

Defeating Bogong

By C. J. M. Cole.

On the eastern fall of Mount Bogong is a delightful valley which the Maddisons, graziers of Tawonga, call "Camp Valley." Here is the only habitation on the mountain, a primitive hut, intended solely for summer use. When it was proposed that it should be used as a winter hut we were considered foolish, as it is constructed mainly of old kerosene tins and snow gums. The fireplace is in a corner and the chimney a hole in the roof. Owing to its restricted protection we named it "Hotel Aertex."

After consideration, food and other necessities were packed in before the first heavy snowfall of last year. At a later date, 29th July, 1934, final preparations having been made, Roy Weston and the writer left Tawonga at 8 a.m., proceeding by horse across the Kiewa Valley Flats and into the valley of Mountain Creek, from near the head of which a direct ascent of the Staircase Spur was contemplated. The weather was doubtful, the barometer, although high, had dropped a little over night and threatening clouds were appearing. Near the foot of the Staircase, a wedge-tail eagle was seen. It is probable that it was a bird seen near the summit on previous ascents and so was regarded as an omen of dirty weather higher up.

We left the horses about ten miles from Tawonga at 1.30 p.m., at an altitude of 5,400 feet, being then 600 feet above the usual snow-line and in a position where the snow was known to be no less than 12 feet in depth during August, 1932. It was with mixed feelings that we commenced to climb, partly owing to the weather conditions above which, quite obviously, were very bad; partly because we were somewhat heavier laden than we had intended to be



The Eastern Fall of Mt. Bogong.

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(fresh meat, a movie camera, in addition to ordinary cameras, a spare ski and sticks and an Alpine tent were regarded as necessities), and, finally, in my own case, owing to insufficient training.

Coming out of the timber at 5,800 feet we encountered wind of hurricane force which, to say the best, created a condition which, in the vicinity of the Gap, demanded great care. At times we were compelled to turn our backs to the wind in order to breathe; we had frequently to kick steps as footholds and occasionally found it necessary to seek temporary rest behind the smallest shelter.

Let me digress a while. It was originally intended that the number in our party should be three or four and that the period of the journey should be two or three weeks. In my case, however, I was unable to get leave, and a last-minute decision to apply for a week's special leave was made. This being approved, little opportunity was left to complete the personnel of the party, or to allow a margin of time in the event of unsettled conditions. The weather



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Sunshine and Cloud, on the way to Camp Valley.

was so bad that a stay in the vicinity of the snow-line was advisable. Let me state, however, that risk exists only under these conditions, and this is the reason why a hut is being erected at 4,800 feet altitude. With only eight days available, we decided to go on.

Later I considered it opportune to inquire whether we should turn back; but, the answer being in the negative, I was quite satisfied to go on, as I felt that we were then half-way across the most difficult section, with easier conditions ahead. Owing to the steepness of this portion of the Staircase, rhythmical breathing, which is adjusting one's stride to coincide with breathing rate, was tried and resulted in improved staying power. The Gap, as seen from above, was indescribably grand; glimpses of the distant valley beyond were seen through mist, fog and cloud and flurries of snow, carried away in fine powder, enhanced its beauty.

While plodding up the last 500 feet to the summit ridge there was borne upon us an intense feeling of excitement. On the Staircase proper there had been weariness; now it was forgotten. We had no longer consciously or sub-

consciously to force ourselves to go on. To see over the ridge and to go beyond, to Camp Valley, was our dominant idea. Something wonderful was there.

Unfortunately, the view from the top was completely blotted out by fog; but we were not dismayed, as we felt that we had left behind the most difficult stage and were confident that the section along the summit ridge could be negotiated, although the visibility was poor. We put on our ski which, for greater safety and because of hard snow, we had carried until then, and continued, the time being 3.20 p.m. Sometimes we could see nothing and at other moments just sufficient outline of the edge of the ridge to confirm our sense of direction. One thing we were thankful for, both here and on the Staircase, the adequate protection our Alpine jackets provided. The wind was so very cold that if a portion of the face was exposed it became numb with cold almost immediately.

Eventually we arrived at the head of the valley and here experienced feelings of great excitement, as our ski turned down into that long desired haven. It was noted that as we left the summit ridge its protection provided improved visibility and a decrease in the velocity of the wind; we were able to glimpse views of covered slopes—slopes which had never been skied on before. We felt like explorers finding a new country, so different is it under snow.

It is quite evident that, during a normal winter, the hut in Camp Valley would be well covered in snow. To assist us in locating it, Mr. W. Maddison, who had, at considerable trouble, packed our food in through snow earlier in the year, had, with rare forethought, placed a pole 20 feet in height at the corner of the building and at the top of it he tied a shovel, for use if necessary. This action is typical of the man. His frequent and willing co-operation in connection with our excursions have materially assisted us in attaining our objectives.

Owing to the comparatively small depth of snow on the Staircase Spur we were not greatly surprised that the hut had only a depth of three feet of snow around it when we arrived at 5.20 p.m. It was fairly dry inside, and we knew for certain that comparative comfort was assured, although, not being prepared to take any chances, we had brought with us a specially designed Alpine tent. Our stay was spent, not only pleasurably, but with advantage in accruing data for future use. The whole valley and practically every portion of the main



This panorama taken by Mr. C. J. M. Cole shows

ridge were explored, and, in addition, time was found for practice in slalom, downhill and jumping, so far as our limited technique enabled us. Notwithstanding the weather on the summit which, on some occasions was distinctly bad, and on one, at least, compelled us to return from an exploring jaunt to the west peak, we were able to ski every day.

The valley is certainly in the right position for protection from prevailing rough winds. This fact contributed to our subsequent opinion that we had spent one of the most beneficial and satisfactory snow holidays we had yet experienced. The condition of the snow was excellent; it permitted great ease, particularly when turning. It was mainly composed of a fine powder and required a wax, consisting of a mixture of "Medium" and "Mix," the former as a base and the latter added as required.

We had made complete arrangements to return to Tawonga by a long circuitous route, crossing the Big River near its source, going on to the Bogong High Plains, via "Timms Lookout" and calling at various huts on the way to Tawonga Hut. Leaving this hut, the Niggerheads are passed, the Fainter climbed, and so on down to Tawonga, passing Bogong Jack's Hut and "Botherem" on the way. We do not believe in heavy pack carrying, and so had forwarded food to centres on the path of our crossing. Unfortunately, restricted leave left little time available for the journey, and, owing to a change to adverse weather on the day of arranged departure, our only alternative was to abandon it and spend the remaining three days in further exploration and practice. Eventually we were sorry to leave our "Happy Valley"; but we felt that our major objective had been achieved and were very pleased.

The return to Tawonga was a memorable journey. We crossed the summit ridge through great rolling banks of clouds. Occasionally it seemed that a giant curtain was drawn across the scenery only to be released at the appropriate moment to reveal the snow-capped summit, bathed in glorious sunlight and fringed with a gossamer of fine mist.

From the Cairn we had a long, lingering look at the panorama provided by the High Plains, Hotham, Loch, St. Bernard, Feathertop, Fainter, Buffalo, and, away in the distance Reynard, Howitt, Clear and Buller, before the giant curtain rolled by and closed the last act of our trip on the mountains. The contrast and the beauty of the scenery experienced that day will live throughout our



ing High Plains and Mt. Bogong from Camp Valley.

lives. In the words of Arnold Lunn, "it is the mountains of storm, rather than the mountains of sunshine, which yield the richest crop of enduring memories."

We made down the "staircase" to the snow-line, where we knew Walter Maddison would be waiting, as we had arranged that the state of the weather on the day we had decided we should start for the Plains would indicate whether he should proceed along the Fainter track, to meet us at the snow-line there, or return to the Staircase. Our anticipations were correct; we met him near the foot of the Staircase spur at 1.20 p.m., having left the hut in Camp Valley at 8 a.m. Although we were wet, tired, hungry and thirsty, having laboured continually through heavy wind, snow and rain, yet after a billy of smoky tea made from melted snow, we were happy and contented.

In conclusion, we feel that we have confirmed the feasibility of the scheme accepted by the Ski Club of Victoria for the development of Mount Bogong as a ski-ing resort. Our exploration has satisfied us that convenient slopes of every variety and of suitable length, covered with snow of good quality is to be found in Camp Valley and its environs for a greater period of the year than at any other resort. This is natural, in view of the fact that it is Victoria's highest mountain, being 6,508 feet in altitude.



Shadows.

D. H. Wade.