

## 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Alpine skiing in Australia.

Skis were known in Lapland countries as snow shoes for near 5000 yrs and were used for mobility, hunting, to fight wars and no doubt hold races. Snow shoes have varied many times in style and size, including a long and a short one, used in tandem. Most were generally equal in length, being over two metres long and turned up at both ends. They were similar to what we know today as a langlauf or cross country ski. After the start of the American gold rush, Norwegian miners took snow shoes to America, as they knew they would be mining in snow clad mountains. During the late 1850's the miners started experimenting with snow shoes for alpine skiing, they were up to five meters in length and christened Longboards. The first American ski club was later formed in 1867.

Within a few years other Norwegians chased their gold fortunes in the Australian Alps, the location soon become known as Kiandra. At least two of these Norwegians have been identified as snow shoe makers who had been working as ships carpenters on whale boats in our southern waters. Contrary to common belief, the first Australian snow shoes (skis) were not made using palings. Newspaper reports of 1861 illustrate that snow shoes were used in numbers with great skill. In August that year one man travelled over three miles in a storm, on snow shoes to take refuge in what he referred to as the Metropolis. Skis were known as snow shoes in Kiandra until after the turn of the century, but from here we will refer to them as skis.

In the summer of 1860/1861 the ski makers with the help of many others, produced scores of skis from timber collected from the lower slopes. They also manufactured over forty, seven foot long stout poles to act as a brake when placed between the legs and sat upon. An exhibition of their skills while travelling down hill as fast as a locomotive, was displayed in a carnival at the start of August 1861.

As a touring or hunting ski was not required, the Kiandra skis changed rapidly to suit the Australian Alps, bringing about a new sport known today as downhill skiing using a shortened broader ski. The local ski quickly became known as a Kiandra Kick-in, It was on this type of ski that the land down-under hosted the world's first documented International Ski Carnival, the year was 1908, sixteen years before the first winter Olympics. America won the event, a close second was Australia followed by England.

By 1887 downhill race winners for both women and children were regularly documented.

Organised downhill skiing had not commenced as a sport in Europe until over quarter of a century after Australia, starting with the formation of the first ski clubs in Europe, Germany 1891, followed two years later by Switzerland.

The Norwegian Holmenkollen Ski Museum in 2006 acknowledged that the first two ski clubs were the "Trysil Skytte og Skiloberforning" club and the Kiandra club both formed in 1861.

Recent research shows that the "Trysil" club was an association formed for the use of weapons and physical exercise. The Australian club is now recognised as the first identifiable ski club in the world, carrying with it the distinction of being the longest surviving of all ski clubs.

A more comprehensive account of this unique historic club can be found at ;  
[http://members.ozemail.com.au/~sealark/skiing\\_history.html](http://members.ozemail.com.au/~sealark/skiing_history.html) (No w.w.w.)

Norman W Clarke.  
KPSC (1861) Historian.