

Spring Ski-ing

By J. McComb.

Being one of the band confined, during the unkindly winds of last July, to the shelter of Mount Stilwell, my skiing and photographic ambitions for the season were doomed to disappointment. My only opportunity of re-visiting the snow happened to be the Eight Hour Day week-end (October 3rd to 5th), and, although the cognoscenti were gloomy about spring ski-ing, fortunately a decision was eventually reached to make the trip.

On reaching the Hotel I found that there were no other skiers in the place whose experience extended beyond Smiggin Holes, but Keeley and Hamilton, my companions on the train, evinced a keen desire to accompany me to the Chalet. We left the Hotel at 2.30 p.m. by wagonette, and reached the snow drift below Smiggin Holes half an hour later.

Beyond Piper's Gap the snow was hard and icy, and, although the creeks were open and the sun very hot, progress was easy. In avoiding the creeks running down to Betts Plain, our course was set on the higher slopes of the Perisher Range, and, in following my tracks, Hamilton



Photo:

SPRING CONDITIONS AT THE CHALET.

J. McComb.

The excellent snow conditions in October are clearly shown by this photograph.

missed the line and sustained a nasty fall over a snow-bank twenty feet high, being stunned and rather cut about the limbs and face by a rock on which he landed. A rough examination fortunately showed no serious injuries, and, sending Keeley on ahead alone, the trip to the Chalet was continued at 4.30. The last few miles proved the most painful part of the journey, as Hamilton was in rather bad shape from shock, and the Chalet was not reached until 7 p.m. A good brandy, a roll of sticking plaster, and a meal aided considerably in restoring spirits.



Photo:

Spring Snow on Mt. Guthrie.

J. McComb.

No wind was encountered on the trip, and towards nightfall snow commenced to fall steadily, five points being registered by next morning. The temperatures recorded were 39 deg. maximum and 27.5 deg. minimum, so that we had a good frost on the snow.

At 8.30 next morning dry, powdery snow was still falling, forming a good new layer over the old surface, and an inspection from the top of the Pass showed considerable fog coming down over the Main Range. Conditions improved a little later, and at 9.45, leaving Hamilton, who was still *hors de combat*, we climbed over the Pass in a light snow-storm, the surface being now perfect. Descending into the valley, we crossed the Snowy by a snow bridge (shown in photograph) of which a number still remained. Lower down, the river became a fast-running torrent,



Photo:

J. McComb.

Snow Bridge over the Snowy River at the foot of Charlotte's Pass.

raging down between vertical snow banks rising to 60 feet high in places, and recalling to one's mind the scenes of the old fairy tale, "The Three Brothers."

Following up the route of the Bridle Track above Hedley Tarn and Helms Moraine, the surface turned to hard, red crystals like rock-salt, which slid back downhill under the pressure of our ski. The colour was due, I understand, to deposits from dust-storms blown over from the south.

Reaching the crest the surface improved, but we were now exposed to the full force of the wind and the tip of Carruthers Peak appeared to be visibly disintegrating under its onslaught in a spray of fog and driven particles. After edging carefully along over the ice knobs we were repaid for our discomfort by the wonderful vista of country westward down slopes falling sheer from the Main Range. Beating round into the shelter of the lee slopes of the Munlong Range, the surface altered once more to soft, new snow reminiscent of mid-winter, although a trifle slow on ski now denuded of wax. Running down towards Slaty Gap, we lunched above Northcote Canyon, in that spot overlooking Watson's Crag and the Mueller Ranges, aptly described in the A.S.Y.B. as the "*Summa maxima* of the Australian Alps." Having, on the previous visit, stumbled upon perfect conditions, which yielded the picture of this

lovely outlook used as frontispiece in the 1931 *Year Book*, I feel assured that the statement is no exaggeration.

In contrast with the 1930 season the changes in aspect were remarkable. Jet-black clouds hung over the Canyon, and the gloomy, wooded ranges stretching into Victoria, behind which may lie the solution of the mystery of the lost air-liner "Southern Cloud." Mount Anderson and the peaks towards Twynam were veiled in mist, and over all the changes of light and shade caused extraordinary effects.

Reluctantly leaving, after more or less successful attempts to capture the harsh grandeur on film, we descended well down the northern slope of Northcote Canyon to try another angle. At this stage heavy weather began to blow over the Alps, visibility became poor, and my thoughts turned to the little compass in our rucksack, and the sage advice of Dr. Tece in his article in the 1930 A.Y.S.B. on "The Retreat from the Main Range." However, after climbing a tremendously steep slope in thick fog, we eventually emerged once more into bright sunshine on a vast, glistening plateau facing towards a spur which, I understand, is the Tension Woods Range. This range has the appearance of being flat-topped, and on our side fell steeply in cornices, which should offer plenty of scope for "precipice-jumpers." In good weather this plain should prove one of the best ski-ing areas on the Range. One was struck particularly by sunlight and shadow effects beyond power of description, which the camera failed to record. An outstanding feature was one isolated peak lying many miles away (probably Jagungal) which stood out, at one moment a glistening white, and the next moment turned a dull black as the cloud shadows flew over it.

To complete the many types of surface encountered, snow of the "sago" variety commenced to fall, and, with ski running nicely, the journey was continued up the crest of the ridge leading to Mount Twynam. Once more the wind made itself felt; after a momentary pause to secure a photograph a sudden gust blew us off our feet, one of my sticks and both gloves sailing gracefully down the entire slope and coming to rest on the frozen surface of the Blue Lake.

Reliable sources indicate that this descent is a 1,500 foot drop, but, on running down to secure my spare parts (incidentally *not* taking it straight) and looking up at my companion perched like a fly on the crest, I feel sure that it is nearer 15,000 feet. The climb back again to the top confirmed my suspicion.

From the summit of Twynam a magnificent expanse of the Main Range could be clearly seen, from the summit of

Mount Kosciusko in the south, towards Kiandra in the north, bathed in spring afternoon sunshine, with fleeting cloud shadows racing over the ranges in indescribable patterns. The run off Twynam was a rather hair-raising affair. The speed of the icy surface and the sad effects on the unwary of a nice strip of soft snow every hundred yards or so are best left to painful imagination.

Crossing Blue Lake Creek and retracing our steps towards our original river crossing, the Chalet was reached at 4.50 p.m. Conditions were fine and sunny, and the practice slopes around the Pass were indistinguishable from their mid-winter form. One noticeable feature was the increased length of the day as compared with mid-winter.



Photo: Coming up Mt. Twynam, October, 1931. J. McComb.

Leaving next morning for our return to the work-a-day world, the day broke (with the usual irony of things) one of the brightest I have experienced at Kosciusko. This led to my undoing on the way back for, having discarded headgear, my fair-complexioned face took on that ultra-purple hue generally attributed to extreme alcoholism. This remained a painful reminder for some days later and a source of envy to my surfing friends at home.

Reaching Smiggin Holes in two and a half hours from the Chalet, thence by trap to the Hotel, our spring tour was over. One incident which will always be associated

with this trip was the acquaintance made with a keen and enthusiastic veteran of the Kosciusko mountains in the person of Mr. E. C. Andrews, N.S.W. Government Geologist, who was the surveyor of the Kiandra goldfield in its palmy days, a contemporary of the late Charles Kerry and a source of wonderful information and anecdote concerning our snowfields.

In summing up impressions, I feel that this tour, conceived as an experiment, was not only a success, but clearly confirmed the belief that, now that the comparative luxury of the Chalet is available, spring ski-ing is a very reasonable substitute for winter running. As a commentary, it might be added that neither of my companions had had more than two or three days previous experience on ski, limited to the Hotel runs, and the fact that Keeley as a novice made the entire circuit of the Twynam trip without difficulty is at once a tribute to his adaptability and the spring conditions which made it possible.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

The Ski Council of N.S.W. will conduct a Spring Race Meeting at the Chalet, Charlotte's Pass, in the holiday week-end in October. Details may be obtained from the Secretary, Lanark House, Phillip Street. All clubs will be circularised later this season.

A new Slalom course has been cleared at the Hotel Kosciusko, next to the Kerry course. It allows for the setting of Slaloms for runners who want experience but are not sufficiently advanced for more difficult racing.

