

# North-West Of Kosciusko

By O. M. MORIARTY.

Resolving to make a trip of some two weeks' duration on the north-west plateau, we sent food to the White's River and Mawson Huts in January, 1937. We would like to have sent it further, but if the weather were bad we did not expect to be able to adhere to our programme, which was to go direct from the Mawson Hut to Round Mountain then to the Dargals, Pretty Plain, Grey Mare and back to the Mawson Hut.

The other members of the party were F. Parle and D. Wightman. On schedule, we left the Chalet on the afternoon of Monday, 16th August, the plan being to get an early start next morning from Pounds Creek Hut. The sun shone on newly fallen snow next morning, and, after crossing the Snowy on precarious bridges of snow, we edged and plodded on in deep soft slushy snow to the top of the range above the Guthega. On the range we were in the fog which had been blowing over us during the morning. The wind increased in intensity and in a mild blizzard we went on towards White's River, being glad of the guiding line of the fence posts showing at intervals, as this was an abnormally poor year for snow. The passage along the top of the range seemed interminable and, as worse weather was promised for the night, the sight of the White River Hut at 4.30 p.m. was a welcome relief.

With a blizzard blowing on the tops and snow falling we stayed at White's River Hut the next day. The snow in this sheltered valley is some of the best in the Range, and we had a pleasant day practising turns and runs between gathering wood and sitting by the fire and cooking. In fog and falling snow we left next morning to climb over Gungartan. While keeping well to the western slopes the occasional sight of a misty sun tempted us higher, and we were soon among the peaks hoping for a view to the east of the Range. But the fog rolled down thickly and caution was needed because of the cornices. Finally, after circling round, we found the Tin Hut, ever a hard one to find. Fine weather now came over, and we sped down the valley of the Valentine to reach Mawson's in early afternoon.

On the crusty snow of early morning we left for Round Mountain, going between Grey Mare and Jagungal to observe the Grey Mare country, which we had not seen before in winter. It was picnic skiing with the sun shining out of a brilliant blue sky and deep white snow sparkling on the mountains as far as we could see. This is pretty country with occasional snow gums and streams of water breaking from under snow bridges in the deeper valleys. Our rucksacks were filled with sufficient supplies for five days, but the weight was hardly felt and we considered they did not weigh more than 35 lb. The food had been selected for lightness and a balanced diet, and consisted mainly of pemmican, self-raising flour, wheatmeal biscuits, honey, butter, peasmeal, dried vegetables, dried tomatoes, dried potatoes, dried fruits, sugar, tea, coffee and plenty of Lactogen to use as an all purpose milk. Our sleeping bags were of the usual eiderdown variety. We carried a small pyramid shaped tent which could be erected with an extended stock as a centre pole. Around it were flaps on which snow could be piled and the entrance could be completely closed by a zip-fastener. Being of light japara silk, it weighed only 2½ lb.

On both sides of the Rocky Plain River were precipitous drifts of snow several hundred feet deep. To avoid these we had to keep turning to the north-west, finally crossing the river where the banks were some 150 feet high and climbing up a sloping creek, which led to the Strumbo Range. From here we could look back on a fine panorama of the Kosciusko Main Range from the Bull's Peaks to Mount Townsend, some thirty miles of snow-covered mountains and upland

valleys. A long gentle run took us to the edge of the plateau, where we could see the Toolong River meandering through the snow in the valley beneath. The direct line to Round Mountain lay across this valley, but the steep sides were about one thousand feet deep. To avoid the valley we continued towards the north-east and ran down a few hundred feet to cross the river right against the south-west face of Jagungal. Climbing around Jagungal we were gradually forced higher to avoid the sheer drops first into the Toolong then into the Gulf River, as the head of the Tumut River is called here. The natural route lay on the east side of the Gulf River, giving a long gentle run from the slopes of the Jagungal. The weather was now heavily overcast, and the air so humid and the snow so slushy that we were becoming fatigued. Continuing on we ran out of the snow on a northerly spur above the river. Round Mountain was visible and seemed so far away that we welcomed the decision to turn east and find the Bogong Hut only about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away. Around this hut there is usually fine deep snow with all creeks well covered, but this year the grass was showing through the snow, although it was only early August.

Snow fell during the night, and was still drifting down as we left next morning aiming to follow the centre of the ridge between the Bogong Creek and Gulf River. This proved a good route and we did not run out of snow until we were directly above the meeting of the two waters with Round Mountain full in view. We scrambled down to the river and crossed barefoot. There was broken snow on the opposite bank, but we climbed a half mile up around the drifts before putting our skis on again. Proceeding along the eastern side of the plateau we



MT. JAGUNGAL FROM THE STROMLO RANGE.

—O. M. Moriarty.

looked anxiously for some sign of the hut. We were relying on directions from the *Ski Year Book* which we had carefully copied out, knowing that the hut was our only refuge in this part of the country, in which we had not been previously. "The map is misleading", the good Book said, "the hut is much further south than shown, being one mile S.E. of the top of the mountain and at about 700 ft. lower altitude". The afternoon was far advanced and heavy clouds were scudding over the range, as we anxiously tried every gully and ridge between the range and the river without seeing any sign of the hut. At last we were directly under the mountain, and blasphemously decided to scrap the directions in the Book and look for the hut where shown on the map. Thoroughly tired, we found it just as darkness fell, exactly where shown on the map, as near as we could make it due east of the mountain, and with the two creeks providing a sure guide. The directions for finding this hut should be as follows:—Proceed along the eastern side of the plateau, until right under the slopes of Round Mountain. A fence runs down from the mountain here and would usually be showing in places. Cross



THE GREY MARE RANGE, FROM THE NORTH-EAST.

the fence and the junction of two creeks (the main one being shown on the map) in the clear hollow below the mountain. Turn due east over the centre of a ridge covered with scrub and the hut will be found on a clear plateau a few hundred yards down the eastern side of the ridge at the head of the small creek shown on the map.

The night proved fine and the snow was slushy under a hot sun as we headed west for Mount Toolong next morning. Mount Toolong and the nearby country was well covered with snow and offered fine views of the Black Jack, Dargals and Grey Mare Ranges. With easy running through timber from the mountain, we came out on a tributary of Hell Hole Creek and carried our skis down the grassy gullies to the Toolong River. It proved too deep and strong to cross, and we had to trudge upstream along the bank for a mile or more before a shallow crossing was found. Wild duck were plentiful on the back waters of the river, and, with the golden sun setting behind the mountains of snow, Pretty Plain was true to its name, a pleasant upland valley with streams meandering through grassy flats which stretch away for miles.

As the snow was so poor we had decided to forego Wheeler's Hut at the base of the Dargals, and continued on in the darkness until a full moon rose over the mountains to the east. Soon after meeting the snow drifts we came to Pretty Plain Hut at 9 p.m. Being very weary, we were not pleased by a cheerless night with a fireplace filled with fragments of a crumbling chimney and sodden wood giving a cold smoky fire. A few hundred yards further on next morning we found another hut with a fine fireplace, and ample supply of good wood.

Leaving these pleasant surroundings, skis on shoulder, we climbed steadily up a ridge on the western side of Bull's Head Creek. The height at the hut was only about 4,700 feet. At 5,300 feet we were into continuous snow among scrub, and at 5,800 feet were on the broad top of the plateau with deep clear snowfields stretching away to the south and east. This was a delight to the eye and tired feet, after the last two heavy days of broken snow. The Victorian snowfields could be seen far away as a creamy line in the sky to the south-west; across the deep cleft of Pretty Plain the Dargals were close at hand to the north-west; and to the south, the deep gorges of the upper waters of the Murray were a picture of rugged beauty.

Our route lay to the east across the saddle between the Bull's Head and Cemetery Creeks. By mistake we went too far south and had to negotiate a difficult belt of scrub below the Bull's Head Rock. Once in the saddle the long clear slopes of the Grey Mare Range were above us and we knew we should have no more scrub on the journey. Climbing steadily up on skins, we crossed the narrow ridge of the range, and looked down over miles of deep snow to the valley

of the Grey Mare Creek. That run must have been three miles with only one short climb across a creek. Turning to reduce speed, we glided down, and in one place passed down an avenue or glade with trees on either side and steep little drops asking for quick turns and jumps in the run. That glade is one of the places we must go back and see again. With the snow becoming crusty in the late afternoon sun we dashed down the last slope to pull up with crashes right at the Grey Mare Hut. This had been uninhabited in the summer and was uninviting, so after a refreshing meal and a rest we set out in the chilly evening air for Mawson's Hut. There was deep snow all over the valley right to the water's edge in the creek. Crossing the creek we climbed up a ridge with sheer cornices of blue ice dropping down to the creek valleys. It was dark when we approached the steep slopes to the Rocky Plain River. High up on the ridge we found an area clear of snow, although the river below was covered with snow bridges. A roaring fire of dead timber was soon going and we sat down to make soup and tea and while away the time until the moon should rise. It came up a great golden orb over the frozen snow lands in front of us. We waited until it shone into the bottom of the valley, almost as brilliantly as daylight. Regretfully we left our fire and proceeded down to cross the Rocky Plain River on frozen snow bridges with icicles glistening down to the sparkling water. Climbing gently, we went on with an icy crust tinkling beneath the skis. After an hour or so, mist could be seen rolling down ahead and our bearings were uncertain as the Valentine River bed had not been sighted. Turning to the east we found ourselves in a depression which we identified as the Great Bend of the Valentine in front of the Mawson Hut. On reaching the hut at midnight we were surprised to find ski-marks and hear voices inside. Ray Adams and party had come in that day from Snowy Plain on their way to White's River Hut.

Being quite fatigued owing to the hot weather and melting snow, we spent two days resting at the Mawson with brilliant sunshine and clear weather. Altogether it had been an unusually fine spell. On the morning we left for the Chalet there was thick fog all around and we did not run out of it until we reached the bottom of Guthega Creek. The going from the top of the range was through soft snow and the Chalet was only reached with tired and dogged steps in mid-afternoon after leaving Mawson's at 7 o'clock.



MT. JAGUNGAL FROM MAWSON'S HUT.