

Kiewa and The Bogong High Plains

H. Gibbs

WITH the great expansion of the Kiewa Hydro-Electric Scheme, the Bogong area is changing so rapidly that it is very difficult for the average person to grasp the significance of these changes and their ultimate effect on Victorian ski-ing.

A few years ago, we regarded these ranges as a remote area where the hardy ski-tourer donned an enormous pack and with determined step disappeared into the blue for a week or a fortnight, completely out of touch with civilisation, and returned bearded and dirty, to be the envy of those lesser beings who had not seen further than Donna on a Sunday afternoon.

To-day, so far as the High Plains section is concerned, this is completely changed. Here is a hive of industry where men and machines work through the day and night blasting their way through the mountain. Roads are being pushed forward in all directions and along them towns have sprung up in the snow country. Mt. Beauty is planned and taking shape as a model town, while Bogong township overlooks a beautiful artificial lake reflecting Spion Kopje, with Fainter, Mt. Bogong and McKay in the background. This unique town is built on terraces

planted with deciduous trees, which in the autumn rival the beauty of the spring wattle massed on the slopes leading into the lake.

The main road leads upwards from here to the construction camps of Homan's at 4000ft., Rocky Valley at 5300 ft. and Pretty Valley at 5500ft. These must not be confused with the temporary canvas type usually associated with construction camps. Here we have attractive timber buildings grouped in rows about a larger mess and recreational hall. Nearby are workshops, garages and store buildings. An unusual feature which intrigues the visitor, is the complete absence of chimneys, for everything is run by electricity. Each cubicle is heated by this means and every man has a built-in element in his room. His meals are prepared and cooked by the latest electrical equipment of gleaming chrome and stainless steel. Through the week, standard 35 m.m. sound feature picture programmes are shown in the halls, which have built-in projection boxes. Modern luxurious buses run to regular schedules, transporting people about the Commission's daily business and often the roads are as busy as a city street.

But what about the ski-ing? With thou-



Lower Section of Spion Kopje Course

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sands of people living in and near the snow-line, it is not difficult to imagine what is happening to the snow. The Bogong Ski Club was formed some years ago for S.E.C. employees. Falls Creek forms a subsidiary gully running east and west almost at right angles into the main valley of the East Kiewa. The gully tapers to a basin, about 600ft. below the top of the Frying Pan Spur, and here the Bogong Ski Club have their clubhouse with accommodation for over 80 persons. With a 600ft. face of up to 28 degrees in front of the building and most of that above the timber line, they have a location which should help put them in the forefront of ski-ing. They expect to increase their membership to over 250 skiers in the coming season. Of course, there are numbers of skiers from the camp who do not belong to the club. Most of these are raw novices, who are too shy to join up until they have gained their ski-legs a little more

confidently. Already Victorian attention has been drawn to this area because of the success of teams and individuals of the Bogong Ski Club in winning the 1949 N.E.D.S.A. and then the F.O.V.S.C. championships

More promising even than Falls Creek is the great Spion Kopje ridge on the opposite side of the valley. This culminates in the highest point of the Bogong High Plains at 6287ft. on an unnamed point. It is really an extension of the Mt. Nelse Ridge, as North Mt. Nelse forms its south-eastern end. From here it extends some four miles north-westerly in almost a level ridge to Spion Kopje at 6117ft. and Little Spion Kopje. At this point one can look down into Bogong township 4000ft. below to the north, or Homan's Camp 2000ft. below to the west. It is in this latter direction that a large gully falls steeply from the summit to a flat on Nelse Creek 1800ft. vertically below. For a thousand feet the gully is clear of scrub and below that a run has been cleared by enthusiastic bands of Bogong Ski Club workers.

This, to-day, provides what is probably the longest accessible descent in Australia and it is considered that future State and Interstate Championships may be held here. In any case, the S.C.V. and the B.S.V. are in the very happy position of having a hut at the foot of the run with accommodation for eight persons.

This is a steel-framed Armco hut, originally erected by the S.C.V. as an observation hut at Falls Creek. Suddenly it disappeared and for a long time the mystery was unexplained. Then someone discovered it, through smoke from the chimney, nestling under Spion Kopje, a mere red spot hundreds of feet down and a mile or so from the main road. How it got there down a steep mountainside and terrific scrub, across a marshy flat and two branches of the Kiewa River is a story of mandhandling reminiscent of the Kokoda Trail.

The run has not been properly tried in winter as yet, and still requires a considerable amount of work before completion. However, this is being proceeded with by B.S.C. members, who hope to have it ready for winter 1950.

Through the efforts of Tom Mitchell the Falls Creek gully has been thrown open to Permissive Occupancies for the N.E.D.S.A. groups. Already Albury, Beechworth, Myrtleford and Wangaratta Clubs have them while

Albury and Myrtleford have buildings under way. Across the gully, the Skyline Ski Club has a very comfortable little cabin, erected in 1947 by several S.E.C. staff members who form this group.

At present the S.E.C. has ruled that no larger accommodation than that required for 20 persons may be built on P.O.'s before completion of the construction works in 1956-7. In view of this, the S.C.V. has restricted its plans to a wing of the War Memorial Club-house to accommodate this number for the time being. These plans are in the hands of an architect and will be proceeded with on the club's Falls Creek road site, as soon as a permit for building and materials can be obtained. Transport to this site will be by passenger buses already operating in the area. Private cars will not be permitted beyond the control gate at Mt. Beauty for the winter. At this point a parking space has been made available and a bus can then be taken to the area along the snow-ploughed road. The climb is over 4000ft in 20 miles.

The provision of buses with drivers experienced on these mountain roads is a simple and most effective manner of controlling the traffic, which has already become a problem on Mts. Buller and Donna Buang.

Ski-tows are being discussed for Falls Creek by S.C.V. and Bogong Ski Clubs. A joint effort by both may be the answer to a 600ft. tow to the top of the Frying Pan Spur.

On the southern slopes of the Bogongs, three miles beyond Falls Creek, there is a group of huts forming a community somewhat apart from the Kiewa.

This group of huts gives accommodation

for sixty persons within a radius of less than a mile amidst park-like surroundings, lightly timbered with large snowgums and moderate ski-runs in all directions. The Gippsland access is still used, but the trip across Rocky Valley is preferred as it is only two miles from the S.E.C. road, mostly level with a rise of 200ft. before a run is made down to this community.

So much for the present, but what of the future? In a few years Rocky and Pretty Valleys will be vast lakes. This will separate these southern huts from the Falls Creek area by at least another mile, but provide a most attractive tour in summer. The road to Falls Creek will be a first-class mountain highway, sealed and snow-ploughed to at least 5300ft. Bus services operated by groups other than the Commission are already catering for almost daily tourist trips, bringing service right to the door.

There is no comparable snowfield with these services anywhere else in Australia and, of course, it would never be economically possible for such to be provided for skiing purposes alone, even with twice the present number of skiers.

In the meantime, it must be remembered that development of this State is being retarded by shortage of electricity and skiers should be unselfish enough to realise that present restrictions on private transport and buildings are reasonable and necessary for the early completion of the enormous construction programme. Let us aim at a spirit of co-operation which will eventually benefit all.

