

Hut Courtesies

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HAVE you ever reached a main-range hut after having punched a blizzard for several hours? If you've done much touring, then undoubtedly you have. On the threshold you kick off the old ski, dump the rucksack, and lever off that slab of ice that has conformed to the port bow of face, goggles and cap; pull frozen mittens from numbed hands and, brushing clinging snow from your clothes, stump into the hut (I say "stump" because your feet also are pretty cold, unless you are fortunate enough to possess a perfect boot).

What is your first thought? A fire, of course—followed by a mug of hot tea or cocoa. You glance around the hut. Ah, here we are, some kindling wood and old paper neatly tucked into a box; and some dry billets, excellent! In no time you have the fire crackling and already the numbness has left your frozen limbs. In the meantime another member of the party has gone for water, using a bucket which he found clean, up-ended on the table. By the time he returns, the third member has gone over the shelves to find clean cutlery in one of those flat biscuit tins, some tucker in other metal containers, a little cocoa, tea and sugar, and a few biscuits with a note addressed to "The next party," intimating that the food is clean and bidding you partake thereof.

Being a group of thoughtful chaps yourselves, you will undoubtedly leave the hut in the same clean and tidy condition; your surplus food will be packed away from rats; you will have replenished the wood supply and have left kindling wood and billets in a dry place for the following party; and there will be a little note addressed "To the next party" bidding its members the same welcome to your surplus food as the earlier party had extended to you.

In the snow country such acts are common courtesies, but unfortunately we occasionally run across the skier who, through lack of thought or sheer selfishness and lack of consideration of others, concerns himself with his own comfort only—taking what he can lay his hands on, even to the extent of the other fellow's tucker. I have heard Ken

Breakspear say of some of the earlier main-range skiers that only after having made soup from their boots would they broach another skier's food.

Perhaps you have also had the misfortune to find a hut which had been left with the door open and snow piled around it necessitating a deal of shovelling to get it closed; what little wood was left being covered in snow; axe-handle broken or the head split through using it as a wedge; the floor littered with rubbish and scraps of food; dirty dishes and cutlery, and fry-pans and what not with fat and food clinging to them and rat droppings all over the place. Your thoughts are not pleasant ones as you and your friends go about the difficult task of getting a fire going and you have to go out into the blizzard again to drag in sufficient firewood for the night, hampered because the axe has been rendered useless by abuse. And, when you come to unpack your food, you find it has been broached: not much missing, it's true,—but what a state it's in. Your bag of flour has been ripped open and allowed to fall, splaying flour over the floor; your precious sugar spilled over the contents; your choice tit-bits such as chocolate and raisins missing; and a goodly sprinkling of rat droppings over all. Your case, of course, was not opened with care and refastened; oh no, it was just smashed in and no effort made by one genus of rats to protect it from the other. This broaching of tucker might appear exaggerated, but I have experienced it on two occasions,—though I feel that neither skiers nor stockmen were responsible.

As more and more skiers make use of these huts perhaps we might say to the neophyte: "Just think a little. Imagine the next party coming in during a blizzard. How would you like to find the hut if you were in that party? Good! then leave the hut as you would like to find it,—clean and tidy, dishes and cutlery washed and packed away, dry kindling wood and billets handy and a goodly supply of wood under cover, beds nicely stacked, and axes, brooms, etc., in their places. And, please close the door."