

A Mountain Holiday

By C. J. M. Cole.

I had contemplated a winter trip to Skene for three years. A period spent on the Buller, during the running of the Victorian and National Championships in August, 1935, gave many views of Skene, and it looked so inviting that I resolved to spare no effort in penetrating its splendid isolation. The best known and most used approach to Skene is *via* Jamieson, a town on the Mansfield-Woods Point Road at the junction of the Jamieson River with the Goulburn. It was once the centre of a large mining district,



Panorama, looking E.S.E. from Mt. Buller.

from which tracks—pack and dray—radiated in all directions. One of these meanders 19 miles easterly towards Skene. The track is seldom out of sight or sound of the Jamieson River. Spurs have frequently to be negotiated, and the result is a track which monotonously and tiringly changes its grade.

The first stage of the journey began auspiciously. The weather was fine and the barometer high and steady. Accompanied by an old friend, George Hoskin, of Jamieson, I left Jamieson on Saturday, August 31, and, apart from a difficult and exciting crossing of the Jamieson River, which was in flood, the journey to Mitchell's (the site of Hoskin's former homestead), was both interesting and delightful. Leaving early next morning we took a rough track in a southerly direction, over a low divide and down, through poorly wooded country, to the junction of the left and right hand branches of the Jamieson. The left or main branch heads off Clear, but as our objective was Skene we followed the other for a couple of hundred yards, then crossed to the north bank. We then headed E.N-E, the track leading up a

steep spur called Sunday Spur. This route is a long and circuitous one, but it is the only possible winter approach to Skene from the west. This conclusion was formed by Mr. Stephens and the writer, who, in 1934, made a reconnaissance of the mountain. We ascended by Sunday Spur, and descended to the junction of the two branches of the Jamieson by Handford's Spur, a more direct but precipitous and heavily wooded way which, in our opinion, would be almost impossible in winter. Sunday Spur leads on to the Main divide, where we turned south. At various places along the Divide magnificent views, which included McDonald, Clear, Magdala, Howitt and the Cross Cut, were seen, and at times the distant outlines of St. Bernard, Hotham and other peaks of the Main Alps. Further east magnificent panoramas contained Reynard, Tamboritha and Wellington, among many others.



Showing Mountains from Howitt to the Bluff.

Once on the Divide we met snow. This, together with patches of very rough country, made hard going, particularly for the horses. These animals were, fortunately, in good fettle—they needed to be. The negotiation of a section of soft and deep snow was not without some excitement. Occasionally they were almost buried in snow, so our progress was attended by a considerable amount of bucking and jumping. Hoskin's horse developed a habit of lurching forward and leaving him sitting on his saddle on the snow, much to my amusement. The humor, however, was reversed when I was bucked off head first into the snow while attempting to photograph him; my camera and other gear were scattered in all directions. Various attempts were made to walk and ski. In the former instance one sank almost up to the armpits and, in the latter, progress was so abominably slow, owing to the natural obstacles, that recourse to riding was necessary. Eventually, we arrived at Rumpff's Hut, having taken $9\frac{1}{2}$ hours to cover the 19 miles. I last visited this shelter during Easter, 1934. At that time it seemed a comfortable hut. It is built of logs, with an iron roof. A good fireplace and shelf bunk

covered by a tent, contributed to its snugness. Arriving there in winter, cold and hungry after a long journey, it seemed cold, damp and inhospitable. However, a good fire soon thawed things out a little and after an excellent meal we spent a good night, although I must confess that the wind surged round the building with such hurricane force that I woke several times, and wondered what the weather would be like next day. Awaking again at day-break, the rising of the sun over the snow on the summit of Mt. Wellington was seen through the doorway.



(E. R. Weston).

Above: Roper's Hut, East Kiewa.

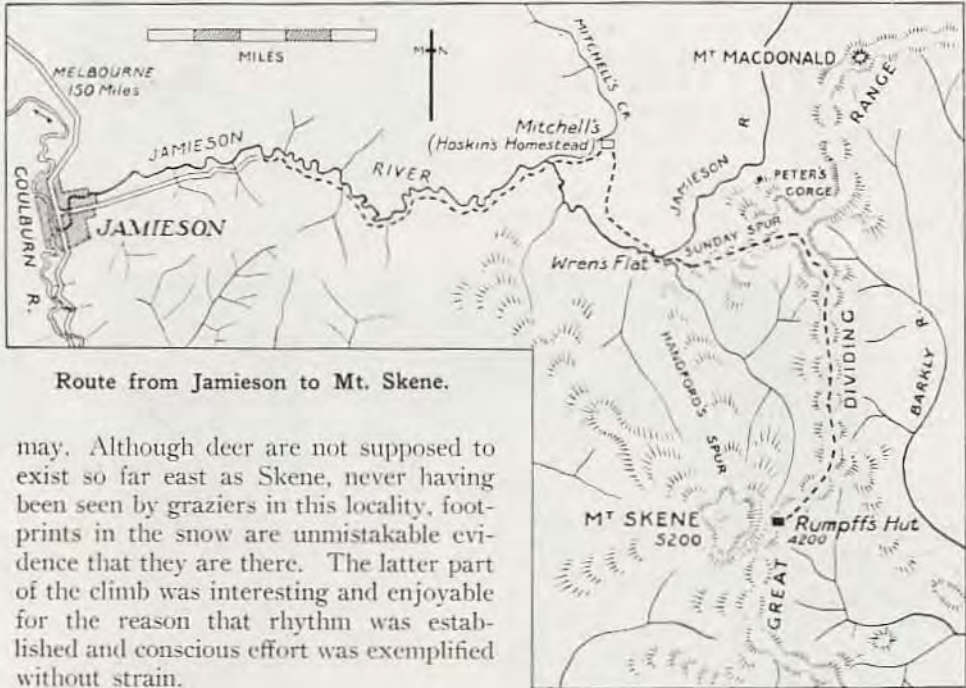
Right: Mt. Skene (on sky line) from Mt. Buller.



(C. J. M. Cole).

and less than two miles from it. On the way delightful panoramas of beauty began to reveal themselves. Looking north, Buller, with its heavy mantle of snow, bathed in sunlight and its peak in the clouds, looked ethereal. No difficulty was experienced in picking out its principal landmarks; Rocky Shoulder, the Howqua Spur and others were clearly seen. Various game tracks were now sighted. The spoor of wombat, dingo, lyre-bird, fox, rabbit and deer, were seen and, of course, recorded. Those of a lyre-bird were interesting, as they

were evidence that this remarkable bird is found in out-of-the-way places, lives in snow, and is not so likely to become extinct as some people fear it



Route from Jamieson to Mt. Skene.

may. Although deer are not supposed to exist so far east as Skene, never having been seen by graziers in this locality, foot-prints in the snow are unmistakable evidence that they are there. The latter part of the climb was interesting and enjoyable for the reason that rhythm was established and conscious effort was exemplified without strain.

Those who have never toured on ski misunderstand the motive of the ski explorer. Others again think that reaching the highest point is the climax of the sport. The attainment of the summit, however, is not a reward in itself; it is a fitting indication of the fascination of enterprise. Unfortunately, touring among the mountains is not always an adventure for those who holiday thereon. A regrettable spirit of competition, which will eventually compare with the making of mechanical speed records, is creeping in. Limited satisfaction is the reward for this narrow outlook.

On arrival on the summit, my attention was directed to various animal tracks which I naturally proceeded to investigate. The first were those of a fox, which led away out in the direction of the highest point. Several times I looked well ahead, half hoping to see him on the crest of a distant rise, so fresh did the tracks appear. I was absorbed in this fascinating pursuit before I had a good look around and began to comprehend the beauty which was seen on every side. The far horizon included many old friends, the Baw Baws, Matlock, Arnold, Lake Mountain, Federation, Torbreck, Terrible, Tolmie, Table Top, The Governors-Twins, Buller, Cobbler, Darling, Sterling, Eagles Peak, The Bluff, McDonald, The Nobbs, Clear, King Billie, Magdala, Big Top, Howitt, The Crosscut, Reynard, Tamboritha, Crinoline,

Baldhead and Wellington. When viewed from a distant and different angle each was not always instantly recognisable. The faint blending of colours, the pencilling of shadows and the slow movement of distant clouds contributed to a delightful harmony.

Then I realized quite suddenly that there was something about an unskied slope that tugs at one's heart. I rose, adjusted my ski, and set off. The swish-swish of my ski created a refrain, a melody of their own. And then the slopes—and there are many good slopes on Skene. I tried as many as possible. I drank deep of the champagne of speed. The bottom of the slope reached, I paused and comprehended the meaning of silence—the silence of the snow-clad hills. It was a profound and, at times, uncanny silence, except for personal noise, such as the breathing of air.



The Summit Ridge of Buller.

C. J. M. Cole.

Eventually I had reluctantly to leave the higher levels for the hut on the Divide, and, whilst proceeding to the eastern face, a little variety was created by the attentions of a wedge-tailed eagle. Suddenly a flutter of wings and a large shadow close handy caused me to raise my arm and sticks in self-defence, as the bird flew by, brushing my cap in progress. A hurried upward glance evinced the fact that he was returning; ducking the head and protecting the eyes with one arm, I made a rough calculation as to when he would arrive, and swung my other stick into the air. I missed. He did not again return. Such was my farewell to the summit of Skene. The last run home down the steep descent to the Divide was the last thrill for the day. Upon reaching the snow line the monotonous pace of the footslogger was resorted to.

There is a charm in ski-ing on virgin terrain, regardless of how familiar that terrain may be to a few cattlemen who occasionally frequent it in the



Above: Fox tracks on the summit of Mt. Skene.

Right: Rumpff's Hut.

On arrival, threatening weather caused us to erect an Alpine Tent securely and in haste. Towards evening, the wind died away, but a heavy pall of treacherous clouds forbode trouble. While seated around our camp fire in this little visited and isolated place, we were surprised to see a pure-bred dingo calmly walk into the fire-light, take stock of things, and quietly disappear into the night. Later, flying squirrels amused us with their gymnastics as they swung from tree to tree. During the night it rained—a deluge such as can only occur in the hills—and it continued without sign of abatement until well into the morning. The process of getting breakfast was only possible in conjunction with a complete wetting. The barometer was very low and was continuing to drop. About midday we came to the conclusion that the only wise thing to do was to pack up and evacuate. We had a trying journey out; the rain saturated us to the skin, flying sleet and hail

summer months. It was this thought that prompted me to set off with the intention of experiencing the charm of McDonald instead of continuing a delightful stay at Skene. We left Rumpff's Hut in the morning of a day that promised a change in the weather; the barometer was dropping, the sky was overcast, and the outlook was not promising. We made our way back along the Divide, past the turn off that leads to Mitchell's, nearly to McDonald, where we left the track on the east side, and headed the waters of the Barkly, camping alongside it in a delightful little glade at 4,500 feet. We were just under McDonald, which was heavily coated with snow almost down to where we camped.



C. J. J.

stung us, and on the higher levels snow numbed us almost to the point of frost-bite. Eventually we arrived at the junction of the two Jamiesons, where for a moment the clouds lifted over Skene, just sufficiently to allow us to appreciate her beauty and aloofness.

We had never before been so cold and saturated and it was inadvisable to stop for refreshment. We could only recall a most delightful meal which was prepared close to this spot. Coming off Skene on a previous trip, without provisions, we decided to fish. On the way we caught grasshoppers and, with the aid of a sinker and hook attached to a long switch (Good God!—General Editor in disgust) 22 rainbow trout were landed in half an hour. We lit a fire among rocks, wrapped the fish in paper, and cooked them slowly on the top of the rocks. The paper nicely scorched we pulled it off, the skin came too, and the most luscious and juicy fish ever tasted was the result.

We were indeed glad to get back to Mitchell's, where a huge fire was lit in an attempt to dry everything.

Several better ski-ing mountains, more readily accessible than Skene, are available for those whose main idea is ski-ing. But to those who like variety, admire scenery, enjoy nature and do not mind a long approach occupying a couple of days from the base, Skene offers an entrancing holiday

