

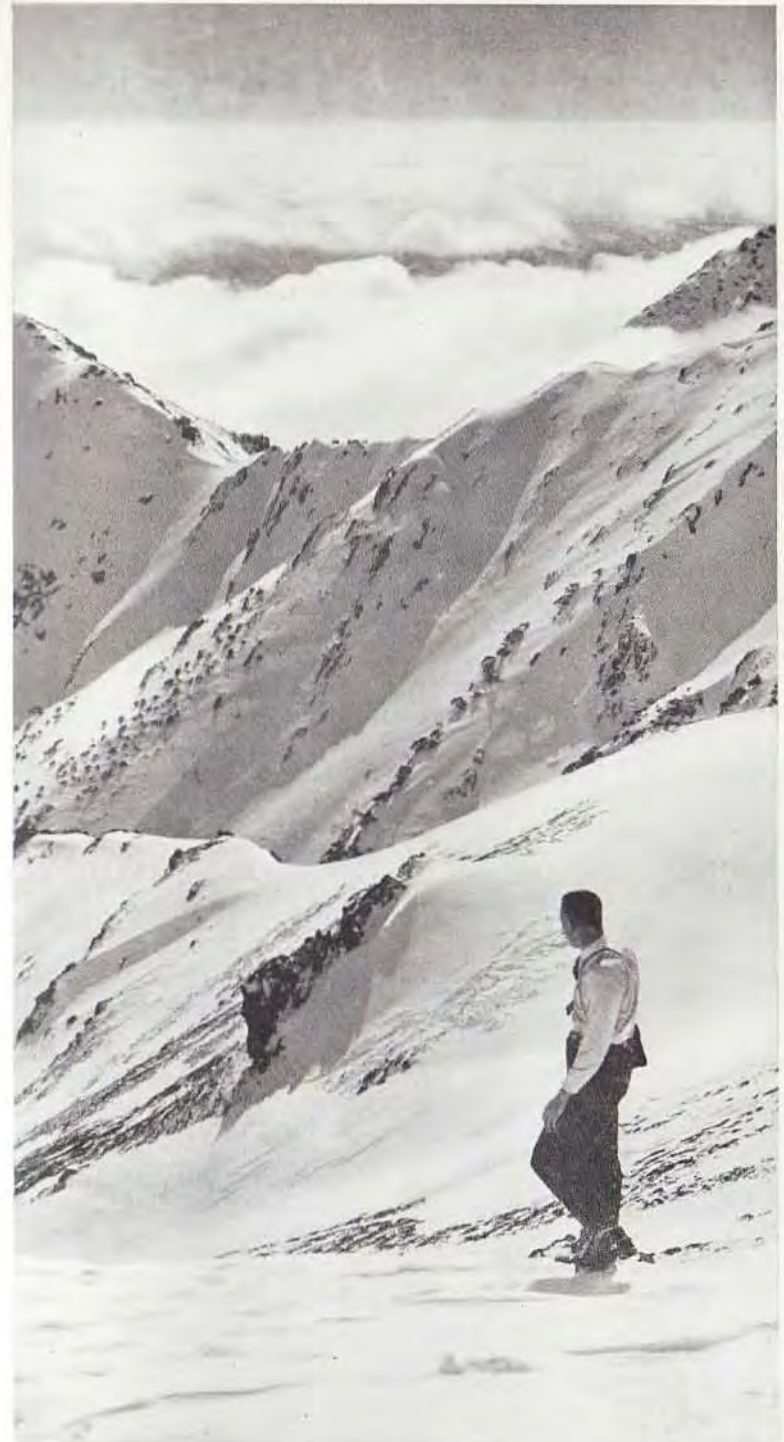
## An Appreciation

In 1928 the *Australian Ski Year Book* made its first appearance. Its Editor was Mr. Percy Hunter, and from that first number to the latest, the 1933 edition, he has continued to act as General Editor. From that position he has now resigned, and an opportunity is available to an Associate Editor to let the rank and file of Australian skiers know (what his Editorial position prevented their hearing) the wonderful services he has rendered to ski-ing in this country. Fortunately for us, this is not in the least in the nature of a farewell, for Mr. Hunter remains chairman of the Ski Council, to say nothing of his vice-presidency of several clubs; it is merely an excellent opportunity of introducing to many skiers who have not come in contact with him the man to whom, it might well be said, they owe their sport.

For the history of modern ski-ing, in New South Wales at least, centres mostly around Mr. Hunter. He rescued it from the desuetude into which it fell with the decline of Kiandra and was mainly responsible for its sturdy growth at Kosciusko. When, later, it advanced to the position of an organised sport it was he who watched over and guided its early deliberations. When, first, two clubs and then, later, others, formed a New South Wales Ski Council there was only one obvious choice for the position—a difficult one then—of chairman, and we may still be grateful for the day when Mr. Hunter accepted his election. It was a time when there was a sharp cleavage, not only between the two main clubs in the State, but also between those who had pioneered ski-ing here and the newcomers whose preoccupation was with racing, tests and organised exploration. Percy Hunter had been a leader in the former class; he is, however, the fortunate possessor of a type of mental agility which flourishes among leading journalists. I know no man who can



PERCY HUNTER.



adjust so quickly his outlook to changed conditions. In a remarkably short time he had begun to force on the one school the realisation that organisation and racing had come to stay and to tone down the more fantastic schemes of the other. It was not until some time later that it dawned on people that in the process the original animosity between the clubs had disappeared.

One can hardly refrain from personal recollections of some of those Council meetings. With a bland smile he sat at the head of the table, deftly steering debate away from the Scylla of acrimony or the Charybdis of useless acquiescence, restraining the excitable, extracting useful contributions from the less verbose and occasionally throwing in one of those delightfully apt similes which make him the most refreshing of after-dinner speakers. The joy of it all was that not one of those who argued ever realised that this subtle directing was in operation. An experience of human nature which ranged from the editorship of a big newspaper to the running of Australia House in London, from a multiplicity of important Public Service positions to the chairmanship of this section of the Pacific Cable Board, has not been without its effect on Mr. Hunter. One detail of his management of these meetings remains particularly in my mind. He never allowed any motion or amendment to be put in a controversial matter until everyone had spoken. By that time it generally appeared that, on essentials, the meeting was agreed; then, and not before, a skilfully-worded motion was put and, of course, passed without dissent. Mildly astonished antagonists found there was nothing to argue about. I have often wished that I could see Mr. Hunter presiding, amiable and imperturbable, over a joint meeting of the M.C.C. and the Board of Cricket Control on the subject of body-line bowling.

His knowledge of the Australian Alps extends back to 1902. In that year he went on a summer trip to the summit of Kosciusko. In those days it was a laborious business. By stage coach from Cooma one went to Jindabyne and there took saddle and pack-horses into the mountains. They camped the first night west of the Porcupines, rode to the summit next day and back to the camp, returning to Jindabyne on the third day and Cooma on the fourth.

In 1905, after becoming influenced by the enthusiasm of the late Charles Kerry, who had been visiting the snowfields for several years, he organised the first Government party of skiers to visit Kiandra. The party went by coach to Adaminaby, spent the night there and drove next morning to the snow-line. There was eight miles of ski-ing to Kiandra, not one of the party had seen a ski before and, of course, it blew a blizzard. Here I can quote Mr. Hunter's own words. "After spending a week in Kiandra we skied out 14 miles to Yarrangobilly Caves and came home via Tumut. Three weeks later I took another party up and repeated the programme. Sir Samuel Hordern was in the second party, also Reg. Todman and Charlie Bennett. But I think all the others have gone. Jack

Mulligan, whose book has just been published, was in the first party."

The idea of opening up Kosciusko was Mr. Hunter's. Sir Joseph (then Mr.) Carruthers, the Premier of New South Wales, was, fortunately for later generations, a man of vision. There was much criticism of the idea, the local inhabitants laughed at the thought of an hotel inside the snowline, the usual arm-chair critics in Sydney had a grand time pointing out the difficulties and the difficulties themselves were almost insur-



C. Gilder.

Looking west from the lower slopes of the Perisher, over Amos Creek.

mountable. But with Hunter's driving force, Carruthers' faith in the project and the ingenuity of Colonel Vernon, the Government Architect, the hotel was built and the road pushed through the mountains to the top of Kosciusko. "The road," says Mr. Hunter, "was a fearful snag and transportation an absolute nightmare."

The Sydney visitors to Kiandra had formed a club of their own, apart from the Kiandra Ski Club (or "Snow Shoe" Club, as it was called, the word "shoes" being used for ski in Kiandra, a usage which has survived to this day). The first party of visitors to the Hotel Kosciusko included several of those who had been in the Kiandra parties; on that now famous first night in the partly-built hotel the Kosciusko Alpine Club was formed from the Kiandra Visitors' Club. Mr. Pearson went round the bare corridors of the new building beating a gong to summon all present to the billiard-room. That was 25 years ago, and he and Mr. Hunter have maintained their connection with the club ever since.

I tried to extract from Mr. Hunter the story of his work for ski-ing, but he stopped at that point. He wrote, "You know all the rest. I really didn't do anything more, but look on and laugh." If that statement were correct we should still owe quite a big enough debt of gratitude. But everyone knows that actually he developed and opened up Kosciusko, fought and struggled to make it the success it is and never lost the first, fine (but careful) rapture in the enjoyment of ski-ing which had been his from the beginning. After the war the Alpine Club began to organise again and a *Year Book* was started, with Mr. Hunter as its Editor. I am the owner of a set of these publications (it was later merged with the *Australian Ski Year Book*); they are brimming over with his quick and subtle wit and form a valuable record of the careless days before tests were heard of, when the summit record stood at over 14 hours and when people really skied for fun.

Then came the joint publication of the present book and later the Council, as an offshoot from the *Year Book*. This is more modern history and known to all, but one can only regret that, as ski-ing grows in popularity and spreads wider, a progressively smaller proportion of its followers can be brought into contact with Mr. Hunter's delightful personality.

It must not be imagined that it is a personality compounded only of the wit, kindness and good humour of which I have written. I have good cause to remember one transgression of mine as a new and inefficient associate Editor of the *Year Book*. My telephone rang and for some ten minutes lightning flashed from it while I was very prettily and efficiently put in my place. Five minutes later, whitefaced and somewhat shattered, I was on my way round to apologise. When I arrived it was all over and I found that I was forgiven. But I never forgot.

It would require the pen of an Arnold Lunn to do justice to the subject which I have here attempted. Indeed, I could wish that he and Hunter should meet, for they would have much in common. Failing that, let us "take it as read." We have been fortunate in profiting by the experience and enthusiasm of a rare personality; our good fortune will not easily be forgotten. "Let us now praise famous men."—S. J.

