

Ski Tows in Victoria

WITH the rapid development of ski-ing in Victoria—there are now over fifty clubs—it is natural that there should be much thought given to the establishment of ski tows. Here are some notes on the tows which have already operated or will be operating this year.

At Hotham.

This rope tow is of proven design, with nutcracker-belt attachment for the skier.

The haulage machinery, pole-pulleys and rope-clips are made by Hamilton & Co. of

Christchurch, similar to their many successful tows in New Zealand. This choice though costly, was made to attain complete reliability of operation. Power supply is a Bedford 25 h.p. petrol engine at the top of tow.

Choice of site proved difficult. Many sites perhaps more suitable from the ski-running viewpoint had to be ruled out because of lack of a flat take-off or landing, severe short pinches in the centre of the slope, sidelings (cross gradients), or impossibility of getting

a straight tow line. A representative of the Hamilton Co. assisted in selecting the site, which was not finally chosen until after four summer inspections and a winter's study. The tow slope chosen is on the east fall of Mt. Higginbotham (Swindler's Creek Valley), alongside the Varsity Drag course. The vertical height of the lift is 770 ft., and length of the slope 620 yards, i.e. from 70 yards below Begg's Bath to the Alpine Road.

Installation was in charge of Mr. B. Hanson, who has had much previous installation experience with Hamilton's and who flew over from N.Z. for the purpose.

The survey shows that there is a take-off slope of 14 deg. for 40 yards, thence going uphill it is 18 deg. for 85 yards near the water channel, followed by 80 yards of 23 deg., 105 yards of 26 deg. 80 yards of 30 deg., 20 yards of 26 deg., 150 yards of 23 deg. 30 yards of 25 deg., and finishing with 30 yards of 16 deg. landing slope, the whole bearing East-North-East. The average time of ascent by the tow will be three minutes, or about 7 miles per hour.

Half a dozen new ski-trails adjacent to the tow are being opened up, to increase the wide variety of running already available. The Brandy Creek water channel (Begg's Bath) will be cleared to link all slopes in the valley and give quick access to the foot of the tow.

The charge for use is expected to be about £3 weekly or proportionately higher for daily hiring, but will be largely dependent on the volume of patronage.

Initial funds required, i.e. for purchase, installation, and for first season's operations, are in the region of £3,000.

The tow is owned by a public company, Ski Tows Ltd., the shareholders of which, so far, are all skiers. The average shareholding is about £50 a head, in £1 shares. The company is being operated as a commercial enterprise, although profit-earning may not be achieved in the first period of operations, i.e. until patronage has become established. The first Directors are Malcolm McColl (Chairman), Warrant Begg, Don Bennett, Jim Harper, Hamish Pearson and Mick Hull, all members of the University Ski Club or Alpine Club.

At Mt. Buffalo.

This tow, situated at the Dingo Dell run, Mt. Buffalo, on the way to the Horn, is of the endless rope type.

It is owned and operated by the Mt. Buffalo National Park Committee, is of simple design, originally powered by an old Cadillac V8 car engine (now a Ford V8) with a 3 inch sisal "yacht" rope.

It has a length of 700 feet with 130 ft. lift. Time of ascent is about 85 seconds, and about 15 skiers the maximum number on rope at one time.

After two lean years of snow, last winter proved successful and it was enthusiastically used.

While the endless rope, grasped by the hand (with or without a protecting glove) is the most primitive form of tow, it is suitable to the conditions appertaining to Mt. Buffalo. These conditions are:—

- (a) High proportion of novice or first season skiers.
- (b) Steady flow of patronage.
- (c) Comparative flatness and evenness of slope.
- (d) Short run of rope.

Grips have been tried, but are unnecessary and, with inexperienced skiers, dangerous.

Rope breakages do occur, three in 1951 season, but other than this risk, there appears to be little of either difficulty or danger in the operation. In short, the endless rope tow serves the beginner's slope economically and satisfactorily.

At Fall's Creek.

When a team from the Bogong Ski Club visited New Zealand in 1950, the Bogong boys were tremendously impressed by the ski tows. It is not surprising then that, on their return to Australia, Toni St. Elmo, Ron Roberts, Max Denham and Lou Piera should decide to build a tow on their own home ground at Falls Creek. The Nissen Alpine Club was formed and, in the summer of 1950-51, the club built a ski tow on the Fry-ing Pan Spur to serve the major runs from the top of the Spur down into the East Kiewa River.

The tow has a vertical lift of about 700 ft. and is 1850 ft. long. It is designed along similar lines to the Hamilton, being of the endless rope type, and attachment is by belt and nutcracker. The tow is powered by a V8 Mercury engine. Most of the equipment, winding gear, poles, pulleys, etc. were secured in Australia. Although the tow was designed to carry 12-15 persons at the one time with a three minute lift, it was found in

operation that this load was too great, but the tow worked very satisfactorily carrying a smaller number.

At only 6/- per day for a lift from the water race near the Bogong Ski Club hut, to near the top of the Frying Pan Spur, the tow was a great boon to skiers at Falls Creek last year, one runner claiming to have had 30,000 feet of downhill in a day and all of this on slopes averaging about 26 deg.

The tow is adjacent to the declared village area at Falls Creek, where there are already five lodges and more contemplated.

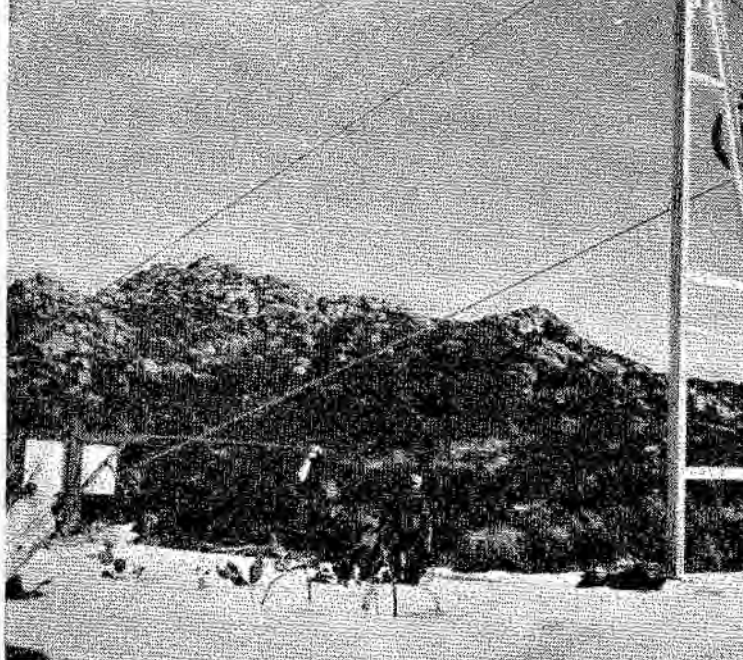
Although the tow had many teething troubles last year, it is certain to be very popular again this year. It is understood that shortening the tow slightly will have overcome many of the problems experienced previously. Altogether this is a fine effort by a few enthusiastic people and demonstrates what can be done to develop our skiing areas.

Also at Falls Creek last year, the Myrtleford Ski Club ran a little portable tow with a vertical lift of about 80 feet, which was designed and built by a member, Gordon Muller, and we believe worked very successfully.

At Buller.

In July, 1949, the Ski Club of Victoria commenced operating a small experimental tow in the tree line just above Cow Camp at Mt. Buller. The tow has a vertical lift of approximately 160 feet, its length from the tow engine at the bottom to the upper pulley is about 300 yards. The tow is powered by a 30 h.p.p Chevrolet engine and at least 12 people can be lifted at once. The tow is an endless rope type with nutcracker and belt attachment. Being an experimental tow only, it was originally designed for use without the nutcracker but, after the first year's operation, it was considered desirable to change over to the Hamilton system.

Mr. R. E. Summers was instrumental in starting the project in the S.C.V. and he had a very willing sub-committee to work with him to build this tow. In the three years of operation it has not only provided an extremely useful service, particularly for novices at Mt. Buller, but it has also been the means whereby the S.C.V. has accumulated a considerable knowledge in the operation of tows, so much so that there is every likelihood of the present tow being extended beyond the tree line and also that a more am-



The Tow at Buffalo. Photo. Vic. Railways.

bitious project will be started on one of the Howqua slopes of Mt. Butler, probably on the Bull Run. This would be a more difficult installation, but would give first class downhill running.

An enormous amount of work has been done by the S.C.V. with their tow at Mt. Buller, and the club deserves full credit for having the foresight to commence the project. Although the tow has not yet quite paid its way, there is no doubt it is making possible the installation of other tows at Mt. Buller with a minimum of teething troubles. One difficulty the club has experienced has been rope splicing, although club members and others have so far been fairly successful when the necessity for splicing during the season has arisen.

Operating the tow has had its entertainment value also. The safety gate at the top of the tow functioned effectively when on several occasions absent-minded skiers failed to release their grip on the nut cracker. The sight of a much flustered skier suspended a couple of feet above the snow until it dawned on him it was time to let go, has often been appreciated by the crowd on Bourke Street.

[We are indebted to Mick Hull, A. W. Keown, R. E. Summers and "Ski" Horizon for most of the above information.—J[N.].