

The Ram's Head Range as a Ski-ing Area

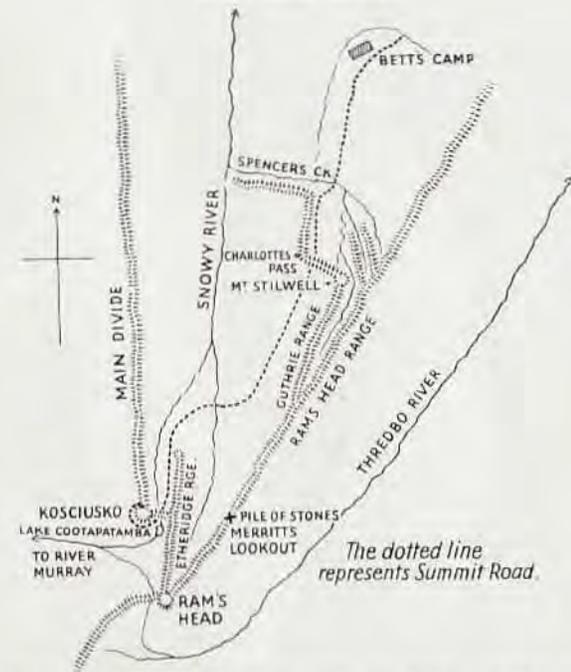
(By E. M. Fisher and J. W. S. Laidley.)

The ski-ing possibilities of the Ram's Head Range have never been properly exploited. On the map the Range forms the eastern boundary of the great Kosciusko plateau; but actually it is the continuation of a low range running about due west, which after forming the divide between the headwaters of the Thredbo and the waters running into the Murray at a low saddle called Tom Groggin, suddenly becomes much higher at the South Ram's Head and Ram's Head. From there it runs almost in a straight line north-east, gradually becoming lower, until it finally ends at the junction of the Thredbo and Snowy Rivers. On its east side it is invariably precipitous, without however having any actual cliffs. This eastern side forms the west wall of the Thredbo gorge. To the west the slope is more gradual, and all tributaries of the Snowy which join that river on its eastern side above its junction with the Thredbo take their origin from this range. The more important of these Snowy River tributaries are: Spencer's Creek and Betts's Creek, the Perisher Creek, Piper's Creek, and Diggers' Creek from south to north. There are no Thredbo tributaries large enough to be deemed worthy of a name on the Ram's Head side.

The crest of the range is undulating with no specially large peaks in its course. Most prominent from south to north are the Ram's Head (7,000 feet), the highest point in the Range, then Mount Stilwell opposite Charlotte's Pass, Mount Wheatley opposite the Perisher, the Porcupines, and Pretty Point (6,000 feet) opposite Dainer's Gap. North from here the Range soon loses its elevation, and ends in a precipitous bluff at the Creel. It is up this hill that the road to the Hotel Kosciusko winds its way.

The south end of the Range at the Ram's Head itself is joined to the Main Divide and to Mount Kosciusko by the Etheridge Range, a spur from which runs almost due south to the Ram's Head and lies between Lake Cootapatamba on the west, and the head waters of the Snowy on the east. Within a mile of this point and a little to the south rises the Thredbo, so here the Ram's Head Range forms the watershed for three rivers.

The Range possesses two most important spurs which are very well known landmarks and ski-ing grounds to all who visit Kosciusko. The more southern is the Guthrie Range. This Range takes its origin about eight miles north of the Ram's Head. Near the point of divergence, but really on the Guthrie Range is Mount Stilwell. From its



MAP OF LOCALITY TREATED IN THIS ARTICLE.

origin to this mountain the Guthrie Range runs almost due north, making with the parent range an acute angle in which the head waters of Spencer's Creek are found. At Mount Stilwell it swings round to a westerly direction and loses much of its height, coming down to an elevation of 6,000 feet. At this point the Summit Road crosses the spur at the well known Charlotte's Pass. Immediately beyond the Pass the Range makes a second turn to the north, and for about three miles reaches an elevation of about 6,200 feet. In due course it reaches Spencer's Creek, which at this point is flowing west towards the Snowy, and the spur turns west along it and finally peters away in the angle between the Snowy and Spencer's Creek.

A second, and even more important spur, is that great block of mountains known as the Perisher Range, and of which the highest point is the Perisher itself, reaching an elevation of about 6,700 feet. This Range, however, will not be described in this article, for it is so important that it needs an article to itself. Moreover, the geography of this area is extremely complicated, and, although some are tolerably familiar with it, yet more exploration should be

done before an attempt is made to describe it with any accuracy. All that will be mentioned now is that the Perisher Range takes its origin from the Ram's Head Range about a mile north of Betts's Camp, and at this point it is low and the road crosses it at the Perisher Gap.

In addition to these two great secondary ranges, there are two others which take their origin still further to the north where the Range is lower. Notwithstanding the fact that these never reach an elevation of over 6,000 feet, yet they are so familiar to all that a word or two of description is necessary. One is joined to the Ram's Head Range at Piper's Gap, and reaches its highest point in the hill immediately behind Smiggins Holes. This spur occupies the whole of the area between Sunset Valley on the south, Piper's Creek on the north and east, and the Snowy River on the west. It forms the western wall of the upper valley of Piper's Creek, along which runs the road to the Summit. The fourth and last spur of any importance takes its origin at Dainer's Gap, its highest point is Mount Sunrise, and its slopes include such well known ski-ing grounds as The Plains of Heaven, Happy Valley, The Grand Slam and the Kerry. To the south it is bounded by Piper's Creek, to the north by Digger's Creek, and on the west by the Snowy.

Nine-tenths of the Ram's Head Range is good ski-ing country, and, since much of it lies well within range of the Hotel, its northern half is very well known. Many parties, too, traverse this part of the Range as an alternative route to and from Betts's Camp. All this area is wooded and provides much excellent running which in places can be extremely difficult; in addition there are some fine runs such as the Maclurcan and many others which are un-named.

The southern half of the Ram's Head Range is not at all well known, very few skiers until recent years having explored its possibilities. In 1925 the Ram's Head peak was ascended by Dr. Schlink and Dr. Fisher; and since then several parties have skied along its length. Last season much of the search for the late Mr. Hayes and Mr. Seaman took place in this region. Unlike the northern half, it is nearly all above the tree line, for there are no more trees on the crest of the Range after a point about a mile and a half south of Betts's Camp.

Access to the Range is easy, the crest may be reached by several alternative routes in about an hour from Betts's Camp, and once the crest is gained there is no more climbing of any consequence to be done. The best way on to the Range is to climb one of the small tributaries which run steeply down to meet Spencer's Creek in the north valley of Charlotte's Pass. There are three of these small tributaries, and as a means of approach the middle one of

the three is the best climbing. To reach it, follow the road from Betts's Camp to the Spencer's Creek crossing, and then deviate slightly east, climbing the hill which still separates you from Charlotte's Pass to the east side rather than directly over the top as is customary when going to the Summit. As the shoulder of the hill is rounded, the Spencer's Creek valley opens up before you and slightly to your right hand. Almost straight ahead lies the creek up which you climb to the top of the Range; I believe it is called Trayyard Creek. The bed of the creek is narrow and steepens rapidly, but only when the snow is very hard will it be necessary to make a traverse. Follow the creek to its source, which lies in a wide gentle depression on the crest of the Range. A few steps to the eastward from here will put you on the Divide, and it will be possible to look down into the Thredbo. Now deviate to the right or south, and, climbing gradually, traverse round the first group of rocks crowning the Range, and on the Thredbo side of them. About a mile from the top of the creek you will find an easy means of access to the crest again through a small pass between two groups of rocks. Here you should be about opposite Charlotte's Pass and overlooking a deep valley running from south to north, which lies between you and Mount Stilwell. Out of sight behind Mount Stilwell lies Charlotte's Pass. Keep on always to the south, and now the going is rather better on the western side than it is on the eastern. During the next mile the valley which we have previously mentioned between the Ram's Head Range and Mount Stilwell becomes shallower, and the Guthrie Range which forms the western wall of this valley comes closer and closer to the Ram's Head Range until it finally merges with it, and the valley disappears.

Standing on the Range here the Snowy Valley is seen for the first time to the westward, and at this point you are opposite Sentinel Rocks and the Snowy River Ford where the snow posts take their huge bend westward over Dead Horse Ridge. Take note of the head of this long valley along which you have come, because it affords a magnificent run on the return journey. The creek which runs in it is, I suppose, the head waters of Spencer's Creek itself, and if you return this way you will have a run of at least a mile and a half, and you will come out on the plain just below Charlotte's Pass and on the Betts's Camp side of it. This valley is the southernmost of the three creeks previously described, which run into Spencer's Creek from the Ram's Head Range.

If you now decide to go on as far as the Ram's Head, keep on still to the south, and you will find the crest of the Range becoming wider, and apparently lower. This is

a delusion, however; what really occurs is that the Snowy Valley is coming up to meet you, for you are now very near its source. A mile along the Range, south of the bend in the road, you may have the fortune to pick out on one of the small rocky prominences of the Range a small pile of stones. This is evidently the mysterious "pile of stones" marked on the map prepared by Vernon. Just south of this point and on the Thredbo side of the Range is Merritt's Lookout, which is almost directly above Friday Flat in the gorge below, and from where the original winter ascent of the Summit of Kosciusko was made.

From about this point on the Range a new aspect of the Summit is seen to the west. The pinnacle can be just seen over the south spur of the Etheridge Range, and between the Etheridge Range and the point on which you are standing is the wide shallow valley which contains the head waters of the Snowy. Here it seems to be about two to three miles wide. Cross this in a south-westerly direction and on the far side a sharp climb of a few hundred feet will bring you to the top of the spur joining the Ram's Head and Etheridge Ranges. From the crest of the spur you will see again a new aspect of Kosciusko and Etheridge, this time from the south. On the eastern side there are so many small rock-covered peaks that you will find it difficult to decide which is the Ram's Head, but if you keep pushing south along the crest which here starts to drop down hill you will finally see a conical hill something of the shape of a bowler hat with a few rocks showing through the snow on its side, and an unmistakable trig station on its Summit. The climb up its side is strenuous, but the view from the Summit is well worth the effort. You will be able to distinguish beneath you South Ram's Head much lower and just within the snow line. To the south-east is that part of the Range bounding the head waters of the Thredbo. Northwards you will look up the gorge towards Rawson's Pass which contains Lake Cootapatamba, with Kosciusko on its left-hand side. You find that Kosciusko tails off westward in a spur which rapidly diminishes in height towards the Murray River, and beyond it again the Townsend Spur and Abbott Ranges do exactly the same thing. Beyond their extremities can be seen the densely wooded ranges of Victoria.

It is very interesting to see how the snow ends suddenly a mile or two from Kosciusko, the Townsend Spur, and the Ram's Head just as it does all down the eastern side of the Ram's Head Range not far below the crest. A day's skiing towards the Ram's Head is well worth a trial. All the climbing is over in the first hour, and thereafter the way leads along an undulating ridge with a height of between

6,500 and 7,000 feet, and magnificent views are to be obtained of the Main Range, the Thredbo gorge, and the Monaro. The return journey is punctuated by one of the most magnificent runs in the whole of the mountains. To mention the bad with the good, the snow conditions are likely to be wind-blown and icy on the top, but not more than elsewhere at that height. Also the steep easterly scarp, where, as a rule, the best snow should be found, is too steep to be of much interest to the ski-runner. This last seems a strange remark, but it is extremely thickly timbered to within a few hundred feet of the crest, and the snow line lies about half-way down the side of the gorge.

Finally, a word of warning. The authors have been caught in a fog on the Ram's Head Range, and it is not the best of places for this to happen. If you set a compass course westward you will come to the snow posts unless you are south of the bend in the road where it crosses the Snowy. If you are south of this, there is no landmark to prevent you going right over the Divide into Victoria. In extremity, of course, there is always the Thredbo as an escape from the Range, but one is not inclined to take this extreme step unless circumstances are very bad indeed; so be sure to keep a wary eye upon the relative positions of yourselves and the road.

In conclusion, an apology and a hope. The geography of this part of the Range has never been described before, and, although the authors are reasonably satisfied with the correctness of the description, and the scheme of the map included with this article, yet an apology must be made for the apparent certainty with which the country is described. The hope is that with this article as a stimulant somebody may be interested enough to correct our present knowledge and add to its sum.

Ski have been used in warfare from a very early date in Sweden. It is recorded that King Swerre, at the battle of Oslo, in 1200, sent out a captain and company of ski-runners to reconnoitre. Ski troops were employed in Swedish wars in 1452, 1576, 1590, 1610, and on to modern times.—*A History of Ski-ing.*