

Ski-ing in Southern Tasmania

By Miss Ida McAulay.

The Ski Club of Tasmania knows two kinds of ski-ing—the day on Mt. Wellington, and the long week-end, or longer trip, to the ski-ing grounds at National Park.

First let me describe a day on the Mountain. The Mountain, to Hobart people, means Mt. Wellington. At about ten o'clock on Sunday morning, ski-booted and appropriately clad, the party starts from town in cars, which wind up the seven miles of road from town to the Springs, 2,500 feet above sea level. The Mountain, speckled or spread with white, may stand out clearly straight above the road, its drifts unveiled and open to the critical gaze of the prospective ski runners: but it may be completely hidden by mists, or again, in captious mood, clear one minute and clouded the next in a sudden squall of snow which scuds over from behind, from the north-west or south-west.

At the Springs cars are left, skis and sticks unshipped from their special carriers on the running-boards, packs adjusted, and the ascent on foot begins. After a fresh fall feathery snow may be lying here and covering bushes and trees, but the more permanent snow is found higher up, and conditions are seldom favourable for ski-ing to the top. An hour, or an hour and a half on the zig-zag track takes one to the Summit. It is never a dull walk. Below, in a constantly changing variety of colour, lie the lower hills, the town with its wharves, and the fretted waterways of the Derwent estuary. Drifting mists shroud or reveal the scenes. In contrast to the snow on top the colours take on a more vivid, deeper tone. Through the mists above, the head of the mountain looms portentously, or perhaps its snowy outline is cut crisply against the sky.

About two hours after leaving the town the party reaches what is known among them as "the front drift." Here there are some fair runs which make a practice ground for turns. In addition there are numbers of other slopes, and when conditions are not good on the front drift the party moves off to better slopes. Subsequent proceedings are often veiled in mist, and the party breaks up into twos and threes, selecting their favourite routes to the more distant drifts, or making cross-country dashes across the open sectors.

At lunch time the whole party foregathers. There is no specifically mentioned time or place, but everyone knows the particular fancies of the lunch and billy car-

riers, and consequently they naturally indicate where to go, and hunger tells the time with sufficient accuracy. A large fire is lit and the conversation is apt to turn to ski-ing technicalities. After lunch the party generally keeps together and devotes its attention to more or less serious practice of turns, the more expert good-naturedly giving demonstrations and advice to beginners.

Sunset, sometimes moonrise, finds the party filing in scattered groups over the crest of the mountain. No matter how often this happens it is always a wonderful experience. The contrast is so sudden. One comes unexpectedly to the edge of a white winter world, and, looking over, beholds a delicate opal-tinted scene below. Around are changing clouds, cold rare air, the austerity of the mountain top—below, a mild and beautiful fairyland, framed in an amphitheatre of rock and snow. A last quick run down over the front drift, and then skis are removed, and the sometimes rather difficult descent down the frozen, slippery track begun. Lower down, ice turns to slush, and the pace becomes quicker. The foreground is dark, the town picked out with twinkling orange lights. Reflections shine across the water. Thoughts turn towards the warm hearths of home.

Such is a day's ski-ing on Mt. Wellington. For those in Hobart during a good winter season it is always at the door.

The trip to National Park is rather different. The Park gates are forty-eight miles from Hobart, and the journey thither can be made by car or train. There are two distinct ski-ing centres at National Park. The first is the group of Government huts at Lake Fenton, to which organised parties are arranged by the Government Tourist Bureau for most of the long week-ends that come in the winter. The organised parties are catered for, but it is possible for private parties to hire huts at Lake Fenton, and these have to make their own arrangements as regards food and packing from the Park gates to the huts.

The second centre is the Ski Club Hut at Twilight Tarn, about four miles further out. This accommodation hut is very conveniently placed for all the best ski running in the Park. The trip to the Club Hut takes the best part of a day from Hobart, but the return journey can easily be made in half a day. Enthusiastic members who cannot leave town in the morning sometimes start in the afternoon, or evening, and, walking from the Park gates in the dark, or by moonlight, arrive at the Hut about midnight. This saves a day, and is well worth while, for the more hardy who have limited time at their disposal.

The Club sends out tinned stores to the Hut by pack

horses before the first fall of snow, so that members when they go out only have to carry their supplies of fresh food, i.e., meat, butter, and bread. It is the custom for each member to carry his or her own portion of fresh food. Old-established members have by this time accumulated a considerable number of personal belongings at the Hut, so that it is unnecessary to carry much in the way of equipment.

It is usual to take horses from the Park gates to the Fenton Huts, so that the long pull up the six and a half miles of track can be made very easily. From Fenton onwards ski-ing conditions should prevail, but during thaws it is often necessary to walk at least part of the next four and a half miles to the Ski Club Hut.

Again, there is nothing dull or monotonous about the journey. From the Park gates the track enters myrtle forest. Enclosed in greenery, one mounts steadily amongst ferns and sassafrass, myrtles and leatherwood. Higher the forest changes from myrtle to eucalypt, and one travels through the glistening, streaked trunks of swamp and cedar gums. Higher still one meets the more stunted mountain growths, and at last the Fenton Huts, and lunch. By this time the party has strung out considerably. The first to arrive light the fire and put on billies. The snow may be lying here, and skis can be transferred from shoulders to feet. The party, once more consolidated, moves off without too much delay, for it is better to get in by daylight.

The next mile skirts the Lake, which may be frozen over. Quiet Corner, a name which speaks for itself, is a pretty part of the Lake. The pine trees along its edge give a Canadian effect to the scene. The track follows the western side of the Lake, but when the snow is deep the eastern side makes the quickest and most pleasant route. With the Lake behind there is a wind-swept moor to cross. From this moor the Newdigate Range can be seen a mile or two away, rising steep and white, or flushed with mauve and pink—a sight that raises a hymn of delight in the heart of the skier. To-morrow he will spend the day sporting on those slopes. A steep run down to Lake Webster calls for his best skill in track running. Two rivers to cross, and then the last lap. This last steep climb skirts the lower reaches of Valhalla Valley—a well-chosen name, given by one of the members of the Club. Suddenly the hill ends, and an open clearing appears. There is a little frozen tarn on one hand, and across the larger tarn ahead, the Ski Hut, looking rather like a cottage in one of Grimm's fairy stories. Compact and home-like, and smoothly roofed

with white, it shelters under the lee of a wooded hill. The first comers see it at twilight across an unspoilt stretch of snow. The tired stragglers are greeted with a comforting orange glow from the windows. The midnight travellers find it quietly asleep under the moonlight.

The members of the Ski Club are greatly attached to their Hut. It is picturesque, convenient, comfortable, and home-like. It is also situated excellently from the all-important view of ski-ing. Practically at the door good nursery slopes run into the tarn, which when frozen over and covered with snow makes an excellent run out for practices. Half a mile away, on the track to the Newdigate Ranges, there are good sheltered slopes with a cleared run, where Telemarks can often be practised when the higher slopes can only offer hard packed snow. These slopes can also be used when blizzard conditions make the higher regions more or less impossible. Above these a rise of a thousand feet takes one to the top of the Newdigate Pass. From here there are good runs over into Valhalla Valley, or in the other direction down on to what is known as the Tarn Shelf, a name that again speaks for itself. It forms a sort of terrace strung with tarns, which encircles the face of the Newdigate Range. Very steep slopes run down into the tarns, which are often frozen and snow-covered. When conditions are good, really thrilling ski-ing can be experienced on these slopes. Continuing on the higher level from the top of the Pass, day expeditions with good long runs can be made to the top of Mt. Field West, Florentine Peak, or down into the Hayes Valley, and considerable variation in snow conditions can be found in a single day.

The scenery is for the most part on a grand scale. There are magnificent views westwards from Mt. Field West, the top of the Newdigate Pass, and from another mountain known to the Ski Club as the Watcher, whence range upon range of snow-tipped mountains can be seen extending ever westwards towards the coast. The country has been carved by glacial action into large, sudden and unexpected shapes. Deep cirques cut into the mountains, until they nearly meet each other. Lakes and tarns are flung down here, there, and everywhere, in the most unlikely places. They seem to hang in the sides of the hills, and even to balance precariously on the very summit of a range. Lakes and streams fill the valleys. Stiff green pine trees fringe some of the tarns, and sparsely scatter a few of the lower slopes. Pandanus incongruously poke their heads above the snow. Such scenery adds to the joy of ski-ing.

The best time, perhaps, is the evening, when from somewhere out on the mountains the homing run is begun. No more climbing—it is practically all down hill. The skis by this time seem to have come alive. They do things of their own accord. They make a skittering noise over the frozen snow. A few glorious swoops, interspersed with gentler slopes, and easy switchback runs, a little track running, and then out on to the top of the nursery slope, and the Hut seen at twilight across the tarn.

In a normal winter, such is the ski-ing enjoyed by the members of the Ski Club of Tasmania in their long weekends and the August vacation.
