



Our trip was planned as a three day, two-night hike through Kosciuszko National Park, taking in the major peaks and incorporating some cross-country walking.

## Accessing the park

Access to this section of the park is via Kosciuszko Road near Jindabyne, through the main entrance gates (NSW parks pass required) and on a partly dirt road to Guthega ski resort. The area is covered in good detail by Rooftop's 1:50,000 *Jindabyne-Khancoban* map.



*This hut lies near a suspension bridge over the Snowy River, where the marked trail finished and we continued northwest toward Mt Townsend.*

## When to hike and leaving no trace

Summer seems to be a very popular time for visiting the park. We were usually in the vicinity of several other parties camping on the Main Range Circuit from the trailhead at Charlotte's Pass. 'Leave No Trace' camping is mostly permitted, except for within the catchments of lakes on the Main Range.

## Collecting water and what clothing to bring

Water may be available from remaining snow, but it's best not to collect it from the lakes as they can be polluted. As in all alpine areas, the weather can change rapidly at any time of year, which we had the delight of experiencing, so suitable clothing is necessary and always carry a raincoat.



*A fine view to the west over Blue Lake and the Kosciuszko Main Range. Note the patchy snow remains even in mid-summer.*

## Day 1

We parked the vehicle at Guthega ski resort and began walking after packing the rucksacks and eating a light lunch. There is a signposted and well-formed track to Illawong Hut (private), and we passed a few families doing the 5km return day-walk on our way in. The weather was hot, sticky and overcast as we reached the Illawong suspension bridge over the Snowy River. Here we spotted our navigational landmark of Little Twynham and began moving cross country and steeply uphill towards it.

The track began in dense heath, which soon cleared to grass meadows with stands of snow gums, and was then replaced by open walking above the tree-line through scattered rock and alpine flowers. Frequent breaks to apply sunscreen and drink a mug of 'Salvital' were appreciated by all.



*Water from melting snow still runs into Blue Lake in summer.*



## Making camp for the night

After reaching the heathy spur of Little Twynham, we continued up the valley and made camp on the northern side of the saddle between Little and Mount Twynham, with views to Guthega and the Jungagul wilderness to the north. The annoying, biting horseflies that followed us on the way up had disappeared by the late afternoon so except for the occasional mosquito, the bugs left us alone.

That evening we ascended Mt Twynham and met a group attempting to summit the ten highest peaks in Australia, Mt Twynham being the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest. In the valley below there were streams and waterfalls aplenty, with water melting from snow still remaining after winter. We collected some from a large pocket of snow above our campsite and boiled cups of tea and noodles for dinner.

The wind became blustery overnight, channelled between the two peaks either side of us, and was strong enough to make us glad we'd bothered to put the guy ropes out earlier. The soft alpine grass provided for a pleasant sleep but was sharp and spiky if you brushed it at the wrong angle, and would have the potential to claim an unprotected sleeping mat.



*The beginning of the Main Range Track from Charlotte's Pass.*

## Day 2

The day was beautifully clear, so we packed the tents early and moved over to the western side of the saddle to eat breakfast and watch the morning sunlight over Blue Lake. To meet up with the Main Range Circuit required a descent to the lake, so we chose a route via the north-western slopes that took us across a slippery patch of snow and several small creeks existing from the snowmelt.

On arriving at the Blue Lake lookout it started to rain heavily, a sudden contrast from the bluebird skies earlier. As the raincoats and pack covers came out, we spotted some rock climbers bailing from a rock face above the lake. We walked uphill to join the Main Range Circuit and travel clockwise toward Charlotte's Pass.



*Seaman's Hut on the Main Range Track was built in 1929 by the parents of Laurie Seaman, who died in a blizzard while summiting Mt Kosciuszko.*

## Stopping for a swim in the Snowy River

There were plenty of people despite the inclement weather, and the track undulated gently down to the Snowy River, where we stopped for a quick, icy swim and to change socks before ascending the steep hillside and reaching the busy trailhead. I ate avocado wraps with peanut butter for lunch while the others boiled noodles, and a mug of fortifying 'Salvital' was shared around in an attempt to ward off any light-headedness from the heat and heavy rucksacks.

After lunch we re-joined the track to Mt Kosciuszko, a veritable highway bustling with hikers and cyclists (who occasionally just rode straight at you, kamikaze style) and the weather cooled off which made for pleasant walking. Our four-person party split into pairs: the quicker



pushing on for around six kilometres to Seaman's Hut at 2030m, where we rested and waited for the other two.



*Continuing north along the Main Range circuit, Muellers Peak in the background.*

## Continuing towards Muellers Peak

By now it was 3 pm, and most day hikers were returning from the summit of Mt Kosciuszko. We got to the top around 4 pm, took a photo as proof, and then continued on the northern leg of the circuit toward Muellers Peak. Being a popular time of year, there were three other parties camping down in the valley to the east at the foot of Mt Northcote.

We put up our tents near a protected rockface close to the track, as strong winds were forecast for the following day, and made dinner and cups of tea. Just before sunset, we trekked over to Lake Albina to watch the terrific colours on the clouds and wondered how steeply the land dropped down to the Lady Northcote Gorge on the other side, which we, unfortunately, didn't have time to explore before dark.



*View of the sunset over Lake Albina.*

## Day 3

The morning was beautiful with bright sunshine and light cloud, although skies were grey and stormy on the horizon. From our camp, we backtracked along the circuit to find the foot pad to Mt Townsend and dropped the packs there. The great mass of Mt Kosciuszko to the south provided some protection from the incoming weather, and the swathes of alpine grass rippled like a khaki ocean as the wind gusted over.

It took about forty minutes followed by a short rock scramble to reach the summit of Mt Townsend, with views far surpassing those from Mt Kosciuszko. We withstood the wind as long as necessary to absorb the view and snap a photo with the surveyor's cairn, and then returned to our packs and continued along the circuit, passing high above Lake Albina and over Carruthers Peak.



*By morning the wind had picked up, but we were walking protected in the lee of Mt Kosciuszko.*

We were now walking along the exposed ridgeline with nothing to break the wind, which was now quite incredible and gusting to 80km/hr, as we later found out. Recent track construction was evident with bags of paving stones carried in by helicopter to combat erosion problems which have been occurring since the 80s on this section of the circuit.

## Making our way to the top of Mt Twynham

There was a signposted turnoff to Mt Twynham which we took and followed an old vehicular track most of the way to the top. Some walkers warned us of a snake up ahead which put a bit more skip in our step, but we passed the ominous spot and never saw it. As we rested out of the wind behind some rocks near the top of Mt Twynham, one of our group observed some



grave-looking clouds on the horizon and faint crashes of thunder. Raincoats were donned and we decided to keep going and hoped that the storm would pass to the west of us.



*Traversing the slopes of Muellers Peak toward Mt Townsend, the storm can be seen brewing to the left.*

After making a rapid descent to the saddle between Mt Twynham and Little Twynham, some thunder cracked very close by, and we dived even quicker into the valley below to shelter below the waterfall. A downpour was imminent as we desperately set up the tents, leaving all the gear in one and piling into the other to play cards and wait out the storm, which was passing directly overhead as rain hammered down on top of us.



*Summit Cairn and the view from the top of Mt Townsend.*

## Changing our plans according to the conditions

Our plan before the storm had been to continue along the ridgeline to the north east, camping another night and returning via Schlink Pass to Guthega. However, it was New Year's Eve and according to the weather radar (there was mobile coverage almost everywhere up high) there was a larger storm coming later in the evening.

The group consensus was firmly against spending the New Year in soggy sleeping bags, so we packed the tents during a break in the rain and bailed once the last of the lightning had passed.



*The storm was moving rapidly as we bailed off the Main Range to the car. The ski slopes of Guthega are visible in the background to the right.*

The damp ground saturated our boots and socks as we jogged down the spur, the humidity feeling strange to breathe after the fresh, cool air of the higher mountains. We reached the Illawong suspension bridge as a curtain of rain washed through the valley, and then pushed the final 2.5kms back to the car at Guthega, where we arrived exhausted but satisfied of our slightly shortened, yet successful trip.

**Do you plan on taking in the sights of Kosciuszko National Park?**