

Across the Bogongs

(By W. Waters.)

(From the "Year Book" of the Ski Club of Victoria.)

The proposed ten days' tour was to commence at Harrierville, with the ascent of Mount Feathertop, thence to Mount Hotham, via the Razorback, and thence across the Bogong High Plains to Glen Wills and Omeo, and to include a trip to Mount Fainter, and an attempt to ascend Mount Bogong if circumstances permitted—the total distance to be covered on ski being about seventy miles.

Messrs. Collings, Fawcett, Gibson, Robinson, Stewart and I were to comprise the personnel of the party, but, unluckily for Fawcett, an accident to his hands prevented him from starting. Gibson was to meet the party at Mount Hotham after competing in the ski championships.

There being no accommodation available, except at Mount Hotham, food and blankets had to be carried, and arrangements were made with a resident of the Bright district to pack out to Blair's Hut in the Upper Kiewa Valley about six days' supply of food, which would be picked up en route to Omeo.

One fine afternoon in August found us ascending the track to the bungalow on Feathertop. The snow line was well down into the valleys, and we were able to don the ski within two miles of Harrierville. Being in soft condition physically on the first day out, our movements were not too snappy, and the short winter day had departed, and a bright moon was rising over the hills, before we arrived, feeling not the brightest, but bearing appetites ready to break gastronomical records.

The bungalow was snowed in, but entrance was gained by burrowing a passage under the roof of the back verandah. There was no one in occupation, so we took possession.

Next day was bright and sunny, and we hoped to ascend Feathertop and reach Mount Hotham before night.

There had been a freeze during the night, and next morning the snow was firmly crusted. Sidling round the spur above the bungalow we had a few mild thrills from side-slips in shaded places, where the ski would not edge securely, but once into the open sunlight the crust

was softer. Under the bright morning sun Feathertop shone a dazzling white. For a full thousand feet below the summit the snow lay so deeply that not a tree or boulder to break its even surface could be detected.

Nearing the saddle between Feathertop and Little Feathertop, Collings, who was bringing up the rear, caught up, and informed us regretfully that an old injury to his thigh had re-asserted itself, and he could not proceed. This was unfortunate, and it was decided to return to the bungalow with him, and abandon for that day our plan of reaching Mount Hotham.



TAWONGA HUT. (August, 1927.)
E. Robertson is shown entering by means of the chimney—the only possible entrance.

Packs were dropped, and after a spell he was able to finish the climb to the crest.

A cornice overhanging for some distance along the summit prevented us approaching too near the edge of the steep fall into the Kiewa. The day being particularly fine, the view from our 6,300 feet of elevation was magnificent. Due to the severity of the winter, the mountain ranges far and wide seemed to be carrying heavy snow, and one overlooked hundreds of square miles of snow-covered country.

During the night the weather changed, and it commenced snowing, and the morning light revealed a dense fog and steadily-falling snow that obscured any object more than forty yards away.

Collings decided to return to Harrierville, as his leg was no better, but we pushed on. The higher we ascended, the denser the fog be-

came, and eventually, owing to the difficulty of finding our way, we had to abandon our idea of getting to Hotham, and returned to the bungalow.

As the weather might have continued to be unsuitable, we returned to Harrierville to push on to Mount St. Bernard, from whence, if stormy conditions continued, we could follow the line of telegraph poles to Mount Hotham.

The road for fully ten miles to the Hospice was under snow, and gave continuous ski-ing, whereas in a normal winter the snow line is said to be not more than four miles from the Hospice.

Next day was one of glorious sunshine, and we left for Mount Hotham, and, taking about six hours over the journey, were able to enjoy the splendid panoramas around us of snow-clad mountains, timbered valleys, and far-distant plains.

Early in the day the snow was in good condition for ski-ing, but the heat of the noonday sun caused the crust to become sticky.

The snow on Blowhard was wind-blown and ridgy, and lunch there, sheltered from the keen wind by a mound of snow which concealed the topmost branches of some hardy old snow gum, was a brief affair, our last impression of it being a glimpse of the cardboard box, in which lunch had been carried from the Hospice, tobogganning erratically before the wind, across the summit and down the slopes into the Dargo watershed.

From Mount Hotham in the late afternoon there was a wonderful view over the nearer snow-clad peaks of the Victorian Alps, and away to distant summits like Kosciusko, Gibbo, Pinnibar, The Pilot, The Cobberas, and many others. A fog crawling out of the valleys was slowly closing over the whole of the Alpine system, but for a long time Feathertop's highest point, faintly illuminated with a shade of color by the rays of the setting sun, and flying a thin wisp of fog from the summit like a pennant, seemed to resist concealment by the mists, but when the sun finally sank and thicker fog banks rolled up, envelopment of the crest rapidly took place.

We were three days behind schedule on arrival at Mount Hotham, owing to the alteration in our plans, and Gibson, who was waiting for us, had decided to leave for Omeo, via Cobungra, the following day if we had not arrived that night.

During the night the weather changed for the worse, a strong south-westerly wind sprang up, and later developed into a gale. Heavy snow fell, and we were detained for two days longer. Chafing at this further delay in our plans, we decided that if the third day should be unsettled we would either go on to Omeo, via Cobungra, or return to Mount St. Bernard. However, the weather improved on the

second afternoon, and from the vantage point of the summit of Mount Hotham we were treated to one of those glorious sunsets that can only be staged in the snow, when sunset sky, snow-clad peaks, and clouds above, all displayed in succession a series of gorgeous colors. It was followed by a night of brilliant moonlight, during which all the surrounding mountains were clearly visible in the cold light. There seemed no prospect so alluring as a run on the ski over the frozen and glittering snow, but eventually bed proved to have the strongest appeal.



LEAVING KELLY'S HUT.

The figures, from left to right, are E. Robertson, E. Stewart, and K. Gibson.

Next morning the sun shone brightly, and we were on the way to Mount Loeh as soon as possible. Instead of following the usual route down to Dibbin's and thence to Blair's Hut, we continued northerly along the spur dividing the two branches of the Kiewa, then down a side spur to where we judged Blair's Hut to be, eventually coming down on to the river within fifty yards of the hut. In the thick timber we had to remove our ski and plunge downhill through snow waist deep. It was strenuous going. From the crown of the spur we obtained some fine views of Feathertop just across the valley.

We had carried only a light lunch from Mount Hotham, intending to have a meal from our supplies in the hut, but to our astonishment there was no trace of our stores, and nothing to explain their absence. There were four of us, with nearly three days travelling

ahead, and when we fully realised the position in regard to food our comments on the situation were distinctly forceful. Fortunately, we were carrying four lb. of rice which had been omitted from the original order, and with this and about 1 lb. of flour which was in the hut we pushed on for the Tawonga Hut.

It subsequently transpired that owing to the depth of the snow it had been impossible for the man who was to have packed out our stores to reach the hut with his horses. He had had an arduous journey, and had visited the hut to leave a note explaining the position.

Leaving the hut without a meal did not tend to make us feel energetic, but to me the others appeared to be disgustingly fit, and did not seem to miss their meal.

The 2,000 feet climb to the plains proved arduous, and darkness had settled on us before the Tawonga Hut was reached. We anticipated that there would be quite a lot of snow around it, but were not prepared for conditions as we found them. It was completely covered, and only about two feet of the chimney was visible above the snow.

It was impossible to burrow down to the doorway, so we entered via the chimney. Our meal that night consisted of boiled rice with some cocoa and custard powder mixed in it, and for the next two days boiled rice and damper without butter, jam or sugar formed our diet.

The following morning was fine, and, departing via the "smoke route," we set out to cover the eleven miles to Kelly's Hut. The sun was distinctly hot, and the snow became sticky, and three times during the day we had to wax our ski. The journey across was a pleasant succession of long runs and occasional climbs. All the creeks were completely covered by snow and ice. Many of the eight feet snow poles were hidden, but the average depth of snow on the plains appeared to be about five feet.

We lunched in Wallace's Hut off plain damper and tea innocent of sugar. Ye Gods! but we brightened at least two shades when Gibson said that he had left some peanuts in Fitzgerald's Hut only twelve months before.

From Basalt Hill there is a fine run down into Rocky Valley, which in summer is a place of spongy morasses, tiny creeks and big boulders, but under the levelling influence of the winter snows most of its distinctive features were hidden.

From the saddle between Marm's Point and Holland's Nob a fine run took us down into the park, and on ascending the opposite slope we were close to Fitzgerald's Hut, to which we advanced with un-

seemly haste on the quest of the peanuts. They were still there, but had all passed the first blush of youth, and mildew had attacked many of them, but, despite their age they were acceptable, and the existence of mildew had to be very evident before rejection took place.

A short run took us to Kelly's Hut, which was almost snowed in, but was very comfortable inside, and had a plentiful supply of wood left by Mr. Wilkinson and his party on an earlier visit.

About nine inches of snow fell in the night, and we had some very enjoyable running down to Wildhorse Creek next day, and from thence another two miles brought us almost to the snow line, from whence our ski and packs were carried about six miles down to the Big River Bridge, where a car was waiting to convey us to Omeo.

Our hopes of visiting Mount Fainter, and of climbing Bogong, had to be abandoned owing to shortage of time, and we would have liked to stay at Kelly's Hut to enjoy the running on the slopes of the park and further out the runs on Mount Nelse, but on another visit we may have the good fortune to sample the pleasures they can give, and to attempt the ascent of Victoria's highest peak—Bogong—which up to the present does not seem to have been climbed on ski.

We covered over fifty miles on the tour, but unfortunately were not attended by the best of luck in regard to weather and arrangements generally, but, despite the few difficulties, we had a very pleasant and congenial party, and, even though we enjoyed all the incidents of the tour while it lasted, we are now able to enjoy it still more in retrospect.



MOUNT BOGONG (6509 ft.) (October, 1927.)

X marks the cairn, 6 miles distant from viewpoint, Timins' Look-out. Black line shows portion of the 3500 ft. climb in five miles out of Big River Valley, being the easiest route to top from Bogong High Plains. Mount Bogong has not yet been climbed on ski.