

THE BAW BAW'S AT LAST

Known best, perhaps, from the geography books as the source of Melbourne's much-maligned Yarra, the Baw Baw range is soon going to spring into prominence with skiers, if the hopes of the Mt. Erica Division of the S.C.V. are fulfilled.

Until recently difficult of access, the snowline can now be reached by a new timber road, and efforts are being made to obtain a tourist road running right over the top.

Meantime, Erica Division's Secretary, Max Thompson, reports:

"Erica members have cut a track of about a mile from the road-end to the top of a ridge, from which Mt. Baw Baw's summit can be reached. Plans are well advanced for a hut near the ridge."

Convinced that this area holds great promise, local enthusiasts hope to make the Baw Baw Plateau Victoria's newest — and handiest — snow playground. It is only about 100 miles by road, due east, from Melbourne. Commonly referred to as "the Baw Baw's," this 5,000-ft. plateau and its dozen or more peaks are much further south than the major Victorian fields; and last year the Baw Baw's enjoyed a relatively heavier and longer-lasting snow season. Drawbacks have been:— difficult access, lack of accommodation, and short runs.

So far, few have skied the slopes of this field. In the past, the only two routes of entry taxed to the full the stamina of the pioneers. The usual route was to Mt. Erica (at the eastern end of the plateau) via Ezard's timber mill and "The Rocks." Even under conditions now vastly improved, that route involves a 3,400-ft. climb in three miles, partly through six inches of mud and slush. "Never again!" has muttered more than one weary, sweating skier, toiling up with laden pack, boots and ski; slipping here, falling there, clambering over logs.

Even when the top was gained, the absence of extensive clearing of heavy timber precluded the enjoyment of all but short runs; if, indeed, the skier had any energy left really to enjoy a run at all. But snow is magnetic! Next week-end would see them at it again.

West away from Erica, beckoned more open slopes on St. Phillack. But time and energy rarely allowed a visit. How the Erica devotees longed for the day when a road would pass through the

heart of the range! For years, these stalwarts roamed the ranges and roads in search of an easy approach to the 30-square-mile playground. They tried from the north, they tried from the south, probing the rough country above every timber tram-line. Some of the efforts were referred to in the 1941 Year Book, in an article by H. G. Toye.

"Just as even the most enthusiastic searchers were giving up hope of immediate access to the central fields," writes Max Thompson, "in February 1944, news came that a road had been constructed from the Erica-Tanjil Bren road to Neulyne's mill at 3,150 feet, only slightly more than two miles from the summit of Mt. Baw Baw, the second highest peak on the range."

Actually it was found that the road had been formed for half a mile beyond the mill, to 3,600 feet. Several trips were made, and members cut a rough track through dense scrub to the top of the nearest ridge. They reported that the snow held much better here than on the Erica end of the plateau, with prospects that a number of good runs could be made with very little clearing.

The long, flat, open morasses of summer time were an aid to progress in winter touring, and provided good run-outs for beginners.

September-October saw the cutting of a track six to ten feet wide to the site of the proposed hut, where a good stream is available. Max says, "It has ideal slopes for beginners."

For 650 yards the track runs up through scrub, then for a further 900 yards to the top of the ridge, through fairly open dead timber. Climbing skins would normally be used, as the gradient of the steepest part reaches 20 degrees. The remainder of the journey to the summit of Baw Baw has an average gradient of 10 to 15 degrees, and is timbered in parts. From Baw Baw (which projects southerly from the centre of the plateau) to St. Phillack, in the centre, is about two miles, the country being made up of large morasses with ridges 200 feet high between them. Excellent (although short) downhill and wood runs abound, the best being on the south-east face of Tores, about a mile from Baw Baw.

Good runs are also claimed further east, on the slopes leading

into Trillicouty Glen, and to the west as far over as Bluff. The only runs located at present with a vertical descent of 500 feet or more (other than on Mt. Erica) are situated in the fairly heavily timbered country between Tores and Mt. Mueller, and much clearing will be needed before they are available for use.

Before the 1939 fires destroyed the tracks and huts, nearly every hiker and walker made the popular Warburton-Walhalla 70-mile trip over the Baw Baw's. The usual approach was by the easier 3-day gradient from the Warburton end.

The plateau itself is about eight miles long, running from Mt. Whitelaw (4,875 feet) at the west to Erica (5,000 feet) at the east, followed by a steep descent. Mt. Baw Baw itself (5,130 feet) juts out southerly from about half-way along the plateau, where St. Phillack (5,140 feet) is the pivot. Also at the south are Tyers (4,600 feet) and Mueller (4,900 feet), while Mustering Flat and St. Gwinear (4,950 feet) are a little N.W. and N.E. of the centre respectively. Bluff (4,850 feet) and Tores (5,030 feet) have already been mentioned. A number of other peaks are still unnamed. The Erica Division has an existing hut on the side of Mt. Erica.

Erica Division and the Narracan Shire Council have been pressing vigorously for a road to provide not only access to the snowfields in winter, but also an outstanding scenic drive in summer. Such a road, from the vicinity of Tanjil Bren, through the centre of the snowfields, to link up with Ezard's road at the Erica end, has been noted by the Country Roads Board for post-war consideration. The Forests Commission and Public Works Department are also interested.

From his knowledge of the range, Max Thompson thinks that the route might follow the west branch of the Tanjil River to cross the top near the summit of St. Phillack, and drop down on the north-eastern side in the vicinity of the Cascades. Using the northern aspect of the ridges would make it relatively easy to snow-plough in winter.

From Melbourne via Robin Hood to Noojee, 77 miles, there is a bitumen road (via Yarra Junction is 13 miles shorter, but not so well surfaced); and the twenty-odd

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Lawler's Hut.

Max Jeppesen.

Over the Dargo Heads.

Max Jeppesen.



SKI-ING TO SWINDLER'S CREEK

By George Chisholm

Apart from the regular run down the Drag, or an adventurous return from a Loch picnic, how many skiers visiting Hotham have thought of doing a run down to Swindler's Creek?

Very few skiers ever go down so far, and this, in my opinion, is a great mistake; beginners will find it a pleasant outing and an escape from regular work on the practice slopes.

For the experienced runner, the diversity of terrain is unlimited. Your ski-ing is sure to improve.

The 1939 fire cleared the snow gums, and you can run any of the many spurs or gullies off the two miles of ridge between the Davenport and Mary's Slide. New and fascinating features are in each run. Here are sheltered slopes, where you often find good snow when the more exposed slopes are unpleasant because of poor or indifferent weather. In bad weather, when ski-ing on Hotham is only for the hardy, then think of Swindler's Creek.

Once the heavy winds in front of the Chalet and across the road

are conquered, you can run downhill at your own pace, beginner or expert; and once down to the Creek you will find you are out of the wind. It may still be snowing, and not ideal for fast running, but for a bad weather sanctuary it has no equal on the mountains.

You can begin a spur with glorious open running, then a run down to an adjacent gully, and finish an 800 feet descent with a wood run. All these spurs cross the water race, known on the Drag as "Begg's Bath." The easiest climb out of Swindler's Creek is to follow the race to the bottom of Slalom Gully, then leave it and turn up Slalom Gully for about 100 yards; and then turn up the first gully to the left, which will bring you out on the Playground. This return route has to be travelled for you to realise how simple it is to come home from this 800 feet descent.

When the work of clearing runs

is recommenced on Hotham, attention should be paid to the best of the runs to Swindler's Creek. The water race should also be high on this list of clearing jobs.

No area of snow country anywhere in Victoria has such possibilities for a ski lift. If a lift were put up either the Funnel or Slalom Gully, from the race to the Pimple, it would serve all these runs.

You could run down to the race anywhere between the Davenport and Mary's Slide; then along the level course of the race to the foot of the ski lift, and so up to the top again at the Pimple; and so on, taking a different downhill course each time. With such improvements, Hotham would be unsurpassed as a ski resort.

The pleasant times experienced by the few devotees of Swindler's Creek, playing along the snow-bridged creek, or ambling leisurely along the clear sections of the race, conjure up the most enjoyable recollections of Hotham — good food for a summer's dream.

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miles from Noojee to Tanjil Bren is well metalled. On the new road to Neulnye's mill, only the last mile is rough, narrow, and steep. Improvement is scheduled for early 1945, and another half-mile beyond the mill should be open to traffic by winter.

"With good fishing, shooting, and walking, plus grand views—ranging from Buller, Skene, and the Crosscut Saw in the north, to Glenmaggie Weir and the Gippsland Lakes to the east—the Baw Baw Plateau could prove to be one of Victoria's most popular resorts in the summer as well as winter, and the ideal place for a chalet," is Max Thompson's opinion.

Here's wishing these pioneers every success in getting it opened up!

Invitation

Interstate skiers with occasion to visit Melbourne should call at the S.C.V.'s new club room, at 330 Little Collins Street (the address, if forgotten, is in the telephone book). Here will be found lots of ski-ing literature, reading and writing facilities, maps, photographs, and trophies—as well as fellow ski addicts.

A Cairn Erected on the Staircase

A Cairn with a metal pole has been erected on the Staircase Spur, Mt. Bogong, where three skiers were lost in a blizzard in August, 1943. (The story was told in the 1944 Year Book under the heading of "Bogong Misadventure.")

The Cairn carries a plate in memory of the three: Georgine Gadsden, John McRae, and Ted Welch. This should be a useful landmark in foggy weather.

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Interallied Services Ski Meeting at Kosciusko

The Allied Relations Committee has just announced that the above event will be held the first week in September. All Allied Nations will compete.

S.U.A.N.Z.

The S.U.A.N.Z. has been recognised as the controlling body of ski-ing in the S.W. Pacific officially by the Ski Union of the Americas. Reciprocal recognition has been given by the S.U.A.N.Z. to the S.U.A. in the western hemisphere.

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Road to Mt. McKay, Vic.

"The road to Mt. McKay, which has been kept closed for security reasons, will be open to the public after the war, when the State Electricity Commission's construction work is finished," said the Minister for Water Supply and Electrical Undertakings (Mr. McDonald), when asked for a statement for the A.N.Z. Ski Year Book. "It is a beautiful road, one of the finest scenic roads in the State, and I know of no reason why it should not be open then."

S.C.V. Life Member

Mr. Stanley Flattely has been made a life member of the S.C.V. after 20 years of stalwart work as a committeeman. He is the second to receive this honour; the other life member is Mr. W. Bankes Amery (1926).

Membership of the Ski Club of Victoria has passed the 1,000 mark.