

Victorian Ski Resorts

By P. E. (Mick) Hull

Hotham Chalet, 1939

PHOENIX-LIKE from the ashes a new Hotham Heights has arisen and what a Hotham! King's Birthday week-end, 1939, saw the opening of the new building, with a full house of hard-to-please skiers. Unreservedly they heartily congratulate the Railways Department for the excellent job that has been produced, despite severe difficulties.

For the new Hotham is modern. Electric light, central heating, a sun-porch, hot water in bathrooms, only a soap-throw from comfortable bedrooms, a kitchen to serve 100, ski-racks fitted with arch preservers, a glass-walled dining-room and lounge, carpets thick enough to make one think of soft snow runs—these are only a few of its appointments. And Jim Bradshaw and his staff had things running as if the house had been established for years.

The completion of the building is a triumph to Mr. Keown of the Victorian Railways Refreshment Service Department and his staff, and to the Way and Works branch organisation, who executed the work. For the difficulties were many—time was short, transport over the Alpine road to 6,000 feet was difficult, skilled labour was in heavy demand, low temperatures affected concrete work, finance had to be studied carefully, and so on, right through the autumn months. However, the weather gods were kind to their efforts, and the last loads were delivered only a day or so before the road closed for the season. The race against winter was won. Then, as the workmen left the finished job, the snow we had long been expecting arrived plentifully to provide excellent ski-ing conditions. Needless to say, the house was fully booked for the season, and deservedly so. Three times this accommodation would be too little.

Buller Chalet, 1939

Many readers will remember the original Chalet at Mount Buller. Built in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles, chief of which was the task of transporting all materials not obtainable on the site eight miles by pack horse, it gave comfortable quarters to twenty enthusiasts. Owing to difficulty of access the proprietor, Mr. Helmut Koffler, refrained from making extensive improvements, and except for the alteration to the attic to make two dormitories, and the construction of a ski room and stables, the Chalet remained as originally constructed until January, 1939.

For some years a road was being gradually constructed, and early in 1939 ski enthusiasts were delighted to hear that the Country Roads Board had been given control of the road and were to complete it to the Chalet that year. This promise of a good road enabled the proprietor to commence a long planned policy—the construction of a modern Chalet—and in March a new building was commenced; portion of the old Chalet was retained and the whole structure was designed to give good accommodation to eighty visitors.

Unfortunately, the extremely inclement autumn so interfered with road construction that only the formation was completed and, without surfacing, the upper two miles of the road was quite impassable for most of the year. As might be expected the construction of the building was seriously retarded, and although the Chalet was to outward appearances finished, carpenters were working throughout the 1939 season. To add to the difficulties of the management, the unusual depth of the snowfall practically isolated Mount Buller for several periods of as long as five or six days at a time, disorganising supplies and essential services.

Improvements for 1940

During the summer the Country Roads Board has pushed on with road construction and the road is now surfaced right to the Chalet and greatly improved. In fact, the journey from the Chalet to Melbourne by car can be made in four hours. It is hoped with the co-operation of the authorities to keep the road open throughout the season. A large parking place has been constructed at the road head, but it will not be possible to erect garages this year.

The company is carrying out a number of minor improvements before the season commences, all of which will help to facilitate the smooth running of the Chalet, and these together with the appointment of an experienced house manager, who has already been engaged, will enable the management to give their guests first-class service.

The new Chalet contains bedrooms with private bathrooms, bedrooms, two and four bunk rooms, and dormitory accommodation, at appropriate tariff rates, excellent bathroom accommodation with an unfailing supply of hot water, and large sitting rooms. A cafeteria will also be available to meet the demands of day visitors.

Victorian skiers are indeed fortunate that private enterprise has triumphed over many difficulties and now offers such good accommodation so close to Melbourne. Further improvements are planned, and if the Chalet receives the support it deserves, they will be added as opportunity offers.

Booking arrangements are in the competent hands of the Victorian Government Tourist Bureau, Melbourne.