The Snowy Mountains Scheme

What is the Snowy Mountains Scheme?

1. **Where is it located? Describe the area and mark it on the map.**

The Snowy Mountains Scheme is located in the Australian Alps south of Sydney and Canberra. The Snowy Mountains is rugged land with delicate river systems such as the Snowy River.

2. **When was it built?**

Initial planning and construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme began in 1949 and was completed 25 years later in 1974, costing around $820 million dollars.

3. **Why was it built?**

The Snowy Mountain Scheme was built to supply the much needed water to the farming and agricultural sectors of inland New South Wales and Victoria. It also generates power stations for about ten per cent of all New South Wales’ electricity usage.

4. **Who built it?**

The Snowy Mountains Scheme was built by the hundred thousand post-war immigrants from Europe. Over 7,000 new Australians worked on the scheme at any one time. Most of the immigrants sought work in the tough conditions to earn money for their families.

5. **What are the major features of the Scheme?**

This scheme features the work of the thousands of European workers and is the world’s most complex hydro-electric system. Only 2% of the project is above the surface whilst containing sixteen major dams, seven power stations, a pumping station and 225 kilometres of tunnels, pipelines and aqueducts.

**How long did it take to build?**

- **1949**
  - End of WW2
  - Planning for Snowy Mountains Scheme

- **1950**
  - Construction begins, mass migration from Europe

- **1960-67**
  - First transitorised computer used

- **1974**
  - Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric Scheme completed
Who were the people who built the Snowy Scheme?

1. Why did people come from overseas to work on the Scheme?

Nearly all of the workers on the Snowy Mountains Scheme were overseas migrants. These people mostly came from Europe as they wanted a new beginning after the Second World War. Although work conditions were often difficult on the Scheme, it was a good source of income for many migrants.

2. List 10 countries migrants came from:
   - America
   - Norway
   - France
   - Belgium
   - Sweden
   - Britain
   - Italy
   - Japan
   - Germany
   - New Zealand

3. What jobs did they do? What skills did they bring with them?

Migrant workers formed tunnelling crews along with teams which constructed dams and power stations, stringing high voltage transmission lines across rugged country, and paving in over 1600 kilometres of roads. Workers also built campsites and townships. The migrants themselves were a wash with skills ranging from professional services to brute force. Regardless of their native country, all workers had a common objective: to finish the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

4. Who was the first commissioner responsible for the construction of the Snowy Scheme? What role did he play?

The first commissioner for the Snowy Scheme was New Zealander, Sir William Hudson. His role was to coordinate the construction process while encouraging and leading the workers.

How has the Snowy Scheme changed Australia?

1. Physical

How did the Snowy Mountains Scheme change the physical shape of the land?

The construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme resulted in the damming of the Snowy River, leading to soil erosion. Most of the surrounding areas were flooded as a result of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric systems.

2. Environmental

What impact had the Snowy Scheme had on Australia’s environment?
The flooding of surrounding areas has resulted in the loss of habitat for many animal species and a drastic reduction of water flow in the Snowy River. The Snowy River carries only 1% of the water that flowed through it before the scheme was built.

3. Social – Cultural

**How did the Snowy Mountains Scheme change the food, clothing, sports and lifestyle in Australia?**

The construction of the Snowy Mountains Scheme required the skills of tens of thousands of workers and at such time which Australia did not have enough. The post-war migration to Australia provided most of the workforce which not only constructed the Scheme but forged Australia into a new multicultural society with the native food, dress, and assorted lifestyles.

4. Economic

**What impact has the Snowy Scheme had on the economy?**

The influx of migrants during the construction of the Scheme brought their own cultural items and many migrants especially of the Italian origin set up their own businesses. Shops and other businesses boomed in surrounding townships such as Cooma during the building of the Snowy Scheme. In 2006, the government decided not to privatise the Scheme as it was part of Australia’s heritage icons.

1. **What is the impact of the provision of hydroelectric power to the national grid?**

Since hydro-electricity is environmentally friendly, it is able to supply about 7% of power consumers in NSW. Over 75% of water in the Snowy Catchment is used for power generation or irrigation.

2. **What is the impact of the provision of water for irrigation on food production?**

Irrigation is one of the key beneficiaries of the Snowy Scheme as it is situated west of the Great Dividing Range, meaning that agricultural production now had a reliable source of water especially in the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems.

3. **What is the impact of the Snowy Scheme on recreation, tourism and skiing?**

Prior to the construction of the Snowy Scheme, the Snowy Mountains was a remote and mostly untouched place with few permanent residents. Today many people visit the Snowy Mountains as part of a large tourism industry. Over 3 million people visit the Snowy Mountains each year.