

The Kosciusko Tragedy of 1928

THIS twenty-year-old story is retold, not only as a matter of interest to those who have never read the Year Books of the day, but lest the death of two fine men cease to have its beneficial lesson for the skiers who follow after them. It may also warn those who think that the Safety Rules are merely made for the other fellow, to think twice before departing from them and to take notice of advice given by members of the Ski Patrol.

On a clear, windless day in August, 1928, Evan Hayes and Laurie Seaman waved to the rest of their party resting near the Red Hut and disappeared over Charlotte's Pass. That was the last time they were seen alive. We know that they reached the Summit from photographs found in Seaman's camera and we know that they perished that night in a blizzard which turned back the balance of their party. Seaman's body was found some three weeks later beside his skis among the rocks where the Seaman Memorial Hut now stands. Hayes' body was found later still in the valley south of Rawson Pass. In the course of the widespread search that followed C. Aalberg reported traces of two ski tracks on the Ram's Head Range towards Meritt's Lookout. The rest is conjecture.

The following reconstruction was made at the time by Dr. J. W. S. Laidley after examining all available evidence, and was born out in part by the subsequent discovery of Hayes' body:

"Let us suppose that after leaving Charlotte's Pass and not having a very good knowledge of the country, they decided to

go to the Summit and keep to the snow poles all the way. They would be out of sight of Charlotte's Pass in 10 minutes, and the snow poles cannot be seen from the route taken by the remainder of the party. The western side of the range for about 3 miles was extremely hard and icy and as they approached Sentinal Rocks, Seaman, who was not very adept on skis, decided to abandon his and walk on to the Summit. In the conditions this would have been far easier going. They proceeded together to the Summit: Hayes on ski and Seaman on foot; there they photographed one another. By this time it would be about mid-day or after, and from the evidence of the rest of the party we know that at this time the fog came up. Indeed, the photographs look as if they were taken in fog, but too much reliance must not be placed in this because the films had suffered much from exposure. Another point of extreme interest in the photographs is that neither man was wearing his skis at the time the photographs were taken. Only one pair of skis are visible in the background. If we add to this the evidence of Aalberg who saw the ski tracks of only one man on the Summit and many boot tracks, our suspicions must approach certainty.

"They are now on the Summit in the fog, and to return they must separate. Seaman decides to follow the snow posts back to the place he left his ski, and Hayes decides to run down to Rawson Pass the most direct way possible, to cross Etheridge and pick up the snow poles at the point where Seaman left his skis.

"It is with considerable conviction that I

believe that Seaman reached the meeting place without incident and sat down to wait for Hayes. Hayes failed to put in an appearance, and Seaman very rightly refusing to abandon the meeting place was benighted. During that night he slept and met his death. Had he been alive the next morning, he was on the snow posts, the weather was not impossible, and then it would have been far better to return to Bett's than to continue to wait."

The lessons so tragically taught were later

embodied in the Safety Rules. The danger of the treacherous, sudden mid-day change from bright sunshine to nil visibility, of splitting from a party, of ski-ing in a party of less than three, of separating when difficulty was only too apparent after the event.

Admittedly the retreat to the Chalet is quicker than it was to Bett's Camp, and the standard of ski-ing has greatly improved, but it must be remembered also that once lost on the Range in thick weather and your chance of being found by fifty searchers is not worth worrying about.