

Housekeeping in a Ski Hut

Shirley Hull

MY first introduction to camp cooking came as a shattering surprise. I was handed a large mug in which was my whole dinner, three different kinds of soup tablets, a tin of tomato soup, various kinds of spaghetti and baked beans, and a minute portion of some kind of stew, all thrown in together. The soup was one temperature, and the beans and spaghetti seemed about 400deg. F. higher. I decided then that it would be a good idea if I had a hand in this cooking myself.

For most ski huts food must be sent up well in advance of winter, usually about April, which places limits on one's choice of items. The daily menus must be planned beforehand.

For a small party—up to twelve or so—we get a large sheet of paper divided into columns for breakfast, lunch and dinner, with lines for each day of the week—a week's supply can be multiplied by the number of weeks you are staying.

Breakfast foods are usually limited to two different varieties alternated each day, and porridge I wipe off unless someone very en-

thusiastic about it offers to wash the billy each day. The rest of breakfast can be eggs, tomatoes, baked beans, herrings, or what you will. At one time I swore off eggs completely; that was after they had been carelessly packed in bran, and several—not a lot—broken. After four months those eggs were rather high, and it was my bad luck to be the one to wash the good ones and throw out the others. This happened two years running, but now we smear them with preservatives and pack them in layers between proper papier-mache moulds, and all is well. Of course, if the case falls off the packhorse on the way in they might not be so good—this also happens.

If sending bacon in the piece, which keeps quite well, take a very sharp knife; the hunks we ate the first time were terrific.

Then to lunch; this is always planned as a cold meal, because skiers don't want to waste time cooking at mid-day, and also quite often lunch is taken out on a day trip. For this there are cold tinned meats and fish, mayonnaise, cold tinned peas, beans or vegetable salad, spaghetti, etc., and if pos-



Fresh Meat? (it is not faked!)

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sible innumerable tins of fruit. Biscuits and butter, and what more could you want? (Beer! Ed.)

At dinner we really relax. Start with soup, thickened with a little flour and powdered milk. For tomato soup, which curdles milk otherwise, add a pinch of soda bicarb. One year at Bogong we did this, but the next I wasn't there, and the others couldn't remember what I added. They tried something different each time, but the tomato soup still kept on curdling.

Tinned meats are very varied just now, but it is a good idea to try them out at home first, as some are more vegetable than meat, and your menu probably already provides a fine array of tinned vegetables. Puddings are rather scarce in variety, and you will just have to take what you can find.

In addition to all this there are prunes, raisins, jams, biscuits, sugar, flour, condiments, cheese, nuts, chocolate, powdered milk, butter, oranges (coated with an anti-fungicide), curry powder, rice (beware the ex-P.O.W.'s) cocoa, tea, tomato sauce, dripping, and non-food oddments such as medical supplies, sunburn jelly, soap, tea towels and a host of other items dependant on the particular mountain you are going to, and whatever you happen to like yourself. If your party like their coffee, as most skiers do, you will need a surprising amount of it.

Packing is important. Potatoes and onions

keep fairly well, but all food not tinned must be sealed in kerosene tins before packing in cases, because of the bush mice that are so plentiful in Victoria, and N.S.W., too. If cases are to go up the mountain by pack-horse the usual size is one which holds two four-gallon square tins. Larger ones may be too heavy and have to be re-packed or left behind.

Watch for things that pick up odours. One year we put all the packets of tea in the same tin as the soaps. We all felt as though we had a mouthful of froth with each cup, and unanimously lived on coffee.

All this has been on hut planning, but eventually our normal yearly group decided to form a club and build our own small chalet at Hotham. Now our food problem is greatly simplified, as supplies can be driven to the door in summertime, and up to the present we have been able to get supplies of fresh meat, vegetables and bread sledged in all through the winter. As well as the usual open fire we have a stove, a large black object which burns and purrs sweetly for some, and just snarls at others. When coaxed sufficiently this will roast meat, cook puddings, cakes and scones: the idea now is to include a good cook in your party, preferably one who does not ski too well, and will come in early to feed you all too well.

We appoint a food manager at the begin-

ning of the year, and she can have a committee to help, but usually two people do the lot. They order enough food, based on the menu plan, for so many people for so many weeks, leaving members to bring their own couponed food, such as butter.

Everyone in the place comes into the one party for cooking and other duties, which are rostered from day to day. This maintains the same good feeling as we had in our hut life and is something we never wish to lose. Occasionally it may be a good idea to

let the women do all the cooking bar breakfast, and the men do all the washing up. This provides a happy subject for conversation at night, with every man arguing madly that he has just done his turn.

If your cabin has a cellar or pantry or other storage, the tins and other food can be stacked so that all one's needs can be found easily. With more food-bins in the kitchen, everything can be to hand. So life in the kitchen of a ski cabin need be no more complicated than in the home.