



Trip Review: Blue Lake Ski and Ice Climb *by Richard*



David ice climbing at Blue Lake

A couple of winters ago now, myself and a few other adventurous souls planned a trip to Blue Lake, in Kosciuszko National Park NSW. Accessing the area from Guthega provides generally sheltered, all-weather access.

Gentle climbing up the Snowy River valley proved not to be so gentle on my legs! A full week's pack was burdened down with additional ice-climbing gear; a rope, ice axes, crampons, harness and helmet. A small group of trees, just East of the Crummer Spur at 1870 metres, must be at about the highest altitude that trees grow in Australia. They provided reasonable shelter for our week-long campsite.

Next morning, a short half-hour traverse around the Crummer Spur took us into the Blue Lake cirque. This is a wonderful glacial remnant; the terminal moraine wall of a long gone glacier creates the barrier that allowed the lake to form. Although blue in summer, wintertime saw something more akin to a moonscape. The lake was like a white flat crater, surrounded by black cliffs encrusted with snow and ice. The depth of the snow and ice on Blue Lake made it quite safe to ski across. Having said that, I am always happy for someone else to try it first.

Many years ago in spring, the ice on the lake was beginning break up into individual 'bergs that bounced up and down in the water as we crossed them. A foolhardy undertaking, but someone else went first!

Some low cliffs on the East side of the lake provided a place to play on this first day of climbing. David soloed up, did not feel comfortable making the last move, and backed off. A top rope was set up, allowing some of the



Campsite among the trees

group who had not climbed before to "have a go"! It was quickly obvious that a firm but gentle controlled swing with an ice axe works well. Attempting to belt the ice into submission does not!



Jannie skiing across a frozen Blue Lake

A day spent in the tent during a blizzard, and 2 days ski touring, broke up the climbing. Mount Tate is a great destination, providing sensational views back over Mount Twynam, Watsons Crag and the Main Range. A second day was spent visiting Watsons Crag. This is Cornice Country with a capital "C". I think the telemarking runs in this area are the best in Australia!

Our last full day saw us heading back to Blue Lake. South facing cliffs had more ice. David had spotted a line of 3 bluffs, broken up by a steep snow slope between each one. He led up each one, placing ice screws for protection, while Jannie belayed. Some flailing around with axes by climbers following up saw the snow stakes belay anchor being tested as they fell onto the rope. It was extremely cold in the shade, waiting your turn to climb. Eventually we all topped out in the warmth of the afternoon sun.

The following day, it was pack-up time. Off to the cars, then indulging ourselves at the bakery in Jindabyne. What a finish!