

Controversies over the name of Mount Kosciuszko

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The story we are going to tell is about visibility of the highest peak of the continental Australia, Mt Kosciuszko (2228 m), from all directions around because this is the key to understanding where all the troubles with naming of the mountain came from. The tourism industry is another factor.

Tourism Industry in Australia became an important component of Australian economy. In the year to June 2019, there were over 8.5 million international visitors in Australia, an increase of 3% from 2018. Tourism contributed 8.0% of Australia's total export earnings in 2010-11. Australian Alps with the highest Australian continental peak, Mt Kosciuszko belong to the **icons** attracting tourists [1,2]. Often over 1000 tourists visit Mt Kosciuszko on summer weekend days.

Clearly the walk from Thredbo is the most popular one. Chair lifting over 560 m to level 1930 m [3], then a comfortable walk 5 km over elevated steel mesh way to Rawson Pass (2124 m) with ecological toilets brings you to the final 1.5 km on a maintained road to the top of Australia. The metal walkways have been built in the 1980's. What a cute description of the walk has been found on the internet.

Climbing Mount Kosciuszko is worth doing. It is pleasant. It is easy. It is hugely enjoyable. And, when you have done it, you can bask in the glory that once you stood on the highest point between the Andes and the East African Plateau. Just don't tell anyone you had to walk up a 4 degree slope to achieve the feat. I should point out that when I did the walk in 2000 I was overtaken by a one-legged man. So don't try and tell anyone that it is difficult.[4]

Another popular walk to the roof of Australia is from Charlotte Pass. It follows a 9 km mountain road built in 1906-9. Until 1982 it was accessible even for cars. So, it is relatively easy and no wonder it has immensely contributed to Kosciuszko becoming a tourist icon.

Ok, but how it was in 1840 when the Strzelecki-Macarthur expedition decided to reach the highest point of Mungah - Snowy Mountains? Thredbo and Jindabyne where 40 km apart, with no roads and the latter distant over 40 km from Mt Kosciuszko. In 1840 neither of them was even settlers' station. The highest peak, Mt Kosciuszko, was not visible from these South-East (S-E) locations. Strzelecki and Macarthur approached the Mountains from the opposite direction, from the North-West (N-W), from Welaregang via Geehi valley [5]. Could they see The Highest Peak from a distance?

To understand the wiggled story of naming the highest Australian mountain we have to realize that Mt Kosciuszko is not easily visible either from distance or from the most popular local tourist locations (*). On the path from Thredbo you need to take a chair lift and walk about 2 km to the Kosciuszko Lookout to have a glimpse onto the Mount not differing in height from surrounding ridges. On the path from Jindabyne Mt Kosciuszko is visible only starting from the Charlotte Pass Lookout. It is not visible from the nearby popular skiing resort, from Perisher Valley. And, eventually, wherever you can see it you can't tell which of the surrounding peaks of almost equal height is the highest. In the 19th century, even with the use of instruments the

dispute lasted over 50 years. In the Snowies we have 23 named peaks between 2000 and 2228 m high. [6]

What about the N-W locations like Welaregang, Tumbarumba, Khancoban or Corriiong? The locals in Tumbarumba proudly claim that Kosciuszko is visible from the higher parts of the town.

We visited a number of these places, curious of what Strzelecki could have seen or known about the highest peak of the Snowies prior to climbing it on 12th March 1940 – 180 years ago. The most promising spot to see Kosciuszko was the Farran's Lookout [7]. The tourist information there includes a telescopic photo of a ridge on the horizon with an arrow showing on the map where Mt Kosciuszko is located, see Fig. 3. I took my own photos with a Nikon Coolpix P9000 zooming up to 83 times and studied the magnified pictures at home on a big screen.

It was not clear where Kosciuszko was located on the horizon in the Snowy Mountains ridge. My friend Eugene Kędziora came to my rescue showing me how to use Google Earth Pro [8] to find the answer. The result was surprising: Mt Kosciuszko is visible neither from Tumbarumba (crossing of Albury St, Boundary St and Masons Hill Rd, 700 m), nor from Welaregang Station (300 m), nor from the Welaregang spot (240 m) where Strzelecki was starting from to reach the highest point of the Snowies, nor from Tintaldra (240 m), Farran's Lookout (280 m) nor Corriiong (300 m), see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. It is barely visible from the top of Tumbarumba Hill (1112 m) and from the top of Mount Mitta Mitta (1003 m). Thought visible from the latter two hills, it shows up only in a telescopic magnification as a barely noticeable spot behind the Townsend (2209 m) – Abbott (2155 m) range. The Townsend – Abbott range dominates the Snowy Mountains ridge seen from N-W and is hiding Mt Kosciuszko located behind. You must climb from Geehi to the Abbott - Townsend ridge to see the ridge Mueller's-Kosciuszko-Rams Head in the full beauty. From the N-W Mt Townsend looks the highest in the range, wherever the range is visible. The northern part, over 2000 m of the Snowy range from Dicky Cooper Bogong to Mt Twynam is also visible from a distance and is particularly impressive when covered in snow.

These observations confirm what we learn from the reports by Strzelecki and James Macarthur [9,10]. Aboriginal guide Jacky, hired at Welaregang, lead them to the peak now known as Mt Townsend. Like at present, also in 1840 this peak from N-W looked the highest in the range. Spencer's letter of 1885 suggests that local people even 45 years after Strzelecki believed that the highest visible from N-W peak of the range is the highest one in the Snowies and, consequently, that it bears Kosciuszko's name [11,12]. So, they probably incorrectly advised the Victorian Cartographers making around 1870 their own triangulation of the NSW-Victorian borders [12]. The result was an incorrect map on which the name *Mt Kosciusko* was placed where the peak now named Mt Townsend is located. Notice also the names *Kosciuszko Creek* on the slopes of Mt Townsend (a tributary of Geehi River) and *Strzelecki Creek* between Mt Sentinel and Watsons Crags [13]. Both creeks are closer to Mt Townsend, away from Mt Kosciuszko and their location fits to the presented here explanation.

These local beliefs seem surviving even until now and can be recognized in recent John Casey's (of Tumbarumba) press interview [14]. Casey claims that his grand-mother and great-grand-mother were referring to Mt Kosciuszko as Kunama Namadgi – A Big Snowy Mountain. However, his grand-mother could not see Mt Kosciuszko neither from Adaminabe nor from Tumbarumba. The impressive white mountain which she could have seen could have been either Mount Jagungal (2061 m), or the top ridge of the Snowy Mountains, or its highest point visible from N-W – Mt Townsend (2209 m). The contemporary tourist icon, Mt Kosciuszko, is not visible from the valleys of Tumbarumba – Adaminabe region, see Fig.1 and Fig. 2. From the height of local hills, Mt Kosciuszko may barely be visible but definitely not as an impressive snowy mountain. Thus, it is hard to believe that Mt Kosciuszko was the Holy Mount to which John Casey was referring to. Kosciuszko could not and cannot be seen from distant valleys (*) but even seen in a close range but without instruments it is impossible to determine that it is indeed the highest peak.

Casey further claims, *'we believe Father God came down and landed on top of it, as he did on snowy peaks around the world, and gave us the laws to live by'*. This resembles the biblical story of Moses and Ten Commandments. We have not come across a notion of the highest mountain in the stories about Dreaming Time. We strongly support our Ngarigo Friends, the traditional custodians of the Monero land on which Mt Kosciuszko is located. We admire and value their culture [15]. We believe that their pre-history and history is rich enough and need not be replaced with something what only *looks* Aboriginal.

No doubt, however, the dual naming may have some commercial value to the tourist industry.

Let me finish the story by reminding that the incorrect Victorian map of 1870 had lead 45 years after Strzelecki to rediscovering the highest peak of Australia by an Austrian explorer Von Lendenfeld who proposed to name it Mt Townsend [12]. The NSW authorities spotted and clarified his mistake but accepted the name Mt Townsend for the second highest mountain. Both mountains bear their names to date. There has never been any swap of names as sometimes one can read on the internet.

The final addition to the troubles with the name was a successful 1997 campaign to add 'z' to its original name *Kosciusko* [16]. The present name '*Kosciuszko*' remains (almost) consistent with Polish name spelling of this American, Polish, Bielarussian and Lithuanian hero and fighter for equal rights and democracy – Tadeusz Kościuszko.

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(*) *The West direction from Mt Kosciuszko is exceptional. Mt Kosciuszko can be seen in telescopic photos taken from Mt Pinnibar or even from a 130 km distant Mt Buffalo. However, this beautiful and wild part of Australian Alps enjoys very low population and does not have any easy access to the highest peak.*

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Fig. 1. The strait line from Farran's Lookout to the top of Mt Kosciuszko passes underground the Abbott-Mount du Faur ridge. So, Mt Kosciuszko cannot be seen from the lookout. (The picture produced using Google Earth Pro)

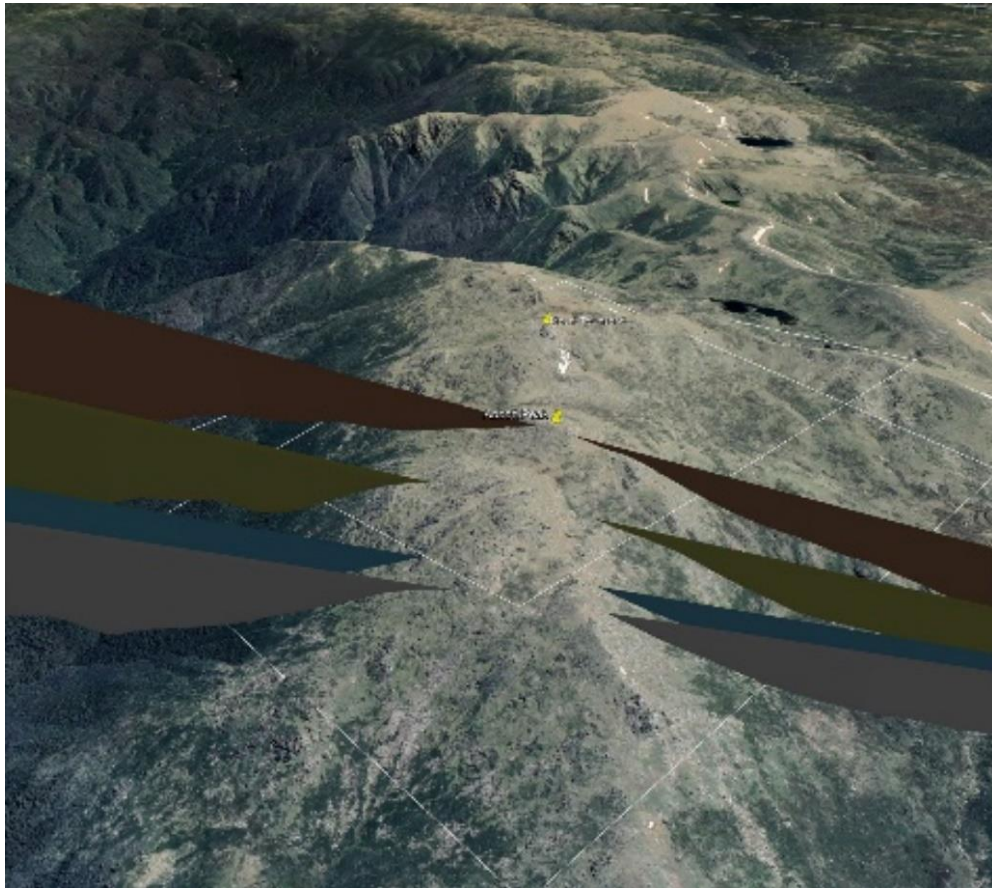


Fig. 2. Strait lines (from left, respectively) starting from Tintaldra Hotel, Welaregang, Welaregang Station and Tumbarumba (crossing of Albury, Boundary, Adelong streets) to the top of Mt Kosciuszko pass underground the Abbott-Mount du Faur ridge. So, Mt Kosciuszko cannot be seen from these locations. (The picture produced using Google Earth Pro)

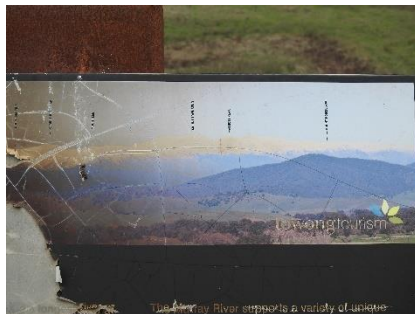


Fig. 3. Tourist information displays at Farran's Lookout on 2019-05-20 (left) and on 2019-12-06 (right) showing location of Mt Kosciuszko in the Snowy Mountain (Munyang) ridge.



Fig. 4 Sunset over Mt Kosciuszko – a view from the East.



Fig. 5 Mt Kosciuszko in the middle, photo taken from North Ram by Paul Ma. A view from the South.



Fig. 6 A view from the North-West on the Mt Townsend-Abbott Peak range.
Mt Kosciuszko is hidden behind the right part of the ridge



Fig. 7 Mt Kosciuszko in the middle of the photo taken from Mt Townsend by Paul Ma. A view from the North.