gain a business sideline using that amount of time

each week could mean. It is not only in this way that these people lose financially; incidental expenses such as fares, petrol, odd phone calls, letters, entertaining, etc., can cost an individual as much as 10/- to £1 per week.

Yes, Mr. Ordinary Skier, you owe quite a lot to these "politicians" you've been scorning so long. You really can't get along without them. For instance, Buller would not now be bristling with over twenty club lodges if it weren't for the efforts of a few people; and similarly, it is safe to say that because skiers in Southern Tasmania have representatives on the National Park Trust they have very precious rights in that area. There are dozens of ways in which your interests are guarded.

If you and your friends are mad about ski-ing—is there a skier who isn't?—you'll do something to help our sport. If the ninety per cent. who do nothing were to spring off their tails and do only half of the work required to develop and govern ski-ing . . . If . . .