

LEAP FORWARD, POST-WAR

By the Victorian Editor

Everything is set for a tremendous leap forward in ski-ing, and in ski-ing facilities in Victoria after the war—which will not be long now. Great advances are in view in regard to both of the prime factors of access and accommodation. Two other factors that will call for attention are equipment and towing. If any proof is needed of the leaps and bounds likely in ski-ing population, the answer is given in the soaring club membership. This, in the teeth of war-time limitations on ski-ing, amply demonstrates the growing popularity of the snowfields.

Forging ahead from 600 to 900 during 1944, the S.C.V. roll may well have reached four figures by the time this book is off the press. It is as plain as a pikestaff that if membership increases at this pace with so many people away, and with such limited opportunities of obtaining leave, of reaching the mountains and of obtaining accommodation, the growth when these curbs are removed will outstrip all records.

If this seems like dwelling too much on mere numbers, it must be remembered that population is the basis of all markets. No matter how much we like to think of our mountains in the aesthetic sense, and while we like to think of the thrills and sparkle for which there is no monetary or metrical measuring rod, we have to come down to the hard fact that the basis of expansion of our ski-ing world is and must be economic.

In short, a government will only open up new roads and run improved transport services if the proposition looks like paying, either directly or indirectly. Tracks may be cut, pole-lines erected, shelters and other facilities may be established if there is a real prospect of developing a tourist industry. New chalets will be built and old ones extended, either by government agencies or private enterprise, only if they look like paying. The same goes for tows. Manufacturers and importers of equipment can only produce gear at lower prices if the size of the market expands.

All this seems so obvious; yet so many people seem to lose sight of it, or dismiss it with an airy "of course it would pay handsomely." They seem to think that because the mountains are so beautiful, the Government should open them up. But any hard-boiled Cabinet Minister whose Government is faced on all sides with demands for money—for education, for medical services, for assisting tangible industries (not to mention vote-catching propositions, let alone demands for reducing taxes)—will say "No," if he thinks that expenditure on opening up would benefit only a few. The vague "Of course it would pay" is insufficient to attract money for private company propositions; promoters want details.

So let us realise, first of all, that however pleasurable it might be

to have plenty of snow available to a relatively few privileged people, an elite group in which everybody knows everybody else—we can never enjoy the facilities of which we dream if we have only a small ski-ing population. This, again, seems to be labouring the obvious, but there are, in fact, some members who say that the mountains will be spoilt if the madding crowd gets into them.

Take towing, for example. Without doubt there is enjoyment to be derived from an uphill climb—the honest sweat, the glow of warm muscles, the pauses to admire the scenery (even if they are excuses for a breather), and the satisfaction when the last hundred yards is in sight. But much and all as a skier might enjoy all this, there is a lack of balance in spending an hour climbing out, after a few minutes of downhill. With a tow, the uphill enthusiast can have it fifty-fifty if he likes. The novice, who learns to travel uphill on his first day, and at present may not learn much control of downhill in his first week, could likewise obtain a better proportion in his practice—and so could others. But when it comes down to tin tacks, the case for tows depends on the revenue they would bring in, and this largely comes back to numbers.

So members should realise that they must have missionary zeal in the introduction of new members, and try to interest as many of

their friends as possible to embark on a snowland holiday. If every member were to make a point, when travel is again available, of introducing only one newcomer to snow each year, the sport would come into its own, and facilities equal to overseas would be provided in our own time, before we get too stiff in the joints, instead of years hence.

Australia is reputed to have a greater area under snow in winter than Switzerland. There is room for all.

Fortunately, the signs are that the ski-ing population will grow apace from its present relatively small number to the square mile of snow.

Already the existing accommodation is hopelessly inadequate for the numbers who wish to use it. The queues for Buffalo, the long waiting lists for Hotham should have convinced the Victorian Railways that expansion of their facilities would pay immediately.

Mt. Hotham Chalet was rushed up in early 1939, after bushfires had destroyed the old building. Plans were drawn up for accommodating about 80, but only a part of the design could be executed before the snow set in. Then war intervened, and six years later the Chalet still holds only 27. The Railways ought immediately to prepare for their clamant market. So far they are silent on their plans, but it is probably certain that they will enlarge Hotham to the 80 mark, perhaps more. Most emphatically they should not stop at 80—a far larger scheme would be an economic proposition.

Factors that would greatly increase visitors to Hotham—and it is likely that the Railway authorities concerned have all these matters on the list for consideration—are easier access and a tow: both inter-linked, of course, with population.

Already the snow-shoed horses have revolutionised access. No longer is there a 3½-mile struggle with a pack. But, given the market, a change-over to approach from the Omeo side, with a snowplough to keep the road open to within a mile or two of the Chalet, is a definite possibility.

Apart from the removal of strain and the additional comfort for all, this would enable elimination of the present rule that bars novices—in short, allow for more population, and so enhance pros-

pects for a tow; likewise for professional instructors. This in turn would stimulate further growth, with better rail and service car facilities, while the easier ingress and egress would make it easier to attract staff.

Some of what has been said will apply to Buffalo, too. It is safe to say that with uniform railway gauge and faster road transport, the Railways' Number-One guest house could quickly create a much greater market for its excellent attractions. Looking back, it must be agreed that Buffalo has done a splendid job for a great many years. The cradle of Victorian skiing, it has been responsible, more than any other place, for introducing people to snowdom. It has provided equipment, tuition, and first class catering, and it is safe to say that these sound lines will be continued. The existing tow at the Cresta is capable of improvement. All-day car services over the intervening seven-mile road are needed; and perhaps separate runs for novices, intermediate and experts, where the novices need not be terrified of fast approaching speedsters, nor the latter impeded by beginners suddenly falling right in their path.

Plans exist for building a new hotel at Mt. St. Bernard, where the 1939 fires destroyed the old one, but the matter is at present indefinite. Nevertheless, the present owners of the site are skiers, and with the possibility of being able to keep the road open to the door, the licence is bound to be exploited sooner or later.

Placing a Chalet again on Mt. Buller, where the road was taken to the door shortly before the old Chalet was burnt, seems a most likely happening. The original intention was to sell the site for a suitable consideration to anyone who would form a new company. Whether this will be done or not is probably not yet decided, but there is such a splendid opportunity here that, without doubt, it will not be long before, one way or another, a new Chalet arises. With the road, building costs will be much below those of the original establishment. A tow, on Horse Hill, was contemplated under the late Helmut Kofler's management. It must again be reckoned a possibility, particularly if other centres offer tows.

Last, but by no means least, are the S.C.V. Memorial Club-house, to hold probably 50 or 60, and the Ivor Whittaker Memorial

Lodge, to take about 30—the former probably on Mt. McKay, unless some factors turn up to offer better prospects elsewhere; and the latter on Mt. Buller—plus im-

provements to the club's chain of huts throughout the mountains.

Prospects for skiers in Victoria are indeed good.

Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge

The late IVOR WHITTAKER, popular Victorian skier, who was lost on a flight in the Middle East on September 13, 1941, when, as Major Whittaker, he was Air Intelligence Liaison Officer between the A.I.F. and R.A.F. A foundation member of the University Ski Club, as well as a member of the S.C.V., "Ike" represented Victoria in skiing contests. In 1931, he won the silver K trophy in Switzerland, and in that year served as a guest officer in an English regiment. When war broke out, he was one of the first to go abroad.

The trustees of the Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge have requested the War Memorial Club-house sub-committee to submit a suggestion for the design of the Lodge to be built on Mt. Buller.

After a great number of designs had been prepared, a very suitable one was chosen and properly drawn up. This design provides for 30 persons, and can readily be extended to accommodate another 15 to 20. It has been deliberately planned to give the utmost economy in both construction and cubic space.

All sleeping accommodation is on the mezzanine floor, and may be subdivided by portable screens to give different ratios of women to men.

The grouping of the separate toilet facilities gives privacy. Living space has been designed to give ample working room for a number of parties.

Uniform distribution of all facilities, and central placing of the stove, achieves this.

The drying room provides greater capacity without the usual congestion and untidiness in the living room. Fuel storage is situated under the stairs, and is fed direct from the wood chopping area outside.

Ski racks are placed around the entrance.

The utmost consideration has been given to elimination of congestion around about such places



The Late Ivor Whittaker.

as the entrance porch, fireplace, entrance to living room, and entrance to sleeping accommodation.

The Lodge is 18 x 40 feet overall, and height is 13 ft. 9 ins. The mezzanine floor extends across one end and along one side, and does not put a complete ceiling over the living room.

The fire range is right in the middle of the floor, enabling access to the whole of its top all round, with an oven on one side. This relieves one of the most serious causes of hut congestion around the warming, cooking, and water-heating area.

The mezzanine floor is L-shaped, runs along one side and one end of the Lodge—i.e., it is 40 by 9 plus 16 by 9. Of this, 16 by 18 is over the top of the drying room and service arrangements, while the other 24 by 9 covers half the living room.

This is one of a number of designs considered, and although no final choice has yet been made, this is thought the best suggestion to date, the Chairman of the Sub-Committee (Mr. Fred Ewert) reports.