

I say Kos-tuze-co, they say Koz-ee-os-co

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Well, what's in a name you might say? Ask those who live in W(h)anganui. And as for Mount Kosciuszko in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales, saying its name might be the biggest challenge it offers.

Whether pronounced the Polish way or the Australian way, getting up to Australia's highest point (2,228m) isn't the most difficult alpine excursion around. I went up with my partner Cathy who, while appreciating grand scenery, isn't a climber; two of my sons Ed and Will and my ex-climbing buddy (he defected to Canberra) Steve and wife Theresa in the second week of the July school holidays.



Snowshoeing across a rolling landscape – enjoying a clearing in the weather

To be honest, we cheated – taking the Kosciusko Express chairlift option from Thredbo up to 1,930 metres. From there it was just a six or so km plod over rolling snow fields to the top. Even so, it was mid-winter and still pretty chilly – not conditions to take lightly, especially as we plodded through whiteout for much of the excursion. GPS is a wonderful thing – we used it lots, especially nearer the summit mound where we were in complete whiteout.



Nearing the summit in a whiteout

When gathering local intel back down at the Jindabyne visitor centre (Jindabyne is to Thredbo what Ohakune is to Turoa) we were strongly advised that snowshoes were essential. We were also advised not to even try the route if it was cloudy. Hmm, I do dislike that dumbing down to the lowest common denominator, cover your arse attitude that can so easily discourage people from giving things a go. I took the first recommendation on board and dismissed the second.

So off we went to suss out the best price for snowshoe hire. This was well worth the effort. After some haggling, our first quote came in at AUD240 – that's not a fair suck of the sav cobber. So we tried at the store next door and, without even haggling, got our six pairs for AUD120 - bonza!

The drive up to Thredbo from Jindabyne only took half an hour. But beware, in busy times and when there's snow on the road it can take several hours. We chose the second week of the Kiwi school holidays for a reason – it meant we were there the week AFTER the Aussie school holidays finished.

At Thredbo it was still busier than we'd expected, so it took a bit of queueing to get our ski IDs (at AUD4 each, a bit of a rip for international visitors who are not going to be back again anytime soon) and lift passes organised. Still, we were at the top of the lift with snowshoes installed by 10am. The thousand or so metres of boring, skier dodging plodding we avoided was well worth the AUD35 per adult.

There is actually a metal grid platform running almost the entire way from the top of the lift to the base of Kosciuszko's summit, but it was mostly covered by snow. So we kept an eye on the GPS as we plodded.

I must admit that the snowshoes were a good idea. It was the first time any of us had used them and it made things much easier. Tip for young players though, don't try to go backwards in them. I did when trying to get into a better spot for a photo and very quickly hit the deck – they are designed to constantly drop down at the back so that the fronts don't catch the snow.



Our only company for the entire day – a kite powered snowboarder – pretty cool

We had virtually the entire route to ourselves and it took about two and half hours for our little party to reach the summit. Our view was a rather fancy permanent cairn and lots of swirling cloud. But it didn't matter, we'd had a worthy little family adventure, given snowshoes a go and summited Australia. And besides, now there's just the six other easy summits on the seven summits list to go.



On top of Australia – 2,228 metres above the Great Barrier Reef. Beauty Bruce

For more images and trip map – Occasionalclimber.co.nz

<http://www.occasionalclimber.co.nz/browse-images-2/other-high-places/australia-browse/mount-kosciuszko-july-2016/>