

## The First Ascent of Kosciusko on Ski.

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The following account of the first winter ascent of Kosciusko is from the pen of the late Mr. Charles Kerry, who led the party which made the successful climb. The summit was reached at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of August 19th, 1897.

It is interesting indeed to contrast this performance when a party of fifteen horsemen with five packhorses, and ski carried as lances, set out from Jindabyne for Friday Flat, in the Crackenback Valley, and spent about a week on the journey there and back, with Dr. Davy's and Mr. Moulden's record trip to the summit and back to the hotel in 8 hours 10 minutes last August.

But the majority of Mr. Kerry's fifteen were strangers to ski, and no living man had seen the mountain in its winter garb. All the country above the timber line was a terra incognita, and the fact that 12 of the 15 succeeded in climbing to the top and returning to the camp at Friday Flat in one day is indeed remarkable.

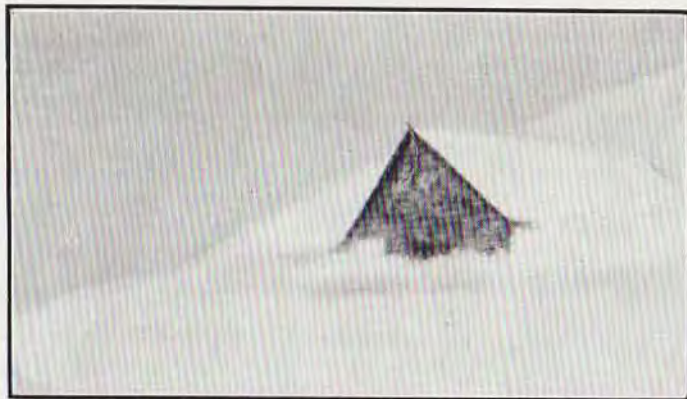
The climbers abandoned their ski for the final assault on the summit, which was probably made over the Cootapatamba saddle, the route at present used by our ski-runners. They arrived at this saddle, however, by a comparatively short snow journey, having made a straight ascent through the timber from the Thredbo Valley at Friday Flat.

Mr. Kerry first describes how the party went into camp and spent a day or two becoming accustomed to ski. On the morning appointed for the ascent, August 19, he says:—

“By 5 o'clock in the late moonlight we were all astir, and day-break found 13 of us tracking in Indian file across the open snow and making for the mountain, each man bearing only his ski, with, for divisible ballast, a camera and a tomahawk; and in his pocket some luncheon as his appetite warranted; wisest he who estimated his capacity before his early breakfast.

“Thirteen of us, and starting from Friday Flat”—“that sounds bad” growled a superstitious one as we headed for the timber. “It did appear ominous, and especially as next moment we found that ski-ing was impracticable by reason of the denseness of the timber, and that there was nothing for it but a bold plunge into the snow, which lay lightly some three feet or more on the top of the thick undergrowth. Ten minutes of this and our leader stopped exhausted. It looked bad, but the second man was pushing on in his place, and thus early it fell that we learned that each must do his five minutes’

spell of track breaking in turn, the rest following closely in his footsteps. Thus for three hours and a half, with the taciturnity bred of breathlessness and with perspiration pouring out of every pore, we literally struggled upwards, our backward track resembling the path of a miniature snow plough, springing from which bracken and undergrowth raised surprised heads to meet the world weeks before their springtime. Four hours and the snow grew noticeably firmer; another half hour, and when it seemed that all our day would be exhausted without more result than indefinite struggling, we emerged from the forest into wonderland. A great drift, overhanging a huge cave, topped the last of the timber, and when we had scaled its frosty sides, on hands and knees, we pulled up for a breather and waited for a normal heart-beat from that palpitating organ. Also, we were



THE HUT ON THE SADDLE BELOW THE SUMMIT OF KOSCIUSKO IN A BLIZZARD.

photographed in our last prideful flounder, for did not our aneroid show that we had ascended 1,800 feet, although we had accomplished but two miles of the estimated eight. Ski now, and with a few luxurious rhythmical strides we had gained a point of vantage farther than we could see the night before, and had an open look-out for weather signs.

“‘The day of the year,’ we shouted in acclamation to a cloudless sky, and a vast sunlit snow plain which stretched before us all unbroken by vegetation or granite outcrop. Not destitute of fauna, though far over this trackless expanse ahead of us sped two hares. This proved first-class travelling for ski, and briskly we glided on all gay, but with a growing thirst, and here the thrice-accursed ‘snow-bias’ first overtook us.



BETTS'S CAMP, JULY 17, 1910.  
The original party setting out for the summit in the morning.



NEAR THE SUMMIT OF KOSCIUSKO.

"Before starting each man had solemnly adjured his neighbor not to eat snow. But there was no water and we had by this time learned that snow mixed with whisky instantly went into hard ice at the bottom of our flask cups; thus it came about that, in direst need, the first handful of snow went furtively into the writer's mouth, and thereafter he bemoaned his weakness until presently he discovered that everyone else was doing the same. Just then we were probably standing, tantalus-like, over one of the minor head-water tributaries of the Snowy River. As noon came, and a halt was proclaimed for luncheon, a similar general weakness was disclosed, for, when the contents of our pockets should have been produced, it was found they had mysteriously vanished before a much earlier hunger.

"Therefore, on again towards a distant ruggedness which, bordering the tablelands rose gaunt and desolate, surely a white-palled barrier to all further progress. 'Have we to climb that?' cried one of us, in dismay. 'We had,' said our guides, recognising in its broken outline some familiar shape; but, they added, from its summit we should overlook the valley which lay immediately below our ambitious goal. By this time, however, several of us felt that if the view from this eminence disclosed much further distance to cover we should never get there. Already one of our party had cried 'A go,' and lay temporarily prostrate upon his ski. Anyhow, we would scale this ridge and see the prospect. So at it we went; the intervals between us widening as each man with dogged persistence tackled the snow cliff 'on his own,' choosing what route he fancied easiest. Our guides had given us a direction. More they could not do, for they were as tired as we were and not so young.

"In this rarified atmosphere our breath came thick and fast, our faces felt and looked like leather, an all-consuming thirst made our dried tongues cleave to the drier palate. 'A pound for a pint of water,' murmured someone in front. The only response was an advanced bid. Half mechanically we at length breasted the wall, and then what a view met our eyes. The guides were probably most astonished, for they had been here before and now did not recognise their summer valley. Here was a steep snow gorge, certainly rolling away from us smoothly; but where, in its depths, should have been Cootapatamba (the highest sheet of water in Australia) and the head waters of the Murray River, the winter coverlet rolled on uninterruptedly, until opposite us it rose again in a sheer wall to a narrow plateau fully a mile in length. Over this plateau hung an enormous drift, roofing it in down its whole length, and supported as we could just make out by regular columns and groinings of frozen snow.

"A little to the left of this there rose a marbled peak to which we took off our hats respectfully, for we knew it instinctively. Its unexpected proximity gave new life to us as we headed for it, but

speedy progress we soon found impossible by reason of the frozen glacier-like slopes around the head of the valley. One false step and instant descent to the depths below; indeed, one of our party nearly took that short cut, and only by dint of careful planting of alpenstock made inch by inch a sober return to us.

"One by one we abandoned our snow-shoes, our feet leaving little impression on the crackling snow, and now for the final pinch. A quarter of a mile to go and five hundred feet. Eventually the summit was reached by twelve of the party at 2 p.m., the first to reach the goal being guide J. Boulton, who thus won the gold medal offered by Mr. Barnett for the first man to reach the summit. The cairn and survey mark were found to be entirely covered with frozen snow which had been blown by the winds into fantastical and stalactitic formations, presenting in the brilliant sunshine a dazzling picture never to be forgotten by the elated explorers.

"After a stay of three-quarters of an hour the descent was commenced, and the camp reached in safety."



PARTY AT THE OLD HUT ON THE SUMMIT.  
First winter ascent by the hotel route, in July, 1910. This hut has now disappeared.