

A Week at Kiandra

(By A. E. Stephen.)

[Very few ski-runners visit Kiandra nowadays. But last winter a party of five members of the Ski Club of Australia spent a week at the little mountain township which enjoys the distinction of being the only locality in N.S.W. besides Kosciusko where ski-running may be enjoyed. The Editor is, therefore, glad to have this very interesting account of the trip from the pen of Mr. A. E. Stephen.]

We arranged a long time ahead to leave on July 20, but owing to adverse weather reports we almost called the trip off. Fortunately, however, there was a good fall about the 18th, and some light falls during the next few days, and at the last minute we decided to go.

The story of the journey to Kiandra has often been told, so I will not dwell upon that. Our car got as far as Sawyer's Hill, where we put on our ski and shouldered our rucksacks and set off at 11.30 a.m. for the last four miles to the town.

On arrival, a little late for luncheon, our host was well prepared, and gave us an excellent beef-steak pie. We found the hotel extremely clean and comfortable, though the sitting-room appeared to have more space devoted to doors than to walls. The weather for the first few days was beautifully fine and still, and the nights extremely cold (for Australia, anyway), on one occasion the thermometer falling as low as 8 deg. Fahr. Later the weather got rather windy. Our host was mildly surprised the first morning when we asked for hot water to wash in and explained that in his opinion one did not feel the cold nearly so much if one washed in cold water. This was interesting, but we decided to use the water hot and thereafter obtained it.

When we arrived the only inhabitants, reading from north to south, were the policeman, who lives in a magnificent two-storeyed residence, part of it being the old Court House, the postmistress and her daughter and two small sons, and our host and his housekeeper and her child. To be quite fair we should add that the town received occasional visits from a Russian miner, as well as from the mailman, and that the two Hughes brothers were working a mine at the Four Mile, and that Mr. Doran, the Secretary of the Kiandra Ski Club, arrived before we left.

Kiandra ski-ing, beginning in the sixties, has developed without any connection with the outside world. The style is not pretty. The Kiandra man rides with his feet wide



A VIEW OF KIANDRA.

apart and his knees bent. Over rough ground where, for instance, the tops of tussocks are barely covered, he crouches right down with his feet wider apart than ever. When he wants to go faster (as he nearly always does, even on the fastest slopes) he moves each leg forward alternately, not striking out sideways as in skating, but a purely fore and aft movement as in walking.



Mr. Jeffries, the proprietor of the Alpine Hotel, Kiandra, on his Kiandra "Snow Shoes."

Turning, of course, is difficult with the feet so far apart, but the Kiandra "butter-pat" is most effective. This is really a very quick succession of step turns. Where the going is good and one can get a good "kick off" he does it in fewer movements, and practically skates round. He also skates down hill a lot—over, round and through bushes—in great style.

Stemming is very little used, possibly because it needs so much room in timber. The local people have a curious turn which is done at very high speed on hard snow—a sort

of Christiania with the skis very wide apart (say 2 feet 6 inches), quite parallel, and, as far as the author could see, quite flat. The little boys when they did this started it beautifully, but, as might be expected, generally went right round and began to slide down hill backwards. The more expert, however, when pointing in the desired direction took a great step (the point of their ski going well over their shoulder), and then regained their balance with the "butter pat."



A PAIR OF KIANDRA SKIS.

The Kiandra ski—or snow-shoe as it is called—varies in length, width, and grooving, according to individual taste. They are shorter than the usual Swiss or Norwegian ski, about six inches broad all the way down, quite flat without any arch, and made of mountain ash. They are surprisingly light—no heavier than our hickory skis. The only binding is a piece of leather, about three or four inches wide, screwed to each side of the ski, making a foot-hole not unlike the kind of leather stirrup sometimes seen

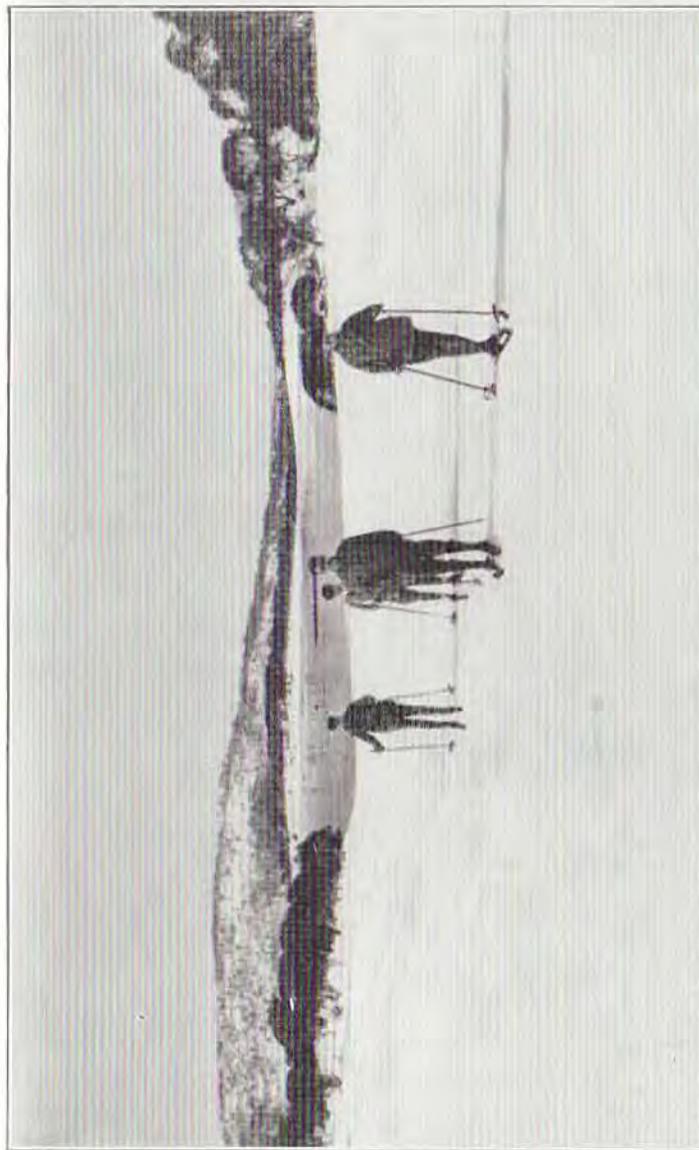
on saddles for very young children. There is a little bar of wood about half an inch high nailed on the ski which holds against the sole of the boot just where it leaves the ski. There is no heel strap at all. The binding is worn very tight, and they kick their feet into them. The ski generally has either three ordinary grooves or else a large number of very fine ones as if made by drawing a curry-comb down it.

Though at present rather distrustful, the inhabitants are experimenting with other bindings and will, in all probability, modify their style very considerably as a result of seeing good Norwegian and other skiers at Kosciusko. All the same, the style and snow-shoe are better adapted to the local conditions than one would think without seeing them. The local people hardly ever fall. Though great jumpers on places one would hardly consider safe as the snow is not beaten down to any extent and the run both before and after the jump is very rough and irregular, they would not go over anything at all with any sort of ordinary binding, as they like to be able to kick off their ski if they fall.

They use a fast, hard wax called Moko, which they melt in a pot and put on with a paint brush. The various family recipes for this are great secrets. As it is very difficult to climb with this on, they often carry their ski up a hill if the snow is at all hard. With a few exceptions very little cross-country ski-ing is done. Most of it is on the championship course, now known as the Grand Slam, presumably after the Slam at Kosciusko, which is used for racing, jumping, learning, and everything else.

Last year was one of the very few years when the Kiandra sports were not held. This was due partly to the lack of snow and partly, we understand, to other reasons. This was a great pity, and we were greatly disappointed to miss them. All the events take place on the Grand Slam, and this was not even run-able last year, except at the bottom. The record for the course—a measured 400 yards—is 14 seconds with a flying start. This gives almost 60 miles per hour, which is a far higher speed than the author has ever seen attributed to ski-ing in any text-book, and it would be interesting to know how it compares with times on a fast slope elsewhere.

Owing to the difficulty in climbing with Moko, the race up and down the Slam has the most interesting condition attached, namely, that the competitor may, if he wishes, use different skis up and down, but that if he does both pairs must go the whole course. We were told that in this race some use Moko and some don't, and some use two pairs of skis, but the race is usually won on Moko.



THE THREE MILE DAM NEAR KIANDRA.

From the Hotel one has to climb about 1,000 feet to the tablelands, which are really the top of the main range at this end. The tablelands are intersected by numerous valleys, one of which is much like another, and when we were there the snow was excellent. Except in some of the valleys it never thawed at all, even in the middle of the day, and, though we found it sticking badly for part of the time on our way to Table Top, this was our only complaint. Bill Hughes kindly took us out on our first day for a very pleasant run on the tablelands down to the Three Mile Dam, where we had lunch in one of the huts at the Sutherland Lode Mine and returned to the Hotel by the valleys.

The next few days we went for short runs in much the same direction, as, owing to the comparative scarcity of snow, the lower valleys were not well covered and the snow was good on the tablelands and the higher valleys. Even in a good season it would probably be difficult to find many interesting long runs, as the country is rather monotonous and one valley is very like another. At Kosciusko there are so many all-day runs that one has no time to practise one's turns, and we found a week of short runs with an hour or two after lunch spent in practising turns, not only good for our ski-ing, but great fun.

The Three Mile Dam was very interesting. It was quite a large sheet of water, and only the shallower arms were frozen over. The Sutherland Lode Mine is situated on a long narrow isthmus, and the lake and surroundings are very pretty.

This would be an excellent site for a winter resort with plenty of ice for skating and good ski-ing, ever so much closer than at the Hotel at Kosciusko, where, after all, the majority of people do not want to go very far afield. It looked as if it would be quite possible to keep the road open all the winter—at any rate to horse traffic—with a little attention and foresight. However, it has taken us ten years or so to get a chalet built at Charlotte's Pass, so we can hardly hope to be alive to see one near Kiandra, too.

Our only long run was to Table Top. This we left till our last day, as we were anxious to get Hughes to come with us, and, unfortunately, we had rather cloudy weather. As a matter of fact we were lucky to get Hughes, as he had not got our messages, and we met him coming to the town just as we were leaving. Of course, our departure was later than we intended, and it was just as well we did meet him, as, though we could have hardly failed to find the mountain, it would have taken us much longer. And since we had invited all the male inhabitants to dinner at 7 o'clock



VIEW ON THE TABLELANDS NEAR KIANDRA.

and were more or less bound to be back in time, we would probably have turned back before we got there. Unfortunately, one of the party had broken a finger, twisted a knee, and broken one of his ski the day before, and had to be prevailed upon to stay behind and make the cocktails for the dinner.

We left Hughes' cottage at about 9.30. We had nearly all waxed our skis for the first time in the week and the climb up Township Hill—which we had done every day—seemed very trying. Perhaps this was because it was so soon after breakfast, as the snow should have been quite good for climbing as early as that. It was just as well we had put some wax on, as we very soon got into very sticky snow which balled badly, even on wax, and we had a very dull and heavy plug along the level for some time. Luckily, although we were descending if anything, we got out of the bad snow after about an hour, and from then on the going was more interesting with an occasional run through timber where Hughes could easily have lost us had he wished.

It seemed a very long nine miles, and were not making as good time as we had hoped. We had passed the only water too early for lunch, and at about two, when we seemed to be about a mile from the foot of the mountain, we saw no prospect of getting any and were all feeling rather as if we should turn back. However, after some argument we had our tinned fruit and some chocolate, and, of course, felt the better for it, and decided to push on in spite of the time.

We were in heavy timber and almost at once, to our surprise, we found ourselves at the foot of the mountain with a very steep rocky bit above us of about 80 to 100 feet. Hughes said he knew we could ski up to the summit on the other side, but it was a long way round and he couldn't guarantee to find us a way any nearer. As we were pressed for time there was nothing for it but to carry our skis straight up. With so much rock about the snow was not at all firm, and every step or two one leg would go in as far as it could. However, all things come to an end, and we were soon over it and on ski again, and on to the lip of the old crater.

On a fine day the view would be gorgeous, and even with snow-storms blowing over we managed to see as far as Jagungal, but our photographs of course were not much good. The inside of the crater was quite sheltered and carried the most wonderful snow imaginable. The trees here were very beautiful—completely covered with snow that had frozen just as it fell without thaw and the usual resultant icicles—as almost invariably happens in this part of the world. We had come up on the west side and found



ON TABLE TOP, 10 MILES FROM KIANDRA.

a place on the north, where we could get down on ski, though not very easily. By this time the snow was very much better and we came home in three hours, including half an hour spent in boiling the billy, arriving at 6.30 just as the cocktails were ready.

Our guests were not very keen on the cocktails, so we had the lion's share ourselves, and very good they tasted, though when we think over the recipe we are not so surprised at the party starting well. The bar of the Alpine Hotel was quite varied, even if the cocktail expert would not call it orthodox. Our host did the dinner in fine style, and it was a proper ending to a most enjoyable week—what more need be said?

The next day we set off to ski back to meet the car we had ordered from Adaminaby at a disgustingly early hour (because the rest of the party, for some reason best known to themselves, wanted to get to the Hotel Kosciusko before two), and Mr. Doran very nobly, not only got up, but came with us as far as the river. The morning was fearfully hot and we again suffered on Sawyer's Hill, though the doctor still says we can't blame his cocktails. The car, fortunately, was where we expected it, and we were soon under way. The road from Adaminaby to Kosciusko was not metalled, the car did not have chains, and the heavy thaw made it frightfully greasy. However, we arrived safely, much later than we expected, famished and immensely relieved and rather surprised to have finished what was really the most dangerous part of our whole holiday without an accident; but too late for the rest of the party to say good-bye to the members of the Alpine Club.

Let us old men rejoice. In the course of an article in the last *British Year Book*, E. C. Richardson says:—"May the writer be forgiven if he concludes on a personal note? His experience may, perhaps, be of interest to others in a like case. He was 56 years of age last winter. He had not, up to then, had any ski-ing, worthy of the name, for fifteen years. He has never been an athlete, and, beyond a little lawn tennis, had not, in recent years, taken any special precautions to 'keep fit.' He had, before re-visiting Davos, the gravest doubts whether he possessed either the strength or the skill to make tours of any length. Well, he was delighted to find that his gloomy anticipations were not realised. After about 10 days, he felt equal to any but the longest and most exacting tours; and as for his skill, whilst this has never been anything but mediocre, he found that he had lost but little of what once was his. Ski-running seems to be like swimming. One never quite forgets the knack of it. The clean, cold, invigorating mountain air does the rest."