

GEOFFREY HUGHES (1928 – 2017)

Geoffrey Hughes, a Sydney lawyer and a visionary, enthusiastic skier, who at the age of 27 became a member of the newly formed Kosciusko Chairlift and Thredbo Motel Syndicate which had its birth at the Charlotte Pass Chalet in 1956.

Born in May, 1928 in Sydney, he is the son of Geoffrey Forrest Hughes, a World War I decorated pilot, lawyer and Company Director. Like his father and brother he became a lawyer. Young Geoffrey's introduction to skiing was during family winter holidays with siblings, Thomas, Constance and Robert, spent at the Hotel Kosciusko. Not long after the Second World War he became a member of the Ski Tourers' Association, serving as chairman of the Northcote Ski Tow sub-committee. He was an active alpine competitor and represented NSW in many competitions in the mid-1950's. Geoffrey heard that Charles Anton, Tony Sponar and Eric Nicholls were talking about starting a ski resort in the Thredbo Valley. He was invited to participate in the project and became instrumental in negotiating the 99-Year lease with the NSW Government. In the original syndicate he was the largest shareholder with 40% of the shares – the others owning 20% each. He was also tasked with finding further funding for the development of Thredbo and did so by bringing Thyne Reid in as an investor. Andrew Thyne Reid who was the Chairman of James Hardy Asbestos at the time.

With the Syndicate consisting of Charles Anton, Tony Sponar, Thyne Reid and himself, needing uphill transport for the resort opening at beginning of the 1957 ski season, inventive Geoffrey set about designing a drive station with parts from the Northcote Tow Hut which had been destroyed by fire in 1956, for a rope tow up Crackenback. The rope tow was built in 1957 by the members of the first club lodge in Thredbo, the Crackenback Ski Club of which Geoffrey was a founding member.

By 1958, the Syndicate formed a company known as Kosciusko Thredbo Limited and issued shares which raised a small amount of capital, and backed by Thyne Reid, the first chairlift was built by Transfield. The company's first profit was in 1961 but unable to raise sufficient capital to build the required hotel and other resort facilities, the Company was sold to Lend Lease in 1962. Geoffrey's life is charmed – he avoided death, when due to his marriage to Dawn and a trip to New Zealand, he was unable to occupy the bed allocated to him at the time of the Mt. Clarke avalanche in 1956 when Kunama Hutte was destroyed and Roslyn Wesche, who was sleeping in the allocated bed, died. His next escape came when he had a serious injury while training in Thredbo with Leonhard Erharter for the upcoming Interdominion Races against New Zealand, where he was to be competing in the Australian alpine team. He recovered fully from the very serious injuries and had a long and successful career as a commercial lawyer in Sydney. He is one of only 12 people in the 1950's to have earned the "Golden Eagle" which was awarded for completing a downhill speed event in the requisite time on Mt. Northcote. Other winners of the Golden Eagle included Charles Anton, Christine Davy and Tony Sponar. Added to Geoffrey's legacy in the establishment of Thredbo, his passion for photography (it would appear that he wore a camera around his neck on many occasions) has resulted in an interesting pictorial history of early Thredbo and the main range. Many of these images are included in his book "Starting Thredbo." His family remain keen skiers and still own property in Thredbo today.