

The Chalet at Mt. Feathertop

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THIS, of course, is all ancient history now. But some of you will have forgotten it, and so here it is—how Feathertop got its bungalow in 1925, to be destroyed, alas, in the bushfires of 1939. There is still good ski-ing there, and maybe another will be built some day, for it is one of the easiest mountains to get at from Harrierville.

The Mount Buffalo Chalet, built in 1910 by the Victorian Public Works Department, was run for many years by Miss Hilda Samsing as lessee. She handed it over to the control of the Victorian Railways in August, 1924, and shortly afterwards I asked her if she would be interested in opening another snow resort. The answer was "yes."

As a result, a meeting was arranged of those interested and it decided on Mount Feathertop (6267 ft.) as the objective. After going into the question of title, it was decided to take out a number of Miner's Rights for various positions. The spot selected was governed by the problem of water supply, and after several examinations, one just below Little Feathertop was chosen. A Right was also taken out for the supply of water.

These details took some considerable time to complete. We then consulted a well-known road contractor in the Bright district—I forget his name—about the construction of a road from Harrierville to the site that could be kept reasonably clear of snow in the winter. It was suggested by him that the existing five miles of "track" could be made into a one-way road at very little cost. Otherwise it would cost, for a re-survey of the "track" and a new road, about £20,000. We then proceeded to enquiries as to the proposed building, and a well-known Melbourne architect, Mr. E. F. Billson, prepared tentative plans for a project to cost something in the vicinity of £80,000.

In the meantime it was proposed to build a smaller building to accommodate about thirty people. Considerable time was taken up in getting data, as no building for snow purposes had previously been erected in Victoria. We wrote to a firm in Norway who supplied a lot of information, including a full working plan of the famous Holmenkollen Jump, costing £10,000, which they had built.

Timber at that time being easy to get, we had the structure for the whole building cut up and laid out in sections, each side being painted a different colour. This work was done in Prahran, Melbourne, by Davies and Co., on a vacant allotment adjoining their premises in Malvern Road. These sections were forwarded to Bright, thence to Harrierville, from where they were sledged five miles up the mountain by six teams each of six horses. Though considered a very hard task, this was duly accomplished by the contractor a day before snow fell and held up all work, burying everything for a week.

The building consisted of eight bedrooms, each of four bunks, fitted with wire mattresses, a large dining room and lounge combined, two bathrooms, kitchen with stove in the centre, hot water system and electric light throughout.

The erection of this structure on the spot took only three weeks for a team of seven carpenters, two plumbers and six labourers. The Bungalow, as it was called, was comfortably fitted up inside and stocked with fifty pairs of Norwegian skis.

The formal opening took place with due ceremony on July 13, 1925, and quite a number of prominent people were present including Doctor and Mrs. Barry Thompson, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, of Lylydale, Miss J. Gerrard, Mr. A. E. Callaway, of C.R.B., Mr. E. Williams, of Tourist Bureau, Mr. H. R. Gollan, of the Railways, Mr. J. E. Toole, of the Millions Club, Sydney, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Rattan (Secretary to the company) and various members of the ski-ing community. During the evening a number of rockets were fired, and these were seen in the surrounding districts.

During the building and formation of the company, I am very sorry to say, we found some Government departments very much against our project, and they put every obstacle in our way. During the negotiations with the Government Solicitor over our site, it was suggested that a fifty-year lease should be granted. This came along after some delay and was progressing very well, when it was suggested that it should be submitted to the Railways Commissioners in case it might be thought prejudicial to their

interests at Buffalo. The Railways held the proposed lease for some considerable time and then suggested quite a number of alterations, one of which was that they should have the option of purchase at the end of the first seven years.

A stalemate resulted on the question of the lease because of these proposed conditions, and the promoters abandoned the project after eighteen months of fruitless negotiation. The company went into voluntary liquidation after selling an asset to the Victorian Railways for £250 which had cost

us £3000.

The Bungalow had run profitably for its first two years under the company's management—although intended more as preliminary publicity for the major project which was planned to follow, than as a profit-maker itself—and it will now remain a matter only for idle speculation whether the £80,000 project would have changed the whole history of ski-ing in Victoria. At all events the attitude of the various Government departments seems to have changed radically for the better since then!