

# Hotham in Summer

By Pat Holdsworth

(Edelweiss Ski Club).

"**H**OTHAM in the summer——!" They stare, disbelieving. "In the winter for skiing, yes, but in the middle of summer, on top of a mountain! What can you find to do all day?"

"Well, we—we like it there, we——" Change the conversation. What can we do indeed!

From the moment we leave Harrietteville on the last twenty miles to Hotham, we are completely absorbed, watching the road, the sky, the distant scene.

A cloud formation looks like a god picture, "Must get that." A patch of colour at the roadside might be a flower we haven't seen, "Must have a look." The winding road, the hills coming nearer and clearer, higher, higher into the cool, clear air of Hotham.

Our cabin is small, with accommodation for only ten persons. It has been built mostly by club members and apart from the major jobs which to date are not yet started (the exterior stone work, continuation of the sun deck, the road) there are lots of jobs for the boys; jobs which must be done regularly such as oiling the outside timbers, renewing the paintwork outside and in, cleaning the tank, clearing the creek bed; and inside the girls do the domestic chores, plan the menus, talk. And clean the windows, a long, long job since the view tantalizes us to linger. We have morning tea on the unfinished sun

deck, hot amber liquid from a tea-pot, or cold amber liquid from a bottle. The boys peel off their shirts and stretch out in the sun.

On our walks we take a camera, for the mountain is a happy hunting ground for photographers of wild flowers: violets, buttercups, blue-bells, daisies. Small daisies, spreading patches of purple and mauve and pink between the sage green stubble of the grass; and large white ones, swaying proudly on long slender stalks. The bright yellow "billy-button" nodding a joyous welcome—new, here is a picture for any camera! There is a lovely blue-bell, tall and graceful with a narrow leaf, against a background of clay and rocks, it makes a perfect picture. And there is one, with a double layer of petals, pink and mauve and a conical centre, we call her "The Lavender Lady." Then there is the Everlasting, "The Love Flower." The Blue Tufted Lily and the tiny Blue Pin-cushion. Tread carefully, there may be one beneath your boot!

Who said the sky was blue, the grass green, the mountains brown? Come to Hotham, rest your city weary eyes on this vast domain of wind and sun, of sky and hills; and try to count and name the colours till you run out of both names and numbers. And not just one days, but every day a different mood, a different colour scheme.

Then, in the magic twilight hour" belonging neither to day nor night," we stand on the sun-deck and watch the startling invasion of the Bogong Moth. Thousands of them, millions of them, flying madly in all directions tearing a pattern across the darkening sky. Where do they come from, where do they go?

"I read somewhere that years ago the aborigines used to come here from miles around just to eat these moths."

"Ugh——!"

We have a party to-night. For it is the Secretary's birthday and the table is decorated with bon-bons, paper caps and blow-outs. We have a four-course meal, all from tins; chicken soup, asparagus, meat pie and vegetables, plum-pudding and brandy sauce, biscuits and cheese. Rhinegold chilled in the creek; claret warmed at the stove; cherry brandy velvet on the tongue. Jokes and laughter, hilarity and songs. Washing up at 11-30. And so to bed.

The sun, too, was up late next morning. He just could not get out of his bed of grey blankets and white sheets. When eventually he did rise, he dragged both blankets and sheets across the sky after him all day and pulled them right over his head, long before his bed-time.

"Looks like rain."

"Ye, we'll work indoor to-day. Finish the stonework around the lounge fireplace, door on the china cupboard, paint the porch door—" The girls bring their books and knit-

ting into the lounge, but little of either is done. How can one read or knit when that fascinating, tantalizing scene is spread before us?

We stand, motionless, watching long fingers of cloud clawing at the mountain tops. Then comes the cloud itself; flopping down the side, smothering the Drift Chalet, the Alpine, the University in an untidy sprawl. Then it sways towards us. The young green leaves of the little snow gums shiver in fright, then disappear slowly in the opaque whiteness. The cloud presses against the window and we turn from its rude stare.

"Let's go for a walk."

Down go the hammers and paint brushes and we tumble out into the damp air. The cars are wet, moisture drips from the trees. "The earth is having a bath." No wonder the modest sun hid his face!

Arms entwined, we march down the road.

Judy runs ahead, tossing her dew-spangled hair.

"Be careful, there may a car coming." A car! in this magic of mountain mist? Fairies and Elves, more likely.

A New Year's Eve party at Lindsay's place. Beautiful surroundings, pleasant company, laughter and songs.

"Home to-morrow."

We stand on the sun-deck for a last soliloquy. How beautiful is the night! Reluctantly we turn from it, conscious of a Heavenly benediction in the gentle wind whispering about us.