

The Chalet at Charlotte's Pass

In the last issue of the *Year Book* an article appeared with appropriate sketches of a proposed chalet at Charlotte's Pass. It was hoped that the chalet would be built last summer, either by the Ski Club of Australia, which was ready and willing to undertake the task, or by the Government. Unfortunately, the chalet has not been built. It has, however, been promised. The Government has agreed to build it; but operations will not be begun until next summer, and the building is promised for the winter of 1930. This building is essential to the proper exploitation of the Main Range as a holiday ground for the Australian people; and it is only the forerunner of a dozen others that are wanted. The chalet should have been built a decade ago, and would have been if the Ski Club enterprise had been permitted. But the Government Department vetoed private action, and we are now promised for 1930 what was an essential as long ago as 1920. It is devoutly to be hoped that no further mischance will hamper the project, and that no delay will attend the erection of the building.

There follow articles from the pens of Dr. Laidley and Mr. R. H. Allen, and of Mr. H. J. Lambie, the Director of the Government Tourist Bureau, describing how the matter stands at present.

THE CLUB'S ENDEAVORS.

(By J. W. S. Laidley and R. H. Allen.)

More has been done for the furtherance of the sport of ski-ing in the last nine months than in all previous years put together. However, quite the most important step of all is the decision of the Government to construct a large chalet at or near Charlotte's Pass.

This chalet has been talked about for some considerable time, but now at last it is definitely emerging from its nebulous crystal into the solid reality of wood and concrete, and it seems to be an apt time to record the prolonged struggles, hopes, and disappointments which have been encountered in the process.

As early as 1921 the late Mr. Ross Gore, then Secretary of the Ski Club of Australia, was instructed to see Mr. Cormack, late head of the Tourist Bureau, to ask whether the Government would build a hut beyond Betts's Camp, which the Club could rent for a period during the season. Failing this, it was suggested that old Betts's Camp, since burnt down in a bush-fire a few years ago, should be moved from its site, overlooking the Thredbo to Charlotte's

Pass, and be put in a habitable condition. This theme and variations on this theme were constantly put before the notice of the Government between the years of 1921 and 1927, but all efforts ended in failure. This period could really be regarded as the first period of endeavor, and, although apparently sterile of results, yet the frequent communications between the Club and the Tourist Bureau fulfilled two very important purposes. Firstly, they caused much thought among the members of the Club, so that when the occasion arose they were more capable of knowing what was necessary in the shape of a building, and where it should be built; and, secondly, they gradually prepared the Government and the Tourist Bureau for proposals, which, if they had been mooted some years before, would have been certainly rejected.

The second period of endeavor may be said to have begun in 1928. Year by year the Ski Club of Australia, together with other Clubs, had been growing larger, more stable, and more solidly financial, and by 1928 we found ourselves in the position to approach the problem in a different manner altogether.

The Government and Tourist Bureau would not build what was required, so we decided to buy an acre of land on a suitable site, near Charlotte's Pass, and there erect a small chalet of our own. This would supply a long-felt want, and at the same time put us in the very desirable position of owning our own Club house. Though we had not sufficient funds in hand to carry out our project, the position of the Club was sound enough to warrant the hope that we could raise sufficient money from our members in debentures.

The maximum which we could hope to raise was £2,500, so the first thing to be done was to get expert advice on the way in which a chalet should be erected in that region, and to find out as accurately as possible what could be obtained for the money. Mr. A. W. Gerard, of the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney, was approached, and he showed great interest and enthusiasm in the proposal, with the result that an article and plans by him were published in *The Australian Ski Year Book* for 1928.

Having found that quite a comfortable chalet could be built for the money, the next thing to do was to get the land. All the land in that part is Crown land, and is leased on snow leases for grazing purposes in the summer. However, the Lands Department were approached and were most encouraging. No land had as yet been alienated from the Crown in those parts, but they could see no objection to us having an acre out of the hundreds of square miles of snow country. The land had to be formally put



LOOKING DOWN PIPER'S CREEK TO THE MAIN RANGE.
Government Printer Photo.

up for auction after the sale had been duly advertised in the *Government Gazette*, but as it was unlikely that anyone else would bid we would probably get as much land as we wanted for about £1, plus the expenses of the survey. The Department even went so far as to have the land surveyed, and it seemed to be only a matter of time before we would be in a position to start building. However, here came the rub: before this could be done the minute must be submitted for approval to any other Government Departments which might have some interest in the matter. For some weeks there was complete and ominous silence, on making inquiries the blow fell. The Chief Secretary's Department had vetoed the proposal. We then began a series of consultations with the Chief Secretary, the late Mr. Bruntnell. He explained to us that it was feared that if private enterprise were permitted to establish a hut on the mountain the revenue of the Hotel Kosciusko would suffer. Though this was, in our opinion, a complete fallacy, we could not change the Departmental attitude.

So far the battle had resulted in a complete rout for the Club, but undeterred by previous disaster, and wholly indifferent to future defeats, we fell back on our second line of defence. We had already persuaded the Chief Secretary to admit the strength of our claims, and now we pointed out to him the injustice of the Club being obliged to suffer for the hypothetical events of future years. It was at this stage that he proposed that, although the Club could not be allowed to build a chalet of their own at Charlotte's Pass, that the Government would do so to our own plans and specifications, and on the site which we had selected. This chalet could be leased by us for a certain period in the winter season. We readily accepted this proposal, and in July, 1928, matters stood like this.

The third round was entered upon immediately after our return from Kosciusko, under conditions in which we occupied a far stronger position. The tragedy of August had found the Clubs willing and able to supply expert advice and help, and many people were beginning to ask questions as to what the Tourist Bureau were going to do in order to avoid a repetition of the occurrence. The Club was requisitioned by the Chief Secretary to advise what should be done. We had urged the safety aspect of the chalet on previous occasions, and now we repeated that the first essentials of safety were to have refuge huts at decent intervals in the higher mountains, naming Charlotte's Pass, the Etheridge Range, the Blue Lake, and other sites further afield as most suitable. Our suggestions were accepted without modification, and our insistence that rapid action was now needed before another summer went by has resulted in Governmental miracles.

The Tourist Bureau were now faced with the responsibility of erecting a chalet at Charlotte's Pass, together with certain other refuge huts on the range. They began to look to the business aspect: that is to say how a paying proposition could be made out of the chalet, and they came to the satisfactory conclusion that with certainty of access during the snow season a larger chalet than we had proposed would be more suitable. The question of access was thoroughly investigated by them, and it was finally considered that if the Main Roads Board would culvert the road from the present Hotel to Charlotte's Pass, and metal the part which is still unmetalled, then it should be possible to keep the road clear for cars at most times and sleighs at all times. The modification in size also necessitated modification in site. The site originally chosen by us was on the road within a quarter of a mile of Charlotte's Pass itself. Here there were two small creeks which would have been quite adequate for our needs, but not enough for a larger building. Some preliminary survey work has been carried out this summer, but the exact site has not yet been fixed. However, we have the combined assurance of the Director of the Tourist Bureau and the Government Architect that actual building will begin as soon as possible after the coming winter, and that the chalet will be habitable in the winter of 1930. It will be finally completed for the winter of 1931.

Here things stand to-day, and we think we may say that the position is very satisfactory. What was originally a small matter has become a large one, and the result should be a boon to every skier who visits the snow country of Kosciusko.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS.

(By H. J. Lamble, Director Government Tourist Bureau.)

For a number of years suggestions for the establishment of a small chalet near Charlotte's Pass have been urged upon the N.S.W. Government Tourist Bureau in order that accommodation might be afforded ski-runners desirous of exploring the magnificent and extensive area of snow-covered country above the 6,000 feet level in the vicinity of the Summit of Mount Kosciusko.

Sites have been inspected and plans developed for buildings which might meet immediate requirements, but so far the important question of proper water supply to any establishment of the kind has presented a difficulty. During the past 12 months more urgent pressure has been brought to bear upon the Department with the view of expediting the establishment of a chalet in this area. The

Ski Club of Australia had plans drawn and submitted them to the Government Architect with suggestions for the provision of accommodation for at least 40 members for a period of five weeks in the winter season. Earlier suggestions had been less comprehensive and seemed to go no further than a building on the Summit Road at the 25 mile peg, with one or two rooms for a small party.

With the rapid improvement of snow removing machinery, also the proposed re-construction of the Summit Road, the practicability of establishing a chalet with the proportions of a modern hotel between Charlotte's Pass and the Spencer's Creek crossing has come within sight. With the view of collecting data regarding water supply for a chalet of such large size the Chief Electrical Engineer, Public Works Department, has had surveys and investigations made of streams and springs in the vicinity. Questions of heating, lighting and power have had much cautious consideration. A hydro-electric power installation would influence one of several sites, whereas should oil fuel engines be used other sites may meet requirements.

It appears expedient, however, to anticipate that a chalet once established in this area will require to be extended from time to time to meet growing demands for seasonal accommodation. An area on which a building or group of buildings might be erected to meet all possible demands of the future is available about the 24 mile peg on the Summit Road overlooking Spencer's Creek Gorge. A chalet in this position will give ski-runners ready access to the Main Dividing Range, about Gill's Nobs, via Spencer's Creek and Pounds' Creek, to the Summit, via the Summit Road, to the Crackenback Range, via Spencer's Creek, and the great stretch of plain country to the south and south-east towards old Betts's Camp. The distance from the Hotel Kosciusko is about 10 miles; from Betts's Camp about 1½ miles. Water supply could be assured either by pumping from Spencer's Creek, or by a gravitation pipe from the headwaters of Spencer's Creek, about 1 mile distant.

Comparative estimates of costs of capital works to supply electric power by means of water turbines or Diesel engines seem at present to indicate that the latter will be selected at all events to supply the requirements of initial building. An amount of £4,800 was voted in February by Parliament to be expended upon the erection of a chalet in this vicinity. None of this money can be expended in the current financial year, but it is expected that the amount will be re-voted and that works will be commenced as soon as the road is trafficable after the winter season.

The Government Architect has developed plans for a structure which will provide accommodation for 40 beds on the main floor, storage rooms in the basement, and accom-

modation for necessary staff on an upper floor. A common room with large fire-place is a feature of the interior. There are also convenient places for skis and other sporting material to be stored and dried. Bathing accommodation is designed for the maximum of comfort and convenience. Power plant will be housed in a separate building, connected by covered way to the chalet. Provision is made for electric lighting, central heating, adequate water supply and sewerage. The necessarily high cost of the building and its equipment in this remote position, together with costly running expenses will impose upon the Department the necessity of fixing a comparatively high charge for accommodation.

The Main Roads Board has undertaken to widen and strengthen the road from Hotel Kosciusko to the Piper's Gap ascent 4½ miles—also to make concrete culverts over the several water courses which occur in that distance. This work will commence in November. It is expected that winter traffic will afterwards be carried as far as this spot in seasons when snow sport is not available immediately at the Hotel Kosciusko.

A large pavilion is to be erected at the site of the existing huts on the rise to Piper's Gap to provide shelter for guests of the Hotel Kosciusko in May, June, September and October. Daily transport will be provided by motor vehicles. There will be provision in the pavilion for storing sporting equipment and for supplying hot luncheon to several hundred picnickers. The pavilion will not provide sleeping accommodation for visitors. Telephone communication between the Seaman Memorial chalet and Betts's Camp has already been provided. Next summer this will be extended to Hotel Kosciusko and en route will pick up stations at Club Creek, Charlotte's Pass, Pounds' Creek, Smiggins Holes and Dainer's Gap.

Present works make Kosciusko the finest and safest ski-ing ground in Australia, and further point the way to more extensive improvements which will render the attractiveness of the area comparable to that of the other famous ski-ing grounds of the world.

On philological grounds, therefore, Mr. Marshall infers that ski were known to these peoples (the Finno-Ugrian tribes) at least some thousand years or so before the Christian era, ages before the Scandinavian tribes arrived in their present home; and he states that in winter to-day the Finno-Ugrians and Samoyeds "do all their travelling, trade, tax-paying, fair-visiting, war, and most of their hunting," on ski and sledges.—Arnold Lunn, in *A History of Ski-ing*.