



# Snowy River Echo

## FREE

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**Your Free Community Newspaper in the Snowy Mountains**



**Happy Fathers' Day  
to all our Snowy  
Mountains Dads  
on Sunday 5th  
September!**

## Winter Expedition to Mt Kosciuszko Retraces Strzelecki's Steps



View of Mount Kosciuszko from Mount Townsend - the very spot where Strzelecki named Mt Kosciuszko in March 1840.

*"The highest peak of Australian Alps - it towers over the entire continent - which before my coming had not been surmounted by anyone, with its everlasting snows, the silence and dignity with which it is surrounded; I have reserved and consecrated as a reminder for future generations upon this continent, of a name dear and hallowed to every Pole, to every human, to every friend of freedom and honour: 'Kosciuszko.'" - Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki*

To follow in the steps of Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki's extraordinary expedition across the Snowy Mountains almost 170 years ago, an intrepid crew of three Polish men, including filmmaker Oscar Kantor, took the challenge to relive the journey

right in the middle of winter.

The harrowing but rewarding expedition took them 6 days/5 nights (two days over their original plans) as they covered over 40 kilometres in the most challenging conditions.

Oscar had already travelled that road in summer with two American mountaineers (story in Echo, March 2009). This time, he was accompanied by team members Mariusz Szlapak and Stefan Lewandowski.

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## Winter Expedition Retraces Strzelecki's Steps (continued from front page)

This is the diary of Oscar Kantor's winter expedition to Mount Kosciuszko this August.

### Friday 7 August

We set out on our Kosciuszko expedition on Friday morning, August 7th, from Jindabyne and on our way to Geehi Valley, our starting point, we saw a wild black cat run across the road – we took it a bad sign, and as it turned out, we had our share of misfortune.

The first stage of our expedition was to cross Swampy Plain River which in winter can reach depths of up to 1.5 metre but we crossed it rather easily. Then, we began walking through a thick forest. It started raining heavily right from the start and it practically did not stop till the evening. We continued



*Crossing the Swampy Plain River*

our journey, soaking wet - sleeping bags, tents, clothes, video equipment and cameras were all drenched. So at 3pm, after having covered only about 3 kilometres, we decided to set up our camp in a very difficult terrain. Unable to find sufficient space for our tents, we were forced to clear a small 3x3 metre space. We went to sleep in freezing temperatures, soaked to the bones.

### Saturday 8 August

The next morning we packed up quickly and moved on. After a 2 kilometre walk, the sun came out but then snow began to fall so we set our camp right away. With great effort, we built a fire and spent the entire day trying to dry our belongings. There



*Seeking shelter for the night between large boulders*

was some singing, as well as campfire stories and the morale of our group was restored.

### Sunday 9 August

Early Sunday morning, we set out for Byatts Camp where the forest ends and the land is slightly easier to cross. The route from Moires Flat to Byatts Camp was very hard with lots of overgrown trees, waist-high snow and the temperatures dropped below zero – which made any progress even slower. It was too early to use snowshoes, so we often sank deep into the snow, carrying our 40 kilo backpacks. Towards the evening we reached Byatts Camp where we built an igloo and we put up our tents between giant boulders. Again, we had a campfire with a sing-along and we grilled Polish sausages.



*"We made it"! The team on top of Mount Kosciuszko*

where we spent the night. Seamans Hut was built as an emergency shelter for mountaineers just like us. There are two rooms and most importantly, a fireplace. Our decision to change course proved to be a smart move as later that evening a terrible snowstorm broke out and continued through the night.

### Tuesday 11 August

On the 5th day of our expedition, we waited until 10am, hoping for the snowstorm to abate; unfortunately, this was not to be. Despite the poor, about one-metre visibility and the strong wind, we decided to take the risk and

no point in going to Thredbo due to the heavy snowfalls from the previous day, so we made our way towards Charlotte Pass. After almost 2 hours of walking in blizzard conditions again and with no visibility at all, we reached Charlotte Pass. We used an oversnow vehicle to get to Perisher Valley where we caught the Skitube to Bullock Flat, and we went back to Jindabyne by bus.

After six days and five nights, our group was totally exhausted but today, I can say that the first Polish winter expedition to Mount Kosciuszko via Strzelecki's track was a success. (As far as we know, this winter expedition



*Warm at last - spending the night at Seamans Hut*

### Monday 10 August

On the 4th day we planned to reach Mount Kosciuszko about noon. However, in order to follow Strzelecki's track precisely, we chose a path through Mt Townsend and Abbots Peak which of course was a detour, so we had another 3 kilometres added to our journey. Nevertheless, climbing Mt Townsend was worth it as we experienced the same scenery that Strzelecki did when he climbed Mount Kosciuszko 170 years ago.

As it got pretty late, we decided not to climb to Mt Kosciuszko on that day. We thoroughly enjoyed sliding the two kilometres down the snowy mountains. Towards the evening we walked past a snow-covered Lake Albina, heading to the Seamans Hut

we set out for Mount Kosciuszko. The distance between the hut and the mountain is about 3 kilometres. It took us nearly two hours but we finally reached Mt Kosciuszko around noon.

(You can view our short movie from the summit - go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWbk6w61mUc>)

Our next challenge quickly came as we started our descent towards Thredbo and all hell broke loose. A blizzard with terrible winds and complete lack of visibility forced us to dig a hole in the snow, where we took refuge for two hours. When the snowstorm ended, we decided to return to Seamans Hut as going to Thredbo would have been too risky. And so, we were quite happy to spend another night in a warm and safe place.

### Wednesday 12 August

On the 6th day we decided there was

has only been successfully attempted once before in the 1960's.)

I would like to take this opportunity and thank Mariusz – for helping me take photos, and Stefan – for setting up the camp, building the fire, and cooking our meals.

I would also like to thank Mr Steve Darlington from Nationals Parks in Jindabyne and Mr Bruce Easton from Jindabyne's Wilderness Sports; and many thanks to Jindabyne's Police Station for their fine cooperation. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Puls Polonii, Ernestyna and Andrzej, for their moral and multimedia support during our journey.

**Oscar Kantor**

You can watch the film and photos of Oscar's expedition at next year's Kozzie Fest' in Jindabyne, early March 2010. In the meantime, you can view their photos on their website [www.oskipictures.com](http://www.oskipictures.com).