

BLACK COCKATOOS AND A SKI LODGE

By ELYNE MITCHELL.

PROBABLY one of the requisites for a well run family ski lodge is a mother who likes cooking and does not like to ski—if she skies—not a mother who is passionately addicted to the sport herself!

Our family is badly off that way.

However, on the other side of the ledger, if mother is absolutely crazy to go skiing, she will put up with a few unexpected inconveniences if they do not upset the ski schedule too much. Unexpected inconveniences can occur even at a gas-and-sewerage-and-electricity joint.

Imagine a lovely new lodge (not ours unfortunately) with gleaming gas stove, gay crockery, dunlopillow cushions and chairs, wood floor and nice mats, Onkaparinga blankets, innerspring mattresses, showers, gas heaters, and a superb view of the ski run through plate glass windows! Imagine the sun pouring into it through these windows! Imagine the sigh of pleasure going up from a family arriving there in a convalescent state after influenza.

A hasty check ascertained that the sewerage was not completely frozen. Only two out of three of them failed to work. The hand basins were frozen solid. The next inquiry indicated that there was gas in cylinders.

Imagine how much we enjoyed a cup of coffee while we watched the smooth wadeln dance of the skiers down the opposite slope!

Beds had to be made for three young children and two adults—sheets, pillow slips, the difficulty of tucking in top banks with heavy inner spring mattresses. *Were those pale blue Onkaparingas and innersprings going to be commensurately more comfortable than a sleeping bag on a mattress on the floor at Pretty Plain?*

Darkness crept in before the beds were made.

"I'm sorry," said Tom's voice, "but something has happened to the electricity."

We had torches, of course, and a gas light in the living room threw a little light by which to eat.

"With a torch, I may be able to see what is wrong with the hot water system," said the same lugubrious voice.

The torch failed to make this problem clear.

Eventually I got the small ones of the family, somewhat unwashed but well fed, tucked into bed by torchlight.

I have often read the claim of people in the drought-stricken Out Back that one can get perfectly clean in a basin of water. At least in the Out Back they probably have not got a white-hard frost outside while they have that scrubby wash. There was no heating in the bathroom. *In the old days at White's or Pretty Plain we used to carry the basin in by the roaring fire.*

"What about the fridgidaire?" I asked, when the light had come from natural sources the next day. I was thinking of the packets of frozen peas I had brought, and the sausages.

"It needs metho to light it, and someone's left the cork off the metho bottle"

"I know," I said. "Bingo! It's evaporated, and we can't light the fridg!"

"That's right, and there's no metho to be bought in the village."

The day that had dawned and brought us light was the Sabbath—not a day of rest for the staff at Thredbo. No one had a moment to do anything about our electricity—but the snow was lovely for ski-

ing and the sun shone. I could put up with most things for that skiing.

The night drifted into the luxurious lodge softly and quietly, just as it used to drift into the old mountain huts. We washed up with kettles of hot water. I carried kettles to the bathroom and washed the children.

On Monday, by lunch time our electricity was going again. Some thoughtless person had seen fit to throw an even grander master-switch than the one in the lodge. The Grand Master switch lived in a kind of fuse box of whose existence we knew nothing. It was outside, and on the opposite side of the house to the one to which we had been formally introduced.

As regards the hot water service, Bill Farrington told us that no one nearer than Jindabyne knew anything about them. As it was not ours we did not like to tinker with it. We borrowed showers from friends—and discussed wedeln under the steaming water.

That night we had light—masses of light—and lucky it was, too, because the smallest was smitten with gastric influenza—not the thing to have away from home!

"Better keep the children in bed a bit longer," said the lugubrious voice, next morning. "We've run out of gas, so there are no heaters."

The lodge was very cold. *It was at the Grey Mare hut that I slept across the hearth and threw on another log whenever the frost crept in.*

By mid-morning two grinning men had ridden the gas cylinders down the steep snow to the lodge. That day, in the queue for the chair lift, I heard of Steve, who was a wizard with hot water services. In the afternoon Steve persuaded ours to go. We also got some metho with which to light the fridg. The beautiful lodge was beautiful indeed.

We entertained our niece and nephew for drinks. We lay back in comfortable chairs in the living room that was warmed by the gas heaters. We cooked ourselves a pleasant meal. We discussed

wedeln, for that day I had had a lesson my first for twenty-one years, and I had enjoyed myself enormously.

Next day, even with school work to be done, we got out earlier—cooking and washing up were so much quicker with hot water! The snow was visibly retreating, and the temperature very high. Soon a wind started blowing down the valley, sometimes switching right round, sometimes tearing over the tops. In the afternoon nine black cockatoos flew over the trail crying, crying. By four o'clock the chair lift had to be stopped because of the force of the wind.

"My aneroid is steady," said Tom when the children and I got home, "but the black cockatoos must be right."

The lodge was very snug and comfortable, and felt even more so as the wind started to howl and buffet. The niece, the nephew, and other friends came in and yarned, their voices dropping into the strange quietness that exists in an airtight, warm house when the storm is starting to roar outside.

The children were snug in bed. We had had dinner when Jean and Joe came in, and we sat telling yarns, evoking the mountains and old, gay, happy, far-off days. We laughed and laughed, and the wind roared down the valley, shaking the warm lodge.

How the wind used to shake the old chalet at Charlotte's Pass.

"An old-fashioned night," Tom remarked, and then we went on to talk of touring to Lake Albina in the spring.

"Whoooo!" the wind howled.

"Those black cockatoos really meant something," Tom muttered.

We all stopped and listened to the wind. Then:

"CRASH!"

I saw the plate glass glistening as it flew past Jean's head, almost earmarking her with a slice off the near ear.

"BANG!" The door blew wide open.

"Crash! Tinkle! Crash! Tinkle!" More of the glass came flying in.

We grabbed the curtain and held it, billowing in the gale, while the two men rushed out on to the verandah and pulled out the remaining glass. If it had not been for the masonite that Joe hammered over the empty window, perhaps the lodge would have been blown away on the blast! At least one of the children had the same idea, because he kept waking and saying he wished we were at the Ski Club Lodge!

Jean and Joe sat with us drinking reviving mugs of black coffee, and telling wilder and wilder yarns of things that had happened in the mountains in the old days! We were used to wild nights. *Do you remember the camp on the Pinnacle of the Grey Mare Ridge, and that one on the top of The Long Spur?*

Soon after midnight the rain started pelting down. It was still thrashing, lashing, and roaring in the waterfalls everywhere, next morning. The time had come for dwellers on the other side of the Murray to pack up their traps

and get going, because there would undoubtedly be a very big flood.

Of course we had to leave the lodge clean. If you have a gas stove you must clean it. If you have shower rooms, basins and the rest, all must be washed, floors too—not like leaving the Cascades hut, or Pinnabar, or Geehi, where one simply swept straight out the door. We mopped, we swept, washed, packed, folded blankets. We switched off everything that should be switched off (and nothing that should not). Tom made seventeen perilous journeys down to the Land Rover, trying hard not to slip and slide down the hillside which was running with water.

Then we made a bolt for the road home before the river beat us.

The first day when the sun shone and after the flood subsided, we were up for the day again. Perhaps, in the long run, it may pay to have a mother who's crazy about skiing.

PILGRIMAGE TO WHITE'S RIVER.

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(Paddy Pallin's idea of a lightweight towel) and the effect was rather like a dance of the seven veils. If the rats put on a performance that night we slept too heavily to take much notice, although Rex insisted that they held a square dance in the front room. Perhaps our orgie of mixed dishes, plus his bath, may have had their effect on Rex!

Next morning, after three days of clear skies and perfect weather, we were greeted by drizzling rain. We did manage to ski about a mile down the valley but the other four miles or so to Guthega Power Station were just plain foot slogg- ing in the mud.

And so ended our tour when we left the dazzling snows behind us and we came back to earth again.

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