

SKI-ING IN NORWAY.

BY E. BIRNIE REID.

IN 1934 some friends, with whom, in previous years, I had done some ski-ing in Switzerland, suggested that I should join them in the latter half of March at Finse, almost midway between Bergen and Oslo. I accepted, and enjoyed the fortnight most thoroughly. They say that many people go to Finse once, and that, if they go twice, they keep on going; that has been my experience, and as a result I have not explored any of the ski-ing centres which lie to the north of Oslo.

The twenty-one hours' sail from Newcastle to Bergen deters many people from visiting Norway. But the B. and N. Steamship service is very comfortable, and the bi-weekly runs of the swift and luxurious M.V. "Venus" are now augmented by an even faster and bigger ship, the "Vega."

One gets broken in gradually to Norwegian food and customs; on leaving Newcastle at 8 P.M. dinner is served in British style, but next day, at lunch, one meets the rather bewildering *Kolt Bord*—a large table full of cold dishes of nearly every possible kind, from cold turkey and caviar to tinned herring and some quaint varieties of fish. One generally finds these so succulent that there is no appetite left for the various hot luncheon dishes provided.

Bergen is, in many ways, like Aberdeen, although on a smaller scale, and the late afternoon approach by the fjord is most attractive. Also, like Aberdeen, there is a standard joke about the *Bergenser* that he can never be without an umbrella. On the way to Finse there is a choice of trains, one leaving at 8 P.M., two hours after the arrival of the steamer, and one at 8 A.M. next morning. The Bergen-Oslo railway is a wonderful feat of engineering and climbs to over 4,000 feet. From the scenic point of view I think it is rather disappointing, because there are so many tunnels and

snow-sheds in the mountainous parts that to look out is tantalising, as well as trying to the eyes.

On arrival at Finse one finds just a station and hotel adjoining, and one or two railwaymen's cottages. Across the railway there are excellent nursery slopes and a ski-ing instructor. Ski can be hired quite cheaply, although it is found more satisfactory to have one's own. Being practically at the summit of the railway, one can get easy runs in each direction, with a train to bring one back, although the service is *not like that between London and Brighton.*

The snag about Finse is the weather. There may be blizzards for days on end, even in March, when only the hardy will venture out. There is an antidote to a certain extent, in that one or two routes are marked with sticks like garden stakes about 20 feet apart. Sometimes it is difficult to see the next one, as it may get covered with snow. Then in bad weather one must turn.

The most popular run is to the top of the mountain, Hardanger Jökelen, a climb of about 2,300 feet above Finse. The top is a large plateau several miles wide. Aeroplanes, fitted with ski instead of landing wheels, can take off from the lake at Finse and land you at the summit. This must beat the Swiss funiculars for time-saving on the ascent, but I hear that the Insurance Companies are now discouraging the practice.

At Easter time there are many tourist huts open within ski-ing distance of Finse. These are used in the summer by hill walkers, and all that I saw were most clean and comfortable. After a hard trek in a grilling sun the Norwegian red, white, and blue flag outside a tourist hut can be a most cheering sight. Every year I find some new runs to do, but most of the large runs may be tackled only with a guide. Now Finse is a small place and the hotel holds fewer than 100 people; as a result there is only one guide. He is a grand fellow but his English is very limited, so, to get the full value out of a day with him, one must have an English-speaking Norwegian in the party.

Many people are interested to see the reindeer. As a rule they are herded like sheep are in this country, though living

in the snowy wastes. On one of our trips a tame reindeer attached himself to the party and followed us for 30 kilometres. He was offered food of all kinds, including chocolate, cheese, orange, and prunes, but the only thing we saw him eat was some moss which he scraped up for himself. At times he got in the way, but it is a real thrill when descending on skis to have a galloping reindeer immediately ahead. The speed at which they can travel even in soft snow is amazing.

The cost of a fortnight at Finse is quoted at approximately £24 from Newcastle, but this may be cut down by travelling second class on the steamer and third on the railway, both without any hardship. The company, with many nationalities—Danish, Norwegian and British predominating—is cheery and homely, and there is light for ski-ing in March up to 7 P.M. It may not interest many readers, but in Norway spirits of any kind can be bought only at State (Vinmonopolet) shops. One can, however, get beer and wine almost anywhere and at any time.

To any fellow-members who are wondering where to put in a fortnight's hill-walking in the summer months, I can recommend the Jotunheim area, going from hut to hut as one feels inclined. The routes are marked with cairns having a coloured mark painted on them. Certainly the language may present a little difficulty in the remote parts, but I think this gives an additional spice to the holiday.