

KIANDRA TO KOSCIUSKO

By PAUL READER

Paul Reader, Keith Field, and Douglass Baglin have joined the exclusive band of skiers who have successfully attempted the arduous fifty mile Kiandra-Kosciusko traverse on skis. Paul's article vividly describes the hazards and difficulties encountered on this long ski tour, of which he was the leader. All skiers will wish to congratulate the party on their determination and stamina in overcoming the many obstacles and dangers that so frequently beset them, and winning through.—EDITOR.

THE first party to make this crossing was led by Sir Herbert Schlink in 1927. The members of our party were Keith Field, Douglass Baglin and Paul Reader. and we set out from Kiandra on 4th July, 1954, departing from Kiandra Chalet at 9 a.m. After some very rough going we arrived at our camp No. 1 at 5.30 p.m. This was the north side of Happy Jack River, on a rock measuring 6 feet by 6 feet, the only suitable site. We were unable to erect our tent and spent our first night under the stars. The final approach to this spot was down a rock slide 1,000 feet in length and of a 70 degree angle. This was the first of a series of hazards we were to encounter. We all took nasty falls coming down, as there was no snow covering the rocks and they were balanced on one another like marbles. Doug broke his stock jumping out of the way of a minor avalanche I started 100 feet above him. Both he and Keith lost the seat out of their pants before we had negotiated half the slide. Keith took a nasty toss at one stage and it was only that I happened to be in front by about 20 feet and was able to grab him as he flew past that prevented what may have been a nasty fall of 100 feet or so. The evening was pleasantly fine, but cold. We had no fires, and our meal was cooked by means of a small primus stove. Our packs weighed an average of 57 pounds.

July 5th.—At 9.30 a.m. we commenced our swim across Happy Jack River. There was nothing happy about the crossing. By 9.45 a.m. a snow storm had commenced with the temperature at 29 degrees, or three degrees below freezing point. We

had removed our clothes for the crossing, hoping to keep them dry; as it turned out this was all to no avail. By the time we had floated all our gear across this 55-foot river, which was running a-banker, three and a half hours had passed—all this time without clothes except for a sweater between swims. At the first attempt Doug and I together, with a pack strapped between, were swept off our feet. Doug was carried 100 yards downstream before he was able to scramble out, whilst I managed to grip a rock after only being swept about 10 feet. Fortunately, I had been able to keep hold of the pack and perhaps saved us from yet another nasty incident, as this pack held most of our food and fire equipment. The cold was intense, and it was at this stage we all became victims of frost-bite. The balance of the day was spent erecting camp No. 2 and endeavouring to thaw out our frozen bodies by means of a meagre fire. The camp site was under an overhanging rock face of decomposing granite on a sandy spit a foot from the river's edge. All we had, including our sleeping bags, was sodden, despite our earlier efforts to keep them dry on the crossing. The cameras were the only items not wet. We spent a very cold and miserable night with snow falling throughout.

July 6th.—Despite the rigorous night the sight we beheld on emerging from our tent was breathtaking. The frightening rock slide we had descended the day before was now blanketed with 18 inches of beautiful powder snow and the trees simply groaned under the weight of snow on their branches, whilst the river gurgled its sil-

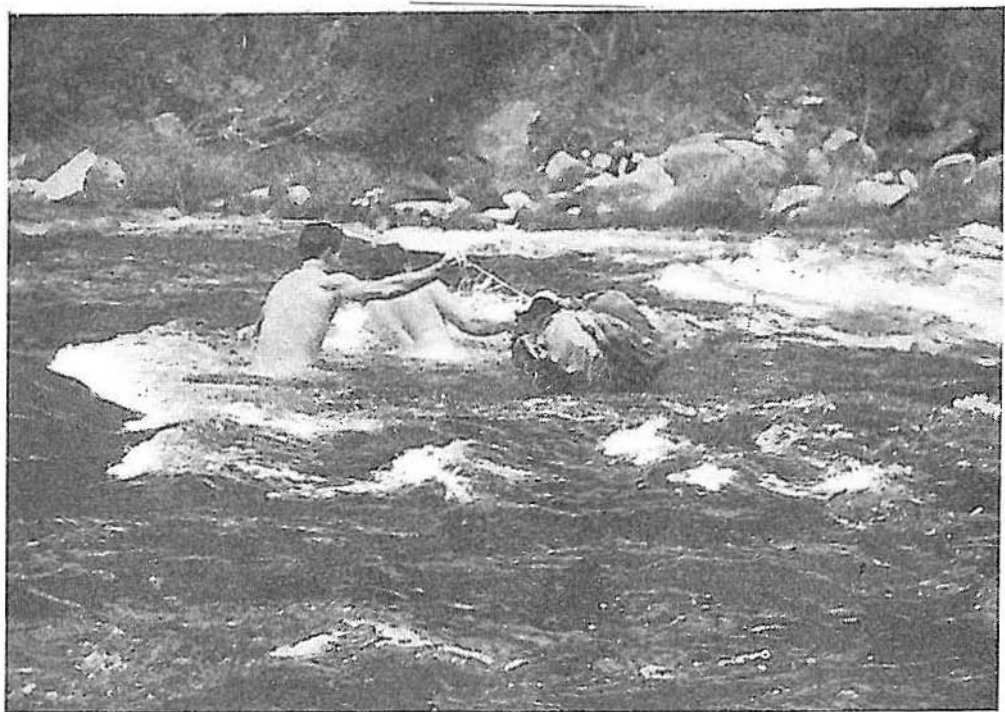
very length through this crystal paradise with a foot of ice at its edges. It was not long afterwards our awe turned to frustration, as we lashed and floundered up the side of the steepest mountain I have ever climbed. It rose from the river like a pyramid, and one only had to lean slightly back to plunge down the face. This mountain turned out to be a freak, for when at last we reached the top we were dismayed to find another joining it twice as high again. The unusual point about this first mountain was that it was joined to the second by what I was later to find out is a ridge called a fishback. This freak ridge left a drop of 800 feet on either side, and was so narrow that Keith was forced to negotiate it by sitting down and passing it between his legs as one would a pole. We continued our climb, with snow still falling, till 4 p.m., and then we were still a day's climb from the

top. At this stage we chose a site for camp No. 3. This was to be a foxhole between two granite rocks, perched on such an angle that one only had to trip to fall hundreds of feet down. All our equipment was still sodden, as the heat generating from our bodies melted the snow falling on our backs. Even with our tent pitched over the opening we still had insufficient room for the three of us. This necessitated having to take turns about of hourly intervals during the night. One would crawl into the hole and try to sleep against the wet moss-covered rocks, another would stoke and choke over the fire, whilst the third would sit outside the tent in the falling snow. By this stage we were so exhausted that we even slept during part of the night.

July 7th.—The scene confronting us the next morning still held some of its grandeur, but we were not really in the mood



Before leaving Kiandra — Paul Reader and Keith Field.



The Happyjack River Crossing — not so happy.

Photo. D. H. Baglin.

to appreciate the scene, and after a hasty breakfast we commenced climbing once again. The snow stopped falling that morning, but with the gums so laden one only had to brush them, or a slight ripple of wind disturb their branches, for one to be enveloped in a cascade of white. We climbed all day and over some really terrifying rock outcrops, where every step brought down rocks. By three o'clock we had reached the top and stood dwarfed in the middle of a forest of huge gums, here and there splintered and twisted like matchsticks by past storms and lightning. By four we had picked a site for camp No. 4. This was by a hollowed gum on a small knoll. We made a bed out of gum leaves spread over the surface of snow, covered them with our ground sheets and two sleeping bags (Keith had lost his the previous day, climbing the fishback ridge), and after pitching our tent we spent a very comfortable night. Keith tried getting in-

to the same bag as myself, but after a few embarrassing hours we gave the idea away.

July 8th dawned a cloudless, sunny day. Realising we were days behind schedule, it was decided to omit a search for Boobee Hut and make the most of the good weather. Our progress was laboriously slow, and I doubt if we progressed more than two miles, though it seemed like ten. The powder snow of previous days had turned to wet, heavy slush, and as our climbing skins were already wet, it clung in thick lumps. The undergrowth kept coming through the surface and catching our bindings, so that every step had to be watched, and with each ski seeming like a ton weight we shuffled on. This was the first day we had been able to wear skins, and similar conditions were to prevail until Mt. Jagungal was reached three days later. I might add that at this stage we were completely bushed and had been since our departure from Happy Jack River. I



The snow storm after crossing the river.

Photo. D. H. Baglin.

put this down to four main factors: (1) The surrounding mountains were unfamiliar. (2) Due to the storm we had been unable to see for more than a quarter mile over the past three days. (3) We had been forced to ignore the compass on so many occasions due to changes of course forced on us by nature that it was impossible to make the necessary corrections. (4) Where we had crossed the river the formation of its course was so unusual over one and a half miles that it should have shown up very clearly on the map and allowed us to pinpoint our position. However, there was nothing shown which even slightly resembled its course. I am therefore forced to the reluctant conclusion that the map leaves much to be desired. (Now I really have let myself in for criticism.) However, we did find many cases where trig. stations were not marked. While I

am dealing with this subject, I may as well bring up a rather sore point. Surely it is not asking too much of those people erecting these stations and who go to the trouble of painting them black and silver, to also, with a few strokes of the brush, write either the name or at least the height of the mountain on the woodwork. This would at least assist the lost wanderer in pinpointing his position and may someday avert a tragedy, which may well occur for lack of a few seconds' extra work.

That night, rather than lose precious height by dropping into the valleys, we decided to camp on a plateau of snow. The fire we made at camp No. 5 was unusual to say the least. It started on the surface of the snow and was no larger than 18 inches in circumference. By morning it was resting on the ground 3 feet lower down and had melted a circle 26

feet in circumference. We were therefore able to sit in this hole with our backs against the wall with our legs stretched out to the fire. It was very pleasant, and another enjoyable evening was experienced. From this plateau we had been able to observe Mt. Jagungal for the first time, and it certainly boosted our morale.

July 9th dawned as had the 8th and we lost no time starting, determined to peel off the miles. Progress was reasonable and uneventful. We were still carrying about the same weight in our packs, as what we had lost in food consumed had been replaced by water absorbed by our sleeping bags, tent, clothes, etc., which we had been unable to dry out. We made camp No. 6 in a clump of gums and, after a hearty dinner, bedded down for the evening. We all felt anxious that the weather would not last: but others besides ourselves must have been saying a few prayers, for it continued to hold.

July 10th.—Ever since Mt. Jagungal had been sighted a new hope and determination to win through had sprung up, and this day we really burnt up the miles and before we fell exhausted at our next camp we must have covered close on 20 miles. During the day we passed close to both Farm Ridge Hut and O'Keefes, but not wishing to waste time in searching for them we pushed on. After all, we were becoming very used to sleeping in the open and rising every three hours to replenish the fire. Camp No. 7 was staked out on the western face of Jagungal. I shall always remember my mixed feelings when I first stepped on to the slope leading up to the crest. This jewel of a mountain, rising majestically out of the surrounding plain country, beckoning us on when our spirits were low and yet never seeming to move closer. At times as distant as the Star of the East and at others the Helping Hand towards our ultimate goal. Who but those who attempt the unusual know the fear of the fight or the thrill of the conquest. Since time immortal those who have sat back and said "What fools they are" have themselves never lived.

We were cutting timber for our fire when Nature stepped in with a paint brush and we were made witnesses to one of the most spectacular and beautiful pictures we have ever looked upon. The sun, sinking in the west, threw its reflection from the crystal snow on to the face of Jagungal, and in twenty minutes changed it to three distinct colours. First we saw a mountain bathed in a delicate pink, then blue, and finally yellow. Fortunately Doug was able to catch each change in colour film. That night we slept the sleep of the contented. We were half-way to Kosciusko with the hardest part over.

July 11th.—Yet another perfect day. By 10.30 a.m. we had climbed over the top and were ski-ing down the eastern slopes

DOUGLASS BAGLIN after seven days on the Main Range. A photographer by profession, Doug. took the pictures illustrating this article with a Rolleiflex.





Keith Field and Paul Reader feeling as tired as they appear after climbing out of the Happy-jack River Gorge. Photo. D. H. Baglin.

which, in my opinion, runs into the finest ski-ing valley in New South Wales.

From Mt. Jagungal we set a compass course for Alpine Hut but made a very stupid mistake by not allowing ten degrees allowance for magnetic north. Our mistake went unnoticed till it was too late and we were in the hut area. We attempted to correct our error, but after tramping on for hours ended at a hut which we thought was Kidmans, and lies to the north of Alpine. We had covered about nine miles that day. The reason progress had been so slow was because we had run out of food (except for powdered milk) and energy, and had been stopping for drinks of water far too much. On arrival at the hut it was necessary to dig ourselves in, as the snow was up to the windows. Unfortunately there was no food to be found, but we managed to find some sugar and tea, so for the first time for days we were able to have something sweet. There was a large quantity of snow in the hut which had come in through the chimney, so after clearing this out we drew

the beds up to the fire and for the first time since we commenced the trip we were able to sit in comfort and warmth. Doug and I puffed contentedly at pipes and it was so pleasant by the fire, each with his own thoughts, we stayed up till 1 a.m. before turning in.

July 12th.—And still the weather held. After cleaning the hut and replacing the wood used, we set a compass course for Alpine Hut. (Second sore point.) Surely regular visitors to these huts could scratch the name somewhere on the building. As it turned out, instead of the hut being Kidmans it was the Tin Hut; therefore the other side of Alpine. Consequently, the course we set just didn't exist and after many wasted hours' searching we found Dicky Cooper Hut, which isn't the most habitable hut on the range, as many "Main Range Rats" know. Had we struck a blizzard in our weakened condition we could well have perished. It is with a view to the future that I mention these points, as I said earlier, for a few seconds' work, tragedies may be averted. We back-tracked from Dicky Cooper Hut (not knowing at the time that this was its name and therefore once again unable to pin-point our position) till we came up Whites River Valley. All we could see of the hut from a distance was the radio mast. We were tempted to ski down, but the climb out of Whites is long and, wishing to save as much energy as possible, we by-passed the hut. We held a meeting on Dicky Cooper Bogong and decided we would eat a little powdered milk we had left and then press on all through the night till we eventually reached the Chalet. By 8 p.m. we were enveloped in a thick mist and visibility was restricted to six feet. We were then running over the Granite Peaks approaching the Rolling Grounds. At 8.30, as we climbed Consett Stephen Pass, the mist lifted and to our east we noticed a glow in one of the valleys. I was leading at the time and was first to see this light. Not wishing to build up false hopes in case it turned out to be just a trick of the moon on low clouds, I kept silent. About ten minutes later Doug



Paul Reader and Keith Field on the Western slopes of Jargungal. On the right is the Grey Mare Range. On the distant horizon appears Mt. Tate at the left, Mt. Twynam, Twynam West Ridge and Watson's Crags. Part of the Mount Townsend area can be seen. These summits all exceed 7,000 ft. in elevation. Photo, Douglass H. Baglin.

spied it and let out a shout. Fortunately our luck was in, and a half-mile further on we were able to pat one another's backs. We had come upon the Norwegian Camp at Guthega. Considering we were then fairly exhausted we decided, rather than push on the extra miles just for the glory of saying "we made it" and then probably spend the next week in hospital, to pocket our pride and ski down the two and a half miles to the camp.

None of us will ever forget the wonderful reception we received on our arrival. The first person we met as we staggered

on to the road was one of the four Australians in the camp. Unfortunately I have forgotten his name; all I know is he used to work at the Old Hotel. We all piled into his truck and, after receiving permission, we were driven to the residential area. Here we met the medical officer, whose name I think was Kevin Graham. Kevin went out of his way to see we received food and accommodation for the night. There were so many other kind-hearted people that I would like to mention all their names, but unfortunately I have already made this story too long.



R.A.N. Ski Club Members at Minohara.

those, too, as the "Tutons" were not as clean as I have seen elsewhere). We slept in our clothes. The hotel could accommodate about 70 skiers. Its name was "Yama no Ie," which simply means "House of the Mountains". The tariff was very reasonable—full board and lodging (one night and three meals) being 400 yen (10/- Aust.). Rail fares are 330 yen each way (8/3 Aust.), so one can have a reasonably cheap holiday.

We were all on the snow at 8 a.m. on Sunday and had a very full day. I had previously skied only twice before (both

times in Japan—once at Daisen on the West Coast and once at Minohara). Ried had skied at Buffalo and surrounding areas about four times (he lives only 60 miles or so from Mt. Buller—lucky blighter!). All the others were "First timers" and made a good showing. The main slope was about 300 yards long with a very good gradient, and there were a number of excellent runs for all classes of skiers. I tried the main run twice and "came a beauty," as I took off over one of the bumps about three-quarters of the way down the first time, but managed successfully the second time. Ried didn't get quite as far as I did on either occasion. The rest of the time I spent on the secondary slope practising "Christiana" turns quite successfully, but without much finesse. Unfortunately there is no ski tow at Minohara (Daisen had a good one, but only 120 yards), so a lot of the time is spent climbing up the hills ready for a quick descent. We departed from Minohara reluctantly, albeit very stiff in the limbs and back, at 5.35 p.m. by the "Chidori" or Ski Special, a semi-express to Hiroshima, arriving at 9.05 p.m., and thence by truck to Kure by 10 p.m. A really enjoyable outing for all.

Kiandra

VERY brief news is on record of the 1954 ski-ing season at Kiandra. Mr. Harris is the new Secretary of Kiandra Ski Club and the ski-ing performances of the Club's youngest member are perhaps of the greatest interest. This youngster is Louise Reed, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Reed. Louise, at the age of seven, passed her preliminary test and completed successfully in racing events by winning a Downhill, and gaining second place in a Slalom. Louise's ski-ing ability has to be seen to be appreciated, and she is certainly a budding champion.

Perisher Ski Tow

The tow will run from the top of Rocky Knob to Happy Valley, finishing at Perisher Creek, one mile downstream from Rock Creek Hut, as well as from Smiggin Holes over Mt. Piper.

The tow hut will be larger than at first planned. The overall measurements are 18 feet by 51 feet. There will be a shelter room, engine room and attractive living quarters for an operator and his wife.