

Snow Fields of the Federal Capital Territory

By J. S. A.

On the Brindabella Range, which forms the border between the Federal Capital Territory and New South Wales, there exist some excellent snowfields. The best of these are on the slopes between Mts. Franklin and Bimberi, which, as the crow flies, are only 20 miles from Canberra. This area embraces the slopes Mts. Franklin (5,400 ft.), Ginini (5,782 ft.), Gingera (6,092 ft.) and Bimberi (6,274 ft.). The last-named mountain has been aptly named the "Cinderella" of peaks for, although it is one of the highest peaks in Australia (I think it ranks sixth), it is possibly the least known and most neglected. The other peaks share the same fate as Bimberi.

The reason for this is the comparative inaccessibility of this area. At present the only way of visiting the locality is to follow one of the two or three bridle tracks for about 15 miles from the nearest road. If the proposed road from Lee's Spring to Mount Franklin is constructed the difficulty of approach to these snowfields will be much lessened and some excellent ski-ing country will be opened up. South from Mount Franklin, the Brindabella Range commences to widen out and the slopes to the Cotter and Goodradigbee Rivers are not so precipitous as they are to the north. It is on these slopes that good ski-ing grounds are to be found. A short description of some of these is given hereunder, to illustrate the possibilities of developing this area.

On the eastern slope of the Brindabella Range there is a wide shelf which slopes gradually from just north of Mount Ginini towards a gap at the northern end of Mount Gingera. This shelf is from three-quarters of a mile to a mile wide and, with the slopes leading down from the ridge, provides some excellent ski runs. In average seasons good snow is to be found on this shelf, and the writer has experienced snow in this locality from two to three feet deep early in June. Its altitude would be about 5,300 ft. at the highest part, falling away to about 4,500 ft. at the gap. From this gap there is a valley, rising in a southerly direction, parallel with Mount Gingera and forming a gap between that and adjoining peaks. Here, and on adjoining hills, are many ideal slopes for ski-ing. Similar conditions are found on the southern slopes of Gingera.



On Mt. Bimberi.

Between Gingera and Bimberi the lower altitudes are against good snow slopes, although, in good seasons, plenty of snow is to be found. Mount Bimberi, like Gingera, provides good snow on ideal slopes and, here again, good ski-ing should be obtained. In a number of places the slopes are not very heavily timbered and courses could easily be constructed.

The distance from Mount Franklin to Bimberi is approximately 15 miles, and good snow is obtainable over practically the whole of this distance. The width of the snowfields varies from about two to four miles in average seasons, while, in good seasons, this area would be extended to include practically the whole of the upper reaches of the Cotter River. Snow to a depth of about a foot to 18 inches is often to be found as low as the Cotter Homestead, at an altitude of approximately 3,500 ft. As most of this area is within the Cotter catchment area, hut accommodation is, at present, rather scarce. The Cotter Homestead, situated at the foot of Mount Bimberi, is the only existing shelter close to the snowfields. This building consists of three rooms, and permission to occupy it has to be obtained from the authorities controlling the catchment area. If a road is constructed from Lee's Spring to Mount Franklin the Canberra Alpine Club intends to build a suitable hut at the foot of Mount Franklin. Other shelters will have to be constructed as the need for them arises.

In addition to the snowfields, mention might be made of a few other points of interest. The proposed road to Mount Franklin will be one of the best scenic roads in Australia. From numerous vantage points unexcelled views of the Cotter and Goodradigbee Valleys can be obtained. The mountains between Kiandra and Kosciusko, the backwaters of Burrenjack Dam and the plains upon which Canberra is situated are just a few of the sights which inspire the tourist along this track. Ginini Falls, formed by Ginini Creek as it rushes down the precipitous slopes of Mount Franklin, are within three miles of the end of the proposed road. These falls are 500 ft. high and once seen will never be forgotten. Another interesting feature of this locality is the large number of massive granite boulders standing out on the peaks. A fine example of this is to be seen in the Coronet rock, a granite boulder about 30 to 40 ft. high, surmounting a sugar-loaf hill. Along with these attractions, some excellent trout fishing is to be obtained in the Cotter River and tributaries to the Goodradigbee River, all of which are easily accessible from Mount Franklin.

Thus, within a short distance of Canberra, there is to be found an area providing excellent mountain scenery, fishing, and snowfields.

In addition to the above short article on the Brindabella Range, Miss Freer, honorary secretary of the Canberra Alpine Club, has kindly supplied us with some further notes on the ski-ing possibilities of the area, from one of the members of the C.A.C. These are given below, and readers who are interested in the subject should refer to the article in the *Year Book* by Mr. W. D. Gordon on the first ski ascent of Mount Bimberi. Since these notes were written the track to Mount Franklin has been begun, though how far it has reached is at present uncertain, as the men working on it were caught by early snow and blizzards in April. The further notes referred to run:—

Mount Gingera is approximately four miles south from Ginini. It is a sharp-ridged mountain, having a rocky summit two miles long. The lower slopes, however, would provide excellent runs down to a long plateau devoid of timber. This plateau is 500 feet below the summit, and offers admirable facilities for the establishment of a base hut, water being available in abundance. This portion of the range is rather inaccessible at present, and few people have ventured there in the winter months. Mount Bimberi is the highest peak in the Federal Territory. It is most easily reached by way of Ororal and the Cotter River Valley—half a day's journey by car and on foot. There are several



The reduction of this drawing to fit the page has made the scale shown incorrect.

gentle slopes at the summit, but there is a heavy growth of timber on the lower slopes. Much of the country between Bimberi and Gingera has yet to be explored.

A party of Canberra skiers will make a trip to this part of the range shortly and investigate its possibilities from the point of view of ski runs. However, without Government assistance in the construction of a road, little can be done towards the development of these snowy regions. Holding that the scenery from the mountain tops would provide an excellent tourist draw in summer or winter, the Canberra Alpine Club is endeavouring to impress upon Government officials the value of the proposed tourist track along the ridge, but, so far, nothing has been done and, for the present, at least, nature's beauties in this region remain a closed book to all except those who have the courage to face winter's worst with a billy, a blanket, and an optimistic spirit.