



*Kunama Hutte promotional photo, Australian Alpine Club website*

## Ski Lodges on the Summit

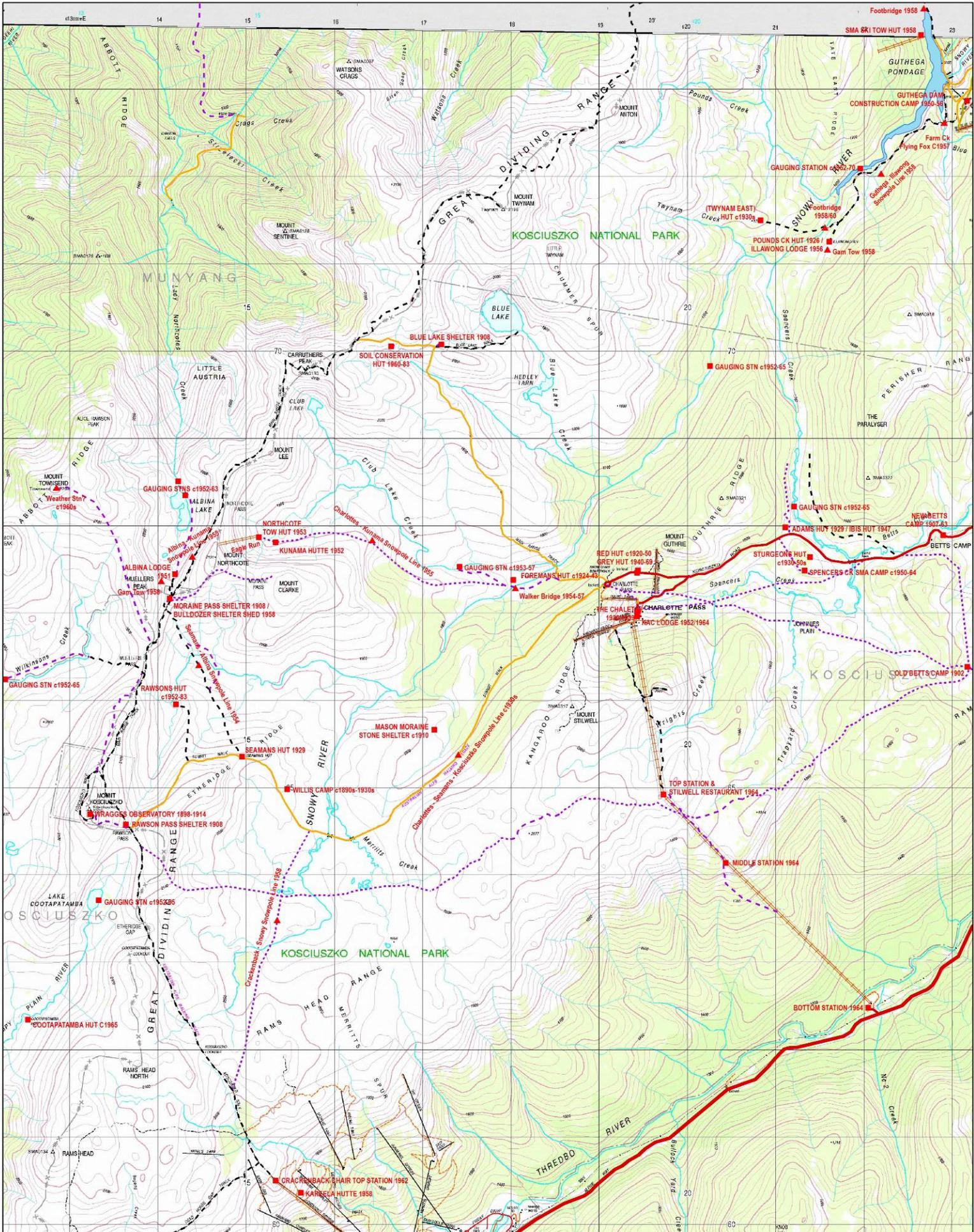
**A history of the Ski Tourers Association' sites - Albina Lodge, Kunama Hutte, the Northcote Tow and Illawong Lodge 1951-83**

**David Scott, August 2013  
For the Kosciuszko Huts Association**

Incorporating thumbnail images from the collections of the *Australian Alpine Club* ([www.australialpineclub.com](http://www.australialpineclub.com)) and private collections available online

**Article #2 of 3 on the history of the summit area within the Kosciuszko NP**





**HISTORICAL SITES IN THE SUMMIT AREA**  
**PERISHER VALLEY 1:25 000 MAP SHEET**  
 BASE MAP (C) NSW LAND & PROPERTY INFORMATION



# Ski Lodges on the Summit 1951-83

## Introduction

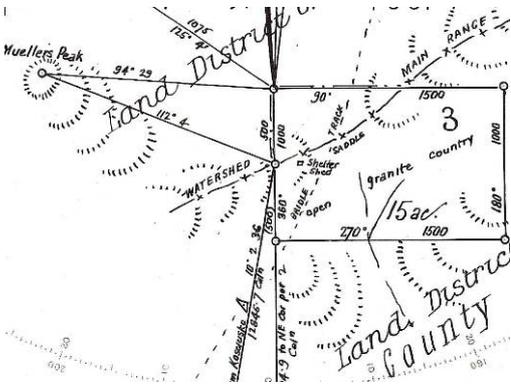
Through the mid-late 19th century the Main Range of the Snowy Mountains was carved up into squatting runs. The Excelsior, Murryang and Agintoothbong Runs converged at Mt Kosciuszko; in the few months when the grass was free from snow stockmen traversed the summit area and stock wandered through the glacial valleys of Lake Albina, Blue Lake and Club Lake.

The first recreational activity occurred with parties riding on horseback to 'the summit' during the 1880s and 1890s,<sup>1</sup> followed by the first winter ascent of Mt Kosciuszko from the Crackenback River in 1897.

Public interest in the area intensified with Clement Wragge's establishment of a meteorological observatory on the summit in December 1897. The exploits of the observers were chronicled as romantic adventures, complemented by the striking photography of Charles Kerry. The Observatory attracted a stream of visitors, and by 1902 the government had built a hut to accommodate summer tourists - Old Betts Camp.



Typical stone shelter shed on the Lakes Walk /Bridle Track - Rawsons Pass Shelter Shed 1926 (Bill Strong, flickr)



Moraine Pass Shelter Shed as shown on plan of portion 3 Parish of Kosciusko 1910 (NSW Lands Dept, Goulburn)



Pounds Creek Hut (Gilder, ASYB 1934)

In 1907-09 the NSW Tourist Bureau constructed the existing road from Jindabyne to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko, *The Creel* accommodation house at the base of the range and the *Kosciuszko Hospice* (later *Hotel*) halfway up. For summer tourists, an accommodation hut was built at Spencers Creek (New Betts Camp) and a bridle track was constructed from Kosciuszko past Lake Albina and Blue Lake to Charlottes Pass – today's Lakes Walk. Along this track were built the first recreational huts in the summit area, at Rawsons Pass, Moraine Pass above Lake Albina, and on the ridge above Blue Lake.<sup>2</sup> They were small one-roomed 'shelter-sheds' with stone walls, iron roofs and dirt floors, a couple of small windows but no fireplace.

The hut at Moraine Pass appears to have been destroyed by snow within 2-3 years. Its exact location is unclear, and it is possible that the stones were later 'quarried' in constructing the granite base of Albina Lodge. The hut at Rawsons Pass survived into the late 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Its location is unclear, possibly on the western edge of the cutting for the carpark/turning bay. The hut at Blue Lake was struck by lightning in 1910, before being partially rebuilt and possibly surviving as late as the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> Collapsed stonework defines its location just north of the intersection of the existing foot track to Blue Lake with the management trail.

## First Ski Touring Accommodation 1910-39

Ski touring out onto the peaks of the Main Range commenced in earnest in 1910 when New Betts Camp was used as an overnight stopover for the first ski trip up Mt Kosciuszko from the Hotel Kosciuszko. Betts would soon become a base for exploration of the range between Kosciuszko and Mt Tate. It had basic furnishings

1 SMH 3 Feb 1885 & SMH 27 Mar 1897

2 SMH 3 March 1909

3 *The Argus* 18 August 1928

4 *The Queenslander* 11 April 1914 & 1937 Lands Dept Map of Kosciusko Region



Twilight Tarn Hut, Mt Field National Park (D Scott 2004)



Alpine Hut 1940 (Richardson, KHA collection/NLA)



Mt Franklin Chalet, Namadgi National Park (D Scott 1993)

(hessian bunks, timber tables and chairs) and a resident caretaker for the winter, with bookings arranged through the Hotel Kosciusko.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-1920s two single-roomed iron huts had been constructed further out on the range to assist tourers - Tin Hut #1 (also known as Pounds Ck Hut) on the Snowy River below its junction with Spencers Creek, and Tin Hut #2 (now known as Tin Hut) in the watershed between Mt Gungartan and the Brassy Mountains. These were stocked with blankets and emergency foodstuffs; visitors slept on the floor and no bookings were required. All of the above facilities were constructed by the NSW Tourist Bureau, Tin Hut with the support of the Ski Club of Australia for use as a base for skiing trips between Kiandra and the Hotel Kosciusko.

The first club ski lodge to be developed in the Australian snowfields, at least the oldest surviving example, is Twilight Tarn Hut in Mt Field National Park, Tasmania. Constructed in 1927 by the Ski Club of Tasmania, it was built by the private sector in the absence of any government funding for skiing facilities in that state.

In NSW, local ski clubs simply made use of the government-funded infrastructure - the Hotel Kosciusko and Betts Camp, and from 1930, The Chalet at Charlottes Pass. In the late 1930s, factions within the clubs began to explore options for private lodges closer to better skiing areas. In 1937 the Kosciusko Alpine Club acquired a financial interest in Whites River Hut from grazier Fred Clarke so as to allow its use as a winter touring base; constructing a bunkroom addition, enclosing the verandah and installing a radio for communication with the Chalet.<sup>6</sup> In 1939-40 the Ski Club of Australia had a small extension constructed on the Chalet that contained club rooms and storage facilities – the first private ski club facility in a NSW ‘resort’.<sup>7</sup>

In 1938-9 the first purpose-built club lodges were built in the Snowy Mountains: Alpine Hut on the headwaters of the Burrungubugge River by a breakaway faction from the Kosciusko Alpine Club wanting access to the north end of the Main Range between Mt Gungartan and Mt Jagungal, and far to the north, the Mt Franklin Chalet was built on the crest of the NSW/ACT border by the Canberra Alpine Club. They featured dormitory accommodation for 14 (later expanded to 20) at Alpine and 32 at Franklin, communal living and dining spaces, ablution facilities and a resident cook to cater meals.<sup>8</sup>

The momentum for developing private facilities on the main range was brought to an abrupt halt by the Second World War, during which time the Kosciusko Hotel, The Chalet, Betts Camp and Alpine Hut were closed down.

### ***Albina Lodge constructed 1950-51***

Upon the close of hostilities the Australian armed forces ran a skiing competition at The Chalet and interest was rekindled through a succession of Australian Ski Yearbook articles on skiing the steep western faces from Mt Townsend to Mt Tate and the release of Elyne Mitchell’s book *Australia’s Alps*.

Charles Anton was a Jewish refugee who had escaped from Austria at the time of the Anschluss in 1938, subsequently joined the army and was introduced to the Snowy Mountains when he competed in the 1945

<sup>5</sup> *Queanbeyan Age* 8 March & 7 June 1912

<sup>6</sup> Bottrill et al: *The Kosciusko Alpine Club 1909-1984*, p26

<sup>7</sup> Arnott, Bob: *Seventy Five Seasons – The Ski Club of Australia*, p58-9

<sup>8</sup> Southwell-Keely, T: *The Alpine Hut ASYB1940* p39-41, and Higgins, Matthew: *Skis on the Brindabellas*, p27



Materials stockpiled at Albina site 1951 (Aust Alpine Club)



Granite foundation being built at Albina (Aust Alpine Club)



Construction sequence of Albina Lodge 1951  
(R Walkom, NLA)

competition at the Chalet. He became a successful Sydney insurance broker and spent many winters skiing the main range. On a tour to Lake Albina in September 1949, legend has it he remarked *“What a pity we can’t have a hut right here, where the ski runs are best and the snow lasts longest?”* Upon his return he solicited support from friends and on 12 October 1949 met with the Kosciusko State Park Trust and the NSW Tourist Department to put forward a proposal for a club lodge above Lake Albina.<sup>9</sup>

Attracted to the prospect of the lodge being available as an emergency shelter for parties skiing the main range, the Trust quickly granted a site and offered to assist with the supply of materials and trades staff.<sup>10</sup>

On 10 November 1949 the Ski Tourers' Association was formed to develop and operate the new lodge, with 60 foundation members donating £1,500 - half the estimated cost of the building. Charles Anton was elected president, with office bearers Dudley Ward and Ken Breakspear, Margaret Anton, Robert (GRT) Ward, Tom Deamer, Marie Gelling, Don Richardson, R Raubitschek and Jack Solar, and with Colin Broad and Robert Ward as trustees.<sup>11</sup>

Plans for the lodge were drawn up by Sydney architect Dudley Ward. Initially planned to accommodate eight, the size soon doubled in response to the member interest. It would be situated on the east side of the valley to avoid being buried in drifting snow, and the long axis of the building would face north to maximise solar gain into the living spaces and provide a commanding view of the valley. Unfortunately the eastern side of the valley lacked reasonable building stone, so a flying fox 650' (210m) long would be erected to cart stone blocks to the site. Prefabrication was a feature of SMA huts at the time, and it was decided to adopt a semi-prefabricated form of construction. The main floor would utilise a timber stud frame, where the elements appear to have been all cut to size beforehand, and the roof would use prefabricated trusses. The walls would be clad in vertical timber boards and lined internally, the roof clad in corrugated iron. The stone basement would include a toilet and store.<sup>12</sup>

The Association made three trips to Albina to plan the site works, peg out the site and recruit labour. Materials would need to be brought in from the summit road at Seamans Hut, across the upper Snowy River and over Moraine Pass. The Park Trust carpenter John Wilson, was to supervise the Trust staff and Association’s volunteers in constructing the hut, all of whom would be accommodated in tents on site or around Seamans Hut.<sup>13</sup>

Offers of help poured in - *“Ray Ainsworth, Park Trust officer, offered a bulldozer and sled to drag timber supplies up the mountainside. Norman Watney, manager of Charlotte's Pass Chalet offered a*

9 SMH 8 December 1950+

10 SMH 8 December 1950

11 SMH 8 December 1950 & Richardson, Don: Albina Lodge ASYB 1951

12 SMH 8 December 1950

13 SMH 8 December 1950

snowmobile. Frank West, Park Trust surveyor, offered to supply a team of six packhorses to bring in sand and cement . . . D S. Mulley, Surveyor-General and vice chairman of the Park Trust, offered to visit the site and inspect the progress of the work; and Mr T W Mitchell, Victoria's Attorney-General gave the benefit of his experiences in the handling of jeeps in mountain terrain.

*“. . . three weeks after the Association was formed, John Wilson put up a tent beside the rock-strewn base of Mount Townsend and Jack Piazza, the Park Trust's stonemason, started shaping blocks of local granite for the foundations of the cabin.”*<sup>14</sup>

The stone base grew out of the hillside whilst the fabrication of the upper floor progressed in Sydney before being trucked to Seaman's. From there, the bulldozer towing a sled could bring in the heaviest loads however much still had to be brought in on man-hauled sleds or two-legged packhorses: *“they speak with a breathless air of the exploits of Mr HJ (Bill) Hawkins . . . who lived seven weeks in the hills while the work was going on and who once climbed four miles from the Chalet with an 80 lb pack on his back comprising a stainless steel sink, a kerosene stove, a fire extinguisher and a refill, and who later was seen carrying over the same distance four 6ft x 3ft sheets of fibro cement against a strong headwind.”*<sup>15</sup>

Blizzards through March delayed commencement of the upper floor. By mid-April the site was covered in the first layer of winter snow, the weight of which threatened to crush and damage the prefabricated elements now stacked onsite whilst the builders had been forced to occupy Seaman's and trek in each day. In desperation, the Ski Tourers Association organised a 'Save Albina' workparty. In just 4 days (22-25 April 1951) the entire upper floor and roof completed. The plumbing for the toilet would not be completed until the spring, but the Lodge would be ready for use that winter.

The building of Albina Lodge was glorified in the press:

*“The difficulties of building in such a remote and inaccessible spot are forbidding. Experts said it couldn't be done. One man thought differently. He was Mr Charles Anton . . .*

*“Men sledged in the timber in 200 lb loads over roadless hills, slept two miles away in Seaman's Hut when violent gales blew their tents away, worked in cold so intense that steel tools froze to the flesh and finished the building with 4ft of snow on the ground.*



Albina Lodge c1950s (Aust Alpine Club)

*“. . . the men who built it toiled 12 hours a day . . . in the most inaccessible and exposed building site in Australia. They worked in snow, blizzards, and mist. Many men, unable to stand such sub-Polar conditions, abandoned the job and returned to Sydney. The remainder stuck it out to the bitter end, even when they were forced to abandon their tents on the wind-swept mountainside and ski six miles to their work every day. Some of the most arduous work was done by New Australians, accustomed to performing similar tasks in the mountains of Switzerland, Austria, and Czechoslovakia.”*

*“. . . but the enthusiasts . . . got the hut up and today you can sleep in luxurious comfort in a man-built eagle's nest, perched high up among the rocks in one of the wildest corners of the Continent, a home for the skier and hiker, a refuge in bad weather for the alpine traveler.”*<sup>16</sup>

A formal party to celebrate the completion of Albina Lodge was held by the Ski Tourers Association at the Sydney County Council offices in May 1951.<sup>17)</sup>

14 SMH 8 December 1950

15 SMH 19 January 1952

16 SMH 24 July 1951 & 19 January 1952

17 SMH 17 May 1951



Construction of Kunama Hutte (Sylvia Bateman collection, as reproduced in Ski Alpine Apr 1982, a copy of which is on the Aust Alpine Club website)



Kunama Hutte under construction March 1952 (GRT Ward, ASYB 1952)



Kunama Hutte south elevation (KHA collection/NLA)



Kunama Hutte north elevation (GRT Ward ASYB1954)

Through the winter of 1951 “180 skiers joined the Ski Tourers Association at a cost of £25 each for the privilege of staying a week or two at Lake Albina Hut. It was such a success that Mr Anton’s restless mountain lovers were encouraged this summer to build another hut, only a mile away near the foot of Mt Northcote . . [to be] called Kunama Hutte.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Kunama Hutte 1952 & Northcote Tow 1953**

The Association had initially considered siting its second lodge at Blue Lake, no doubt for the grandeur of the setting and to provide ski access to the western faces extending north to Mt Tate. However the first Australian ski tows had been around for a decade and the demand for lift-assisted skiing was on the increase, creating a case for the new lodge to be sited close to Albina Lodge where a ski tow could be shared between them.

The site for Kunama was selected in the winter of 1951. The hut was designed by GRT Ward, and would be primarily a timber-framed construction, clad in round backed weatherboards and roofed in zinc tiles. It would sit on atop a small granite-encased basement. The main floor featured a single large open living/dining space. It had a kitchenette fitted with a gas stove along one wall and built in bunks for eight, screened by curtains, along two walls. An attic sleeping gallery with additional mattresses was provided as emergency accommodation, in case skiers enroute to Albina were unable to cross the ridge due to bad weather or failing light. A shower and flushing toilet was located in the basement. Kerosene heating, hot and cold water and battery-powered lighting were to be provided.<sup>19</sup>

The hut was prefabricated at Dee Why in Sydney in January 1952.<sup>20</sup> Access to the site was provided via a rough track that extended from Seamans Hut to Lake Albina, where the SMA had erected two stream gauging stations.<sup>21</sup> From Moraine Pass bulldozers hauled the prefabricated sections and other materiel up onto the ridge between Mt Northcote and Mt Clarke, where “On the week-end of February 9th, the prefabricated materials were transported by the State Park Trust to Mt Northcote. In the subsequent fortnight the entire building, with all its fittings and stores weighing eleven tons, was manhandled down 600 feet of precipitous mountainside.”<sup>22</sup> “By early March 1952, the shell of the building was up, but before the hut could be braced with steel cables, a windstorm blew the building down . . material damage was minor, but time was lost in re-erecting the building. . . the weather deteriorated in early April 1952 and outside work was impossible for the Easter work party. By April 20 the building site was covered with about one metre depth of snow . . a ‘Save Kunama’ workparty on the Anzac Weekend secured the

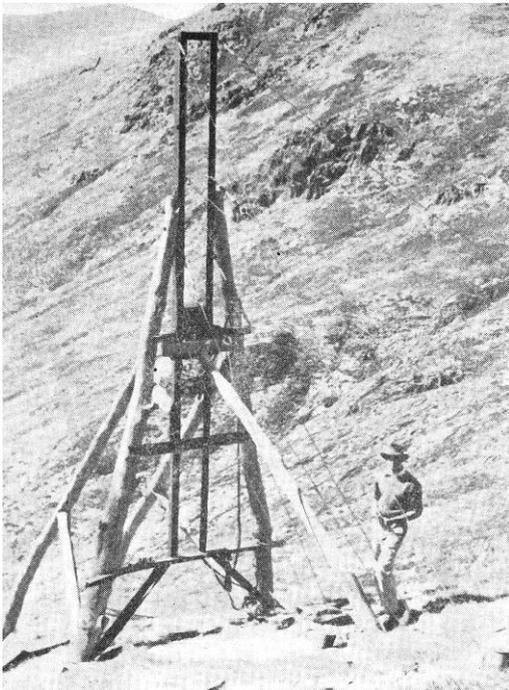
18 SMH 19 January 1952

19 Anton, Charles: STA report ASYB 1954 & Australian Alpine Club website: Heritage Part 2 / 3

20 Ward, GRT: Kunama Hutte ASYB 1952, p58

21 SMA 4” to mile map c1953

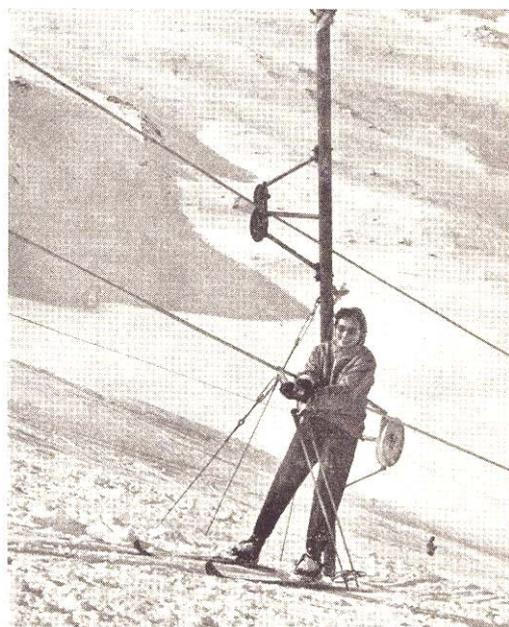
22 Ward, GRT: Kunama Hutte ASYB 1952, p58



Northcote Tow, rebuilt top 'A' frame (Adams ASYB1954)



Northcote Tow (Osbourne ASYB1954)



Former Womens' Ski Champion 'Sasha' (Mrs Karel) Nekvapil on the tow (G Hughes ASYB1955)

building for the winter. The hütte was completed over the 1952/53 summer and opened for the 1953 ski season."<sup>23</sup>

*"The building is orientated to maximum mid-winter sunshine, and a picture plate glass window provides a solarium for a skier who wishes to relax and view the magnificent mountain scene. . . As for the name, Kunama is an aboriginal word for snow, and Hutte (pronounced Hoota) is a Swiss word."*<sup>24</sup>

The basement bathroom was a freezing place, but some found ways to render it more hospitable *"Kunama Hut had its toilets downstairs in a granite foundation, they were pretty good toilets in those days. However, the toilet seats were freezing among the granite foundations. John Nagle,, a senior lawyer, would send us junior lawyers down to warm one up each day for his use.*

*"As all provisions were carried out to the huts rum was the preferred choice as beer was too heavy. We had to carry everything out, so we would take plenty of rum and so we became pretty proficient at fixing hot butter rum, whiskey and the spirit drinks. There were some pretty rough nights out there!"*<sup>25</sup>

A location for a ski-tow on Mt Northcote was surveyed in November 1952, and construction of the Tow Hut commenced in February 1953. All the materials, along with the tow engine and driving unit, were again hauled to the top of Mt Northcote by bulldozer then carried or rolled down the slope.<sup>26</sup>

By April the Tow Hut was nearing completion and the frames to support the tow rope were laid out in their positions. The hut was two storey, with the engine room on the upper floor so that it could operate in deep snow. The ground floor comprised storage areas and a day room for skiers to shelter and warm themselves, plus two extra bunks, although the fitout would not be completed for another 18 months. Over Easter the top and bottom 'A' frames were erected, a line of 7(?) intermediate steel pylons were dug in and 44-gallon drums of petrol (for the engine) and kerosene (for heating) were rolled down the hillside. The tow rope was left on top of the ridge, where it unfortunately became buried under 10' of snow in an early blizzard and took a weekend to locate and dig out.<sup>27</sup>

In July the Association appointed Harry Malcher as tow attendant and caretaker for the two lodges, with the title 'Area Manager'.<sup>28</sup>

A formal opening of Albina Lodge and Kunama Hutte was undertaken by the Ski Tourers Association over the weekend of 1-2 August 1953.<sup>29</sup> *"The Ski Tourers have built two very comfortable huts - Albina, about five miles from The Chalet, holds 12 people, and*

23 Australian Alpine Club website: Heritage Part 2 / 3

24 Ward, GRT: Kunama Hutte ASYB 1952, p59

25 Curlewis, Ian: *Before KT...an interview of a young careabout*, interview with Andrea & Hyland, 2005, Crackenback Ski Club website

26 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p81

27 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p81

28 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p81

29 SMH 1 August 1953

*Kunama, about three miles from The Chalet, which accommodates only eight. These huts can be leased, but club members have priority.”*<sup>30</sup>

It had been hoped to open the Northcote Ski Tow in 1953, however the poorly-sited head frame had become buried under the cornice on Mt Northcote and would not re-emerge until November.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Eagle Run 1953**

In 1953 the Association developed a high-speed downhill test run beside the Northcote Tow, from the cornice on Mt Northcote above the top 'A' frame straight downhill for half a mile, with a descent of approximately 800' (243m) and finishing on a line between the Tow House and Kunama. The upper half had a 1 in 2 gradient – *“equivalent to the slope from the top of the Back Perisher straight down into Sun Valley”*.<sup>32</sup> It was expected to be the fastest course in Australia, comparable with the famous international courses including the *Chamois Run* in Kitzbuel and *Kandahar Run* in St Anton.<sup>33</sup>

To promote the run, awards were created: 'Golden Eagles' would be awarded to ski instructors who covered the course in 35 seconds or less (averaging 50 mph / 80 kph), or others who achieved 42 seconds (41.7 mph / 67 kph). 'Silver Eagles' would be given for a time under 50 seconds, 'Bronze Eagles' for under 60 seconds.<sup>34</sup>

The run was christened the Golden Eagle and formally opened on 3 August 1953. Three snowmobiles brought out 60-odd spectators and competitors from the Chalet. Tony Sponar, Czechoslovakian Olympic place-getter, was fastest over the course in a time of 32.2 seconds at an average speed of 54.4 mph (87.5 kmh).<sup>35</sup> Bill Kubes, Tommy Tomasi, and Charles Anton won Golden Eagles and Doug Thatcher a Bronze.<sup>36</sup>

It was claimed that Tony Sponar had exceeded 75 mph in the top part of the course. By the following year, the Association's claims of Sponar's top speed had grown to *“between 80 and 90 mph”*, and it was decided to promote the Association's ventures by bringing out electronic timing equipment and making an attempt



Speed trial contestants – Harry Malcher, Christine Davy, Tom Mandlick and Charles Anton (D Baglin ASYB1956)

on the world speed record of 98.9 mph (159.3kph) - established by Zeno Colo on the Little Matterhorn in 1947 – or at least seek an Australian Speed Record in excess of 90 mph (145 kph). Poor snow conditions prevented the World Record attempt being considered in 1954, however in that year Harry Malcher managed a Golden Eagle, whilst Jill Macdonald and Margaret Anton won Silver Eagles.<sup>37</sup>

In 1955 the Eagle Run became the venue for an official attempt on the World Speed Record for skiing: *“The Swiss firm of Longine, which also conducted the Italian trials . . . generously loaned the equipment and made available . . . a Swiss trained operator, free of charge. It was decided to hold tests during the Bank holiday weekend early in August. Snow conditions were far from ideal, with strong wind blowing. Nevertheless, 100 metres were accurately measured out, a stretch adjacent to the Tow and the equipment set up. Fortunately the wind dropped and we ran the event late in the afternoon.*

*“Christine Davy made the fastest run, 3.19 seconds [over the 100m timed section], averaging 112.85 kph or 70.12 mph. The other participants, Harry Malcher, Tony Mandlik and Charles Anton,*

30 SMH 20 May 1954

31 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p81-2

32 Australian Alpine Club website: Heritage Part 2 / 4

33 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p82

34 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p83

35 Australian Alpine Club website: Heritage Part 2 / 4

36 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1955, p78

37 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1955, p78

reached speeds exceeding 60 mph. Given more time for preparations, better snow conditions and a more representative field . . . the Australian speed record may one day come close to the 100 mile mark, which would certainly help to put Australian skiing on the map.”<sup>38</sup>

Five Golden Eagles were awarded in 1955 – Christine Davy, Toni Mandlik, Mackenzie Munro, Margaret Anton and Geoffrey Hughes. Not everyone had a right to attempt the Eagle Run. Harry Malcher reportedly stopped skiers who in his opinion lacked ability and experience to stand up to the course.<sup>39</sup>

In 1956 Sponar’s record for the Eagle Run was broken by Austrian ski instructor Helmut Tschaeffert, in a time of 29.3 seconds at an average speed of 60 mph (96 kph). The fastest ever recorded Eagle Run was achieved by Lubor Vozab in October 1962 with a run that averaged 61.9 mph (99.6 kph).<sup>40</sup> The history of the Eagle Run was unfortunately cut short by the events of 1956, in which the records of participants set down in the Golden Eagle Book, were also destroyed.<sup>41</sup>



Summer slalom on Mt Northcote 1951 (GRT Ward ASYB1952)

### Heyday on the Range 1952-56

Over the 1951-2 New Year weekend, the Association held the first summer skiing competition in Australia. The 2.4 km course ran down a gully on Mt Northcote, with 30 gates over its 450’ descent. Czechoslovakian Jack Rozdal won ahead of Danny Coleman and Norwegian Ingvar Karlson, with the trophy being presented by Charles Anton.<sup>42</sup> *“The Norwegians, employees of a Norwegian firm working with the Snowy Mountains Authority, who arrived in Australia only recently, were amazed to find snow here in summer. They were striking figures on the course in their white cotton ski pants, actually designed for langlauf racing, but perfectly adapted for summer skiing. The Norwegians have already formed a ski club, and plan to build a jump at the Blue Cow.”*<sup>43</sup>



Kunama interior 1950s (Aust Alpine Club)

The snow came early in 1952, with skiing possible at Albina from April. The lodge had established itself as a base for extended stays and a destination for day tours out from the Chalet. *“It was not uncommon for experienced touring parties to ski Townsend West Face - the longest run on the range, previously only attempted by a few parties from the Chalet each year - and be back at the lodge for lunch, ready to enjoy afternoon skiing in Little Austria.”*

*“In August and September the lodge was mostly booked out . . . Little Austria, Alice Rawson, Townsend West and all other ‘house runs’ were in perfect condition, and the downhill running - anything up to 8000 vertical feet in a day - was limited only by the strength of our climbing legs.”*<sup>44</sup>

A two-race competition was held over Christmas-New Year 1952-3. The Albina Summer slalom was run on Mt Northcote over the same course as the previous year, with 36 competitors and won by J Gdowski of the Canberra Alpine Club. 18 competitors undertook a steeper slalom on Mt Townsend, won by F Zweifel of the Cooma Ski

38 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1956, p72

39 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1956, p71-2

40 Australian Alpine Club website: Heritage Part 2 / 4

41 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1957, p59

42 Canberra Times 2 January 1952 & Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1954, p81-2

43 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1952, p58

44 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1953, p50-1

Club. Anton remarked *“The number of competitors from different countries points to the international character of the meeting and the important role Ski Tourers' Association is playing in bringing skiers of different nationalities together.”*<sup>45</sup>

Over the winter of 1953 *“both Lake Albina Ski Lodge and Kunama Huette were well patronised with Kunama coming in for the lion's share of attention, being new and comparatively easy to reach from the Chalet. On four different occasions snowmobiles took visitors from the Chalet right to Kunama Huette and on fine days Harry Malcher was busy making gallons of tea for day visitors. The little chalet with its Tyrolean atmosphere and beautiful alpine setting quickly caught the imagination of skiers and it became the focal point of main range trips.”*<sup>46</sup>

A summer skiing competition was again run over Christmas-New Year 1953-4: *“While Sydney was enjoying a maximum temperature of 96.8 degrees yesterday, leading Australian and overseas skiers competed in*



Jimmy Walker Bridge over the Snowy River at Foreman's Hut chimney (I Walker ASYB1955)

*two races over steep snowdrifts near Mt Kosciusko . . . More than 30 competitors took part. The first race was held on Mount Northcote . . the Albina Summer Slalom Cup . . won by the Czechoslovakian champion, Tony Sponar, followed by Billy Day, Australia's top performer at the 1952 winter Olympics at Oslo. His brother, Gordon, was third. The second race on the steepest spur of Mount Townsend . . for the Hans Newring[sic] Memorial Trophy donated by the International Ski Club. The race, an alpine slalom, was over an extremely steep course, and rocks increased the hazards. Only the most experienced racers were allowed to compete. It was won by Bill Day in 24 4/5s, with Gordon Day second, and Hans Braun, of Canberra, third. The prizes were presented by Mr Anton after the carnival.”*<sup>47</sup>

Over the following summer works focussed on modifying the Northcote Tow, installing a septic tank at Albina and providing safer access. The top 'A' frame of the tow was moved 50m down the slope to avoid the Northcote cornice, the route was realigned and more supporting poles were added. A snowpole line was erected between Seamans Hut and Albina, and snowpoles placed on the ground between Albina and Kunama for erection the following year.<sup>48</sup> The Kosciusko State Park Trust reneged on its promise to build a bridge over the Snowy River<sup>49</sup> so over Easter 1954, Jimmy Walker, Ian Curlewis and Margaret Anton constructed a simple wire suspension bridge opposite the Foreman's Hut chimney.<sup>50</sup>



Kunama Hutte and the Northcote Tow Hut (B Arnott 1988)

The tow mechanism was successfully tested on 27-28 March 1954. The tow rope was installed for live testing by Geoffrey Hughes (Chairman of the Tow Subcommittee) on the Queen's Birthday weekend. *“last minute alterations and adjustments were made to the 'A' frame and pulleys and the engine was started . . put into gear and the rope started to move with the first skier . . up Mt Northcote. That afternoon the lift worked for three hours and members rode up and skied down the tow slope like happy yo-yos!”*<sup>51</sup>

45 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1953, p51

46 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1954, p81-2

47 SMH 29 December 1953

48 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1954, p82

49 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1954, p83

50 Anton, Charles STA Report ASYB1955, p76

51 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1954



Kunama Hutte and the Northcote Tow (Aust Alpine Club)

The tow rope was put away to prevent it becoming buried under snow, and brought out again at the start of July.<sup>52</sup>

On 12th July 1954, *"The Northcote Ski Tow - the highest in Australia opened . . . More than 50 skiers travelled to the tow from the Chalet on skis and in two snow vehicles which crossed the frozen Snowy River near its source. The president and founder of the Ski Tourers' Association, Mr Charles Anton, welcomed the skiers, who had lunch outside Kunama Huette.*

*"The tow has a vertical lift of about 530 feet, and is more than one-third of a mile long. [It] will run until the skiing season ends in October or November. It will enable skiers who will represent Australia at the winter Olympic Games in Cortina d' Ampezzo, Italy, to train under conditions comparable with overseas standards."*<sup>53</sup>



Kunama Hutte and the Northcote Tow (ASYB1954)

*"To illustrate the tremendous impetus the Northcote Tow is giving to skiing. During a brief week-end visit Andy McCullough and Harry Malcher left Kunama at 7:30 in the morning. They started up the tow, rode to the top, pulled the safety wire to stop it, and at 7:45 were on Lake Albina, then up Townsend and down and up Townsend west, then via the Alice Rawson run back to Lake Albina, up Mt Northcote and back at the tow at 11 o'clock in time to start it up for the first visitors from the Chalet."*<sup>54</sup>

*"All through the winter the tow operated . . . individual skiers and clubs made good use of it. The K.A.C., for instance, held its club races at Kunama and had five snow-mobiles and nearly 100 skiers in the area. The Sydney Ski Club Races also took place near the tow. The Ski Club of Australia booked Kunama for the first week of its club season, and the Club's giant slalom was held on the tow slope. The giant slalom of the Interstate races in September was also run on Mt. Northcote . . . At the October holiday weekend, long after all other tows in Australia had ceased operations, our lift was still running. Many day visitors from the Chalet used the tow after the skiing season had ended at Charlotte Pass."*<sup>55</sup>



Northcote Tow Hut and tow ('Bogong', forum.ski.com.au)

Ironically, midwinter was often a less successful time for the tow, where blizzard damage or an accumulated snow cover in excess of the 20' high supporting poles caused closure of the tow for weeks at a time.<sup>56</sup> Using the tow could also be hazardous: *"The tow was a*

*nutcracker and was as dangerous as hell. . . an army webbing belt round your waist that was attached with a little bit of rope to the nutcracker. You'd hang on to the rope, but then if you put your arm over the rope it would twist and turn and pull you all over the place. I once saw a girl . . . picked up by her jacket . . . was just about to go around the bullwheel so we had to shut down the tow."*<sup>57</sup>

To improve the relatively poor patronage of Albina Lodge a number of upgrades were undertaken over the summer of 1954-5. : *"For the coming season Albina will have electric light and individual reading lights over each bunk, and a hot shower will also be in operation. Albina Lodge is no longer just a hut on the*

52 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1954

53 SMH 13 July 1954

54 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1954

55 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1955, p76

56 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1955

57 Curlewis, Ian: *Before KT...an interview of a young careabout*, interview with Andrea & Hyland, 2005, Crackenback Ski Club website

*Main Range, but a comfortable Chalet with all modern comforts . . . inner-spring mattresses, independent two-bed cubicles, running water, sewerage, stainless steel sink, etc .. not to forget the most glorious alpine view and the longest and steepest ski runs in the Australian Alps. The charge is still 10/- per night for members, with a variety of tinned foods available at Sydney prices. To . . . make members' stay still more pleasant we have appointed an area manager, Bill Clark, . . . who will live at Albina during the coming season . . . A snow pole line leads from Seamans via Muellers' Saddle right to the Lodge, and for those who do not like to carry heavy packs up-hill for a long time provision has been made to take them to the top of the Northcote Ski Tow, and from there it is only fifteen minutes' walk to the Lodge.”<sup>58</sup>*

A snowpole line was also established from the Jimmy Walker Bridge over the Snowy and up to Kunama, and the Northcote Tow House fitout was completed. This incorporated two separate two-bed cubicles, a toilet, and food preparation area. This increased the total number of beds in the lodges to 26 and the Association proudly reported *“for the coming winter season all lodges will have running hot water, gas cooking, electric light with reading lamps over each bed, septic tanks and stainless steel sinks.”*<sup>59</sup>

The summer ski competition was cancelled for the first time in 1954/5 due to a lack of snow.<sup>60</sup>

The winter of 1955 proved disappointing. The season had a late start as rains prior to the Queen’s Birthday washed away the early snows. Mid-season there was severe and prolonged blizzards that damaged installations and caused the tow to be buried for 3 weeks. In a portent of the future Anton reported that *“a cornice avalanche descending on the top ‘A’ frame and strong snow creep did not help matters.”*<sup>61</sup>

With the help of the Kosciusko State Park Trust’s bulldozer and jeeps, the Ski Tourers Association brought more than 15 tons of food, fuel and building materials in to the lodges over the summer of 1955-6. Two extra bunks were erected within the Tow House, allowing it to accommodate eight.<sup>62</sup>

The summer ski competition was held for the fourth time. The Albina Summer Slalom Cup was contested by 34 runners over a course set by Tony Sponar. The mens’ event was won by Ruedi Wurth, and the ladies’ event was won by B Lane. The Hans Neering Memorial Race was again a slalom on the second spur of Mt Townsend. Toni Mandlik and Ruedi Wurth tied for first in the mens’ event whilst A Moore won the Ladies’ event. The prize-giving party was held at the Chalet.

By 1956 the Ski Tourers Association had 750 members, accommodation for 30 with an operational ski tow on the main range, and a bright future with the proposed development of a chairlift up the Rams Head Range to bring Albina Lodge within about one hour’s skiing from Thredbo.<sup>63</sup>

Members of the Association were branching out into other skiing enterprises. Demand was such that a faction decided to break away and redevelop the old Pounds Creek Hut on the Snowy near Guthega Dam into another lodge whilst another group formed a syndicate to pursue skiing facilities development on a whole new scale - the Kosciusko Chairlift and Thredbo Hotel.<sup>64</sup>

### ***The Avalanche, The Fire 1956***

Ian Curlewis travelled up with a party in the winter of 1956; *“we were going up to Kunama once again . . . had to pick up John Holt and a girl called Roslyn Wesche on the way. Again, we were still pretty short of money so we knew we couldn’t afford to*



Roslyn Wesche  
([www.roslynlodge.com.au](http://www.roslynlodge.com.au))

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58 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1955, p75-9

59 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1955, p75-9

60 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1955, p78-9

61 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1956, p71

62 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1956, p71

63 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1956, p71

63 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB 1957, p59

64 Anton, Charles: STA Main Range Report ASYB 1956, p73



Kunama Hutte after the avalanche (Aust Alpine Club)



Kunama Hutte after being struck by the avalanche (R Walkom collection, KHA/NLA)

stay the night in the Chalet . . . we got a rope tow up to the top of Charlottes Pass, we got down, crossed the Snowy River at Foreman's Chimney in the face of a raging blizzard, and by about five, a quarter past five we knew we were not going to get to Kunama, nor were we going to find our way back to the Chalet. . . we came across a little 4' x 4' [1.2m] red hut, you've seen those little water measuring huts around the mountains, we found that we were able to get in through the top of that, through a trap door in the top, and that really saved our lives I suppose. . . because of the heat of our bodies inside the walls inside condensed and so there was water running down and so we couldn't lean against the walls, we had to stand up all night with every bit of clothing we had on. I even shared a sleeping bag with John Holt!

"John and I were lucky as we could open a crack in the door to have a pee outside but poor Ros had to wait all night. However, we awoke to the most fantastic day next morning. We skied off and had two wonderful days skiing up at Kunama. The rope tow was going well, the only trouble was that the water had frozen in the water supply we had established to Kunama Hut. We then had to dig a hole down in the snow . . . about 12 feet deep at this stage, and found water.

"A blizzard came in that evening. There were 13 of us in the hut at the time.

"Early the next morning Keith Hordern got out to go and 'spend a penny' downstairs in the loo. He was about to get back into his bed when the avalanche hit. That is when Ros Wesche was killed. The snow came down and covered one corner of the hut and forced her face into the snow and she suffocated. Keith was lucky, he was thrown out. I was pinned by the chest by a wooden beam. I couldn't move. If the beam had moved another half inch I was going to be dead along with Roslyn. I was concerned that the 'firesides' [kerosene heaters] were going to start a fire. Fortunately they had been thrown out in the snow by the avalanche. There was a tank up in the mezzanine floor that overflowed and flowed straight down into my sleeping quarters onto me and into the sleeping bag.

"The rescuers didn't want me to move for fear of further movement of the structure. I wasn't too keen on moving myself. After an hour or so I was cut out, soaking wet, by Ken Breakspear and the Studley brothers. It was about 8 o'clock in the morning.

"It was a pretty sombre trip back into the Chalet. Roslyn was only 23 or 24 [sic, 20] when she died. We had to carry her body on a sled and were met at the Chalet by Ros' father and mother who had already been told of Ros's death. She was a fabulous girl."<sup>65</sup>

The avalanche swept down the north face of Mt Clarke in a strip 50m wide struck Kunama Hutte at 7:20am on 12 July 1956. A collapsing cornice had started a small powder avalanche near the summit, which in turn triggered a major slab avalanche approximately 50m wide on the lower slope. This caved-in the back

<sup>65</sup> Curlewis, Ian: *Before KT...an interview of a young careabout*, interview with Andrea & Hyland, 2005, Crackenback Ski Club website



Kunama ruin 2000 (J Hart KHA collection/NLA)



Kunama ruin 2013 (M Higgins)



Northcote Tow Hut on fire (L Smith ASYB1957)



Tow hut ruin & engine 2013 (J Evans)

wall of the hut and pushed the entire structure off its foundations. The hut had been sited on a small knoll to avoid the pressure of snow creep down the hill, but the amount of snow cover at the time effectively flattened the terrain and prevented any deflection of the avalanche.<sup>66</sup>

Newspapers reported a party of rescuers coming from a nearby hut (probably the Tow Hut and Albina Lodge) to help dig everyone out.<sup>67</sup> The coroner found that Roslyn Wesche had died from a fractured spine accidentally received when a heavy beam fell on her.<sup>68</sup>

Three weeks later, on the night of 2 August, a fire destroyed the Northcote Tow Hut: *“From reports by the three occupants . . . (Ginelle Heine, Peter Kelly and Paul Keneally), it appears that the fire started about 5pm, when a kerosene heater caught alight, spraying burning kerosene up the wall of the living room. Efforts to drag the flaming heater from the living room failed . . . A foam extinguisher and CO2 extinguisher were used without success. A telephone call from the burning airlock, although unintelligible to the people at Albina, alerted them that something was wrong and a party set out for the Tow House. The Tow House occupants . . . shut all outside doors in an effort to deprive the blaze of oxygen. As they were lightly clad (only one had proper boots), and as it was bitterly cold and getting dark, they set off up the icy slope towards Albina. They were met when halfway up by members of the rescue party . . . Leon Smith was first to reach the Tow House and he frantically dug out the entrance to the Kunama basement to reach the fire extinguishers and big water tank. By the time the other members of the Albina Party (Bill and Christine Davy, Mike and Pat Osborne, John and Ross Allen) had some fire fighting equipment ready, the fire was beyond any control and they had to watch the Tow House burn down to the ground.”*<sup>69</sup>

Over the remainder of the winter, the Association managed to shift many of its bookings for Kunama and the Tow Hut to Albina Lodge. *“We finished the season with no other mishap except a rather narrow escape of a party from carbon monoxide poisoning when an exhaust coupling worked loose and fumes discharged in the hut – a warning to clubs operating generating plants inside their lodges!”*<sup>70</sup>

The snow cover was more extensive than in previous years, *“good drift skiing could be enjoyed as late as the middle of February”*, and the fifth season of summer races were heralded as *“the best ever”*. Jean Ecuyer won both the Slalom and the Hans Neering Memorial Downhill, and Paul Reader the Jump.<sup>71</sup>

Over the summer of 1956-7 the Association made interim arrangements for the following winter, whilst dealing with long term planning in the wake of the 1956 disasters. The fitout of Illawong

66 Ward, GRT: *The Kunama Avalanche*, ASYB 1956

67 Canberra Times 13 Jul 1956

68 Canberra Times, 14 Aug 1956

69 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p88-9

70 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p89

71 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p89



Remains of Northcote Tow top 'A' frame & Pylon 1 2013  
(J Evans)

Lodge was nearing completion and it was expected to be affiliated with the Association, to become accessible to members for bookings. Portable 'Gam' rope tows were to be installed at both Albina and Illawong. The salvageable parts of the Northcote Tow were loaned to the Crackenback Ski Club for re-erection at Friday Flat.<sup>72</sup>

Conscious of the risk to members should a disaster befall Albina comparable to Kunama and the Tow Hut, the roof of Kunama was fixed over the granite basement walls to create a crude emergency shelter, whilst a small new shelter shed was proposed to be erected on Muellers Saddle.<sup>73</sup>

### ***The Move to the Resorts 1958-63***

The tragic loss of Roslyn Wesche and destruction of Kunama Hutte and the Northcote Tow was a turning point in the fortunes of the Ski Tourers Association. It coincided with a major shift in the direction of skiing in Australia, which was indirectly suggested in a comment Charles Anton had made in the 1955 Australian Ski Yearbook about a trip to Kunama:

*"On another weekend trip, with only a few people on the tow, and consequently no waiting, I had 45 runs in exactly four flours, thus running nearly 25,000 vertical feet downhill over a distance of more than 15 miles."*<sup>74</sup>

Since the completion of Albina Lodge, the skiing scene had changed dramatically. 'Alpine skiing' was on the rise. Equipment had improved to improve control in downhill running, ski tows had started to become popular and private club lodges had begun to spring up along the Kosciusko Road - at the Smiggin Holes, Perisher Valley and at the Chalet. Commercial hotels were also being erected, to offer meals and evening recreation. The State Park Trust had been forced to establish controls upon the spread of development – both for administrative and environmental purposes - and take the first steps to concentrate development into designated resort areas.

Less than five years after the Trust had supplied vehicles and staff to assist the Association in building Albina and Kunama, it rejected an application to rebuild a lodge on the Kunama site, and encouraged the Association to take up a lodge site in one of the fledgling resort areas. Furthermore, the heavily-eroded vehicle track between Seamans and Albina was closed for rehabilitation. From then on Albina was to stand alone out on the range, serviced only by oversnow vehicles, pack horse or man-hauled supplies.<sup>75</sup>

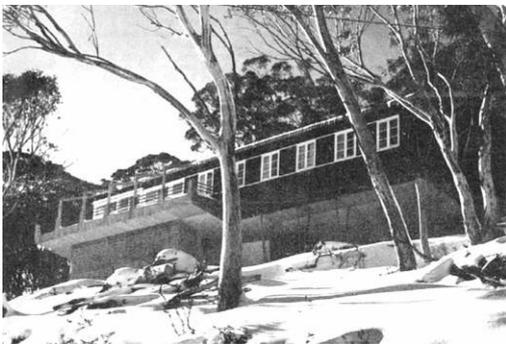
For the Association this change of attitude was devastating and would remain a sore point for many years. However in hindsight, it forced the Association to pursue other avenues and achieve far greater things than could be achieved in continuing to develop and maintain isolated backcountry facilities.

72 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p90

73 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p90

74 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1955, p76

75 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1957, p90



Roslyn Lodge at Thredbo (D Baglin, Aust Alpine Club)



South elevation of Pounds Creek Hut 1946, prior to the rebuild (Smith, Aust Alpine Club)



South elevation of Illawong Lodge 1999 (JHart KHA collection/NLA)



East elevation of Pounds Creek Hut (ASYB1928)



East elevation of Illawong Lodge 1999 (JHart KHA collection/NLA)

Charles Anton was already making private plans for a major resort at Thredbo. In 1955 the Snowy Mountains Authority had constructed the Alpine Way and the Kosciusko Chairlift and Thredbo Hotel Syndicate had been formed by Charles Anton, Tony Sponar(?), Eric Nicholls, George Lloyd, Geoffrey Hughes and Andrew Reid with a 99 year lease over the Friday Flat area. The first run was cut through the trees in November 1956, and the following Easter more runs were cut and an engine and rope tow was installed at the location of the present middle station on the Crackenback Chairlift. Over the summer of 1957-8 the mile-long chairlift from Thredbo Village up the Rams Head Range (where the ski area would soon be renamed 'Crackenback Peak') was erected to the level of where Kareela Hutte now stands.<sup>76</sup>

Over the summer of 1957-8 the Association relocated one of the former barracks buildings from Guthega Dam site to Thredbo<sup>77</sup> and converted it to a 22-bed lodge. Named Roslyn Lodge after Roslyn Wesche, it opened in June 1958,<sup>78</sup> (and substantially rebuilt in 1995 when it became High Noon Lodge). A telephone line was run from Albina Lodge via Seamans Hut and the Crackenback top station, to Roslyn Lodge.<sup>79</sup>

Early in 1959 a syndicate of Association members built the Kareela Hutte at the location where an 'Upper Thredbo Village' was proposed, but which never eventuated. Kareela appears to have become affiliated to the Association prior to being sold to Kosciusko Thredbo P/L in 1962, following which the Association re-invested in the construction of new lodges at Perisher Valley and Falls Creek, which would open in 1963. In 1962, the Ski Tourers Association changed its name to the Australian Alpine Club, under which name it continues to operate.<sup>80</sup>

### ***A Lingering Spirit of Adventure – Illawong & Albina 1956-69***

In 1955 John Turner and a small syndicate of Ski Tourers Association members developed a proposal to upgrade the semi-derelict Pounds Creek Hut into a small backcountry touring lodge, and with the agreement of the Kosciusko State Park Trust to take over the hut on a leasehold basis, rebuilding work - on what was to become Illawong Lodge - commenced in 1956.

*“A small group of us felt that Pounds Creek Hut - suitably reconstructed; was the real solution to the problem of skiing on Twynam, being, as it were, right on the doorstep of that wonderful mountain. Our aim was to do for Twynam, Anderson and Tait [sic], what Albina had done for Townsend, and Kunama for Northcote and Lee. The building of Illawong faced us with enormous physical difficulties . . . However, we brought the lodge to completion. It contains accommodation for 8 people plus temporary visitors. It is equipped with electric light, telephone, automatic hot water service,*

76 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1960, p98

77 Australian Alpine Club website: History p1

78 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p101

79 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p104

80 Australian Alpine Club website: History p1



Illawong Lodge 1957 (Smith, Aust Alpine Club)



Illawong Lodge with Little Twynam peak (M Higgins 2012)



Snowy River Bridge at Illawong (ASYB1960)  
Replaced with the current bridge in 1971 by the NPWS



Illawong suspension bridge as rebuilt by NPWS c1971  
(M Higgins 2012)

gas cooking, refrigerator, septic tank, drying room, AND innerspring mattresses.”<sup>81</sup>

One of the main difficulties was access. With no road into the site the majority of materials had to be trucked to Guthega Dam, then carried on a boat up to the head of the reservoir, then either manhandled or conveyed by horse-drawn sled the last 1.2km to the hut. The boat trips were not without incident: *“Every kind of watery disaster short of drowning occurred sooner or later. Once, a flood spread timber, mattresses and oil drums from one end of the dam to the other. Boats, all of them called ‘Jumping Trout’, were occasionally swamped or capsized . . . one was lost in a flood and not recovered until a year later . . . another took off in a high wind and landed on the opposite bank . . . this same boat, the Jumping Trout III, finally came to grief when a 44-gallon drum of petrol hurtled down a steep bank, landed amidships and went through the bottom, leaving a drum-shaped hole, as in a comic cartoon.”*<sup>82</sup>

As for the horse-drawn sled: *“The manager of the Chalet at Charlottes Pass offered the services of ‘Mick’, who was a most suitable horse indeed, except that it was usually necessary to find Mick, catch him, bridle him and get him over quite rough country to Illawong before starting to make use of him . . . Mick had two speeds – stop and run. Sometimes no amount of coaxing would move him; at other times he was off like a shot with his driver struggling to keep up and prevent the sled from overturning.”*<sup>83</sup>

Over the summer of 1957-8, the Illawong group built a bridge across the Snowy River opposite the Lodge. Unfortunately, it was washed away by an unprecedented flash flood in the following autumn, carrying away not only the bridge but a boulder of several tons in weight to which it had been anchored. A new bridge was constructed over the following summer, anchored into boulders high above the river with the aid of a pneumatic drill loaned from the SMA. The group also built a flying fox across Farm Creek to transfer supplies and personal gear when approaching from Guthega, and erected a snowpole line from Guthega to the Lodge.<sup>84</sup>

After two years of works, Illawong was completed, Charles Anton describing it as *“a testimonial to John Turner’s imagination, rugged individualism and stubborn tenacity.”* It opened for the 1959 winter.<sup>85</sup>

Of benefit to Illawong residents, in September 1958 the SMA Ski Club installed an electrically-driven rope tow on Tate East Ridge, approximately 1½ miles north of the Lodge. This provided ready access to Mt Tate for touring and opportunity to practice downhill running.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile at Albina Lodge, for the 1957 winter season the Association had planned to use a small Oliver OC3 tractor to bring in supplies and residents, housing it in a shed on Muellers Pass that could double as an

81 Turner, John C: *A Goose Into a Swan* ASYB1960, p63

82 Australian Alpine Club website: History

83 Twenty-One Years of the AAC, 1971 as quoted on the Australian Alpine Club website: History

84 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1958, p93

85 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1958, p93

86 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p103



Albina Lodge c1960 (Snowy Saga)



Albina Lodge & Mt Northcote 1961 (NAA)

**LAKE ALBINA SKI LODGE**  
A SKI TOURERS ASSOCIATION PROJECT.

A lodge for experienced skiers, offering the longest open runs and finest ski touring in Australia. Also noted for its late season Spring skiing—when other resorts are noted for trout and daisies!

- ★ Highest Ski Lodge in Australia—6,530 ft.
- ★ Overlooking Lake Albina and facing Mt. Townsend where January skiing is quite common.
- ★ Hot water, gas and electricity (32v.).
- ★ Accommodation for 12 in 2-bunk rooms. Tariff, non-members, £12/10/- including food.

BOOKINGS AT  
**WORLD TRAVEL HEADQUARTERS,**  
Kindersley House, 33-35 Bligh St., 28-4841.

STA advertisement (ASYB1961)



Albina Lodge 1963 (M Paton KHA collection/NLA)



Snowtracs at Albina 1964 ('Kalyvaro Ski Club')

emergency shelter if necessary. However construction was postponed, and the numbers of members using Albina the following winter was “disappointing”.<sup>87</sup>

The summer races were again held over Christmas-New Year 1957-8. Despite a few days of rain beforehand the Slalom course was fast, but a pea-soup fog limited visibility to less than the distance from gate to gate along the course. Tony Mandlik and Christine Davy took out the event, but the Hans Neering Memorial Slalom and the Jump had to be cancelled due to deteriorating weather.<sup>88</sup>

The Kosciusko State Park Trust erected a snowpole line from the top of the Crackenback Chairlift to the Snowy River, which provided faster ski access into Albina for the 1958 season.

Numbers of residents at Albina Lodge increased through the 1958 winter. Lou Vozab was appointed ‘Area Manager’ or caretaker, one function of which was to escort parties to and from the Lodge. Unfortunately the portable Gam rope tow proved a failure despite several attempts at modification.<sup>89</sup>

An attempt to erect the Muellers Pass shed was made the following summer, however it was destroyed in a “terrific storm” during construction, following which the project appears to have been abandoned. Supplies for the summer and 1959 winter were brought in by a team of 6 pack horses from Thredbo led by Jean Findlay, whilst the Association explored options for stocking winter supplies at Seamans Hut and hiring a Snowcat for supply runs.<sup>90</sup>

For Christmas-New Year 1958-9 “The seventh annual STA races were held on Sunday, December 28, on the ‘South America’ drift on Mt Northcote facing Seamans. The Albina Slalom started at 11:30am and was set by Tony Sponar. It had 35 gates and was tricky and fluid. Thirty-five competitors took part and the standard was up to the NSW Championships. Telephone communications were laid by Leon Smith connecting the start and finish line . . . allowing a much longer course. In the afternoon a giant slalom for the Hans Neering Memorial Trophy was run . . . The summer races have become an accepted event in the Australian Ski Racing Calendar. Many spectators came to Northcote including visitors from the Thredbo Alpine Village, who had travelled the chairlift and then walked across the Ramshead Ranges, or had ridden up on Jean Findlays horses.” D Collman took out both of the mens’ events, and M Stuart (nee Day) both ladies’ events.<sup>91</sup>

Anton regarded the failure of the rope tow at Albina in 1958 as a major setback: “This tow . . . is most important to a successful season for Albina and to rekindle the interest of skiers from the Thredbo, Chalet and Perisher areas in touring on the main range. It is invaluable when the weather is not good enough to go touring and

87 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1958, p93

88 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1958, p94

89 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p102

90 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p102

91 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p104

*greatly appreciated by skiers returning from touring who want to spend the rest of the day practicing on the slopes near Albina.*<sup>92</sup>

However the real issue for Albina was not whether it had a tow but its isolation. By the winter of 1959 the Association was itself offering three alternative ski accommodation venues to Albina, all of which were more accessible for weekend use, had better access to services and increasing numbers of tows. From the winter of 1959 onward, Albina would not have a resident caretaker. Increasingly, it would become a base for Association members seeking an alternative experience to that offered by resorts and tows - day touring along the crest of the Main Range or technical skiing on the steep western faces.

The Summer Races were cancelled over 1959-60 due to a lack of snow,<sup>93</sup> but had 30 participants the following December when the Albina Slalom was won by George Derschko and Miss B Hanam, and the Hans Neering Memorial Trophy was won by Lou Vozab and Miss B Hanam.<sup>94</sup> The midsummer races – which had become as much a part of the Association’s heritage as Albina Lodge - would continue into the mid-1960s. In 1963/4 a portable poma and television coverage was arranged for the event, which unfortunately had to be cancelled due to poor snow – reportedly the third time in 13 years it had not proceeded.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst Albina Lodge would always be regarded by the Association and Alpine Club as a beloved part of its heritage, by 1963 it had become a minor part of its operational business, and the annual reports on its use and development would become passing references to Albina having “*a successful season*”.

On 17 September 1966 Australian skiing was deprived of one of its greatest influences when Charles Anton died of meningococcal septicaemia whilst on a skiing holiday to Thredbo, aged only 49. His ashes were interred behind a plaque near the top of the Crackenback Chairlift whilst a peak on the main range north of Mt Twynam was named in his honour.<sup>96</sup>

### ***Left to the ‘Rats’ 1969-85***

Despite its increasing focus on resorts, the Australian Alpine Club remained strong advocates for the establishment of a network of ski-touring huts across the Main Range, to provide access to the major



Albina Lodge c1977 (K Hueneke, KHA collection/NLA)



Albina Lodge c1970s (R Vallak, KHA collection/NLA)

peaks. This had been a founding tenet of the Ski Tourers’ Association, but in the face of a growing environmental movement that would see the creation of the Kosciusko National Park before the decades’ end it was more a romantic hope than a realistic objective.

By the mid-1960s, grazing was entering the final phase of its systematic exclusion from the Park; the SMA was dismantling its works sites as the southern projects of the Snowy Scheme neared completion; the NSW Soil Conservation Service was implementing a major program to revegetate grazing damage on the Main Range - which had been declared a Primitive Area.

At this time an emotionally-charged item of ‘unfinished business’ between the Club and Trust resurfaced. The Club made an application to build a simple emergency shelter on the granite foundation of Kunama Hutte, where the old roof had been jerry-rigged into a crude shelter several years previously. It was to be both an emergency shelter and a memorial to Roslyn Wesche. The

92 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1959, p102

93 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1960, p106

94 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1961, p122

95 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1964, p112

96 Canberra Times, 20 Sep 1966 and Australian Dictionary of Biography online (Anton, Charles William 1916-66)



Albina Lodge 1982 (D Scott)



Albina Lodge ruin 1983 (D Scott)



Albina Lodge ruin & temporary shelter 1983 (D Scott)



Albina Lodge ruin 1987 (G Cummings KHA collection/NLA)



Albina Lodge ruin 2011 ('Hikingfiasco' website))

Trust not only refused the application, but subsequently burnt the remains of Kunama along with stockpiles of salvaged material that had been readied by the Club for the shelter. The ever-politic Anton could barely restrain himself in the Australian Ski Yearbook, declaring the Trust actions as *"a wilful and dangerous act"*.<sup>97</sup>

The sensitivities surrounding Kunama caused a growing rift of ill-feeling that worsened in 1969, when Albina Lodge was resumed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service upon the creation of the Kosciusko National Park. Presumably the Club was given the option of removing the Lodge or surrendering ownership of the material. A few items of equipment such as the lighting plant appear to have been removed around this time. Economically, the loss of Albina was probably inconsequential to the Club – rental returns were likely to have barely covered the cost of building maintenance and provisioning – but the seizure of a key icon of the Club's heritage would have been a highly emotive issue. Its ultimate fate a decade on did nothing to improve the relationship with the Trust.

In the wider context of public alienation that was occurring in the wake of the formation of the Park - the cessation of grazing, the resumption of freehold lands and the dismantling of the townships of Kiandra and Yarrangobilly - the breaking of the Club's attachment to Albina was of little political consequence.

The NPWS opened Albina to the public as a shelter hut. It was instantly a popular venue for ski-tourers being well-sited and offering a superior standard of accommodation to any other huts above the snowline. A new generation of 'main range rats' adopted it as their winter base. In the summer months it became a popular lunch stop for day-trekkers doing the Lakes Walk from Rawsons Pass to Charlottes Pass, it being possible to take a bus to Rawsons Pass until 1982.

Within a short time the NPWS was struggling with the upkeep of gas and kerosene, having to use Snowcats and even helicopters. Visitation of the order of 2000 per annum began to have major impacts upon the building and overwhelmed the small septic system designed for 1/5 the numbers. The presence of the Lodge – which offered security in bad weather along with a toilet - was also attracting groups to camp around the glacial lake.

Under the auspices of the Kosciusko Huts Association (KHA), the Australian Ski Club and Nordic Ski Club undertook maintenance works during the 1970s.<sup>98</sup>

Human waste management remained a major issue. The KHA argued that concentrating visitation at Albina provided the opportunity to manage the waste in one centralised location, and even if it required upgrading of the septic system that was still likely to be easier than managing waste from dispersed camping. The NPWS favoured options that reduced the impact by reducing the level of visitation.

97 Anton, Charles: STA Report ASYB1964, p111

98 Hueneke, Klaus: Hutsheet # 8 – Albina, Kosciusko Huts Association c1980

An increasingly hardline nature conservation philosophy within NPWS during the late 1970s led to a the release of a 'huts issues statement' in 1980 that proposed the removal of 30-40 huts from the Kosciusko National Park including all in the summit area except Seamans Hut.<sup>99</sup>

The Kosciusko Huts Association embarked on a campaign to 'Save the Huts' through media articles and public seminars, making a film and assisting Klaus Hueneke in compiling his book *Huts of the High Country*. By the time the 1982 Plan of Management for the Park was enacted, the community outcry had saved many huts across the Park but not those in the summit area. Albina Lodge, Rawsons Hut and Soil Conservation Hut were scheduled for removal, whilst camping in the catchments of the glacial lakes was to be banned and the summit road was to be closed to traffic other than management vehicles.

In April 1982 Albina Lodge, Rawsons Hut and Soil Conservation Hut were demolished. Combustible material was burnt onsite and non-combustible was helicoptered out. In May 1982 a small prefabricated fibreglass shelter was helicoptered into the Albina site and left in place for about 3 years as an emergency shelter. The granite basement walls at Albina were demolished in the 1990s.



Illawong Lodge 19783 (Warren Peck, Aust Alpine Club)

Illawong Lodge almost shared the same fate. Fortuitously, in 1982 its future was set aside for review when the lease held by the Illawong Ski Tourers expired in 1985. At the time it was proposed that the Lodge would become a public shelter hut upon cessation of the lease. The risk of it following the same historical path as Albina – public shelter hut, high visitation, management 'nightmare', enforced demolition to address management issues – was highly probable. Fortunately the Illawong Ski Tourers were successful in lobbying for a lease renewal, reportedly aided by political and commercial connections, and Illawong continues to provide basic accommodation and function just as it has for over 50 years.

With the accumulative loss over time of New Betts Camp, Alpine Hut, Kunama Hutte, Albina Lodge and the Mt Franklin Chalet, Illawong Lodge is of special heritage significance as the sole surviving backcountry ski touring lodge in the Kosciuszko National Park.

### **Sources & Further Reading**

Australian Alpine Club Website, Heritage pages – <http://www.australialpineclub.com/pages/history.html>

Australian Ski Yearbook articles – copies available on the Kosciuszko Huts Association website <http://www.khuts.org/index.php/heritage-2-5/tourism-recreation/101-australian-ski-yearbook-act-victoria-and-tasmanian-articles>

Crackenback Ski Club website, 'Before KT' - <http://www.crackenbackskiclub.com.au/content/history-beforekt.aspx>

Southwell-Keely, Peter: *Highway to Heaven*, WriteLight / Perisher Historical Society 2013



Plaque on the granite foundations of Kunama Hutte (M Higgins 2013)

<sup>99</sup> (NPWS April 1980)