

# A Winter Ascent of Mount Bogong

(By W. F. Waters.)

(From the Victorian Ski Club's "Year Book.")

Mount Bogong (6,508 ft.) the highest peak of the Victorian Alpine system is in the north-eastern portion of the State, and about 20 miles due east of Bright. The mountain should not be confused with the Bogong High Plains, an extensive plateau, approximately 50 square miles in area and averaging 5,500 feet in height, lying more than five miles south of Mount Bogong, and almost completely cut off by the deep valleys of the Kiewa and Big Rivers.

Mount Bogong had not been climbed from the High Plains in winter, so a party of the Ski Club determined that they would, during the winter of 1928, venture into the realms of the monarch of the Victorian mountains, and in his domain of snow and ice pay homage to his winter splendour.

There are two routes from Mount Nelson by which Mount Bogong may be reached from the High Plains—either along the spur dividing the heads of the Kiewa and Big Rivers, a roundabout journey of nearly 13 miles, mostly through snow-gum, with much undulation, including a deep saddle nearly 2,800 feet below the Summit of Bogong; or a shorter route of about nine miles across open country to Timm's Lookout, then down 2,000 feet into the valley of the Big River, and up a tongue spur and the main spur 3,000 feet to the Summit.

It was decided to follow the latter route and to allow three days for the trip, camping the first night at the Big River, ascending Bogong and returning to the camp on the second day, and on the third day returning to the starting point, Kelly's Hut. During the summer of 1927 a tent intended for camping in the snow was designed and made, there being no huts in the Bogong country which could be used on the trip, and a tiny primus stove was obtained which could be used in the tent in the event of the weather preventing the lighting of fires.

The party consisted of Messrs. K. H. Gibson, E. C. Robinson, E. G. Stewart, and the writer, and they met at Kelly's Hut on August 12, 1928. Fine weather was hoped for, as if the party were caught in bad weather beyond their Big River camp they would have had difficulty in finding their way back to the hut owing to the absence of definite landmarks.

After practising on the 13th and 14th and suffering two days of dense fog and high northerly wind on the 15th and

16th, a start was made on the evening of the 17th, which broke fine and clear. There had been a frost in the night and the snow was firmly crusted. The only incident in the first two miles towards Mount Nelson was the breaking of a Bilgeri binding spring, and it took half an hour to fit a spare. On the ascent of Mount Nelson some locally-made calfskins were used on one pair of ski, and they acted splendidly on the ascent.



Ascending Bogong at about the 5000ft. level (using crampons).

From the Summit of Mount Nelson there was a splendid panorama in brilliant sunshine. Away to the north-east were Kosciusko and Jagungal, and to the east-north-east the Pilot and the Cobberas were plainly visible, and all appeared to be carrying a heavy cap of snow in comparison with the extremely light fall in the Victorian highlands. Nearer at hand Mount Bogong was ringed about below the crest with a stratum of thin filmy cloud, but other details,

including the top half of the snowed-up cairn were plainly visible. A mile from Mount Nelson a thin belt of fog was encountered, but a run down into a tiny head of the Big River and round it, left the fog behind.

The open country to the west and north-west of Mount Nelson offers some wonderful possibilities for ski-ing, and if a small hut could be erected on the site of Duane's old hut, it could be used as a base for some very fine trips. It would be about six miles from Kelly's Hut.

Timm's Lookout was two miles away, and with the fog hovering it developed into a race to get there before the cloud settled down. With more than half a mile to go a thick blanket of mist suddenly descended, but it was possible to keep our bearings until the Razorback was reached and followed. From Timm's Lookout (5,600 feet) a long spur leading down into the Big River, 2,000 feet below, was followed for about a mile and a half to a saddle. Then we turned off and headed straight down to the river. The first 500 feet of the descent was through thick snow-gum, where hard stemming brought us safely to the snow-line. The fog had been left behind, 100 feet below the Summit. On these northerly slopes the snow, owing to the light winter conditions was extraordinarily thin, and for the remainder of the descent ski had to be carried.

A little flat along the river, the site of a camp during a summer walking tour, was the objective for the night. It was reached before dusk, and was nearly free from snow. In this locality the Big River flows through a deep gorge with steep rocky sides, in places bare of timber. At intervals the river is bordered by tiny flats, which in the summer months are a blaze of color from the varied blooms of countless wild flowers. Lyre birds were particularly numerous, and several dancing mounds were found in the scrub close to the tent. The wonderful mimicry of the birds aroused us early next morning. As the barometer had not altered, a bright morning assured us of a fine day.

To reach the main spur, a tongue spur had first to be climbed. The first 500 feet was very steep, and, owing to the absence of snow, ski had to be carried. From a turn in the spur the first close glimpse of Mount Bogong towering above was obtained. For the next 500 feet there was ample snow, and ski could be used.

A thousand feet above the Big River, at about the 4,500 feet level, the main spur was reached, with 2,000 feet still to be climbed. The main spur ran northerly, and on the east side was covered with thin snow, the best side being bare. A further six hundred yards, and an ascent of about 300 feet brought us to the snow-line proper, and ski could be donned.

Another 400 feet and the timber line was reached. For

the next 500 feet the spur was very steep, and knife-edged; on the western side sheer cliffs dropping into a head of the Kiewa River, and on the east side a very steep and long slope, down into the Big River. The snow there was crusted and icy, and several nasty side-slips necessitated the use of crampons.

The weather up till then had been perfect, but we saw with dismay that far above on the Summit thick fog was blowing over, and we feared that our chances of obtaining a clear view from Victoria's most commanding viewpoint were likely to be lost. While still a mile from the Summit, fog again descended, and we had to bunch together to keep in touch. The cairn was reached at 12.30 p.m., the ascent



CAMP IN THE BIG RIVER VALLEY; ELEVATION 3500 FEET.

Left to right: W. F. Waters, E. C. Robinson, K. H. Gibson, and E. G. Stewart.

having taken four hours. There was a faint, but very cold breeze, and in the shelter of the cairn the primus was lit to melt sufficient snow to boil a billy of tea.

While there the fog lifted completely, and we were treated to an unlimited view in practically every direction except, unfortunately, that towards Kosciusko, which was hidden by a bank of cloud continually crawling out of the valley of the mountain creek and creeping southerly over the tops towards Mount Wills. All the higher peaks of the Victorian Alps were plainly visible, but all showed patches bare of snow unusually high up for that time of the winter. On the Buffalo scarcely any snow could be seen.

While lunching at the cairn there passed by the only signs of life seen since leaving camp—two little feathered

travellers—a flame-breasted robin and his mate, on their way from the Big River over into Mountain Creek. A moment's pause to rest on the snow, a splash of crimson against the white, and they were gone. Far out over the Staircase a wedge-tailed eagle lazily circled in the bright sunshine.

There was little time to visit the different portions of the Summit, which is boomerang-shaped, and about four miles in length, but sufficient to note several very fine runs, with snow in plenty, even though the winter was light. We were loth to leave, but fearing that, as the sun went off it, the snow in the steeper places on the way down might become too icy to be pleasant, we left after a stay of an hour and a quarter. For some unknown reason the snow which was expected to be icy was very soft, and gave no trouble.

The steep descent of the razor-backed spur provided a few mild thrills, with sheer cliffs on one fall and steep slopes on the other. Stemming through timber is not devoid of excitement, the chances of one finding himself wrapped round a tree through an error of judgment instead of passing neatly by it being about even.

In three and a half hours from the Summit we were back in camp where, with appetites sharpened by the efforts of the day, we were not long in preparing and disposing of a meal.

During the night the barometer dropped slightly and some rain fell, and next morning camp was broken early to



DESCENDING BOGONG—RACING THE FOG.

be on the move as soon as possible. The 2,000 feet climb to Timm's Lookout proved arduous, as the slopes were steep and strewn with fallen timber, and we looked forward to reaching the snow-line. On donning the ski we found, to our dismay, that the rain of the previous night had caused the snow to become sodden, and it balled on the ski repeatedly. The weather had definitely changed for the worse, the sky was overcast with heavy clouds, and a rising wind seemed to forebode the coming of a storm.

From Timm's Lookout a farewell glimpse of Bogong was obtained—not the mountain of yesterday, bright and sparkling in the sunshine,—but a huge bulk looking gloomy and sombre under the grey sky. We left as soon as possible to cover the seven miles to Kelly's Hut. The travelling conditions were abominable, and owing to the sodden state of the snow we led in turn every half mile. We had looked forward to the long run off Mount Nelson, but found to our disgust that we could scarcely move down the slope.

A storm was rapidly gathering over the Fainter, and we were anxious to reach the snow pole line before it should break; however, it passed over and we eventually reached the snow poles and the hut; after nothing worse than several heavy showers of stinging sleet.

#### SKI VETERANS' SOCIETY.

A Ski Veterans' Society has been formed, with headquarters in London, and members scattered all over the world. The Council of the Society are the veterans, Messrs. E. C. Richardson, Arnold Lunn, Kenneth Swan, and Dame Katherine Furse, Captain d'Egville, General Wroughton, and Mr. Vivian Caulfeild. Candidates for election should have 7 years' experience on ski, but exceptions may be made. Australian foundation members are: Mr. C. L. McFadyen, Dr. Eric Fisher, Dr. H. H. Schlink, Mr. Percy Pearson, and Dr. W. O. Paul and Mr. N. Storaker is also a member for Norway. The objects of the Society are to assist and encourage young ski runners to maintain and develop the finest traditions of the sport of ski running in all parts of the world, and the membership is limited to 400 on the active list. Members should be those recognised by any national Ski Council, as first, second or third class ski runners or jumpers after not less than seven seasons' experience of active ski running. The subscription for life membership is £1, and the colors of the Society are blue, green, and scarlet.