

TASMANIAN SECTION

The Tasmanian Season of 1931.

By G. T. F. Chapman.

Good snow and poor weather were the outstanding characteristics of the last season. Heavy falls occurred throughout the highlands of the State in July, and these and succeeding storms built up most extensive drifts that lasted well into the New Year. Quite reasonable drift skiing was available up to Christmas. Unfortunately, bad weather and impracticable icy surfaces prevailed during the days scheduled for the S.C.T. Club Championships in mid-August. This circumstance and the inability of members to prolong their visits made the abandonment of the meeting necessary.

Despite adverse weather, however, a number of exploratory trips were undertaken, and the first skiing ever witnessed on the Hartz Mountains was done during a week-end visit in September. The Hartz snows and the two-roomed hut were found to be quite good, and the trip one that is well worth while after a reasonable fall.

In the North the Launceston Club was active, and after a succession of difficult trips in bad weather opened up the main plateau of Ben Lomond, finally climbing Legge's Tor (5,159 ft.) on ski (readers are referred to the account of these trips given below). Although Ben Lomond is not a skiing resort in comparison to National Park, it has some fine slopes on the eastern face of Legge's Tor. Lack of shelter and accommodation are the chief drawbacks at present, but the proposed hut and calm weather will make the "Ben" a valuable asset, particularly to Launceston residents. Ben Lomond is some 40 miles from Launceston and accessible on week-end trips.

At Hobart, local conditions were also improved by new tracks on Mount Wellington, and these gave a good impetus to novices' activities. The S.C.T. closed its season, as usual, with a dinner and annual meeting in December, when the officers for 1932 were elected (see p. 191.).

The Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club

[*Note.—By courtesy of Mr. F. Smithies, of the N.T.A.C., and Mr. Hall, its Honorary Secretary, we are enabled to give the following account of the Club and the ski country in which it operates. Portion of this account comes from Mr. Hall's report, portion from an article by Mr. Smithies in the Launceston "Weekly Courier," and the remainder from a letter from him to the Editor "A.S.Y.B."*]

The Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club was formed, towards the close of 1929, at the instance of the Launceston Fifty Thousand League and a constitution closely following that of the Ski Club of Victoria was adopted. For its early activities the Club turned to Pine Lake, on the Central Highlands, where a good motor road reaches an altitude of 4,000 feet, within 45 miles of Launceston. Lack of snow, however, in the 1930 winter at once made evident the unsuitability of this field for good skiing. As a result of the experience, numerous exploratory trips were made in 1931 to other snowfields, including The Western Bluff, Chudleigh Lakes and Ironstone Mountain (all on the Western Tiers), Cradle Mountain and the Northern and Southern ends of Ben Lomond.

We are a young Club, of course, and all members are only novices, although some of the younger lads are showing good promise. Unfortunately, we lack expert instruction, and have to depend largely on book knowledge, which makes it a fairly slow business. Any lack of experience, however, is made up in enthusiasm, and we have a keen lot of members. So far no races or tests have been held, as we have been testing out the various snowfields adjacent to Launceston, with a view to settling on the most suitable spot for a headquarters. As indicated in the article by G. T. F. Chapman in the 1931 *Year Book*, excellent snow conditions exist in the more distant mountains, but lack of communication prevents much use being made of them at present, although some day they will be properly opened up and exploited. Cradle Mountain is, perhaps, the most easy of access of these distant fields, and, as an accommodation house already exists there, it is not by any means an impossible proposition. For the past few years a party of us has made a point of spending about a fortnight there in the depth of winter.

Our concern, however, is to find a good locality fairly close to Launceston, so that week-end, or even day, trips would be possible. Of course, there is the Pine Lake area, to the north of Great Lake, to which there is a good motor road, rising to over 4,000 ft. elevation. This is perfectly

easy, for we motor right into the snow in about an hour and a half's run from the city, and then there is the great plateau of the Western Tiers to explore. Some winters it is completely covered and forms one vast unbroken snowfield for months at a time. In others it might be uncertain and spasmodic, with plenty of snow one week and practically none the next. In any event, the area is not altogether suitable, owing to lack of slopes, though quite interesting for touring. A little further west, also on the Western Tiers, is Mount Ironstone, which offers much



Photo:

F. Smithies.

Barn Bluff (5114 feet), from Cradle Plateau, Tasmania.

better conditions, but the approach is by way of foot tracks only from the low country, and, until it is made more easy of access, it cannot be extensively used.

During the past winter we concentrated on Ben Lomond, which I believe will provide the best facilities within reasonable distance of Launceston. It has upwards of 1,000 ft. extra elevation, as compared with the Western Tiers, is generally permanently covered during the winter months, and has some excellent slopes. We ascended it from almost all points of the compass in an effort to find the best route for a permanent track, and have finally decided on an ap-

proach by way of Upper Blessington, 34 miles by motor from Launceston (1,600 ft.). At about the 4,000 ft. level, after some three miles of fairly stiff climbing, we have selected a good hut site. Timber for this is being split at the present time, and voluntary workers will run up the building—a single 20 x 18 ft. room to start with—before winter sets in. Horses will be able to negotiate the track to the hut, and from there it will be half an hour's climb to the summit (4,500 ft.). The highest point (5,160 ft.), is then approached by easy grades. This is known as "Legge's



Photo:

F. Smithies.

Accommodation House in Cradle Valley. Cradle Mt. (5069 ft.) in the background.

Peak," or "Legge's Tor" (it is the highest point in Tasmania), and on the south-east side steep slopes fall away into a deep gorge, providing splendid slopes of almost any gradient. Here the snow lies right through the winter, and even in early December we found drifts large enough to give one plenty of practice in turns.

At least we shall have decent camping conditions, only a few hours' journey from the city, within easy reach of plenty of snow, and we are looking forward with the keenest anticipation to the coming winter.

(*Mr. Smithies' article describes an earlier trip to Ben Lomond by a route different from that mentioned before. The party camped at 3,500 feet in a snowstorm, some in a 7 x 5 trapper's hut and others in a light tent.*)

Breakfast over, a start was made for the top of the mountain. Arctic conditions still prevailed, snow falling continuously, and the gale up aloft increasing in strength as the day wore on. About half a mile from camp the recently-selected site for the Alpine Club Hut was inspected and approved. Travelling upwards through the timbered slopes was a sheer delight as each new vista of loveliness opened out before us. The soft, powdery, and comparatively dry snow was not sufficiently deep to impede progress, and it was not long before, at the 3,900 ft. level, the timber line was left behind and a short rocky climb ended in a long level platform about half a mile wide, covered with stunted growth and light scrub (4,100 ft.). Traversing this, ski were donned, and the long, gradually ascending gully ahead presented no difficulties, except for the roaring wind which now began to manifest itself in no uncertain manner. Coats, wraps, balaclavas, and everything warm were brought into requisition, and the summit was reached at approximately 5,000 feet. Here the full force of the storm was encountered, the gale howling with demoniac fury, apparently straight from the South Pole, and making travelling almost impossible. Adopting the line of least resistance, a northerly course was set, and, like ships under sail, the party careered gaily across the high, snow-covered plateau. It had been intended to properly explore the northern half of the mountain for the purpose of locating suitable drifts and good slopes, but it was soon realised that under the conditions prevailing anything of that nature was out of the question. Indeed, with ski tracks being obliterated by the drifting snow as quickly as they were made, and visibility limited to a few yards in any direction, it would have been a matter of considerable risk to have ventured far in any case, and before long it was decided to abandon the summit for the more sheltered slopes of the gap by which the ascent had been accomplished. Such a decision was far more easily made than carried out. It would be difficult to imagine more strenuous and trying conditions for travelling than battling into the teeth of the gale on the return, the driving snowstorm, mingling with the flurry of powder snow whipped up from the surface, proving almost unbearable in its cutting and blinding effect. Actually no great hardship was involved, as the distance was short; but bending to the icy blast with heads bowed, the wind itself providing the only sense of direction, the party reached the gap after just an ex-



Photo:

F. Smithies.

Camp at 3500 ft. on Ben Lomond, Tasmania.

hilarating taste of what it would mean to face any considerable journey in such circumstances.

Officers for 1932-33 are:—President, C. F. Monds; Vice-Presidents, G. E. Perrin, C. K. Stackhouse; Captain, F. Smithies; Committee, I. Carr, J. G. Branagan, G. C. McKinlay, jun., W. F. Mitchell, H. L. von See; Hon. Treasurer, S. V. Tilley; Hon. Secretary, R. G. Hall, 7 Dowling Street, Launceston.

SKI CLUB OF TASMANIA.

Officers of the Ski Club of Tasmania, 1932:—President, H. R. Hutchinson; Vice-President, V. C. Smith; committee, D. L. Anderson, W. T. A. Crookall, G. R. Brettingham-Moore, E. Ward, Miss N. L. Hutchison, Professor A. L. McAulay; Hon. Secretary and Treasurer, G. T. F. Chapman, 212 Davey Street, Hobart.

