

Main Range Vicissitudes

By R. Gelling.

[After some six months of pestering we succeeded in extracting this article from Mr. Gelling, but, at the time of going to press, we had failed completely to obtain any account of his subsequent record trip of 16 hours from Kiandra to Kosciusko or of his trips in the Jagungal district.—Editor.]



It had been our desire for some years to ski on the Main Range from Kiandra to Kosciusko, and to attempt to become better acquainted with the landmarks and diverging spurs. Accordingly, Telfer and myself made arrangements to go direct to Kiandra for the beginning of our ski-ing. On July 28, after many months of lengthy discussion, mostly by letter, as to equipment, food, routes, etc., we found ourselves deposited in wet and slushy snow, ten miles from Kiandra. Shouldering our rucksacks, we skied along the road, together with some chaps of the K.A.C., who came up in the Service Car with us and were going to Kiandra for the inter-club match.

Following the road, we forded numerous creeks and scrambled over fallen trees and limbs that had been blown across the road a few days previously during a snow storm. Up over the ridge between Alpine Hill and O'Connor's Hill, down again and it seemed a long weary trip as we did not know any landmarks. We were very pleased to see Mr. Downey, of the Alpine Hotel and the Pattinson boys, who had come out about four miles to meet us. After a brief spell at the hut below Sawyer's Hill, we set off again, through the timber, and, climbing straight over Sawyer's Hill, had a good run down to the Eucumbene River, where the road was open; here we found the hotel car, in which we deposited our rucksacks. From here, it was comparatively flat going, and we found enough snow on the side of the road to ski on. We arrived at the Hotel about 4 p.m., having walked the last half-mile. Unfortunately rain had fallen and most of the snow in the immediate vicinity of the Hotel had gone.

The next day was dull and light rain fell, but we went up Township Hill on to the Tableland and found plenty of snow half a mile from the Hotel, with an ascent of about 700-800 ft. The eastern slopes of the Tableland carried practically no snow, but the western side was well covered, having good open and timber runs, which carried us along to the northern end of the town, where we skied down New Chum Hill until we came to the grass.

Unfortunately rain fell again on Monday, but, being keen to get further afield, we set out for Mount Selwyn. With Nicols, of the K.P.S.C., and some of the men from the K.A.C., we climbed up Township Hill on to the Tableland and ran over the other side in a southerly direction, over a few small creeks that form the headwaters of Bullock's Head Creek and on to the base of Mount Selwyn. By now the rain had gone, and we were shown the new Championship course. It was about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the Hotel and was a fine straight run that had recently been cleared by the Kiandra enthusiasts.

Tuesday was still dull, but we wanted to see Mount Tabletop, so had some lunch and a day's rations packed and started along the range. The Tableland runs from Kiandra to Mount Tabletop, a distance of about 10 miles. It is flat to undulating, with only one small valley breaking it, at Four Mile Creek. The most part is very lightly timbered, thickening up towards Mount Tabletop, where the range swings more in an easterly direction and narrows down considerably.

We met Nicols and a party about two miles out, and at this moment it started to rain. Rather than go back and sit about the Hotel, all hands decided in favour of going on a few more miles; so we skied along almost to Four

Mile Hollow. Here we boiled the billy in the rain, with the aid of charcoal saturated in kerosene. Most of the party were soaked by now and decided to return, but, as Telfer and I were anxious to see more of the country, we got directions from Nicols how to get to the Elaine Mine. Luckily we had our water-proof Japara silk capes with us, and so were quite dry. The capes serve as ground sheets, measure 6 ft. by 3 ft., and only weight 12 oz.

We ran on as far as Four Mile Creek, then off the range into Four Mile Hollow, and followed it along in easterly direction, over a few small ridges and creeks. We found the mine, with its three huts, in a steep-sided, narrow valley or, rather, a gully, at the head of the Four Mile Creek. It was completely sheltered from all winds and cannot be seen until one is almost on top of it. There is a good deal of timber about here and the country is not the best for ski-ing. We saw no signs of life around, so climbed on up the creek and from the ridge at its top were rewarded with a view of Mount Cabramurra or Tabletop (5,850 ft.). It was only about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles away, and from this angle did not appear to have much snow on it, on account of the thick timber on its side. We had accomplished our objective for the day, so we returned down to the mine, having a rough run over fallen timber, boulders, etc., and decided that we would have a look at Tabletop more closely on the morrow.

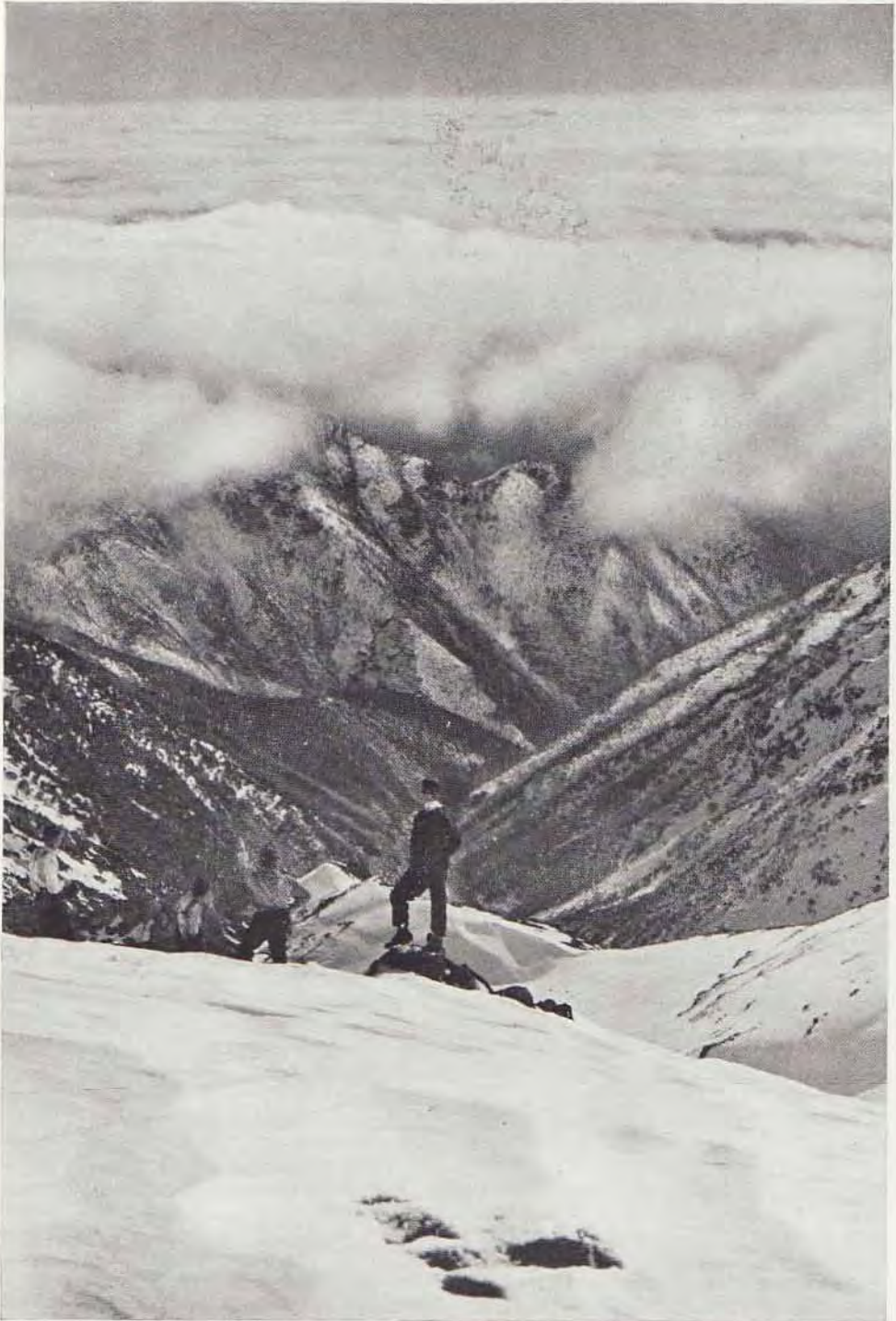
We were delighted at the mine to be welcomed by Mr. Bob Hughes and his brother, who had just come up from their gold mine. Mr. Hughes was good enough to offer us the use of one of the huts and very generously gave us some extra blankets and made us generally very comfortable. We spent a very good night in our Japara silk sleeping-bags. These are lined with down, only weigh $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and are 100% warmer than the ordinary canvas bag lined with a couple of blankets.

We were in great spirits next morning, when we rose to find the sun shining brightly. This was our fourth day on the snow and the first time we had seen the sun. Again we climbed up the creek and worked our way over towards the south, until we were on the range again and soon were climbing the north-west side of Tabletop, the last two hundred yards being very steep.

On top it was comparatively flat, a peculiarity that gives it its name. Here we were greeted by a glorious view of the country in all directions. Most of the snow country lies to the south, where Jagungal, holding its majestic head proudly, crouches, sentinel of the range. Taking a compass shot at Jagungal, we found it to be approximately 200 deg. from the Trig. Station. Looking east and round to the north, there are odd peaks of snow, but no ski-ing country. From here the range runs more or less south-south-east and is not at all distinct. This country consists of hundreds of small ridges, forming innumerable small creeks, which then form the headwaters of the Happy Jack's River. Good runs can be made from the southern slopes of Tabletop, most of them being fairly steep.

Running to the south from the top, with much side-stepping and skidding, as the surface was very hard, and, in patches, icy, we dropped down nearly a quarter of a mile and then traversed eastward for another quarter-mile. Here we came to a small flat with no timber on it. Looking up to the north, we saw the Tabletop Hut, only 200 yards away; making for the hut, we decided to lunch there. This is a weather-board hut with fire-place and nothing else. It is a good shelter, but not recommended for living in if it can be avoided.

We were preparing the fire for lunch and collecting firewood, when, to our amazement, there was a swish of ski and a small figure dashed down on us from a nearby hill. Imagine our astonishment when we were hailed by George Aalberg! He had just skied over from Hotel Kosciusko, having made this astounding run of nearly 50 miles alone, in 18 hours. After this most unexpected meeting we lunched together; as we ate our steak and toast George told us of the many incidents of his extraordinary trip. He vaulted and jumped



MUELLER RIDGE FROM CARRUTHERS' PEAK.

A. Ford.



Courtesy "The Sun."

The Mail leaving Betts' Camp.

E. McNeil.

many creeks, the moon being obscured by clouds and making it difficult to pick out landmarks, whilst at one stage he ran into heavy fog and was compelled to sit down and wait until it lifted. He complacently set to and made himself some tea! Little did we dream that we would be doing these same things in a few days' time.

Breaking camp again, we all climbed round the northern side of Tabletop and had a beautiful run back along the Tableland to Kiandra on good snow. Having acquainted ourselves with a part of the Kiandra end of the range, we started discussing our plans again for the through trip. As Aalberg wanted to get back to the Hotel as soon as possible, we decided that the three of us should travel back together the next day. We went through our rucksacks, carefully looked to our bindings and ski and soon had everything in order. We packed rations for three days, consisting of steak, soup tablets, bread, butter, sugar, tea, raisins, dried apricots, malted milk tablets, cake, chocolate and rum. Our equipment included adhesive tape and a small medical kit, carried by Telfer, and we each carried the following: compass, penknife spare bindings, matches, watch, waxes, goggles, spare gloves and socks, tooth-brush and mug. Dr. Telfer and I carried sleeping-bags and capes. Other equipment, shared out between us, included maps, billy can, fine tie-wire (to swing billy and for mending sticks), spare tip for ski, small pliers, flat cigarette tin filled with kerosene-soaked rag, small torch (which was exceptionally useful), soap, face cream and tooth paste and greenhide lacing. With the above we had everything we needed without being overloaded, and the equipment proved quite sufficient.

The next day, Thursday, August 2nd, was dull and cloudy and did not look at all promising, but, after some discussion, we decided to make the trip. During the morning we waxed our ski thoroughly with a heavy dressing of Stockholm Tar and afterwards used "Mix" or "Medium" Oestbye, as required. Incidentally, Stockholm Tar burned well in with a blow-lamp (but slowly, with not too much heat—just sufficient to make it bubble, but not burn), is the only base wax that will stay on under long hard conditions for any length of time and give good service. With the help of "Mix" or "Medium" and, sometimes, some white paraffin, it will run and climb well on any snow.

Thus fully equipped, we left the Hotel about mid-day and soon were well

NEW SOUTH WALES SECTION.

up Township Hill. Near the top we put on ski and found the snow rather wet and heavy, so made slow time to the Four Mile Creek, where it began to snow. As we went on it became heavier, and soon we were nearly up to our knees in it. Our ski began to ball badly and we had some difficulty in waxing them, as they were wet. Having travelled so far we were reluctant to go back, so decided to push on to Tabletop Hut, hoping that the weather might clear. Nearing Mount Tabletop the visibility became very poor. Here we worked around the northern side and approached the hut from the north. Reaching the hut about 4 o'clock, we made a fire, had some tea, dried our clothes, and then our ski and waxed up again.

Meanwhile it had stopped snowing. We decided to go down to the lower hut, about two miles from Tabletop. Unfortunately, we left too late, and, by the time we were in the vicinity of the second hut, it was dark; it was impossible to distinguish the hut from the many clumps of trees. After searching about in the darkness we gave it up and ran on further into the Happy Jack Valley. Here many of the clouds had gone by and the visibility was fair. After crossing several creeks we ran down the Happy Jack River itself, looking for a crossing. Finally we had some excitement and anxious moments vaulting across.

We were now about 15 miles from Kiandra and, as it was about 8 o'clock, we decided to camp for the night. Selecting a clump of trees ahead, we skied up to them. Luck was with us, as we found a huge hollow tree with an inverted V-shaped opening, a natural camp, which was christened "Argetel." Our first thought was to collect a good heap of firewood and then a fire was lit. By this time it had started to snow very lightly.

Investigating our camp closely, we were happy to find that one could lie full length in it and two sit up inside and, as the wind was in the right direction, we had a very good shelter. After a pot of soup, some steak, bread, butter and tea we took turns at stoking the fire and lying down. Breaking camp early, as we were getting a bit cramped, we set our compasses south and had a good, easy run along the Happy Jack Plain. The sky now was overcast, with heavy cloud, but it had stopped snowing and only a light wind blew in the valley. Very soon we crossed the posts of the old telephone line that ran between Adaminaby and Farm Ridge.

After going about three miles from Argetel, we started climbing the range, about a mile east of Crook's Racecourse. The range here was not very high, but high enough to get some idea of what the wind was like higher up; this decided us to keep to the low-lying country. After a few steady climbs, with an occasional run down, we found ourselves running down the slopes that drain into the upper creeks that form the Gun-



On Charlotte's Pass.

[Photo: A. Ford.]

garlin River, which flows down the Snowy Plain. We had been travelling south up till now, so altered our course a little to the west and ran at about 200 deg. This enabled us to miss many of the dozens of small creeks and made the crossings easier. The Snowy Plains proved very good travelling, the land being mostly undulating, only small hills with nothing big to climb.

From the valley we could see it was still blowing very hard up on top, so we kept on our course until we reached the Bull's Peaks River, then followed it along a few miles, nearly to Bull's Peaks. Here we turned up a tributary of the river and climbed due west—a long hard climb, then a short run down, and the next climb brought us up on to the Main Range itself. But the range did not have a very cheery welcome for us. We felt the wind increasing as we climbed out of the valley and came into the clouds again, while the visibility got worse as we went on.

Our object in getting back on to the range was to avoid running into the rough timbered country between the Brassy Mountains and the Main Range, where we would be climbing ridge after small ridge. Once we got up on top we would have good running on to Tin Hut. We certainly expected wind, but not the hurricane that hit us. It was simply furious, almost impossible to stand up against. There was no snow falling, but the clouds and mist were very heavy and the visibility only a hundred yards at the very most and often only a few feet. That is, when we could lift our faces up to look ahead. Here we set our course at about 190 deg. and struggled on, but only went a mile or so. It was most uncomfortable trying to withstand the wind and the icy pellets that shot about like bullets and clung to our clothing. Ski and sticks soon formed great slabs of solid ice. It was now about 4 o'clock and, as we were not making much headway and anticipated a rough night, we decided to make camp.

Running south-east off the range, we scouted round, looking for some timber. After a steep run down of about half a mile, a clump of green saplings with dead wood standing among them was found, in a more or less sheltered position. But, to compensate for the drop in wind velocity, it began to snow, big, flaky stuff. Wood being the all-important factor, we pulled down and dragged into a heap all we could lay hands on and soon had a pile four or five feet high. Next was our shelter. This was quickly made by running four forked sticks into the snow, which was four feet deep. Cross-sticks were rested on the uprights and these were covered with a layer of green bush. Everything looked as good as could be expected so we decided to light our fire, as it was beginning to get dark. With the aid of our kerosene-soaked rags, a little persuasion and an unlimited amount of cussing, a fire was started, and soon it was blazing and doing its best to defy the snow falling all round it.

We sat down or, rather, crouched down, to our second meal of the day. The first round was a cup of delightful soup, a masterpiece of Telfer's. It was so good that a second issue was suggested, but this was strongly vetoed by the Ration Committee. Next we murdered the bit of steak we had left. Each portion looked lonely and small. Then toast, with plenty of butter aboard, as all agreed that it was very heating. Sipping our tea, between cigarettes, it was voted the best meal of our lives. Of course, this feasting lasted well on into the night, on account of the restricted conditions; believe it or not, melting pot after pot of snow, to make a cup of tea, requires infinite patience and clumsy feet must be kept out of the way. [I shall be more careful next time.—Editor.]

It was after eleven before we thought of turning in. This we did singly—one lying in the shelter, on bushes and a ground-sheet, with another ground-sheet over the sleeping-bag—the other two sitting around the fire and keeping it going. The fire thawed much snow after a few hours and, as it sank down, it started to smoke horribly. When it worked through to the ground we dug out the snow walls of the pit it had made in solid blocks and placed these, in

the form of a wall, on the snow outside. Soon we had a big pit with seven-foot walls which afforded great shelter. Towards dawn, the snow ceased falling and the blizzard had partially blown itself out. After a breakfast of soup, toast and raisins, we left our smoky dug-out, climbed up on to the range and found conditions considerably better. There was very little wind, although the clouds and mist were hanging very low—visibility being no more than half a mile. Again we had to use our compasses frequently. The running was good—easy climbing, with a few short runs on firm snow that took us to Tin Hut at Gungartan, reached at mid-day. Here we found a small bottle of whisky, sent up with other provisions by Jamieson, in summer time, for a trip of his own. [I shall be more careful next time.—Editor.] This was very popular and warmed us up whilst lighting the fires and shovelling the snow out of the hut. We had lunch here, chiefly of boiled sago and sugar, dried fruit and chocolate. As Telfer and I were making for the Chalet and Aalberg wanted to get to the Hotel, we parted here, Aalberg going that afternoon. He ran down Finn's River about two miles, went over on to Disappointment Spur, crossed the Snowy River, near Piper's Creek, climbed up to the Plains of Heaven and so down to the Hotel.

We decided to wait until next morning, so collected some wood and made ourselves comfortable for the night. We left the hut next morning about 10 o'clock, in fairly good weather, and climbed the second highest peak of Gungartan. Here we had a fairly good view northwards, but much mist was drifting over the southern end of the range. An exciting run down to White's River Pass, on the icy slopes of Gungartan, brought us into soft snow on the pass itself. Climbing out of the pass, the clouds formed again around us, so it was necessary to use the compass, now and then, all along the Rolling Grounds, until we had run down into Consett Stephen Pass. Here the mist left us for the rest of the journey. At this point we met Michaelis and a party, who had just run off Mount Tate. We all went back to the Chalet in bright sunshine, after a marvellous run down the Guthega, almost continuous to within half a mile of the Snowy River. Here we turned south-west and ran parallel with the Snowy until we had crossed the three sharp ridges, when we ran down to the river and found a crossing a quarter of a mile below Pounds' Hut. Thence to the Chalet, arriving there about 4 p.m.

Although we did not see as much of the middle of the range as we wished, we learned many things. We learned that camping out on the range was quite possible (although not to be recommended as a pastime), provided wood was available; this can always be found on the edge of the range. Rag soaked in kerosene is very valuable on long tours, is light to carry and is twice as efficient as Meta tablets. We found, too, that malted milk tablets and raisins were the best things to eat during the day—chocolate only to be used at meal times, when water is available.

