

The Selmer Norwegians

By George Petersen

THE introduction of so many Norwegians to the Southern Alps has given a great impetus to ski-ing in the district. So keen are they on the sport that when they first came to Kosciusko, having insufficient skis for all, some used the staves taken from barrels and not only skied but were to be seen jumping with them.

Mr. C. Klaussen, a member of the staff of Selmer Engineering Pty. Ltd., has been kind enough to prepare the following account of the activities of the Selmer Norwegians, both at work and at play:

As is well known by now, the Norwegian contracting firm of Selmer Engineering Pty. Ltd. has been entrusted with the construction of the first power station, penstock and dam under the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The dam across the Snowy River is situated at Guthega and the power station at Mungyang, these being connected by a three miles long tunnel and a penstock nearly a mile long.

A stipulation of this task being undertaken by Selmer's was the utilisation of some 90 per cent. non-Australian labour. Consequently, Selmer's brought with them some 350 Norwegian staff members and workmen, most of whom were flown out in seven charter flights between October, 1951, and the end of February, 1952.

Since the commencement of the work in the field on a very small scale in October 1951, quite a considerable task has been accomplished by Selmer's. On the present works sites very little was to be seen at the beginning; a barracks, a small store or two, an insignificant diesel power aggregate and so on. Now all this is altered. Roads lead from the Cooma district to all of the four works camps, Mungyang (administration headquarters of Selmer's), Guthega, Adit and Surge Tank, where small towns and communities have grown up. More than seven hundred men and women (approx. half the number Norwegians) live here now, and the works have taken definite shape. The power station site at Mungyang has been excavated, nearly 50,000 cu. yds. have been removed, and the foundations have been concreted. From the power station site

towards Surge Tank the great penstock is being erected, at Guthega the concreting of the dam foundations is due to start in March, and the tunnels are stretching for considerable distances into the rock. A number of difficulties have been encountered, as is always the case with a large construction works, especially in a "foreign" country, as Australia is to Selmer's (or was!). However, such starting difficulties are now, mostly, a matter of the past. Some unexpectedly poor rock has also been encountered, but on the whole it can be said that a good progress has been made, and should nothing unforeseen happen, 60,000 kilowatts of power should be at disposal at the end of the contract period in the latter half of 1954.

As is only to be expected, sport has played a great part in the daily life of the Selmer people. Norway being known as the "cradle of ski-ing," and Snowy Mountains being very similar to many Norwegian districts in nature as well as partly in climatic, it is only natural that ski-ing was taken up extensively and enthusiastically by the Selmer men. A ski-ing club was formed, the Selmer Norwegian Ski-ing Club, and competitions arranged, mainly in the Nordic tradition.

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the birth of King Haakon of Norway, the Selmer Norwegian Ski-ing Club arranged extensive competitions at Guthega, where a jump allowing for jumps of some 40 metres or more was made. In spite of rather unfavourable weather conditions, the competition was a great success, about 2000 spectators rolling up.

Winner of the jumping contest was Peder Botten, of Sulitjelma, North Norway, a good class jumper even according to Norwegian home standards, with jumps of 41.5, 40.5 and 38.5 metres.

[Other results are reported elsewhere.—Ed.]

The prize presentation took place in the newly built Welfare House at Guthega and was carried out by Miss Ragnhild Selmer, the daughter of the managing director of the Selmer Company, Mr. F. Selmer.

The Selmer Club sent a strong contingent to the Australian Ski-ing Championships at



Site of the Guthega Dam, Tate East Ridge in the background. Photo. George Petersen.

Mount Buller in Victoria. As was only to be expected, the Norwegians proved superior in langlauf and jumping. The Norwegian competitors also contributed heavily to the New South Wales victory in the inter-state competitions. The Norwegian competitors were all very much impressed with the arrangements and, especially, with all the kindness and hospitality shown to them in Victoria.

The Selmer Ski-ing Club also won the contest for the Balmain Cup, from the

Cooma Ski Club, Jindabyne, Berridale and Canberra Ski Clubs .

The Selmer Club also took part in several other competitions with good results. All told, I think it might be contended that the actions of the Norwegian runners during last season would prove a fillip to Australian skiing, and they are, of course, only too glad to help in the improvement of this excellent sport.