

SKI TOURERS' ASSOCIATION

Kosciusko Main Range Report

By CHARLES ANTON

THIS report covers the fourth year of the Association's activities and is dominated by the outstanding and unqualified success of the Northcote Ski Tow, the highest tow in the Australian Alps.

After the 1953 season's disappointment with the tow, when it became completely buried, the top "A" frame was moved about fifty yards down the slope. The route was re-aligned and the number of poles was increased. On March 27 and 28, 1954, the tow was given a test run, which proved so successful that our April Bulletin carried the jubilant slogan "The Tow Does Go."

Queen's Birthday week-end in June was the real test of the tow under winter conditions. A large party of twenty-seven went to Kunama and Albina for the week-end. On Saturday all available hands were put to work under the direction of Geoffrey Hughes (Chairman of the Tow Sub-committee) placing the tow rope in position. In the afternoon last-minute alterations and adjustments were made to the "A" frame and pulleys and the engine was started. Shortly after, the party was rewarded for their labour when the engine was put into gear and the rope started to move with the first skier (by kind invitation—the writer) being towed up Mt. Northcote. That afternoon the lift worked for three hours and members rode up and skied down the tow slope like happy yo-yos! In the July Bulletin we exclaimed "It Goes and Tows."

Having learned our lesson the previous year when in June the tow was left unattended and the rope buried, we took the rope in and did not bring it out again until the beginning of July, when Harry Malcher took up residence at Kunama. On July 11, a brilliant Sunday morning, about seventy guests, mainly K.A.C. members, skied or travelled in three snowmobiles to Kunama for the official opening of the tow

with our Treasurer, Robert Ward, acting as host. It was a heart-warming sight for those who had toiled so long and had been disappointed so often to see the Northcote slopes dotted with skiers and long queues forming at the start of the tow. Such gay activity in this lovely corner of the Main Range brought to mind a day, only two years back, when two skis and two stocks, stuck in the snow on a knoll, marked the site where Kunama Hutte now stands; leading from the knoll was a single track to the present position of the Tow Hut and up Northcote along the route where the tow now operates were footmarks

ROBERT WARD outside Kunama.

Photo. D. H. Baglin.





HARRY MALCHER, Area Manager for the Association. Photo. G. E. F. Hughes.

in the snow measuring the distance to the top. A dream come true!

All through the winter the tow operated with almost monotonous regularity, and individual skiers and clubs made good use of it. The K.A.C., for instance, held its club races at Kunama and had five snowmobiles and nearly 100 skiers in the area. The Sydney Ski Club Races also took place near the tow. The Ski Club of Australia booked Kunama for the first week of its club season, and the Club's giant slalom was held on the tow slope. The giant slalom of the Interstate races in September was also run on Mt. Northcote, giving the Victorian racers an opportunity to see our Main Range projects. They were most eloquent in their praise.

At the October holiday week-end, long

after all other tows in Australia had ceased operations, our lift was still running. Many day visitors from the Chalet used the tow after the ski-ing season had ended at Charlotte Pass.

Some incidents should be mentioned to illustrate the tremendous impetus the Northcote Tow is giving to ski-ing. During a brief week-end visit Andy McCullough and Harry Malcher left Kunama at 7.30 in the morning. They started up the tow, rode to the top, pulled the safety wire to stop it, and at 7.45 were on Lake Albina, then up Townsend and down and up Townsend west, then via the Alice Rawson run back to Lake Albina, up Mt. Northcote and back at the tow at 11 o'clock in time to start it up for the first visitors from the Chalet. On another week-end trip, with only a few people on the tow, and consequently no waiting, I had 45 runs in exactly four hours, thus running nearly 25,000 vertical feet downhill over a distance of more than 15 miles.

Walker's Bridge: For the last three years we had asked the Kosciusko State Park Trust to erect a simple footbridge across the Snowy near Foreman's Chimney, to enable lodge users and Main Range tourers to cross the Snowy without the usual acrobatic efforts. The Trust advised regretfully that for once they could not assist us, as they had no labour available for this job. With the prospect of the Northcote Ski Tow operating we felt that it was imperative to get some sort of structure erected for use in spring and early summer; a time when there is usually a great deal of snow in the Kunama basin but not much around the Chalet, a time when days are longer, the weather kinder and visitors from the Chalet can flock to Kunama, provided they can cross the Snowy dry-footed. With the limited finance and labour at our disposal the chances for this bridge seemed dim indeed. However, one of our staunchest supporters, Jimmy Walker, at Easter decided to take definite action. On his own initiative, together with Ian Curlewis and Margaret Anton, in three days he erected a wire suspension bridge with borrowed material just down-

stream from Foreman's Chimney.—Although not entirely finished (planks have still to be laid across the treads), the bridge has already been used by a great many skiers. Across it Phil Simpson, who broke his leg last September, was carried on the rescue sledge to the waiting snowmobile on the other side of the river. The swaying structure, high up above the rushing Snowy, still proves a little terrifying for some users, but next season there will be a foot-walk consisting of planks and the bridge will be further stayed with wire ropes.

Lake Albina Ski Lodge: During the last season the lodge was not sufficiently patronised, considering the fact that Albina (at an altitude of 6,530 ft.—the highest habitation in Australia) has a great deal to offer, such as inner-spring mattresses, independent two-bed cubicles, running water, sewerage, stainless steel sink, etc., not to forget the most glorious alpine view and the longest and steepest ski runs in the Australian Alps. It can fairly easily be reached from the Chalet over various routes. A snow pole line leads from Seaman's via Muellers Saddle right to the Lodge, and for those who do not like to carry heavy packs up-hill for a long time provision has been made to take them to the top of the Northcote Ski Tow, and from there it is only fifteen minutes' walk to the Lodge.

For the coming season Albina will have electric light and individual reading lights over each bunk, and a hot shower will also be in operation. Albina Lodge is no longer just a hut on the Main Range, but a comfortable Chalet with all modern comforts. The charge is still 10/- per night for members, with a variety of tinned foods available at Sydney prices. To provide continuity of service and make members' stay still more pleasant we have appointed an area manager, Bill Clark, a member of all three projects, who will live at Albina during the coming season—another step in the right direction.

Kunama Hutte was booked out for most of the season. The outstanding new feature, electric light, delighted resident members. Harry Malcher, our Kunama

area manager, did a fine job in running the tow and looking after Kunama, and members were full of praise for his efforts. He will be missed when he goes for a trip overseas the season after next.

Northcote Ski Tow Hut: Being pre-occupied last year with modifications to the tow and hampered by lack of finance, we were unable to finish and furnish the accommodation and warming section of the Tow Hut. This year we are giving this problem a great deal of attention, and for the snow season we will have accommodation for four members in the Tow Hut, which will have two separate two-bed cubicles and all facilities such as water closet, running water, stainless steel sink

SASHA ON NORTHCOTE TOW. Mrs. Karel Nekvapil—"Sasha" to her very numerous friends—was Czech. Women's Ski Champion for four years to 1948, finished sixth in Alpine Combined Events at the 1948 Olympics, and established a formidable record in International Racing before coming to Australia.

Photo. G. E. F. Hughes.



and food preparation area, electric light, etc. This will bring our total beds in our three lodges on the Main Range to twenty-six.

Northcote Eagle: The Northcote Eagle test run—which was established last year with Tony Sponar, Tommy Tomasi, Bill Kubes and Charles Anton winning golden eagles and Doug Thatcher a bronze eagle—proved again popular. Snow conditions, however, were very rarely propitious and only Harry Malcher won a golden eagle in the excellent time of 37 $\frac{3}{5}$ seconds, and Jill Macdonald and Margaret Anton won silver eagles.

World Speed Record: Tony Sponar, who covered the Northcote Eagle course (which is over half a mile in length with a drop of over 700 ft.) in the phenomenal time of 32 seconds, thus averaging 60 miles an hour with a top speed of between 80 and 90 miles an hour, suggested that an at-

tempt on the world record should be made on the Mt. Northcote course. The existing record with standard ski equipment was established by Zeno Colo in 1947 on the Italian side of the Little Matterhorn. The present record stands at 98.9 miles per hour (159.3 kilometres), and Tony thought that, provided electronic measuring equipment over a distance of one hundred metres could be obtained, accurate to one hundredth of a second, an attempt on the world record might prove successful or would at least establish an Australian record in excess of 90 miles an hour. Longines Watch Company had the necessary timing equipment available in Australia, but unfortunately poor snow conditions in September prevented the holding of the event.

Midsummer Races: Races for the Albina Summer Slalom Cup and the Hans Neering Memorial trophy, usually run between Christmas and New Year, had to be can-



KUNAMA HUTTE INTERIOR.

Photo. D. H. Baglin.

celled owing to lack of snow. We hope for better luck this year.

Memberships in the three projects have greatly increased during the last year. Albina now has 193, Kunama has 147, and the Tow has 269 individual members, Ski Clubs having taken 65 memberships. Kunama memberships are closed, Ski Tow Foundation Memberships are available at £10 each, and Lake Albina Ski Lodge Memberships at £35.

Perisher Development: Ski Tourers' are glad to see huts springing up almost overnight in this area, and it gives us great satisfaction to think that we were the first ones to complete a Ski Lodge in the Kosciusko area in what surely must be the most difficult spot to build in the Australian Alps. By doing so we have probably given encouragement and impetus to clubs to build their own lodges. We consider the Perisher area a training ground for future Main Range skiers, and for this reason members of our Association, such as Alan Coogan, Bill Hawkins, Geoffrey Hughes and myself, have given Sverre Kaaten, the honorary organiser and sponsor of the Perisher Ski Tow project, all the assistance we could. After having lagged behind world ski developments by at least twenty years, skiing, the cinderella of New South Wales sports, is finally going ahead.

Our thanks are due to those members of the Association who for the past few years have worked hard and had to put up with so many disappointments. I feel that they are being repaid by such sights as fifty



JIMMY'S BRIDGE. The nervous preferred rock-hopping, but many crossed the Snowy near Foreman's Hut in this way. S.T.A. members Jimmy Walker, Ian Curlewis and Margaret Anton built this 50-yard suspension bridge during the Easter week-end, 1954. For '55 the bridge will have planks between the two bottom wires, making tightrope walking unnecessary.

Photo. Ian Walker.

or sixty skiers enjoying themselves on the Piste alongside the Ski Tow on Mt. Northcote or a sunrise watched through the picture window at Kunama.