



LAKE ALBINA SKIING

By ALAN ANDREWS.

At Left:

Down in the timber 2500 feet below Townsend on the Townsend West Spur you look eastward and upward to the saddle on Townsend North Spur.

Since the nineteen forties, when a few energetic souls used to make pilgrimages to the Main Range to reconnoitre the "Western Faces," surprisingly little has appeared in the Year Book concerning this fascinating area. This is even more surprising when you consider that since those times we have been blessed with that little gem of a ski lodge—Lake Albina, and all the finest runs are now practically on the doorstep.

Being somewhat enamoured of this part of the Alps I have made the decision to remedy the situation by rushing in where the angels of the last ten years have feared to tread and talk of some of the main runs in the area. To qualify my "doorstep" statement and to set a limit for this article, I will restrict to mentioning only those runs which are west of the main divide and which commence within a two mile radius of the Lodge—the two mile radius may be seen on the accompanying map by any of scholarly

types interested enough to peruse this epistle.

The first trip of the holiday almost invariably finds me on the top of Townsend. Here, although gazing at a view that should hypnotise me, I seethe with impatience to run down into the timber. Being unlikely to move far before doing just that, I am immediately faced with the decision of whether it shall be Course (1) or Course (2).

Now Course (1), I have found, generally goes further down into the timber, but requires a swerve around the shoulder at the back of Townsend. Course (2), on the other hand, requires less will-power as it goes straight down—down and down until stopped by the scrub about 2200 feet below the Trig. That's quite long enough for weak legs and it might be added that this first climb out is, well (whisper it), generally not pleasant.

The other obvious run from Town-

and's summit is Course (3) which starts around the south side of the knoll at the back of Townsend and finishes in the creek just north of Hannel's spur. If one veers north when skiing down the west face of Townsend, although many pleasant runs may be had, the scrub tends to start at a higher level and in my opinion the traversing runs obtained are not so satisfying as the three mentioned.

A similar run to (3) is obtained by going north-west from the top of Abbot—it would be generally steeper. Depending just where the start is made, quite a few variations are possible; I have shown only one—Course (4). With any of these "Abbot North-West Face" runs, however, if you strike a lean season they could tend to be too rocky.

Jack Kennedy and I spent a couple of enjoyable days a year or so back poking around west and south-west of Abbot. We preferred the southern variation of Course (5), possibly because of the lurching spot, although both offer rewarding running and wonderful scenery. Many a sardine we gulped down, seated by those cascades that drop into Geehi Creek, our eyes glued to that western vista. It was well worthwhile, too, to cross that great basin behind Abbot, run farther down into Wilkinson's Creek and make our way back by the valley to the Lodge.

But of all the western runs from the Abbot-Townsend ridge the one that has given us most delight is Townsend West Spur. We have always done the run (Course (6)) in two sections, first running down the Townsend North Spur to the saddle directly opposite Little Austria, climbing to the knoll further north on the North Spur, then running down the West Spur into the timber.

Once the timber is reached, by veering left, then to the right through the trees a glade is reached which takes you to a saddle on the spur at 4750 feet. A turn south, and then down again through a lovely slalom gully till you will stop, no doubt breathless, and gaze out at Vic-



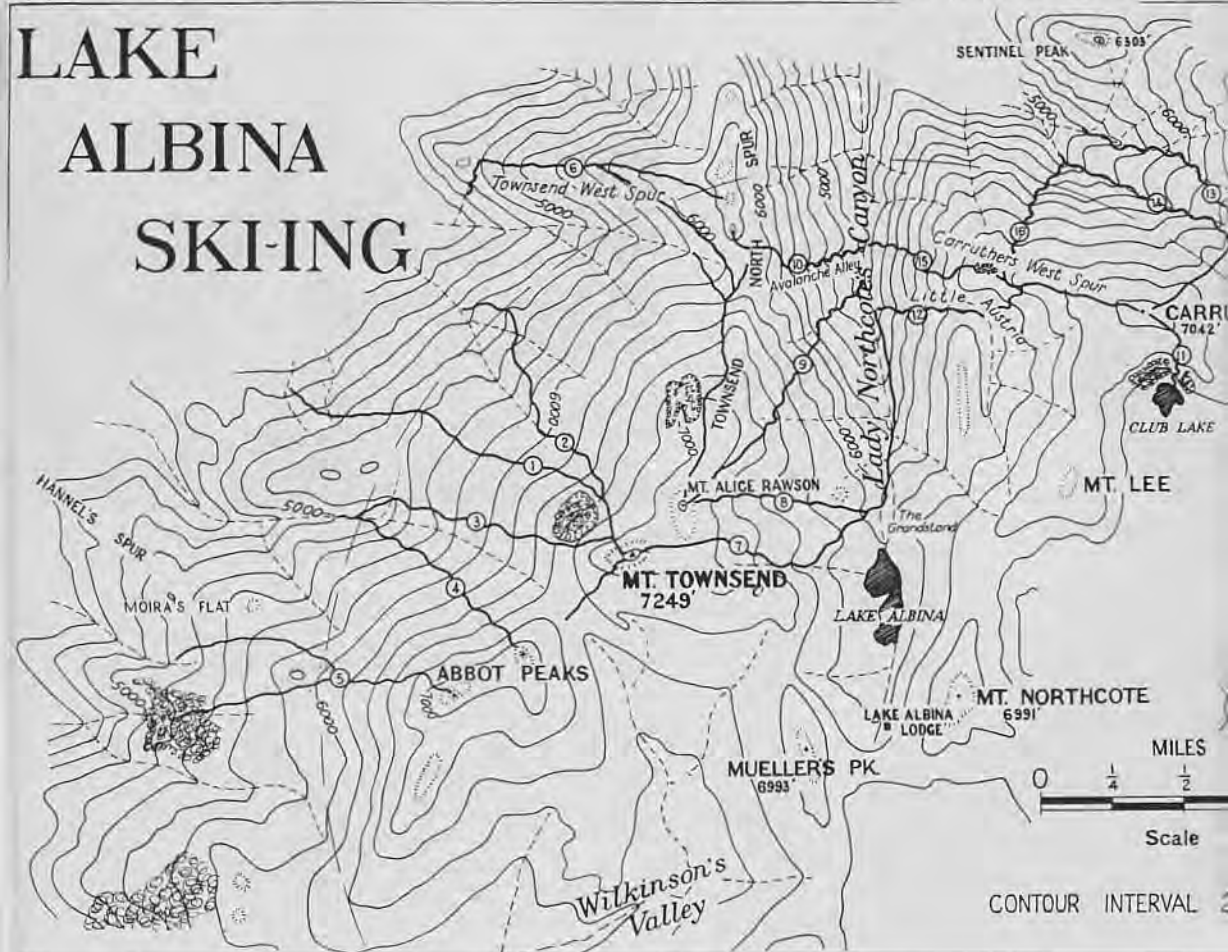
Where the trees grow horizontally—Avalanche Alley joins the Northcote Creek.

toria's Bogong, looking much, much closer than its sixty miles. It is possible to make the two mile course a continuous run of 2500 feet descent by traversing around the head of the creek at the top saddle, but it means sacrificing the upper slopes of the West Spur. Colin Wyatt in 1942 claimed this the best run off Townsend and in his opinion the best of all the Western Faces. The average slope of the running is in the order of 20 to 25 degrees. It is generally less

steep than the Townsend West Face runs previously mentioned.

The other long run off Townsend is much better known—"The Race Course" (Course (7)). Not so very long ago Championship Downhills were held on this course. It is a delightful run and can be made two miles long if continued down the floor of the Northcote Canyon to the foot of Little Austria. The first section averages about 15 degrees, the Canyon floor although about 13 degrees has not the blind bumps that make the upper section so satisfying. Commencing from Alice Rawson (Course (8)) the run is similar, steeper at the top, but no bumps.

Skiing with Frank Spencer, one of those characters who is happiest most when his skis are just adhering to some cliff face, good spring conditions gave us one of the best runs into the Northcote Canyon—the main Alice Rawson run (Course (9)). This course dropped us some 2200 feet with an average gradient of 32 degrees, ending up just below Little Austria with an easy climb out by the Canyon. Later, with Rod Kater and Diana Govan added to the party, we ran it again, following it up the next day with a run down Townsend West Spur, then from the top of this spur down into the Canyon again via Avalanche Alley. This little run (Course (10)) is one of



the steepest possible in our country—it averages 36 degrees or more for its 1200 feet vertical descent. Name it what you will, but to me, having seen it surface avalanche in both spring and winter conditions, Avalanche Alley it will remain.

To get some idea of the comparative steepness of these runs, using the same basis of assessment Carruthers to the Snowy would be say 7 degrees Charlotte Pass to the Snowy 12 degrees, Thredbo slopes 15 degrees, and the north wall of Club Lake, which can be an exciting run (Course (11)) reaching say 35 degrees.

About a quarter of a mile north of Avalanche Alley is another promising looking gully which drops some 1800 feet from the Townsend North Spur to the Northcote Canyon—it would need good snow cover for the bottom section and the climb out via the Canyon, but has no doubt been run at one time or another.

Still keeping within our two miles limit, we can now move across the Canyon and deposit ourselves on Carruthers Peak. The best known run from here is Little Austria, perhaps too well known to require much comment. As can be seen from the map, the course (12) starts down the West Spur of Carruthers, drops south into the top of the funnel and eventually ends 2000 feet below in the floor of the Northcote Canyon. Unfortunately, often the conditions in the funnel can be unpleasant due to ice on one side and slushy snow on the other. If these conditions are met, a pleasant run can be had by skiing down on the open face slightly to the south of the funnel.

Little Austria was the earliest of the "Western Faces" to be written up and deserves its popularity. The courses (13) and (14) in the steep valleys between Sentinel Peak and Carruthers West Spur also deserves the attention they have received. I am the first to

admit, however, that they can hold in store a diabolical climb out at times.

I have no personal experience of the remaining two courses indicated on the map—Course (15) though has certainly been run, and Course (16) is straightforward enough.

Well, that's the picture for a start. It only scratches the surface, for every time you stop and look around more and more runs leap into focus and seem to be asking to be skied. There is certainly no need to repeat yourself at any time during a season, but since you and I know that we always do, well then maybe next season . . .

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