

Thredbo self-guided road collapse walk

You will need to allow approximately 1 to 2 hours to complete the full walk or you can do sections of the walk as time permits. The full walk is suitable for anyone with a medium level of fitness.

On 30 July 1997 at 11.40 pm a section of the road above Thredbo collapsed causing the destruction of 2 buildings and the subsequent loss of 18 lives. This informative walk takes you along the Thredbo River and winds up through the village to several viewing areas of the road collapse site. At the height of the walk you will walk to the top of the village on the Kosciuszko Alpine Way.

1 Bobsled Deck

The walk begins at the Valley Terminal on the walking path that passes the tennis courts. Follow the signs from the Valley Terminal car park past the tennis courts to the Thredbo Bobsled. Walk up the ramp to the take off platform of the Thredbo Bobsled.

Looking from this platform across the river towards Thredbo gives a good appreciation of how the village has been laid out between the Thredbo River in front of you and the Kosciuszko Alpine Way above the village at the back.

The Kosciuszko Alpine Way is the only road linking the eastern and western sides of the Great Dividing Range in the southern section of the Kosciuszko National Park. It runs between Jindabyne and Khancoban and was built in the 1950's to allow construction access to the Murray 1 and 2 hydro-electric power stations during the construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme. It was built as a short term road before Thredbo was established.

Once the power stations were completed, the Snowy Mountains Authority upgraded the road with fill and planted vegetation on the downhill hillside. Maintenance of the road was then transferred to the then Kosciusko State Park Trust, later to become the Kosciuszko National Park.

View from bobsled



2 The Lower Observation Point

Continue along the walking path, passing the start of the Merritts Nature Track. Stop just after the metal grid just past the two yellow posts and look across the valley.

This observation point gives a direct view of where the road collapse occurred and the subsequent stabilisation and revegetation works. It was from this point that the television crews covered the story of the road collapse and the rescue of the only survivor, Stuart Diver.

At the rear of the site is a series of gabion rock retaining walls that have been constructed to stabilise the site after the Kosciuszko Alpine Way collapsed onto it and also to support the Kosciuszko Alpine Way above. Two lodges were located on the site. The original foundations of the upper lodge, Carinya, can be seen to the left at the top of the site.

Nothing remains of the second lodge Bimbadeen. Bimbadeen was located below Carinya, separated by Bobuck Lane, which is now supported by the large concrete retaining wall visible running across the middle of the site. Eighteen people were in Bimbadeen and one person was in Carinya on the night of the collapse. Seventeen people lost their lives in Bimbadeen and one person in Carinya.

The road collapse pushed Carinya Ski Lodge onto the Bimbadeen Staff Apartments, destroying both buildings. Rescuers were hampered in the early stages of the rescue operation due to the potential for further land movements and an underground stream exposed by the collapse of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way embankment. This stream had to be diverted before significant rescue operations could begin.

The area has now been stabilized with extensive engineering works in the form of retaining walls, drainage and revegetation with native grasses, bushes and trees. The buildings at the base of the site were fortunate to escape damage.

View of site from lower observation point



The Commemorative Platform



3 The Commemorative Platform

Continue approximately 40 meters along the path to the "T" intersection with another path, turn right to go down to Friday Drive and then right again at the base of the stairs, crossing the metal pedestrian bridge over the Thredbo River. Immediately after you cross the river, carefully cross the road and climb the steps up onto Bobuck Lane.

Turn left at the top of the steps and climb up Bobuck Lane, which turns steeply up to the right. Continue along Bobuck Lane until you come to the edge of the memorial site, just past Leatherbarrel Lodge. Partially cross the site and stand off the road on the landing at the top of the stairs that descend onto the commemorative platform.

From this point you can look up to the top of the site and clearly see the stonework of the remaining foundations of Carinya Lodge and the gabion retaining wall of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way at the top of the site. The lower portion of the former Bimbadeen foundations ended at a point adjacent to the bottom of the lower contemplation platform.

Continue down the stairs onto the lower contemplation platform. This is a place for quiet contemplation overlooking the site.

At this very special site care has been taken to retain existing snow gums (eucalyptus pauciflora) and black sallees (eucalyptus stellulata). Several other eucalypt species native to the region have also been planted. All of these have been propagated from seeds collected under license from the Kosciuszko National Park and are representative of the flora of the region, some being endemic to Australia's alpine region.

Over time this will become a magnificent memorial garden with the colours of the wildflowers and multi-coloured trunks of the snow gums filling the site. Eighteen main posts were used in the construction of the commemorative platform signifying the eighteen lives lost.

4 The Upper Observation Point

When ready, return back up to Bobuck Lane and continue right, past the site along Bobuck Lane to the upper observation platform above Winterhaus where you can study the rehabilitation features of the site. To access the top of the site walk approximately 100 metres past Aneeki, Karas and Mittabah lodges and climb the stairs on your left between Mittabah and Pindari lodges at Bela's Corner. Look for the large sign directing you up to Winterhaus Lodge.

As you climb the stairs you will note newly planted vegetation in the gully on your right. These were planted after the drainage in the gully was replaced following the road collapse. A total of five such drainage lines throughout the village were replaced during the two years following the road collapse to ensure that all stormwater runoff is channeled in a controlled manner and directed to the Thredbo River.

Continue up the stairs to the front of Winterhaus and then continue climbing past the left hand side of the building to the blue steel steps that lead onto the Kosciuszko Alpine Way.

Below the blue steps is a good location to observe the construction of a gabion wall. Each rock is hand stacked into the wire baskets to produce a solid structure. Gabion walls allow the drainage of ground water through them but have similar retaining properties to reinforced concrete retaining walls. The walls are founded on engineered concrete footings and constructed from individual wire mesh "baskets" that are tied together with wire and then packed with stones. The baskets are then tied back into compacted earth behind the baskets, forming a gravity retaining structure.

At the top of the steps, turn left along the elevated concrete car parks and walk past Tyrola Apartments and Schuss Ski Club to the top of the memorial site.

On the night of 30 July 1997, the two buildings of Bimbadeen and Carinya lodges became involved in the collapse of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way embankment. The embankment collapsed under pressure from ground water that was contributed to by poor drainage and the original construction technique of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way embankment. Carinya Lodge was pushed by the collapsing embankment into the lodge below and both Bimbadeen Staff Apartments and Carinya were completely destroyed.

The tragedy occurred late at night when most residents were in bed. Over 2000 cubic metres of liquefied soil took barely a few seconds to move 250 metres. The Carinya building was pushed downhill with such force that it crossed Bobuck Lane and ploughed into Bimbadeen, causing the building's total collapse.



Gabion Walls

Immediately after the failure of the embankment and the collapse of the buildings, the whole area was considered so unstable with an underground stream pouring torrents of cold icy water through the remains of the two lodges, that rescuers were hampered by the possibility of further collapse of remaining walls and concrete floors.

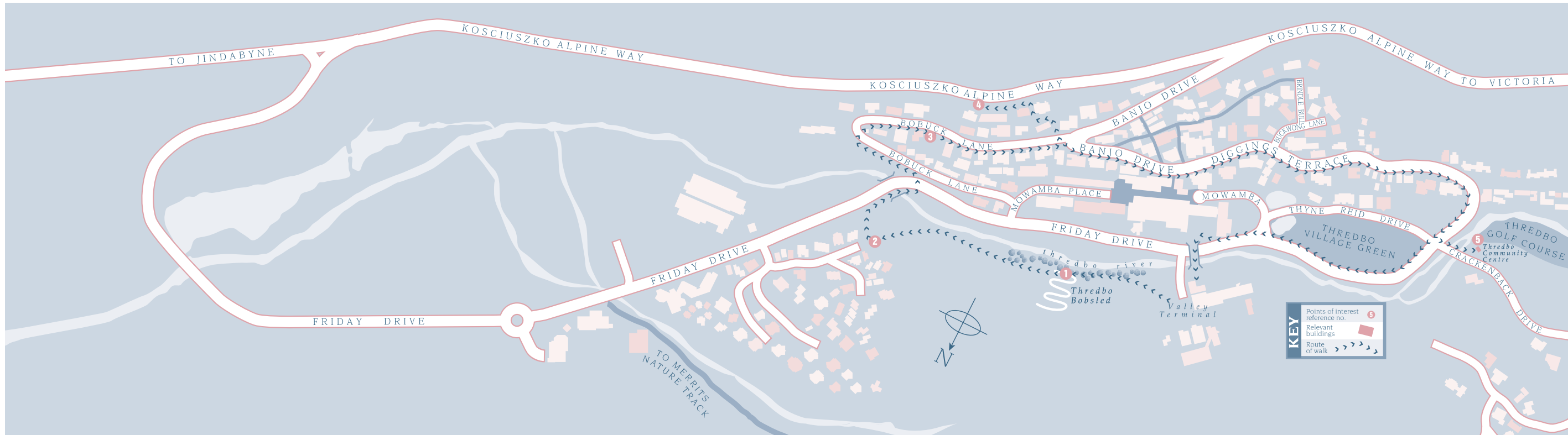
The emergency rescue effort in Thredbo brought volunteers and specialists together from all over Australia. They worked night and day to clear the debris from the two lodges and prevent further mishap. The State Emergency Service rotated 1350 crew with about 250 on the site at any one time.

The magnitude of the stabilisation work is evident from this viewing point. The gabion walls extend as far as the eye can see on both sides of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way. Approximately \$AUD24 million was spent on this extensive work.

Half way down the site, visible between the native plants, you can make out the lower flooring of the original Carinya lodge.

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Thredbo self-guided memorial walk



THREDBO

5 The Thredbo Memorial Community Centre

Return to the floor of the valley walking at a leisurely pace back down the stairs past Winterhaus. Turn left at the bottom of the stairs and continue down Diggings Terrace to the Thredbo Memorial Community Centre.

As this section of the walk is approximately 1 kilometre, you may wish to break your walk at the town centre and enjoy food or drink in the Village Square. The shops are accessible by turning right down the orange paved stairs at the stainless steel "Diggings Terrace" sign. At the end of Diggings Terrace opposite the duck ponds, turn left and cross the Thredbo River on the Crackenback Drive bridge to the Chapel and Community Centre.

The Community Centre was built with funds from both Federal and State governments plus donations from the Thredbo community and the general public as both a memorial to the tragedy and for the future people of Thredbo. It contains the Thredbo Early Childhood Centre downstairs with a library and a multi purpose hall, which is available for hire. A memorial stone at the entrance displays the names of the eighteen people who lost their lives in the road collapse.



Across the road is the John Paul II Ecumenical Chapel. Times for services are given on the front doors.

A coroner's inquest was conducted into the events surrounding the road collapse. The Inquest found that: "The causes of the tragic deaths, which occurred as a result of that landslide, are complex."

The Coroner concluded that at the time of the road collapse, no individual government authority had responsibility for the maintenance of the Kosciuszko Alpine Way.

The fill embankment was in a marginally stable state at the time due in the main to it being originally built as a construction access road by the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Authority, not the public road it subsequently became.

Funding constraints on the National Parks and Wildlife Service limited what could be done to maintain roads operationally. The National Parks and Wildlife Service had been "inheriting roads not designed for the purpose to which they were later put".

From a position adjacent to the Community Centre, you can view the entire valley as it narrows to the west towards Dead Horse Gap, then as you view the village you can understand why this site was chosen for a snow sports resort. You can in fact gain a magnificent view of the whole valley and surrounds with a trip up the Chairlift to the restaurant and lookout. If you haven't already done this, it is highly recommended as a way to understand the landscape and location.

Return to the Valley Terminal by returning across the bridge, turning left onto Friday Drive and following the road for approximately 400m.

In memory of those who lost their lives:

Dianne Ainsworth	John Cameron	Barry Decker
Sally Diver	Dianne Hoffman	Werner Jecklin
Oskar Luhn	Andrew McArthur	Stephen Moss
Wendy O'Donohue	Mary Phillips	Aino Senbruns
Michael Sodergren	Mariam Sodergren	Steven Urosevic
Colin Warren	David Watson	Anthony Weaver