

The Kiandra to Kosciusko Traverse of 1929

(By L. G. Teece.)

The Kiandra-Kosciusko traverse had been the main objective of the Ski Club of Australia for many years. A considerable amount of preliminary survey work was carried out in the summer season before the first winter expedition was undertaken. Dr. Schlink and Mr. D. B. Reid were pioneers in this respect and made the first expedition on horse-back, starting from the Kiandra end of the range. However, the guide whom they took with them had no knowledge of the south end of the range, and they got no further than the spur which separates Finn's River from White's River. They deviated along this prominent ridge in mistake for the Main Range, and were forced to retrace their steps to Kiandra without penetrating further south. One valuable concrete result of this trip was the erection of Tin Hut at Gungartan, close to the site of the dilapidated structure which they found in existence, and it is the presence of this hut that enabled future winter expeditions to set forth.

In Easter, 1926, a large party of Club members successfully accomplished the trip on horse-back in three days. Here again the accompanying guide, though his services were invaluable in the Kiandra district, was at a loss for the correct route when the Valentine River was reached, and the knowledge gained by the previous winter expedition to Granite Peaks was of timely assistance in putting the party on the right route.

In the winter of 1926 the first unsuccessful attempt of the traverse was made on ski. The start was made from Kosciusko, but the party, which was unduly large, got no further than Gungartan, where they were held up for three days and nights by a blizzard in the smoke-infested Tin Hut. The supply of food was so meagre that the party were even reduced to attempting to eat the apology for bread baked by Mr. Gordon.

In 1927 the first successful winter traverse was accomplished by Dr. Schlink, Dr. Fisher, Dr. Laidley and Mr. W. Gordon, accompanied by Mr. W. Hughes, of the Kiandra Ski Club. This party started from Kiandra and completed the journey in three days. The first day was spent in travelling from Kiandra to Farm Ridge Hut, in approximately eleven hours of indifferent ski-ing. It was a bad season for snow and the greater part of the Happy Jack

Valley, whose altitude is only four thousand feet, was bare. The party had to carry their skis for some distance and had some difficulty in crossing the Happy Jack and Doubtful Rivers, which were unusually high. They put up a fine performance on the second day by covering the long stretch of country from Farm Ridge to Pounds' Creek Hut. Tin Hut was reached at lunch time, and rather than risk the danger of being marooned there by possible bad weather they pushed straight on, but the last stretch of their journey, occupying two hours, was accomplished in the dark.

Though the winter traverse was thus successfully accomplished, it was felt that there was much with regard to the ski-ing possibilities of the route that still remained to be investigated, and last season it occurred to Dr. Davy and the writer to undertake the trip with some variation of route. Mr. W. Hughes had promised to be in Kiandra during the winter season and to accompany us if conditions proved favorable.

We accordingly left Sydney for Kiandra on July 19th. On the train we encountered three other ski-runners who were going to Kiandra for a holiday, and with whom we temporarily joined forces as far as that town.

We had not proceeded far by car when it became evident that it was an exceptionally good season for snow. The snow was lying fairly thickly, even at Adaminaby, and it was only due to the extraordinary skill of our driver that we succeeded in getting the car to within nine miles of Kiandra. We then set out to do the remaining distance on ski, under perfect conditions, though a hot sun and heavy rucksacks soon brought home to us the necessity for some hard training.

The snow conditions at Kiandra were found to be better than any of the Club members had ever previously experienced—every hill was deeply covered, and the snow was in perfect condition. We found the Hotel little altered. A bath-heater had been installed, at terrific expense as the proprietor informed us, but though it produced a terrific noise it never succeeded in providing anything approaching hot water. The entire verandah had also been enclosed with galvanised iron to keep out the drifting snow, with the result that all the rooms were in pitch darkness for the entire day. However, we were made tolerably comfortable, and the snow conditions were so good that we had no inclination to grumble. Hughes met us at Kiandra and we proceeded to formulate our plans and map our route. A study of the map showed us that proceeding south from Kiandra the Main Range takes a wide semi-circular sweep to the east from Kiandra to Bull's Peaks, when it again runs



The accommodation at present available above Hotel Kosciusko are Betts Camp, Charlotte's Pass, Seaman Hut, Pounds' Creek Hut, and Tin Hut.

almost due south. Jagungal and Farm Ridge both lie on a spur, which leaves the Main Range, near Bull's Peaks, and runs north-west. Between this spur and the Main Range lies Happy Jack Valley. Thus anyone starting from Kiandra must descend the western slopes of the range into the comparative lowlands of the valley and ascend again, either to the Jagungal spur or to the Main Range itself, when it again turns south in the vicinity of Bull's Peaks. The shortest route across this valley is to Farm Ridge, and the 1927 party had followed this course, because Farm Ridge appeared to be the only available refuge for a night's rest.

In view of the abnormally fine snow conditions, we realised that the entire Happy Jack Valley would be well filled with snow and would provide excellent travelling, avoiding the precipitous and densely wooded country on the way to Farm Ridge. The only point for consideration was whether it was possible to do the entire journey from Kiandra to Tin Hut within the space of a single day. We expected to encounter no difficult country, and hoped that by crossing the rivers high up we would find them all frozen over and would save the time and energy usually expended in fording them. This would involve a day's journey of some forty odd miles, and we could not risk having to search for Tin Hut in the dark, but we estimated that by making an early start we could accomplish the distance in daylight with some margin in hand for emergencies. The proposed route would not only traverse the best ski-ing ground in the Happy Jack Valley, but would also cut off some few miles of distance by avoiding the detour to Farm Ridge.

The first few days at Kiandra were spent in getting into condition and in practising our turns on the slam. We have found that continuous turning practice with its inevitable falls and repeated short climbs puts one into condition to attempt a long journey much more quickly than does performance of daily expeditions over easy country. Mr. W. Gordon, who had just returned from three weeks of glacier ski-ing at Mount Cook, had been invited to join us, and had so far weakened as to ask us to telephone him if the weather appeared propitious, in which case he would come to Kiandra immediately. On Monday, July 22nd, it was snowing hard and blowing half a gale, so we decided to summon him before the good weather in order that we might be ready to set off as soon as it cleared. He was accordingly telephoned, and left for Kiandra the same night. Our action was a wise one, for he reached Kiandra the next day, in perfect weather, which remained settled till after the more difficult part of our trip had been accomplished. Further snow had fallen in the interim, and

the last ten miles of the journey from Adaminaby to Kiandra had now to be done on ski.

As Gordon was in good condition from his New Zealand trip, it was decided to waste no further time in Kiandra and to set out on Thursday, July 25th. In order to cut a few miles off the long journey of the first day we determined to make the actual start from the Elaine Mine, which is situated four miles from Kiandra. This mine, the property of the Hughes brothers, lies in a deep gully some five hundred feet below the eastern side of the tableland. Accordingly we journeyed in leisurely fashion to the mine on Wednesday afternoon.

The experience gained in previous expeditions had taught us to reduce the weight of our rucksacks to the minimum. No spare clothing was carried other than socks, slippers and sweaters. Since we knew Tin Hut to be well stocked with food, we only carried sufficient for two meals and an emergency ration. Spare bindings, repair outfit, compass and map completed our equipment. As it happened no portion of the kit of any of the party required the least attention during the journey.

We estimated that under favorable conditions we had thirteen hours' ski-ing ahead of us on the first day, and in order to allow a safe margin for unexpected delays we decided to leave at 2 a.m.

When we arrived at Elaine Mine, on Wednesday afternoon, the outlook appeared unfavorable, there was an occasional flurry of snow, and the higher hills were all shrouded in clouds. At night-fall the weather cleared completely, and it was a brilliant starlight night, with the moon approximately at the full. With fine hospitality, the Hughes brothers turned out of their own quarters to provide accommodation for us, and we went to bed at 8 o'clock to get a few hours' sleep before setting out on our long journey. The alarm-clock roused us at 1 a.m., and after a hurried breakfast we started out at 2.15. It was a particularly cold night; in Kiandra itself the thermometer that night fell to zero, and in some parts of our journey it must have been considerably below this. Unwisely we piled on every stitch of clothing we possessed before we left, for we had to commence by a stiff climb of five hundred feet, straight up a wooded hillside, to regain the tableland. Hughes made the pace so hot that we were glad to halt when we reached the top for a few minutes' breather and to discard our sweaters.

On reaching the tableland we encountered perfect running conditions, well packed soft snow on top of which the intense cold had spread a thin covering of powdery ice crystals. On this undulating country no effort was needed

to swing along at a steady five miles an hour gait. On approaching the Nine Mile we circled around the back of Tabletop, passed by the Tabletop Hut and shortly after commenced our descent into the Happy Jack Valley. This descent was all through timbered country and gave excellent practice at wood running, but Hughes chose such an excellent course, picking out an easy grade and placing his turns with such judgment, that we had no difficulty in following him. The condition of the valley exceeded our expectations; the whole valley was well filled with a great depth of snow, in perfect condition, and its open undulating nature made for very fast running. We estimated that we covered fifteen miles in the first three hours. Only Hughes recognised the fact when we crossed the Happy Jack River, which was so well snowed over, that we could see no indication of its banks.

At 6 o'clock we reached the more precipitous banks of the Doubtful River, but even this more rapidly flowing stream was all snowed over, except for an occasional hole, and we had no difficulty in crossing. By this time the cold was intense and after a few minutes' halt, whilst a ration of chocolate was distributed, we pushed forward to begin our long climb. Dawn broke whilst we were still climbing the long hill out of Doubtful Valley, and, though all the party were eager for breakfast, it was too cold to halt till the sun had risen and gained some strength. We also felt it advisable to push on as far as possible before the heat of the day might spoil the perfect snow conditions. At 8 o'clock we halted for an hour for breakfast in a small open valley, where a fallen tree provided a spot on which to build a fire. From here the Main Range appeared but a short distance off, and, though several hills appeared to intervene between us and it, we little realised that nearly four hours' ski-ing lay before us ere we climbed the last rise on to the plateau, which runs from the Jagungal Saddle to Tin Hut.

On resuming our journey, after breakfast, it soon became evident that we had deviated somewhat too much to the west. There is a long spur, which climbs by a steady grade with but few undulations, from the valley to the Main Range, and should provide much the easier route. We had missed this spur by keeping too far to the west, and were faced with a succession of hills over which we had to climb before we could gain the range. For hour after hour we surmounted successive hills, the monotony being relieved on each occasion by the short run down into the next valley. At 11.30, by which time the heat of the sun had become intense and the snow was just commencing to ball badly, we rounded the shoulder of a hill and



THE PARTY DIGGING THEIR WAY INTO TIN HUT.

saw straight before us the final deep valley which separated us from the range itself. We skirted this valley on its northern side, avoiding any great loss of height and finally reached the eastern edge of the range at 12.15, at a point about ten miles north of Tin Hut. We had been ten hours on the journey, of which nine had actually been spent on ski. As we looked back and saw Tabletop looking insignificant in the distance, we realised that only perfect snow and weather conditions had made our projected day's journey possible of attainment.

We were now on familiar ground. The well-remembered land marks of the Jagungal expedition of the previous season were in view, and we knew that the remaining ten miles lay along an easy undulating, treeless plateau. Not only was there no ice to be seen, but the snow still continued to ball badly, so that after journeying for half a mile we called a halt, waxed our skis and had a hurried lunch. A light breeze from the north, which had now sprung up, though it was still cloudless, made us soon

ready to be again on the way. From here we struck off due west for a few hundred yards to get away from the eastern side of the range, which had been exposed to the morning sun, and to reach the centre of the plateau. We were well repaid, for the character of the snow changed at once to well-packed hard snow.

Our ambitious day's journey was nearly at an end and we swung along all four abreast, a sure sign that none of the party were feeling tired. The remainder of the journey to Tin Hut passed without incident, and we reached it at 3.30 p.m. The snow was unusually deep at the hut, and was up to the level of the roof. Accordingly, with our skis, we dug it away from the upper part of the door till we were able to push the door open. Gordon was then lowered head first through this aperture, and he passed out a shovel with which we were able to clear the entrance. There was a fair amount of snow within the hut, but it was otherwise in good condition. There were ample supplies of food and plenty of blankets, though most of these latter were in a very dilapidated state. The heating stove, which the Club had sent up during the previous summer, was in position, and proved a great boon. Not only has it abolished the smoke nuisance, but with its use the hut is now as warm as could be desired, whereas previously no one had ever experienced other than a night of torture in this hut.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in getting and stacking fire-wood, cleaning up the hut and unpacking the case of blankets and stores. Dick Allen had selected these stores in Sydney during the summer, and his previous experience had evidently stood him in good stead, for he had provided a host of delicacies warranted to tempt the most jaded appetite. Just at dusk a heavy fog came up, but the night was quite mild. With a couple of blankets and a sleeping bag apiece we were all comfortable. Whoever had installed the stove, however, had merely cut a hole in the weatherboard lining of the hut to allow the flue to emerge, and this hole had not been lined so that the flue was in places in actual contact with the wood. About 2 a.m. we were awakened by the crackling of flames, and found that the lining of the hut had caught fire, and there were a few exciting moments till the flames were extinguished with buckets of snow. Realising the plight in which we would be involved if the hut were to take fire, the party took it in turn to sit up for the rest of the night and watch the fire.

When morning broke the whole range was shrouded in dense fog, but after considerable discussion we decided to make an attempt to resume our journey, since apart from

the fog the conditions were not bad. We had not travelled more than a few hundred yards when a fierce argument arose as to the location of the Gungartan Saddle, different members of the party placing it in diametrically opposite directions. Visibility was intensely bad, and we could not see for more than a dozen yards. Accordingly, we took the more discreet course and retraced our tracks to the hut, prepared to submit to a day's imprisonment. We relieved the monotony of our enforced idleness by lining the hole in the weatherboard with some of the zinc lining from the case of supplies, thus obviating any further danger of fire. Throughout the day the fog remained dense, but towards evening there were occasional breaks. We thought that if we could surmount the Gungartan Saddle in safety we could find our way for the rest of the journey by compass alone, provided that there was not excessive wind, and of this there was no sign.

Since it is less than half an hour's run from Tin Hut to the Saddle, we only required a brief break in the weather to make our escape. During the night the fog lifted for a few minutes several times, so that on Saturday morning at 8 o'clock we set forth during one of these fine spells. Before we were half-way to the saddle the fog came down again denser than ever, but we had already set our course, and presently one of the posts of the fence that crosses the saddle loomed into view. We followed this fence over the saddle and along to the left, crossed it, and presently came to the crest of the long run which leads to the tree-covered slopes just north of White's River Saddle. This run was somewhat spoilt, for the bad visibility necessitated running at a steady pace in complete control. For once the snow through these trees did not ball, and when we reached White's River Saddle we found ourselves temporarily free from fog at a relatively low altitude. The higher peaks were still densely covered, and soon after commencing to climb Granite Peaks we were again immersed in fog.

Along the Granite Peaks Range we steered entirely by compass, aiming for the Consett Stephen Pass. During this period of the journey we wandered somewhat from our true course; at first we kept too far to the west, till ultimately we found ourselves on the edge of a deep gorge leading down to the Victorian side of the range. This error we somewhat over corrected, and subsequently kept too much to the east, and finally emerged from the fog, not at the Consett Stephen Pass, but about 300 feet lower down on the left bank of the Guthega gorge. The run down the Guthega is notoriously bad. As a rule the first 500 feet are straight running, but after this, as the gorge

narrows, the snow almost invariably balls during the day time. However, rather than climb back the necessary 300 feet to the Pass and thence over Mount Tate to Gill's Knobbs, we decided to risk the Guthega run. For once this valley belied its reputation, and we found excellent well-packed snow all the way to the Snowy River. We reached the Snowy River at 12 o'clock. It was well frozen, and we experienced no difficulty in crossing to the further bank, where we halted for lunch, and then decided to make straight for the Hotel instead of going to Betts Camp. We lightened our packs by casting out our emergency rations for the benefit of the foxes, and commenced the long climb up the Blue Cow Creek.

The ascent along the valley of the Blue Cow Creek from the Snowy River to the Perisher Mountain is one of the longest continuous climbs in the whole of the range, and we made it unnecessarily long by missing the Herbert Marks Pass, which would have led us into Sunset Valley; instead we climbed direct over a shoulder of the Perisher Mountain itself. Fortunately the going was good and the weather cool; indeed, there was a slight flurry of snow during portion of the ascent. A magnificent view is obtained from near the Summit of the Perisher, and far below us we could see the snow posts winding across the plain on the road to Betts Camp. Here we had our first sight of human life since leaving Kiandra, in the form of the distant figures of a couple of skiers crossing the plain on their way to Betts.

The run from the top of the Perisher to the Plain beggars description. There is a drop of about a thousand feet, and we were able to take it in one long traverse, which landed us within a few hundred yards of Piper's Gap. It is a pity that this particular run is so little known to the general body of visitors to the Hotel, for it is within an easy day's run from the Hotel and no other run is so accessible or can compare with it for length or general excellence of its slopes. Only the runs from Gill's Knobs and Mount Twynam which are much further afield can surpass it. The rest of the journey was uneventful along the well known road which we have all traversed so often, and we arrived finally at our destination about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

In making comparison of the route adopted by the first expedition in 1927 and that taken by ourselves, I have no doubt that ours is much the better. Our actual skiing time was confined to two days, though an additional day was entirely lost owing to bad weather. Two very full day's skiing only took Dr. Schlink's party as far as Pounds' Creek Hut. Our loss of a day through bad weather

meant that the two expeditions occupied practically the same time from start to finish. The route through the Happy Jack Valley which we followed would not be possible except in a good snow season, but when the ground is well covered the skiing in that valley is as good as could be desired. The Hughes brothers followed much the same route from Kiandra to Tin Hut in 1928, whilst engaged in the search for Hayes and Seaman, but on that occasion they had to carry their skis for several hours.

The journey from Kiandra to Kosciusko has now been accomplished on two different occasions. It has never yet been done in the reverse direction. Unfortunately the day seems still far distant when this trip will be regularly available for the average ski-runner. Between the Hotel and Tin Hut it offers few difficulties, but the section from Kiandra to Tin Hut is not without hazard. Even in perfect weather and with excellent snow conditions we occupied thirteen hours on this section of the journey, and during the whole of it we passed no possible place of shelter where we might have taken refuge on the sudden onset of bad weather. Should a sudden blizzard be encountered between Tin Hut and Betts Camp, the ski-runner can always quickly reach the comparative shelter of the Snowy River gorge, and, though he might find conditions here decidedly unpleasant, he would be sheltered from the full intensity of the wind and could face a night in the open without fear of the result. If, however, a blizzard were encountered on the ten miles' stretch between Tin Hut and Bull's Peaks or in the Happy Jack Valley itself, no comparatively sheltered gully would be at hand and he would have to travel many miles to the east to emerge from the snow country. Further, the topography of the country south of Tin Hut is now well known, and in any weather the more experienced runners would succeed in finding their way with the aid of a compass and map, but at the present juncture none of us would like to have to find our way through the Happy Jack country in bad visibility without one of the Hughes brothers to guide us.

I do not think either of the expeditions would ever have been undertaken without the assistance of Mr. William Hughes, and the Ski Club members owe him a debt of gratitude for the time and trouble which he devoted, without thought of reward, in accompanying both of these parties, neither of whom could have set out without his intimate knowledge of the Kiandra end of the range.

There is urgent need for the erection of an additional hut somewhere between Tin Hut and Kiandra. A spot at the foot of Bull's Peaks would be an ideal location. Trans-

portation of building material from Adaminaby to this point would be easy, and such a hut would be situated in a sheltered spot amongst the foot hills of the range, where the country is lightly timbered and provides an endless succession of excellent runs.



W. Gordon and Drs. Ashleigh Davy and Lennox Teece near Jagungal on the way across from Kiandra.

In "Ski Notes and Queries," Claude M. Browne, on how to enjoy ski-ing, says of rucksacks: "The writer finds the Norwegian type the least tiring to carry. It has a tubular metal frame at the back and enables the weight to be distributed, and not all taken on the shoulders. This type of rucksack, of course, actually weighs more than a simple canvas sack, with no frame, but quite light ones can be obtained of English, Swiss, or Norwegian make. They stand upright on the ground and the contents do not shift in them when running (or, for that matter, when falling). A waist-strap should always be used with any kind of rucksack, as it saves effort in counteracting the swing of the sack.