

Charles H. Kerry

By George Petersen

SINCE the loss of my historical records of the Southern Alps in the Hotel Kosciusko fire, I have since endeavoured to retrieve my loss, in the course of doing so I have gathered some facts concerning the life of Charles H. Kerry, who was termed "The Father of Ski-ing in Australia" by Mr. Percy Hunter.

Unfortunately, most of Kerry's records about Kiandra and the snow country were destroyed by fire many years ago and just prior to being published, however, I found that he had written an article for the British Ski Year Book. I wrote to the Secretary of the Ski Club of Great Britain, Mrs. S. G. Tennant, who has kindly forwarded a copy of the article, which was published in the British Ski Year Book, 1906.

The article, which follows, is a very interesting link with early ski-ing at Kiandra.

"SKI-RIDING IN AUSTRALIA"

*By E. C. Richardson, Kiandra in August.

THE following article is based on information kindly supplied by Mr. C. H. Kerry, 310 George Street, Sydney, N.S.W. Mr. Kerry is the organiser of the Alpine Club, Sydney. He states that anyone desiring further information about ski-running in Australia should apply to him, or, in the alternative, to the Secretary of the Kiandra Ski Club, Kiandra, N.S.W.

The Snowy Mountains are situated in New South Wales, close to the Victorian border, and there it is that ski-running—or "riding" as it is called—is practised in Australia. The general character of the district is that of an elevated plateau some 6000 feet above sea, intersected by deep valleys and broken up by peaks which rise 1000 feet or so higher. Mt. Kosciusko (7256ft.) is the highest in the colony, whilst the Ram's Head, Crackembac, Bull's Peak, Gungahlin, Bald Hill and Table Top are mountains of lesser magnitude. Snow lies on these for at least ten months in the year and sometimes does not disappear at all. The weather in winter (our summer) is severe and blizzards are frequent.

Kosciusko itself has already been ascended on ski, but this mountain is too far removed from civilisation to be of use to most ski-runners, for the nearest village, Jindabyne,

is thirty-five miles from the summit. Kiandra, a small township with a population of about 300, is the recognised centre of the sport. Kiandra is reached by rail from Sydney to Cooma, about 12 hours, and thence by coach, 45 miles, till within about ten miles of the village, when ski must be used for the rest of the journey. There is a good hotel and a flourishing ski club at Kiandra and the country round about is admirably suited to the sport. Ski are indeed the only convenient means of locomotion in winter, and they are used there by everybody. The school stands in the midst of a huge snowfield and is approached by even the tiniest children on ski.

Ski-races and competitions are held towards the end of every July and, throughout that month and August, the snow is always in capital condition for the sport.

The history of ski-running in Australia has been much the same as in other countries. First a small knot of enthusiasts, then a club and then a prophet. Until the arrival of the prophet stick-riding is the order of the day and the take-off for the jump is placed at the bottom of the hill. The prophet is usually a Norwegian, and in this respect Kiandra has been no exception to the rule. Herr Borre Winther appeared there in 1901 and his graceful style of running at once appealed to everybody.

The following is an account of championship racing of that year, taken from a Sydney paper:

"The excitement which prevailed during the separate heats reached its culminating point when William Pattinson, of Kiandra Snow Shoe Club, met Borre Winther, of Alpine Club. The flag fell to an excellent start. Pattinson, one of the most daring and clever riders of the Snowy Mountains, quickly took the lead, but, coming down the second steep slope, Winther crouched low on his shoes in true Norwegian fashion and, gaining great impetus, shot past his opponent. At the last dip Winther had a lead of 15 yards, when simultaneously both competitors fell. The terrible speed at which they were travelling threw them almost together by the winning post. Both regained their feet and passed the judge, Winther leading, but, not complying with the rules that both feet must be in the shoes, was disqualified and the prize was awarded to Pattinson."

From which it would appear that at that

time the championship was decided by merely a straight run downhill. Had the course included some uphill work and some zig-zag running through wood, it is safe to predict that the superiority of the Norwegian would have been more apparent.

The following is an account of the jumping at the same meeting:

"The Jump event was a test of ski-riding over a 5ft. bank of snow, the start from anywhere on the slope above the measurement taken from the face of the bank to the spot where the rider's feet again touched the snow. Last year's winning jump was 38ft. 6in.; 41ft. 10in. secured the trophy this year, this distance being jumped by Winther, who then offered to make a jump down an incline in the manner common in Norway. A snow bank 6ft. high was built in a spot indicated and Winther, taking a preliminary run from the top of the championship course, rode over this alighting 62ft. below. A second attempt put up a record of 77ft. With the snow in better order, the rider was confident he could have reached 100ft."

All this is a curious parallel to the achievements of the Telemarkings near Christiania and of Norwegian students in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Herr Winther also introduced modern bindings to Australia, for Mr. Kerry writes that until he "showed us the new style our fastening was a simple wide leather band adjustable across the toe, from which the feet became at once detached if the runner fell. Now the fixed boot style (whatever that may be.—Ed.) is in vogue."

As regards swinging and turning, Mr. Kerry writes: "Very few Australian runners—not more than six—can while travelling swiftly stop or turn in a few feet and reverse their positions." And in answer to an inquiry about the stick he replies: "We use only one stick as an aid and in dangerous spots on steep slopes it is our practice to sit down hard and use it as a brake." From which it seems fair to conclude that, in common with most other Norwegian teachers, Herr Winther neglected to show his pupils how to control the speed on steep and difficult ground by means of the ski themselves, without resorting to the expedient of sitting on the stick. Australian runners, when they have gained more skill, will, however, doubtless discover this for themselves, if, indeed, they have not already done so.

The type of ski in use at Kiandra differs from the ordinary Telemark pattern. Mr. Kerry writes: "Our ski are about 4in. wide and 7ft. long, slightly broader at the centre, and also stouter; bend about the same as Norwegian. In fact, our ski are generally made by Norwegians, of whom several are mining in the locality. We have tried the long Norwegian ski—about 8ft. to 9ft., narrow, with groove at the base, but find them not so suitable for our snow, which is frequently soft. We use a local straight-grained timber called mountain ash and let the snow wear grooves in the base by cutting away the softer part of the grain. "Personally," adds Mr. Kerry, "I have mine grooved artificially about six to the inch and a quarter inch deep, which ensures a good grip on the snow." The ordinary Telemark ski used about Christiania and in most parts of Norway are about 7ft. 6in. long and about 5in. wide at the centre, so the "long Norwegian ski" above referred to are doubtless those still used by the country folk on the wind-swept fjelds and in Sweden.

Mr. Kerry encloses a number of newspaper cuttings, setting forth accounts of the beauty of the Snowy Mountains in winter and of the joys of ski-running there, all of which show that the sport is likely to become as popular in Australia as in other countries where it has been tried. Is it too much to hope that the day is not far distant when lovers of winter sport in this country and in that, will meet in friendly emulation on the snow with ash on their feet, even as they now meet on the cricket pitch with willow in their hands?

[*Capt. Richardson, a noted British authority on ski-ing, is obviously speaking in the very early years of the century.—D.M.R.]

