

THE CURRANGORAMBLAS

by
Alan Andrews



IT was in the previous summer that the idea had originated. We had walked across the Capital Territory from Williamsdale and were spending about four days exploring the pot holes and limestone caverns of Cave Creek, a tributary of the Goodradigbee. Many were the times during those four days that we had imagined ourselves ski-ing down the perfect curves of the gullies running from Spencer's Hut. A winter visit was clearly called for and we thought that even if there was no snow on these lower hills we knew of slopes on the top of Bimberri that would not fail us . . .

" 'Tis winter now; the fallen snow
Has left the Heavens all coldly clear . . . "

Clear, that is, when we left Cooma, but it was far from so as the bus started to climb up from the Eucumbene. Murkier still was the prospect when the poor old thing gave up the ghost about four miles the wrong

side of Kiandra. We cannot pretend to have enjoyed those miles. However, we did arrive eventually at Kiandra Chalet and a good meal did alter our outlook somewhat. We were now at the beginning of the road.

Because of hopes of a lift we delayed our departure till well after four o'clock and it was with very little visibility that we started to ski up the road towards Rule's Point. Seven miles of slush and seemingly innumerable creek crossings finally brought us to the vicinity of Roadman's Hut. Then a mile of beautiful powder. Perhaps it was the packs, well over the forty-pound mark, that prevented us from appreciating the running to the full. It is certain, though, that we appreciated that little hut.

Dinner was served about 9 p.m., and it wasn't till next morning that I knew whether the boards we slept on were hard or not. It was a good little hut, weather-board and cosy, but even so the cold had us

up early next morning and cooking breakfast. Next morning we set off on beautiful snow again, marred only by the numerous wave-like drifts. This powder lasted for nearly three miles, but with Bullock Hill behind us water wings became once more the order of the day as we returned to slugging it beside the road through deep slush.

The guest house at Rule's Point had kindly held our stores, so now we loaded them on to our already overloaded backs and set off like Sherpas for the final two miles. Then Long Plain Hut and, as if to mark our arrival, down came the snow. Down it came, big flakes and heavy. We were in the one place to appreciate it best—inside. And inside we stayed; there was plenty to do organising for the three-day trip we would start in the morning.

The next morning's object was to be central point in the Currangorambla Range—Tom O'Rourke's Peak and the route was to be via Leonard's Hut. It was only rolling country and unwisely we decided on a direct bearing to Leonard's. We should have known better—especially when we encountered unexpected difficulty in crossing Long Plain Creek. But no, on we went, blithely forgetting the trouble we had experienced even the previous summer in crossing the Murrumbidgee, and that a good five miles upstream. We soon remembered when we reached the stream and discovered a River with a capital R. So, upstream we went intending to try again above the junction of McPherson's Creek at the head of whose valley is Leonard's Hut. And all the time it snowed those lovely, big, wet flakes.

We dropped to the river again at the junction only to find it still a swiftly flowing channel as uncrossable as ever. Yet it had to be crossed somehow, so unwillingly we prepared to cross it by the only method open to us.

Off came the packs. Off came the skis. Off came boots, socks, yes—and even trousers. On went the packs again and we were ready. The next part was hard; it meant stepping barefooted on to the snow, then picking up skis and stocks—then into the Murrumbidgee.

As we stepped on to the snow on the other bank and started to reclothe ourselves in frantic haste, still it snowed those lovely, big, wet flakes. After a couple of miles of skiing up the valley we joyously discovered

that those toes that remained still had a little life in them.

We reached the "Tiger country" now and it stayed with us for most of the 700 odd feet up to Tom O'Rourke's Peak. The thick timber and fallen logs made traversing impossible and as we climbed without skins it was definitely hard work.

Viewed from the south-east, Tom O'Rourke is one of those mountains which always seem to invoke the phrase, "Like Friar's Alp." However, as we reached the alp it was not quite so bald as one would wish. A pity, too, since this its southern side was covered with the most perfect of snow; the kind of snow that squeaks as you climb. You know the sound I mean—it has always, and will ever, remind me of a dental filling being pressed home into a well-excavated cavity.

Perhaps we should have left the packs and done some running then and there—but we didn't. Instead we crossed over the summit and looked to the north. "Fairest of all is the first vision . . . and the first glory of a mountain view never comes again." It opened up a vista of snowclad peaks and snowless gorges. Spread below us was the Cooleman Plain and we gazed greedily over it, running our eyes back to the Cooleman Mountains then further to Gingera—from here, the monarch of it all.

Then we had to leave, so off we started on our twelve hundred feet downward climb. And I mean climb, gravity or no gravity. As perfect as was the snow on the southern aspect of the summit, just as execrable did we find it on the northern flank. Skis would sink feet into the soft mess and grate nastily on the ever-present rock beneath. We gave up the unequal struggle and doffed the boards to flounder knee-deep amidst rock and scrub. Every hundred feet we dropped seemed to increase weight of skis and pack proportionately till finally we stumbled out on to the open plain. Even then there was little opportunity to ski and it was only as we approached Spencer's Hut that we skied again.

We only started lunch at 3 o'clock and it was 4.30 before we set off again—this time making for The Pockets Hut. We were able to ski half the way, but needless to say were benighted long before we reached the hut. Furthermore, we knew that the ridge we must cross to reach the Pockets was heavily timbered and steep. I never have relished

following compass bearings through heavy forest at night, especially when a deviation of a few yard means a night in the snow. So we picked up the fence system when we hit the timber and carrying skis once again staggered down the slopes till at last we saw one particular shadow that looked as if it might be a hut—and so it was.

We slept at the Pockets, better, I think, than we would have at Spencer's. I remember even in summer this malthoid constructed hut was anything but warm. The Pockets, on the other hand, is weatherboard—relatively a four-roomed mansion.

Bimberi, with all of its 6267 feet, dominated the scene and we left the packs next morning and set off towards Oldfield's Hut to try the skis on the mountain's south-west slopes. It was the same story, carry the skis up the northern slopes and bash through scrub and snow on the southern slopes. But at Oldfield's Hut we had skis on again and soon after crossed the Goodradigbee and headed up Bimberi's slopes.

This time, though, it was not a success story and we regret to announce that we climbed only a little over a thousand feet up the mighty mountain. Kev, whose stomach had been most unco-operative since breakfast, had to confess that the remaining thousand feet was out of the question. You can't climb if you are ill, so regretfully we made our way downward and back to the Pockets.

As they stand, these south-west slopes of Bimberi are not ski-able and trails would

have to be cut to make it so. Yet if the day ever arrives there is potential for 2000 feet of downhill on these slopes.

Next morning found us ski-ing on heavily frosted snow, this time towards Old Cur-rango Homestead. We had taken only three days' food so we had to return—or starve. We had decided to return.

As we skied down Boundary Creek we realised that the southern slopes of Black Hill offered the best ski-ing in the area. Its southern slopes are practically bare of trees and covered with wonderful snow—500 feet of ski-ing and no clearing attached. We confirmed this opinion later when talking to the local ranger, Tom Connor, and he told us that this valley holds its snow particularly well.

Another homecoming in the dark—the last one and our trip was over. It had been hard going, most of it in wombat country of the worst degree with little downhill running. Still, we wouldn't have missed it for worlds.

These northern snow leases have a charm all of their own. They cannot offer you thousands of feet of downhill running on open slopes, still they draw you unto themselves; their sheltered valleys and timbered spurs seem to welcome you and hold you. Perhaps it is that they enjoy your company . . . "for but few of them that begin to come hither do shew their face on this mountain." Like those shepherds of old they, too, look lovingly upon you and say, "Welcome to the Delectable Mountains."

S.W. Slopes of Mt. Bimberi

A. Andrews

