Thredbo Village Self Guided Heritage Walk

When the first Aborigines entered Australia through Cape York Peninsula 50,000 or more years ago, the Kosciuszko Plateau, 3,000 kilometres to the south east, was still very much in the ice ages. It's estimated that Aborigines took up permanent residence on the Monaro Plains at the base of the Kosciuszko plateau from 5,000 to 15,000 years ago.

The Aborigines who came to live on the edge of the mountains eventually formed four major tribal groups; the YA-itmathang, the Wolgal, the Waradgery and the Ngarigo. The high part of the ranges was no-mans land, held in trust for all the tribes and most certainly unoccupied during the winter months. In the spring, it became a great meeting place where people gathered in their thousands for ceremonies and the annual feasting on the Bogong moth, which was considered a great delicacy.

The Village

Thredbo in the Kosciuszko National Park, is one of Australia's highest alpine towns at 1365 to 1930 metres above sea level (Cabramurra is the highest town).

The area known as Thredbo Village had been used by early graziers when, in 1955, a Czech by the name of Tony Sponar, working as a hydrographer for the Snowy Mountains Authority, realised the great potential of the area as a Ski Resort. Sponar had been a ski instructor at St Anton, Austria, from 1941 to 1948 and saw Thredbo developing with the same atmosphere as at St Anton.

In May 1955, the Kosciuszko Chairlift and Thredbo Hotel Syndicate was formed and subsequently acquired a lease from the state government with the idea of developing a year-round resort. The initiating directors were Tony Sponar, Charles Anton, Eric Nicholls and Geoffrey Hughes.

In winter 1955 a study of weather and snowfall characteristics of the area was made. By the end of that year it was decided that the Friday Flat / Crackenback Peak area was best suited for development and a line was cleared and surveyed for a proposed chairlift on Crackenback Peak. In October 1955 Andrew Thyne Reid joined the syndicate.

In January 1957 the State Park Trust gave the syndicate an option for a lease, and work began in the summer of 1956 – 57 on a chairlift and basic accommodation.

Tony Sponar was the first area manager and had a budget, in 1957, of 4000 pounds to build a road from the Alpine Way to the present site of the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and 1000 pounds to build a lodge.

In May 1957 the syndicate was renamed and reorganised into Kosciuszko Thredbo Limited. Andrew Thyne Reid was the Chairman and through his experience with the James Hardie Company, raised the money for the continuing development of Thredbo.

To obtain a 99 year lease the group had to build a ski lift and 100 bed hotel within 5 years. After 3 1/2 years it was clear the group needed a partner with more financial strength and construction expertise. Tyne Reid negotiated with the bidders, McGrath Coach Houses and Lend Lease.

In 1961, Lend Lease acquired the lease and until 1987 the company developed Thredbo into the most unique alpine resort in Australia, the only one to operate year round.

In January 1987, Amalgamated Holdings Limited, known to most as the Greater Union Organisation, purchased the lease and since then Thredbo has gone ahead in leaps and bounds, In summer 1987/88, major developments of some $30 million were undertaken including the largest snowmaking system in the southern hemisphere and the installation of two state-of-the-art detachable quad chairs.

The Village can accommodate approximately 4,300 people with a permanent population of 250 to 300 people. Since 1996 over $130 million has been invested in the upgrading of the mountain and Village facilities. Begin walk at Valley Terminal 1. ❶ (see map on reverse).

❷ The Thredbo Alpine Hotel
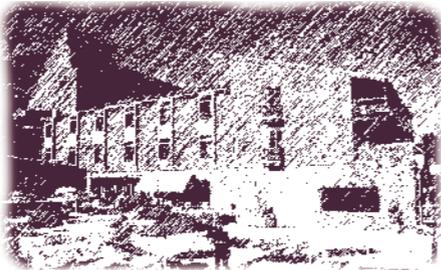
Cross the river on the road level and turn right.

Originally named the Coach House Inn, stage one was completed in summer 1961-62 and provided the central place of commercial accommodation as required by the lease agreement. The original architect was Peter Storey and the builder was Civil and Civic Pty Ltd. Over the years the hotel has undergone many changes.

The stone retaining wall of the hotel was built in 1964 by Cees Koeman from river rock taken from Friday Flat creek.

The wooden foot bridge over the Thredbo River was designed to complement the broad terrace created by the retaining wall. It is a good example of timber framed construction that was fashionable as a part of the Bush School style of the 1960s and early 1970s.

❸ De Dacha (1967)

Turn left past the Hotel carpark – there are two duck ponds on your right. De Dacha is the first building on the other side of the ponds.
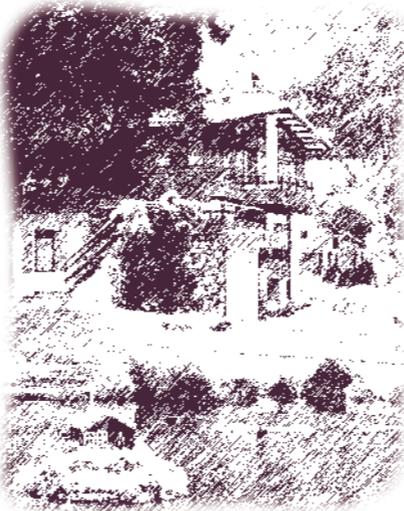
De Dacha lodge is an example of European Alpine architecture. It was built by Lend Lease as a manager's residence, the original cost was $28,000. It was sold in 1993 after extensive renovations for $650,000. The original design was by Albert Van der Lee who was the resort manager for 22 years (1962 – 84) and who lived there with his family for 15 years (1967 – 82).

❹ Sastrugi (1958)

Above and to the left of De Dacha.

Designed by Eric Nicholls (a member of the original syndicate) and Otto Ernegg, Sastrugi is a building which represents the earliest phase of development of Thredbo. It is an excellent example of abstract modernism and was originally owned by Andrew and Katherine Thyne Reid. Thyne Reid was the first chairman of the original Kosciuszko Thredbo Limited who provided the original syndicate with some badly needed finance.

Work in 1999 expanded the building but kept the original integrity of the design intact, in keeping with its listing as a valued heritage building.

❺ Crackenback Ski Club (1957)

Continue up the road to where the road becomes a mall.

This is the first building started in Thredbo, built during the summer of 1956/57 along with the Company Lodge. The steep roofed gable section is original with the front gable and entrance porch added in 1990. It was designed by

architects Constance Crisp and Robert MacLurcan. Constance was the sister of original syndicate member Geoffrey Hughes (President of the Crackenback Ski Club for many years).

In 1956 an avalanche destroyed Kunama Club Lodge, near Mt Kosciuszko. Close to the hut was a rope tow which was destroyed in an explosion soon after. The hut went up as a result of the combination of a faulty heater and a store of gelignite. The heavy cast iron drive wheels, poles and pulleys, survived the explosion. Hughes bought these components from the Ski Tourers Association and used them to assemble the first rope tow in Thredbo at a cost of 1,875 pounds.

Many early members of this club played important roles in the establishment of the first rope tow and ski trails on the mountain. The steepest little run was cleared by a weekend working party of some very enthusiastic young single club members. The clearing was named Lovers Leap by those who know why!

❻ The Black Bear

Walk past the first shops and turn right up the stairs, at the top turn left and head up the hill. Black Bear is on the left.

Established by high profile identity Karel Nekvapil who fled Czechoslovakia in 1948 to join his young bride Sasha, the glamourous but humble Czech national women's ski champion who had defected after representing her country in the 1948 Olympics in St Moritz,

Switzerland. (She came 4th in the slalom, a bit of bad luck – Karel claimed that the pill had not been invented yet). Karel's brother Jan took over the lodge in 1971 when Karel and Sasha renamed the lodge Black Bear after the restaurant the family had owned and operated in Brno (Moravia) until the communist party confiscated the now Czech republic in 1948.

❼ Candlelight Lodge (1957)

Next to Black Bear.

Candlelight was the first commercial lodge built in Thredbo. Established by Hungarian immigrants Kornel and Suzanne Desco who lived and worked here most of their lives, the lodge was designed by Otto Ernegg, an Austrian architect from Sydney. The Desco's were a very dedicated and hard working couple. Their lodge and restaurant set the highest standards in Thredbo for some 20 years.

❽ High Noon (1962)

On the corner opposite Candlelight Lodge.

Rebuilt in 1995, it was originally a Snowy Mountains Authority hut and established as Roslyn Lodge by the historic Ski Tourers Association of Australia, lead in the early years by Charles Anton. Anton was part of the original syndicate. The club was renamed the Australian Alpine Club, and the Ski Tourers Association built a new club lodge, also named Roslyn, nearby in 1976. The name Roslyn comes from Roslyn Wesch, a member of the club who perished in the Kunama avalanche near Mt Kosciuszko in 1956. Walk back down the road a little to the Jack Adams path on the left.

9 Kasees (1965)

On your left behind the Denman Mountain Inn (it has a beautiful garden).

Ann and Cees Koeman (Dutch migrant) are now the longest Thredbo residents. They have been living and working in the village from the early 1960s. Cees was mountain manager in 1962. Ann ran the office for the company in those years. The lodge was built in Alpine style by Cees Koeman and designed by Bela Racsko.

10 Berghutte (1958)

Along the path on the left.

Reputedly the second 'A' frame constructed in Thredbo, it was originally designed by Derek King from Frenchs Forest. Although alterations have been made in 1969, 1972, 1973 and 1975 the original 'A' frame is still evident today. It is a ski club with a very active membership who are mostly based in Sydney.

11 Alpenhorn (1960)

At the end of Jack Adams path go to the bottom of the street and turn left.

This is one of the early commercial lodges and was established by the Smit Family, Dutch migrants. In 1964 it was bought by Michael and Dawn Lucas, English migrants who were very active in the Village community and Chamber of Commerce in the 1970s.

12 Ski Club of Australia

Go back down the road.

The first and famous ski club (formed after Kiandra's gold rush) is often just referred to as "The Ski Club". It is a very large and rather exclusive old boys club. The club itself originated well before World War II and was modelled on the Ski Club of Great Britain.

The building was a relocated Snowy Mountain Hydro-electric Scheme hut from the Island Bend camp at Guthega. The original hut can be seen on the western end of the current structure.
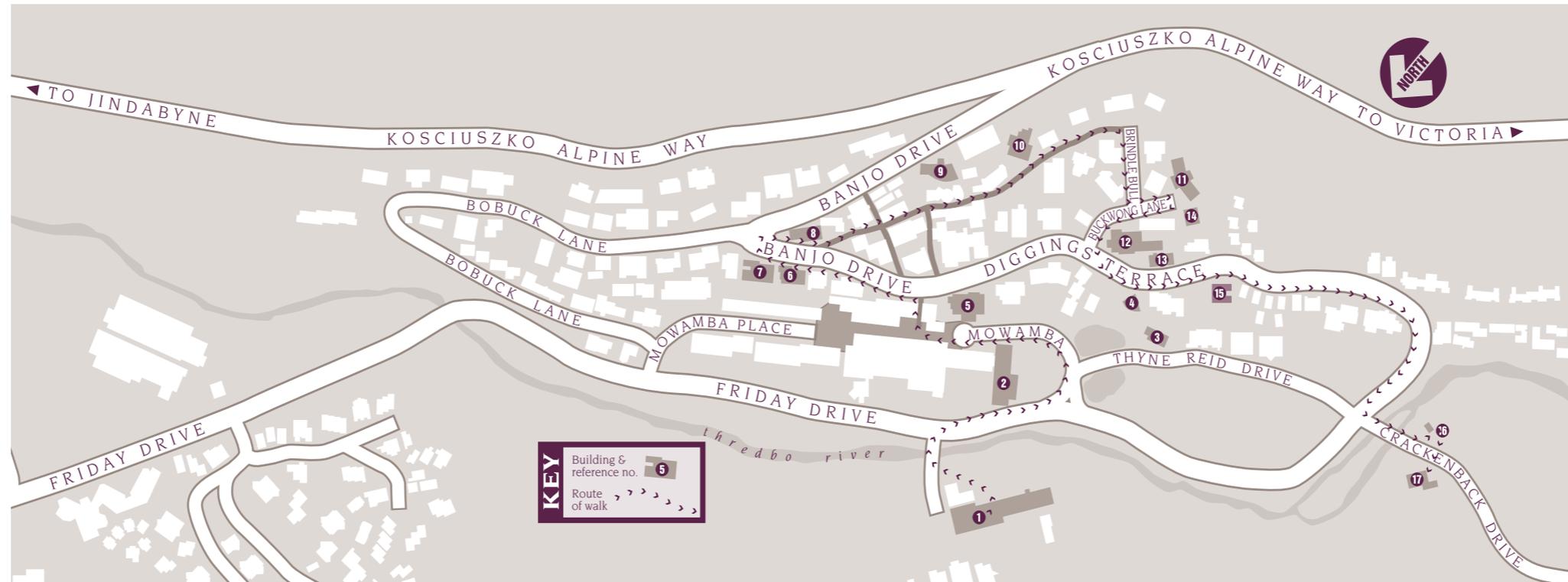
13 Ramshead Hut

At the bottom of the road turn left and pass Ski Club of Australia, Ramshead Hut is the next building.

One of the 5 or 6 prefabricated Norwegian huts used for the Snowy Mountains Authority workers in the late 1950s. When the scheme was finished some of the huts were moved to Thredbo (Others were High Noon, the original youth hostel, the Lodge, the original hotel, later staff quarters, and the Ski Club of Australia). Ramshead Ski Club members are mainly graziers from the Monaro.

The syndicate bought the old Snowy Mountain Authority huts from the Norwegian company, Selmer Engineering, at Guthega. The huts were de-mountable and were used originally as Luftwaffe barracks in Norway during the war. They cost 500 pounds each.

14 Wombiana (1959)

Just past Ramshead is a path where halfway up you will see Wombiana on the right.

The original plan was prepared by Peter Muller, an architect from Palm Beach, Sydney. As it remains largely intact it is listed as a valued heritage building. Wombiana was one of about twelve "private" lodges, that is, they were built before subleases were issued which have now been converted to proper commercial buildings. Wombiana was built by the Richardson family of the Victor Lawn Mower Company.
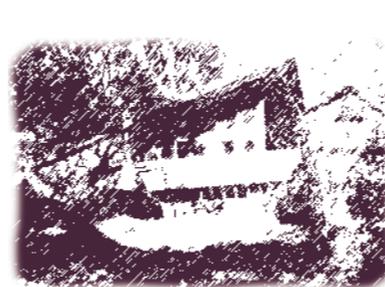
15 Seidler Lodge (1962)

Continue on down the road where Seidler Lodge is on your right.

This lodge was originally built for Dick Dusseldorp, chairman of Lend Lease, the parent company of Kosciuszko Thredbo from 1961 to 1986. Dusseldorp used to come to Thredbo nearly every weekend for many years. He commissioned Harry Seidler to design the building. The accepted design was conceived in a weekend and won the prestigious Wilkinson Architectural Award in 1965.

Return via the golf course, Community Centre 16 Chapel 17.

KEY

Building & reference no. 5

Route of walk

self guided heritage walk

THREDBO
ALPINE VILLAGE