

Victorian Review of the Year

By John Nicholls

THE rapid development of ski-ing in Victoria continued during 1953, and is still racing ahead, though progress has abated somewhat and cannot be compared with the flush years of 1949-50-51.

Perhaps the most important aspect during 1953, and subsequently, is the inauguration at long last of the Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs' Ski-ing Improvements Fund. We have high hopes that this scheme will give us many more facilities on our mountains, much better and safer access and, eventually, raise the level of our ski-ing. The scheme is discussed elsewhere in this issue.

Even the old-timers eventually admit they cannot remember a ski season in Victoria as good as 1953. Right up into January it was still possible to ski somewhere in Victoria's mountain country. The spring ski-ing was really magnificent, and it is a constant source of wonder to club committees and private enterprise that more people do not forsake the chancy conditions of mid-winter for the obvious attractions of ski-ing in spring.

Once again we completed a season without a major tragedy, but surely our luck cannot hold any longer if access to Hotham is not improved. The story of how thirty-five people spent a blizzard night in Blow-Hard hut, and how two actually camped out in the snow during a trip into Hotham must not be repeated. Fortunately, Hotham access for 1954 will be much improved, because of the Wangaratta Ski Club's effort in making a safe pole line from Saint Bernard to Hotham, and also the fillip given access via Omeo by the C.R.B.'s decision to plough the road to Whisky Flat or further. Safety on the snow is still something not adequately catered for, however, and last minute efforts are being made before the 1954 season to rejuvenate the almost defunct Red Cross Ski Patrol and establish it on a sound basis at Buller, Hotham and Falls Creek.

While Kooroor Chalet at Buller, Drift Chalet at Hotham and Bob Hyman's Falls Creek Lodge all had successful years, the S.C.V. again lost heavily with Hotham Heights Chalet, purchased from the Railways Department two years ago. For a num-

ber of years Hotham Heights has not paid and there were many in Victoria who felt that the S.C.V. could not expect much greater success than the Railways had. It seemed rather a pity that a club should go into private enterprise on such a large scale as is demanded for successful operation at Hotham Heights. There is much to be learned from the S.C.V.'s experience. A chalet the size of Hotham Heights, and as remote, should be operated by someone with a very close personal interest, preferably by the owner himself; the reasons for this are obvious, if one looks at the results already achieved by Forras Bros., Lindsay Salmon and Bob Hymans. The up-shot of the S.C.V.'s financial failure at Hotham is that the Club has now severed its connection with this enterprise, which is in the hands of an entirely independent company, formed chiefly of the S.C.V. Hotham Heights debenture holders. At time of writing, it seems likely that, with considerable effort, Hotham Heights will be kept open for winter, 1954.

One very important outcome of the S.C.V.'s purchase of Hotham Heights from the Railway is that a special Bill was passed in Victorian Parliament granting the S.C.V. a "spotted" freehold title. This title has its very great limitations and it is arguable whether it is much better than the lease-hold held by Lindsay Salmon. However, it is a start and it is reasonable to expect that as time goes on efforts of the Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs to obtain free-hold titles throughout Victorian snow country will be intensified.

Unhappily, we are still unable to report the formation of the proposed Victorian Ski Association, which has been under discussion for three years between F.O.V.S.C. and S.C.V. The chances are, however, such a body will indeed be formed before the end of 1954, and we have good reason to believe that formation of this association embracing the S.C.V. and other clubs will make great steps towards further development of ski-ing in this State. No longer, we hope, will there be friction between the S.C.V. and other clubs, which has been a most unfortunate aspect of Victorian ski-ing for many years and which has undoubtedly done much to hinder



Joyce Brockhoff Memorial Cabin.

Photo. Eric Burt.

the full and sensible development of ski-ing here.

The Victorian total of Ski Clubs draws close to the seventy mark, and although the rate of formation of new clubs has slackened markedly and, indeed, there have been one or two small clubs which have actually fallen by the wayside, it is quite evident that more and more people are ski-ing every year.

An unusual but none-the-less welcome affiliation to the F.O.V.S.C. during 1953 was that of the South Australian Ski Club. Several attempts had been made to form a Club in that State since the war, but it was only in August of 1952 that a properly constituted organisation was formed. This was chiefly due to the energy of Dr. M.W. Woods, who convened the first meeting and became the first and present Club President. Apart from providing a satisfactory social focal point for the few South Australian skiers and the many interested exiles, the Club

was able to arrange two long week-ends at Buller during the year. Problems of transport, equipment and accommodation provided some headaches, but the latter was resolved by the co-operation of two Victorian Clubs which kindly made their lodges available. In the coming year the South Australians hope to spend another long week-end at Buller at the beginning of the season and a full week at Falls Creek in August. Provided the ever-present difficulty of accommodation can be overcome, the Club's future seems assured; interest is keen and membership is increasing steadily; near the end of the year membership totalled nearly 50.

With so many new clubs formed in the last few years the overwhelming number forget that the S.C.V. was formed thirty years ago and the Chamois and the Wangaratta Clubs not long afterwards, and this year the University Ski Club celebrates its

25th Anniversary, whilst the Women's Ski Club has just turned 21. Doubtless, few would believe that the first Ski Club in the world was started at Kiandra nearly 100 years ago. Most clubs have a fairly closed membership, being groups of people who have banded together in a social manner to form a club, or have formed because of some particular qualification, viz.: University Ski Club, Australian Postal Institute Ski Club, Monsanto Ski Club., etc. Of those that are open to membership from the public at large, the S.C.V. and Youth Hostels' Association are by far the most important. Youth Hostels' Association has done magnificent work to encourage young people to ski without the financial burden which, unfortunately, is part of the game these days. The country clubs, too, have enabled their members to get comparatively cheap ski-ing, and such clubs are, of course, blessed with far easier access because of their position relatively so close to the snow.

Buller is still the most important ski centre in Victoria. There are now more than thirty club lodges on the mountain and every week-end hundreds of cars make the 150 mile trip from Melbourne. The presence of the Koorora Chalet and the S.C.V. Ivor Whittaker Lodge in providing excellent accommodation and supplies has made it very easy even for the inconstant skier to get away to the snow for a week or so. The Ivor Whittaker Lodge has provided fresh meat on the mountain from its freezing chamber, which is capable of holding 500 carcasses, and Koorora Chalet has provided fresh bread baked on the mountain. Access is still rather a problem with Buller, with cars parked in parking areas strung out along the road and going as far as snow conditions and parking space will allow. The Federation made the first attempt, unfortunately unsuccessful, to keep Buller road free from snow to the old Chalet; due to a lack of finance and faulty design of the plough blade, the scheme had moderate success early in the season, but the vehicle used (Hamish Pearson's "Gutsache") was out of operation for most of the season. However, despite the lack of success this was the first effort at keeping the road free from snow, and it showed that, provided satisfactory equipment is obtainable, clubs will co-operate and provide sufficient finance to get better access. Next season, perhaps, with some

money from the "Ski-ing Improvements Fund," access to the old Chalet sight will indeed be possible. Incidentally, it is of interest to note that it is 100 years since Baron Von Mueller made the first recorded ascent of Mount Buller.

Falls Creek, despite the cut in the Kiewa Hydro-Electric Scheme works programme, was as busy as ever. With excellent access to within 2½ miles easy road ski-ing, this popular ski centre had hundreds of week-end skiers, quite a number staying for their annual snow holidays. There are now 12 club lodges and one commercial Chalet. This is the home to the North Eastern District Ski Association, which embraces not only clubs with lodges at Falls Creek, but also other country clubs, such as Wangaratta and Tallangatta, which ski at St. Bernard and Mount Wills respectively. Wangaratta, incidentally, has revived quite a lot of interest in Feathertop as a ski centre. Many Wangaratta members have spent week-ends and longer on Feathertop's magnificent slopes. After all, Feathertop, our second highest mountain, is fairly easily accessible from Harrietville for the energetic, and undoubtedly has some of the most magnificent ski slopes in Victoria. Tallangatta and District Ski Club has built a new hut near the summit of Mount Wills, but this mountain has not yet grown the village keenly anticipated when the ski-ing boom hit Victoria a few years ago. The Upper Murray Ski Club, with headquarters at Corryong, in the shade of the Kosciusko country, has built a lodge in the high country extending towards the foot-hills of Australia's highest mounts and is doing great work in developing entirely new ski-ing areas. The Baw Baws are still in the doldrums and it is unlikely any further lodge building will take place until a good road has opened on the highest parts of the plateau. For those in Central Gippsland, however, the Baw Baws affords a quickly accessible week-end ski resort. An excellent network of roads on the Victorian side of Mt. Kosciusko, constructed by the Snowy Mountains Authority, may lead eventually to the re-awakening interest among Victorians of ski-ing in the Dargals, Greymares and the Main Range.

Ski tows continue to be built. The tow at Hotham has been a wonderful boon and may run at a worth while profit during the coming season. In a sense, it is a co-opera-

tive effort, for the finance was provided by keen Hotham skiers. Similarly, the Railways Tow at Buffalo has been a marked success for that cradle of Victorian ski-ing. At Buller, in addition to the S.C.V. novice tow, John Hilton Wood ran a small tow on the popular Bull Run, and has visions of a Tee-bar. The Nissen tow at Falls Creek ran for most of the year, and the Myrtelford Club also had a very small tow operating. For the coming season, Tallangatta will operate its Club tow at Mount Wills and we believe Tom Mitchell has developed his own portable private tow.

During the year, the Southern Districts Ski Association of New Zealand visited Victoria at the invitation of the North Eastern District Ski Association. Many of the visitors stayed on after the official time was over and had a better look at Australia and we trust they went home duly impressed. Their time on the snow was spent almost entirely at Falls Creek, although they had a few days at Buller, where the weather failed to be nearly as hospitable as the club's resident there. Thankfully, they had good conditions at Falls Creek, and apparently had excellent ski-ing, including some not very serious racing. They were most impressed with the quantity of snow, varying snow conditions and our tree-running, all of which were far different from the conditions they normally encounter at their main resort, Queenstown.

They were a very happy party, and those of us fortunate enough to meet them, entertain them and ski with them, sincerely hope that they will find time to return to Victoria again one day. This was the first visit of a regional team from New Zealand, although the Bogong Club, Albury Club and NEDSA had previously visited New Zealand. Our country clubs are quite keen on this inter-dominion regional scheme, although interest in Melbourne is not apparent. However, the number of individual skiers going to New Zealand and wanting to go to New Zealand for their winter holiday continues to increase.

With our team in New Zealand for the inter-dominion races, the Victorian racing season was comparatively light and is reported elsewhere. The Victorian Inter-club Championship conducted by the F.O.V.S.C. resulted in a win for Kandahar Club, which is not surprising, as this club was formed almost entirely by past and present front

rank Victorian racers. The country clubs, Myrtelford and Wangaratta, were represented in the finals, and some of their skiers showed sufficient promise to point to State and indeed Australian future champions. During the season, a rather abortive attempt was made to revive ski jumping in Victoria, and although considerable interest was displayed by many young skiers, it was short-lived due to lack of facilities. We must construct a suitable jumping hill at Mount Buller before we can expect ski jumping to assume any importance here. The racing record would not be complete without reference to Toni Asinagul's magnificent run to break the record for the "Vasity Drag" at Hotham. We should record, too, the visit by Shann Turnbull to Austria, in response to the invitation for a visit of an Australian University team by the International Union of Students, to compete in the World Student Winter Sports Championships at Semmering, near Vienna, in February and March.

The year book is far too small to record every aspect of Victorian ski-ing for the year. We can but briefly mention such things as the great strides taken to introduce children to ski-ing particularly at Buller and at Falls Creek, where the Dawn Club was formed specifically for introducing members children to the snow. Another lodge was burnt down at Buller, this time the Cedar Club (it has now been rebuilt), following the loss of Buller Ski Club's lodge the year before. Until heating and lighting appliances using liquid fuels become completely fool-proof we may expect further ski lodge fires. We say this even at the risk of insurance companies reading it.

We are happy to report, too, that Australia's first permanent base on the Antarctic mainland has been established under the direction of Mr. Phil Lad, a prominent Victorian skier, and the occupying party includes another skier, Dr. Bob Summers.

There was plenty of activity among skiers on the social side, with barbecues and beach picnics being prominent entertainment, in addition to the more conventional dinners and balls. It is a most extraordinary thing about ski-ing that probably, in most cases, skiers see more of one another in the off season than they do on the snow, and that is probably a very good thing.

No review of ski-ing in Victoria would be

complete without expressing our gratitude to the various State Government Instrumentalities with which we have been concerned during the year. At Mount Buller, for instance, the Mount Buller Recreational Reserve Committee (set up by and under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Commission) has treated the requirements of skiers firmly but sympathetically, and it is undoubtedly due to the work of this Committee that Mount Buller has progressed so well during the last few years. The Lands Department has shown that it is well aware of the attractions of Mount Hotham by the manner in which it has assisted clubs which want to build there. The Country Roads Board has always done its utmost, within its very restricted financial orbit, to consider the needs of skiers and tourists who wish to visit our high country. Falls Creek would not be near the excellent ski resort it is, were it not for the wonderful assistance given skiers

by the State Electricity Commission. We cannot mention all the things the Government does for us, but certainly we should show our appreciation of other bodies, such as the Forestry Commission, The Railways Department and the State Tourist Committee and all the individuals in the Public Service and Members of Parliament who have so freely given their advice. Naturally, there are still many more things we want—we want the Mount Buller Recreational Reserve Committee to have control of a far larger part of Mount Buller. We want even more work done on the Hotham road, so that it could be ploughed far easier in the winter, and who would not like to see the Buller road widened and sealed sufficiently to be kept clear of snow during the winter?

Well, there it is, Season, 1953. Of 1954, we hope that greater strides will have been taken to improve the status of the sport and the facilities by which it may be enjoyed.

