



Laurie Seaman on the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, hours before his death (ASYB1929); the Seaman Memorial Hut (D Scott 2010)

Death on the Summit

The Seaman and Hayes tragedy of 1928
and the construction of the Seaman Memorial Hut

David Scott, August 2013
For the Kosciuszko Huts Association

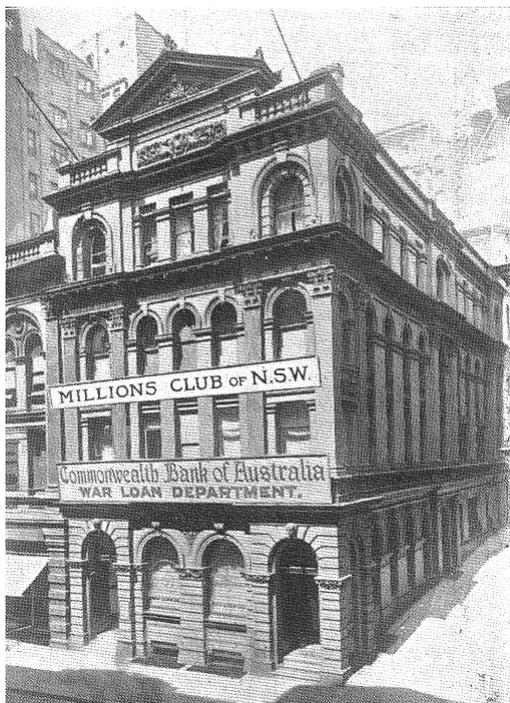
Incorporating thumbnail images from the *Australian Ski Yearbook*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Henry Willis Collection* and plans from the NSW Public Works Dept

Article #3 of 3 on the history of the summit area within the Kosciuszko NP



Death on the Summit – the Seaman & Hayes Tragedy of 1928

“On Tuesday, August 14th, 1928, W Evan Hayes and W Laurie Seaman waved good-bye to their friends at Charlotte’s Pass, and were not seen again alive. Thus occurred the first skiing fatality in the history of the Australian Alps; and so peculiar were the events which led up to the tragedy, and so fruitless were the extensive searches which were made for the missing men, that it should be of interest to all . . .” Dr John Laidley, Australian Ski Yearbook 1929 ¹



The Millions Club, 118 Pitt St Sydney (www.usc.com.au)



Evan Hayes with his skiing trophies (ASYB 1929)

Introduction

Established in 1912, the *Millions Club of NSW* was a gentlemen’s club with premises at the corner of Pitt and Rowe Streets in the Sydney CBD. The Club’s name derived from its founding goal – to improve the international standing of Sydney as a major city by achieving a population of one million people, primarily through British immigration in accordance with the White Australia policy. During the 1920s and 30s the Club attracted wide publicity for its promotion of British youth migration, initially boys from Dr Barnado’s homes in England, and fundraising for a range of other “*patriotic causes*”. Presided over by Sir Arthur Rickard, “*the outstanding Sydney real estate developer of the era*”, the club was patronised by a broad range of businessmen and “*politicians flocked to be associated with the Club*”. Many years later, after the founding goal had been realised, the Club was renamed the Sydney Club (1962) and subsequently merged with the University and Schools Club (2004).²

Among the members of the Millions Club in 1928 were Laurie Seaman and Evan Hayes.

William Evan Hayes was 29 years of age, being born on 25 December 1898 at Merrylands. A bachelor residing in Neutral Bay, Sydney, Hayes was in the employ of the Aeolian Company of George Street,³ a distributor of pianos and pianolas.

Hayes had been skiing in the Snowy Mountains for 12 years, initially with the Kosciusko Alpine Club and from 1923 with the Millions Ski Club, to which he had been honorary secretary since it formed as an off-shoot of the Millions Club. Whilst he is only recorded as being to the summit once in that time,⁴ he had collected a string of skiing trophies including the JM Dempster Cup for the cross-country championship, and had come 1st or 2nd in the Club Championship for the four years leading up to the 1928 season. He had written “*that song of the snow, ‘Boorangalang’, sung with a swing whenever Millions’ members meet*” and “*his personality was a force more renowned than the snow itself. He was never one of the party, but rather the party himself.*”⁵

William Laurie Seaman was an American citizen, born in Glen Cove, New York, the son of an influential family. He qualified as a civil

1 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p97

2 www.usc.com.au: historical notes on *The Millions Club*

3 *Manaro Mercury* 3 Jan 1930;

4 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p1027

5 *SMH* Aug 18, 1928; Bath, Keith: *In Memoriam*, ASYB1929 p156



W Laurie Seaman (ASYB 1929)

engineer in 1915 and served in the US Army as a pilot during the First World War before returning to engineering, including a stint in the family business and a world study tour during the early 1920s. By 1925 he had immigrated to Sydney where he was working for an insurance loss assessor, Ernest W Bell. By 1928 Seaman was a partner in the firm, had married Bell's daughter Christine, started a family and was living in Bellevue Hill, Sydney. He was described as having a "quiet retiring disposition . . . a host of friends who loved him for his sterling worth. Although world travelled, he was not a man of the world, rather a man of the home . . ." ⁶

Seaman was a member of the Aero Club, the Royal Automobile Club and the Millions Ski Club. Regarded as a promising skier, he is credited with having some experience of snow sports in Canada prior to coming to Australia. In the winter of 1927, he had his first trip to the Australian snowfields, at which time he skied to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko ⁷ with a party from the Millions Ski Club



Hotel Kosciusko c1930 (from postcard)

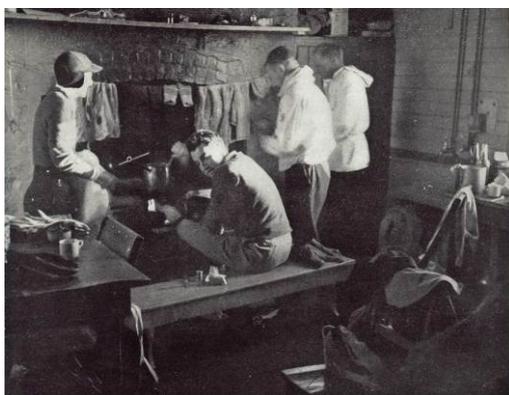
In the second week of August 1928, about 120 members of the Millions Ski Club were packed into the Hotel Kosciusko (at the location of the current Lakeside Inn). At that time it was common practise for each NSW ski club to book out the entire hotel for a 1-2 week period each winter. They were highly-sociable affairs; Hayes having declared on his arrival at the Hotel on the 11 August "I practically had to pawn my shirt to get here, and would do it again to come with another Million Club party." ⁸



Betts Camp in the 1920s (ASYB 1928)

Dependent on their capability, the skiers staying at the Hotel would ski the runs around the Hotel, undertake day tours over the surrounding hills or up to the better snow at The Smiggin Holes, or go on overnight tours to Pounds Creek Hut or Betts Camp.

For the fit and adventurous there was the enticement of Mt Kosciuszko. In 1913 the summit trophy was established by the Kosciusko Alpine Club, a challenge to ski from the Hotel Kosciusko to the summit and back in the shortest time. The initial time for the return trip of nearly 55 km was 15½ hrs, set by Dr Shorney in 1914. In August 1928 the Hotel was abuzz with the news that Arnold Moulden and Lorimer Dods of the Ski Club of Australia had set a new record of 6 hours and 55 minutes in the previous week, smashing the previous record by 1hr 15mins. ⁹ However the ambition of most skiers was merely to attain the summit, skiing to Betts Camp for a couple of nights in the hope the weather would provide a clear enough day to ski the 27 km up and back, before overnighing again at Betts and then returning to the salubrious appointments of the Hotel.



Betts Camp interior in the 1940s (ASYB 1944)

On Monday 13th August, thirteen Millions Ski club members skied to Betts Camp from the Hotel Kosciusko. ¹⁰ Tom Armytage, the Club president, returned to the Hotel with most of this group, leaving a

6 Bath, Keith: *In Memoriam*, ASYB1929 p158; *Manaro Mercury*: 3 Jan 1930 cites address as 15 Benelong Crescent, Bellevue Hill

7 *SMH* 18 Aug 1928

8 *Manaro Mercury*: 3 Jan 1930 - Coroner's Inquest into the death of Evan Hayes

9 Arnott, Bob: *Seventy-Five Seasons: The Ski Club of Australia*, p10

10 *SMH*: 16 Aug 1928

party of six at Betts to gain some skiing practice for the Millions Ski Club Challenge Cup, which was to be held in the following week.¹¹

They waved and disappeared . . . Tuesday 14 August 1928

On Tuesday morning the party at Betts Camp, comprising Evan Hayes, Laurie Seaman, Thomas Bottrell, Lorne Douglas, Emil Sodersteen and Mr Larsen (probably C Larsen,¹² although some sources cite the sixth member of the party as Ray Utne¹³) departed for Charlottes Pass on the first leg of a journey in which the final destination had not been agreed. The weather was fine, and a trip to the summit was a possibility, but at that time Hayes and Seaman intended to return to Betts Camp for a late lunch and then go on to the Hotel for dinner and a committee meeting. As a result, the party was not carrying any spare equipment, food or clothing.¹⁴ Hayes had even left his compass in his knapsack back at Betts.¹⁵



Emil Sodersteen (Sodersten) at a better time, 1940 (Wikipedia)

Excluding Seaman and Larsen, the group appears to have all been proficient skiers - active in club competitions during the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁶ Sodersteen had recently gained fame as the lead architect and designer of the Australian War Memorial, which had just commenced construction in Canberra.¹⁷

Sodersteen described the fateful events of that day "*We left camp after breakfast . . . all of us deciding to take it easy. Hayes and Seaman were about 400 yards ahead, when near Charlotte Pass, the four in our party sat down and had a few oranges*" in front of the Red Hut. After a few moments, up at the Pass "*we saw Hayes and Seaman waving their arms about, evidently for us to go on. We started towards them, and when we reached the top of the hill, found that they [appeared to have] skied down from Charlotte towards the Snowy Valley. Their tracks on the hard ice were very indistinct.*"¹⁸ It was about 10:30am.¹⁹ The main party were puzzled at how quickly

Seamen and Hayes had disappeared from sight, but believed they may have opted to try a route toward Mt Kosciuszko that followed the Snowy River low down on its southern bank, which was partly concealed from their view. The weather had been fine and warm all of the preceding week, leaving the snow thin and like sheet ice on the west facing slope with boulders protruding everywhere. After a while the main party found itself following numerous frozen tracks left by previous parties skiing to the summit.²⁰

*"We took a middle course between the road and the Snowy Valley, and kept a lookout for them ahead. At one time we saw two figures and made towards them, only to discover that they were two perpendicular rocks. We reached Mt Etheridge, just this side of Mt. Kosciusko, when the wind began to rise and cloud came down on us. I was some 300 yards up the mountain side at the time, when I slipped and, rolled over and over for nearly 75 feet, when my skis jammed on a mound of ice. I was thoroughly shaken, but luckily suffered no serious injury."*²¹ It was now about 1pm. If Seamen and Hayes had taken a lower route along the River, then they were expected to have re-emerged into view ahead of the main party by now. Instead it was believed they must have swung around below Charlottes Pass to follow the river downstream toward Spencers Creek, and returned to Betts for lunch. No further consideration was given to them.

11 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

12 SMH: 14 Sep 1928 – C Larsen attended the funeral for Laurie Seaman, along with Bottrell, Douglas & Sodersteen

13 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p97; SMH 1 Jan 1930

14 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p97

15 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

16 ASYB 1928-34: various Millions & Kosciusko Alpine Club reports,

17 Dept of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities: National Heritage List place details for *Australian War Memorial and the Memorial Pde, Anzac Parade*; Australian Dictionary of Biography online: *Sodersten, Emil Lawrence*

18 SMH: 18 Aug 1928, quote attributed to Emil Soderstein [sic, Sodersteen/Sodersten]

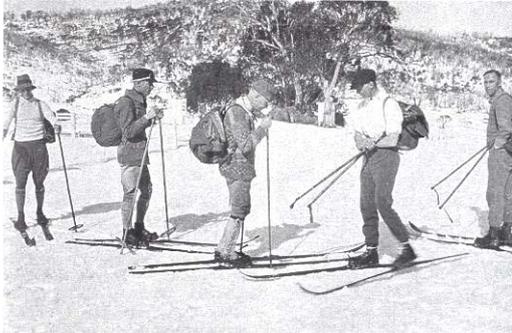
19 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

20 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p97

21 SMH: 18 Aug 1928, quote attributed to Emil Soderstein [sic, Sodersteen/Sodersten]



The Red Hut at Charlottes Pass (K Malone, ASYB 1932)



A ski touring party above Betts Camp in 1927 showing the clothing and equipment of the day, and several skiers who later participated in the search – Bill Gordon, Dr Ashleigh Davy, Dr Herbert Schlink, Dr John Laidley and Emil Sodersteen (B Arnott, 1998).

“We began to hurry back, and were soon in an icy blizzard. The sleet cut into our faces. We could not see any distance ahead, and urged each other to keep together, so that our progress was slowed up, as two of the party was all out to it. With difficulty we reached Charlotte Pass hut [the Red Hut]. It was snowed up, so we dug our way in, and then began to thaw out our hands, which were frozen and swollen. We were all famished. We had no food with us, so did not like the prospect of staying in the hut. We decided to venture out again and make for Bett’s.”

Even within the sheltered confines of the Spencers Creek valley, with a road and pole line to follow, conditions were terrible and navigation difficult. *“Before going far Cotrell [sic] and Larsen were missing, and after cruising about I found them making down the wrong gully.”*²²

*“When we arrived [at Betts Camp] we were concerned that Hayes and Seaman had not turned up, and after a rest all of us started out again. Cotrell [sic] and Larsen went into a valley north of Bett’s, and I went alone to the left-hand side. We stayed out until all was inky blackness, and kept coo-eeing, but the blizzard was terrible, and we realised that if the missing men were not in the vicinity they would have no chance of picking up their right direction.”*²³ In retracing their tracks to Charlottes Pass, Botrell and Larsen came across a glove and scarf that belonged to Evan Hayes, having been dropped or discarded by him earlier in the day.²⁴

The Search Begins, Wednesday 15 – Thursday 16 August 1928

The party at Betts held grave fears for the safety of Seamen and Hayes. Rain and snow fell during the night,²⁵ and at first light on Wednesday 15th August, Lorne Douglas set off alone for the Hotel Kosciusko to summon help. The snow conditions were poor and he had to abandon his skis and proceed on foot for the second half of the journey. *“Douglas arrived back at the Hotel shortly after daylight; a meeting of the men present in the Hotel was held immediately and a party despatched to Bett’s Camp, both to reinforce, and, if necessary, to relieve those who were already there.”*²⁶ The Police at Jindabyne were quickly notified, and officers from Kiandra were despatched to Jindabyne to provide assistance.²⁷

The unrelenting effort of Douglas over those first days is indicative of that put in by numerous members of the Club and Hotel staff. The following morning he would head the 13½ km back to Betts as part of a fresh search party; and after searching through the day would return back to the Hotel in the evening to report on progress; only to be bound back to Betts with a fresh group of searchers on the next day.²⁸

Following Lorne’s departure from Betts on the 15th, Larsen, Bottrell and Sodersteen undertook a sweep up to Charlottes Pass - in the hope that overnight Seaman and Hayes had found their way back to the Red Hut - and down toward the Snowy River.²⁹ At the time, they believed Seamen and Hayes had either proceeded down the Snowy River from Charlottes Pass or crossed the river and headed toward Blue Lake.

The support party from the Hotel included two strong Scandinavian skiers, who would be employed on long sweeps into the more distant parts of the ranges. The first was George Aalberg, a Norwegian engaged

22 SMH: 18 Aug 1928, quote attributed to Emil Soderstein [sic, Sodersteen/Sodersten]

23 SMH: 18 Aug 1928, quote attributed to Emil Soderstein [sic, Sodersteen/Sodersten]

24 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p98

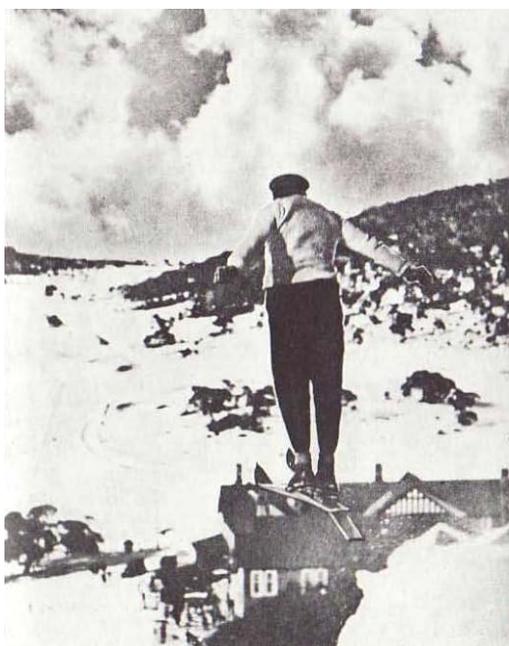
25 SMH: 16 Aug 1928

26 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p98

27 SMH: 16 Aug 1928

28 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

29 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p99



Guide and instructor George Aalberg, a key proponent in the search, demonstrating his skill on the Hotel Kosciusko ski jump in 1930 (ASYB1931)



Pounds Creek Hut on the Snowy River downstream of Charlottes Pass (C Gilder ASYB 1934)

as a guide and instructor at the Hotel and the Australian Ski Champion (1927-29), who would subsequently hold the summit record in 1929 and the Kiandra-Kosciusko record in 1934.³⁰ The second was Mr IT Soderlund a former Swedish military officer, who conducted a major importing business in Sydney and had only recently joined the Millions Club.³¹

Aalberg reached Betts Camp before lunch, only to find there was nobody there. Outside was a note saying "*Larsen is sick - in Charlotte Pass hut.*" Enroute to the Red Hut he came across Larsen and a companion (probably Bottrell) heading slowly back to Betts.³² Larsen was suffering an "*internal haemorrhage . . . having strained himself*" and would have to wait medical treatment³³ before heading down to the Hotel.

After arrival of the support party, Sodersteen and J(?) McGrath skied down Spencers Creek to Pounds Creek Hut³⁴ in case Seamen and Hayes had retreated there. Aalberg also skied down Spencers Creek, before following the Snowy back up to Charlottes Pass, ascending to Blue Lake, and traversing the east side of the divide northwards³⁵ before dropping down to Pounds Creek Hut for the night. The remainder of the support party searched about Charlottes Pass "*for about a mile in every direction*".³⁶

By the end of the first days' searching, a committee had formed at the Hotel to co-ordinate the overall search effort and media reports. It comprised the manager of the Hotel, Peter Speet, and Millions Ski Club members TS Hunt (president of the tour), Tom Armytage, (Club president), SA Bailey (Club secretary), and Colonel Vernon. "*When several members of the main search party . . . returned . . . and*

reported no success, Mr Speet . . . at once called all the men at the hotel together, and explained the seriousness of the position, and urged everyone to be ready to do his share according to his ability. He made arrangements to send away Mr Hennings [sic, Hemmings?], who is on the hotel staff, and who is a remarkably good ski-runner, and knows every inch of the country. Mr Hennings and a companion left after tea last night to grope a way in the pitch darkness to Bett's Camp. His instructions were to organise the Searchers there - about 16 men-into parties, and to scour the numerous valleys and ravines."³⁷

The first search parties were moving before dawn on Thursday 16th. Police Sergeant Carroll, Mounted-Constable Lambert, Aubrey Weston and Percy Wallace set off on horseback from Jindabyne to follow the length of the Thredbo River up to Deadhorse Gap. "*Frequently the horses were up to their girths in snow. At other times they were up to their knees in boggy marshes. They . . . travelled 70 miles [112 km], penetrating into the mountains as much as possible. At one time they saw smoke rising, and with great difficulty they reached the spot, only to find it deserted. Evidently some shepherd had been travelling overland.*"³⁸

30 ASYB 1929 & 1934

31 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

32 *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928

33 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

34 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p99

35 *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928

36 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p99

37 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

38 SMH: 18 Aug 1928; *The Argus*: 18 Aug 1928



First media stories broke on Thursday 16 August, and followed events (examples SMH)

- 39 SMH: 17 Aug 1928
- 40 SMH: 17 Aug 1928. – quoting Percy Pearson
- 41 SMH: 17 Aug 1928
- 42 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p99
- 43 SMH: 17 Aug 1928
- 44 SMH: 17 Aug 1928
- 45 *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928
- 46 SMH: 17 Aug 1928
- 47 SMH: 17 & 18 Aug 1928

As the daylight arrived, Lorne Douglas, Dr Duggan and 4-5 others left the Hotel Kosciusko to join the searchers at Betts and treat the injured Larsen. Later in the morning, Harold Richardson set off from the Hotel with Mark Wallace, the two having been assigned “to go backwards and forwards to the camp, taking food and stimulants, and bringing back the latest information . . . After passing Smiggin’s . . . they encountered a blizzard, with bitterly cold sleet driving into their faces. They could only see 60 yards ahead, and Mr Wallace was blown over twice.”³⁹ Only two weeks previously, two men had apparently been cut off between the Hotel and Betts by a blizzard and forced to spend the night in the open huddled over a fire.⁴⁰ “The weather eased somewhat at Bett’s Camp, but the searchers were hampered, as they could not survey the country from the hill tops.”⁴¹

Meanwhile, from Pounds Creek Hut Soderlund and Aalberg did a sweep down the Snowy River to Guthega Creek, before climbing over the Back Perisher to Perisher Creek and thence proceeding back to Betts. In the afternoon, Aalberg and Hemmings headed south to sweep a section of the Rams Head Range whilst the remaining searchers were engaged in the hills and gullies around Charlottes Pass.⁴²

By the end of the second days searching, “the search parties had completed their inspection on the hills round Charlotte Pass, where the men disappeared, and they were convinced that they must be further out. Tomorrow leading skiers will concentrate on a disused track to the summit [the Old Kosciusko Rd from Old Betts Camp along the range south of Mt Stilwell]. Mr Hayes mentioned at one time that he would like to try for the summit along that particular route, and it is thought that he may possibly have gone that way.”⁴³

Erstwhile the Jindabyne Police were arranging for a search party of experienced bushmen to follow the course of the Snowy River from Jindabyne up to the Hotel, five other bushmen to undertake a search on the Crackenback side of Kosciuszko, a “black tracker” (Rutherford) and two more bushman to search the lower hills on the Piper Creek side of the Snowy River; whilst the Kiandra Police had arranged for a party of their local bushmen to proceed to Kosciuszko to assist.⁴⁴ The bushmen who supported the Police throughout the search are recorded as HV Carter, Charles and William Hemmings, (Bert?) McGregor, Thomas Pendergast, A Snashall, Percy Wallace, Aubrey and John and Ulrick Weston, Ashley Willis, “and others”.⁴⁵

At the same time, the Victorian police were requested to institute a search on the Victorian side of Kosciusko,⁴⁶ probably aimed at the Tom Groggin – Geehi area in case Seamen and Hayes had been forced to retreat off the west side of the main range.

Pioneer Australian aviator Bert Hinkler, who had just completed the first solo flight from England to Australia, was approached to participate in an air search for the missing men. Unfortunately his own plane was in Bundaberg, too distant to be brought into use, but he strongly advocated the use of a plane. Millions Ski Club member Keith Bath commenced negotiations with the Aero Club, of which Seaman was a member, to supply a search plane, in which the Club could provide an observer who was familiar with the main range.⁴⁷

TWO MEMBERS OF THE MILLIONS SKI CLUB, WHO WERE LOST IN A BLIZZARD AT MOUNT KOSCIUSKO AND WHO ARE STILL MISSING.



MR. W. L. SEAMAN, A MEMBER OF THE MILLIONS SKI CLUB, who, together with Mr. Hayes, is missing at Mt. Kosciusko.



AT THE SUMMIT OF KOSCIUSKO LAST YEAR. MR. W. L. SEAMAN (WHO IS MISSING) IS ON THE LEFT. Dr. Winton is at the top of the picture and Mr. Keith Bath (who left Sydney last evening to take part in the search) is on the right.



MR. EVAN HAYES (SECRETARY OF THE MILLIONS SKI CLUB), who has been missing at Mt. Kosciusko since Tuesday morning.



CHARLOTTE PASS, showing the summit in the distance on the left and the country towards the Blue Lake on the right.



POUND'S HUT, which may be reached by the missing men.



TYPICAL SNOW COUNTRY, through which the missing men will probably travel.

In Sydney, members of the various NSW ski clubs were walking into the Government Tourist Bureau and offering to assist in the search⁴⁸ whilst "there was an animated scene at Sydney railway station . . . as the Cooma Mail train left, carrying as passengers a number of members of the Ski Club of Australia, and of the Kosciusko Alpine Club." These included Dr John Laidley, who had been in Schlink's party for the first Kiandra to Kosciusko traverse in 1927 and who was proceeding to Betts Camp to coordinate the ski-based search parties, plus Alastair Stephen, HD Wilkinson, RJ Furley, Cam McFadyen, AC Genge and Keith Bath. At Bungendore they would be joined by Bill Gordon, another of Schlink's traverse party.⁴⁹

By Thursday night, Seaman and Hayes had been missing 2½ days. The searchers were in no doubt of the likelihood that they were now looking only for bodies. However there remained a slender chance that if the men had been able to drop down below the snowline on that first night then they might still be alive, holed up in a shepherds hut or rock shelter somewhere down along the Snowy or Thredbo River valleys, possibly injured and unable to move. The searchers were not about to give up on their colleagues and friends, but were bewildered by the question of where had the missing men travelled beyond the Pass?

First Clues, Friday 17 – Saturday 18 August 1928

At 9am on Friday 17th August, Aalberg and Soderlund set off for the summit, the first searchers to go there since the disappearance of Seaman and Hayes. They skirted the Mt Stilwell and followed the general route of the Old Kosciusko Road. On reaching the headwaters of the Snowy, they decide to do a right-hand circuit around Etheridge rejoining and following the summit road around to Rawsons Pass.⁵⁰ They must

48 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

49 SMH: 17 Aug 1928

50 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

have passed within 30m of the place where Laurie Seaman's body lay, covered by a dusting of snow from the previous days.

Upon reaching the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, Soderlund would report *"we saw nothing there"*⁵¹ whilst, for reasons that are unclear, Aalberg would later report sighting footprints and a single set of ski tracks leading to the cairn.⁵² Aalberg and Soderlund skied south away from the summit cairn *"as the wind was blowing in this direction to-day. Just as the blizzard was blowing on the day the men were lost. We assumed that, unable to face the gale, the men had turned their backs to it, and tried to make down into a lower level. About a mile from the Summit . . . we came within an ace of losing our lives. We were ski-ing down a long slope, when a drop of nearly 400 feet opened up in front of us [a notorious cornice above Lake Cootapatamba]. I just had time to fall and dig in my alpenstocks. Seeing me do this Aalberg followed suit. Otherwise it would have been the end of us."*⁵³

Aalberg and Soderlund appear to have skirted south of Lake Cootapatamba to Etheridge Gap and thence headed toward Merritts Lookout, with the intent of proceeding back down the crest of the Rams Head Range to Betts. *"About two and a half miles from the summit we suddenly crossed big ski marks in a sheltered position. . . There were two pairs of ski marks, two or three days old . . . for about 50 yards the lines were frozen into the snow, and after that the drifted snow had covered them up. We kept on zig-zagging over the area, but did not see any other tracks. The tracks were going in the direction of the Crackenback range . . ."* The two men rushed back to Betts, where Laidley's party had just arrived to reinforce the search teams.⁵⁴ All the searchers were questioned as to whether any had been near Merritts Lookout, but as none had it *"is considered safe to assume that the tracks are those of Seaman and Hayes."*⁵⁵



An RAAF DH60 Moth of the period, as used by the Aero Club and RAAF in the search (Airways Museum website)



Bert Hinkler with the famous Avro Avian he flew to Australia, the same type of plane used in the search by Captain Reid (Airways Museum website)

Whilst Soderlund continued on to the Hotel to file the report, the first aeroplane flight was made over Mt Kosciuszko. The plane was a 'Moth' (probably a De Havilland DH60) piloted by Rupert King and having Lieutenant Wally Shiers – who had served as one of Sir Ross Smith's mechanics on his historic flight from England to Australia - as observer. Flying from Cooma, the plane was fitted with long range fuel tanks to increase endurance to 5 hours. *"The flight over Mount Kosciusko lasted about two hours. Although a careful search was made from a height of about 700 feet, no traces of the men were found. Weather conditions were unfavourable, and the Moth had to face a severe gale, blowing over the mountains at about 60 miles an hour."*⁵⁶

A second plane, an Aero Club-owned Avro Avian piloted by Captain RW Reid flew from Mascot to Jindabyne, where Reid travelled up to the Hotel to be briefed in readiness for the following day. Plans were made for a Royal Australian Air Force 'Moth' (probably a De Havilland DH60) to fly down from Richmond to Cooma the following day,⁵⁷ piloted by Pilot Officer Carroll, with Corporal Eddison as observer.⁵⁸

Upon the receipt of Soderlund's report at the Hotel, the entire focus of the searching shifted to the Rams Head Range and Thredbo River

51 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

52 SMH: 19 Sep 1928; and Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p100

53 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

54 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

55 *The Argus*: 18 Aug 1928

56 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

57 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

58 *Evening News*: 18 Aug 1928

Valley. Police Sergeant Carroll made arrangements for additional bushmen to go on horseback toward Merritts Creek, and for the 'black tracker' to be taken to the site of the ski tracks. In Sydney, 25 members of the University Ski Club and five members of the Kosciusko Alpine Club under the leadership of Percy Pearson set off for Kosciusko. Amongst them was the young skier Venn Wesche⁵⁹ who, 28 years later, would return to Charlottes Pass in tragic circumstances – to recover the body of his daughter Roslyn following her death in an avalanche that destroyed Kunama Hutte in July 1956.

An unsubstantiated newspaper report claims that 51 searchers at Betts Camp on the 17th, with over 100 searchers involved across the area.⁶⁰ Another reported that *"Miss Barber (Victoria) and Miss Gelling, who are excellent ski-ers, have done good work in establishing themselves [at a depot] half-way to Bett's Camp, and are supplying hot tea and, sandwiches to the workers as they pass backwards and forwards."*⁶¹

On Saturday 18th Laidley's search team set off to sweep the Rams Head Range down to the treeline around Merritts Lookout. Here Alastair Stephen found what looked like herringbone tracks climbing up from the trees.⁶² George Aalberg and Bill Gordon travelled back to the summit, where they *"searched about the summit and a little way on the south-west side found tracks of a skier travelling alone. A little distance on, a second pair of tracks joined the first. [They] followed, losing them at intervals, over the southern side of Etheridge Range, where, instead of turning to the left in the direction of Bett's Camp, they bore away south to the Ram's Head Range. . followed them over these mountains and for more than half a mile on the other side, down to the precipitous cliffs that tower above the valley of the Thredbo River"* near where Stephens' discovery had been made. *"In one place the marks went right up to the wall. Then, apparently, the ski-runner tried in different directions to get round, and, when baffled, turned back to look for another exit . . at one point he saw that one skier had evidently taken off his skis, either to see whether travelling would be easier, or to work himself out of a difficult situation . .*

"Aalberg followed in and out of heavy timber, tangled undergrowth, and rocks . . he is convinced that the tracks are those of the missing men, and asserts that . . after travelling about two miles [from the summit the two men] were evidently feeling the severity of the blizzard, and at the 6540 feet level post, instead of turning left and facing the icy blast from the north-west, they bore away south down the valley to the right, and continued towards the Ram's Head Range and the timbered country . . Aalberg argues that when a skier is overtaken by bad weather and gets lost he is strongly tempted to turn his back to the storm and travel along a valley for better shelter, as climbing in the face of a gale is exhausting and almost impossible.

*"He is of the opinion that the men either found a way into the wooded valley, or, finding they were on the wrong track, turned back. If they have reached the lower slopes below the snow line, they will find conditions warm and dry, with plenty of running water, and they will be able to sustain themselves with roots, and, probably, rabbits. If not, he believes that they most probably perished the first night out. The ski marks, he says were made when the snow was wet, and they are packed up and frozen hard."*⁶³

The tracks appeared to be 3-4 days old; left a very faint imprint on the frozen snow and it was impossible to tell in which direction they were going. They passed about half a mile south of the bend in the summit road west of the Snowy River crossing, and were lost in the timber around Merritts Spur.⁶⁴ There was initially caution at Aalberg's report, as Dr Oscar Paul and Alastair Stephens had skied through this area, however *"Aalberg said he saw their tracks, which ran parallel to the cliff tops, while the others crossed at right angles and ran straight down to the cliff edge [and] Dr Paul said that his party did not take off their skis anywhere near Merritt's Lookout."*⁶⁵

59 SMH: 18 Aug 1928

60 *Canberra Times*: 18 Aug 1928

61 *The Argus*: 18 Aug 1928

62 Arnott, Bob: *Seventy-Five Seasons: The Ski Club of Australia*, p17

63 SMH: 20 Aug 1928

64 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p100

65 SMH: 20 Aug 1928

The Moth and Avro Avian both patrolled the skies over the mountains during the day. *“Captain King, one of the aviators, said that hundreds of ski-tracks had been sighted in Saturday’s search, but it was impossible to distinguish the tracks of the missing men from those of the searchers . . . the visibility was perfect, and they were able to distinguish the- searchers moving about the snow-covered ranges.*

“Captain Reid after a search yesterday, considered the chances of finding- the men hopeless . . . He had carried out a patrol of the summit, Betts Camp, Perisher Range, Blue Lake, Club and Albina Lakes, Mt Townshend, Rams head, Charrol’s Path, and Merrick’s Look-out, [sic] at altitudes of between 5,000 and 7,000 feet.”⁶⁶

The Search Continues, 19-23 August 1928

On Sunday 19th August a gale grounded the planes. Laidley’s search team based at Betts undertook a sweep *“three parties, each of three skiers [left] Betts’ Camp early to run over the snow slopes to Merritt’s Lookout and back to Betts’ Camp. Each party was to work parallel to the cliff frontages, one right in the timber, the second higher up, and the third farther away still.”⁶⁷* Thus *“the whole of the Ram’s Head Range*

UNAVAILING SEARCH FOR MEN LOST IN A BLIZZARD ON MOUNT KOSCIUSKO.



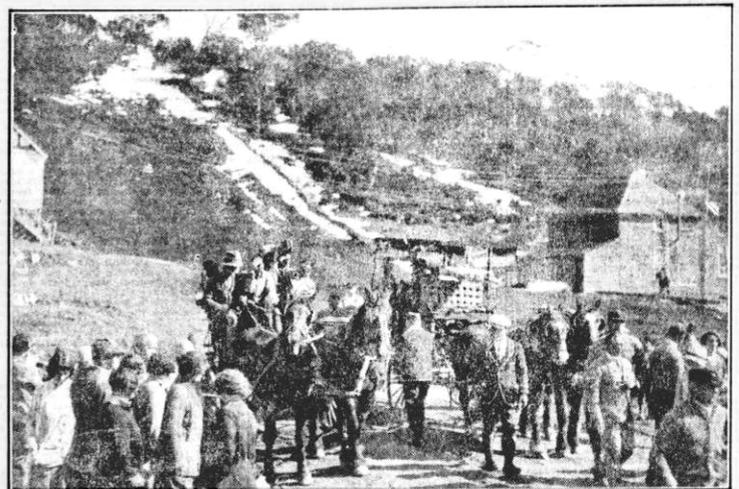
SKI-RUNNERS FROM BETTS’ CAMP SCOURING THE SLOPES



DR. JOHN LAIDLEY’S SEARCH PARTY.
From left to right, standing; Mr. Keith Bath, Dr. Laidley, Messrs. W. McFadyen, W. Gordon, A. Consett, Stephen, R. Furley. Seated: D. Wilkinson and A. O’George.



SEARCHERS FROM JINDABYNE.
Sergeant Carroll, Mounted Constable Lambert, and Messrs. Weston and Wallace, with a companion, on the road to the summit.



LEAVING THE HOTEL FOR THE UPPER SLOPES.

⁶⁶ Canberra Times: 20 Aug 1928

⁶⁷ SMH 20 Aug 1928



Searchers at Betts Camp including Reg Gelling
(KAC collection via Walkom 1991)

*. . . was thoroughly searched. However, the thaw in the last 24 hours had been very great, and the weather conditions were bad. The party returned to Betts's Camp that evening with nothing further to report.*⁶⁸

Dr Laidley's appraisal of the situation as of the 20th August was as follows, *"Hayes and Seaman had been out for five nights: a heavy thaw and over an inch of rain had combined to destroy any tracks which they may have made . . . the one clue to their whereabouts had been followed as thoroughly as possible . . . there was no part of the snow country within a radius of 12 miles [20km] of Betts's Camp which had not been traversed in the search . It seemed, therefore, that it was now useless to continue the search in the high country for*

living men. If they had failed to reach comparative shelter it was certain that they were not alive, but if they had succeeded in reaching the Thredbo or some other river valley, it would have been possible for them to live for weeks. With these considerations in mind the intensive search from Betts's Camp was now abandoned and the Sydney party returned to the Hotel. It was recommended that the valley searches continue for the next week or two, and that Betts's Camp be occupied simply with a skeleton party."⁶⁹

A small party of Millions Ski Club members would be maintained at Betts until at least the 24th, and they would continue to sweep the area west of Betts for bodies. In the absence of any guarantee that the tracks found on the Rams Heads were those of Seaman and Hayes and would lead to the men or their bodies being found in that area, a second team consisting of AC Genge, PC Bottrell, GL Gelling, J Gelling, and FA Parle undertook a detailed examination of the Snowy River between Charlotte Pass and Pound's Creek, where parts of the river was still covered by snow. This was the last area the men had been seen in, and there remained a chance they may have come to grief in a collapsing snow bridge and/or their bodies lay concealed in the waters. The search involving lowering Genge down the banks on a 300' length of Manilla rope, *"the operations will be fraught with considerable danger, but the utmost precautions will be taken by those engaged in the work, all of them being thoroughly experienced men.*"⁷⁰

On the 20th, the two planes involved in the early air search returned to Sydney leaving only the Air Force Moth to carry on. The following day, *"the military aeroplane . . . flew over the hotel at 11 am today and returned at 12:30 pm Flying-Officer Carroll dropped a message to say that he had flown over the Ram's Head Range and down the Thredbo slopes, carefully examining the country through his military glasses. He reached within 200 feet of the bottom, and saw the bushmen making their way upwards, as well as two fires higher up the slopes. He saw men having a meal. He did not see anyone on the snow line.*"⁷¹ The Air Force Moth patrolled the Thredbo Valley again on the 22nd, before returning to Richmond on the 23rd.⁷²

Whilst engaged in searches out of Betts Camp, Percy Pearson injured an ankle. He was able to ski back to the Hotel, but was evacuated a few days later with a suspected broken bone.⁷³ A few days later, John Barber, a Victorian based at Betts, also broke a bone in his foot and had to be evacuated.⁷⁴

Over the following week the main focus of operations lay with the search teams of bushmen being coordinated by the Jindabyne Police, who scoured the Thredbo valley and southern side of the Rams Head Range; *"the bushmen from Jindabyne are now camped at Friday Flat, and have gone into the wild country.*

68 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p101

69 Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p101

70 SMH: 20 Aug 1928

71 SMH: 22 Aug 1928

72 SMH: 23 Aug 1928

73 SMH: 20 Aug 1928

74 SMH: 27 Aug 1928

News from them will still come through very slowly. . . Some of the personal friends of the missing men remain at the hotel, and the visitors generally are very depressed."⁷⁵

On the 23rd August, the media picked up on a most unusual report: *"there are some who refuse to give up hope. Two search parties set out again on Tuesday, on different trails, pinning their faith to nothing more than a woman's dream. The dreamer was Mrs W Coleman, of Jindabyne. She told a story on Tuesday morning of a remarkable vision she had during the night of the two men —one lying dead in the snow near Smiggin's Holes, and another sitting under a rock near Charlotte Pass. 'I saw the two men in the vision as clearly as if I was gazing at them in the flesh,' she said, 'and I am convinced that some unknown power is using me as a medium to guide the searchers. The man sitting under the rock had his head bent down; and he was holding what appeared to be a camera, or a book. The other man lying half-buried in the snow. He was wearing dark trousers and a pull-over sweater. . . An extraordinary coincidence was that on Tuesday afternoon several people reported to Mr Speet, manager of the Hotel Kosciuszko, that they had seen the ominous gathering of a circling, body of crows high over the spot where Mrs Coleman saw the body in her weird dream."*⁷⁶ *"It is said that on former occasions her 'second sight' has invariably proved correct. Possibly this daughter of Dan McGregor has inherited the old Scotch gift of foreseeing tragic events."*⁷⁷

The Search Ends & The Political Response, 24 August 1928

On the 24th August the official search wound up - *"The search for Messrs W Laurie Hayes and Evan Seaman [sic], who were overtaken by a blizzard on Mount Kosciuszko last Tuesday week, has been given up as hopeless. Bushmen, who were exploring rough country along the Thredbo River, where tracks thought to have been those of one or both of the missing men were found below the snowline, spent two nights in the open, and returned on Friday. They found no further traces of the men.*

*"It is now considered that nothing will be found till January, by which time the snow will have melted. Until then the hotel management and police will regularly patrol the surrounding districts in the hope of finding the bodies."*⁷⁸

*"Mr Laurie Seaman, when he was lost, carried with him an autographic camera, and his relatives are anxious, if this is found at any time, that it will not be opened or interfered with in any way, as it is almost certain that, unless death came suddenly, Mr Seaman would write a last message on the film, and this, on being developed, might solve the mystery surrounding their disappearance."*⁷⁹

During the course of the search, there had been discussion in the newspapers over the measures required to improve the safety of skiers at Kosciuszko, including the need for telephone communication between Betts Camp and the Hotel, the keeping of tracker dogs at the Hotel, and the provision of more shelter huts.⁸⁰

On the day the search ended, the Chief Secretary announced that he *"will recommend to the Cabinet that £12,800 be placed on the draft estimates [for the following financial year] to provide chalets and telephone facilities on Mount Kosciuszko. A new chalet at Charlotte's Pass will cost £4,800, five shelter chalets, £1000 each, and a telephone cable from the Hotel Kosciuszko to Betts Camp and the chalet will cost £3000."*⁸¹

The Chalet and telephone line would be installed within the following two years, but it would be the late 1940s before a line of shelter huts was in existence between the Hotel and summit.

75 SMH:22 Aug 1928

76 SMH: 23 Aug 1928

77 *The Land*: 24 Aug 1928

78 SMH: 27 Aug 1928

79 SMH: 24 Aug 1928

80 SMH: 20 & 24 Aug 1928

81 SMH: 25 Aug 1928



Lillie and Harry Constance with Charlie Burns outside Seamans Hut c1930. The dot indicates the rock behind which Seaman was found. (Henry Willis collection)

Seaman Found, 9 September 1928

On Sunday 9th September 1928, the body of Laurie Seaman was found near Sentinel Rocks on the Etheridge Range. Evan Mander Jones, a master at the Sydney Church of England Grammar School, was returning along the road after visiting the summit with a party of four boys from the school, when he noticed a pair of skis and stocks protruding from a snowdrift about 30 metres off the road. The skis had 'WLS' branded on them, and in looking about, they found the body of Laurie Seaman behind a large rock. He was in a

sitting position with his legs crossed and his head leaning against the rock. He had glasses and a cap on, but no gloves. A camera case was slung over his shoulder, and an inspection of the camera revealed the nameplate 'W Laurie Seaman'. Mander Jones' interpretation of the scene was that Seaman had not collapsed in a state of exhaustion but had set aside his skis and stocks whilst taking a rest in the lee of one of the largest nearby rocks he could find. Leaving the site undisturbed, Mander Jones returned immediately to the Hotel where Peter Speet notified the Jindabyne Police.⁸² Enroute, Mander Jones' party discovered a glove at Charlottes Pass which was deemed to be the second glove belonging to Evan Hayes.⁸³

It seems the mountain was of a mind not to give up her dead just yet. The party that set off to recover Seaman's body, comprising Police Constable Alfred Lambert, Evan Mander Jones, George Aalberg, Aubrey Weston, Harry Ewart, Bert McGregor and Leslie Abon, was set upon by a blizzard which forced their retreat to Betts Camp, where they spent the night before retrieving the body and taking it back for the Coronial Inquest at the Hotel. The Cooma Coroner, HH Solomon, concluded that "*death took place about a mile and a half from the summit of Mt. Kosciusko on or about 15th August from continued exposure to extreme cold, consequent on deceased being caught in a blizzard.*"⁸⁴

The inquest was attended by Seaman's father-in-law and business partner, Ernest W Bell, who stated that "*he had been asked by Mrs Seaman to express in open court her heartfelt gratitude to all who had so nobly assisted in the search for the bodies of her husband and Mr Evan Hayes . . . [and] all that had been done in the occurrence. The Coroner, on behalf of those who had assisted, assured Mrs Seaman that they had regarded their work as a simple duty. He knew the people, of Manaro well, and knew that in such a sad case they looked upon it as a duty to render every assistance possible. He would ask Mr. Bell . . . to convey to Mrs Seaman and relatives the sympathy of all concerned in the mountain search. . . [and] the Coroner spoke in terms of commendation of the splendid work performed by the searchers, especially those who had given their services voluntarily, which had been carried out with much hardship, and, in instances, considerable danger.*"⁸⁵

Laurie Seaman was buried in the Anglican portion of Rookwood Cemetery on 13th August 1928. Rev Todd performed the last rites, and members of the American Legion and of the Millions Club Ski Club were the pall-bearers. A bugler from the Royal Garrison Artillery sounded 'The Last Post'. The mourners included Ernest Bell, Sir Charles Rosenthal, Sir Arthur Rickard, Herbert Lamble and Ezra M Lawton (Consul-General for the USA). All of the party that had skied off with Seaman on that fateful day attended, along with large contingents of searchers from the NSW Ski Clubs, members of the American Society, and Gerald Hayes (Evan's Brother).⁸⁶

⁸² SMH: 10 Sep 1928; and *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928 – Coroner's Inquest

⁸³ Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, ASYB1929 p101

⁸⁴ *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928 – Coroner's Inquest

⁸⁵ *Manaro Mercury*: 14 Sep 1928 – Coroner's Inquest

⁸⁶ SMH: 14 Sep 1928



Images recovered from Seaman's camera of the two men beside the summit cairn on the day they disappeared – Laurie Seaman (above) and Evan Hayes (below)



The body of Evan Hayes 1 Jan 1930
(Henry Willis collection)

On 8th January 1929 Laurie Seaman's wife, Christine, gave birth to their second child, a son⁸⁷ – believed to have been named William Laurie Seaman, jnr.

Finding Hayes, September 1928 – December 1929

Despite suffering water damage the film in Seaman's camera was able to be developed and the last two pictures taken revealed the important fact that both skiers actually reached the summit. Seaman is shown standing beside the summit cairn, snow goggles up on his forehead, but without skis. Hayes is also shown beside the cairn holding a glove and with a pair of skis standing upright in the snow beside him. The photographs helped to piece together the events surrounding the tragedy, which remain generally consistent with the 1928 hypothesis of Dr John Laidley (and are discussed in the next chapter), the consequence of which was that in the spring of 1928 it was believed that the missing body of Evan Hayes would be discovered in the vicinity of Rawsons Pass and the Etheridge Range.

On 6th December 1928, Keith Bath led a team of around 20 Millions Ski Club members and Jindabyne bushmen in a search of this area over a 3-4 day period. They were on foot and horseback, and generally combed the area in line abreast formation. Whilst *"the most likely localities were thoroughly explored, no traces could be found. Mr Keith Bath, after seeing the nature of the country in the summer time, came to the conclusion that the task, even with a party of 50, would be a hopeless one, as the country is very rugged, and consists mainly of out-crops of boulders, 15 to 20 feet high. He states that even with men a few yards apart, it is almost impossible thoroughly to inspect the innumerable crevices between the rocks. Mr Bath considers that it would be useless to organise another search, and after consultation with the other officers of the club, he has decided to offer a reward of £20 for the recovery of the body. He points out that shepherds who are pasturing flocks of sheep are gradually making their way up to the higher levels now that the snow has melted, and those men during the summer season are the most likely to succeed in the search."*⁸⁸

Bath's approach would ultimately succeed, but not until the following summer. Perhaps Hayes body remained concealed beneath a snowdrift that didn't thaw over the summer of 1928-9, or perhaps no-one went past the site where Hayes body lay.

On 31st December 1929, Evan Hayes body was discovered on a spur of Mt Kosciuszko adjacent Lake Cootapatamba by Jack Willis, a boundary rider employed by Rose and Cogan of 'Boloko', Dalgety, who was tending sheep in the area with another rider, Charlie Burns. *"Attracted by the continual barking of their dog, two shepherds - Messrs Willis and Burns - found the body, which had been reduced to skeleton form by long exposure, not far from the summit of Mount Kosciusko, and about 300 yards from Lake Cootapatamba. . . His last act was to place his skis across each other to prevent himself*

87 SMH: 9 Jan 1929 – Birth notices

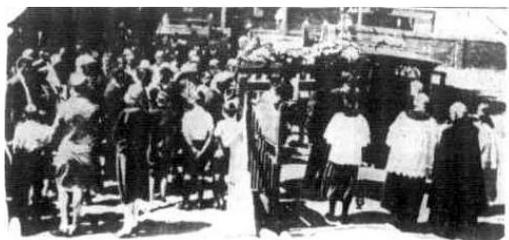
88 SMH: 1 & 17 Dec 1928



Evan Hayes' skis were left at the site he was found for some time afterward. Jim McGregor holding daughter Lindsay, Jack Willis and Harry Blewitt (Henry Willis collection)



Charlotte and Henry Willis (son of Jack Willis) with Graham Scully at the same location; note collapsed cairn at bottom left (K Hueneker 1988)



FUNERAL OF LONG LOST MOUNTAIN VICTIM—The funeral of Mr. William Evan Hayes, whose body was found at Mt. Kosciuszko more than a year after he had been lost, leaving St. Mary's, North Sydney, today following Requiem Mass.
Evan Hayes Funeral (*Evening News* 2 Jan 1930)

from sinking in the snow when he lay down on them. One alpenstock was also found beneath the body, having apparently been used as a head rest, and the other was resting against a rock nearby. One of the shepherds hurried to the Hotel Kosciuszko and informed the manager (Mr PMA Speet) of the discovery. The police at Jindabyne were notified . . .⁸⁹

Police Sergeant Carroll, attended by Constable Lambert, Aubrey Weston and John Hemmings proceeded to recover the body, which "was in an advanced stage of decomposition; it was lying on its back, . . . the right arm was straight down parallel with the body, the left arm across the breast . . . lying on a pair of skis; [with] the letters 'EH' on the toes of the skis. . . on the third finger of the left hand, a gold signet ring with the letters 'WEH' engraved thereon. [also] a wallet containing some papers which had been partially destroyed by water, also a pair of goggles and a Millions Club ski badge. . . The body was fully clothed in khaki coat and trousers, ski boots, socks, singlet and a khaki cap tied under the chin. . . A search of the clothing failed to reveal any final message. This is taken as an indication of the exhausted state of the lost man when he lay down."⁹⁰

HH Solomon again conducted the Coronial Inquest at the Hotel Kosciuszko, concluding "the remains of deceased were found at Lake Cootapatamba on 31st December, 1929, without any marks of violence on the body, but how, when, and by what means he came to his death the evidence adduced did not enable him to say." Hayes' employer was interested in discovering whether he had been carrying any money as he supposedly should have had £50 from a cash sale in his possession; but this had not been with his personal items at Betts Camp and nor was it found on his person.⁹¹

Haye's skis apparently remained at the site he was discovered for some time after the body was removed and a memorial rock cairn was erected beside them.⁹² In June 1930 the Millions Ski Club published a notice that Jack Willis was to be paid the reward for finding Hayes.⁹³

Evan Hayes was buried in North Sydney Cemetery on 2nd January 1930, following a service at St Marys, Ridge St, led by Rev Father O'Mara. The key mourners were Hayes' brothers Gerald and Ronald, and his sister Leah. Members of the Millions Ski Club again served as pall bearers. Herbert Lambie from the Tourist Bureau and numerous representatives from other ski clubs attended, as did "Mrs Laurie Seaman, of Palm Beach . . . who came especially to attend the service, to express her sympathy with the Hayes family, and to lay a wreath on the coffin."⁹⁴

Interpreting the Clues - What happened to Seaman and Hayes?

89 SMH: 1 Jan 1930

90 *Manaro Mercury*: 3 Jan 1930 – Coroner's Inquest

91 *Manaro Mercury*: 3 Jan 1930 – Coroner's Inquest

92 Henry Willis: pers comm to G Scully 1988

93 SMH 29 May 1930

94 SMH: 3 Jan 1930

Most of the following interpretation was deduced in 1928 by Dr John Laidley following the discovery of Laurie Seaman's body and the processing of Seaman's film.

The only hard facts are (i) when Seaman and Hayes were last seen, (ii) where each was found and the circumstance of the bodies, and (iii) the images of both at the summit. The footprints on the summit and the ski tracks over the Rams Head Range past Merritts Lookout are strongly believed to be made by the missing men, but this can never be guaranteed.

At the time Seamen and Hayes set off from Charlottes Pass (10:30am), both men were considered to be fit and have a reasonable proficiency on skis but were relatively unfamiliar with the area, each only believed to have been to the summit once before, on trips led by more experienced skiers. It is believed that they were not carrying a compass, nor a map (nothing being available with contours or similar detail at that time) nor any food. Hayes, being the more competent skier and more extroverted, was likely to have become the natural leader.

Observing the relaxed pace of the main party, Seamen and Hayes probably surmised that if they were to have a chance of getting to the summit that day then they needed to break away from the main party and proceed apace. In light of the icy conditions and their lack of familiarity with the area, it is most likely they set off from Charlottes Pass along the easiest route – the snow pole line that followed the summit road. Travelling quite a bit faster than the main party, they had already rounded the first bend in the road in the 10 minutes it took the main party to crest the Pass. The main party crossed over the Pass and dropped down to adopt a route toward Etheridge midway between the road and Snowy River, from which travellers along the road cannot be readily seen.

The marked difference in the pace of the two groups is apparent in the photographs of Seaman and Hayes on the summit in cloud, at which time (about 1-1:30pm) the main party has just decided to return to Betts from a position on the base of Etheridge, some 2.5km short of the summit.

The condition of the summit photographs is poor; it being difficult to tell whether the cloud is a backdrop or the men are totally enveloped within it. From Aalberg's reported sighting of a single set of tracks and footprints on the summit, and the presence of skis in Evans' picture but not in Seaman's picture, Laidley proposed that in the icy conditions Seamen may have chosen to walk up the summit after leaving his skis lower down whilst Hayes skied up. Most importantly, this would explain why the two men separated upon leaving the summit – a walker would generally stride straight down the fall-line to Rawsons Pass, whilst a skier would generally descend in a zigzag of long traverses back and forth across the hillside.

The decision to separate is what cost the two men their lives. Both would soon find themselves alone and in great peril. Both would have opportunity to save themselves, but let that opportunity pass out of their commitment to be reunited and proceed to Betts together.

Most likely the two men separated at the summit cairn, but they may have only split up after descending back to Rawsons Pass. Either way it appears Seaman headed off along the pole line beside the road whilst Hayes opted to do an anti-clockwise loop over Etheridge, with the intention to meet up on the far side of Etheridge at the location Seaman's body was later found. What Aalberg meant in his report of ski tracks being seen a '*a little way on the south-west side*' is unclear. It could mean Hayes started downhill from the cairn in a southwesterly direction initially and then doubled back to Rawsons Pass on his second traverse, however if the 'little way' was 1km down the spur above Lake Cootapatamba, then it would indicate Hayes skied right down the southwest spur of Mt Kosciuszko to a point below the lake before heading east toward Etheridge Gap.

A number of assumptions are drawn from the two men parting company. Firstly, that whilst there was cloud about the blizzard had not yet arrived, for the two would have realised the recklessness in parting company after its arrival. Secondly, Hayes was not attracted to skiing along the pole line for some reason – the most likely being that the steep cross-slope that exists along that section of road can be treacherous in icy conditions, such as were reported by the main party in that area. Thirdly, Seaman was still travelling on foot after leaving Rawsons Pass (having either left his skis down the road somewhere or because he was

carrying his skis at this time because of the icy conditions) – for if he was on skis he would have followed Hayes in skiing the less treacherous route around the southern end of Etheridge.

Seaman appears to have walked along the pole line till he arrived at the rendezvous point on Etheridge. Here he sat down behind a rock with his legs patiently crossed, close to where his skis lay in readiness to put back on. Why did he stop just there? He doesn't appear to have been incapacitated; the place isn't defined by any prominent landmark; whilst the open and highly exposed nature of this location renders it one of the 'last places in the Snowy Mountains' you would want to stop at in the midst of a blizzard. The place must have had a specific relevance to their trip up the road, for the men to agree to meet there on their way down. Laidley proposed that on the trip to the summit Seaman took his skis off and left them at this point because they were coming to the most treacherous icy section on the route; maybe he was already having difficulty on the icy snow, maybe he could recall the treacherous section between there and the summit from his trip of the previous year.

Alternatively, it could have merely been a place where the two men sat down for a rest on the way up. Or it could be that the men did not ski up the pole line along the summit road on their way up but instead took the low route along the river which the main party had initially thought they travelled, proceeded so far ahead of the main party as to remain unseen, and emerged onto the pole line and road at the point Seaman came to rest. In fine weather, it is possible to take a bearing to Charlottes Pass from this point and ski in a direct line toward it, effectively 'cutting the corner' of the road and snowpole line.

In any case, it appears that Seaman was at an agreed rendezvous point waiting for Hayes to arrive by 2:30pm. As the hours passed hypothermia would have set in, the gloom around him would have merged into darkness and Seaman would have lain back and fallen asleep against the rock, never to wake.

As Laidley stated: *"what happened to Hayes is far more problematical . . . the mystery directly hinges on the existence of the tracks leading to the Thredbo"* initially discovered by Aalberg and Soderlund on the 17th, and investigated further by Stephens, Aalberg and Gordon on the 18th. The tracks indicate Evan Hayes left Rawsons Pass to ski southward toward Etheridge Gap, with the likely intent of circling eastward and then northward to head back to where Seaman was waiting.

However on crossing Etheridge Gap, Hayes appears to have travelled east and then deviated increasingly southward. It appears likely that three factors had come into effect by the time he crossed the Gap, (i) the blizzard had arrived, reducing visibility to only a few metres in which it was impossible to tell where the crest of Etheridge was or even the lie of the land around him; (ii) lacking a compass, unable to sight the position of the sun and even unable to take a reasonable back-bearing along his own tracks for any distance, he would be oblivious to the direction he was heading; and (iii) the strong northwesterly wind proceeded to blow him off course, and as time passed he would have had a natural tendency to turn his back on it – causing him to adopt a southeasterly path.

Perhaps as he skied east from the Gap, Hayes decided to head for the snowpole line just west of the Snowy River. This may have been an attractive proposition in that he should be able to reach the snowpoles sooner and easier than traversing high up around Etheridge on a direct route to Seaman's position, the poles extend left to right across his path for a kilometre and thus should be hard to miss, and on reaching the pole line it would only be 800m or so along the poles back to meet Seaman. The problem was this route would have taken him out into gently undulating terrain, where he could no longer orient himself by the rising ground of Etheridge always being on his left; within a few hundred metres he would be lost in a featureless expanse that extends from the road to Merritts Lookout.

In a blizzard it is difficult to track the distance you are covering, and as Hayes had not skied around this side of Etheridge before he would be uncertain how far it was around to the road. He may not have been too surprised that he did not reach the snowpole line within an hour, but coming onto a forested hillside some time later would have been a real shock. On arriving at the clusters of trees above Merritts Creek, Laidley proposed that Hayes may have thought he had missed the snowpole line along the road and skied parallel to the road all the way to the trees above Charlottes Pass. After skiing around the clusters high on

the ridge he would have soon come upon dense forest, unlike anything near Charlottes. At this point he probably appreciated that he had been heading southward and was now overlooking the Thredbo Valley.

The time is probably around 3pm, and it is a critical moment for each of the two men. The blizzard was especially dangerous that day because it was coming out of the northwest. The airmass was relatively warm, at or just above freezing. Consequently, rather than deliver extremely cold snow that would remain dry on the men's clothes, the blizzard was assailing the two men with sleet and wet snow, causing their clothes to become saturated and creating a wind chill factor far below freezing. Survival depended on getting out of the wind. Seaman, wet through and freezing from sitting out in the wind for an hour, was in greatest peril. His only hope lay in reaching the safety of the hut at Charlottes Pass by nightfall, and to have a chance of achieving this he needed to be leaving soon after 3pm. Instead he opted to wait for Hayes and risk skiing on in the dark.

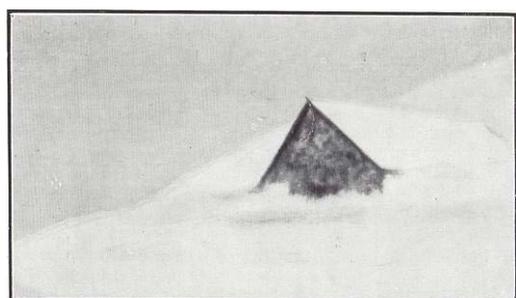
For Hayes it was a *'Touching The Void'* moment. In a cruel twist of fate, he had effectively taken one of the most direct routes to safety from the summit that was possible in a north-westerly blizzard. He was at a point where he could quickly drop down out of the wind into the shelter of the forest, abandon his skis and make his way down to the valley floor. Here, in the last light of day, he might have found a shepherd's hut or at least been able to improvise a shelter and possibly even light a fire. If Seaman had been skiing with him at the time, both men would have faced a reasonable chance of survival.

But Hayes was alone, with the likely expectation that his less-experienced colleague was up at the rendezvous point, sitting in the blizzard, waiting for him to appear and lead them back to safety. The



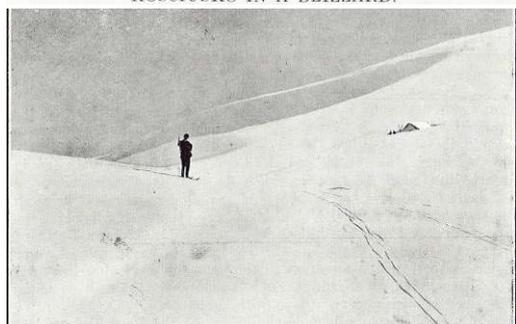
Rawsons Pass Shelter Shed c1926 (Bill Strong, flickr)

tracks indicate Hayes decided to attempt the return journey back to Seaman, herringboning up the ridge and then following his own tracks back toward the summit. He must have been aware that unless the blizzard stopped on the return journey his chance of survival was marginal at best. He would be lucky to reach Seaman by dusk. Seaman, after 3 hours of sitting in the blizzard, would be suffering exposure and probably incapable of skiing back to Charlottes Pass in the dark and icy conditions. If they could not get back to Charlottes Pass then they would die together, which for Hayes was clearly preferable to leaving his friend behind.



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

From the tracks reported by Aalberg, it appears Hayes was able to retrace his tracks back as far as Etheridge Gap, heading straight into the blizzard. After the Gap, he appears to have missed the point where his original tracks veered off toward Rawsons Pass or up the southwest spur, and instead continued straight on across Cootapatamba Creek. It was probably sometime after 4:30pm. Night was falling; the blizzard was still in progress; he would have saturated, frozen and exhausted. On reaching the relative shelter from the wind offered by the lee of Mt Kosciusko, Hayes took his skis off and lay down on them to rest, an indication he was feeling the cold. And this is how he was found 16 months later.



Two images of the Rawsons Pass Shelter Shed from the 1928 Australian Ski Yearbook

The Missing Hut

A mysterious aspect of the story is the absence of references to the stone shelter shed at Rawsons Pass, both in the newspaper reports of the time or in the subsequent articles describing the event. A solitary reference was made of it in *The Argus* of 18th August: "Mr Clement Wragge, meteorologist, once had a hut on the very crest [Wragges Observatory], quite close to the cairn, but it was burnt, I think, some years ago. The only shelter is a Government hut, and it is the most cheerless structure of its kind I have ever looked into.

There is no floor, for instance, and the ground within seems never to dry. Those, at least, were the conditions when I was there."⁹⁵

Constructed in 1908, this little stone shed with an iron roof and dirt floor, was depicted in photographs of the time - indeed the 1928 Australian Ski Yearbook, published only a few months before the tragedy. Intended for summer use, it appears to have been mostly buried by snow during the winters and there are no reports of it being used by skiing parties. By the late 1920s the shed may have been in a partly ruined state, filled with snow and ice, and would have likely required some digging to get inside through the doorway or under some loose roofing iron.

Seamen and Hayes must have passed within a few metres of this shed as they ascended and descended the summit from Rawsons Pass. The snow on the main range that winter was not so deep that the shed would have been wholly buried (photos show bare ground at Betts); it is likely the corner of the roof would have been projecting above the snow as in the ASYB photographs.

Even a crude, partly ruined, and partly snow-filled shelter shed, would offer protection from a blizzard that was at least as good as a snow cave. Strangely, and sadly, both men perished within 1½km (<30 minutes' walk or ski) of this structure.

The Laurie Seaman Memorial Chalet, March - May 1929

Laurie Seaman's parents, Mr and Mrs William H Seaman, visited the scene of the tragedy in November 1928, 13 months before Evan Hayes was found. After being shown the exact location at which the body of their son was discovered they called at the Tourist Bureau and suggested that a Memorial Chalet be erected on the spot so as to provide shelter for any others who at any future time might find themselves in a similar plight to that which brought about the death of their son.

The suggestion was adopted immediately and Mr Seaman left a sum of £200 for the construction of the



Seamans Memorial Chalet under construction
March-April 1929 (unknown, from CMP 1989)

building in trust with his late son's partner, Earnest Bell, and requested that a Committee consisting of various club representatives and the Government Tourist Bureau discuss plans for a suitable Memorial Chalet.⁹⁶

To this end a committee comprising Percy Pearson and Cam McFadyen (Alpine Club), Dick Allen and Dr John Laidley (Ski Club of Australia), Emil Sodersteen and Keith Bath (Millions Ski Club), and Ernest Bell (representing Mr Seaman) met and discussed the matter with Herbert Lambie (Director Government Tourist Bureau) and Colonel Richard Wells (Government Architect).⁹⁷ The Government Architects Branch submitted designs which were considered and approved with amendments by the committee.



The hut was officially opened on Friday by the Chief Secretary (Mr. F. Chaffey) who is shown in the group with papers in hand.
Opening ceremony (SMH 18 May 1929)

Construction of the hut commenced on 4th March 1929, under the supervision of a representative of the Government Architects Branch, presumably HT Grove who was present at the official opening. The sum donated by WH Seaman covered the purchase of materials while the cost of carting the material and the construction of the building was borne by the Government Tourist Bureau.⁹⁸ Stone masons had to be brought in from outside the local area to construct the granite walls, although Charles Conway, a local builder who built the nearby Foreman's Hut in the summer of 1927/28, may

⁹⁵ *The Argus*: 18 Aug 1928 – *A Place of Vast Distances* by RH Croll

⁹⁶ *Manaro Mercury*: 20 May 1929

⁹⁷ Bath, Keith: *In Memoriam*, ASYB1929 p158

⁹⁸ Bath, Keith: *In Memoriam*, ASYB1929 p158



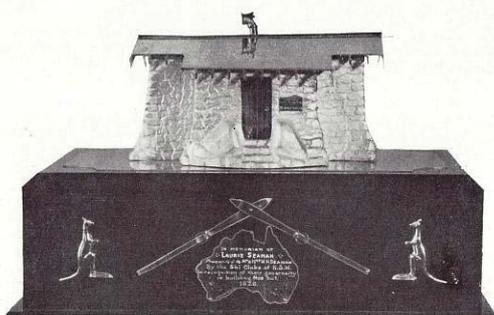
THE SEAMAN MEMORIAL HUT.

Seamans Memorial Hut 1929 (ASYB 1929)



SEAMAN'S MEMORIAL HUT, 7000 FT.
W.F. BRIDGES

Seamans Memorial Hut (c1930s postcard)



Silver replica of the Seaman Memorial Chalet presented to Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Seaman in memory of their son, who lost his life in a blizzard at Kosciusko in winter 1928. The presentation was made by the Millions Ski Club and the other Ski Clubs, in recognition of the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Seaman in building this chalet.

Silver model of the hut presented to Laurie Seaman's parents by the NSW Ski Clubs (ASYB1930)

have constructed the roof framing, windows, doors and internal lining.⁹⁹

The Laurie Seaman Memorial Chalet was officially opened on Friday 7th May 1929. A snow fall 3 days before turned the roads a quagmire, and the entourage had to walk 8km from Charlottes Pass to the hut. A light covering of snow and a biting wind brought home memories of why they were all there. *"There the Chief Secretary [the Hon Frank Chaffey MLA] officially opened the chalet, and in an address recapitulated the tragic events of last August, Mr Chaffey said that it was most fitting that there should be a permanent memorial to two such gallant men. The chalet was a most appropriate gift. It would serve a most useful purpose, and perhaps would be the means of preventing a similar tragedy occurring again. Mount Kosciusko was a great national playground, and the Government hoped to develop it with the aid of alpinists. . . After formally dedicating the building the Minister placed a wreath on the steps of the chalet that had been sent from the United States by Mr and Mrs Seaman, sen., the inscription bearing the words: 'He Died Climbing'. Mrs S Hood also placed a wreath on the steps on behalf of the director of the Tourist Bureau and the staff of the Hotel Kosciusko."*¹⁰⁰ *"A silver laurel wreath, sent by the widow of Mr Seaman, was placed on the steps of the chalet."*¹⁰¹

The ceremony was attended by Ezra M Lawton (American Consul-General), William Hedges MLA (member for the Monaro) with his wife and daughter, Mrs Chaffey and son, Herbert Lambie (Director, Government Tourist Bureau), HT Grove (Government Architect's Branch), Tom Armytage and Keith Bath (Millions Ski Club), Percy Pearson (Kosciusko Alpine Club), RH 'Dick' Allen (Ski Club of Australia), Frank A Parle (Royal Automobile Club), Charles W Smythe (Aero Club), Emil Sodersteen (Millions Club and member of Seaman and Hayes' party), AH Balmain (Balmain Bros of Cooma, who provided transport), and Peter Speet (Manager, Hotel Kosciusko).¹⁰²

Keith Bath described the newly completed building in the Australian Ski Yearbook, 1929:

"The site is within a few yards of the rocky outcrop where the body of Mr Seaman was found, and it allows a prominent view of the chalet from all directions. The building comprises two sleeping rooms, equipped with three bunks each. In addition there is an entrance porch to afford protection and for the storage of fuel.

"The walls are of granite rubble procured in the locality, the stone being backed with concrete to provide a suitable surface to apply celotex used for the purpose of securing protection against the extreme cold of the winter. Insulated flooring and roofing are also provided. Provision is made for a fuel stove for cooking and warming, and cupboards are provided for food. In order that access may be available at all times during the winter, a key of the door will be placed in a protective receptacle at the doorway and chained thereto.

99 Leo Russell: pers comm to Henry Willis

100 *Manaro Mercury*: 20 May 1929

101 *Evening News*: 18 May 1929

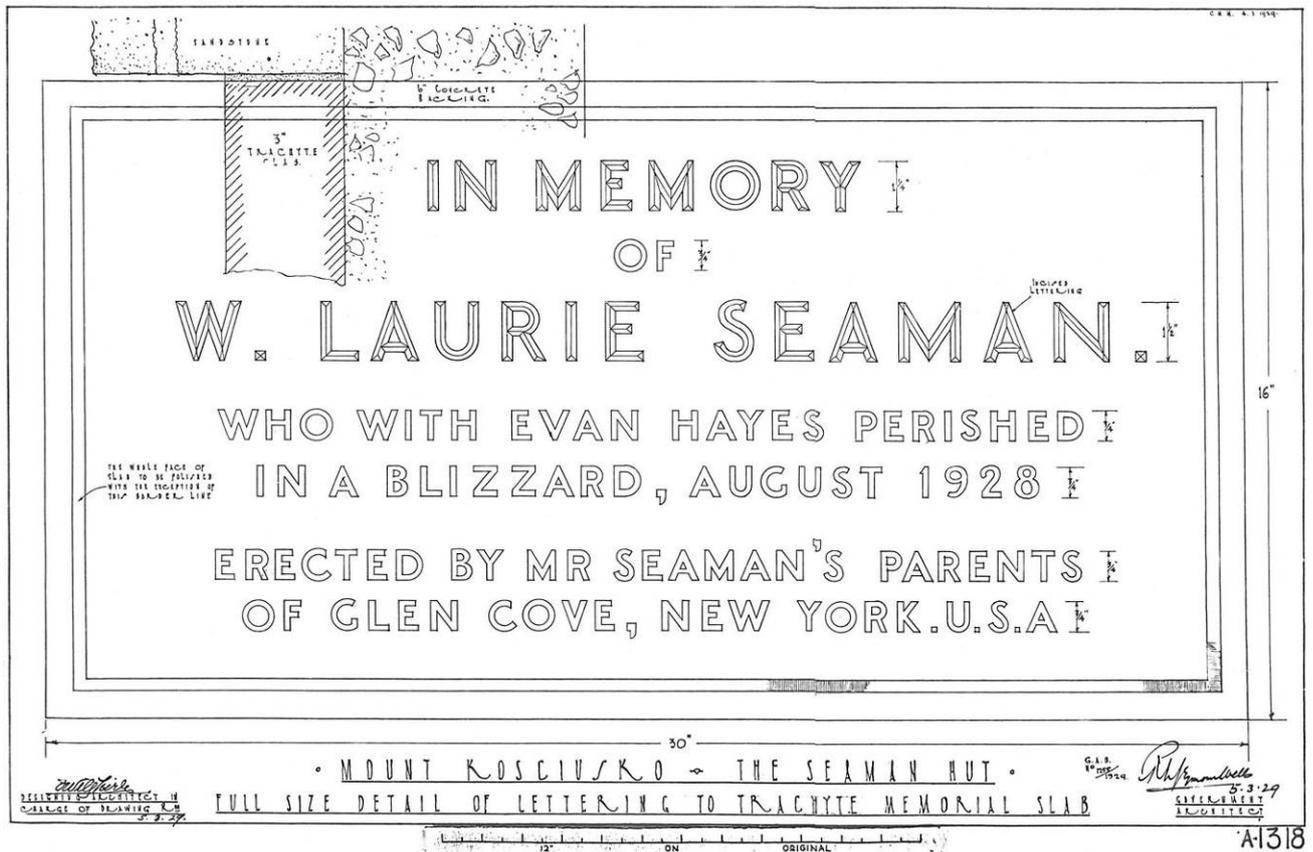
102 *Manaro Mercury*: 20 May 1929

“At one side of the entrance porch, which faces the road way, a handsome trachyte memorial stone with a suitable inscription is built in. The building is to be connected by telephone with both Betts Camp and the Hotel Kosciusko by means of an underground cable.”¹⁰³

Accommodation at the hut could be booked through the manager of the Hotel Kosciusko, similar to the use of Betts Camp, however with the key remaining in the receptacle for emergency access.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Bath, Keith: *In Memoriam*, ASYB1929 p158

¹⁰⁴ *Manaro Mercury*: 20 May 1929



At the time of the opening of the Memorial Chalet, 7 months before Evan Hayes was found, Keith Bath had also stated that *"the Millions Club . . . intended next year to erect a chalet to the memory of Hayes."*¹⁰⁵

By the time Evan Hayes body was found, work was far advanced on the construction of the new Chalet at Charlottes Pass and the installation of a telephone line linking all of the buildings on the main range, as the government honoured the commitments it made at the end of the search to improving facilities and safety.

Postscript

The Seaman Memorial Hut was initially maintained by the NSW Tourist Bureau. During the 1960s, the hut was taken over and maintained as a refuge by the Snowy Mountains Authority, with responsibility passing to the NSW NPWS around 1970.

The summit road was a public road until the early 1970s, whereby anyone could drive their own car to the hut, and even up to the summit itself. Charter coaches conducted a shuttle service between Perisher Valley and Rawsons Pass during the summer months from then until 1982, when the deterioration of the road resulted in its closure to all but NPWS park management vehicles.

Since that time, public access to the Hut has been restricted to basically walkers, skiers and cyclists travelling from Charlottes Pass or Thredbo, both over distances of approximately eight kilometres.

The Seaman Memorial Hut continues to receive more visitors than any other hut in the Kosciusko National Park. It also continues to serve as a reminder of our vulnerability to the ever-changing weather in the Snowy Mountains and provides a safety net for those who may one day find themselves in perilous circumstances enroute to or from the summit, as were experienced by Laurie Seaman and Evan Hayes in August of 1928.

¹⁰⁵ Evening News: 18 May 1929

Sources & Further Reading

Australian Ski Yearbook articles – copies available on the Kosciuszko Huts Association website

<http://www.khuts.org/index.php/heritage-2-5/tourism-recreation/838-australian-ski-yearbook-articles>

With specific reference to the following articles:

- ASYB1929: Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, p97-109
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Bath, Keith: *The Seaman Memoriam*, ASYB1929, p170-171
ASYB 1930: Laidley, Dr John: *The Kosciusko Fatality of 1928*, p?

Newspaper articles available online at the National Library of Australia's TROVE website:

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>

Arnott, Bob: *Seventy-Five Seasons: The Ski Club of Australia*, Allen & Unwin 1998.

Denelong Crescent
Bellevue Hill

Dear Mr & Mrs Willis

I feel at a complete loss to convey even in a small measure my great gratitude to you and too many others, whose brave and untiring efforts meant so much to me and mine in the great loss that has befallen me. Words at a time like this are so futile. With my life's memories will be linked now the remembrance of your noble and unselfish deeds, in the search for my dear, dear husband.

In my deep sorrow I cannot adequately express my thoughts, but Oh please do accept my most grateful and heartfelt thanks.

Yours very sincerely
Christie Seaman

Letter from Christine Seaman (wife of Laurie Seaman) to Jack Willis 1930 (Henry Willis collection)