

tourists on the summit of kosciuszko since 1875

By Pauline Downing

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Advert for the Hotel Kosciusko from The Agricultural Gazette of NSW 1914

In January 1875 the first enthusiastic tourist party was taken to the summit of Mount Kosciusko by Len Scully, a cattleman who was grazing his stock on summer grasses. Initially the party went by horseback, starting from below where Jindabyne is situated today. The party camped near Kalkite and next morning walked the last section towards the summit in mist and rain. They encountered steep and difficult snow slopes, frozen hard and difficult to transverse.

There is some confusion if this and following parties climbed to the summit of Mt Kosciusko or Mt Townsend as Townsend has the illusion of being a higher peak. David Scott has compiled a wonderful compendium of these journeys, quoting from the diaries of the travellers, in his paper *Tourists on the Summit*.

To stand on the summit of the highest point in Australia was, as it is now, an achievement for those early intrepid 'tourists'. Mt Kosciuszko is counted among the Seven Summits of the World of the seven continents, Kilimanjaro, Vinson Massif, Carstensz,

Pyramid, Everest, Elbrus, Mt McKinley and Aconcagua (two lists exist with a controversy over the Australian and Antarctic summits) although Kosciuszko is the smallest of those summits by half.

In August 1897 the famous photographer Charles Kerry and ski party ascended the highest peak leaving from Thredbo.

In the first decade of the 1900s the NSW Government Tourist Bureau was encouraged by the beauty of the mountains to build accommodation for tourists close to the summit. A hut, approx 4sqm, was constructed at Betts Camp on Spencers Creek in 1910. It was the first tourist accommodation on the high peaks for use by horse trekkers, walkers and winter skiers - it burnt in the 1927 bushfires. A series of smaller safety huts were planned to encourage skiing and effect safety for the Main Range pioneer skiers. These were built much later in the 1920s and 1930s.

The most imposing and grandest of the tourist accommodation structures was the Kosciusko Hotel. Construction commenced on Diggers Creek in April 1907 and opened in 1909. In 1913 another 49 bedrooms were added. In the first of the summit ski races that became a focus for competition over the next 30 years, Schlink, Shorney and Jacobsen skied from Hotel Kosciusko to the summit in 1914 setting a record time of 15hours 15 minutes.



Charlotte's Pass, 2 a.m., August 5, 1938. Courtesy the "Pub."

Chalet Fire in 1938. Image from from the Australian Ski Year Book 1939.

"The Pub" as it was affectionately known was the place to be until a disastrous fire in 1951 consumed the hotel. Only the 'servants or staff quarters' that stood separate from the main building, now known as Sponars Lodge, was saved.

Access was almost impossible in some weathers, and the Kosciusko Road, proposed in 1906, was completed in 1907. The Chalet at Charlotte Pass was completed in 1930, built just below the summit of Kosciuszko. It became overcrowded as the popularity of skiing took hold and overflowed into the old Betts Camp.

Ski races and state competitions were organised. A new Betts Camp was built closer to the new road and

enlarged. A comment on the accommodation was "...the most outstanding feature of the hut are the blowflies and instead of having to pay 2 shillings to stay here, a bonus should instead be paid for the doubtful privilege of staying one night."

The Chalet burnt down in 1938, (see photo) it was rebuilt a year later.

Private ski lodges, club lodges and commercial accommodation in Thredbo, Perisher and Charlotte Pass with ski in - ski out facilities attested to the popularity of tourism in the Snowy Mountains. Summer activities became more affordable and popular towards the end of the 20th century with lodges staying open during the summer to support bushwalking and horse riding, tennis, kayaking and the full range of summer activities that the Snowy Mountains cater to today.

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Advert from the Australian Ski Year Book 1939.

The Kosciuszko huts Association (KHA) always needs and welcomes new members and supporters who receive a list of all huts and ruins in Kosciuszko and Namadgi National Parks as well as four newsletters per year. To join, write to KHA, GPO Box 2509 Canberra ACT 2601 or visit us on our website www.kosciuskohuts.org.au



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