

Cars to Kosciusko



Jones, S. J. *Motoring to Kosciusko*. Image held by the State Library of Victoria.
<http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/57125>

Pioneering motorists, from the earliest days, set their sights on touring through the Snowy Mountains and driving to the top of Kosciusko. An ambitious journey, all things considered, and ascending Kosciusko by car impossible in the first few years of last century as even horseback tours often found the track to the summit impassable.

Difficulties with poor roads and availability of fuel aside, motoring to the high country was an attraction to many of our prominent early motorists as they found their confidence in distance motoring. The first to attempt the journey was Mark Foy.



Artists impression of the Foy motor party at Lake George on the way to Cooma.
Motor Cars at Lake George. (1902, March 8). *The World's News* (Sydney), p. 15. Online at
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128448030>

In 1902 Foy and a party of friends, including tourism promoter Percy Hunter, motored to Cooma in his 10 hp 2 cylinder Panhard and 6-1/2 hp Liberia. The Panhard, later known as "The Flying Fox", already had a Sydney to Melbourne trip to its credit in November 1901. It unfortunately broke down on the return journey from Adaminaby and Kiandra and was towed into Cooma by horse. The local blacksmith, though having no experience with a motor car, excitedly offered to fix the vehicle and promptly pulled the engine apart. In a local photo, Foy, with dirty hands, is standing beside his dismantled Panhard. To Foy's chagrin the repairs baffled the blacksmith and the Panhard returned to Sydney by rail. The Austral Cycle Agency, importer's of Foy first De Dion in 1901, were likely tasked in March with the Panhard's repair, along with another Foy vehicle. Austral subsequently took Foy to court to recover the costs of the repairs, Foy considered their account exorbitant and the judge agreed with him.

Reports of motorists to venturing far into the Snowy Mountains then don't appear for another 4 years, though the affluent were enjoying excursions to Mt Kosciusko and the Yarrongabilly Caves, fishing and trying snow sports at Kiandra. These areas were accessed by rail to Cooma then horse drawn coach or horseback to reach Kiandra, Jindabyne, Adaminaby and the summit.

In early 1906 2 motor parties ventured well beyond Cooma. J M Arnott, accompanied by his friend Banjo Paterson, probably in Arnott's 24/30 near-new Swiftsure, drove into Jindabyne on February 16th and were proclaimed as having brought the first car through Jindabyne. Their tour included Tumut, Cooma and Kiandra and camping and fishing at Wee Jasper.

Colonel J.M. Arnott, Banjo Paterson and chauffeur T L Griffin, at Jindabyne. Image held by the National Library of Australia <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-136499876>



On March 1st 1906 Sam Hordern Snr., accompanied by Messrs. Percy Hunter, Waters and Gillette, left Sydney to tour in his 16hp Richard Brazier to Cooma, Jindabyne and Yarrangobilly Caves, returning home via Tumut, Gundagai, Cootamundra and Bathurst. Hordern's son joined the group with a second car (possibly his 12hp Darracq) on Saturday 3rd and they drive out to Jindabyne, the group intending to travel up Kosciusko (using horses). The whole tour covered over 2800 miles and only had 2 punctures.

The winter of 1906 saw quite a few Automobile Club members, including Chas. Bennett (Bennett & Barkell), Sam Hordern Jnr. and cycling show manager Tom Scott, enjoying the snowfields at Kiandra, sans cars. There is little doubt that they would've supported the Government's proposals in early 1906 to build good tourist accommodation handy to Kosciusko and a motor road to the summit, the ski fields and the fishing rivers. Percy Hunter, by then Assistant Director of the NSW Government's information office, had successfully convinced the government into funding development of the area for tourism and no doubt rounded up support for the high country projects among his influential motoring friends.

By April 1907 government works were indeed well underway, with several miles of the new motor road to Kosciusko completed from Thredbo Crossing to Charlotte Pass, and a summer camp erected at Thredbo. A few miles further up at Digger's Creek, a government hostel for 100 guests was being built to attract the winter skiing enthusiasts.

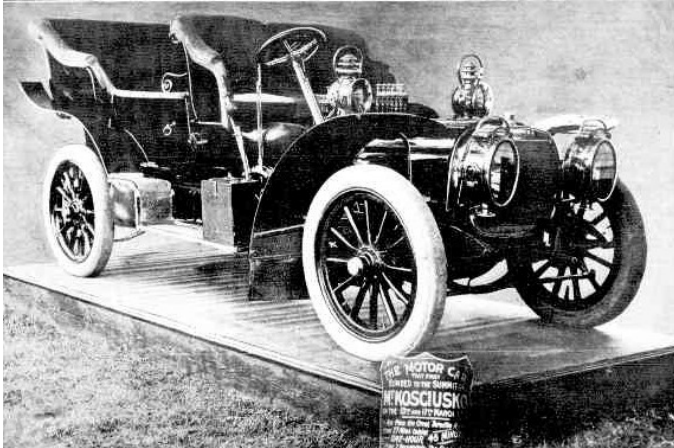
While these construction projects were proceeding in the warmer months more motorists were exploring the high country. Among them, in February 1907, Dr Lester and 2 companions in his c.1904 14 hp Darracq driving from Mudgee to Jindabyne and then across to Bega. They were able to proceed further than previously any motor car had towards Kosciusko, going as far as Spencer's Creek, 7-1/2 miles from the summit. (Dr Lester's Darracq, was already a well-travelled vehicle. In 1905, he drove it overland to Melbourne and around Tasmania, returning to Mudgee via Sydney and Jenolan Cavesⁱ).

A new bridge over the Thredbo River was opened in December 1907 and the motor road was approaching Kosciusko. Cars could travel to within 4 miles of the summit, making the return journey from the government's new Snowy River House (*aka* "The Creel"), opened in March 1907 at Thredbo, an easy day's outing, including walking or riding to the top of the mountain for lunch. Meanwhile, the government hospice, a substantial building 9 miles from Thredbo and 17 miles from the summit, was also well underway.

The new road was 16ft wide at its start and 12ft wide at the summit end with a hard granite gravel surface, with a general gradient of 1 in 14 and the steepest part 1 in 12, and though an almost continuous climb had few steep grades, most bends were generously laid out though there were a few narrow sections. It was found to be suitable even for low horsepower cars, a small De Dion was used by C W Oakes, MLA, in January 1908 to reach almost 3 miles from the summit. Within weeks of Oakes' drive the new road was completed all the way to the top of Kosciusko.

Another intending to drive the mountain in January 1908 was John Arnott, back again, this time in his powerful 40 hp Minerva. However, the time he intended to spend around Kosciusko was taken up with rescuing motorists and vehicles stranded at the flooded Umeralla (sic) River crossing north of Cooma and towing them into town.

The first motor cars to ascend all the way to the cairn on Kosciusko were meant to be the cars carrying Governor Sir Harry Rawson and party, which included motoring pioneer Herbert Garratt (of motor agency Garratt's Ltd.) in his 18 hp Clement Bayard and a 10 hp De Dion. They were however apparently trumped by Melbourne motorist, E F Miller and 5 passengers in his 30 hp Leon Bollee. Miller stated he drove the new road on March 13th and again on the 17th.



Miller's Leon Bollee, exhibited by the agents, Dalgetty's, at the April 1908 Sydney Royal Show. *Prominent Exhibits at the Royal Show.* (1908, April 22). The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW), p. 1067. Online <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article165393628> (The car was described as very handsome, finished in green enamel with bright brass fittings)

The Governor's motor group probably took "second place" with their successful trip on March 20, 1908, though Garratt continued to claim they were first, the Governor even naming Garratt's Clement Bayard "Kosciusko" in honour of the achievement. The new road's engineer supporting that claim by stating that a culvert necessary for vehicle access was not in place when Miller claimed to make the ascent. Miller countered with the offer to get statutory declarations from his passengers, who included the Creel's licensee, Hugh McIntosh.

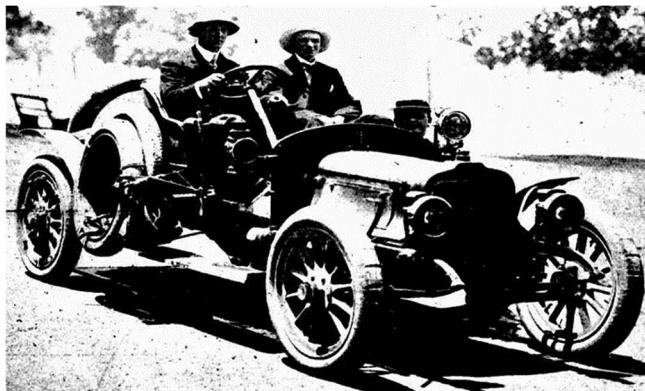
Third prize goes to Dame Eadith Walker, who was keen to motor to the summit and did so in atrocious conditions in early April in her 30/40 Itala. Governor General Northcote toured the area by car before Dame Edith but is recorded as going by car to Charlotte Pass then by horseback round and to the summit.

Eadith Walker's 30/40 Itala. *Allen Family Album.*
Image held by State Library of NSW.



Garratt returned in April 1908 with his FIAT 15/20 and another car. They encountered snow from 15 miles through to the summit, some in drifts feet deep. A snowstorm at the top beside the cairn required shovels to dig out the cars for the descent, and despite some very heavy going they made Thredbo that evening.

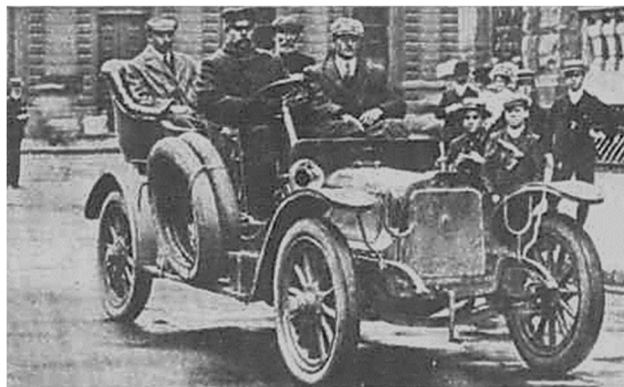
Noted Victorian motorist Harry James was perhaps the last to try driving up the mountain in the colder months of 1908. With 3 passengers in the Melbourne to Sydney record-breaking 15 hp Talbot, James found that heavy rain had made the road beyond the hospice construction site incredibly slippery, and despite his skills he gave up when the car slid over a culvert.



C B Kellow (driving) and Harry James in the Sydney to Melbourne record Talbot, January 1908. *Motoring*. (1908, January 23). *Table Talk* (Melbourne.), p. 29. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article145915817>

The winter months of 1908 thwarted other motorists keen to try the new mountain road, but by Spring, Mr P Winchcombe spoke highly of the road and scenery after driving his Minerva from Sydney in September, though snow drifts prevented him reaching the summit.

Among the summer motorists were Mr and Mrs Isaac Phizackerley in a 15 hp Talbot, using chains for the muddy conditions beyond the hospice due to heavy rains, "Phiz" otherwise found the road to be excellent. His Talbot had detachable back seats, which was not uncommon, and with these removed he used the space to carry naptha and their luggage.



Phizackerley's Talbot on the ACA's Motor Contest April 1909. AUTOMOBILE CLUBS RELIABILITY TRIAL. (1909, April 28). *The Sydney Mail* (NSW), p. 26. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article164293759>

Herbert Garratt returned again in April 1909 with two FIAT 15/20s and succeeded in getting his cars to 1/4 mile from the summit, after a lot of digging through snowdrifts. Almost, but not quite at the top!

The government hospice at Diggers Creek, on the winter snow line, was by now more enterprisingly named the Hotel Kosciusko (later known as Sponnar's) and was completed early in 1909. The Hotel was entirely built to the government design and contract, and first managed by Mr Stoye, formerly of the Australia and Metropole Hotels, Sydney. Guests were accepted early in the year,

Dr A L Kerr, of Granville, Mrs Kerr and nephew Mr Russell travelled from Sydney to Kosciusko in Kerr's roadster, Russell's photos capturing the January 1909 trip. They too found that the summit could be unpredictable, a mile or so from the top cairn they were overcome by a blizzard and a solid obstacle of a 6 foot wall of snow. They were appreciative of the, at that stage spartan, overnight accommodation at the hotel, which was nearing completion.



Kerr's roadster at the crossing at Paddy's river, which those using the Goulburn to Cooma route had to negotiate.



Hotel Kosciusko nearing completion, January 1909.



The Kerr party above the snowline, January 1909
 Images held by State Library of NSW
<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/9yM6aDz9/OD3d723pdvoRM>

The Hotel Kosciusko's official opening in June 7th 1909 by Governor, Lord Chelmsford, was attended by a substantial contingent of motorists, who found the new road somewhat less than ideal due to very heavy rainfall, necessitating the use in some sections of an old-school but functional "corduroy road", temporarily laid down by locals and hotel guests. The night after the opening the hotel was dusted with snow.



Hotel Kosciusko (Kosciuszko) - new building. Image held by Museums of History NSW. Online <https://flic.kr/p/CE5JQy>



Among those keen to try out the new hotel and the road were Melbournians, Harry James and fellow pioneer motorists, Tom Rand and W J Proctor. A few days after the official opening, and some decent snowfalls, they attempted to reach the summit in Rand's 35 hp FIAT, but could not get closer than 5 miles.

Digging the snow drift ahead of Tom Rand's car. *Coaching and Motoring on Kosciusko.* (1909, June 16). The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW), p. 31. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article164292180>

By July 1909, Percy Hunter, now Director of the Government Tourist Bureau, advised that the 50 bedroom hotel was regularly turning away bookings. The Tourist Bureau offered guided tours from Sydney to Kosciusko, winter and summer, when guests could enjoy accommodation with all modern conveniences plus recreational facilities, a lake, and access to skiing, hiking and fishing sites. With ample garaging, the hotel quickly attracted guests travelling by their own car. For those without a own vehicle the government service could include a highlight the new 8-passenger hire cars that ran daily from Cooma, road conditions permitting, as their timetable said, "Leave Cooma, 9.15; arrive Hotel Kosciusko, 12.30; lunch". Horse drawn coaches however continued to run from Thredbo, especially when the road was snowed under.

The Tourist Bureau introduced 2 new Clement Talbot cars in June 1909 to run from Cooma to the Hotel. Their inaugural drive was a special opportunity for paying passengers to travel from Sydney on May 29th.

Were the Clements before the FIATs?

the opportunity to travel from Sydney to the Hotel either in your own vehicle or one of the government's 2 new 8 passenger FIAT's, bookings of course with the Government Tourist Bureau!



<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/1JkoWAqY#viewer>

The NSW Tourist Bureau Clement Talbot's *The Start for Kosciusko from Tourist Bureau.* (1909) Original image held by NSW State Archives. Online at



Clement-Talbot motor car which runs from Cooma to Kosciusko.

Image held by Museums of History NSW. Online

https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/si1pi2/ADLIB_RNSW116029064



Governor and Lady Chelmsford with one of the Clement Talbot's at the entrance to the Hotel Kosciusko. *Official Opening of the New Hotel.* (1909, June 16). The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser (NSW), p. 27. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article164292158>

The procession of Sydney and Melbourne private motorists keen to drive the high country ramped up with the opening of the Hotel Kosciusko. Among them Reginald Gowing in his new Daimler Silent Knight, chauffeur driven, the first car to get through to the Hotel after the winter of 1909.

1909-1910 saw plenty of guests drive to the Hotel, including Mr and Mrs A V Dodwell, their 2 children and nurse, friend Dr Brockway and their chauffeur, Mr Jeffs, all in a 16 hp Standard in October 1910. What sets their journey apart was that the Dodwell party drove from Brisbane, enjoying an extended tour to the Hotel Kosciusko, a four-horse coach ride to near the summit, some tobogganning, and a return trip that included Kiandra, the compulsory visit to the Yarrongobily Caves and a look at the Federal Capital site and an uneventful drive back to Brisbane. Their journey was increasingly becoming typical of the motoring holiday to the high country.

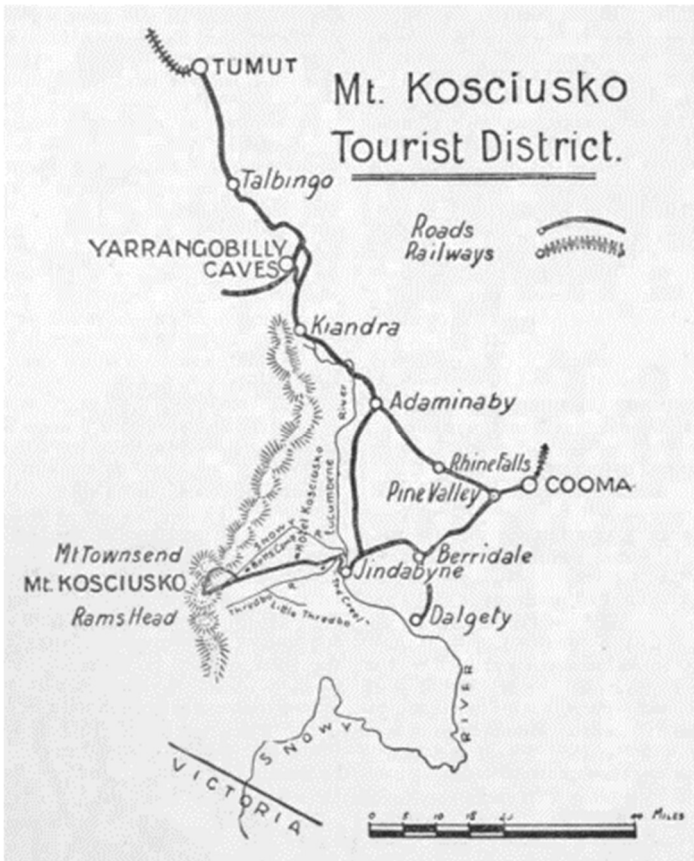
For those without their own vehicles the options had become quite exciting. As well as the rail and horse coach and riding excursions that had become popular with the opening of the Creel and then the Hotel Kosciusko regular motor car services had commenced

Local entrepreneurs switched from coaches and horse drawn drags to motor vehicles making the trip, as

FIAT motor car which ran from Cooma to Kosciusko. Image held by Museums of History NSW. Online



https://search.records.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/si1pl2/ADLIB_RNSW116029065



1909 tourist map. *The Lone hand* Vol. 5 No. 26 (1 June 1909) p.133. Held by the National Library of Australia. Online at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-402007884>



New South Wales. Government Tourist Bureau. (1909). *Sectional map of the motor road to Mt. Kosciusko* Held by the National Library of Australia. Online at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-234013107>

Note 1. I acknowledge that the name of our highest mountain is now spelt Kosciuszko, but have chosen to use the spelling prevalent in the period covered by my article, viz. 1900-1915.

Note 2. Apart from the inevitable question of what became of the various cars mentioned above, do any survive, perhaps with owners unaware of any Kosciusko connection, I wonder what became of the plaque affixed to Garratt's FIAT naming it "Kosciusko, christened by his Excellency Sir Harry Rawson, on Mount Kosciusko, March 20, 1908, being the first car to reach the summit.?"

Betts Camp with 3 cars, 2 are Renaults

https://digital.sl.nsw.gov.au/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?embedded=true&toolbar=false&dps_pid=IE1207528&_ga=2.211096151.359656078.1649887862-543235554.1649887862 From Dunphy photos

C.1917 Veteran cars on dirt road. Motor touring 'On Jindabyne Road', New South Wales. 1 is a 12 seater charabanc, the other a big tourer.

<https://collection.maas.museum/object/29272#&gid=1&pid=1>

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1909 FIAT - COOMA-MOUNT KOSCIUSKO MOTOR SERVICE. (1909, September 21). Evening News (Sydney, NSW : 1869 - 1931), p. 8. Retrieved March 12, 2022, from

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article114761844>. COOMA-KOSCIUSKO SERVICE. (1909, September 17). The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), p. 11. Retrieved March 14, 2022, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article15082027>

1909 FIAT Fiat motor car which ran from Cooma to Kosciusko

<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110106728>

<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110106730>.

<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110106733>.

<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110106729>

<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110106728>

Clement Talbot <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/nV2aNyEn/QoJyOB6AQQRvA>.

<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/YK58Wojn/xrkwBDqWqEqN6>

Renaults in front of Betts Camp, ca. 1910 <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-147474125> see also pg 20

https://khuts.org/images/stories/history/TouristsOnSummit_DScott_14aug2013.pdf

H Petersen and K Gjerstrup <http://www.monaropioneers.com/transport-mails.htm>

In 1910 called Monaro Motor Service Coy

https://khuts.org/images/stories/history/TouristsOnSummit_DScott_14aug2013.pdf

ⁱ A lovely photo of Dr Lester's Darracq being repaired beside the road on Cherry Tree Hill in 1906 can be viewed at <https://oldimagesrylstone.blogspot.com/2012/02/brooklyn-cherry-tree-hill-running.html>