

Snowfields of the A.C.T.

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The Past

THE potentialities of the mountain ranges which form the western boundary of the Australian Capital Territory were realised by a small group of ski-ing enthusiasts in Canberra in the early thirties. They carried out initial exploration and later on organised the Canberra Alpine Club, which took over the task of opening up the snow fields within some forty miles from the National City.

The first two objectives set up by these pioneers of ski-ing in the Australian Capital Territory, namely, the development of snow sports for the people of Canberra and the opening of the mountain range of the

A.C.T., were partly achieved with the building of the road from the Brindabella Pass to the south along the range to Mt. Franklin, Mt. Ginini and Mt. Gingera.

The next logical step was to provide accommodation in the area of Mt. Franklin or Mt. Ginini, where there are reasonably good runs and fairly reliable snow conditions in the winter months. This objective was achieved with the building of the Club House at Mt. Franklin in 1937.

From then on the Club has concentrated its work on clearing the runs and improving the Club House, thus offering its members and the people of Canberra facilities for

week-ends on the snow within less than two hours' drive from Canberra.

The Present

Today, the snow fields of the A.C.T. have been sufficiently developed to cater for the present requirements of the population of Canberra. The beauty of the range—sometimes referred to as Federal Range—attracts also a number of visitors from other States, many of whom are now regular visitors of these charming snow fields—so different from the more widely known Australian Alps.

The clearing of fire breaks along the western boundary of the A.C.T. has considerably increased the existing ski runs on the range. A wide continuous fire break extending from the Forestry settlement at Bull's Head to Mt. Franklin for a distance of some twelve miles has opened new runs on the mountain tops by-passed by the road. As this stretch of the road is often impassable after a heavy snow fall even for vehicles with chains, the new runs along the fire breaks are welcomed by skiers who had previously trekked those twelve miles in order to get to Mt. Franklin. It will be a pleasure to all familiar with the difficulties experienced in trying to reach Mt. Franklin, to test these runs next winter.

The main ski runs are at present located between Mt. Franklin and Mt. Gingera.

On Mt. Franklin (5400ft.) there are: the wood run from the top to the west to the Club House, and the slalom course on the southern slope. There are also two smaller runs: the morning course and the nursery run.

Two miles farther to the south of the Club House, the Alpine Club has its best run on Little Ginini (appr. 5400ft.). This ski run, with its delightful view of the Main Range of the Australian Alps in the distance, and the numerous intervening ranges beyond the Goodradigbee River, is a jewel. On this run, the Club has built a small ski jump allowing for jumps up to about twenty metres. Here also it is planned to instal a ski lift.

Another two miles farther along the road, the Royal Military College Ski Club has recently opened ski runs on Mt. Ginini (5782 ft.). Additional clearings are planned in this area. This Club has one large hut ready and another under construction. It is expected that this hut will be finished before the winter of 1953.

Although no runs have been cleared on Mt. Gingera (6092 ft.), this mountain should

also be included in the revue of the present ski fields of Canberra because the southern slopes and the natural clearing beyond Gingera's long, table-like top offer good ski-ing, particularly later in the season. Experience has shown that good snow conditions survive here into the spring for some weeks longer than on the previously mentioned ski runs.

And the Future...

With Canberra's increasing population and the rapidly growing number of skiers, certain improvements will be necessary to the existing ski runs and accommodation. It is probable that the scenic beauty of the Brindabella Range, which attracts an equally large number of summer visitors, will speed up erection of accommodation for this class of mountain lover. This would, of course, greatly assist skiers in the winter.

The already developed snow fields differ in character from the Alps in that the slopes and the tops of the mountain are covered by snow gums. It is therefore probable that a ski run will be cleared which will be more suited to the natural surroundings of the Range. A snow gum slalom course could easily become a permanent feature of the A.C.T. snow fields, combining ski-ing with the charm of the sturdy snow gums.

Farther afield along the western boundary line of the A.C.T. and beyond it, lie Mt. Bimberi (6274ft.) the highest mountain in the A.C.T., Mt. Murray (6040ft.) and Mt. Morgan (6150ft.). All these offer good possibilities for ski-ing. In particular, Mt. Bimberi, with its clear, broad shoulders and the slopes of varying degrees, seems to be the next step for development as a ski-ing field. This vast, and little known area, will, however, remain beyond the reach of an average skier until a motor road opens access.

Summing Up

One cannot deny that the modern dynamic or power ski-ing is more suited to the longer and steeper slopes than those opened at the present in the A.C.T. As far as ski racing with capital "R" is concerned, Mt. Kosciusko and the Alps will remain the battlefields of the ski-ing experts. But those who wish to combine enjoyable ski-ing and the charm of the changing alpine scenery as well as the thrill of the close touch with the native flora and fauna, will look forward to the day when the snow-capped top of Mt. Gingera seen from Canberra heralds the arrival of snow to the ranges called by the Canberra skiers, "Our Mountains."