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SKI TRIPS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BY WALTER MOSAUER

WITHIN two hours drive from Los Angeles, between the serene blue ocean and the strange pale desert, there are mountains rising to heights of ten and eleven thousand feet. From late spring to the fall the mountaineer rejoices in their far-flung panoramas, their fine forests, and their streams rushing through picturesque cañons. From December to April a mantle of snow covers them, sometimes eight or ten feet deep—then hardly anybody penetrates far from the camps in the lower altitudes to the higher peaks. Until a short time ago, the vast majority of southern Californians saw the snow, far off, from the warm orange-groves and the palm-lined boulevards, but never cared to come too close to the cold white stuff.

In recent years, however, motoring trips to the mountain resorts for a few hours of snowballing or tobogganing have become increasingly popular. But, while advertising managers of these few resorts arranged for ski-jumping meets to supply thrills for large week-end crowds, *ski-touring* was still practically unknown, and the snow of the mountains remained unmarked by ski-tracks. A few individuals, however, began to go out on skis to continue their mountaineering activities in the winter. Among them were Loyd Cooper, of Claremont, and Murray Kirkwood, of Pomona College, who climbed San Gorgonio (11,485 feet), the highest peak in southern California, in midwinter (February, 1931). Skiing technique, nevertheless, remained most rudimentary—steep slopes were descended in long traverses, with kick turns and many spills, while a downhill turn was unheard of. Another group, the Big Pines Ski Club, developed a higher technical standard under the able leadership of Lester Lavelle, who had graduated as an accomplished skier from the mountains of Washington and Canada.

In 1932, I taught the principles of the Arlberg School, the low crouch and the stem christiana, to several students of Pomona College, who became my faithful followers. Among them was Murray Kirkwood, whose mountain-craft, reliability, and cheerful optimism have made him an ideal companion on most of the trips described here—under pleasant conditions as well as in rough going.

Then, during the winter of 1933, ski-mountaineering in southern California finally came into well-deserved popularity. From Pomona College the Arlberg tradition was handed on to Scripps College. At the University of California at Los Angeles a ski team was developed, and, to my great joy, the Southern California Chapter of the Sierra Club took a serious and energetic interest in skiing. The Sierra Club, because of its ideals and the type of its membership, is destined to counterbalance the obnoxious overemphasis on ski-jumping and professionalism, and to promote ski-mountaineering for its own sake. Moreover, unknowingly, the Sierra Club selected the ideal site for a ski-lodge when it built Harwood Lodge in the upper part of San Antonio Cañon, at an elevation of 6300 feet.

In the close vicinity of Harwood Lodge, we have long, treeless slopes of all degrees of steepness—almost level stretches on which to initiate the timid beginner, as well as slopes of an inclination of forty degrees or more, real specimens of *alpiner Steilhang*, on which the intrepid expert can get the acid test of his swinging ability. The best thing about these ski-fields is their northerly exposure, which preserves the deep winter snow and makes possible well into April delightful spring skiing on granular snow. In 1933 these slopes saw ever-increasing crowds of skiers faithfully practicing the snow-plow turns, the stem turn, and the stem christy. Doubtlessly, Harwood Lodge will remain one of the main centers of ski-mountaineering in southern California, since it is the point of access for some of the finest major trips of the region.

A four- to five-hour climb will bring the skier to the summit of San Antonio (10,080 ft.), one of our noblest mountains. Instead of following the usual route along the ridge, including the well-known "Devils Backbone," we always climb the south face of the mountain. First we "sidehill" through the timbered slopes to the right of Gold Ridge Cañon, to an old miner's cabin, and then we emerge from the woods and zigzag up through the steep shale slope to the ridge, whence the summit is easily reached.

After a short rest at the summit, which on clear days commands a wonderful panorama, extending from Catalina Island to the Panamints, we descend to the southwest, first over the wind-blown crusted snow of the highest slope, then diving into a long gully, which leads south, down, down over hissing spring snow. A few scattered trees cannot disturb us, and soon we turn east to traverse

over to the west pocket of the huge concave shale slope. Here we drop down over the edge to the steepest run of the trip, a slope of forty degrees or more. What a feeling of satisfaction to look back up to this snowy wall, shining in the oblique rays of the afternoon sun, and to see a perfect snake track of stem christies winding down the declivity!

A delightful, long, unobstructed run to the east, and we are back at the bottom of the slope. A refreshing drink at the stream, the headwaters of the waterfalls near Harwood Lodge, and down we go into the woods, traversing and swinging until we reach the road, which is followed back to the lodge. After heavy snows, one can continue on down below Ice House Cañon (4850 ft.), thus making a total descent of more than 5000 feet.

For those who do not care to make so strenuous a trip, there are shorter, but still profitable, excursions to be had around Harwood Lodge. By following the course of the road which goes over to Lytle Creek, one can comfortably reach the old Sierra Club cabin at 7500 feet elevation, enjoy the sweeping panorama of the desert to the east, and then return by way of a steep, partly narrow cañon to Manker Flats and the lodge. Or, one can turn toward Telegraph Peak (9008 ft.) from the ridge, climb as close to the summit on skis as seems advisable, the highest ridges being very steep and rugged, and return by way of another delightful cañon which opens into one of our most popular practicing slopes at Harwood Lodge. The Cross Ski Hut is located in this cañon.

Ice House cañon, branching off San Antonio Cañon at 4859 feet elevation, gives access to another splendid skiing region, the timbered slopes of Ontario Peak (8752 ft.). Kelly's Camp, the highest all-year camp in southern California (8080 ft.), deeply buried under many feet of snow through several months, furnishes cozy headquarters for a stay of several days. The northerly exposure and protected location of the slopes keeps the fluffy, powdery snow in "cold storage" and permits skiing in the spring when the snow is gone from most other regions. Cucamonga Peak (8911 ft.) can also be reached on ski, but does not make a profitable trip. Too much traversing of extremely steep gullies is necessary, and the country is too rugged to permit enjoyment.

One of the most popular centers for winter sportsmen from Los Angeles has heretofore been Big Pines (6862 ft.), the Los Angeles

County Playground. It is accessible over a good road, kept open by snow-plows, but it requires a drive of 200 miles round-trip, so that it seems advisable to go there for two days to make the long ride worth while. Ski hills of different sizes, from the small novice-jump to the tremendous master-jump, attract those who like jumping, and the spectators. There's always lots of life up there, and he who likes colorful crowds will enjoy this trip. One can get away from the throng, too, and climb Blue Ridge (8505 ft.), where fine skiing can be had in view of North Baldy (Baden-Powell, 9389 ft.) and Baldy itself (Mount San Antonio, 10,080 ft.), and of the purple immensity of the Mohave Desert stretching away to the far off Panamints. On the other side of Big Pines, Table Mountain is a favorite of ski tourists, with good powdery snow on its wooded north slopes. Neither of the two trips, however, is long enough to fill a day. Pine Mountain (9661 ft.) may be climbed from Blue Ridge and will furnish a fuller day's schedule. The Big Pines Ski Club maintains a fine lodge for its members, where members of the Sierra Club are also welcome.

Below Big Pines is located Wright Wood, the headquarters of the Wrightwood Ski Club, in the midst of good skiing territory.

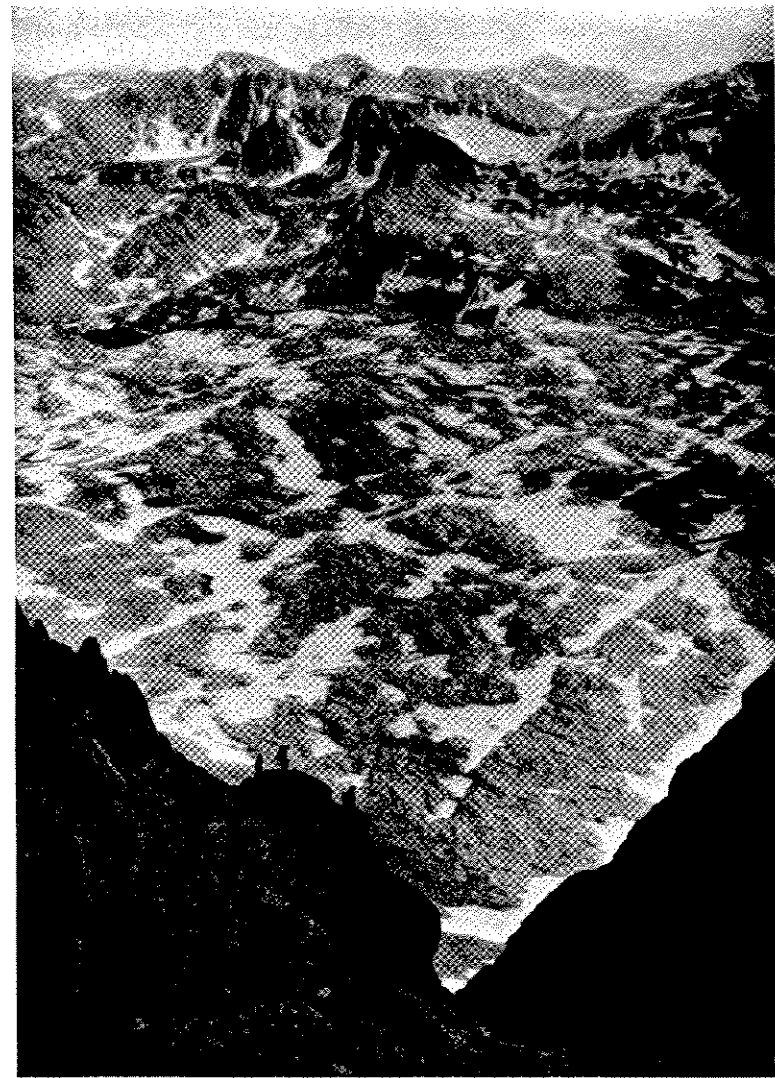
Lake Arrowhead has attracted many thousands of people to its well-organized winter sports programs, the jumping contests on its new ski hill, the ice hockey matches, and many other features. The drive from San Bernardino over the excellent new high-gear road, along the "rim of the world" and the edge of the San Bernardino Mountains, affords wonderful vistas and is a pleasure in itself. The lake, a brilliant blue gem in its setting of white wintry woods, the gay crowds exhilarated by the wintry air, the modern, elegant accommodations, all combine to make the visit a very pleasant one. There is good skiing near by, around Cottage Grove, and a new ski-hut will be the center for ski-touring on open slopes and through the woods. Camp Seeley, the Los Angeles City Playground in the San Bernardino Mountains, is also noted for its winter sports.

Big Bear, twenty miles farther east along the "rim of the world" drive, closely resembles Lake Arrowhead. Here, also, there are many pleasant short trips on gentle wooded and open slopes. A major trip leads to Sugar Loaf Mountain (9842 ft.).

From the "rim of the world," one has an imposing view of the bulk of southern California's greatest skiing mountain, which also

is the biggest of them all—Mount San Gorgonio (11,485 ft.). To climb it from the south, one drives from Redlands up Mill Creek to a point above Forest Home (5000 ft.). Through Vivian Creek and High Creek, one reaches the summit in about a seven hours' climb, so that it seems advisable to make it a two days' trip in order to have plenty of time and fresh, well-rested thigh muscles for a delightful descent the second day. The country is beautiful, the timber not dense, and there are some fine runs through open valleys of gentle inclination.

The crowning experience of the Southland's skier, however, is a trip on the north side of this good old mountain. Unfortunately, access to it is rather difficult, over old, narrow, winding mountain roads, which are not kept open during the winter. But when one gets there, over Barton Flats and the Sawmill Road, the reward is well worth the effort of the ride. I spent two days there in early April, 1933, with Murray Kirkwood, Glen Dawson, and Louis Turner—and what a time we had! A camp on soft ground under huge pine trees, close to a rushing stream, two sunny days with radiant blue sky, while heavy, dark cloud-banks covered the lowlands, and the most perfect skiing of the season. The first day we climbed through the lovely Valley of the Thousand Springs, through open woods and wide cañons, to about 10,000 feet elevation, where the snow was so badly cupped and wind-crusted that we turned back. Down we zoomed and swished on well-waxed skis, over the long gentle slopes, down into the steep gullies where splendid spring snow made "tail-wagging" a sheer delight, and back to the Valley of the Thousand Springs to bask in the burning high-mountain sun and drink of the crystal-clear water. After a good rest during a calm, clear, moonlit night, we used the next day to climb to the ridge above Dollar Lake (9900 ft.). The ridge connects Mount Shields and Mount Charlton of the San Gorgonio massif, and affords a fine view of the southern slopes of San Gorgonio, San Bernardino, and the lower valleys. The descent was perfect. In fact, daring continuous runs on reliable granular snow through open woods, I led the wild chase, followed closely by my companions, whose technique and steadiness had improved rapidly. Sudden, swerving christies at high speed through narrow gaps between trees; long-drawn-out, rythmical swings on the open slopes brought us, all too soon, back to the valley, thrilled, exhilarated, happy.



LOOKING DOWN ON HUMPHREYS BASIN FROM MOUNT HUMPHREYS
Photograph by Lewis F. Clark



A SKIING FIELD IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Wind-Blown Snow on Ridge West of Mount San Gorgonio
Photograph by Nathan C. Clark—Feb. 22, 1931



HARWOOD LODGE
Photograph by Nathan C. Clark—Feb. 21, 1932

Idyllwild, a popular mountain resort on the massif of the San Jacinto Mountains, permits of some good skiing, especially on Tauquitz Peak (8826 ft.); but generally the country is either too flat and level, or too abruptly dropping, broken, and rocky to be called ideal. Mount San Jacinto itself does not seem to be a good skiing mountain, because of the great horizontal distance covered in its ascent.

He who is not content with the variety of skiing territory close to Los Angeles, can, in eight hours, drive up to Owens Valley and ski on the east face of the Sierra. Although frequently described as an extremely rugged, almost perpendicular rock wall, this side of the Sierra Nevada is a veritable ski paradise because of its wide, open, U-shaped glacier valleys. Toward the end of April, 1933, Glen Dawson, Louis Turner, Dick Jones, and I drove up from Independence towards Onion Valley, which we reached the next day after a two hours' climb. We then continued up to Kearsarge Pass (11,823 ft.), the first party to visit it since October, 1932, and returned in a snow-storm, the new snow marring the quality of the ski run. Nevertheless, we enjoyed it. In February, 1934, our group, enlarged by four other U. C. L. A. students, spent several days in Bishop Creek in the company of Norman Clyde and William W. Dulle. With them, we skied to Bishop Pass (11,989 ft.) through unforgettable high alpine scenery.

To sum up the possibilities for ski-touring in southern California, we must admit that almost nowhere do we find the long, easy, unobstructed runs typical of the Alps. There is hardly a place where you can let your skis fly as they may, in a straight care-free *Schussfahrt* over endless gentle slopes—there is only one mountain that affords it: Mount San Gorgonio. You must keep your speed controlled, negotiating the steep, timbered, irregular slopes in a long series of linked turns. Yet this feature makes skiing interesting, and by the very nature of the exacting territory, breeds careful skiers with a highly developed technique. The easy accessibility, the long lasting season, and the usually reliable weather are attractive indeed.