

The Hartz Mountains of Tasmania

By G. T. F. Chapman.

A slight darkening of the bright spring sunlight, a chilliness as a light cloud partially obscured the sun, brought us back to the purpose of our trip and, with a little involuntary shiver, my companion buttoned up his shirt collar. I looked at my watch: "After eleven; time we got down." It was time, but we both continued to gaze at the skyline of blue and purple peaks and ridges, mantled in gleaming snow. "Pieton runs a long way south." "Yes," I replied mechanically, for I was speculating on the ski-ing possibilities of Mt. Weld, the difficulty of traversing his densely wooded slopes and whether the snow would be worth an expedition. "It's getting cold and starting to haze over; let's go." With that we pulled our rucksack cords tight and gave a final glance at the South-Western Ranges. "Still four, three hundred," I remarked, returning the aneroid to its case. "That's pretty accurate," my friend commented and then we scrambled down some three hundred feet of loose, broken rock to the topmost tongue of a snow drift, where our ski awaited us like expectant dogs impatient on their master's return.

We had just climbed Mount Hartz and below us, some four thousand three hundred feet down, the slumbering Huon, with its orchards and homesteads, lay basking and dreaming in the warm September sun. The roofs of Geeveston were plainly to be seen, while, further to the south, the wide sweep of the Southern Ocean's horizon faded away into a hazy sky. Yesterday we had

lunched in Hobart and after a pleasant forty-mile run we had parked our car in an old mill at South Creek, the road terminus and the starting point of the nine-mile pack-track to the Hartz Hut. Here, on the top of Mt. Hartz, the Hut was hidden by an undulating spur or fold of the moor that stretched for a mile and a half between us and our last night's hospice. The Hut was good, even palatial as bush huts go, being floored, lined and fitted with a complete door and chimney for each of its two rooms. Bunks too; in fact a haven of rest, not to be lightly scorned. We honoured it with prolonged patronage, until nine in the morning. This, mark you, was not sloth; far from it. It was but a mark of appreciation to the Hut, its builders and their



skill. However, we had seen on our arrival that the moors were thawed out and we knew the day's ski-ing would be restricted to the drifts and side-slopes of Mt. Hartz and the ridge. This ridge straggles along in a northerly and westerly line, with open and undulating moors on its east side.

On leaving the Hut we had carried our ski across the moors to the foot of the pass, in the ridge at the foot of Mt. Hartz. Here connected snow-drifts gave a snow track up on to the peak and we easily zig-zagged our way up some 700 feet, to within approximately 300 feet of the cairn at 4,300. Thus, in side-tracks and herring-boning, did we achieve the first ski-ing done on the Hartz, on Sunday, 5th September, 1931.

When we had looked down over the peak, towards the south-eastern side a welcome surprise spread before us, a cirque valley full of good hard snow, snugly sheltered from the morning sun and northerly winds by a bowed spur that extended away from the main ridge. The western side of this cirque was the slope of Mt. Hartz, the only outlet being to the south-east. As a result "The Dougery," as we called it, caught and retained a great deal

of the blown-over snow from Mt. Hartz and in its shady and sheltered keeping it accumulated from fall to fall until the late spring. Although there had not been a fall for two weeks and mild weather had thawed out the exposed moors, the Dougery was still well filled with good snow, its steep and varying sides promising all manner of good running. We had looked, gloated, and then, knowing that we had found good snow slopes, turned our attention to the splendid westward view, now so clearly pictured in the morning sunlight.

With a final snick of his heel-clips my partner straightened up and with a couple of powerful lunges was sizzling down the fast, granulated snow; a swing to the right and he vanished over the edge of the ridge. A loose buckle delayed me some seconds and when I came across the ridge he was sixty feet below, at the bottom of a steep drift, and taxi-ing across to repeat his descent on a second big connected drift that leads to the saddle overlooking the Dougery valley. Linked stem-Christies were the order of things, giving good practice, forcing snappy and accurate turns. We were soon on the crest of the saddle with open snow stretching out to the bottom of our cirque valley. Our ski grizzled as we shot down the still frozen bank; a quickening, surging and rush of frozen air as we hurtled down, an undulation, a dip, a rise, a frozen boss (which nearly threw me head first) and then a soft spot and, with a fatal waver, balance and control failed and I took a glissading fall. Up and on, but now with wider tracks, to run out on the floor of our discovery. High above the intense blue of the spring sky; the warm, brown, lichen and weathered rocks and the intensely clear snow showed the height we had so quickly descended. The aneroids now showed three thousand two hundred feet, indicating a run down of some six hundred feet or more. The Dougery turned out to be even better than anticipated. The high protecting wall of Mt. Hartz to the west and the sheltering spur to the north-west broke all the wind. The sunshine glared into the Dougery now and made it a wonderfully comforting valley.

"Another biscuit?" "No thanks." And, stiffly rising, I collected up the scattered gear from our lunch rock. It was now some two hours or more since we had arrived at the Dougery, and after excellent ski-ing we had lunched preparatory to returning to the Hut across the moor. Some last runs, and then we slowly climbed up the side to the saddle of the sheltering spur. Here we felt the rising wind, but now we quickly dropped, traversing from drift to drift, till we finally ran out on to the Badger grass at the foot of the pass at the base of Mt. Hartz, close to where we started the ascent some hours earlier. Hurrying on, we soon crossed the moor, not delaying to try the numerous practice and nursery drifts that ran invitingly close to us from the main ridge. At the Hut we had a snack and assembled our gear, marching off on the homeward trail at about a quarter to four and eventually arriving at our car some minutes before half-past seven.

The Hartz Hut is built close to the edge of the shelf-like plateau of moors that runs round the northern and eastern sides of the main ridge of the mountains. This plateau shelf rises from some two thousand eight hundred feet at the north, to about three thousand two hundred feet at the southern end, near the foot of the pass; undulations, streams and creeks from the tarns, as well as small belts of timber, add variety and the shelf varies from three-quarters to a quarter of a mile in width. The hut is about the centre of the moor, so is admirably located, allowing easy tours to the moors, as well as being reasonably handy to the good drifts on the ridge, the Dougery and Mt. Hartz. As the ridge runs in a north-south direction, the moors on the eastern side are sheltered to a great extent from the westerly gales and there seems to be a good number of drifts and practice slopes that should be also well protected from more southerly weather. On the western side of the main ridge the mountain slopes away fairly rapidly into the gullies that form the Picton Valley and, apart from the ridges round Lake Hartz, the west side seems too rough and exposed for good ski-ing.

The Hartz have a "Hoodoo" and a little marble stone, a hundred yards from the Hut, tells how a party returning from prospecting in the Picton Valley were exhausted by a blizzard that broke upon them when crossing the ridge. It is this liability to sudden bad weather and sea mists that is the drawback to the ski-ing possibilities, thaws cutting out the moors, and mists waiting to cloak the drifts and slopes from sight. All this renders the Hartz snow far more uncertain than that of the more inland ranges of similar height.

The track into the mountains was cut a number of years ago, but the popularity of the mountains has suffered considerably with the opening up of the Mt. Field National Park. Again, the famous Geeveston Mills are no longer running and the forests no longer produce the scenes of timber-trains and hauling teams. Only small box-case timber is cut and the tram rails and lines have been torn up or are rotting to decay. All these factors, as well as fires and their depredations to the once beautiful dense scrub round the lakes, have tended to cause the Hartz to be overlooked from a snow point of view; but as they do not matter from the skier's viewpoint, there is quite a case for week-end visits after good snowfalls.

The peaks and snow country of the Hartz are clearly visible from Mt. Wellington on fine days and, after a little experience in snow-craft, it is quite possible to have a very good idea of the conditions likely to be found on the mountains from observations from Mt. Wellington.

The time required for a visit varies with the tastes and capacities of the people concerned. However, to all able-bodied people two days is sufficient to try out the mountain; three seems the ideal.

The visitor has to take all food, bedding and gear with him, but, as pack-horses can be got out to within a mile or so of the Hut, according to snow conditions, the trip can be made quite easy. In fine weather horses are taken to the Hut. By motor-

ing to the road-end at South Creek (41 miles from Hobart) in, say, two hours, and walking to the Hut in another four and a half, a visit on Saturday and a return late on Sunday is quite practicable. The eight or nine miles of track are fairly good, though somewhat wet in places.

The Ski Club of Tasmania

The Ski Club of Tasmania has enjoyed another excellent year and, although members have not experienced a good snow season, a number of trips were made, both to Mount Wellington and to National Park, where the club Chalet was well patronised.

Owing to poor snow in August and the absence of a number of members club competitions were not held. Snow in National Park and all southern Tasmanian mountains was not good and, though July falls were very fair, they were not maintained or supported during August, mild weather and thaws cutting out a great deal of the not over-abundant July snow. In consequence, the later falls in September were not of great use, as they had little on which to accumulate. During the King's Birthday week-end some of the northern club members paid a visit to the Club Chalet at National Park, and this meeting resulted in the Tasmanian Ski Council constitution being started on its successful course. Later in the spring some members were able to accept the N.T.A.C.'s invitation to visit their Ben Lomond Chalet.

On account of the light snow in August the surface of Twilight Tarn, on whose shores the Club Chalet is built, was in good skating trim and as a side-line some very good days' skating were had. While hardly the business of the Club, skating is an



The Club Chalet, Twilight Tarn, National Park (3500 ft.).
A Spring Snow Scene, November, 1931.