

## From Kiandra to Kosciusko on Horseback

*The following article from the joint pens of Mr. William Hughes and Dr. Schlink is descriptive of the journey made in the summer of 1926 on horseback from Kiandra to Kosciusko to spy out the land and to form a conclusion whether it was feasible to ski across the route in winter.*

### Part 1.

(By William Hughes, Kiandra.)

It was during January, 1926, that the trip was accomplished, it being organised by members of the Ski Club of Australia, their object being to gain a knowledge of the route so as to make it possible to attempt the trip with a fair chance of success in winter. The party was led by Dr. Schlink, and with us were the Misses G. and D. Ryrie, of Michelago, Mr. Teppema, Consul-General for the Netherlands, Mr. Douglas Reid, and Drs. Fisher and Teece. Starting from Kiandra late on a clear, bright day, the outfit consisting of some sixteen horses and a total of ten persons, made an excellent subject for a movie photographer, who accompanied us. Climbing steadily upwards, the tablelands were reached within half an hour. A large level treeless tract covered by luscious snow grass met our eyes. Looking backwards into the valley we had just climbed from the little township of Kiandra the highest town in Australia lay below us, presenting, with its little weather-beaten cottages and worked-out goldfields, the variegated tints of the up-turned earth contrasting vividly against the bright green grass, a subject fit for the brush of a painter.

Our route takes us to southward over an old river bed, which lies hundreds of feet below the surface of pre-historic lava. Following it some nine miles south, the abandoned Empress Mine was reached and camp made. The thick, snow grass made excellent mattresses, but we rose early and after several hours' packing, saddling and coaxing and cursing fractious ponies we got under way, winding through fallen timber until Mount Tabletop, 5,728 feet, an extinct volcano, was passed some two miles east of the Empress. Turning south, more difficult country is covered, and after three miles we come out into the Happy Jack River Valley, famous as a stock pasture. We turn east across the Happy Jack and, following a long ridge reach the ruins of McGregor's old hut, where much needed lunch is discussed. After lunch, impassable fences, minus gates take control, three miles east to the head of the Gungarlin

then back west, again south, cutting the wires per medium of stirrup irons in an odd fence or two (a heinous offence), and we strike an abandoned road leading to the Grey Mares Bogong Mine. After following it for an hour some old sheep yards are reached near the head of the Doubtful River, and approximately six miles east of Jagungal (6,850 ft.), which striking eminence seems to be the keynote of our conversation.

Making use of an old fireplace made of granite boulders used many years ago by shepherds, we boil the billies and dine *al fresco*, the rare air acting as a stimulant to our appetites. Darkness comes on and we sit for awhile around the blazing gum logs. Excepting for the musical tinkle of horse bells and the occasional cry of a night bird the bush around is still and silent, the sky, like black velvet, closely studded with innumerable stars, visible only because of the rarity of the air at such high altitudes. It is as if we are in a world apart. It is hard to realise that but a few hours' journey distant is the city with its gigantic buildings and congested thoroughfares. It seems inconsistent with the laws of nature that such contrasts in environment could exist so close together.

Next morning we travel due south past the Bull's Peak on to the Main Range again. To the west are innumerable mountain peaks, some of them seeming because of their distance away even more majestic than those we are travelling over. To the east a few straggling cottages in Adaminaby, some thirty miles away, are visible. We get to the west of our true course again, negotiate some swampy country, cross and re-cross the Valentine River, swing to the east and reach Litchfield's old hut (where Tin Hut is now built).

I have no accurate data as to the actual height of these peaks, which consist of a succession of granite "knobs" rising but at most a few hundred feet above a plateau, which extends for some four miles along the route; but should judge it to be over 6,000 feet. Some mobs of stunted goat-footed cattle were met with and a mob of sleek, mountain horses, reminiscent of "The Man from Snowy River," galloped off at our approach. But it was the view to the eastward that drew everyone's attention. To the west was as earlier described; but to the east immediately below us the heavily timbered foot-hills sloped away to the edge of Monaro's rolling plains, thousands of square miles of which were visible, a brown drought-stricken waste, studded here and there with oases of green trees. Looking over the plains the coastal ranges, some seventy miles away, were clearly to be seen, and perhaps through some of the gaps in them the sea was visible, but

human eyes could not detect the difference between it and the sky.

Reluctantly descending from this eyrie and passing over the bleached bones of a mob of horses which had perished in the heavy snows of winter, we pass through the Consett Stephen Pass and reach Mount Tate. Induced by the view to be obtained from the Summit, Dr. Schlink and two others of the party climbed upwards, leaving the remainder to descend into the valley of the Snowy, to cross that most turbulent of Australian rivers at the most practicable crossing and reach Betts Camp late at night. The experiences of Dr. Schlink's party after leaving the main party were more interesting.

## SPENCER'S CREEK IN THE DARK.

### Part 2.

(By Herbert H. Schlink.)

As the cavalcade of riders slowly ascending Mount Tate from the Consett Stephen Pass became silhouetted against the horizon, the camera man who was riding behind with me became quite enthusiastic and complained that he had had as yet little or no time to exercise his art on the magnificent panoramic scenery through which we had passed and were passing. As he had gone to the trouble of bringing a pack horse loaded with apparatus and we were in country that we had traversed on ski in previous years, it was decided to call a halt. Little did we know how long it took to unpack a movie camera. By the time everything was set for shooting the riders arranged in various positions of advantage, etc., the sun was setting, and the temperature as well. After a few groups were taken the horses and riders became restless, and all were anxious to get on. Mrs. Pat Osborne (then Miss D. Ryrie) was pale, but uncomplaining. However, the camera man was just warming up to his job, so it was agreed that Bill Hughes' brother and I should remain with him and let the others proceed to Betts Camp.

After taking several more photographs and spending twenty minutes re-loading the pack horses we began to descend the mountain. For awhile we were able to see the hoof marks of the party ahead, but we soon lost the trail owing to the oncoming darkness. Of the three I was the only one who knew the country, and then only under snow conditions. Naturally, I took the track that I had traversed on ski, crossing the Snowy River where Spencer's Creek runs into it. The old guide, who had gone ahead with the main party, refused to believe that we had crossed the

Snowy at that spot. He said it was impossible. However, darkness and our ignorance got us across, our horses nearly being washed from under us several times. But worse was to come. It was now pitch dark and the country on the right bank of Spencer's Creek over which I had had many a delightful run on ski was one mass of boulders and heather-covered creeks; the famous Bugeral Creek, which presents difficulties even on ski, was almost impassable. After much difficulty my horse managed to clamber down and up the steep banks, but the poor photographer who was leading his pack horse refused to let go the halter and was pulled clean off his own horse into the middle of the creek. All eventually got across and after another hundred yards, with our horses slipping and falling, we decided to dismount and lead them to prevent their legs from being broken. Another hundred yards convinced us that the horses were more intelligent than we were, as many times they tried to warn us that we were about to fall flat on our faces or slip down a crevice formed between huge walls of granite. Eventually, after many narrow escapes from our horses toppling on top of us and on account of the terrified condition of the animals, we decided that Hughes should stay with them until daybreak, and that the other two should try and reach Betts Camp where the rest of the party were. Fortunately, in addition to the pack horse carrying the camera, another pack horse was left with us, and on it were all the hobbles, but, painful to relate, no food. We unpacked, unsaddled and hobbled the horses to prevent them wandering and injuring themselves.

We had crossed the Snowy River about 6 p.m., and it was now 7.30 p.m. It had taken us over an hour to do a little more than a quarter of a mile, which is an indication of the roughness of the country. We were still four miles from Betts Camp, and did not look forward to the trip on foot.

Leaving the matches with Hughes, the two of us set off, climbing up one side of the rocks only to slide down the other. It seemed we would never get out of this Dante's Inferno country. After half an hour of it we looked back and saw the fire Hughes had lit not more than a few hundred yards away. We pushed on breaking our finger nails, tearing our clothes and cutting our limbs until we seemed to be over the worst of the rocks. Then came the heather-covered creeks and pools into which one leg would suddenly sink up to the hip and the face be smothered in the ground to prevent the curse that would otherwise have come out of it. It was so dark that the only way we could keep our direction was to listen to the rushing waters of Spencer's Creek on our right. After what seemed an

eternity we lost the sound and thought we must have wandered off our direction. The fact was that Spencer's Creek had left us where it crossed the Summit Road, and we were now heading straight for the hut. In our state of uncertainty we were delighted to see a search party headed by Dr. Fisher with a hurricane lamp coming along the road.

We landed in camp about midnight with wet, frozen feet, torn clothes, cut hands, arms and legs, almost completely exhausted. It had taken us four and a half hours to do four miles. There had been some misunderstanding regarding the food supply which the Hotel management was to have left at the camp, and consequently we retired to bed on an empty stomach. Teppema's last cigar saved me from perishing.

Before the break of dawn the guide set out to rescue our friend, Mr. Hughes, who had stayed with the horses all night. He followed a well known bridle track on the left side of Spencer's Creek, that which the main party had traversed the previous evening, but which unfortunately we followers knew nothing of and eventually saw Hughes and the horses camped amidst a desert of huge boulders on the right bank. He said it was only with extreme difficulty that they got the horses on to the left bank in daylight, and wondered how we had travelled in the dark even as far as we did along the right bank without breaking our own and our horses' necks.

Yet another misfortune was to overtake the reunited party at Betts Camp. The main party had reached the camp the previous evening after dark, and, as we had all the hobbles on one of our pack horses, they had put the horses into a small paddock at the back of the camp carefully, put up the slip rails, quite ignorant of the fact that the only part of the fence remaining were the posts, the wire either having been removed or broken down by storm. The result was that when daylight arrived the horses discovered this and made off along the road to the Hotel, leaving the party stranded. Two of us walked to the Hotel and sent back motor cars for the others.

Thus ended an otherwise very pleasant three days' ride across the Australian Alps. We had learnt much about the terrain, and it allowed us to successfully accomplish the first winter journey on ski from Kiandra to Kosciusko. The journey was full of disappointment for the camera man, as nearly all his work was destroyed by the rain which fell during the night. Hughes had no coverings even to protect himself, and arrived at the camp drenched to the skin.

I cannot close this article without paying a tribute to the courage and endurance of Mrs. Pat. Osborne, who, un-

known to the party, contracted pneumonia at Bull's Peak, and uncomplainingly rode twelve hours to Betts Camp, even attempting to reach the Hotel next morning on foot. Not until we reached Cooma the next evening did she give in and go to bed with a most serious illness. This was the most unfortunate happening of our eventful journey, but stands as a wonderful example of an Australian girl's courage and grit.



DR. SCHLINK WITH A GROUP OF AUSTRIAN SKI-ERS.