



(Above)

TOURING FROM  
MELCHSEE-FRUTT.  
(GRAUSTOCK 2,665m.)

*Photo H. Freston*



ON TOUR FROM  
MELCHSEE-FRUTT.

*Photo H. Freston*

## A NEW S.C.G.B. CENTRE

BY HENRIETTA FRESTON

MELCHSEE-FRUTT is reached in a day from London by air. The train route from Zürich passes through lovely country and one gets a glimpse of Lucerne before continuing the journey to Sarnen. The bus ride from Sarnen to Stöckalp takes about an hour and is not without incident. The road is narrow and winding and there are many travellers who want to alight, heavily laden with baskets and bags, at the most unexpected places.

On safe arrival at Stöckalp it is only fifteen minutes by air cable to Melchsee. Not very many people can go up at one time, so this sometimes entails a long wait, but there is a restaurant at Stöckalp where weary travellers can have refreshments and keep warm until their turn comes. Here I must give a word of warning—show your ticket and get a number before seeking a pick-me-up. Next year the cable car is to be bigger and is to go faster, and the Waldhaus Restaurant at Stöckalp is to be enlarged; this should prove a welcome improvement. The bus and train service is best at the week-ends, but obviously there are more people too, so it is best to arrive on a week-day, especially towards the end of February and in March and April. One of the charms of Melchsee is that at present it can't be reached by car and is not over-crowded, so that one can enjoy the "Parsenn of Central Switzerland" in solitude.

Melchsee-Frutt is in the centre of Switzerland at 6,000 ft. above sea level, and is an ideal centre for children, beginners, medium skiers and tourers who like day tours. The tours are not difficult, the slopes mostly being wide-open fields with a varied choice of ways down. There are glorious views from the summits and one sees many well-known peaks. The climbs range between 1 and 4½ hours, according to where you want to go—and whom you are with! Tree-running is only encountered on the runs that go down to Stöckalp.

This year—unlike most Swiss centres—we had very good snow conditions throughout the season until well into April, and a good share of sunshine too. At times there was a strong wind and on those occasions the cable railway could not run, in fact once we were cut off for five days and the menu had to be changed; the juicy steaks ceased to appear! Perhaps those stranded down at Stöckalp enjoyed them.

There is no village at Melchsee, just the two hotels (the Kurhaus and the Reinhard), a small pension, one little shop—which has a surprising amount of things for sale—a chapel and a few chalets. The Ski Club parties stayed at the Hotel Reinhard this year, and received a very warm welcome. It is a delightful hotel, spacious and comfortable, and the cuisine is excellent. There is dancing in the hotel and always something going on for those who want to be gay. Those who prefer the peaceful life are protected, as the bar, where the dancing takes place, is sound-proof. The family Reinhard take a personal interest in the welfare of their guests, and everywhere there is an atmosphere of friendliness.

The Ski School is most co-operative and tours are arranged as often as possible. The standard of teaching is high and those who attended the classes made marked progress and enjoyed themselves.

The S.C.G.B. was active throughout the season with tests, races, expeditions and various other amusements, including sailing across the lake on a windy day on ski, with blankets stretched between ski sticks to act as sails. We had a most amusing race and the winners sped incredibly fast. There is never a dull moment at Melchsee. One party distinguished themselves in a singing competition, others in playing an extraordinary game with bottles. There were carnival nights and gala nights and dancing competitions; in fact there was nearly always something going on which gave an excuse for a party.

Perhaps one of the highlights was the not-so-young Ski Club Rep. racing in an "international event"—a "He and She" race organised by a German party—with Walter, the man who looked after the ski, stoked the stoves, put out the *chaises longue* and so on. This entailed tossing off strong drinks, and kissing at various strategic points, as well as speeding down the course! They did the best time by 3 seconds, but were discreetly running *Hors Concours*, so as not to disappoint anyone else who wanted to win!

If you are not wedded to *piste* running, and like soft snow and going to places away from the world and his wife, Melchsee will please you very much. All the members who went there this year enjoyed it—including the S.C.G.B. Representative.

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## KAFFEKLATSCH

By N.M.S.

So much is written nowadays about the cost of funiculars, *téléferiques*, ski-lifts and the like in proportion to the footage they climb. One reads that the ski-lift at X will carry you 290 ft. for 1s. 6d., or the *téléferique* at Y 602 ft. for 5s. od.; and that therefore the comparative cost per 1,000 ft. descent is such-and-such—Pure Bradshaw from first to last.

Nobody seems to cater for the middle-aged, who are possibly not as sound in wind and limb as they were, and who like to rest awhile on the way down. I should like to see a time-table where the Chalets where you can sit in the sun and sip a coffee are enumerated and given their true merit.

With the advent of funiculars and ski-lifts, *piste* skiing has become a mad rush to get to the top, and an even madder rush to get to the bottom again, a little reminiscent of the Brighton Road on a summer Sunday. Woe betide the middle-aged skier like myself who likes a coffee *en route*. You have only to mention the word and out comes a stopwatch; "No, sorry, we have only three and a half minutes to catch the train up again," and so on for the whole day, until you collapse into your hotel at the end groaning about the 20,000 ft. you have covered without so much as a sniff of a coffee.

No time to admire the scenery, or look for a chamois, or the tracks of hares and foxes.

I have been tempted many a time (I said tempted!) to misread the time-table, and assure my companion that we have quite five minutes in which to catch the train, when, in point of fact, three and a half is cutting it fine. My joy is complete when we approach the station to see the train crawling out, and I know that just around the corner there is a delightful little chalet, where every form of *apéritif* is to be had, and not another train for half-an-hour; plenty of time for my coffee!

These non-stop, non-coffee-drinking skiers miss so much that makes for a pleasant ski-ing holiday in the Alps. They cannot tell you the names of the peaks, because they never have time to look at them; the Jungfrau, the Eiger and the Matterhorn are just names on maps. They don't know one animal track from another, because they pass by so quickly they haven't time to notice them.

Let us have some more coffee drinking, or something stronger if you prefer it, and more time to become acquainted with the mountains.

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## IMPRESSIONS

By BUNTY STOCKWELL

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO—magic sounding name! How exciting to arrive there at night for the Olympic Games!

The Dolomites soared into the darkness like giant sentinels. Then a blinding scene of floodlights and a multitude of coloured flags—everywhere gaiety and expectancy. Parties of competitors on their various ways to early bed, parties having fun, hopeful shopkeepers and restaurateurs angling for the shoals of stargazers.

Into a car and up a very steep hill, toes curled up trying to help the car get a grip on the ice, round an old cowhouse with a final christy and so to the Villa Ehrenberg de Begontina proudly flying the Union Jack.

What a beautiful home it must have been. I looked out of my window and my eyes travelled down to the town and then up the mountain to the other side of the valley, drawn to the floodlit War Memorial high up in lonely splendour. Few other memorials can have such a magnificent setting. Searchlights were playing on the clouds reflecting signs, apparently something new in technique. Our room was heated by a superb green and white china stove fed, like some giant Moloch, with huge logs of wood piled into it from the sitting room next door. Rather terrifying to be in a panelled room and to open a small iron door and see flames licking the walls! Ivy trailed round the walls and across the ceiling, the doors were decorated with eighteenth century paintings, old prints hung everywhere. A hideous little iron stove stuck out into the room; however, it kept the coffee hot and was a useful waste-paper basket. The

sanitation, although incongruously modern, had old fashioned tendencies, and we had to rise above a permanent flood in one of the white tiled bathrooms.

Upstairs to the kitchen, where a small staff were reigned over by a splendid Italian peasant woman whose lasting impression of the "Inglese" must surely be their capacity for potatoes. She short-circuited the difficulties of peeling sufficient quantities by producing the most enormous dishes of delicious spaghetti—washed down with the local chianti. These to be remembered rather than the more austere meals of tinned rations forced on us in the interests of economy.

Out into the intense cold of the morning. Shouldering a path through the crowds it was fun listening to all the different tongues and spotting the fashion highlights. . . . A girl "poured" into immaculate white vorlages. . . . A competitor's sable après-ski hat. . . . Course officials in their scarlet and bright blue looking a little self-conscious, especially the fat ones. The "swapping" of pins was in full swing and a fine rash was appearing on many proud lapels. Everywhere and on everything Olympic Rings.

All activities were a gradual build-up for the "Opening," lavishly staged and most successfully produced. Zeno Colò skied down from the War Memorial bearing the Olympic Flame, spectacularly followed by gunfire and a rain of coloured rockets and star shells—and, it is rumoured, with a box of matches in his pocket. The only hitch, the speed skater's ghastly trip over the wire while bearing the Torch round the Stadium—there couldn't have been a person present who did not hold his breath and share his dreadful agony. Finally, the firm voice of Italy's Giuliana Minuzzi spoke the Olympic Oath—the first time a lady-skier had been so honoured—and the 1956 Winter Games were ON.

Whatever happened or has been said about these Winter Olympics, and it is easy to be wise after the event, anyone who had the good fortune to be part of them must have felt the magic in the air and known they had shared a place in history.

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## MENS SANA IN CORPORE SANO

BY JOAN WHITWORTH

WHAT an imaginative plan it is to increase the joy of anticipation of a ski-ing holiday by taking part in a scheme of graduated exercises for several weeks beforehand. The exercises, so minutely described both in line and prose, in *Pre-Ski Exercises* give plenty of variety and make certain that no muscle in the body is left in any doubt as to what will be required of it in the weeks to come.

If time is no object then intending skiers couldn't do better than to do most of the exercises in the way described (even to the wearing of the cap—woollen) and the number of times suggested. For everyone who values a stable spine it would be much better to skip the exercises involving forward bending of the trunk; there is a

strong body of medical opinion to support the theory that forward movements do certainly encourage that most fashionable of complaints—a slipped disc. As the main object of these exercises is to cut out some of the occupational complaints of the skier it would be gratuitous to substitute a new one. If it is necessary to earn a living as well as to prepare for a snowline holiday, some of the general fitness exercises could well be left out or done less frequently.

For the nursery skier (not to be confused with the skier of the nursery slope) bunny jumps, skipping, climbing trees or merely running ceaselessly to and fro is quite enough preparation for muscles which are never given a chance to stiffen.

If there is room at home to expand, a family full-dress rehearsal could well be indulged in; this would give the uninitiated a foretaste of things to come and a chance to get the feel of ski boots and ski legs. Some local colour could be added by the father of the family, taking the part of the Ski Lehrer, calling out, "Bend ze knees  $\alpha$ "—demonstration then follows—or "Bend ze corpse forward," possibly accompanied by swooning from those less familiar with the hazards of a ski-ing holiday.

Finally, one word to the touring skier, who uses his shoulder and respiratory muscles every bit as much as those of his trunk and lower limbs. A few simple breathing exercises done in front of an open window, and some strenuous work for the shoulder muscles to accustom them to supporting heavy weights will prove well worth while. Who can forget the grinding pain from soft shoulder muscles totally untutored (especially the feminine ones) in carrying loads only suitable for Everest porters. The enthusiastic skier who rolls his lawn for months before his holiday, carrying gradually increasing loads, has certainly got something; and yet when his holiday comes his muscles will think he has got nothing.

"*Mens sana in corpore sano.*" Freely translated, those who are mental enough to go ski-ing can at least have a fit body.

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## I SKI THOUGH BLIND\*

BY DR. ERNST FISCHER

It was in Russia, in July, 1944, during World War II, that I lost the sight of my left eye. In October, 1951, my right eye, too, went blind. There followed lonesome days and sleepless nights, in which I tried desperately to cope with the collapse of my whole visible world. All that was dear to me in the activities of daily life, including my profession, had to be written off; all that remained were memories, now poignant with regret, and my spiritual resources at a low ebb! With much longing I thought of my mountains and of climbing and ski-ing expeditions. What would become of my beloved ski that had carried me up and down the snow slopes like a god. I

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recalled one snowy night when I had guided a group of skiers back to camp, my eyes no help in finding the trail, for I had to depend on the feel of my feet on ski. The vast expanse of greyish white snow showed no trail or marker. Heavy snow-flakes whirled, blocking out all sight, and there was only one way to get through—by feel, by concentrating on the resistance of the ski to the snowy ground. Many were the times I erred from the trail, but the softer snow gave warning and by careful side-stepping I soon found the path again. This ascent, with constant attention to every step upward, was strenuous indeed, but it brought us safely to camp.

As I had then been able to make my way without benefit of sight, relying solely on the feel of my ski, why could I not now follow the track of a newly-made ski trail? Of course, one would need a guide or companion, but I was lucky enough to find one in Gretl, my ski companion of former days . . .

During February I left hospital and mid-March found Gretl and myself in Austria's Tyrol. Gretl broke trail and I followed without difficulties while she chatted; I listened intently to her voice, the sound indicating her direction. For the rest I felt my way along her track, any deviation registering immediately by the softer snow underfoot. On the way back my companion tried changing directions, using sharp turns and even a few wide swings. We were silent, so that I might hear the swishing noise of her ski as she cut through the snow like a knife through icing sugar.

While at first it required concentrated attention on my part to follow in Gretl's tracks and keep the proper stance in relation to her position it soon became easier. As we practised day by day, I began to react automatically to any impulses transmitted to my now much keener sense of hearing, as well as the "feel" of my ski, by instant correction of any errors in action. Walking on ski presented no longer any difficulties; I was able to glide down a gentle slope without a fall and to make a kick turn while standing was no trouble at all. For a change of direction, the good old stem turn did the trick every time, even though it did require some practice under the altered circumstances.

Words fail me to describe the elation and feeling of triumph I experienced, when tired but happy I relaxed on the train that brought us back to Vienna. And what is more, I had proven my contention that a blind person can ski.

The following year I left with my "Ski-ing Eye" for a new section of the Austrian Alps. Wherever there was a snow-covered slope, up and down it we went and, after a few runs, I no longer minded ski-ing into the pitch dark. On the way back, we took several longer runs, my companion going ahead and calling at regular intervals: "go-go-go," which told me there were no obstacles. Traversing, it was possible to regulate my speed and, on hearing the call "turn" (right or left) I was able to come to a quick stop, and my companion and I soon developed a feeling of happy teamwork, which gave me a sense of security. Absolute confidence in the Ski-ing Eye is essential to the blind skier.

At times there were other skiers on the slopes, but not until they noticed my yellow arm band and asked questions, did they become aware of my being a blind skier. In fact, they rather doubted that I was totally blind. However, they did try to keep out of my way and we did not interfere with each other in the least. As we continued practising, my confidence increased and the feeling that I was making progress, brought the warm glow of satisfaction.

After the first trials at blind ski-ing, I began to think of the possibility of group ski-ing. I was convinced it could be done. I knew several blind people who were ski enthusiasts, so one fine winter's day I met with three blind comrades, a seeing and "Ski-ing Eye" lady, and a ski instructor. Ski over one shoulder, the poles in the other free hand, we walked in single file up the road to Kobenzl Mountain. Constant small talk kept us together and in line. At the top there was a fine wide slope. Our ski instructor directed each of us individually, gave the starting signal, called the turns and stops and gave helpful advice. While climbing uphill, he directed each skier in such a way as to be out of the path of the one ski-ing down.

The method by which the instructor taught us the turns was so simple that I want to mention it here. Starting in the usual correct position with knees well bent, poles in hand at the correct angle, you let go. As you want to turn, you push your right fist towards the left ski point, as though to grasp it; instantly, the ski turn to the left. Then you proceed the same way for the opposite swing, the left fist towards the right ski point and the ski turn to the right. You practise this for a while and in no time at all you are able to swing down even a steep slope. On the way back, our Ski-ing Eye lady started first, the blind skiers following the sound of the instructor's constant "go-go-go." Before crossing a narrow bridge, the signal "turn" gave warning to stop and thus we arrived at the outskirts of town without mishap.

Our group consisted of seven blind war veterans who convened without any official organisation; we each found a Ski-ing Eye lady and together made lengthy excursions on ski during our vacations. Each blind person and his companion form a unit and the several units are kept together and led by an instructor. He takes the lead, then follows the first blind skier with his companion and so on; like a mother hen with her chicks, the ski instructor keeps calling to his flock.

From the sound and location of the instructor's voice, the blind skier senses any change of direction and thus is able to make the same turns at the same spot as the instructor. In the same way each companion directs her blind charge downhill over the path or slope taken by the instructor. A descent in such unbroken formation by a group of blind skiers cutting their patterns through the snow, is quite an accomplishment, and can only be achieved by group practice allied to various sports such as gymnastics, swimming and hiking.

Summarising my experiences, I would like to say that a suitable companion, or Ski-ing Eye, is indispensable for ski-ing when blind. Women are to be preferred, as their motherly instinct and greater

patience make them ideal companions. The Ski-ing Eye should be as good a skier as her charge, though in group ski-ing a somewhat less experienced companion will do. The leader of a group should be a ski instructor.

The ideal terrain is open slopes and wide trails. On the open slope the blind skier has practically the same possibilities to swing or *schuss* as any seeing skier; on any uphill climb the same rules apply, but on the downhill run it is different. The blind cannot see the frequent changes in the terrain and cannot, like a seeing skier, compensate by shifting his weight rapidly. Therefore, the descent is broken up into shorter runs. Even while ski-ing with a group, each blind skier should have a companion who gives him the necessary feeling of confidence by her frequent calls. The short command "halt" or "stop" should only be used in case of danger. The quieter and more evenly the directions are given, the steadier the blind person will be able to ski.

Our group has already accomplished several long downhill runs over difficult terrain, and at a ski resort in Germany a skier with his instructor went down a fairly steep run of nearly two miles, twice in succession!

But what a feeling of mastery, of freedom and of adventure ski-ing can bring to one who is blind.

I know nothing quite like it to bring sparkling health to the cheeks and to equip leaden-feet with the wings of the morning, if only for a brief and thrilling interlude.

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## SKI-ING IN PERSIA

BY GILL KIMMINS

USUALLY it's Friday morning—the Persian Sunday, unless one is in the British Embassy or lucky enough to get the day off, and then it is Sunday—for ski-ing in Teheran.

Invariably the day begins by being completely chaotic. Ski-ing clothes can't be found as the *bargee* (Persian for maid) has put them away, and, being Friday, it is her day off and so she is not there to tell one in what obscure cubby-hole she has hidden them. The "boy" has tried in vain to make the hot water work, but, as the boiler is temperamental, erratic and Persian this is an impossibility, and so shaving is done in ice-cold water to a slight accompaniment of grumbling. Breakfast is swallowed rather hurriedly, as by this time one is about an hour late for picking up various people who want a lift up to Arbali (the place where one skis). Ski, food, drink, extra sweaters, etc., are piled into the car and off one goes; collecting one's friends *en route*.

As soon as Teheran is left behind the road turns from asphalt to stones, bumps and dust. Arbali is about an hour and a half's drive away through a rather deserted, stony, sandy, mountainous desert. At first there are only patches of snow, which become larger until

everywhere is thinly covered; the further and higher one drives the thicker the snow becomes. Occasional tiny villages are passed, situated by rivers which are surrounded by sudden splashes of green. The countryside has an extraordinarily fascinating beauty of its own; the rugged, barren snow-capped mountains, with strata of many different colours—green, mauve and orange among the changing shades of brown and yellow; sometimes a lone tiny figure on a donkey or a caravan of camels going from somewhere to somewhere on an unseeable road; or a ragged bunch of men, covered with dust from passing cars, as they vainly try to fill the pot-holes in the road.

Eventually one arrives at the village of Arbali. The road then winds up a mountain-side, clinging to the edge of a terrifying precipice. Everything is covered with snow in which, if there has been a recent fall, one is bound to get stuck. However, with any luck the bulldozer will be working and the car will be given a push—upwards, one hopes devoutly, but sideways as often as not as the driver is rather careless. At such moments the sheer drop of several hundred feet has a petrifying aspect. The bottom of the ski-lift is then reached with, one hopes, no more difficulties. Masses of ragged, frozen-looking men and boys rush up to the car in hopes of getting some money afterwards for helping with ski and looking after the car.

There is a stone hut for eating and resting in here. Having greeted friends and chatted for a while, ski are put on and one walks to the ski-lift. Below the lifts is a very good nursery slope for beginners. The slopes are dotted by people in varied costume. Usually the English are easily recognisable by an outrageous hat or peculiar trousers, but always striving hard and willingly. Here and there one sees a motionless Persian, so exquisitely dressed that she would look more at home in the Palace Hotel, St. Moritz, than in the wilds of the Persian mountains.

There are two ski-lifts, but only one works. It is the most wonderful contraption, having a fantastic engine, which looks as though it has been taken out of a dilapidated lorry, and is extremely difficult to start. Usually about twelve men are working on it, all giving opposite and completely different advice, shouting at the top of their voices with absolutely no result. In the end, someone decides it must be frozen, having been exposed to the snow, wind and ice for the past week; so, regardless of a full petrol tank on the engine, a fire is lit underneath! In a quarter-of-an-hour it is working and—provided someone has remembered to bring some extra petrol—will work for the rest of the day; otherwise it will stop, amidst a helpless shrugging of shoulders. After paying five *rials* (about sixpence) for a ticket one is pulled 400 feet to the top, at an extremely sedate pace. One's difficulties are not yet over as the last pitch of the lift is a practically vertical slope. Unless one is very quick at swinging the right ski out sideways one finds oneself crashing downwards into the poor people behind, taking them with one in an ungraceful and probably rather painful descent. Having managed to get off the lift without mishap there is a very enjoyable and quite steep descent back to the lift, which is all too short.

If there is enough snow, instead of going back to the ski-lift one can go down the other side of the mountain where there is a long and extremely nice run down to Arbali village. However, if one forgets to tell a car to go down to the village, then there one stays unless willing to climb for a very long way. If there is not enough snow to go down to Arbali village one spends the day going up and down the ski-lift with a break in the middle for a picnic lunch, helped down by a bottle of Persian wine or vodka; invariably one skis much better after lunch. By about three-thirty or four o'clock the sun has disappeared behind the mountains and it becomes very cold, so everybody leaves for Teheran feeling rather tired but very happy.

It is possible to ski in several of the mountains nearer and further away from Teheran. Indeed, one can do so in a place called Shimshak until the end of May, provided one starts at about three o'clock in the morning, before the sun has turned everything to slush. The trouble is that the mountains are unknown, there are no guides and therefore one must be quite a competent skier before attempting them, and be prepared for a long climb. Demavend, the only Persian mountain known to most people, is hardly every skied on from Teheran, as it is a terrific drive of about ten hours; moreover, it is a very long climb, with nowhere to stay unless one took a tent, which would be much too cold in winter.

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## CLOTHES AT CORTINA

BY ZANDRA NOWELL

THIS being Olympic year, there was a buzz of activity before the teams went out to France for their training. Individual trainees were busy getting themselves fit, either at their own homes or up in the Lake District, where they water-skied throughout the summer and made use of the excellent facilities provided by Sir Wavell Wakefield, the Chairman of the Ski Racing Committee. A tremendous amount of work was done by Robin Brock-Hollinshead ordering and collecting equipment, which turned out to be extremely good. Last but not least, the clothes, which were worn throughout the season by the team members, were being made and fitted by the various firms which had so very kindly offered to provide them for us.

Among other things with which we were equipped were ski trousers, specially cut by Ebster at Harrods, made from a fascinating blended black and royal blue Bilgeri material, which looked wonderful from the start and retained its good shape throughout. To top these, for wear on the slopes, we had blue Everest-cloth anoraks, with warm and most comfortable nylon linings. They were made with a kangaroo pouch and attached hood, were beautifully light and completely weatherproof, which was saying something last season! They were specially made for Lillywhites by Howard Flint. Our team sweaters with the coloured roundels and dates were, of course, the standard ones.

For the parade at Cortina and for general out-door wear we wore red stocking caps and had superb three-quarter-length reversible jackets, presented by the British Olympic Association. On one side they were lambswool and on the other bright blue gaberdine. They were particularly useful as they could be used either on the snow or for *après-ski* wear.

For *après-ski* wear we had lovely blue pleated terylene skirts, which were a great success; I have worn mine on many occasions this summer, with a mental vote of thanks to Maxwell Originals. With them we wore check blouses of two shades of blue, with a clever adaptable neckline; they were made by Bernella.

It was interesting to see the clothes chosen by the other teams at Cortina. The Germans wore grey-green suits, so well cut that it appeared that they had been poured into them. The Swiss wore white and grey, not very practical for constant use, and the Norwegians had an attractive grey-blue uniform. It was almost a pity for them to wear their anoraks, as they covered their wonderful, multi-coloured sweaters. The Italians were wearing a deep lilac colour, and the Americans had an infinite variety of clothes and uniforms, their sweaters being the most outstanding item in their wardrobe.

I do feel that our appearance compared favourably with that of the other nations; in fact, after the parade at Cortina many favourable comments were made. This smart appearance is a most vital part of a team's equipment, as it helps not only the morale but also the ski-ing when the clothes are as practical and comfortable as ours were this year.

Our sincere thanks go to the many firms which helped us in this way during the Olympic season.

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## SKI-ING - IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC!

BY JILL FITZGERALD

To me it is a happy thought that not many years hence skiers over here will be saying, come the summer months, "Where shall we ski this July? Chile? Australia? New Zealand?" . . . No, it's not as crazy as it sounds, especially when one considers the enormous strides made in aviation in recent years, and the promise of even better things to come in the way of faster air-travel and general reduction in fares. Even now, New Zealand is only 48 hours away by air! Though I admit that the fares are, as yet, a major drawback.

But even these days, to the majority of people, ski-ing in New Zealand sounds just as wildly improbable as surfing in Iceland—for to them New Zealand is just another group of islands in the Pacific, perhaps a little larger than the others, and situated "somewhere off the coast of Australia"! Far from being semi-tropical, our climate is very like that of Britain, while both islands are blessed with a "backbone" of mountain ranges offering ski-slopes which can be

favourably compared with those in ski-ing countries throughout the world. Access to these slopes is still a major problem, but since our first ski-lifts were installed in 1947 each year has seen tremendous progress in the facilities which our ski-resorts have to offer—and each winter, as a result, the standard of ski-ing has improved. I hope the day is not far distant when, like the Swiss, the Austrians, and the Scandinavians, we will be known as a nation of skiers—for wherever one lives in New Zealand one can find good ski-ing within, at the most, 4 or 5 hours' easy motoring distance.

Many of you will have now seen that magnificent film, "The Snows of Aorangi"—a documentary produced by the New Zealand Film Unit and filmed in colour by our ace camera-man, Brian Brake—which has aroused the interest of skiers all over the world. It is a "must see" if you wish to find out more about New Zealand ski-ing, and is, incidentally, a brilliant film which has already won major awards at film festivals throughout Europe. "Snows of Aorangi" is mainly concerned with ski-touring on the Tasman Glacier, in the Mount Cook region of the Southern Alps, being a record of a tour carried out in 1952, but it also has brief sequences filmed at Coronet Peak and Ruapehu, major ski-resorts in the North and South Islands.

Coronet Peak, the mecca of skiers in the South Island, is ideal ski-ing country and is, incidentally, my favourite resort in New Zealand. We have there a chain of ski-lifts extending from the snow-line, about 3,500 feet, to within a few feet of Coronet Peak itself, about 5,500 feet—and the run down, over steep, tree-less country, is nearly perfect. There is scarcely a rock beneath the snow, and as the slopes lie away from the sun a good season will give weeks of ideal ski-ing in packed powder snow—the dream of every skier. Although the vertical descent is short by European standards, the slopes are so open that one can still find tremendous variety in a comparatively small area. At the foot of the ski-lifts is a minute mountain village, consisting of a number of Club lodges, at which guests as well as members can stay—the main chalet, with a heated community room and cafeteria, and living quarters for the ski-lift attendants and ski-patrol—a first-aid hut, ski-repair shop, and ski-hire and ski-shop. Most people, however, stay in Queenstown, a delightful village on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, some 3,000 feet below and ten miles from the ski-ing grounds, and each morning the ski-buses bring one from there right to the ski-lifts, a journey of 45 minutes . . . and back to Queenstown again at the end of the day.

The first ski-school was established at Queenstown in 1947, when the manager of the Mt. Cook Tourist Company invited Olaf Rodegard to come out as soon as the Sun Valley season was over and teach at Coronet Peak for the whole winter. This was a tremendous success, and ever since then Olaf has been sending us instructors from Sun Valley and other American ski-schools each year—with the result that every season sees an improvement in the general standard of ski-ing.

In the North Island, Ruapehu is the main ski-ing centre: it is

one of three mountains lying right in the centre of the island; Ruapehu, Tongariro, and Ngaurehoe, but the first of these is the only one suitable for ski-ing. Ngaurehoe is a very active volcano at times, and not to be recommended for winter-sports! At the foot of Ruapehu nestles the Chateau, a large luxury hotel where many skiers stay, and which houses the ski-instructors and all the staff who run the ski-lifts, mountain transport and so on. From the Chateau itself a winding road climbs four miles up the mountain to the foot of the chair-lifts, and as at Queenstown one finds here a small alpine village of club lodges, with a ski-hire and repair shop, cafeteria, and so on. This is very different terrain from Queenstown—real mountain ski-ing, in fact, with some magnificent runs down the various glaciers when one has ridden to the end of the last chair-lift—and, for beginners, a T-bar on the nursery slopes. Franz Skardarasy, of Zürs, established the first ski-school here just before the war, but there have been tremendous developments since then, mainly thanks to the enterprise of Walter Haensli, of Klosters. Walter spent several winters instructing at the Chateau and building up the ski-school there, and was also responsible for installing New Zealand's first chair-lift at Ruapehu in 1954, although by then Harvey Clifford had taken over from him as head of the ski-school—Walter having had to return to Switzerland to take care of his business interests there. Ruapehu has a longer season than Coronet Peak, mainly due to the higher altitude, and also to the fact that one can find perfect ski-ing on the glaciers until as late as January—our midsummer. In the warmer weather enterprising skiers climb to the summit, bathe in the crater lake (which is warm, as Ruapehu is a dormant volcano) and then ski down the glaciers again!

But the main strength of ski-ing as a sport in New Zealand lies in the fact that wherever one lives there is good ski-ing near to hand, and, apart from these two main resorts, there are numerous smaller ones run by the local clubs where week-end ski-ing thrives. The small town where I live in the South Island has a club with a membership of over 100 young and enthusiastic skiers, who have built their own ski-lodge and installed a rope-lift on an ideal snowfield only 50 miles inland—a motoring distance of little over an hour, with a short climb from the car park up to the lodge. There, for 2s. 6d. a night hut fees, 2s. 6d. a day for the ski-lift, and the cost of transport from the town, members can have two full days' ski-ing each week-end for *less* than they would spend on cinemas and so on during a week-end at home! This means that ski-ing can be anyone's sport, for there are even good ski to hire for those who feel they cannot afford the initial outlay for equipment—and, for all this, annual membership fees are only a guinea for each member, and less for children still at school. This is a typical New Zealand club, one of many—I can think of a dozen or more in the South Island alone, and the North Island will have as many again.

All these clubs run "ski-weeks" during the season, with emphasis on the training of juniors—and we have, in addition, ski-ing scholarships open to junior members, which provide a fortnight's

free instruction and accommodation for eight youngsters at the Chateau in the North Island, and eight at Coronet Park in the South. The clubs nominate any particularly promising girls or boys under the age of 16 amongst their members, and for two weeks each year the lucky ones spend a fortnight of intensive training in downhill and slalom practice with the head overseas instructors at Ruapehu and Coronet Peak—by this means we hope to provide a pool of experienced racers for future New Zealand teams. The scheme is still only in its infancy, but is already showing tremendous results.

The answer to the amazingly low club membership fees in New Zealand is, of course, that nearly all the work on club lodges and lifts is done voluntarily by members during the summer months, in a series of week-end working parties. Needless to say, the young men who are carpenters, engineers, and builders by trade are eagerly sought after!—and the women do their part too, acting as cooks and caterers for the amateur workmen and wielding a paintbrush with the greatest skill between times. The results are impressive—Aorangi, Ruapehu, and Tongariro, in the North Island, and Otago, in the South, are magnificent examples of this enterprising spirit, having built club lodges which are an example to all. Splendidly designed, with attractive community rooms painted in gay colours, drying rooms, men's and women's bunkrooms with adjacent shower and washrooms, these lodges provide the skier with every comfort.

Yes, as things are, we're well on the way to becoming a nation of skiers. I still remember with delight the day when one of our Sun Valley instructors, newly arrived for the season at Coronet Peak, received a letter from his mother in the States . . . “—so glad to hear you're enjoying yourself, Bill, but Gee! it must be funny to see all those natives on skis!” What an entrancing vision that remark conjures up—hordes of Maoris in grass skirts, feathers in their hair, and bare feet firmly clamped into Kandahar bindings! I hope he never disillusioned her.

The major drawback, as I see it, is our isolated position in the world, which means we are at present sadly lacking in international competition—every two years we hold an inter-Dominion event against Australia, but this is not enough. A small team did go to Oslo in 1952, and the experience gained there was invaluable—but we were all bitterly disappointed when for some mysterious reason the N.Z. Olympic Council turned down our application to send a team to Cortina this year. I say mysterious, because the reason was never made clear to us, but I fear it was mainly apathy on the part of our present Ski Council and the Olympic Council. The fact that the Australians, whom we defeated in the last inter-Dominion racing in 1953, sent a full team to Cortina made us all the more convinced that we should not allow our comparatively low standard to be a deterrent in sending representative teams overseas. In the few short months they had in Europe, the Australian team improved out of all recognition—and I feel a New Zealand team would have done likewise, thus helping to raise the standard at home, and providing a further incentive to our younger racers who are even now approaching their peak.

Well—are YOU coming to New Zealand? It's all there, waiting for you—Ruapehu, Coronet Peak, superb ski-touring on the Tasman Glacier, “pioneer” ski-ing on the club grounds throughout New Zealand—and a warm welcome from every skier in the country, including myself!

### “SOMETHING TO YOUR ADVANTAGE . . .”

MEMBERS are always asked to quote the BULLETIN when contacting advertisers; this can benefit individuals as well as the Club. For instance:—

Benjamin Edginton offer members 5 per cent. cash discount on any catalogue items (except for ski boot hire). They have supplied most of the major expeditions, including Everest, and are the only firm in London where I have found Kendal Mint Cake, the ambrosial peppermint fudge.

Swan & Edgar don't print a catalogue. They are, all the same, worth a détour between Lillywhites and Simpsons, *en route* for Harrods and Gordon Lowe, since they specialise in low priced ski clothes, particularly for children.

Unaccompanied children can be sent to Zermatt with the Wayfarers Travel Agency, in charge of a P.N.E.U. headmistress. I have seen her in action, and she is extremely good at the job. This agency also deals in out-of-the-way centres, both in Switzerland and France.

Kendal Milne have just opened a winter sports department, which should be a boon to members in the Midlands.

We are pleased to be the first British publication carrying an advertisement for Méribel-Les Allues, the centre of Les Trois Vallées in Savoy. Skiers who want good ski-ing and gaiety will find it a miracle; not for the dinner-jacket-in-the-jungle school.

As well as more conventional travel, not to say the Ski Club's parties, World Sport and Travel handle the dog-sleigh tours in Norway. (*S.N. & Q.*, September, 1955.)

Huskies are, however, strictly optional; whereas there were only three ski-tows in pre-war Norway, there are now nineteen and the *abonnements* seem fabulously cheap by Alpine standards. Midsummer ski-ing is also available, and the “Blossom” and “Glacier” Slaloms take place in June and July respectively. (Article next year, please, Zandra.)

Summer ski-ing is also featured in the Aosta district of Italy, notably at Cervinia (Breuil). Indeed, we might have had an article about it, but for the unfortunate fact that our Hon. Treasurer edits a rival publication. This is the more regrettable in that the publicity not only mentions “Ski-ing competitions in August” but also “Launched kilometre tests, with ‘Gold K’ prize.” So not only might one return from one's summer holiday with a race in the bag—they are all strictly lowlander “for city skiers only”—but also with a—if not “the”—Gold K. Any comment from our Sinister Father?



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## INFORMATION PLEASE

The Hon. Secretary and Hon. Editor do their best to keep track of those members to whom exciting things happen, such as getting married, having babies, breaking necks or even moving house.

They are, however, bound to miss a great many of these gripping instalments and would be most grateful if members would send a post card as and when these notable events occur.

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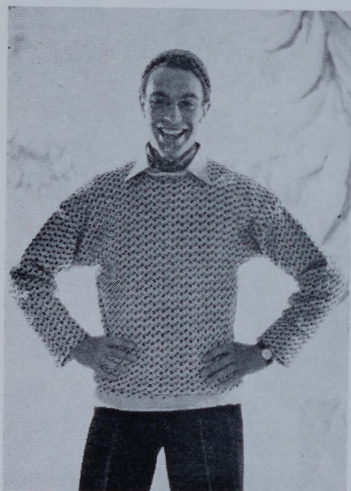
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