

# Albina Via Guthega

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THE approach to the Main Range from Smiggins Holes is long and gradual and boring. Therefore, we decided that for our journey to Lake Albina on the Six Hour Day week-end we would look for a route which was short and steep and interesting.

Careful study of the new ordinance map showed three possible routes—from the west via Hannel's Spur, from the north-west through the Northcote Canyon or from the north-east via Guthega. Frank Spencer was very keen to try a new road which leads from the Geehi and is to follow the Grey Mare ridge to Tumut Ponds and Kiandra. The plan was to go as far as possible up this road, then cross the Geehi and climb up the Northcote Canyon on the Townsend Spur. Fortunately, we decided that this was too ambitious a project for a long week-end. At Christmas time I met three very weary bushwalkers who had spent two and a half days doing just that.

On the map Hannel's Spur looks a nice gentle slope, but in actual fact the track is largely overgrown by scrub and is excessively steep in some places. It took me six hours to ascend in summer without a pack, so the 5300 foot climb would be most difficult in winter with skis and a heavy pack. In the end we decided to do the less ambitious trip via Guthega and so Frank Spencer and I flew to Canberra on the Friday evening, where my sister Constance met us with the car.

Fortunately for us, there was a strike in progress at Guthega and we were able to park the car down near the Snowy without fear of it being swallowed up by any of the fearsome pieces of machinery which now inhabit that part of the Snowy Valley. After walking half a mile up the Guthega River to find a crossing we were on the snow at 9 a.m.

We found that there was still a heavy covering of snow on the Tate East Ridge (on which the Balmain Cup races had been held a month earlier). We had an easy traverse along the ridge above the Snowy and as we reached the end of the ridge the whole north-east face of Twynam came into view.

It had been hot on the traverse, but we

felt a cool breeze in our faces as we schussed down to Pounds Creek. Pounds was running a banker and looked extraordinarily chilly. We dashed up and down the bank trying to find a crossing. But after much waste of time we had to do what one should always do in the first place—get in and get it over. On this occasion proceedings were more than usually drawn out by the discovery of a wonderful new game. Frank tried to throw a boot across—but did not quite succeed. It floated merrily away and was finally recovered two hundred yards downstream. When I had stopped laughing at the spectacle of Frank hopping barefoot through the snow I picked up one of my boots by the ankle strap, whirled it around my head like a sling shot and sent it whizzing across. Feeling very proud of myself at this effort, I picked up my other boot and whirled it around my head. The strap promptly broke—and I went off downstream while Frank laughed. We later decided to form a society to press for the inclusion of ski boot throwing in the programme of Australia's first Olympic Games in 2056.

After crossing Pounds Creek we began the 2000-foot climb up Mt. Twynam. Unfortunately, we tried to be too cunning and we followed the easiest contour route up Twynam Creek. This brought us to the disordered pile of rocks below Little Twynam, from which point we had to do a long traverse across the steep icy slopes 800 ft. above the Blue Lake. Eventually we reached the top of the range and saw before us the breath-taking slopes of Twynam West spur covered in perfect spring snow. In spite of all the downhill possibilities of the area, however, we preferred to sit down, suck oranges and smear our faces with zinc ointment, for the heat and glare had been intense as we climbed up the eastern side of the mountain.

The views along the two miles from Twynam (7207 ft.) to Carruthers Peak (7042 ft.) are magnificent and we made various excursions to take photographs, for Sentinel Peak and Watson's Crags, with the green Murray Valley in the background, provide an unusual mixture of Alpine and Australian scenery.



Mt. Townsend, October, 1952.

Photo. F. Spencer.

We had our full share of downhill on the Sunday and Monday on the snowfields adjacent to the lodge with a bright sun, perfect snow and a cool breeze.

Charles Anton described the snow as the trickiest he had ever seen on account of it would have tricked anyone into imagining himself to be a good skier!

After lunch on Monday we covered our skis with Klister wax, put our skins in the bottom of our packs—as instructed by the Norwegians—and set forth for Guthega. For the first hour the weather was perfect and on our way we were able to watch two big thunder storms below us—one roaring and crackling up the Géehi and the other going down the Snowy. Then the weather on the tops began to go wrong and we found ourselves in a mild blizzard. Our desire to quit the tops before visibility became bad caused us to go around the western side of "Big" Twynam and run quickly down the southern branch of Pounds Creek. This involved finding a passage through the line of boulders which marks the crest of the north ridge of

Twynam, boulders obviously left there by some lazy giant who changed his mind about completing a wall.

As we ran down towards Pounds Creek the snow became soggy (it must be remembered that the pass north of Twynam is only 5800 ft., the lowest point on the divide for many miles) and it took us three and a half hours to reach Guthega from the Albina Lodge. Here we finally took off our skis at dusk, after three perfect days.

The journey convinced us that Guthega is an ideal starting point for main range touring and would make a wonderful site for a new hotel or Alpine village. There are excellent slopes a few hundred yards away on Mt. Tate, the top of Twynam is only three miles off, while to the east there are the slopes of The Blue Cow and the Back Perisher. Indeed, when the construction work is finished there will be a ready made township capable of giving accommodation for hundreds, with electricity and an all-weather road.