

Our proud history

Introduction to history



The Snowy Scheme launch



Adaminaby – 17 October 1949

Prime Minister Ben Chifley watches on as Nelson Lemmon, Minister for Works and Housing, announces the launch of the Snowy Scheme, the largest engineering project undertaken in Australia.



The first power



Guthega Power Station – 23 April 1955

Prime Minister Robert Menzies turning the switch to produce the first power, officially bringing the Snowy Scheme to life and dispelling any public doubts about the worth of the project.



The beginning

- 💧 The original vision of the Scheme was to offset the effects of drought, by diverting water westward for irrigation and simultaneously harnessing the potential for generating hydro-electricity.
- 💧 A 1944 committee of State and Commonwealth parliamentarians was formed to examine, from a national point of view, development of water resources of the Snowy Mountains region.
- 💧 In July 1949, the Commonwealth Parliament passed the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Power Act. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority was established as the operating body of the Snowy Scheme.
- 💧 Built between 1949 and 1974, the Scheme took 25 years to build and was rated one of the civil engineering wonders of the modern world.
- 💧 The first Commissioner was Sir William Hudson, a visionary ahead of his time, who served from 1949-67 (knighted in 1955).

► Innovation - fast facts

- 💧 The Snowy design team further developed the technique of rock bolting, a safer and cheaper alternative to concrete-lining for supporting rock in tunnel walls. Rock drill designs and drilling techniques also influenced the design of the modern masonry drill bit.
- 💧 In December 1959, a decade before the rest of the country, Commissioner Sir William Hudson made wearing seatbelts compulsory for all Snowy Scheme workers.
- 💧 SNOCOM, Australia's first transistorised computer and one of the first dozen computers in the world, was used by Scheme engineers for complex design calculations from 1960-67.



Smiggins Hole camp, below Kosciuszko



1951

Tent camps provided very basic living conditions for the first work crews to prepare construction sites for reservoirs, dams and tunnels.



People power

During construction, eight regional townships and more than 100 temporary camps were established throughout the Snowy Mountains.

Over 100,000 men and women from more than 30 countries worked on the Scheme.

Many workers came from war-torn Europe through the Commonwealth Government's immigration scheme. It was a great social achievement and the birth of multiculturalism in Australia.

For the first years of construction, hundreds of workers lived in tents. Many preferred this to overcrowded huts in the townships.

Tunnelling records were set during construction, with the project coming in on-time and within budget.



Eucumbene - Tumut Tunnel



1955



Construction

Drillers from all over the world constructed tunnels through the Snowy Mountains, diverting water to irrigation areas along the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers.



Tantangara Dam



1959