

Winter Sports for Canberra

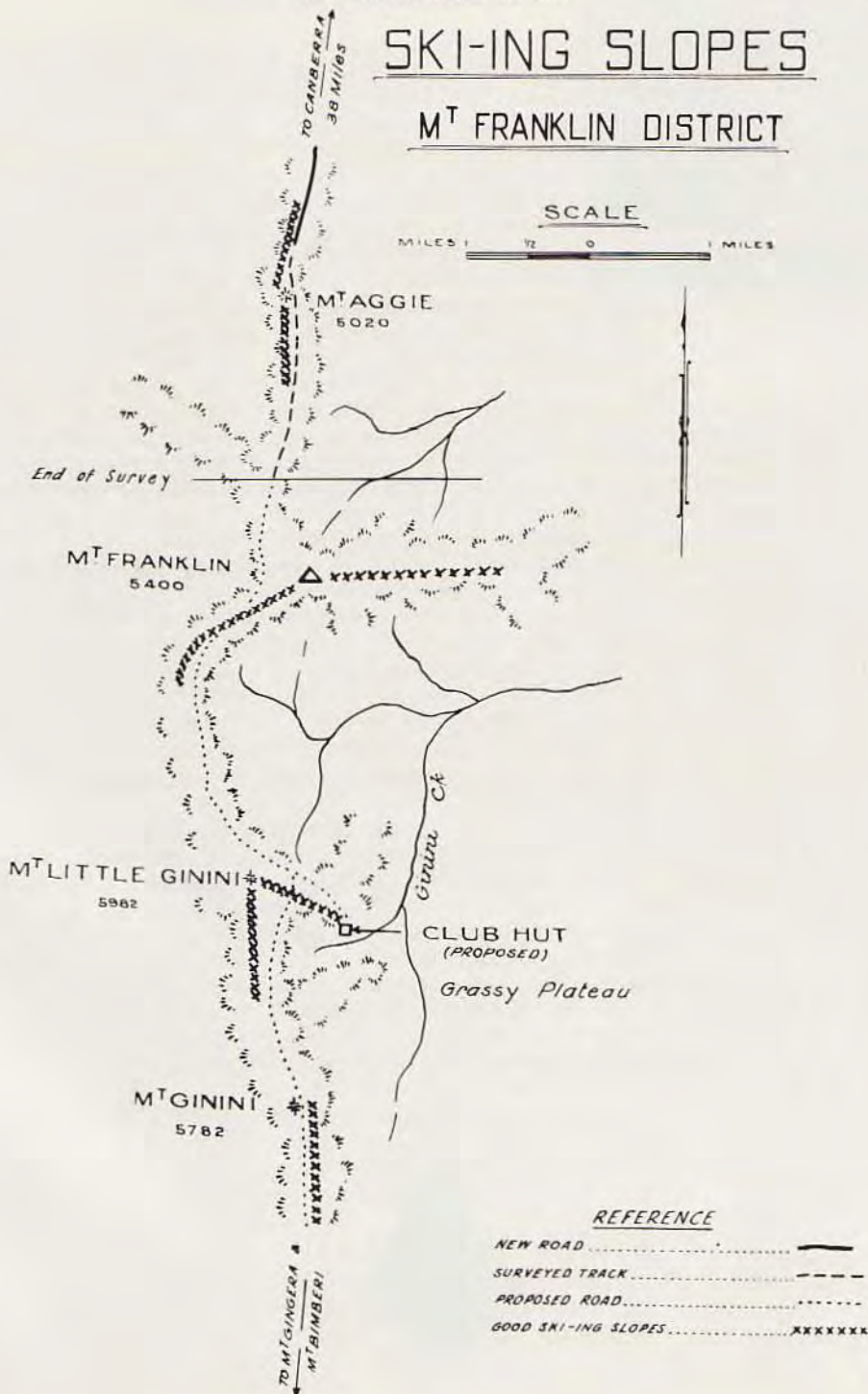
With the new road along the Goodradigbee and Cotter watershed rapidly penetrating the heart of the western mountain range, an easily accessible winter sports resort, providing excellent facilities for ski-ing, will soon be added to Canberra's tourist attractions. The road, which is being constructed primarily as a tourist route, but also for afforestation purposes, already runs 10 miles along the ridge, touching on its way minor peaks from which glorious panoramas are unfolded. The summit of Mt. Aggie (5,020 feet), which is within easy distance of the road, commands more than 5,000 square miles of country, extending from beyond the Canberra valley and the headwaters of Burrenjack, far across to the Tumut Range in the west, and southward to Kosciusko, Kiandra, and Jagungal. The present objective of the road is Mt. Franklin, which, although not the highest peak in the Federal Territory, is well into the snow belt. Ultimately, it will be continued along the range past Ginini, Gingera, and finally Bimberi—the highest mountain of the district—making a round trip which will open up some of the most magnificent scenery in the Commonwealth.

An exploration recently made by several members of the Canberra Alpine Club revealed the great possibilities of the Franklin and Ginini region for winter sports. Excellent runs were charted, including gentle slopes for the novice, and stiffer grades for the more experienced skiers. Leaving the Federal Capital on a Saturday afternoon in drizzling rain, the party headed towards the mountains in cars loaded well over the plimsol line with ski, camping equipment, and "tucker" for four days. The new road starts at the top of the Brindabella Mountain, 4,000 feet above sea level, and, as the surface of the road had not had time to pack down, further progress was only possible with chains. With several inches of mud on the surface, travel was difficult. The rain had turned into light snow and the temperature had dropped considerably. Patches of snow, showing evidence of recent heavy heavy falls, were encountered. Five miles along the track we found the roadmen's camp and, as the workers had returned to Canberra for the weekend, took possession of the settlement which proved an admirable base for the expedition along the ridge. The roadmen's equipment fortunately included a plentiful supply of blankets which were put to good use during the first freezing night on the roof of the Federal Territory.

Early on Sunday morning the trek began, the explorers with their blankets, supplies, ski, and sticks giving creditable imitations of Christmas trees. For the first four miles, the preliminary survey track along the route which the road will take made progress easy. Leaving the survey track behind, the journey was continued over gentle grassy slopes, an old brumby pad winding between the snow gums, being faintly discernible. The party had lunch at Mt. Aggie, and had an opportunity to take stock of the glorious outlook. The day was brilliant and colourful contrast was provided by the green cultivated fields of the Brindabella Valley, two thousand five hundred feet below. To the south was the rugged sky-line of the Australian Alps. Only a mile and a half from Mt. Aggie, Mt. Franklin glistened in its white mantle, and, with the patches of snow becoming rapidly larger and more frequent, enthusiasm reached fever pitch. We camped on a saddle in the southern shoulder of the mountain, which marked the end of what seemed a fine ski-run from

SKI-ING SLOPES

M^T FRANKLIN DISTRICT



the summit, more than a mile away. A closer examination, however, revealed that the snow was on the thin side, with several rocks showing through. Further south, Ginini and Little Ginini appeared promising and a further excursion was planned for the next day. A cloudless sky was a clear indication of another freezing night.

Monday dawned clear and cold, the temperature being near zero. With the coming of light, miserable faces, with blue noses and ears, slowly emerged from the sleeping bags, only to return again with convulsive shivers. Moisture inside the tents had condensed and frozen on the canvas and on the sleeping bags. The warmest blankets were totally inadequate under such conditions and, further sleep being out of the question, a fire was lit and the thawing-out process began. Cooks were frustrated when an egg which had been left outside all night refused to break into the frying pan. It was frozen through. The morning was glorious and, with a little exercise and plenty of hot tea, high spirits returned. The snow was a little thin for travelling, and when Little Ginini was reached, half an hour later, large areas of fallen timber prevented the use of ski. The summit of this peak was reached after about a quarter of an hour of hard climbing. The snow was two feet deep and several good runs were tested on the way to Mt. Ginini itself. Travelling southward along the ridge proved most enjoyable running, the sparse timber giving ample opportunity to practise turning. Lunch time found the party within a mile of Gingera, a long, flat-topped mountain, visible from Canberra. Some excellent runs could be seen on its slopes, stretching far to the plains below. However, time was short and much as we wanted to explore Gingera, the return journey had to begin. On the return trip to Franklin, a beautiful run was found on the south-eastern slope of Little Ginini, leading from the summit to a grassy flat half a mile below. This small plain is sheltered and would be an admirable site for a chalet. Another chilly night was spent at Mt. Franklin and an uneventful trip back to Canberra completed a most enjoyable and profitable holiday.

Recently the Department of the Interior increased the squad working on the new road, and it is possible that Mt. Franklin may be reached before the weather forces the abandonment of the construction until after the winter. The cost of the road to date has been £8,000. Apart from the winter sports aspect, the route will have a big attraction for tourists all the year round, because of its scenic value. To Alpine enthusiasts, however, it is a gateway to a snowy paradise, and with the development of the area along sound lines, ski-ing facilities equal to any in the Commonwealth should be available, not only to people in adjacent districts, but to those from distant northern centres, who will find the journey nearly 100 miles shorter than to Kosciusko, or Kiandra.

