

Village Life at Mt. Buller

By V. M. Corr

EVERY settlement has its pioneers—something apt to be forgotten by those who have everything served up on a platter and just ready to be carved. So let us take a glimpse back at what went to produce the beginnings of the Mt. Buller Alpine Village at Cow Camp.

Snow in the main street of Mansfield! That is almost how it looked from photographs to the early ski enthusiasts. But Mt. Buller turned out to be 30 miles from Mansfield, and access up the mountain but a rough bridle track. Still, that and the fewness of the skiing fraternity did not stop the building of the old hut on the spur and later the Boggy Creek Hut, and then came Kofler with his chalet. But, after the war, Buller was almost back to its primitive days, with the commodious chalet a burnt ruin and the Koflers dead. The only places of accommodation were the S.C.V. Boggy Creek Hut, Cow Camp Hut and the shelter built on the ruins of the Old Chalet.

The first sign of renaissance and new growth was when C.S.I.R. started its "experimental" hut, others secreted illegal huts among the snow gums, Y.H.A. built its "temporary" quarters at Horse Hill, and the S.C.V. broadened and developed Kofler's old foot track into a traffickable road and commenced the Ivor Whittaker Memorial Lodge. But no village yet! The new buildings were well spread over the mountain and it was already evident that even the three new lodges would nowhere near provide the accommodation for all those who wanted it. The Forests Commission began to be bombarded with requests for sites. Some of the bolder spirits had ventured into what they hoped were the trackless wilds of the Buller forests with malthoid-covered huts, prefabricated at home and carried up in sections by human pack-horses, with dens hastily knocked up in the dense bush from the wreckage of the old chalet, with caravans laboriously installed before winter and removed in the spring, with tents neatly tucked away in thickets, with other ingenious "packaged" lodges erected perhaps in a single long and exhausting night.

At first it seemed that the Forests Commission was disinclined to grant permits for

sites and these cramped and clandestine quarters might be all that could be hoped for, with skiers, other than those lucky enough to get bookings at the Ivor Whittaker, Y.H.A. or C.S.I.R., doomed to spend their days slinking away each evening after skiing like foxes to their holes. Some of the dwellings must certainly have closely resembled a fox hole, too—for example, the shanty built round the ruins of the Chalet chimney often housed fourteen or fifteen.

But pressure on the Commission continued through constant fresh or repeated requests, and, at last, a big step forward was taken when the Forests Commission decided to reopen the matter and to meet club representatives on the mountain. Mr. Geratty, a Commissioner, inspected the area with club representatives and it was almost unanimously agreed that Cow Camp was an ideal site for a village.

About this time, the Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs was formed, incorporating in it many of the clubs which had been active in pushing for development of the Commission had the Cow Camp area set aside as the "Mt. Buller Recreational Reserve," to be controlled by a Committee of Management consisting of representatives of various public bodies and of the S.C.V. and the F.O.V.S.C. Under the Committee, portion of the area was surveyed and the lots allotted to applicant clubs, which began the erection of club lodges with a fanaticism born of seeing their dream come true. Who will forget that first King's Birthday when a round of club parties such as has never since been seen on such a scale gave vent to the clubs' happiness at the prospect of their first winter in their homes, even if only partly finished!

Later, the survey was extended as it became apparent that new clubs, spurred on by the concrete evidence of the splendid club lodges which had risen before their eyes, would need further sites.

The wisdom of planned development through a joint body representing public authorities and skiers, laying down standards of construction and management, but

leaving the clubs otherwise to control their own affairs, has become fully manifest.

Now we have at Cow Camp twenty-two habitable lodges and others still building. The smallest lodge will sleep eight, the largest over thirty. The lodges vary widely in design, but their attractiveness is such that the village rated a full article with photographs, including the cover photograph, in the "Home Beautiful."

Those who have sampled "village life" at Buller agree that the set-up is a vary happy one. The relative proximity of the lodges, originally thought to be a disadvantage, is now seen as well suited to the mountain, giving the right opportunity for pleasant

neighbourly intercourse, without the impression of crowding. Possibly a few of the lodges are too close, owing to the way they have been sited on their block, but mostly the size of the sites has been found reasonable.

So, if you weren't one of the "originals," next time you go to Buller and proudly add the finishing touches to your new building, looking forward to its christening on Queen's Birthday, just give a thought to what lay behind the ease with which you obtained that lodge permit.

[Victoria is fortunate. There are now villages also at Hotham and Falls Creek, though Buller's is by far the biggest.]-Ed.]