

Bogong Snow Poles.

By E. R. Weston

The snow poles on the Bogong High Plains date back to the 1890's, when the Mines Department cut tracks through the Alps. In places where there were no trees to blaze, tracks were marked by snow poles, each three chains apart.

In January, 1894, Mr. J. H. McColl, Minister for Mines, and Mr. A. W. Howitt crossed the Plains from Mt. Fainter to Glen Wills, and approved the construction of tracks and erection of poles to aid prospectors. By December of that year eight and one-half miles of snowpoles had been erected between Mt. Fainter and Young's Hut at a cost of £45. The main line from the Hotham edge of the Plains to the Glen Wills side was finished before the winter of 1895 at a cost of £123, including the approach tracks.

With the decline of mining in the Alps, the pole lines were allowed to fall into disrepair until the newly-formed Ski Club of Victoria induced the State Government Tourist Committee in 1925 to reconstruct the main route. The new poles were provided with round, brass number-plates, Plate No. 1 being at the head of the track from Blair's Hut and No. 377 down in Wild Horse Creek, on the eastern edge of the Plains. The total cost was £600, including a new approach track from the big River Bridge. Connection was maintained with Tawonga Hut and Young's Hut by unnumbered poles, but the old poles from Tawonga Hut north to Mt. Fainter were not replaced. All that now remains of this former route is an old moss-covered pole here and there. Incidentally, a few of these old poles still show where Dungey's Track crossed the river flats below Dibbins Hut.

The new poles, instead of descending to the Big River round the north side of Holland's Nob, went down Wild Horse Creek by way of Fitzgerald's and Kelly's huts.

In 1927 the Tourist Committee cleared the old track from Mt. Hotham to the Plains and marked it with nine miles of new poles. These had square plates, No. 1 being at Hotham and the last, No. 235, placed where this line joined the old route near Mt. Jim on the western edge of the Plains.

The establishment in 1932 of the State Electricity Commission's meteorological station near Mt. Cope, in preparation for the Kiewa hydro-electric scheme, made necessary long lines of poles leading to the various gauges in Rocky and Pretty valleys. These were erected in the summer of 1933-34, and were followed in later years by other S.E.C. routes, until this central area is now well covered with poles.

For winter travellers there still remained unmarked the country around Mt. Nelson, including many splendid ski-ing areas; this made hazardous in bad weather the traverse from Mt. Bogong. The defect was remedied in 1939-40, when the Public Works Department built an entirely new line from Holland's Nob (No. 1) over Nelson and north to Timms' Lookout. This was done at the request of the S.C.V. The poles were placed two chains apart, an improvement on the old three-chain spacing. There are two branch lines from this line, one leading to Roper's Hut at the head of Duane's Spur, and the other to Batty's Hut, on the New Country Spur.

At the same time the main route was overhauled and an alteration made to the section between Basalt Hill and Cope Hut. The pole line was moved eastwards to pass Wallace's Hut.

In the summer of 1940-41 most of the important pole-line junctions on the Plains were furnished with durable metal signboards, showing both direction and distance.

A pole-line was erected on Mt. Bogong in the summer of 1936-7, running from Quartz Nobs Spur (near the West Peak) along the whole of the summit to the Cole Memorial Hut in Camp Valley (on the eastern side) with a junction line leading off from the Cairn northwards down the first part of the Staircase Spur.

Pole-lines have not yet been erected along the Razorback beyond the Bon Accord Spur towards Mt. Feathertop and the Bungalow site; they are needed to make this trip safe in winter, because of the rapid weather changes to which the route is subjected.

Not a great deal of ski-ing has been done on Mt. Fainter, and part of the reason for this is that it lacks a pole-line leading from Tawonga Hut on the south fall to Bogong Jack's Hut on the north. There are some good slopes on this mountain, but navigation in a fog would be difficult without poles, due to the ill-defined and rambling nature of its summits.

The pole-line on Mt. Bogong could well be extended beyond the Cole Hut in an easterly direction until it reaches the head of the "T" spur, now recognised as the easiest route to the Plains. Until this is done, strangers arriving from the Plains may have some difficulty in locating the Cole Hut, as the "T" Spur peters out in confusing scrub on a flattish ridge where it joins Camp Valley.

With these additions, high-level "ski-roads" in the better known section of the Victorian Alps will be practically complete.

War-time conditions being what they were, it was only to be expected that 1942 would see Victorian ski-ing at a very low ebb. With the complete absence of competitive ski-ing, the difficulties of travel and the loss of the Buller Chalet by fire, it was not surprising to find that most of the Victorian ski-ing fields were left undisturbed in their winter solitude. The Hotham and Buffalo Chalets were the only resorts to see much activity. However, a party of seven S.C.V. members visited Mt. Bogong early in October and enjoyed a week's spring ski-ing.

It seems only a few years since the trip to Bogong was a first-class adventure—one not to be lightly undertaken. Now, however, thanks to the fine work put in by the S.C.V. Bogong Committee, it is no more arduous than the journey to Hotham. It is a pity that the war has prevented us from reaping the full benefits of the labours of those who pioneered Bogong.

Leaving Melbourne on a Friday morning, the sun was shining with sufficient vigour to make us think of shorts and suntan lotions as we travelled by train to Wodonga, completing the last lap to Tawonga by service car. Saturday dawned fine and sunny, but our first view of the mountain was not reassuring, only a few small drifts being visible, and the Staircase Spur on the skyline looked a mighty long way away.

With the horses and packing in the capable hands of Tom Jones, of Tawonga, everything went smoothly. The foot of the Spur was reached after a pleasant ride across the river flats with eight or nine crossings of Mountain Creek thrown in for variety.

The climb up the Staircase to the Bivouac Hut presented no serious difficulty—the track was overgrown in parts, but could be easily followed. Above the Bivouac, however, it was badly washed out and overgrown, a fact which caused considerable discomfort to one of the party who lost his mount and the seat of his pants, after which it was decided to unload and finish the job on foot. Still, the back of the climb had been broken, and the Summit Hut was reached without undue strain. What a blessing this shelter hut would prove under blizzard conditions. A short breather before we continued over the summit, following the pole-line across to the Cleve Cole Hut, partly on foot and partly on ski, although the sticky nature of the snow made it hard going.

Next day the weather broke, much to the discomfort and disgust of two members of the party who arrived a day late. Seldom has so much moisture been absorbed by so few. However, after they had been wrung out and put to bed for sixteen hours, their spirits revived, but the hut resembled a Chinese laundry for several days.

Considering the record of the weather during mid-winter, we were fortunate to have relatively fine conditions, three days of mist and rain and four of mixed cloud and sunshine.

Bogong in October carried a remarkably heavy mantle of snow. First impressions of the snow as we had approached the mountain were disappointing, but once over the top our hopes were restored by the sight of deep snow covering all the southern slopes, and extending down the gullies to well below the tree line. The persistent high north winds and heavy snowfalls of the winter had resulted in a very uneven distribution, the exposed northern ridges being quite bare whilst the southern and eastern slopes had more snow than in a normal mid-winter. A large cornice at the head of Weston's Gully, breaking away, had strewn huge blocks of snow for several hundred yards below. Cairn Gully also showed evidence of a similar avalanche earlier in the year.

Although the snow was plentiful, its ski-ing qualities were quite another story. Lack of frost, followed by rain, had formed very sticky, slushy snow which defied any wax to give good speed, a defect which was remedied by ski-ing on steeper slopes. On one or two days, however, it firmed up and faster running was possible.

Haunted Gully, at the rear of the hut, as usual provided excellent ski-ing. It offers a variety of runs, either open or wooded, with degrees of slope ranging from 25 degrees down.

Lendenfeld Point, about a mile north-west of the hut, has a number of spurs running down to the east. These finish in a gully at the foot of which a spectacular waterfall crashes down.

The ski-ing down these spurs into the gully is first-class. One can start on a slope of about 30 degrees and run down for almost 1,000 feet, finishing in the narrow gut just above the falls. This gully does not appear on the usual Bogong map, and, as it provided such thrilling ski-ing, we decided to name it Weston's Gully, after Roy Weston, who has done so much good work in exploring and mapping Bogong. Cairn Gully, too, provided a "wow" of a run. As steep as anything on Hotham, and dropping 800 feet, it is fast enough to please the most hardened downhill runner.

In roaming about Camp Valley, Aertex Hut was found to be still buried, and snow extended right down below Howman's Falls.

The Cleve Cole Hut has been fully described in these pages before, but it really must be lived in to appreciate it fully. It is by far the most comfortable hut the S.C.V. possesses—compared with most mountain huts it is a mansion. We found it in excellent

condition—clean and dry—a credit to the previous occupants. During the week we took the opportunity to do a few repair jobs. Several of the inner windows were re-glazed and restrainer chains fixed to all the outside windows to prevent them being blown off during a gale. The most surprising feature of all was the hot shower, which was greatly appreciated.

The Summit Hut also received some attention. Several sheets of roofing iron, which had succumbed to the winter gales, were replaced. A Visitors' Book and a set of hut rules were installed for the edification of future visitors.

By the end of the week the snow had thawed considerably. The creeks were showing through in many places where we had skied only a few days before. Even so, the snow was so deep in the gullies that good drift ski-ing as probably available on Bogong until the end of November.

It seems to be fashionable to make plans for post-war developments, so it may not be out of place here to suggest a few points for consideration.

Bogong is, undoubtedly, one of Victoria's finest ski-ing fields, but to add to its popularity there are several jobs yet to be done.

Firstly—on the score of accessibility. It is desirable that the road from Tawonga to Cooper's farmhouse should be continued on to the stockyard at the foot of the Staircase Spur. At this point a shed should be erected for the protection of stores and cars. The track up the spur needs a good deal of clearing, and the very rough portion above the Bivouac Hut requires attention. In mid-winter, when it would be necessary to traverse this section on ski, trouble would be found with the scrub and rocky outcrops.

Secondly. When Bogong becomes as popular as it fully deserves to be, increased accommodation will be required. Another hut on the west peak end of the mountain would be a great asset.

Thirdly. Although many skiers like to think they are right out of touch with the humdrum world, nevertheless this isolation presents a real danger. When there may be hundreds of skiers visiting the mountain, accidents are bound to happen, especially if competitive ski-ing takes place. The installation of a small radio transmitter would overcome this difficulty. It is not as expensive as it sounds, and is quite a practical suggestion.

Fourthly. The linking up of Mr. Bogong with the Bogong High Plains by means of an extension of the existing pole-line past Mt. Nelson to Roper's Hut on Duane's Spur would open up a lot of new touring country in the vicinity of Mt. Nelson.

With the completion of these improvements one can heartily agree with the prophecy in the 1937 Year Book to the effect that—"There is no doubt that all who so desire will now be able to spend a holiday on Mt. Bogong in as much comfort as could be found at any other snow resort, and an ideal field for the ski-ing enthusiast, whether his leanings are to downhill running, touring or jumping, will be found on this mountain."

Buffalo, 1942.

By A. M. Fairfoul

If the cars cannot go to the snow, then the snow very obligingly comes to the cars—that, in effect, is what happened at Mt. Buffalo National Park, Victoria, last year, when, because of wartime restrictions, no transport was provided to any of the runs on the Plateau.

Heavy falls of snow right throughout the winter made it one of the best snow seasons ever on Buffalo and literally brought ski-ing right to the back door of The Chalet, the slope down from the stables and garages being very popular with skiers who like their sport on the spot.

The three regular runs, Cresta, Cathedral and Dingo Dell, were very well covered and were all patronised, the last mentioned, nearest The Chalet, getting the largest measure of support.

The accommodation at The Chalet was limited to approximately 120 guests, about two-thirds the normal capacity, and bookings had to be made well in advance to have any chance of getting accommodation. However, the continuance of good ski-ing conditions well into the Spring spread the season and enabled the late-comers to get their share of good sport. Actually the September and October snow was so good that it reversed the old maxim to "last in gets it."

Worthy of mention is the large number of day trips made by servicemen from more or less nearby camps. Many of them saw snow for the first time, and, as they were able to procure equipment at The Chalet to get their snow legs, the visits were extremely popular, probably in many cases giving birth to a lasting love of our winter sports.

Note.—Because of staff shortage, accommodation at Buffalo will be further reduced this year.