

Baw-Baw . . . A Fresh Ski-ascent

By H. G. Toye

HERE in the Baw-Baw are a dozen peaks within as many miles, all over 4,500 ft.

On the 11th August, E. Lindgren and I made what was to be a trial run. I was amazed to find how altered the country appeared around St. Phillack. It had been a depressing sight just after the fierce bush-fires, but the white mantle of winter had been kind indeed, and its new glory of soft white decked the grotesque trees in jewels of brilliant ice.

The trip was so effortless that on the following week-end I decided to rise early and make a dash for Baw-Baw, which had never been skied on before. We left Yallourn after dinner on Saturday, arriving at Ezards' sawmill about 2.15 p.m. Incidentally, anyone who is feeling fit might try to lop a few minutes from Elof Lindgren's 52 minute dash from the car park to the N.B.W. Hut. I took it slower—very much slower, and continued on to the summit to do a bit of skiing before tea. The moonlight ski-ing was so good I didn't get down till supper-time.

Our plan was to be on the summit of Erica by sunrise, not an easy effort after breakfasting on pancakes made of reduced cream, eggs, chopped ham, and a little flour. Try them sometime—you will find them most sustaining. Two ten-inch diameter ones, and you can ski all day long without needing another bite.

The run down the track from Erica to about the base of Mount Kernot was fast, the snow being glazed smooth, and harder than concrete at that early hour. Then came the gradual upward climb, at first along a rocky path through thick burnt timber till the south spur at St. Gwinear was reached, and then on and up to St. Phillack. Here the country is reminiscent of that part of the Bogong High Plains around Wallace's Hut and the S.E.C. Cottage.

The other two members of the party, Messrs. Lindgren and Finlason, decided to settle down for the rest of the day on the S.E. run off St. Phillack, whilst I went south to Baw-Baw. It had taken only two hours from the summit of Erica, and by this time the sun had thawed the surface so much that well defined tracks were showing and running conditions were good. The 5,130 ft. Mount Baw-Baw is in sight almost all of the time after leaving St. Phillack (5,140 ft.).

It is more practical to follow and cross low saddles between morasses (semi-swamp areas in summer) than trying to follow the old track along the ridges. Some of these morasses hold large quantities of water, and at one particular spot this must have been pouring down to another level, for it could be heard roaring and rushing beneath the snow. The majority of the morasses run east and west, but fortunately the one right at the foot of Baw-Baw has a long tongue running right up to the drifts on the summit. Care has to be taken in running down this, for creeks running across this final morass are apt to leave insecure bridges along their course during a thaw.

The top of Mount Baw-Baw is perfectly flat and a good-sized stone cairn is on the south-east end. It made an excellent place to sun-bathe and apply Klister for the trip back.

Around about lay the Baw-Baw plateau with its 50 square miles of snowy hills. To the west was Arthur's Seat at Dromana, Mount Donna-Buang and Lake Mountain, the Dividing Range and Mount St. Clair, the townships of Matlock and Aberfeldy down along the Thompson River, and towering above them on the horizon the snowy tops of Mount Buller, Skene, and Howitt, Tabletop,

and Mt. Useful close by, and the white blur of the Alps, and below the tumbled country around Walhalla. The valley of the Latrobe with its paper mills, power stations, and innumerable townships gradually sprawled out from the saw-milling country immediately below, and even right out to where the Gippsland Lakes and Bass Strait merged with the horizon. Southwards over the Strzelecki Ranges, 80 miles away, were the peaks on Wilson's Promontory. Finally, completing this vast panorama, could be seen Westernport Bay, seen over the rugged Tanjil Bren, Toorong and Loch Valleys, Noojee and the rich dairying country around Warragul and Dandenong.

Basking in that glorious spring sunshine, with the every-day world so far down below, was like being one of the Gods of Olympus. But a roaring filled the air, and grew and grew, and the dark shadow of a bomber on patrol came chasing over the hills, a reminder that the blessings of civilisation were not quite so remote after all.

After mid-day spring seemed to have changed to summer, the snow became wet and soggy, and it seemed as if the wings of the morning had been turned to chained iron-balls on our feet that afternoon. But that is a general feeling on leaving any good ski-ing ground. Without a doubt the best ski-ing areas in the Baw-Baw's had been located, and much useful data as to possible approaches had been gained.

I have since then made further trips to determine the best access to these fields and have found the Forests' Commission most helpful. A steel timber-haulage line graded 1 in 25 runs from Ezards' No. 1 Mill around the northern side of the mountain at an altitude of 3,400 ft. for some ten miles to just past Little Boys' Creek. This is through the fire-killed timber area, and it is expected that a road parallel with this line will shortly be made.

Bell's Creek fire-break is then followed for about two miles along an almost flat track until the Warburton-Walhalla track is crossed some two miles east of the site of the old Whitelaw Hut. After heavy falls, it is reasonable to expect ski-ing within a few hundred yards of leaving the tram-line, for in winter the rail-line is often covered.

A little over a mile from the rail one well-grassed basin, free from trees and stones and protected by surrounding hills seems to promise good ski-ing, and is easily accessible.

On the southern side the road has been extended past Tanjil Bren to some miles east of Mount Baw-Baw. Eventually the plateau will be almost encircled by a nearby continuous road at about the 2,000 ft. contour. From the road to the summit of Mount Baw-Baw is 3 miles, and it is hoped that tourist roads will be constructed enabling skiers to use the slopes on Baw-Baw after a motor trip from Melbourne of well under 100 miles, via Warragul, Noojee and Tanjil Bren.