

Our proud history

# Women of the Snowy Scheme

During the construction of the Snowy Scheme, men outnumbered women because of the tough labouring nature of the majority of the jobs and social acceptance of gender job division for the era. Although there were fewer women who worked on the construction of the Snowy Scheme, the women who did played a significant role. Women also provided the essential foundational support to the Snowy workforce at home and played a significant role building a community.

## + Doctors



Dr Ina Berents was the doctor at Cabramurra, the highest township in Australia at the time. It was tough going as, during the winter, many of the mountain roads were closed. Dr Berents' patients varied from mothers giving birth, to men with injuries from tunnelling accidents.

## Teachers



One difficulty facing many migrants from non-English speaking countries was communication. The Snowy Mountains Authority employed 38 English teachers, running regular classes for the workers in the evenings. As well as teaching English, teaching staff were needed across the Snowy towns and camps to cater for the children of Snowy workers.



## 'The Duchess'

According to Snowy folklore, an endearing personality was Georgina McQuade, the accommodation officer at Cabramurra. The story goes that on the day of her arrival, Cabramurra was experiencing extreme weather conditions with heavy snow falls. She walked into a packed canteen of workers at the end of a day's shift. Suddenly, in the middle of the noise and boisterous activity, the workers saw a vision in stiletto heels and a stylish, flowing outfit enter the room. The entrance was so dramatic and out of place that the room fell silent, as she became the centre of attention.

Georgina believed a lady should maintain her standards, whatever the situation. She dressed up for every occasion in the most stylish fashion of the day and dyed her hair every possible colour. Her quest for elegance in adversity set an example that others followed. Engineers started arriving at social functions in dinner jackets (but still in gum boots) and their wives would appear in the latest city fashions. In fact, Cabramurra had its fair share of magazine features about the social events. Georgina earned the affectionate, life-long nickname of **'The Duchess'**.

## ► Fast fact

Women also contributed to a significant number of secretarial, telegraphy, catering and cleaning roles.



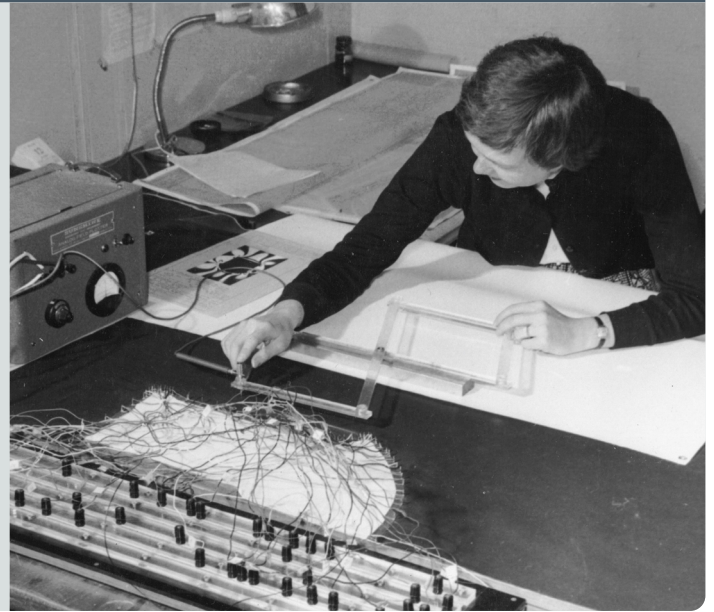
## Architects

A woman was the first architect employed in 1950, contributing to construction design on the mighty Snowy Scheme.

## Drafters and engineers

Women led the drafting unit in the early days and there were also female engineers. As drafters, the women were responsible for filling in technical details of the design using drawings, rough sketches, specifications, and calculations made by engineers, surveyors, architects, or scientists. These drawings and specifications were used to physically construct the Scheme.

Ildi Botka, one of the female engineers, undertook hydrological investigations, flood studies, sediment and evaporation studies, melted snow water forecasting and even wrote computer programs!



## Nurses



During the construction of the Snowy Scheme, Sister Passmore was a bush nurse based in Jindabyne. She was instrumental in treating a diverse range of medical issues for the workforce and the growing community.

## Scientists



Scientists played a key role during the construction of the Snowy Scheme. From analysing cement, to micro-distillation and dust counting, the scientists' work was incredibly diverse.