

Falls Creek Village

By Jim Curtiss

FALLS CREEK—how different this ski-ing name is from most of our other Victorian ski centres, Mts. Buller, Hotham, Buffalo, Bogong, Donna Buang, Baw Baw. Why, to be honest, there isn't a mountain at the Village and most of the ski-ing is done on the Frying Pan Spur! True, across the Bogong High Plains are the well-known mountains Cope, McKay, Nelse, Jim, Fainter, but these are usually only visited on day trips by parties from the lodges in the Village.

What makes the Falls Creek Village so well known to-day, so different from our other ski resorts? Firstly, its location and access—the Village itself is built on the higher slopes of the banks of the Falls Creek, which takes its rise in the corner of the Frying Pan Spur. (Whether the Creek derived its name from the fact that it falls rather rapidly from its source to its junction with the Rocky Valley branch of the East Kiewa River, or from the actual falls in its bed just below the Upper Kiewa Valley Road is not known.) Geographically, it is on the north side of the Bogong High Plains and is accessible by several old routes: from Hotham via Dibbins Hut, past Mt. Jim and across the plains to Pretty Valley (S.E.C. camp), then over Ruined Castle; from Omeo via bridle track from Mr. Fitzgerald's at Shannonvale, up Middle Creek Valley bearing across to Wallace's Hut and following the snow poles into Rocky Valley, and thence to Falls Creek; off Mt. Bogong, travelling past Roper's Hut and along the pole line across to Rocky Valley. These routes are not recommended as a means of easy access to Falls Creek. (Shades of the Blowhard portion of the Mt. Hotham access.) The most popular and easy way is via Wangaratta or Albury to Tawonga and Mt. Beauty, and thence by the State Electricity Commission's private road, the Upper Kiewa Valley Road. Provided visiting skiers to the Falls Creek Village have accommodation booked at one of the lodges in the village, permits of entry can be arranged through the Secretary of the Club concerned and the authorising officer of the S.E.C. at Mt. Beauty. As must be expected under the conditions, certain



The Creek itself, Falls Creek

Photo. R. Quillian.

regulations are laid down as to time, days of travel, speed, etc., but if visiting skiers to the Village carry out the requests asked of them, no difficulties should be experienced.

The Upper Kiewa Road from Mt. Beauty to Falls Creek is 19½ miles long, but during the winter the snow is cleared only as far as Howman's Gap (17 miles), leaving a walk of 2½ miles up a 1 in 16 road and, depending on the conditions and pack at the time, it is usually accomplished in one or two hours. Besides, it is extremely safe and sheltered, due to the road formation of high batter with tree and shrub wind protection. The road from Mt. Beauty is one of great



Falls Creek rising in elbow of Frying Pan Spur.

Photo. K. J. Shoebridge.

scenic attraction; on the first section one is given awe-inspiring views of Mt. Bogong, Victoria's highest mountain, and throughout, as the road twists through gorge and forest, exciting peaks are forever coming into view. Mirrored Lake Guy, with Bogong Village clustering at its side, is a never-to-be-forgotten sight.

To-day, there are ten Ski Club Lodges in Falls Creek Village plus a tow house and a privately run public chalet and ski school, together with several other lodges in various stages of erection, and more sites available for those who are interested in forming their own ski clubs. In 1948, however, when the large Bogong Ski Club Lodge was first built at Falls Creek, there was only one other lodge in the area, Skyline, then privately owned by a small number of S.E.C. employees, but it has since been acquired by the Ski Club of Victoria. The Albury Ski Club started its venture with a small building during the summer of 1948-49, then built its main building and has gone on improving it each year. In 1949-50, the Myrtleford Ski Club laid its foundations and raised a structure as time and money became available. And so, as each year has gone by, the numbers have slowly but surely increased—Hymans' Ski School, Kiewa Valley, Nissen Ski Tow, Dawn, Morona-Towalla and, this year, Nelse, Snowden and St. Trinians.

The Clubs in the Village have formed a Falls Creek Alpine Village Advisory Committee, which meets as required and enables

Clubs to discuss their various problems. At the same time, suggestions are received as to how the village and runs may be improved and, where necessary, the Committee makes recommendations to the S.E.C. (which controls the whole area) so that permission may be obtained for such improvements to be carried out.

Some clubs have open membership, others can accommodate members of other Ski Clubs, whilst there is the Ski School where all can be accommodated. Tariff and conditions re meals differ from lodge to lodge, but local trading facilities are available prior to entering the area and bulk tinned food can be stored in the lodges well in advance of the first snowfall. Persons desiring to make up a party to spend a winter holiday in Falls Creek Village should contact a Falls Creek Club Secretary and make their arrangements before the winter, but this is not so necessary for the shorter week-end trips.

The Village area is ideal for the use of Clubs which cater for the average skier and novices, as it is well sheltered. Even in the worst weather, it is easily accessible and offers slopes of varying steepness up to 1000ft. vertical descent. Some of the more advanced skiers have turned their eyes to longer and steeper slopes to match their techniques, and this has led to the commencement of the development of some of the best ski-ing terrain in the State. Day trips are available across the Bogong High

Plains, which are of an average height of 5400ft. These trips across the wind-sculptured snow are rewarded by views of mighty Buffalo, etc., ranging out to the horizon. Under ideal conditions it is also possible to catch a glimpse of Koscuisko on the skyline. Abundant snow has always been available for ski-ing from the end of June through to the end of September or October, and even later on the higher peaks.

Falls Creek has much to attract skiers from other centres. The Nissen Alpine Club runs a ski tow which is operated for a vertical pull of 800 feet (last season it was only 600 feet) and the Myrtleford Club has a small ski tow of its own. Its easy access has drawn many Melbourne Clubs and there is still talk of some Sydney clubs building there. As a base for touring it is a wonderful spot and the Frying Pan and Falls Creek itself were considered good enough for the venue of the last Inter-Dominion.

It is rather a novel experience to be ski-ing down a slope and to know that not far below you is a race line (a wide, deep channel which collects run-off water for utilisation in the Hydro-Electric Power Scheme) which could spell disaster for the unwary. These race lines get covered with snow in mid-winter, but the snow is not nearly secure enough generally to carry the weight of the skier, hence they must be jumped (but this is only for the few) or they must



be crossed at one of the bridges skiers have built during the summer months.

The racing or competitive side of ski-ing in Falls Creek is handled by the North Eastern District Ski-ing Association (NEDSA). This Association organises once a year a field day of sports and races and all Clubs under its auspices are entitled to compete for the Championship of the North East and to hold the Lindner Cup for the ensuing 12 months. The first two place-getters in the Championship are entitled to race in the Victorian Inter-Club Championship held later in the year. Lower grades are also encouraged by trophies and cups made available for B and C Grades. Racing equipment, such as poles, telephones, wire, etc., are procured by placing a small yearly subscription on each Club.