

Drift Ski-ing in Mid-Summer

M. E. & C. W. Anton

WHEN the winter mantle of white has gone from the Australian Alps, great drifts of snow, pink from the dust blown from the plains, are often left to lie across the backbone of the main range in summer. Flowing like glaciers down the eastern valleys, where they were banked up by the great storms of winter, they make a fantastic patchwork of colour on the bare, grey-brown contours.

Since we first discovered three years ago that there was snow—and we could ski on it—at Kosciusko in the summer, the dormant ski bug, usually under control by the Eight Hour Day holiday week-end, now makes a nuisance of itself every Christmas. Before we know it, we find ourselves once again headed south with as much excitement as we make our winter pilgrimages, hoping, but not really believing, that we will again find Australian summer "firn"—pink, and fast, and enticing. One year we arrived on Boxing Day to find the whole of the range covered with glistening new snow that had fallen the night before. Fortunately, as is was of no use for ski-ing, the new snow melted quickly, revealing the pink, frozen drifts beneath.

This Christmas we did not have the same

luck with the snow that we have come to expect as our right, for we almost feel that mid-summer range ski-ing is our discovery. But we did get in some good practice for the winter. There are plenty of people who give summer ski-ing a "go" on drifts near the summit road, which they can reach by car, but they don't know the delight of setting out on horseback for the main range, with the skis strapped across the saddle, and the longest and steepest snowdrift as their goal.

One day in particular stands out in our memory as the most perfect and satisfying of our summer ski trips. We "did" three peaks that day—Big Twynam running down towards the Blue Lake; a steep glacier-like run from a ridge between Twynam and Caruthers, and then a superb run down Lee, steeper and more exciting than in winter—and with the horses waiting to take us home; an improvement from a comfort point of view, we found, to the snowmobiles.

The weather was the kind you dream about in winter—windless, warm and sunny. Early in the morning we went down to the paddock to try out the horses which Mr. Day had selected as being docile enough to carry our skis without shying or bolting. We found our idea of docility did not coincide



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with Mr. Day's! The horses had only been brought up the day before and were decidedly frisky, so we cantered them around the paddock to quieten them down before introducing them to the skis, which we did with some apprehension. We tried balancing them lightly across the saddle ready to jettison them at a moment's notice. But the horses must have seen skis before, for after several little side jumps, when the first caught sight of the ski tips out of the corners of their eyes, they ignored them completely. So we put on our packs, tied on our skis, and cautiously rode up to the top of Charlotte Pass, which, incidentally, that Christmas was skiable as far as the "Big Rock."

The horses slithered down the other side, while we learnt new tricks in balancing ourselves and the skis going down hill. At the Snowy we were surprised to see two pairs of skis leaning against a rock, and looking most incongruous among the summer daisies. The owners, we found, were a Swedish couple spending a holiday camping by the Snowy

and walking to the nearest snowdrifts for their ski-ing. As the horses splashed belly-deep into the Snowy, gushing and lively in contrast to its solid, frozen mass in winter, we remembered the times when we had skied across it, often only guessing where its banks lay. On the other side we followed the track to the Blue Lake, and up along the shoulder of Twynam, where we parked our equestrian fore-runners of the snowmobile on the edge of a snowfield which ran from the top of Twynam down to the rocks overhanging the Blue Lake. We thought what a wonderful slalom course it would make, and what a pity there could not be a summer slalom race held there every Boxing Day—snow permitting. We skied almost to the Blue Lake where we had lunch, but not the swim we had planned optimistically. After dunking in one finger we decided to stick to the snow—it seemed much warmer!

Crossing the ridge from Twynam to Car-ruthers we laid our tracks on every worthwhile drift, making full use of our unpatented (as yet) ski-lift which we worked this

way: A would take the horses down, while B skied; both would ride to the top of the next drift, then A would ski while B took the horses down, so eliminating any uphill work. Summer ski-ing is certainly ski-ing de-luxe—it is not even necessary to wax because the crystalline snow is fast enough without, and wax only collects the dust.

We did not reach the top of Carruthers until nearly five o'clock and the evening wind was beginning to blow. We knew we were on Carruthers when we met the wind on this windiest of peaks, but we did not mind, for instead of bringing clouds out of the "cloud factory" in Little Austria (which evidently goes on strike in summer) it brought a welcome coolness to our sunburnt faces as we urged the horses down the ridge

towards Lee. Across the ridge there was a great cornice—legacy of that winter cornice often so difficult to edge over—reaching half way down to Club Lake. Then on Lee itself the snow extended down in an ever-narrowing drift to the creek. Although Lee had looked good as we rode down to the Snowy in the morning—and we had kept it like the cherry to the last—we had never expected it to yield such a superb run. We climbed up again to where the horses patiently waited, and set off for home. The novelty of being still out on the range at six o'clock gave us an uneasy feeling, and made us as anxious as the horses seemed to be to get back to the Chalet. Mr. Day's reproachful glances later showed that he did not approve of skiers coming in after sunset in summer or winter (or was it because he thinks summer ski-ing is crazy, anyway?).



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D. Telegraph