

SKIING DOWN SAN DIEGO WAY

To the barrel stave fraternity from northern climes, it must seem incongruous that San Diego with its orange blossoms and palm trees could harbor as rugged and enthusiastic group of skiers as ever swooped down a mountain side. But such is true. The bite of the ski bee seems to be more virulent in this tropical climate as there is no record of a recovery. Once a skier, always a skier, from the first sitzmark on. In the good old summertime it is nothing to see nostalgic slope-dopes, their toes dangling in the warm Pacific and a tall cool one in their hands, to sigh longingly for snow, preferably in large quantities. Close your eyes and dream, little skiers, soon the birds will be flying south again.

Skiing was still something of a novelty on the Pacific Coast when the San Diego Ski Club was first organized in 1937 by Gene Muehleisen. The original members turned out in equipment and clothing that would bring hoots of laughter from the stream-lined skiers of today, but their enthusiasm for the new sport was boundless. Like man, they evolved. The old days of the toe strap and the telemark are happy memories now and today these tropical "wabbits" are as smooth swinging as good equipment and expert instruction can make them.

In the early days of the Club's history, both skiers and skiing were primitive. There were no developed areas in the San Diego mountains although a few hardy individuals had skied there on home-made equipment as early as 1930. Many members travelled northward to the San Bernardino Mts. and beyond to ski and it was during this era that the Club established a reputation as the most travelled unit in the hickory circuit. But they soon wearied of this commuting to and from distant ski areas and decided to develop their own beautiful and accessible mountains less than two hours driving distance from the city. During the summer of 1939 the members explored the skiable areas in the Laguna and Cuyamaca Mountains for just the right slope. Finally the ideal site was located on the northeast slope of Cuyamaca Peak and was promptly named Jackson Meadows in honor of the Club's president at that time. Sleeves were rolled up and a series of work parties began. Ingenuity blossomed. Someone produced a dilapidated Model A Ford. Pulleys, chains, rope and all the ingredients for a ski tow appeared like rabbits from a magician's hat. At summer's end the muscle-bound members sat back on a log and proudly viewed their finished tow - all new and shining and waiting for snow.

But the Club's summer activities didn't end there. The following summer the slope was widened and additional runs were cleared. The third year found them constructing a warming hut adjacent to the tow shack. (Yes, it blows and snows here too, despite the eternal sunshine myth). The shelter provides a double-feature:-to supply warming and cooking facilities and to house the rescue toboggan and first aid equipment. An efficient ski patrol covers the area and deserves a pat on the back for promoting safe and sane skiing. Over a period of six years only two accidents have occurred which

necessitated the use of the toboggan. Besides keeping a wary eye on reckless boomers, the patrol has other functions. The Forest Service has twice called upon the patrol to transport food and fuel to snow-bound rangers atop Cuyamaca Peak.

The Club is greatly indebted to the Forest Service for its splendid cooperation in making the development of the Cuyamaca area possible for skiers. As a further contribution it has made available to the Club the Cuyamaca Fire Guard Station during the winter months. This latter is a beautiful stone lodge with excellent accommodations for some thirty skiers and is located one and one-half miles from the ski slope. Saturday nights there are something to remember-- a crackling fire, hot buttered rums and someone giving forth with a little jive on a harmonica. Great sport, skiing!

The ski slope is just a short hike from the lodge along a beautifully timbered trail. Slalom racing is very popular down here and all runs are timed. This gives the members, mainly the juniors, the competitive urge to wiggle through a flush one-half second faster than Joe Doakes. A better and more controlled type of skier has resulted from this form of competition. In addition to slalom running lessons are given in the mornings and afternoons to beginners and advanced skiers. These lessons are designed to improve the skiing technique of the pupils as well as the amateur instructors. Alas for the unhappy instructor who falls down or muffs a turn as his eager beavers jeer with delight and show him just how it is done amid much horseplay.

Since the outbreak of the war a large percentage of the membership has joined the armed forces. San Diego skiers are represented in all branches of the service, although the Ski Troops boast the largest number. Most of them are overseas now and it will be a great day when we all get together again for a long postponed "schnee session".

During the last few years many of our week-end skiers are members of the armed forces stationed in and around San Diego. To these transplanted skiers the Club offers its facilities and arranges transportation. Many of the service men are amazed to find snow and a well organized ski club in this area. (Again that eternal sunshine myth.) Before the first snowflake falls the Club holds a meeting and a notice is sent to all the major camps in the vicinity. The response usually calls for much scurrying around for assitional chairs to accommodate the new-comers. Good ski movies are shown and the Club's winter activities are outlined. An invitation is extended to all service men to join us for the season and the response again is overwhelming. The Club has solved the problem of supplying equipment for these guest skiers by asking every member to contribute extra skis and boots. This way of doing things has a double benefit. It affords the Ski Club an opportunity of meeting interesting skiers from other parts and it gives the out-of-towners a chance to keep their ski legs in good working order away from home.

During the summer months water skiing and work parties keep the members in good shape for the first snowfall. All in all, it's a good life and we would not change places for all the tea in China. We ask you---where else can you water ski on "salt water powder" one week-end and snow ski the next?

Dorothy Wullich.....