



Ski Trip: The Bluff to King Billy, by Cameron

We drove up on the Thursday night to camp at Sheeppyard Flat on the Howqua River. Friday morning we continued over Eight Mile Gap and Refrigerator Gap to the gate on Sixteen Mile Road. From here it was a five minute walk to the snowline where we were able to don skis and ski to Bluff Hut for a mid-morning break.

The track up to Bluff hut is a steady climb, and as it had not snowed for a while, the snow had melted to the same shape as the heavily rutted four wheel drive track underneath it. From Bluff Hut it was relatively obvious that there had not been a lot of people in the area for a while. The distance to Lovicks Hut is around 5 km and did not take much time to cover. A steady climb up to the top of Mt Lovick, with a small detour to the very summit. Next a gentle at first, then steeper 2 km descent to Lovicks Hut for lunch. After lunch it's all up hill to Picture Point. The last 200 metres of the climb was not particularly steep, but the track is under a heavy canopy of trees and on the south side of the ridge; the snow was therefore very icy. At certain points on this climb you can sneak onto the ridge line proper and gain good views of Mt Speculation and the Crosscut Saw. A little bit further along the track you come to the Alpine Walking track intersection, which was our overnight campsite. After setting up camp we decided to climb King Billy One and Two, from which we had 360° views of the surrounding area.

We had planned for the next day a climb up the west ridge of Mt Magdala, but when we awoke in the

morning the conditions were not that favourable. Instead we opted for a trip down to Rock Point, just near Chesters yards. The track is easy to follow, running through a lightly forested alpine ridge and is a little more down than up. Lunch was on top of Rocky Point, the view from the top was not great, being surrounded by trees. Back towards camp there are a few places where the trees are more open and you can ski off the west side of the road in the deep clear bowls. Some are steep, others not so steep, so is a good place for everyone to have a play. Getting back to camp, we thought we could make the next day a little bit shorter and headed back to Lovicks Hut. Lovicks Hut is a dump, so we set up tent under the hut's veranda.

Sunday morning we packed up and after a lazy start to the day, a steep climb took us out of the valley and up and over Mt Lovick, with views down the Jamieson Valley. After lunch at Bluff Hut, we left our packs and skied up to the summit of The Bluff. Heading back was another good run down to the hut with some tree/rock dodging at the end. It was now just a 20 minute ski/walk back to the car and fish'n'chips in Mansfield.

It is recommended to have a 4WD to get to the gate we started from. You can get as far as Refrigerator Gap in a 2WD car, but you need to carry chains. The road is not cleared of snow, so heed the weather. Use the Mt Stirling snow report for snow depth at Telephone Box Junction. This gives a good idea of the snowline.