

Thredbo Ski-ing

By W. Davy

THE Thredbo River is a landmark to all Kosciusko skiers, for it is from the lower end of this valley that the road to the snow really starts to gain height. This is as far as most skiers' interest goes, for up until a very short time ago the ski-ing slopes of the valley of the Thredbo were but a haunt of types armed with very adhesive skins and the roving instinct inclined to places other than the Western Faces.

My first sight of the valley was in 1948, when, as a very beginner, I clambered over to the top and looked down what at the time was to me a vertical face. I think that it was in 1950 that, with Charles Anton, Oscar, Joe and Shan Turnbull, of Victoria,

I made my next trip. It was then that I realised what a wonderful slope it really was. Here, within forty minutes of the Chalet, was a ski-ing ground better than I had seen on the main range and infinitely more accessible. Since then, with a slight acquaintance with European runs, I can compare it favourably in variety for all classes of skier, except perhaps the real beginner, and its racing possibilities with anywhere on the Continent I have seen. This should be tempered slightly in that the maximum vertical drop at the moment for a downhill race is only 1900 feet. In Europe 2000 feet is considered a good minimum. This height, however, should be attained before long as trails are cut lower into the trees.



Snowy Valley from Northern Spur of Paralyser.

Photo. G. Petersen.

From the Chalet, after climbing between the two peaks of Stilwell, it's but a gentle push across the flat top some three-quarters of a mile to the beginning of the run. From the top the view is spectacular. Far below can be seen the course of the Thredbo River and, directly across, the thickly timbered Rocky Knob. To the south-west is the Dead Horse Gap and a little further south another range in which the river rises. To the left in the distance is the Jindabyne Valley. The north-western side of the valley on which we stand is known as the Kangaroo Ridge, terminated in the south by the peak of Ram's Head.

The first hundred feet of the run (if you go straight) is very gentle and misleading. Once on to the slope proper, however, it loses all pretence of gentleness and drops sharply away. About four hundred feet down there is then a tendency to flatten out and here you strike the trees for the first time. These can be left well alone if

desired and a good run goes down a valley that can be enjoyed by all comers. For the more intrepid, steep and difficult ways can be found through the trees with as many obstacles as the wildest could desire. This particular part of the ski-ing slope terminates in a tree-lined valley at about 1600 feet from the top. From here on Bob Arnott and a few supporters have cut out a track to take the ski-ing further down still, giving 1900 feet in all, about 4950 feet above sea level. This last part through the trees is not difficult.

In 1953 the Australian and State Championships were held here for the first time. The run was named by Bob Arnott the "George Chisholm Downhill Course" in appreciation of the latter's efforts to further ski-ing in Australia. It turned out to be a magnificent racecourse, providing all the necessary variations to make a first-class downhill. It ended with 1600 feet of running over steep and not so steep slopes, through

trees and over bumps and ridges. Next year, with luck, it will be the full 1900 feet.

Seen from below, the charm of true Australian ski-ing can be fully appreciated. Away from the cut trail the snow gums are so thick that penetration is well nigh impossible. Out of the nearly continuous wind of the higher ridges it is wonderfully quiet and, incidentally, a nicer place to have lunch on the Snowy Mountains would be difficult to find.

This leads to another very important point. It is seldom that the Thredbo Valley would not be skiable as far as wind and weather are concerned. Fog and blizzard lose their force in these sheltered regions. As for snow conditions, I feel that in general they are better than those of the main range.

All that has been said up to date deals with the past and present. Far more important is the future of the ski-ing of this valley. Here, I believe, is the makings of the ski-ing conditions that will enable Australians to compete successfully in world-

peak at only a little over 7000 feet, and a reliable snow line at a little under 5000 feet, we are restricted in our downhill courses to the few slopes between these altitudes with the necessary steepness and continuity. Of the slopes that fulfil these conditions, the Thredbo is the only one with a real future, accessible in mid-winter and yet with variety of terrain and the necessary steepness.

To open up the slope effectively a ski lift of some sort is essential—and it will need to be a big one. In turn, this is out of the question until a road is built up the Thredbo by the Government. This is actually the proposed route of the road to Victoria over the Dead Horse Gap, but when this will be made remains anyone's guess. Perhaps private enterprise with the necessary backing will accomplish this.

Until a lift is built, however, we still have a wonderful ski slope of comparative accessibility from the Chalet. Let it be hoped that not in the too far distant future it will be unnecessary to go to Europe to find slopes on which to learn to compete in international downhill.