

MOUNT RUFUS, TASMANIA

By D. Martin



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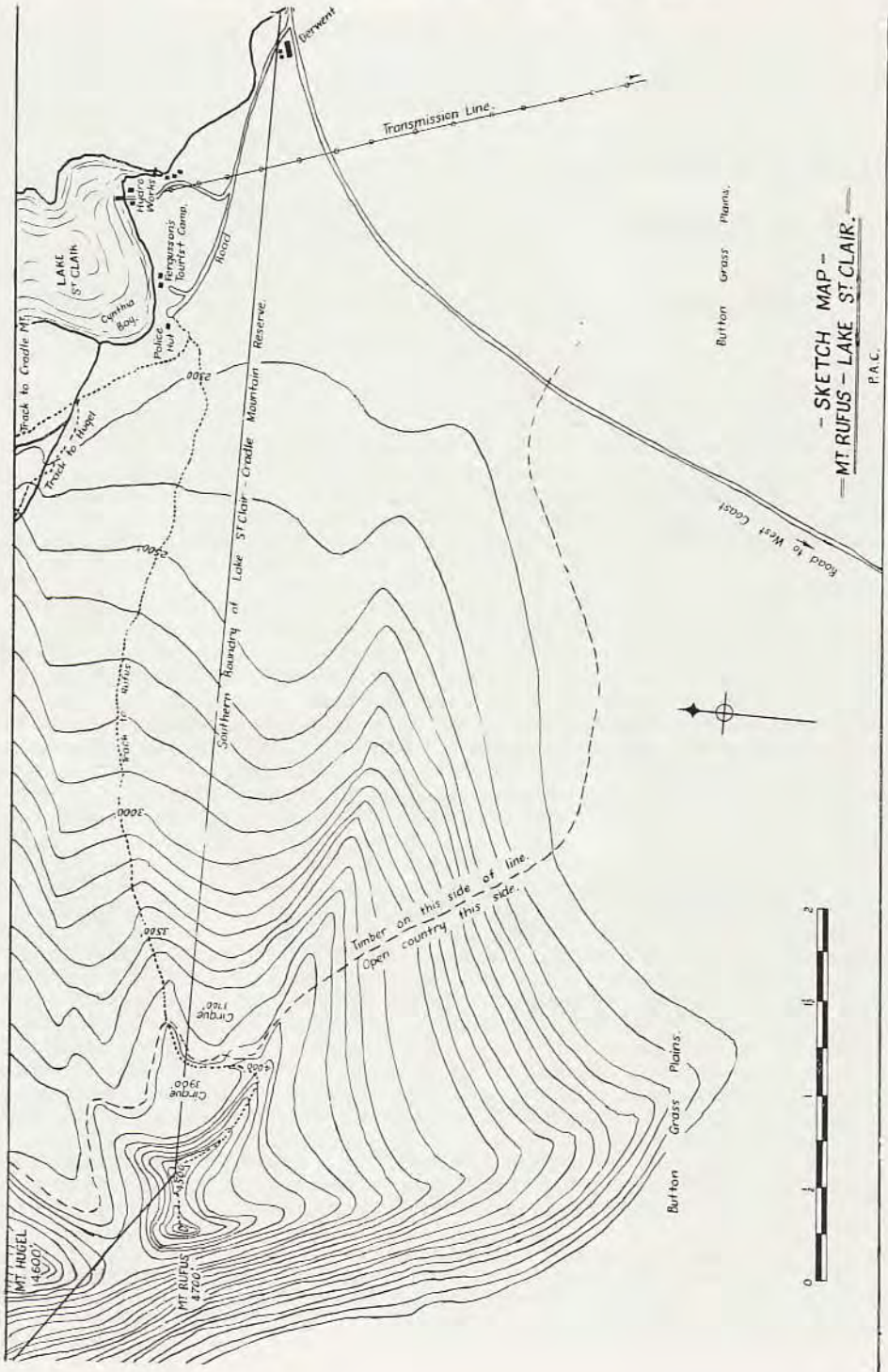
CLIMATIC factors tending to destroy snow in Southern Tasmania are those producing warm rains from the east and north-west, while most of the snow comes with antarctic depressions with wind from the west to south-west. The easterly rains which spoil so much of the snow on Mount Wellington, near the coast, seldom penetrate far inland, while north-west rain is more general; though it appears to do less damage in western areas. Snowfall is generally heavier towards the centre of the island than in the south-east.

The snow mountains lie between four and five thousand feet, which is too low to escape the warm rains above. Skiers are forced by the snow-gums on to the bleaker slopes to obtain open going. Country over 4,000 ft. is very broken and jagged and not sufficiently continuous to provide good shelter. Thus long slopes are rare, and steep slopes have no out-run.

The opening of the West Coast road from Hobart to Queenstown has made more accessible the mountains nearer the centre of the island away from the warm coastal rains, and, while most of these are too rugged, a few are promising, particularly Mount Rufus, which is at the southern end of Lake St. Clair Scenic Reserve. Rufus was first traversed on ski in 1933, when several parties made the ascent from the West Coast Road (see A.S.Y.B., 1934). They skied only on the south slopes, which are gradual, providing long easy runs, but not sufficient to draw skiers regularly away from the more accessible mountains. However, the discovery last season of steeper snow slopes on the east face of the mountain brings Mount Rufus back into prominence, particularly in view of the notable lack of racing slopes in Southern Tasmania. There is a long gentle slope of about 8 miles to the West Coast Road, a very steep and impracticable slope to the west, and steep slopes to the north and east. The eastern slope provides something all too rare in Southern Tasmania, a smooth 30 deg. slope of 700 ft. drop from 4,500 ft. with an out-run on to a small glacial plain. Given reasonable snow, it would appear possible to obtain a downhill racecourse of 700 ft. by combining the descent with a small amount of traverse. The main snow winds coming from the west to south-west deposit their snow rather well on this slope which is also sheltered.

Mount Rufus may be approached easily from either Fergusson's Camp at Cynthia Bay by a new track of about four miles, or from beyond the Navarre River Bridge on the West Coast Road, over generally open going for about eight miles.

In the former case, a four foot track of easy grade rises from the Lake at 2,400 ft. At present the track is rather too narrow for comfortable ski-ing, but could readily be improved. The latter route is considerable longer and distant from a base camp, but is quite easy going.



— SKETCH MAP —
 — MT RUFUS — LAKE ST. CLAIR. —
 P.A.C.

It is worth noting here that there is good accommodation at the Derwent Bridge Hotel, 4 miles by road from the Lake, while Fergusson's Camp at the Lake itself supplies beds in permanent tents and board of a most generous kind. The views from the summit are magnificent. To the west one looks across a 2,000 ft. gorge and Lakes Undine and Dixon to Mount Gell, with Frenchman's Cap and the Western Ranges in the background. To the north the jagged mass of Hugel and the peaks of the St. Clair Reserve; to the east to Mount Olympus and Lake St. Clair; to the south-east, down the valley of the Derwent, to Mount Wellington at Hobart (100 miles distant) and to the south the Rasselas Valley and the King William Ranges. Using Fergusson's Camp (3½ hours from Hobart by car) as a base, it is possible to do one and a half days' ski-ing in a week-end from Hobart, but before it can be used to advantage, hut accommodation at 3,800 ft. and an improved track are necessary. Plans for these are already in hand.