

Review of the Year

By John Nicholls

THE 1952 season established more firmly Victoria's pre-eminence as the ski-ing State of Australia. Club lodges continue to be built at an extraordinary rate, and acquisition by the S.C.V. of the Hotham Heights Chalet has given further impetus to the development of Hotham.

It was a very long season in Victoria—admittedly with its lean periods—but in many respects it was one of the heaviest we have had since ski-ing began. There was good ski-ing and plenty of snow at all major resorts in late October, and drift ski-ing could be had in some places well into December.

As usual, the ski-ing accent was on Buller, Falls Creek and Hotham. With over 26 club lodges and now "Kooroora" Chalet, built during the summer by the Forras brothers, Buller can accommodate over 400 skiers with a degree of comfort many of us could never have anticipated. Besides the accommodation of the smaller clubs, the S.C.V.'s Ivor Whittaker Lodge and this new chalet can easily provide for interstate skiers and newcomers—an impossibility in past years. All this means that Mt. Buller has become the major ski centre in Victoria, and undoubtedly will remain so for some time, due to its proximity to Melbourne and comparatively easy access. The Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs has a scheme this season to keep the Buller road free of snow up as far as the old Chalet site, which would then leave only about a mile's easy walking or ski-ing up to the Village. Both the Ivor Whittaker Lodge and "Kooroora" Chalet will provide, as well as accommodation, casual meals and services such as fresh bread, vegetables and even meat, together, of course, with a large range of canned foods. As yet there has been no application for a licence on Mt. Buller, but this is bound to come.

At Falls Creek, too, development has been rapid, and there are now over twelve lodges completed or in the process of completion. There, too, skiers other than members of the clubs having lodges can find excellent accommodation at the Bob Hyman's Ski School.

While the work of the State Electricity Commission on the Bogong High Plains is curtailed, access to Falls Creek is perhaps not so easy, because the road is snow-ploughed only as far as Howman's Gap, leaving a walk—albeit a rather easy walk—of two to three miles. The ski tow conducted by the Nissen Alpine Club is a further attraction at Falls Creek, and this centre is bound to go ahead. One of the interesting features of development of this area in the last two years is that, despite all the initial clamour from Sydney clubs for sites, as yet no such club has built.

Hotham, for long the undoubted Mecca of Victorian ski-ing, is changing rapidly. Not only are more club lodges being built—there will probably be at least seven completed before winter 1954—but there is now almost adequate accommodation provided for skiers from other clubs by the Drift Chalet and by the Hotham Heights Chalet, which was recently acquired by the S.C.V. In addition to the stimulus which comparatively abundant accommodation has given Hotham, there is, of course, the ski-tow which functioned extremely successfully near the Varsity Drag course throughout 1952. Were it not for the difficulties of access, Hotham would probably be the nearest approach to ski centres of overseas standard that we have at present in Australia. Access, however, is, as ever, the big problem, and although the Country Roads Board has done magnificent work in ploughing the road from both the Harrierville and Omeo sides, access far too often is either too long or too dangerous, and sometimes both. The Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs has recently drawn the attention of the Country Roads Board to the possibility of a low-level route to Hotham via Dungey's Track, which follows the West Kiewa and the Cobungra Rivers, and could provide a low-level route from the Ovens Valley across to Gippsland.

These three ski centres are undoubtedly causing an unhealthy disregard of other excellent terrain in Victoria. Gone appear to be the days when skiers toured for a week or a fortnight on the Bogong High Plains

and Mt. Bogong itself, living from night to night in the various cattlemen's huts. However, there are some signs that newcomers to ski-ing are learning that there are other areas perhaps than Mt. Buller or Falls Creek, and that they would like to see them. This attitude is bound, within the next few years, to lead to greater use of all our ski terrain than at present. Mt. Bogong itself seems to be capturing a little more interest now that many clubs have finished building their own club lodges, and it should surely not be very many years before there will be still further development on this wonderful mountain. Many of us hope, of course, that whatever development there is will be on a minor scale compared with that at Buller, Falls Creek or Hotham. Some country clubs continue to develop their own respective areas; clubs such as Wangaratta, Tallangatta, Upper Murray and the Erica Division of the S.C.V. continue their interests at St. Bernard, Wills, Pinnabar and the Baw Baws.

One of the most extraordinary features of recent development of ski-ing areas in Victoria is that Feathertop, that loveliest of mountains and second highest in Victoria, remains relatively untouched. Since the Chalet was destroyed by bushfires fourteen years ago the only accommodation available there has been the old Feathertop Hut. Although this hut still stands, and is still used, it can only accommodate a few, but the few who go to Feathertop now don't mind having to rough it. It will not be very long before the call of Feathertop is too strong for old and new, and it would not be surprising to see another hut spring up within the next couple of years.

With over sixty clubs, Victoria has now probably more active skiers than New South Wales. This position is no doubt accentuated because Melbourne is so much closer to the Victorian snow country than is Sydney to Kosciusko. While by no means are Melbourne skiers the only ones responsible for development of ski-ing in Victoria, it is quite clear that the major activity is directed from Melbourne and that, of course, is the main reason Buller has gone ahead more than other Victorian mountains. It is interesting, however, to see the extent to which country clubs are developing Falls Creek, and this area is now the centre of a very keen ski population, and a thriving regional organi-

sation, the North Eastern District Ski Association. There are many who feel that development of ski-ing in Victoria could be better progressed through the regional organisations than through a body such as the Federation of Victorian Ski Clubs, and it is certainly generally agreed that the structure of Victorian ski-ing is such that control by one club, with others affiliated thereto just would not work. It is unfortunate, therefore, that we must report at the time of writing that the efforts of the F.O.V.S.C. and the S.C.V. to form a new organisation which would be representative of all Victorian ski clubs, the proposed Victorian Ski Association, have not yet come to fruition. However, it is confidently expected that a new body can be formed before the close of this year. If the Victorian Ski Association is not formed it will be to the detriment of ski-ing in Victoria, for in the opinion of the writer the present structure is not in the best interests of the majority of skiers, or in the healthy development of the recreation of ski-ing. Clearly the S.C.V. has been a marvellous club, and undoubtedly has contributed more—at some times almost solely—to Victorian ski-ing than any other club. However, the S.C.V. has now so extended its financial interests in the snowlands that it tends to become dependent on a much wider group of skiers than its own club members. This is one of the reasons why other clubs feel that the interests of the S.C.V., the State Controlling Body, are not necessarily theirs, and since membership of other clubs—either members of the Federation or not—is more than double that of the S.C.V., it is evident that a body representative of all clubs must be formed at the earliest possible moment. The F.O.V.S.C. has, over the past two or three years, made this its foremost objective, but the S.C.V. does not appear to have taken the matter quite so seriously.

During the year our Olympians returned, and in general were enthusiastic about the desirability of sending teams to the Olympics. This has never been the bone of contention in any differences of opinion (in Victoria) regarding ski-ing and the Olympics. The real point is that most skiers feel it was quite unnecessary for the S.C.V. to become affiliated with the Victorian Olympic Council. It is felt that ski-ing is mainly a recreation, and that if the sporting side of ski-ing finds it essential to be affiliated with

an Olympic body there is no need to prejudice the recreational side, which, after all, is by far the more important at present. Most skiers feel (and the F.O.V.S.C. has always maintained this view) that if Australian ski-ing is to be affiliated with the Australian Olympic body it should do so on an Australia-wide basis, and no particular State should affiliate until agreement is reached with other States.

The National and Interstate racing was conducted successfully by the S.C.V. on behalf of Victoria, and one of the highlights was the standard of the jumping. With the Norwegians from New South Wales and some of our recent European acquisitions in Victoria it looks as though jumping will take on an interest which it has not had since Kaaten, Romuld and Johnson twenty years ago. It was disappointing that some of our Olympians had not returned in time to take part in the State and National titles. Disappointing, too, was the fact that, although many protagonists of the scheme for sending a team to the Olympics claimed this would stimulate interest in racing in Australia, the very year of the Olympics New South Wales could not get sufficient interest among skiers to run their State Championships, hence depriving some Victorians of the opportunity of competing. The Victorian inter-club championship was again successfully conducted, and the final at Mt. Buller was won by the S.C.V., which competed for the first time. During the year the N.E.D.S.A. sent a team to New Zealand which competed against New Zealand provincial teams. Although this team had little success in the races, the trip itself was so successful that this team from the Southern Districts Ski Association of New Zealand will visit Victoria as the guests of the N.E.D.S.A.

With the change of Government in Victoria skiers here are anxiously awaiting the new Government's attitude towards the National Parks Bill, which was before the House when the political crisis leading to the Victorian elections occurred late last year. This Bill is designed, among other things, to implement many of the recommendations which the State Development Committee made on Victorian snow country a few years ago, and would lead to considerable further development of our mountains. It is confi-

dently expected that the present Victorian Government (Labour) will be quite sympathetic to the limits of its financial resources with the requirements of skiers and tourists to our mountains. Committees, such as the Mt. Buller Recreational Reserve Committee, which, under the aegis of the Forests Commission, has jurisdiction over the village area at Mt. Buller, are unlikely to be affected. This Committee has done excellent work, and the Federation is pressing very strongly for the area under its control to be enlarged considerably. One anomaly, for instance, is that the S.C.V.'s Ivor Whittaker Lodge and its environs do not come within the Committee's area, and hence do not necessarily have to fulfil the stringent building requirements of the Committee. The Federation is moving, too, for some greater security of tenure for clubs in Victorian mountains than the permissive occupancies under which clubs build at present. The difficulty with a permissive occupancy is, of course, that funds cannot easily be raised, whereas if lodges were built on freehold, or even leasehold, land clubs would find it much easier to obtain the relatively small amount of finance necessary for various projects. The S.C.V., for instance, is in a difficult position with the Hotham Heights Chalet, in that they tendered for the Chalet on the basis of its being freehold, which unfortunately the Government is now loath to grant.

The Red Cross Ski Patrol continues, although interest in it is not nearly so great as it should be. Such projects probably always have a slow beginning, and it is hoped that the interest of the few active workers in the Patrol remains unabated until such time as the necessity for it becomes obvious to a greater number. The Royal Insurance Company will again offer its Ski Accident Insurance Scheme, but this year at a greater premium. This is understandable, for such a scheme depends on the participation of a large number if premiums are to be kept low. Up to the end of 1952 the Company announces that it had had 104 claims since the inception of the scheme, and that £1121 had been paid out in respect of them. It is quite evident that the majority of skiers who have injured themselves on the snow have not been insured. It is evident, too, that these skiers are unlikely to be uninsured in the future.

The F.O.V.S.C. anticipates that its Ski-ing



Falls Creek Slopes.

Photo. T. W. Mitchell.

Improvements Fund will be in operation for the 1953 season. Already many clubs have given support to the scheme, and others have indicated that they will do so. The idea of everyone who skis contributing a mere 6d. per night on the snow to a fund set aside for the general development of skiing is surely one with which no reasonable person would quibble. There have been three splendid examples already this year which show how useful a few hundred pounds in such a fund could be—such causes, for instance as the snow ploughing of the Buller road, the purchase of sledges for the Red Cross Ski Patrol, the maintenance of the Joyce Brockhoff Memorial Lodge, and so on.

The "Snowlands Pictorial," produced by the S.C.V., appeared during the year, and was greeted with considerable interest by skiers and others. Perhaps it would be true to say it will be appreciated by people interested in Victoria's mountains rather than specifically by skiers. Although the book contains some excellent snow photography, we have seen many better than a large number of the photographs which appeared, some of which were obviously very old. Captions with the various pictures could also have been

considerably improved to add information and interest for the reader. It is a book many skiers will want to have, but, as some have already said, there is much scope for another. Nevertheless, the S.C.V. is to be complimented on really pioneering this field, and we trust that their new venture is not an unfinancial one. "Ski Horizon" and "Schuss," the journals respectively of the F.O.V.S.C. and the S.C.V., continue to be published and maintain quite a fair standard, despite obvious financial difficulties.

Outstanding among the social or "off-the-snow" events was the Victoria's Snowlands Art Exhibition, arranged in Melbourne during February by a group of interested skiers. It was a wonderful idea and such a success that it is likely to become either an annual or a biennial exhibition. About twenty professional and amateur artists exhibited over fifty oils and water-colours. As the exhibition here was confined really to Victoria's snowlands, both New South Wales and Tasmania would be well advised to hold similar exhibitions of paintings of their own snow country. The social events of the years followed much the same pattern as in the past, outstanding events being the Wangaratta

Barbecue, the Albury Woolshed Ball, the S.C.V. Ball and the many more homely functions of other clubs in Melbourne and the country.

Whilst the past season has been one of unabated enthusiasm and development, it would be as well not to overlook some of the bad features. The worst, of course, is the obvious lack of initiative, ability or responsibility on the part of individual skiers to make some small contribution to the welfare of ski-ing in general. All clubs and organisations seem to have difficulty in finding people to do the various jobs which, in some cases, must and, in most cases, should be

done. While it is true this sort of attitude is not confined only to ski-ing, we have for so long considered that he who skis and loves the mountains is almost necessarily a good type that it has come as a shock over the last few years to find so many people prepared to let so few make it easy for them to go ski-ing. We have the attitude in Victoria at present of individuals allowing petty financial considerations (about sixpence or a shilling per member per year) to determine their policy on major issues. The recreation of ski-ing cannot for too long support people such as these, or very soon it will not be the recreation we all want it to be.