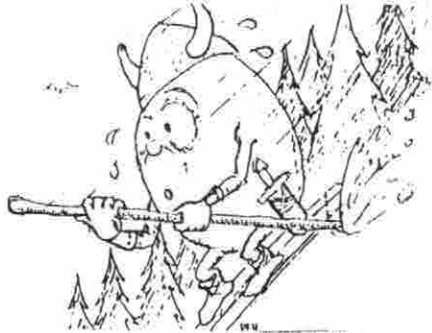


History



Touring in Australia

In Australia the real pioneers of oversnow winter travel were our Aborigines, who for some thousands of years crossed the lower mountain passes on foot. Often these were snow covered and as far as we know no special equipment was developed by the Aborigines for over-snow travel. The first references to Europeans crossing the snowfields come from Tasmania where the fur hunters of the 1830's used snowshoes to hunt. The snowshoes used in Tasmania have been mistakenly referred to as skis, but the hinged binding and remarkable similarity to ancient snowshoes from Canada make it obvious that they were snow-shoes and not skis.

The California Gold Rush of 1849-50 attracted scores of miners from all over the world and Norwegian miners quickly introduced skiing to California in the winters of the early 50's. Some of these Norwegians left California for the newly discovered gold fields of Australia and a few even reached the snowy goldfields of Kiandra, where they introduced skiing to Australia in August, 1861.

Skiing took off with a rush at Kiandra in 1861 and became a very popular winter sport for the miners as well as being an indispensable method of transporting supplies and mail to the outlying mining areas. The Scandinavian countries at that time were still using unequal length skis - one long glider ski and one short fur-lined pusher ski - but the origins of the equal length "modern" skis first used at Kiandra in 1861 are obscure. The equipment at Kiandra was rather basic - skis were solid mountain ash about 8cm wide and 2 to 2½ metres long, with no camber or centre groove. The straight grained mountain ash used for the skis was surprisingly light and quickly developed characteristic ridges in the denser bands of the grain. These mountain ash boards were soon named "Kiandra butterpat" skis, because of the unique grooves in the grain of the mountain ash. These skis were unique to Australia and were in general use until the 1920's but are now very scarce and many skiers have never seen them.

ing was introduced by miners from Kiandra to Victoria the 1860's but as far as is known it did not develop to a winter sport for the miners, probably because most the goldfields in Victoria were below the snow line. Kiandra butterpat skis and snowshoes were used by miners to traverse the alpine passes between the goldfields in Victoria during the winters.

1909 also saw R.W. Wilkinson tour Mt. Buffalo on skis - his first ski tour - and it is interesting to note that Wilkinson and Schlink, both of whom first skied in 1909, were to open up the Australian Alps for nordic skiing by numerous exploratory trips, winter and summer, for the next twenty years.

In 1921 the Ski Club of Australia was formed with the main object of Main Range touring and Dr. Schlink of this club quickly organised a party to explore the snow fields of Kiandra. By 1922 Mount Twynam, Mount Tate and Gill's Knobs had been climbed for the first time on skis by Dr. Bertie Schlink and his friends. In 1923 in Victoria the first Snow Carnival and Skiing Championships were held on the slopes of Mount Feathertop and from the enthusiastic response to this event the Ski Council of Victoria was founded in June 1924. On 5th July 1924 members of this newly formed S.C.V. made the first winter ascent of Mt. Buller.

Winter 1928 saw Bill Waters in Victoria lead the first recorded winter ascent of Mr. Bogong from the Bogong High Plains.

After World War II the Main Range was relatively deserted only a handful of tourers kept the sport alive. In 1949 the Ski Tourers Association was founded by Charles Anton and with the building of the mountain lodges Albina, Kunama Heutte and Illawong, the southern end of the Main Range was again well patronised by tourers.

The recent (i.e. within the last thirty years) history of skiing is an explosive development into all sorts of deviations from over-snow transport. By dividing them into two categories, we can see how the activities fitted the fundamental types of equipment: Nordic and Gravity or Alpine.

Because the alpine group of activities are essentially a fixed position sport which by their very nature preclude the possibility of escape from the commercially controlled tows, they do not feature in any history of skiing prior to the technical innovations of the last thirty to forty years.