

# Ski Tourers' Association

By Charles Anton

SINCE Ski Tourers' Association was founded three years ago with the object of building a chain of shelter and touring huts across the main range at Kosciusko, it has built the two highest habitations and erected the highest Ski Tow in Australia. The three main range projects of the Association, Lake Albina Ski Lodge, Kunama Hutte and the Northcote Ski Tow now have a total membership of more than 500. Ski Clubs have taken 63 memberships.

During the summer and autumn of 1953 paid labour, Kosciusko State Park Trust labour and parties of volunteers worked hard at improving and completing the three projects.

**Lake Albina Ski Lodge:** Further improvements were made to the lodge, a septic tank was completed and a snow pole line from Seaman's Hut to the lodge erected. Snow-poles were also placed on the ground between the lodge and Kunama Hutte ready for erection the following year. A rescue sledge, donated by the International Ski Club in memory of Hans Neering was placed in the lodge.

**Kunama Huette:** Work continued on the completion of the building and innumerable trips had to be made to the material dump on the Northcote-Clark saddle some 700 vertical feet above Kunama Huette, the nearest

approach for bulldozer. In all, over 70 tons of building materials, furniture and furnishings, including all sand and cement, had to be carried down the steep and slippery slopes, and week-end after week-end volunteers from Sydney and other places had to travel to Kunama and help the permanent workers.

By the beginning of July, Kunama Huette was fully completed, furnished and stocked with fuel and food ready for occupation by members. The hot water storage system was working and the experimental two burner rock gas stove in the kitchen installed. This liquid gas proved an outstanding success and with the stainless steel sink and food preparation area, together with ample cupboard space, made cooking for 8-10 persons very easy.

**Northcote Ski Tow:** Having surveyed the route of the tow on Mt. Northcote in November, 1952, and again at Christmas of that year, work on the tow installations and the tow hut started in February, 1953, when all materials and component parts for the tow arrived at Kosciusko from Port Kembla. Here, too, everything had to be dumped on the top of Mt. Northcote, having been transported there by bulldozer from Seaman's Hut. All building materials, engine and driving unit and component parts had to be carried or rolled down the very steep tow slope.

By April the tow hut, enlarged to sleep four skiers in addition to housing the engine and driving unit and serving as a warming hut, was nearing completion and top and bottom A frames and intermediate poles were lying in position. A large party of members at Easter erected the top and bottom A frames, dug in the intermediate poles and helped to bring down petrol and kerosene in 44 gallon drums, a tedious and dangerous job.

The prospects for the tow to operate for the winter season thus seemed very bright. Winter set in early, creating many further difficulties such as the rope left on top of Mt. Northcote on coil ready to be put on the pulleys, being buried under 10 feet of snow by a terrific blizzard. It took a party nearly a full week-end to locate and dig it out. However, at the beginning of July the stage was set for a test run, which revealed certain weaknesses which we hoped could be rectified speedily.

At this stage it was decided to engage a ski tow attendant who would at the same time look after the huts of the Association. We were lucky indeed to find this man in the person of Harry Malcher. Born in Aus-

tralia 26 years ago of Austrian parents, he and his family went back to Austria during the depression and he returned to Australia three years ago. It is of interest that his father, Franz Malcher, in 1913 was the first skier, together with the Norwegian Consul Fay, to make the trip on skis from the Hotel Kosciusko to the summit and return in one day, an event greatly featured by the Australian press in those days. After winning a downhill race, for which which he was awarded an inscribed watch which his son Harry still carries, he extensively toured the Main Range on skis. His experiences are recorded in a beautifully illustrated booklet of the Australian Alpine Club entitled "Skiing in the Fifth Continent." To us it seemed fitting that the son of one of the early explorers on skis should be managing our main range huts and looking after our tow.

But, alas, there was no tow for Harry Malcher to operate when he came to Kunama at the end of July. Heavy snowstorms raging for weeks on end completely buried the rope with layers upon layers of ice over it and, to make matters worse, the cornice on Mt. Northcote, creeping forward, completely buried the top A frame, proving

**Kunama Huette during Blizzard.**

Photo. G. R. T. Ward.





Competitors climbing Townsend for Hans Neering Memorial Race, December, 27, 1953.

Photo. G. R. T. Ward.

that we had been too ambitious and placed it too high.

During the WINTER SEASON both Lake Albina Ski Lodge and Kunama Huette were well patronised, with Kunama coming in for the lion's share of attention, being new and comparatively easy to reach from the Chalet. On four different occasions snowmobiles took visitors from the Chalet right to Kunama Huette and on fine days Harry Malcher was busy making gallons of tea for day visitors. The little chalet with its Tyrolean atmosphere and beautiful alpine setting quickly caught the imagination of skiers and it became the focal point of main range trips. Members fully occupied the Huette for most of the season and it proved very comfortable to live in.

**Northcote Eagle:** It had been planned to celebrate the inauguration of the Northcote Ski Tow with the establishment of a permanent test run from the top of Mt. Northcote above the A frame down to a point in line with Kunama Huette. In spite of our misfortune with the tow for the 1953 season, it was decided to establish the run, which is in line with overseas test runs, such as the Chamois Run in Kitzbuehl or the run over the Kandahar run in St. Anton.

With some 60 spectators and three snowmobiles from the Chalet, the run, which is a timed descent run, was inaugurated on August the third. Czechoslovakian Olympic place-getter, Tony Sponar, taking the course straight from the top of the cornice down to the finishing line, some  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile and 800



vertical feet below, clocked 32 1/5th seconds, averaging nearly 60 m.p.h., and hitting about 75 m.p.h. near number 3 pole of the tow. Bill Kubes, Tommy Tomasi and Charles Anton, all turning on the cornice, were timed 40, 41 and 41 1/5th seconds respectively. Doug Thatcher's time was 56 seconds.

With the runs thus established the maximum times allowed for the Eagles are as follows: **Golden Eagle:** instructors, 35 seconds, others, 42 seconds. **Silver Eagle:** 50 seconds. **Bronze Eagle:** 60 seconds. It is hoped that, with the tow operating, this test run, which provides tangible awards for skill and daring, will become very popular.

**Spring and Early Summer Ski-ing:** The snow after a severe winter lasted particularly well and during the October holiday week-end winter conditions prevailed with the weather beautiful and all runs perfectly covered, including the Western faces. Occasional parties continued to enjoy skiing from the lodges right through October, November and December and had the tow worked it could have been operated until the middle of November.

**Summer Races:** For the third year in succession long lasting snow on the main range enabled us to hold ski races between Christmas and New Year. On Sunday, December 27, some 30 skiers competed for the **Albina Summer Slalom Cup** on a huge drift on Mt. Northcote facing Seaman's Hut. The standard of racing was particularly high and, with the exception of the Australian Championships held in September, was better than for any races held at Kosciusko during the winter season.

Tony Sponar, racing in beautiful style, was clocked for the best combined time, 82 seconds. The race was won by Billy Day 83 4/5 seconds, with Gordon Day 84 4/5 a close second. Christine Davy won the women's race with a combined time of 97 seconds, which would have placed her fifth among the men. In the afternoon an alpine slalom for the **Hans Neering Memorial Trophy**, donated by the International Ski Club, was held on a very steep spur on Mt. Townsend facing Lake Albina Ski Lodge. (Hans Neering, one of the first Foundation members of Lake Albina Ski Lodge, took part in the previous alpine slalom and died last Easter). As the course was steep and hazardous, owing to the number of rocks jutting out of the snow, only a selected num-

ber of racers were allowed to compete. In this race there were some spectacular falls and near misses of rocks. It was won by Billy Day in 24-4/5 seconds, followed by Gordon Day. Christine Davy's winning time of 30 seconds would have again placed her fifth among the men.

Results:—

#### Albina Summer Slalom Cup

	Men	Seconds
Tony Sponar .....		82
1. Bill Day .....		83 4-5
2. Gordon Day .....		84 4-5
3. Bill Davy .....		90 4-5
4. Fritz Zweifel .....		96
5. Tommy Tomasi .....		100 1-5

	Women	Seconds
1. Christine Davy .....		97
2. Constance Hughes .....		123 3-5

#### Hans Neering Memorial Cup

	Men	Seconds
1. Bill Day .....		24 4-5
2. Gordon Day .....		26 1-5
3. Hans Braun .....		27 3-5
4. Jimmy Walker .....		29 3-5
5. Tommy Tomasi .....		30

	Women	Seconds
1. Christine Davy .....		30
2. Constance Hughes .....		48

**Maintenance and Improvement:** During the summer of 1954 further work was carried out on the three projects and the two huts were stocked with food and fuel. Modifications to the tow installations were carried out, the top A frame shifted down the mountain and the course of the tow slightly altered. At the time this article is being written plans are being completed for a large party of volunteers to go to Kunama at the week-end March 27/28 to give the tow a test run. It is also planned to instal a generating set and storage batteries at Kunama as we are planning for electric light this season at Kunama, including individual reading light over each bed. Batteries and engine were donated, as well as the time of the member who did the wiring at Kunama.

Ski Tourers are looking forward to enjoying their main range ski-ing from their greatly improved huts. Their only regret is that the Kosciusko State Park Trust has been unable to build the promised footbridge across the Snowy near Foreman's Chimney and to erect a snowpole line between Kunama and Charlotte's Pass.

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