

# The Baw Baws

T. W. Mitchell

FROM the summit of Mt. Baw Baw (5130 feet) one can survey the plateau which is an isolated outpost of the main snowland system and crowns the uprearing end of a peninsula or spur running off in a south-easterly direction from the main dividing range of the alps. The plateau is about 11 miles long by about 3 miles wide. Ten miles away, Mt. Erica (5,000 feet) formed a high promontory jutting out into the Gippsland lowlands. There are three huts over there among the giant boulders on Mt. Erica. These are the huts of the Captain Hurley Rover Crew of the Yallourn Boy Scouts; the hut of the N.B.W. (No B—Women) Club; and another "hut" built by walling up with saplings the spaces under a super-giant of a rock. This Mt. Erica area is losing its popularity because, although it is nearer to the Gippsland towns than the Mt. Baw Baw approach, the Climb-of-Three (three thousand feet, three miles, three hours, three days to recover) is a strong factor in the reorientation of popularity.

The section of the plateau in the segment defined by Mt. Baw Baw, Mt. Erica and Mt. St. Phillack, in particular, shows evidence of the fact that it is a remnant of an ancient peneplain that has been uplifted. A long period of subsequent deeply rasping erosion has left the harder rocks (in the main, granites) still exposed. As a result, the landscape is a mosaic of gentle ellipses in repetition or perhaps a series of crowded plum-pudding tops covered with a grey fungus of dead snow gums. In between there is a stippling of little boggy land-locked flats. The country is somewhat less treed where the long ridges lie transversely in rows towards Mt. St. Phillack (5,140 feet).

After taking in the extensive view we came to the top of the Painted Run, a downhill course of some 200 vertical feet of most interesting running down through the snow gums. It really provided me with some sporting and interesting ski-ing, but it was too short, lots too short. That is the main trouble, apart from thick timber, with the ski terrain on the Baw Baw plateau because, except for the Thompson ski run of about 800 vertical feet into the valley of the

upper Tyers River, the average vertical footage of runs off the various peaks on to the plateau is only about 300 feet. Apart from this defect, though, the Baw Baws are well worth developing as a ski resort. The terrain generally reminded me of the Laurentian ski terrain in Eastern Canada and I feel that if trails are made and marked on the Laurentian lines, in conjunction with an alpine village, we will have an excellent alpine asset that will yield us many hours of pleasure.

Back at the lodge we had a cheery cup of tea and then set off regretfully back down the mountain. Before doing so, I had talks with various club members with reference to their ideas on the development of the mountain. Although all are agreed that an alpine village is necessary, they have not yet decided exactly where they wish the village. There are only three really possible sites; one over towards Mt. St. Phillack; another in Faith Creek; and a third in the vicinity of the present lodge. The first one is out of the question because of distance, thus the choice is between the other two. I favour Faith Creek because, not only is the terrain, water supply, etc., suitable, but there is a very pleasant view out over the lowlands through a notch in the plateau edge. The present lodge area, while admirable for a village, is completely devoid of view. I always feel quite definitely that a view is extremely important in connection with an alpine village. I am strongly in agreement with Francis Bacon where, in his essay on Pan or Nature, he writes, "He (Pan) was held to be Lord President of the Mountains, because in high mountains and hills, Nature lays herself most open and men are more apt to view and contemplation." Accordingly, the more landscape you can see from your ski lodge, the greater chance Nature has to reveal itself to you and to beget those mental impressions that are moulded into the memories that mean so much to you throughout all the vicissitudes of the years.

The recommendation of the Victorian Parliamentary State Development Committee is that a road be constructed right up on to the plateau, but implementation of

this may take a little time. In the meanwhile, my recommendation is that the main road be pushed on the extra mile or so to Newlyn's Mill and a parking place constructed there. A parking place should also be provided at The Winch (3,500 feet) for the convenience of late spring skiers.

A summer access road, similar to the one from the Old Chalet site at Mt. Buller, should be constructed at once in order to help the construction and equipping of lodges. About  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles only of this is required because a suitable road of this nature already runs for several miles up the mountain.

We continued our regretful way down the mountain, the pinches that had seemed so steep and unending on the way up now

melted almost unnoticed underneath our feet.

The warm air of springtime seeped up to meet us and warred with the keen winter air of the upper heights. After the sequestered shelter of the Mt. Buller trees, it was a queer sensation to move under the shorn golry of this fire-slaughtered Ash. These towering columns of sterile grey are all the more dwarfing to you because their crowns no longer blot out the sky.

From Newlyn's Mill the imposing cataract of the mountains dropped away, range after range, to blend with the indefinite square miles of the plains. All this wealth of glory and only one hundred short miles from teeming Melbourne. Fifty miles nearer to Melbourne than Mt. Buller.