

# When skiing found its way to Australia

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*"Kiandra is a rather dreary place in the winter, but yet the people are not without their amusement. The heaven-pointing snow-clad mountains afford them some pleasure. Scores of young people are frequently engaged climbing the lofty summits with snow shoes and then sliding down with a volancy that would do credit to some of our railway train"*

(From The Sydney Morning Herald, 10 August, 1861)



Kiandra was a town in New South Wales, at an altitude of 1,400m in what is now the Kosciuszko National Park, around 200 km south-west of Canberra. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the town enjoyed its heyday, after gold was discovered there and miners moved in from all over the world. In 1859, the town had a population of 7,000, many of them immigrants from Europe and China.

It was in this setting, then, that during one particularly harsh winter three Norwegians, Elias Gottaas, Søren Gregoriussen Torp and Carl Bjerknes, founded the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club (snow shoe being the term they used for skis). The club's earliest members included Tom Yan from China, the German Catherine Wortz and Martin Amundsen, cousin of the scientist and explorer Roald Amundsen. In 1929, the club changed its name to the Kiandra Pioneer Ski Club.

Debate continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century among the sport's historians about which is the oldest ski club in the world. We do know that the Norwegian Trysil Skytte og Skiløberforening and the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club were both established in 1861. We also know that prior to 1883 Alpine races were not being staged by any other club in the world, except by this Australian club. In each heat two skiers would race against each other in a schuss, with the loser being knocked out and the winner going through to the next round.

Over the years more and more events developed, skiing carnivals were put on and competitions held for boys and girls in the U8, U12 and U16 categories. To the downhill, was added slalom, ski jumping, cross-country skiing and tobogganing. More and more people were being drawn to the competitions from other parts of the country. The



Egon Theiner



photographer Charles H. Kerry from Sydney is known to have visited Kiandra, as did the explorer, war reporter and author Banjo Paterson and Percy Hunter, founder of the NSW state tourist office.

For around 30 years after the ski club was founded, and long after the short gold rush was over, Kiandra remained the only place in Australia where people were able to ski. As the sport expanded in a southerly direction towards the Snowy Mountains, Kiandra almost became a ghost town, yet the club continued to exist and went on to survive further hard times - for instance in 1937, when the Kiandra Hotel, including the clubhouse, burnt down. A new clubhouse was built in 1955 and in 1966 the club purchased the Tyrol Ski Club Lodge in Perisher, adapting to the ever-changing circumstance.

Among the most notable members of the club since the 1920s are ski jumper George Doran, Jim Pattinson, Kurt Lance, Bill Day, Paul Reader, Antony Mandlik, Jason Onley, Colin Myers, Frank Pallin and Pat Lee.

The founders of the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club and all its members throughout its 150 years deserve our praise, our gratitude and our recognition because it is down to the efforts of these pioneers that skiing today is fortunate enough to be able to call itself a "global sport".

Skiing in Kiandra (AUS) can be dated back to 1861

