

## Impressions of Ski-ing in New Zealand

By Colin Wyatt, in the "Australian and New Zealand Ski Year Book"

ALTHOUGH superficially the alpine regions of New Zealand—at any rate those of the South Island—resemble the Alps, the climatic and snow conditions are totally dissimilar, so that the European ski-runner has radically to readjust his ideas to the new conditions. From the skier's point of view, the country suffers from an insular climate, resulting in a heavy rainfall and higher humidity. This reacts upon the snow in two ways. Firstly, icy conditions and wind-crusts are of general occurrence, powder snow as a rule only occurring in sheltered valleys and after a fresh snowfall, so that for high-level touring in both islands crampons are an essential part of equipment, while it is next to impossible to bivouac out in the snow in sleeping-bags in winter, as is so often done in Norway, since the heavy condensation would soon soak through everything. Secondly, humidity binds snow together far more firmly than in Europe, so that snow-avalanches are of very rare occurrence and slopes which none would dare to approach in Europe become perfectly safe even under slabby conditions. On the other hand, the ice comes far lower, the snout of the Fox Flacier, for example, being only about six hundred feet above sea-level, while hanging glaciers form on almost all steep faces, so that one has constantly to guard against ice-avalanches. Fortunately, these places are fairly obvious, so that risks are very small. High alpine conditions occur at approximately 2,000 feet lower than similar conditions in the Alps and one can safely say that a *dreitausender* in New Zealand equals a *viertausender* in Europe. Probably few people realize that, in the Tasman Glacier, New Zealand possesses the largest glacier in the world outside the two polar regions and Central Asia\*; it is considerably larger than the Aletsch Glacier in the Oberland.

On the North Island mountains ice conditions occur which have no parallel elsewhere. Ice "feathers" form on rocks and snow, sometimes of a transparent blue, anything from three to fifteen feet long, which render ski-ing absolutely impossible and walking extremely difficult. Imagine a vast bird of solid ice with five-foot feathers, fluffing up its plumage, and you have some vague idea of what these condi-

tions are like. They are caused by the rapid freezing of the condensing moisture from the air and are particularly noticeable on Mount Egmont, which is surrounded by the sea on three sides. There plumes three inches long formed on my rucksack straps in a mist at 6,000 feet within an hour, while my ice-axe became so coated with ice that the sling-ring jammed.

The development of technical ability in the sport has of necessity been slow, for the New Zealanders have had to teach themselves almost entirely. The majority of runners has never seen a skilled European runner in action. As a result, the standard is at present a good deal lower than the average European standard and is generally to be compared with the English standard in, say, 1924; but their keenness is such that a little stimulus has very far-reaching results, as can already be seen since Barry Caulfield first came out for the Mount Cook company the year before last. His teaching has had an enormous effect, and has been of the greatest benefit. It is now to be hoped that the Government Tourist Department will engage some other professional for the Chateau Tongariro in the North Island, since only a few of the North Islanders have the time or the money to travel so far south to Barry Caulfield. The Tourist Department would be amply repaid for the initial effort. It has a shining example in the N.S.W. Tourist Department's action in bringing Ernst Skardarasy to Kosciuszko, which has been of incalculable advantage, not only to Australian ski-ing but also to the tourist business.

Owing to their having acquired their knowledge of ski-ing technique mostly from books, the one bad fault of New Zealand runners is that they cannot be induced to leave the beaten practice slope. They place far too much importance on practising turns time and time again on one small hard-beaten area, which they get to know by heart in a very short time, always starting their turn or series of turns from a standstill, with the result that they are apt to fall to pieces in their turns on tours. I am certain that if New Zealand runners would forsake the practice slope and expend the same energy and enthusiasm in making two climbs of a thousand feet or more and then practice their turns on the run down in the actual places where they are needed, on varying angles, and under varying snow conditions, they would develop into good runners far more

\*This is an old and proud claim of New Zealanders. Unfortunately Canada has become glacier-conscious and has discovered giants with appropriately outlandish names which have now dwarfed the Tasman, e.g., Klinaklini.—N.Z. Editor.

rapidly. I would rather see a bastard turn which achieves its object on a run, than a copy-book one carefully prepared on the nursery slopes. New Zealand skiers are far too timid in venturing further afield than the immediate vicinity of their hut grounds. In the course of a long run a huge amount is learned—steadiness, control, balance, ability to diagnose snow conditions ahead—which can never be learned on the practice slope. Even in falling about on a long descent one learns one's faults and how to correct them by practical experience, which cannot be said of falls on the beaten nursery slopes. And lastly a long steady ascent, followed by a long descent, is far healthier and more enjoyable and makes you fit far quicker, than spasmodic interrupted dashes and scrambles round the hut.

The good runner should be able to turn and run in any snow. Even if a certain type of snow seldom or never occurs on your own country, you should practice it whenever possible. A member of the Ruapehu Ski Club recently remarked that they had had terribly deep, heavy slushy snow at Ruapehu which they found it almost impossible to turn in, and he asked my opinion. The answer is—"Telemark." The interest in the S.C.G.B. Tests as a standard is very great, and I have been fortunate enough to have been able to set the test machinery in action, with very good results as far as the Third Class and Q2 Tests are concerned. But the Second Class Test cannot be carried through in New Zealand until some special formula for local conditions is authorized, since, in the first place, no wood-running exists in the country, and, in the second, only very rarely does one find more than one thousand feet of soft snow, if that. The weather and snow conditions unfortunately prevented much in the way of jumping, but on Egmont I succeeded at last in putting through a Third Class Jumping Test.

It is greatly to be hoped that a funicular will be built at one of the main centres in the near future; until this is done, not only will the development of the sport, of necessity, be restricted, but the country will not have the appeal to the winter tourist which would make it so well known if such facilities existed. It must not be forgotten that a funicular would be used, not by the young alone, but also by the aged and infirm.

New Zealand is essentially a ski-mountaineering country, and there is an almost endless amount of ski exploration to be done. Until now few have ventured into the high glacier regions in winter, yet these offer hundreds of miles of superb country which would be easier of access on ski in winter than on foot in summer. Few people, as yet, seem to realize the use of ski as an accessory to the climber; they form just as honourable a part of climbing equipment as crampons or ice-axe. I was able to make three ascents, including one first ascent, which I should never have been able to

accomplish without ski; in fact, one glacier up which I climbed comfortably, unroped, the glacier leading from the head of the Darwin Glacier to the south foot of the rocks of Mount Annan, I have since been informed from several reliable sources is completely impassable in summer. Many a ridge or arête which in summer is very difficult ice or ice and rock, becomes in winter a safer and far more enjoyable climb. Who has not grudged the hours wasted plodding home on foot over miles of glacier after a climb, which could be done so pleasurably and with so little effort in a few minutes on skis?

Already a good nucleus of alpine huts has been created in the main glacier districts, all stocked with tinned food, a stove and kerosene, and very comfortable wire bunks with mattresses and blankets; there still remain a great many glacier basins where huts would be of the greatest use both to climbers and skiers, of which the Murchison struck me as the chief of those I saw. Some of the huts are under the control of the tourist organizations, but the latter have not yet realized that huts which would be of use to skiers would be just as useful for opening up and popularizing the mountains as huts designed purely for the summer climber. Judged by European standards, both hut fees and guiding fees are very high and these, together with the ridiculous import duty on equipment, have put ski-mountaineering beyond the reach of many enthusiasts. Furthermore, no maps worthy of the name are available, and it is therefore not safe for any but an experienced party to venture out in doubtful weather, since a compass is of little or no use without reliable maps.

Access is always the chief difficulty in the remoter glacier groups, and the majority require two or three day's work packing in provisions and tents by horse and often by oneself. Possibly some pioneering spirit will try to open up these districts by aeroplane—landing on the glaciers—which would be the most practical way of saving time and energy in reaching one's base. Some very good work has been done by Captain Mercer, of Air Travel (N.Z.), Ltd., who has made landing grounds at the head of several of the more remote mountain valleys south of Mount Cook area, and has already flown in several parties of summer climbers and kept them supplied with food. Many of the glacier névés should be suitable for landing grounds since they are mostly fairly flat, and the snow, especially before 10 a.m., smooth and hard, except after new falls.

It is greatly to be hoped that the Government will make an effort to have all huts under the control of some such authority as the Alpine Club, with a fixed scale of charges and an official guiding tariff for the whole country. The institution of a proper school for guides, awarding diplomas, on the lines of the Swiss Alpine Club and German and Austrian Alpine

Club, is much to be desired, but is, I fear, far too Utopian at present.

The few first-class guides, every bit as fine as the crack European guides, are much booked-up in advance, and inexperienced strangers may be put into the hands of any odd man around the hotel irrespective of his knowledge of mountain-craft. This, of course, only applies to the very crowded and would-be European resorts; in the smaller places, especially those managed by past climbers, the consideration

and care of all types of party leaves nothing to be desired.

The mountains are the greatest playground and means of all-round physical development that a nation can have, and the powers that be should make it their duty to render them easily, cheaply, and safely accessible for every citizen. They have made the fortune of the nation in Austria and Switzerland, and there is no reason why they should not do so in New Zealand as well.

## Observations on Girls' Competitive Ski-ing

By Alice MacFarlane

THE SKILL and the style of our Eastern Canadian girl skiers has improved remarkably during the last five years. This progress is due I think, mainly, to the competitive side of the sport and to the assistance and encouragement of a group of elder skiers.

To find more than a dozen girls who could even ski passably would have been a rather difficult task five years ago, today I am sure that there are several hundred. Of course the sport has grown tremendously and the equipment changed considerably. Long semi-racing skis and long poles, that occasionally gave you a black eye or knocked a few teeth out, were the vogue. Nowadays the short broader ski with metal edge and secure downhill harness and the light cane ski-pole that barely reaches your hip give you a feeling of control and unity of body and ski.

Around Montreal there are a group of about thirty girls who gather nearly every week at ski-meets during the winter. These competitions consist usually of a downhill and slalom race of a type harder than those of the high school boys, but slightly simpler than those of the highly trained collegians. I would emphasize that we have not had the advantage of coaching and training by ski professionals, as is the case in every other country, but have picked up whatever slim knowledge and skill we possess by daily observations, serious concentration and sheer determination. When the time comes that systematic coaching and training is available there will be still further improvement.

A good tip in downhill racing is to try and memorize the trail as you ascend so that when you close your eyes you are able to visualize every turn, twist or bump, and the best way to run the course. Use your own judgment and do not pay too much attention to the other competitors' ways and means of running the race.

Girls have a well-known tendency to sit down when they think they are travelling a little too quickly. There is no reason for this if you are skiing under proper control. When necessary to check your speed, try a few control turns (skis well edged into the side of the hill), but if you have lost control and are falling, a slide on one side to the slope of the hill will barely stop you and you are up and on your way again; whereas backward or forward falls take so much longer to regain your balance and often result in a bad shaking up that hinders you for the rest of the race. Be sure to have your knees well forward so that most of the weight is on the ball of the foot then you have an even distribution of weight that will give you good control.

Ski technique is what really shows in slalom racing. Here, too, it is necessary to study the flags carefully and when running the race keep your mind always on the pair ahead of you. The advice of a Swiss ski professional, a beautiful skier herself, is to concentrate, because after watching some of our girls race, she said that often they would lose the thread of their thought and it nearly always resulted in a fall or penalty.

Everyone who saw Miss Pembauer, the Austrian skier who won the Canadian Ladies Open Championships last winter, race will never forget her. So lithe, quick and graceful she seemed to fly down the hill, her body and skis in perfect rhythm, co-ordination and a finish that is lacking in most of us. We are still a long way from the expertness of the European skiers, but I think with more contact with these girls our own skiers will take a long stride forward as there are without doubt Canadian girls with courage, speed and a natural tendency to ski, who after coaching and training will become fine proficient skiers, and in the future Olympic Winter Games, Canada will be well to the fore.