

ADDRESS DICTATED BY PADDY PALLIN WHO COULD NOT ATTEND

Kosciusko Huts Association 20th Annual General Meeting Kahane Lodge Perisher Valley 13th April 1991

Kosciusko Huts Association must be very proud, as I am, as you have 20 years of service for the community, the Kosciusko National Park and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

When we think of the reasons for the forming of the KHA and look back to your formation the Presidents, Committees voluntary workers past and present you have every right to be proud. Having preserved not only the huts, hut the history of the park, you as KHA members have given service to our present generation, whilst giving to our future generations the ability to see first hand how the pioneers of our mountains survived and lived. By your foresight and unselfish efforts, the KHA has given a living museum and preserved our early mountain history.

The work of the KHA has maintained a safe haven for search and rescue parties with the back up of huts to give shelter security for the injured, exhausted or lost to recuperate, maps to assist those who may need to reassess their position; shelter till the blizzard abates, the rain stops, fog lifts. A place to dry clothes, a moments respite to warm hands and feet and prepare a meal.

How pleasant it is to be with one's friends in a hut, to exchange stories, sing songs or just to talk, exchange ideas or gaze into the fire.

Can you imagine the coast of Australia without Life Savers Association, country towns without their clubs, Rotary, Lions, Apex, Red Cross or Meals on Wheels. I cannot imagine Kosciusko National Park without the KHA working in harmony with the NP&WS and its Rangers and Staff.

Thank you for the honour bestowed on me to be your founding Patron. Best wishes to you all for the future

God Bless

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THE ORIGINS OF THE KOSCIUSKO HUTS ASSOCIATION

Neville Gare Parks Superintendent

On an historic occasion such as this, I know you will not mind if I put before you the two real reasons why I feel qualified to speak to you on this subject, be it history or prehistory.

The first concerns my old forest engine-cling lecturer and football coach Kal McGrath, who in a moment of inspiration expounded to us the view that the only people who should write about history are those who are in it!"

The second emanates from my friend and former colleague Bruce Leaver, now based well downstream from these mountains in the city of Adelaide, who alluded to me a year or two ago as "an Historic Site"!

So, secure in my formal qualifications, let me try to give you my perspective on the origins of the KHA.

My interest in huts pre-dates my arrival at Kosciusko in 1959. Before that I served for 7 years as a professional forester in NSW, based at Bermagui, Bombala, Armidale and Tamworth. In that time I averaged 1 or 2 nights a week camped in huts or tents in a number of state forests, I enjoyed many a cup of tea by an open fire, and not long before moving from Tamworth to Kosciusko I had the pleasure of designing and building a rough-sawn weatherboard hut, complete with stone and galvanised iron open fireplace in Tuggolo Slate Forest. Not being constrained by national park status or jogging protesters, we felled a nice stringybark tree and had it milled to our required sizes at the local sawmill.

So when I arrived in these mountains, some thirty two years ago almost to the day, I was delighted to find the collection of old huts which were here. And although I was rather busy trying to manage this 1.3 million acre park with my skeleton staff of 4 from day 1, I managed to get out and use a few of the huts in those early years. So Seamans, Adams, Rutledges, Dead Horse, Cascade, Tin Mines, Napthalis, Kidmans Harveys, Alpine, Tin, Mawsons, Cesjacks, Delaneys, Four Mile, Jounama, Gooandra,

Currango, Coolamine, Geehi, Whites River, Horse Camp, Schlink Hilton, Valentines, Grey Mare and Pretty Plain were all on my visiting list.

There are many good memories· the horse ride with Geoff Nash and Michael and Ivan Pendergast of the SMA from Valentines via Grey Mare and Strumbo Range to Pretty Plain; the dead wombat jammed under the bench at Pretty Plain; the smokey fireplace at Kidmans; the rustic rambling, galvanised grandeur of Alpine, built for the Main Range Rat!

3 days on horseback at Tin Mines with Keith Gray and Frank West; Frank's big pile of tins and bottles outside Dead Horse; the view of the western faces of the Abbott Range from the toilet door at Geehi; morning light on Jagungal from the door at Mawsons on a trip with the exclusive Squirrels Club bringing in a rescue sled made by Bill Kenyon; the art gallery at Grey Mare; and of course cups of tea and scones with Tom and Molly Taylor at Currango. And the super-hut Alpine, and the avalanche that destroyed Kunama, and Pounds Creek-became-Illawong _ all part of Charles Anton's dream of a chain of serviced Main Range Huts.

Let me share for a moment with you the challenge facing a young forester idealistic, enthusiastic but of limited diplomatic talents - and his wife and young son in April 32 years ago:

The Snowy Scheme was in full cry, and the SMA was king, with major works townships at Island Bend, Cabramurra and Khancoban; the mountains ringing with heavy construction work on dams, roads, power stations, tunnels and transmission lines.

The ski resorts were about to boom - Thredbo 2 years old, the first hotel and T-bar just built at Perisher, and a growing demand for ski lodge sites.

Grazing above 4500 feet just banned by the NSW Government, and the new (and first) superintendent with instructions (but no rangers, horses or dogs) to impound illegally grazing stock. And virtually no understanding of Kosciusko as a national park among the 60 people interviewed in my first 6 weeks - Snowy Scheme sure, lost snow leases sure, place for well-off people to ski sure but "national park", what the heck is that all about?

My staff was 4 labourers; our budget was about \$40,000.

And let me share with you the advice when I started in a letter from one of the park trustees, the forester and bush walker and pioneer conservationist, Baldur Byles, veteran of a six-month solo survey of the Upper Murray catchment of the Main Range in 1931/32:

Apart from technical and administrative abilities the new superintendent requires the following:

1. Real interest in and enthusiasm for the job. Determination to dedicate his life to it.
2. Willingness (and that of his wife) to live at Waste Point, at any rate for a large number of years.
3. The personality to pursue his own right policy and succeed in implementing it without antagonising or falling foul of anyone. And there is no shortage of bristling points all of which are wired to dynamite.
4. The capacity to earn the respect and, if possible, the affection of all those numerous bodies and individuals with whom he will be obliged to work.

If he makes the Job develop and expand he can expect his own position to expand proportionately. If he fails he won't have much to recommend him when applying for another Job.

I don't know whether I have enthused you or drowned you - that probably depends on you. My only regret is that the Job turned up 20 years too late.

Well, I wasn't drowned, but I was very quickly put to the test as development and visitation in the park erupted in the sixties. And one of those bristling little points wired to dynamite to gradually emerge was the matter of the huts.

Prior to the establishment of the Kosciusko State Park in 1944 the mountain huts had led a relatively uneventful existence. Largely built by grazing and mining interests, most of them were kept in a state of good repair by the stockmen looking after sheep and cattle each summer on the snow Jeases. They were generally spartan and simple structures, and the pioneer ski tourers and bushwalkers of the thirties and forties used them in a fairly conflict-free give-and-take arrangement with the stockmen. It worked well, for the numbers were not great, and there was little vehicular access.

Declaration of the park had little effect, except to some extent around the Kosciusko summit area and the high country just north of it, where grazing was officially banned from 1944 - a ban often honoured in the breach rather than the observance. For the rest of the park at least, official grazing and traditional shared hut usage continued.

1949 and the arrival of the Snowy Scheme brought the big changes. Some 500 miles of roads and 1000 miles of four wheel drive access tracks were built by the SMA over the next 10 to 15 years, opening up the mountains as never before. This access, plus publicity for the Scheme, plus an influx of European migrants with an interest in snow, plus increased leisure time and spending power in the Sixties transformed use of the mountains. The huts began to feel the pressure of increased use, particularly after the ban on grazing above 4500 feet in 1958 left most of them without the care of the stockmen.

Initially the slack was taken up informally. A number of groups such as ski and bushwalking clubs took responsibility for caretaking some of the more popular huts, like Mawsons, Tin Hut, O'Keefes and Grey Mare. It was all unofficial, but it was agreed in our discussion with these groups that no group would have any proprietary rights as a result of its caretaking role. This important principle carried through to later events.

These few huts were all right, but most of the others were neglected and increasingly used, and sometimes abused, by various anonymous and uncontactable people. Things like kitchen-sinks and refrigerators began to change their simple character, and unauthorised four wheel drive vehicles damaged the country in various places taking materials and food-caches for winter into various huts.

By the time I went on a 6-month study tour of North American parks and forests in mid 1966 a lot of things at Kosciusko were coming to a head. We had a dynamic new Minister, Tom Lewis, and there was talk of a national park system to replace the Kosciusko State Park Trust. The Snowy Scheme was on the run down towards completion and questions of maintaining roads, fire control and wider park management had to be faced. The ski resort explosion had brought many problems, including access, parking, snow clearing, communications, waste disposal and water and power services. Alongside them, concerns about the huts and their management and integrity tended to pale into relative insignificance.

Nevertheless I did not forget the hut question while in North America. In some places, like the Appalachian Mountains in the east, a series of huts was maintained by organisations like the Appalachian Mountain Club, hut users paying a nightly fee. That system seemed to work well. In other places, use of public huts had caused such problems that it had been decided to demolish them. I got varying opinions and advice on the subject.

When I arrived back home early in 1967 things were even more hectic than before. So I had little time to even think about such things as demolishing huts as we passed from the era of the Kosciusko State Park Trust to that of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service at the end of 1967. Over the following two years the new Service was somewhat daunted by Kosciusko and its special problems, and a good deal of time was spent with the new head office flexing its muscles nervously and our staff reacting predictably. The hut question raised its head on several occasions, and I mentioned my North American observations to several people. For several weeks we had with us the former superintendent of Rocky Mountains National Park (Colorado), Roger Contor. He indicated that they had got rid of huts there because of problems such as we were beginning to experience - sanitation and rubbish disposal, hut maintenance, overcrowding and user conflict at peak periods, unauthorised and inappropriate alterations and additions, firewood, and so on.

My friend the late Paddy Pallin says in his book *Never Truly Lost* that I returned from the United States determined to demolish all the huts. Such is not the case. My personal feeling for the huts was strong, but I knew we had to consider all the options, including the possible demolition of some.

The difficulty was to arrive at a management decision in a way which identified and involved the increasing array of hut users, in the midst of the turmoil surrounding the transfer of park administration from Trust to NPWS.

By early 1970, rumours of possible hut demolition began to circulate, I did nothing to discourage them, referring instead to the problems which were developing, and mentioning again the North American experience. Finally on 26 May 1970 the paper *SKI NEWS* ran an item headlined **NORDIC SKIERS IN REVOLT - PARK TRUST RANGE POLICY MAY COST LIVES**, going on to announce a petition against the Park Trust's policy on the main range huts. It mentioned reports that the Trust's policy was to eventually remove all buildings from the Kosciusko Primitive Area.

Here at last was the chance to bring the issue right out into the open. So I wrote to *SKI NEWS* three days later pointing out that the only policy concerning huts adopted by the NPWS, which had succeeded the Trust, was that there should be no exclusive ownership or control. We did not propose demolition of huts which were essential and effective as emergency shelters, and while we were in the process of evaluating the

merits of existing huts we were following a program of maintenance of huts like Grey Mare, O'Keefes and Mawsons by caretaker groups. Our rangers had where possible assisted with packhorse transport, and had removed accumulated rubbish from some sites.

I mentioned also that we had sought the views of various interested parties, and hoped that the SKI NEWS article would stimulate more interest in questions of financing, operating, maintaining and servicing huts, as well as safety aspects. We wanted constructive suggestions, and hoped to finalise interim policy recommendations for the NPWS Director by the end of 1970.

The matter was placed before the Kosciusko National Park Local Committee for discussion later in the year, and a questionnaire circulated in August to known clubs and other interested groups and individuals. On receipt of the responses I called a public meeting, which was duly held at the Park Headquarters at Sawpit Creek on 5 December 1970.

Some 180 people attended, the questionnaire responses were presented, and a full and frank discussion followed. From my viewpoint, we needed a forum within which the Service and the wide range of hut users could consider together the management implications of the buildings we had inherited. It was no good pretending there were not problems. What was needed was an objective appreciation of their values and advantages, as well as the management problems and challenges they presented. I wanted the users to be part of the solution rather than the problem. I suggested that a group be formed, perhaps to be called 'Friends of the Huts of Kosciusko', with this in mind.

It was obvious from the discussion that there was a lot of goodwill and potential for voluntary assistance, with the emphasis on public huts, open to all and without any exclusive rights to individuals or individual groups.

Finally a motion was passed

That an association tentatively to be named the Kosciusko Huts Association be formed. and that an interim steering committee of nine be elected.

The steering committee was duly elected, and it included the Park Superintendent or his nominee (normally the Chief Ranger). Its job was to prepare a draft constitution. This was duly done, and the KHA had its first general meeting at Sawpit Creek on 8 May 1971.

By that time I had gone on loan to Papua New Guinea to establish that emerging nation's first national park and a park service. The KHA was on its way, and I was not to return to Kosciusko in an official capacity to maintain the sort of contact I would have liked in its formative years. On my return to Australia in 1974 to live in Canberra I joined the Association and remained a member for some years. For various reasons my membership has unfortunately lapsed, but I have been pleased in recent years to take part in maintenance and restoration work at both Delaneys and Tin Mine Huts, as well as visiting others from time to time.

I look around me tonight and see many new faces, as well as some old friends from those early and momentous days - Bob and Sybil Story, Robin Miller, Reet Vallak, Pieter Arriens, Rex Cox.

And there are some faces absent _ faces belonging to people like Paddy Pallin and John Paynter who contributed so much towards making the KHA a reality. It is good to see the progress you have made, and the firming relationship with the NPWS, after some ups and downs. For me there is a good deal of satisfaction in remembering some of those early weekend meetings at Mawsons Hut, with people like Gus Fay and Bill Kenyon and John Paynter and Bob Story and others, when the seeds of some of the ideas were sown, to bear fruit later in such fine fashion.

May the KHA's next twenty years be as fruitful and productive as those that have just passed, in the unselfish care and enjoyment of a very special cultural heritage in this special park which belongs to all of us.

Thank you all. May you continue to live up to the spirit of the KHA, as so well expounded and established by those who began it all twenty years ago.