

My Pioneer Trip to Kosciusko

by Percy W. Pearson

From the Kosciusko Alpine Club 1923 Year Book

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As a boy my greatest ambition was to be amongst snow, and when in after years I jealously read of Messrs. Chas. Kerry, Percy Hunter, George Bell and a few others visiting Kiandra for the snow sports, I was very anxious to join the party.

I think it was in 1907¹ I heard that the Government Tourist Bureau was organizing a party to visit the snow fields at Kosciusko, where the Hospice² was being erected and I hastened to have my name enrolled.

I think that Mr. Paterson and the other officers of the Tourist Department must have got tired of the sight of me, as I was in and out of the office daily and asking all sorts of silly questions about the snow and what I would have to wear.

A large number of people had their names given in to join the party. I think most of them were as anxious to go as I was, but a week before we were to leave, Sydney experienced a cold snap, and the majority lost their enthusiasm, and the party dwindled down to six, with the addition of three others who left Sydney a few days previously for Kiandra and were to join us at the Creel³.

I was out of my bunk in the train at daylight and had my face glued to the window looking for the snow, and I think we were all disappointed on arrival at Cooma not seeing any, as we

fully expected to view snow all the way out, but when we met old Paddy Heyland, who was to drive us out in his coach, we were more contented, as he assured us that we would get all the snow we wanted when we got to Kosciusko.

We left Cooma at 10 o'clock and arrived at Berridale in time for lunch, leaving again at 2 o'clock.

We had a bit of excitement as we were leaving Berridale. A mile out from the town we saw two mounted constables galloping across the country and signalling for us to stop. We did so, and, when they arrived they looked very important and demanded to know who was in charge of the party, also the names of us all. It appeared the driver of the coach had broken some antediluvian traffic regulation at Cooma that morning and had been reported, and consequently the troopers were sent after us. At any rate we heard nothing more about the matter; I think some of our names must have given them a bit of a shock.

We arrived at the Creel at 7 o'clock and were met by the three Charlies, Bennett, Paterson and Brockhoff, who had been to Kiandra for a few days.

We were up early the next morning, as we were to have our first experience on skis. We loaded the coach with Kiandra skis and a toboggan and started for the snow, all excitement.

We drove for an hour or so and suddenly got the order, "All out; get your skis ready and cut a brake stick each." These we had to cut off a tree, and were to be used to help us climbing and also to sit on when coming down a hill.

Of course, the three who had been to Kiandra and our friend, George Bell, put on a "bit of dog", and showed us how it should be done, but we soon found that even they had spills, so we had to try ourselves. No adjusting bindings, as we only had Kiandra skis, with a plain leather strap to put our feet

in. We each waddled gingerly

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to the edge of a slope and let go, and found we could fall just as gracefully as the others, and before long, with a lot

of perseverance, we got on famously, and I shall never forget the satisfaction and pleasure I felt when I first negotiated the slope.

We spent about an hour practicing and then made our way toward the hotel, which was partially erected, and left for the winter, and I think the sight of the building in the centre of the snow was one of the finest I have ever witnessed.

One little incident I must mention. We left the Coach at Rennix Gap and loaded the toboggan with skis and various articles, including a box of eggs. We decided that two of us would draw the toboggan by a rope and another sit on it and look after the luggage. We seemed

to be getting along famously. George Bell was in the middle of a funny story when we felt a tug and heard a muffled cry behind, and looking back saw the toboggan upside down, and our friend, who had been holding the box of eggs, dragging on

his back. He was a pretty good sport, for although he had frozen omelette over his face, he took it in good humour. We proceeded to the building, unloaded, and spent a most delightful afternoon in the snow, and left for the Creel at dusk, all very pleased with our first day's ski-ing.

We were back again the next day and felt we were all improving, but as so much time was spent travelling up and down the mountain I suggested we should camp in the building, so four

of us found some old camp stretchers and took them to what is now the drawing room, made a good fire and were comfortable for the night.

The next day Mrs. Percy Hunter and her two boys joined the party, and all hands decided to camp in the building for the balance of the holidays.

That night we decided to call a public meeting with the object of forming an Alpine Club. I found a bell and toured all round and invited all residents of Kosciusko to attend. The meeting was most successful and enthusiastic.

[KAC was founded the following year with an inaugural meeting on 3rd August 1909.ED] I think Charlie Paterson⁴ was made President and I was elected Hon. Secretary, which position I have held ever since.

The next day an excursion was arranged to explore, and got as far as DainersÕ Gap, and as the party left the hotel I happened to be in the lead, so think I can claim to be the first man to go up the road on skis.

We had a carnival on our last day which was most successful. We had a ladiesÕ championship, which I think, was won by Mrs Hunter; a gentlemanÕs championship, won by Charlie Paterson, and I had the honour of winning the new chumsÕ race.

I have revisited Kosciusko annually ever since. I never lost my enthusiasm, and hope to be able to do so another sixteen years.

My greatest ambition is to encourage the sport and make Kosciusko what it should be Ñ the most popular holiday resort in Australia.

The 1907 group including Percy Pearson (standing, 4th from left) and Charles T Brockhoff (seated, 2nd from right)

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Footnotes

1. Actually 1908

2. The future Hotel Kosciusko was originally referred to as a Hospice - the definition in that era being a house of shelter for strangers or pilgrims and not serving alcohol.

3. The Creel was built on the Summit Road in 1907 to house the workmen constructing the Hotel Kosciusko opened in June 1909.

4. Actually Charles T Brockhoff (Southwell-Keely, P (2009) Out on the Tops)

About Percy Pearson

Percy Pearson was a successful competitive cyclist as was his father Joseph Pearson. Percy heard about skiing in 1906 and in 1908 joined a group of eight which went to Kosciusko to see the embryonic hotel being built at Diggers Creek.

The group camped in the partly completed hotel and Pearson suggested the formation of the Kosciusko Alpine Club.

This did not happen immediately but did so the following year. Pearson was elected foundation Honorary Secretary, a position he held for the next 27 years.

During that time he was involved in all activities of the club including racing, importation of skis, development of ski technique and instruction and manually clearing ski runs with an axe. He was a meticulous recorder of minutes and records and it is due to him that KAC has such an excellent record of its earlier years. In failing health he was elected President in 1938 and died in 1939 at the age of 64 years.