



The summit of Sentinel Peak in early winter. In the background is seen part of the longest direct fall in Australia—the five thousand two hundred vertical feet descent down the West Spur of Mount Townsend (7,250 feet).
Photo. G. R. T. Ward.

AN EARLY SKI TOURER'S STORY

Translated by C. W. ANTON

THE following are excerpts from a booklet by Franz Malcher published in 1933 by the "Deutscher und Osterreichischer Alpenverein" (German and Austrian Alpine Club) under the title 'Als Bergsteiger und Schilauer im Funften Kontinent' (Mountaineering and Ski-ing in the

Fifth Continent). The booklet describes Franz Malcher's five weeks' holiday at Kosciusko in 1913. His photographs and map of the Main Range are beautifully reproduced. It is interesting to note how little progress has really been made since then. The train trip from Sydney is still

as uncomfortable as it was in 1913, and the trip to the Hotel site still takes about the same time. His poetic description (unfortunately lost in my translation) of a lonely Main Range tour, which would heavily tax the stamina of our hardest tourers to-day, is particularly interesting in view of the fact that his son, Harry Malcher, has been Ski Tourers' Association's area manager at Kunama for the last two seasons. It seems fitting that the son of one of the earliest Kosciusko ski tourers should be closely connected with our projects on the Main Range. Incidentally, Franz Malcher, now over 70, is still climbing mountains in Austria. He is in charge of the Alpine Information Service in Innsbruck and plans to come to Australia soon.

"Ski Trips in the Australian Alps"

"It was in July, 1913, that I had my last wild ride through the Australian bush in the south-west of Queensland. It wasn't easy to say good-bye to this place of more than 700 square kilometres, where two of us had had a wonderful time looking after 3,000 head of half-wild cattle. Old Andy's 'good luck, old boy' was still in my ears, but I had a longing in my heart which sent me from the sun-drenched bush to the clear white of the snow. Thus it was that as the southern winter came into the land I turned south towards the Australian Alps.

"I came via Brisbane to Sydney, where I had left my skis and other gear. On the evening of August 11th, 1913, I finally sat in the mail train which was to bring me close to the Australian Alps. On the high plain of Queanbeyan it got rather chilly and the iron hot water bottle only kidded my feet that it was warmer. Early in the morning we arrived at Cooma, and in an open mail automobile I was taken to Jindabyne, 83 kilometres away. At the Creel we had lunch and changed from motor car to horse-drawn carriage. Gradually patches of snow appeared and half an hour before reaching the Hotel Kosciusko the snow was lying heavily on both sides of the road. At Rennix's Gap,

1,603 m., we had the first view of the Hotel. A short run downhill and around the frozen lake which serves as a skating rink, and in the late afternoon we reached the Hotel Kosciusko.

The big Hotel, which was erected in 1909 by the Government and has since been added to at various times, lies at an altitude of 1,529 metres and offers splendid accommodation. The Government has done its best, and a motor road leads right to the highest point of Australia, Mt. Kosciusko, 2,234 metres. A modest accommodation hut, Bett's Camp, is situated half way. During the winter the Hotel is a much-patronised winter sport centre, but most of the guests are hardly out of hearing of the dinner bell! The Australians have not yet discovered the treasures which they possess in these mountains, and this is the reason why I was fortunate to enjoy the area's untouched beauty. Until the tree line ends the scenery is dominated by snow gums with their evergreen leaves. With the last stunted little gum trees left behind the mountain chain rises above the sub-tropical vegetation. After the entry of winter the eye dwells on gently rising slopes to the high tops of the mountains which are sharply etched in white against the dark blue of the southern sky. This is the only mountain chain in Australia which rises above the tree line.

"The day following my arrival a sports carnival was held with ski-ing, skating and tobogganing. This was the big occasion of the winter season and the hotel was fully occupied. When I learned that the Norwegian Consul, Mr. Hans Fay, from Melbourne, would also take part in the ski race I agreed to run, too. The race track, 'The Kerry,' was 'delightful,' hardly 400 yards long, and so little inclined that I thought it would be an art to fall on it. Most of the competitors, however, managed to do so! My skis were waxed better than Mr. Fay's and won me the race. The result of the race was immediately wired to all newspapers, and in the evening there was the usual big ball and prize-giving." (Harry Malcher still carries the inscribed

silver watch which was presented to his father on this occasion.)

"Mr. Fay, who wished to make the trip to the top of Mt. Kosciusko, urged me to establish an Australian record with him by completing the trip on skis from the hotel to the summit and return in one day. Until then the few skiers who had made the trip had always spent the night at Bett's Camp, half-way up the mountain.

"The 19th August dawned clear and we left the hotel at 7.15 in the morning, and in half an hour were at Dainer's Gap. One and a quarter hours later we were at Piper's Gap, reaching Bett's Camp at 9.45. There we ordered our lunch for 3 p.m. on our return. The weather and visibility slowly got worse, and when we reached the summit at 12.40 there was a storm blowing and a heavy fog reduced the visibility to almost nil. The small wooden hut on the summit was filled with snow, and as we could not find shelter from the growing storm we left after a short breather. We had to feel our way down, but once we came out of the fog we had no trouble in reaching Bett's Camp at 2.45 p.m., where we had our lunch. We left Bett's at 4.0 and were back at the hotel at 6 p.m. in good time for a bath and change into the usual dinner jacket. Our record attracted a good deal of attention and was reported in most of the Australian newspapers.

"After a week of comparative ease at the hotel my longing for lone tours returned and I was waiting for the news that the caretakers of Bett's Camp had left so that I could make this hut my headquarters for my projected Main Range tours. On the 6th September I left the hotel heavily laden with food and gear and reached Bett's Camp in the afternoon. During the next few days the weather permitted only small exploratory trips of the immediate surroundings. Not until the 17th September did I get the really fine day which I had waited for so long. After hurrying with my chores I left the hut at 7.0 in the morning. The snow was wonderful and the wind had dropped, and for the first time the Main Range was in clear view. Half an hour later I was on top of Char-

lotte Pass. From Kosciusko to Mt. Tate in the north there is one beautiful ski-ing mountain after the other. I could see my goal for the trip, Mt. Townsend, the most impressive of them all. In no time I was down at the Snowy, of which no trace was to be seen, and in long traverses I reached the top of Mt. Clark at 8.45. Kosciusko in the south looks rather uninviting, but there was splendid beauty in the north. The run across to Mt. Northcote was easy, and presently I stood on the Great Divide. I let my boards clatter over the ice to Northcote Pass, where there was a small summer shelter hut for tourists (since disappeared!). At 10 a.m. I reached the top of Mt. Townsend, where I had a long contemplative rest. At 11.30 I was on my skis again and presently reached the top of Mt. Alice Rawson. From there I had a fast run in good powder snow down to Wilkinson's Valley at the foot of Abbott's Range. At noon I reached the southern and highest peak of Abbott's Range. Soon I was back at the weather hut on Northcote Pass, and below the Pass I could now see the white expanse of Lake Albina, which during the morning had been hidden in clouds. Via Northcote I reached Mt. Lee at about 1.40, had a pleasant run down the saddle, and in order to get a look into the western faces I followed the mountain chain to Mt. Anderson. From there I had an unbelievably beautiful view of the wild crags and gorges, but unfortunately did not have a photographic plate left to record it. I returned to the Main Range and at 2.45 I was on top of Mt. Twynam, where I rested for nearly an hour in the sun. From Mt. Twynam I enjoyed a very steep run down to the Blue Lake, which I disturbed for the first time from its winter sleep. I left Hedley Tarn, the second lake on my right, and skied down Crummer Range to the Snowy River, which I reached somewhat low, as all the snow bridges had gone. Finally I got across and had a very hot climb up to the Saddle between the two peaks of Mt. Guthrie. Another pleasant descent and langlauf, and at 5 p.m. I finished my most beautiful day in Australia with a Christiania in front of Bett's Camp.