

Records

news - but the bush telegraph was faster than I thought and spoilt my surprise. So it was a congratulatory Robbie who greeted me with, "I thought you'd get it this year." On hearing of my wet feet he told me of the trouble he'd had at Happy Jack's River. There was plenty of snow in '64 but no snow bridges were left - he'd had awful trouble climbing the one and a half meter snow wall out of the river!

Although we may never again have such a good snow cover as Robbie had, he did use wooden skis, which are considerably slower than today's. While I had slow, wet snow, he collapsed from lack of water in the heat towards the end and was lucky to regain consciousness before getting too cold. The time he would otherwise have made is hard to judge.

Far from being unhappy that his record was gone, Robbie was glad that some more people are attempting the crossing. I commented that his eight hours target had been a bit too daunting a task for most. Now the target is tougher, but I'm sure it won't stand nearly as long as Robbie's record. I just hope, like him, that a few more will attempt what I see as the best cross country trip in Australia.

The Diamond Straitjacket – (The Alpine Crossing)

According to cross-country folk-lore in Victoria, you have to be crazy to attempt some of the long distance journeys across the southern alps and high plains. You need, they say, to be put in a straitjacket.

So it was that the Hotham to Big River journey became known as the Silver Straitjacket, and the trip from the top of Bogong to Hotham as the Gold Straitjacket. The climb from Mountain Creek up the Staircase to Mt Bogong, and then across the High Plains to Hotham, was an even greater test, and deserved a Diamond Straitjacket. In 1965, the journey claimed the life of Victorian Cross-country Champion Charlie Derrick in his first attempt to establish a time for the distance.

Writing in the Australian Ski Yearbook after Danny Flynn successfully made the first crossing, Wendy Cross summed up the nature of the Diamond Straitjacket.

"Danny Flynn knows what adventuring is all about. He is one of that unique breed of men, who set out to achieve the impossible, pitting human strength and endurance against the awesome odds in favour of Nature. And none knows better than Danny how very much the odds swing in Nature's favour when the contest is waged in winter, on Australia's wind-swept Alps. Yet Danny took up the challenge...and won.

The run from Mountain Creek to Hotham Heights has held a morbid fascination for Australian cross-country skiers since 1965, when Victoria's langlauf champion, Charlie Derrick, tried to set an inaugural record. Charlie was caught by bad weather after he'd passed the half-way mark, and instead of taking shelter in one of the huts along the route, pushed on and was overcome by hypothermia at the top of Mt Loch - just an easy downhill run from Hotham Heights Hotel, where his friends waited, unaware of his fate. During the next 10 years, no-one else dared to follow in Charlie Derrick's ski-tracks. No-one, that is, except Danny Flynn."

Another ten years on, Endestad's time over the distance is a remarkable effort.

After the long haul up to the Bogong Summit Hut, the Straitjacket route runs past Cleve Cole Hut and down to the Big River, up past Mt Nelse and around the back of the Rocky Valley Dam, then down again to Dibbins Hut before the final climb up to Derrick Hut, below Mt Loch, and a relatively easy ski along Loch Spur to the road and in to Hotham.

Setting out with three companions, including Swiss skier Christina Brugger, Endestad reached Hotham Heights in less than six hours, leaving the others far behind. Even so, Brugger's time of seven hours twelve minutes was also an outstanding performance, and sets a standard that Australian women may find hard to attain.

Map courtesy of Algona

