


The Bushwalker

Lower Jenolan Gorge,
Wild Dog Mountains

Volume 34
Issue 1
Summer 2009



Don't you wish
you were here?

**Wolgan Falls,
Newnes Plateau**

Photo: David Springthorpe

Contributions of interesting, especially typical and spectacular bushwalking photos are sought.
you don't want the same photographers all the time, do you?



Photo: Brett Davis

"Wave Cave"
Bainbrig Creek
Near Sassafras

The Bushwalker

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The Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW Inc represents approximately 66 Clubs with a total membership of about 8,700 bushwalkers.

Formed in 1932, the Confederation provides a united voice on behalf of all bushwalkers on conservation, access and other issues.

People interested in joining a bushwalking club may write to the Confederation Administration **admin@bushwalking.org.au** for a list of Clubs, but a far more useful on-line list is available at the Confederation website **www.bushwalking.org.au**, broken up into areas. There's lots of other good stuff there too, including the bushwalking FAQ.



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Volume 34, Issue 1, Summer 2009

From the editor's desk. . .

The format of this issue is a bit different this time. Several articles are more about the photography than before. After all, the publication is printed full-colour, so why not? What do you think of the experiment? Comments are welcome. Articles are too of course.

Articles for Publication

Clubs and members are encouraged to submit relevant articles, with a very strong preference for those with good pictures. Both the author and the author's club will feature in the Byline - this is a good way to advertise YOUR club. We will also accept articles from outside bodies where the articles seem relevant to members.

Articles may be edited for length and content to help fit into our page limit. Pictures should be sent at maximum available resolution: at least 300 dpi, preferably in their original unedited form. JPG, PDF or TIFF formats are preferred. **The text should be sent as a plain text file (*.txt)**, NOT as a Word file (*.doc). I repeat, please send the pictures separate from the text file; do NOT send them embedded in a Word doc file. Pictures taken from a Word doc file are simply not good enough and won't be published. And, of course, the Editor is always interested in receiving bushwalking books and maps for review. All enquiries should be sent to editor@bushwalking.org.au.

Please note that opinions expressed by authors may not represent the official opinions of the Confederation or any Club. The Editor's opinions are his own.

Roger Caffin
Editor



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Gaping Gill, November 2007

Julie Cox

5 am Friday.

Eight of us left for the drive to Mt. Tomah to do the canyon called Gaping Gill. At 9 am after wetsuits were put on and equipment checked we began the 400 m descent into our creek system. The last 200 m was straight down and rough as all heck with lawyer vine, cutting grass, leeches and loose rocks. Delightful? No! But upon reaching the creek a beautiful rainforest opened up and we arrived at our destination.

Two abseils, one 20 m and one 30 m, the second being straight through a waterfall. Although some did manage to stay out of the main stream and avoid a good drenching, I reckon they missed some good fun. As Alan said, "It's not often we get to abseil into a waterfall".

The walk out was huge. Thunder Gorge was magnificent, and we oohed and aahed as we walked upstream, admiring the abundance of orange yabbies until we turned into Rainbow Ravine. What a surprise this was. It would have to be one of the most interesting canyon exits. We had now joined the Claustral track and this was not easy. Two tricky bits required a rope and it was a long, hard slog back to the cars. We

camp ground and pick up the track that would take us down to the Wollangambe River: one and a half hours walking and 200 m downhill. We were heading for the Waterfall of Moss.

Once at the river we had to swim across and climb a 10 m pitch where a rope was already fixed. Andrew and Don went up okay but it wasn't easy, so a belay was set up for the rest of us. This meant if we slipped or fell our fall would be arrested. After climbing to the top of the cliff we contoured around to the head of the creek and began the 1st of 8 abseils. All I can say is that this was a superb canyon, the abseils tricky but good fun, and we all felt privileged to be able to see such beauty. I could waffle on about each waterfall – they were all flowing due to the rain we'd had but words just cannot describe it. This canyon is aptly named and the end section is so narrow you can touch both sides with outstretched arms. Very, very pretty. We then reached the Wollangambe River and swam 200 m to the point we came into it and retraced our track to camp at about 7 pm.

7 am Sunday.

I awoke feeling sore and stiff and if anyone had suggested we not canyon today I would have agreed. But as often happens, after breakfast the body starts to get moving and good company makes one rally round. We packed up camp and drove to the parking spot on the Bells Line of Road from where we would begin. By 9.30 am we were off and

reached Mt Wilson about 7.30 pm. It was a long day.

9 am Saturday.

Two of our party decided to go home in the morning as their bedding had got wet during the night. It was still drizzling and there was no hope of getting it dried out. So it was 6 of us that set off to walk to the end of the

straight away I was glad to be out here and the view was spectacular and our canyon Better Offer was 'just down there'.

The abseils again were all different and interesting. One looked so high it didn't look as though our rope would reach so I sent Don over first. He's lighter and easier to pull up (joke). Because of recent fires we had a blind scramble around the cliffs: any sense of a track had been wiped out. We saw a baby snake coiled up in the sun until he had enough of us and slithered off. Eventually we reached the gully that would take us out. We found the track and reached the cars about 6 pm. ♦



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A Night Out

Michael Smith,
Nimbin Bushwalkers Club

The year was about 1968. My brother Jim and his girlfriend P (a shy and curious creature who sometimes accompanied us on practice rock climbs, wearing boots and always a dress), myself and my girlfriend M climbed into a rough Volkswagen for a trip to the Blue Mountains. Jim was to take P rock climbing on the 3 Sisters (since banned) and M and I were to walk to the Ruined Castle and return. For each of us it was an odd sort of thing to put a girlfriend through. We were both rock climbing instructors by this time.

We went our separate ways at Echo Point, planning to meet again at the end of the day for the trip home. With rucksack on my shoulder and girlfriend on the hand the descent into the Jamieson Valley was made via the Golden Stairway. We passed the Scenic Railway and crossed the Landslide, followed Narrow Neck around and were nearly at Ruined Castle. (I still don't know what it looks like 40 years later). It was obvious that M and I were not going to make it so we turned around and hurried to beat the darkness. Alas, my partner was slowing down rather than redoubling her effort. I spoke to her and tried to convince her that some super human effort now would save us from having to spend all night in the bush. She lumbered on in her slow and inevitable way. It was a big lesson to me: I couldn't believe that someone could not rally that extra speed. There was every chance that the night could prove fatal - or worse that a big rescue fuss might be made.

Inexorably, darkness closed in and we couldn't see a thing. It was a particularly dark night, without a moon and a full canopy of trees overhead. We just had to stop: we couldn't see each other so we held hands and kept in voice contact. I didn't fancy the freezing night ahead. The track was about 2 metres wide and fairly well formed. Thousands of tourists used it each year. I broke off a branch and used it in a sweeping motion to feel for the track edges and moved forward a small step at a time. It was totally black in all directions.

Thus we made our way along the track. My brother was waiting for me and once it was dark he must have known there was trouble below. He let out a cooee from the cliff tops. I knew it was him and I decided to give him 3 cooee's back - this is a standard distress signal. It was my hope that he would go to the police station or somewhere and get some torches or lanterns and walk down the track to see us home. He swears he only heard one cooee, which he took to mean we were OK, so he hopped in his car and drove home!

I did not know this and expected my brother to bring light to the gloom at any moment. Nevertheless, we persisted in trying to find our own way out. Eventually the track seemed to end in fences and signs. I knew we were at the bottom of the "Scenic Railway".

In one way this was a quick way out: we could climb up the rails. But only a mad rock climber would consider it [not true - Ed]. I decided not to leave my girlfriend alone in the bush so we gave up and set about toughing the night out. I gallantly gave her my jumper and for warmth I put the map down my shirt and then tried to 'wear' the rucksack. It was very cold. I stuffed leaves and vegetation down my shirt for insulation. It was itchy. We lay down together to wait for death or the morning. When it got very cold we got up and danced about to generate some warmth.

About 2 am a big, bright moon rose, lighting up the track. We were on a landing of sorts, and the track leading away from it was now visible. We gratefully climbed out of the valley and along the cold streets of Katoomba to the railway station where we caught a train at 5.30 am. Neither of us suffered any ill effects. I now have a special fondness for the moon and always carry a torch and matches on a bushwalk. ♦

[Following a rather epic Club day trip which attempted to climb the now impassable Gordon Smith Chimney in the Grose valley, the term 'day trip' was formally defined as meaning you get home at an earlier hour of the day than you left. *Editor*]



Let Someone Know Before You Go

Keith Maxwell
President BWRS

Some years ago I was asked for a simple list of bush safety hints for a rescue display. Now many persons have written at length with long lists about safety in the bush. However the simple list below seems to cover most of the incidents where BWRS has been involved or media reports. Really 'clever' people manage to ignore multiple safety points.

All searches for missing people start by us asking what was the planned trip? Bad navigation or deviations from this planned walk all make the search harder. In November 2002 an injured, inexperienced canyon team went badly off course on Newnes Plateau. One person died and they were only found after three days following a massive search! There are still bushwalkers missing in Tasmania who did not "let someone know before you go", and this is the basic rule.

The DO list:

- Give the names of all group members and complete route details of where you are going to close relatives, friends or Police. Include details of where your car(s) will be parked.
- Tell them when you are leaving and returning and anyone's special medical conditions e.g. diabetes, asthma.
- Notify them of your safe return.
- Take the correct map and compass, and know how to use them.
- Take appropriate clothing & footwear. Always take a windproof / waterproof parka and clothing that can keep you warm when wet - eg wool and fleece, and definitely not cotton jeans.
- Take waterproof matches and some spare food in case of delays. Always take some cold snack food such as dried fruit, nuts or chocolate for quick energy.

The DON'T list:

- Overestimate your abilities. Always allow time for the unexpected, like thick scrub and cliffhines.
- Go faster than the slowest member of your group. At regular intervals do a head count of your group.
- Split up your walking group (except for below) during the trip. There is safety in numbers.
- Leave an injured person alone in the bush. A walking group of three or more will allow one to look after the injured while the others go for help.
- Keep moving when lost. Find a campsite nearby with water that will be visible from a helicopter. Wave vigorously at any helicopters: they are probably looking for you!
- Forget if you are overdue to phone home from the first phone box or as soon as you have mobile phone reception.

While poor equipment can make your trip unsafe, good equipment may make your bushwalk more enjoyable but not necessarily safer. You also need personal fitness combined with good trip leadership.

The Great Ocean Walk

Mystery Author

Victoria's Great Ocean Walk, running parallel to the Great Ocean Road between Apollo Bay and Port Campbell in Victoria, is one of Australia's newest long distance walking routes. It starts at Apollo Bay and finishes next to the now closed Glenample Homestead near the 12 Apostles.

Approximately 90 kilometres of track, sandy beaches and old forest roads are to be negotiated to complete this very scenic walk.

Ten members of the Shoalhaven Bushwalkers did the walk in late October 2008 as a series of one day walks using car shuffles from a base camp. We had two groups of 5 walkers doing the track from opposite directions, hopefully meeting near the halfway point each day for lunch then heading for the other vehicle. Our base camp was at Bimbi Park, which has bunkhouses, cabins, powered caravan sites and camping sites. The main attraction is actually its Koala population.

Day 1: Marengo to Blanket Bay
Overcast with rain threatening. We skipped the first 3 km of the Great Ocean Walk west from Apollo Bay (footpaths and roadside), and started 3 km along at Marengo, next to the caravan park. The first four stages were very short so we also decided to do them in two days. This was easy.

By the time my group had arrived, parked the car, put on our packs and had photographs taken, it had become quite humid. The flies were swarming around us as we headed through the Marengo Caravan Park along a yellow coloured crushed gravel pathway - 'The Yellow Brick Road'. Views of a rock platform just off the coast on Marengo Reefs gave our only view of seals for the entire trip.

Once through the caravan park we passed what would soon become the familiar blue 'Great Ocean Walk' signposts, plus a yellow sign warning us of snakes as the narrow track took us through heathland behind a beach. This brought us out to the beach and onto a long rock platform, the weathered rocks resembling cobwebs with their pockmarked appearance. Bald Hill gave us some excellent coastal views from the top. The descent was along a steep grassy slope. By now every walker's rucksack was covered in flies.

We followed more rock platforms, then went over a short woodland-covered hill to

the very tiny Shelley Beach. We followed the impressive conglomerate rock platforms along the coast rather than going back up to the track. There were shapes that resembled broken eggshells, mushrooms and one that resembled a toilet seat. We stopped for a tea break next to an inlet that might have been the narrow mouth of the Elliot River. It rained lightly, just enough to keep the flies at bay while we nibbled.

We crossed the inlet and climbed into Stringybark forest, to reach the Elliot Ridge walk-in Campsite which was very impressive. There were many numbered tent sites with square wooden benches that resembled tent platforms, a three sided wooden shelter, composting toilet block and two rain collecting water tanks. All the walk-in campsites along the Great Ocean Walk were like this. I started wishing I was doing this walk as fullpack, if only to savour the camping areas on the walk.

However, we had reached the first overnight campsite on the walk before midday. We would have no trouble reaching Blanket Bay by mid afternoon. There were koalas very high up in the trees. Obviously at night this place would become 'Party Central' as the track notes mentioned yellow bellied sugar gliders and no doubt a possum colony too.

The unsealed Elliot River Road took us inland through rainforest and eucalypt forest. The forest was full of bird song; the bird watcher had their binoculars out. Just before midday we met our 5 other walkers coming from Blanket Bay. We chatted about the track conditions and they warned us about very muddy conditions ahead. It wasn't long before we were stepping around the edge of some deep mire on the track. There were several mud cone-like structures - the burrows of land yabbies.

After lunch we saw several snakes on the narrow track. They were dark brown with a greenish belly: Copperheads. That had me walking in front on 'Snake Patrol', although I never saw any snakes. Maybe it was my heavy bushwalking boots. Finally the track descended very steeply to the beach at Blanket Bay where the car was waiting for us. We had a quick look around the site before driving back to Bimbi Park for a well earned shower and change of clothes.

Day 2: Blanket Bay To Aire River
I awoke at 7.00 am after a very comfortable night's sleep - I didn't even hear the bawling koalas. Sadly, again the skies were overcast and threatening. Today's

walk commenced where we finished yesterday, right next to a boot cleaning station. There are several of these along the Great Ocean Walk and walkers are expected to brush their boots to remove fungal spores that can spread die-back in plant communities along the track. These 'Hygiene' Stations come equipped with a seat and brushes.

The boardwalk from here only went for about 100 metres before



2 of the Twelve Apostles

becoming a bush track that ascended into forest. The track went inland for some distance and we caught up to a lone bushwalker who was doing the Great Ocean Walk as a full pack walk. I envied him immediately. He was one of very few other walkers we met on the track in our 5 days.

At Parker Inlet we had to make a decision: follow the coastline via the beaches and rock platforms around Point Franklin, or ascend the steep hill and walk the cliff tops. We took the inland option, up a steep ascent on stone block steps. It was tiring but not too hard. The track levelled out at the top, providing excellent views, and made its way along the cliff-top heathland. I failed 'snake patrol' by stepping over a Tiger Snake without seeing it.

As we came over a small rise to see the Cape Otway Lighthouse we could see the weather changing. We put on our raincoats just as the rain hit us. We cut short our tea break and followed the new track, another 'Yellow Brick Road', away from the coastline to the bitumen of the Cape Otway Lighthouse Road. We walked this for at least 2 km, having missed a signpost to a parallel foot track. Our heads were down against the rain. At the Cape Otway Lighthouse we headed for the shelter to get out of the rain. Admission to the lighthouse grounds was \$14.50 each; we settled for a cold drink instead.

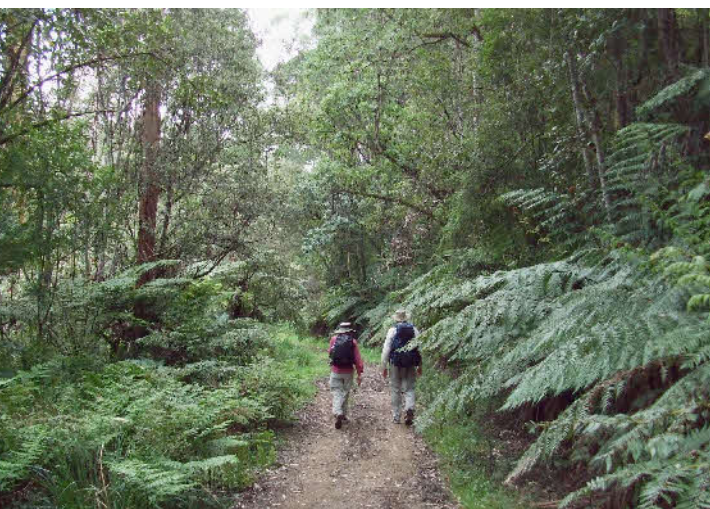
The Cape Otway hike-in campsite was just 5 minutes away, and we arrived at the same time as our other walking group from Aire River. We all enjoyed a long lunch break in the three-sided shelter shed.

After lunch during a minor break in the weather we were able to look around the old lighthouse cemetery before taking the cliff top track to Aire River. We passed up the side track to Rainbow Falls: a strong wind had come up and apart from blowing the rain at us it also was strong enough to almost knock us over along the unprotected areas. Had it been coming in the other direction the walk could really have been interesting.

Near the mouth of the Aire River we followed a very sandy track down through tunnel-like thickets of Melaleuca. Descending on the sand was much easier than ascending. We followed another very sandy track to the famous Aire River Bridge and I couldn't resist taking my version of the ultimate Aire River Bridge photograph.

Day 3: Aire River to Johanna Beach
The clouds cleared, revealing a wonderful blue colour as we set off along the track from Aire River through the 'Walk-In Campsite' and ascended a ridge through coastal melaleuca and heathland until the track levelled out, then it descended to a spot halfway up the ridge above the

The forest track beyond Elliot Ridge campsite



waterline and kept to this contour for quite some distance. The track was narrow and sandy but very scenic. We had the rugged cliff tops above us and the rock platform and sand below. I noticed there were a number of black and white coloured butterflies on the track and one fluttered around me for quite some distance.

We arrived at Castle Cove, noting the eroded rock formations across the bay. We were only one headland around the corner from the famous Dinosaur Cove, but sadly we wouldn't be visiting it. Our plans for coffee at the famous Glenaire Cafe were thwarted: it was closed. Instead we sat on the grass next to the lookout and mingled with the tourists while we enjoyed morning tea. The flies were getting quite thick as the temperatures rose.

A high track through the scrub at the top of the cliffs meandered around the headland, giving us excellent views of the eroded rock pinnacle. There were lots of Xanthorreas with their long stalks all in flower, and lots of birds in the trees. At the top of the ridge above Dinosaur Cove there was another boot cleaning station. We complied. A long wooden boardwalk across the hill top led to a 2nd cleaning station, and our second group. Once again we were passing each other long before lunchtime. They warned us about the masses of flies near the walk's end. I was very thankful to have bought along my head mesh.

We followed another coastal track down to Johanna Beach, so named after the wreck of the Johanna in the 1800's. After lunch on the sand in front of the dunes we struggled along the soft beach sand for a good 2 km until we reached another obstacle, the fast running and relatively deep Black Witch Creek. Some of us took our footwear off and waded; others followed the creek all the way to the mouth looking for a shallower crossing.

Another long section of sand to a track behind the beach to soft green grass next to the car park. We weren't looking forward the next ascent after 2 km of heavy sand walking, but it wasn't that bad at all. The track climbed steadily with great views of the coastline on one side and lush green farmland valleys on the other. The flies were a menace and swarmed thicker the higher we went. We passed the 'Walk-In Campsite' and continued upwards. At the 5th gate we came upon an unexpected sight: the car. The other group had driven halfway down the 6 km dirt track, cutting out 3 km of boring road. With all the flies swarming around us and the oncoming dark clouds looming we didn't complain.

Day 4: Coach Road Intersection to Wattle Hill

The sun was shining as we put on our packs and headed off. We followed an unsealed gravel road past farmhouses, eventually descending quite steeply to meet up with a hut on Melanesia Beach. We crossed the sand noticing the conglomerate patterns in the cliff face, resembling Chocolate Chip Ice Cream. We ignored Decision Point to go around the beach as the tide wasn't quite in yet, though it was close. We made our way across the rocks, picking our moment to cross the wet sand between the onrushing waves. Once safely onto the second beach we located a rocky spot for a tea break.

Beside the beach was a stepped track which ascended steeply to meet the alternate route behind the beach. It then climbed steeply to come out on the cliff side, still ascending and providing magnificent views of the coastline before another set of steps took us high over an outcrop of rock at Bowker Point into a small gully. The track gradually descended along a forested cliff edge, then ascended once again, with about eight flights of wooden stairs, complete with banisters. I intoned "3rd floor Ladies underwear, 4th floor Haberdashery, 5th floor Men's suits"...

After that we were faced with a steep zig zagging track. The occasional gap in the forest provided a cool refreshing breeze welcomed by all of us. The top was an open grassy area, Ryans Den campsite, complete with wooden platform and excellent views up and down the coast. Our other group was here too so we had a group photograph with the impressive Cape Volney in the background. Some of our group commenced lunch there, but others weren't hungry and moved on up through forest, crossing another creek and then to a grassy hill. There we found a wooden bench for lunch, with a cool breeze and good views.

After lunch the track continued to ascend and descend through coastal heathland and it was quite hot going. At one point Doug leaped several metres into the air. He had almost stepped on another snake, the snake had struck out at him but missed. While small, it was a fully grown and very aggressive adult Tiger Snake. As I passed it was still in the grass just a metre from the track, ready to strike. We shot past, and thereafter watched the track carefully.

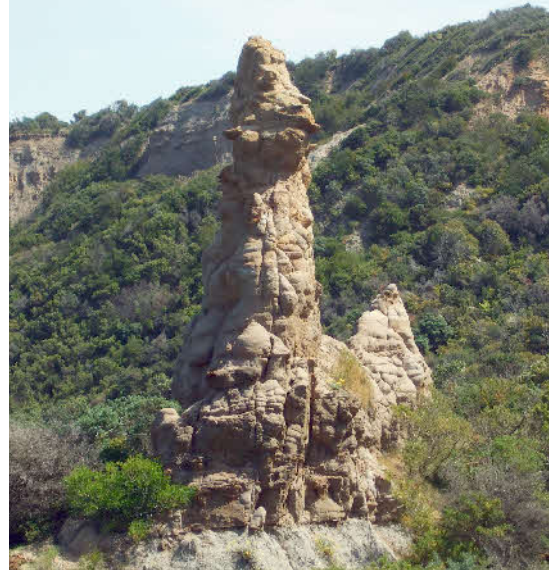
Climbing up to Wattle Hill we passed a very photogenic pinnacle in the bush. At the top of the hill above Moonlight Head were two benches where we sat on and enjoyed a very cold breeze coming off the ocean. We could have sat there for the rest of the afternoon, but had a 4 km walk to Wattle Hill and the car.

Day 5: Wattle Hill to Glenample Homestead

We set off for Wattle Hill under overcast weather. All 10 of us would be walking the same direction today as everyone wanted to visit Wreck Beach with its historic anchors before the high tide at midday. A car shuffle was arranged, then we headed for Wreck Beach. We passed by Moonlight Head Cemetery and stopped to view some of the historical headstones before making our way onto a narrow track and on to Gables Lookout, a wooden platform on a high cliff. We then back-tracked to a narrow side track and followed this through the bush down to Wreck Beach.

It commenced raining, though only lightly and not for long, but the cloud cover still made things very dark. We made our way across the sand to the rock platform where two anchors lay embedded and rusting in the rock. These two anchors and the capstan are from the wreck of the 'Marie Gabrielle'. Further on, cemented into the rock at the back of the beach is an anchor from the wreck of the 'Fiji'. Both ships foundered during the late 1800's. No wonder they call this the 'Shipwreck Coast'.

After scrambling over a jumble of rocks we made our way to the track head at the



Rock pinnacle near Moonlight Head

western end of the beach. We followed it up through the cliff line to Devils Kitchen and the 'Walk-In Campsite', and then along the Old Coach Road to Princetown. This wide sandy track was a tedious and totally boring section with little in the way of views. We were most thankful when we stepped onto a firm dirt road and crossed the Gellibrand River bridge.

On the other side of the bridge was a long grassy area complete with picnic tables, but it was early afternoon and the day's finish was only 100 metres up a dirt road. We decided to complete the final 5.5 km walk today, rather than drive all the way back tomorrow. Some wanted to dump their packs in the cars, but there was no way I was walking without water or rainwear, so I headed off. Almost immediately I found myself on another wide and very sandy trail, but not long after I noticed a signposted side track heading into the heathland. This narrow track went along the cliff top and I soon caught up to some others as they stopped to get their first views of the distant 12 Apostles from a high knoll. They continued on as I enjoyed the views.

I was careful to watch out for more snakes but didn't see any on this last section. I was glad I'd kept hold of my rucksack: I was able to stop for a drink while hoping the main group would catch up. One person did, and she asked me how close we were to the finish. I thought we had only walked 4 km of the 5.5 km distance. However, as we came over the next ridge I was surprised to see the track descending to a car park on the side of the road with the now closed Glenample Homestead - the finish line.

Once everyone else arrived and caught their collective breaths, we went to the 12 Apostles and Loch Ard Gorge.

We arrived back at Bimbi Park at 7.30 pm. ♦

Anchors on the rock platform of Wreck Beach



Barrington Tops National Park

Michael Keats *The Bush Club*, Roger Caffin *Editor*

This is a photo essay made by an experimental melding of two trip reports to the same area, showing how two parties can see some things the same and other things differently. At least, the two parties seem to have had similar weather - foggy wet! No, you may not be able to separate the two streams out, but the Editor is interested in what you think of the experiment.



We started at the Williams Creek picnic area, went down the wheelchair walk and across the fine steel bridge to the Blue Gum Walk. The river runs through basalt; much of the whole area is basalt and the rainforest vegetation shows this well.



Shortly after the bridge we found an orchid - *Calanthe triplicata*. It is the only one of about 150 varieties in the genus to be found in Australia. The rest of the species are in Asia, and are often seen in the airports of Singapore and Bangkok. We also saw a Veined Doubletail Donkey orchid or *Diurus venosa* at the Black Swamp, a Greenhood orchid *Pterostylis abrupta* on the road to PolBlue, and a Potato orchid *Gastrodia procera* on Aeroplane Hills.



Further up the valley we re-crossed the Williams at Fern Tree Creek, with fine falls. Both parties were here and took this photo! Then we went up the fairly level Rocky Crossing track to Lagoon Pinch.





Immediately we were aware of the huge size of the trees in the area. Gum trees do grow big, but these were simply huge! And the strangler figs growing up them in places were equally huge. Fortunately all these are within the National Park, safe from logging (we hope!).



From Lagoon Pinch the route is UP the Corker Track. One thing the Corker Track does not do, and that is fool around about when you start climbing. Virtually from step one you are on the ascent. I am not sure whether it was the mist, less oxygen in the air or just the happiness of being on the track and out in the wild but the haul up the long 10 kilometres and 780m climb in one go did not seem all that hard. Perhaps it was that we could not see anything but the immediate forest that helped – there was little sense of relative height- this feeling persisted all the way up the Williams Range.



Higher up we entered an Antarctic Beech forest - *Nothofagus moorei* – a forest so ancient that its pollen record appears in the Late Cretaceous. Individual trees in the forest may be up to 10,000 years old with their original root buttresses now up to 1m above the present ground level. As well as being living fossils these trees are artistic masterpieces, the misty aura enhancing their appearance. Underfoot this was a wet section so a close watch on each footstep was important.



The Selby Alley Hut was visited on the way up. It's a simple old bush hut, but with a special meaning to the local bushwalking clubs who maintain it. Apparently it even has some heritage value, it is so old. The side track to it is not obvious, which is a good thing. The Falls by the hut are small but nice.





All of us camped at Wombat Creek, just off the Link Track. This is over 700 m up from Lagoon Pinch and over 1,100 m from the Williams River picnic site - quite a climb. Some of us had better weather for dinner than others. Collecting firewood in the rain was quite a task. Firstly everything was wet, very wet – not surprising in a rain forest – secondly many others before us had scoured the area for firewood so it was necessary to range over quite an area to find suitable material. In doing so I was disgusted to find so much litter in the bush. Later I made a point of going into the bush and collecting as much as possible - some was burned and the rest was carried out.

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The next morning was not fine. Putting soggy boots on over dry socks was not a good call - totally wet feet in seconds. We breakfasted and got ready to go. The rainy-misty conditions persisted all day depriving us all of much of the beauty of the 'Tops' country. At 08:00 am we arrived at GR 543 529 – the turnoff for Careys Peak. We had climbed a further 150m. We arrived at Careys Hut a few minutes later. It is a crude makeshift affair but would be very welcome in continuous bad weather. It is well stocked with dry firewood and has a commodious fireplace. Sleeping inside might be a rather dirty business though. We took photos of each other standing proprietorially at the door.

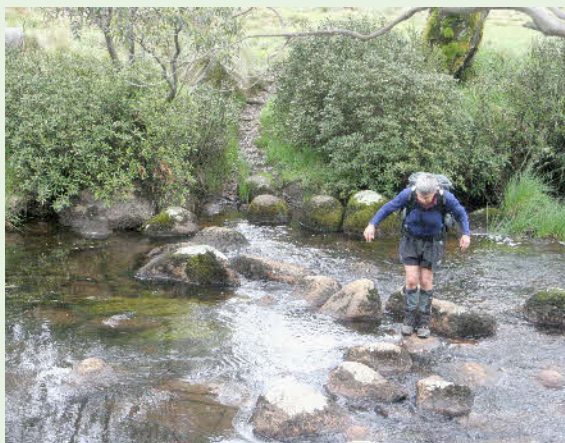


A further 250m up a gentle incline through thick wet scrub, and there in front of us was a sundial on a plinth. Also in sight was the handrail around the top of the viewing platform and the remains of the former geodetic trig, which gave us our elevation of 1543m. Beyond lay a uniform whiteness as far as the eye could see. The direction plate surrounding the sundial identified the location of Stockton Beach, Singleton, Murrurundi, Nundle and many more places. Not today. The best view was a 2 second break when the vague outline of a nearby range was visible, and then it was back to solid whiteness.



From here one party went to Mt Barrington and then north towards PolBlue - a bit of a boring road bash in the mist. They then returned to Junction Pools. The other party took the far more interesting route along the Edwards Swamp Trail. At the junction a cairn reinforces a somewhat dilapidated sign. After the broad trail of all the other walking tracks, the entry to the Edwards Swamp Trail looked narrow and very wet. The parts of me which were not already wet soon disappeared as I led through the saturated brush. Then, remarkably, the track opened out. Before descending to Saxby Creek there were some colourful views to the north of Saxby Swamp and Wallaby Hill. I say colourful with good reason. The area is infested with an exotic golden flowering broom species. Intense yellow bands of colour were a major feature of landscape pictures all the way to Junction Pools.

At an unnamed creek between Saxby Creek and Edwards Creek the Forestry Commission and/or the NPWS have created several wooden road sections with half logs to stop vehicles sinking into the mud. These sawn logs are 3 m plus in length and up to 700 mm wide. At GR 525 542 a sign proclaims the Crows Gate. A careful study of the topographic sheet shows this point to be on the boundary of a surveyed portion, possibly an internal boundary on land originally taken up by the Edwards family, who used to farm this area.



Crossing Edwards Creek was fun with the water flowing swiftly and the provided stepping-stones just under the surface. We were on alert for the wobbly ones. Up a short rise and there is a NPWS plaque with information about the Edwards family, together with an artists impression of the former multi-roomed hut where Mrs. Edwards would have struggled to make a lonely home. Nothing remains of the building today. But who's to say they didn't enjoy it?

At 10:21 am above the Barrington River we stopped for morning tea. In its higher reaches the Barrington River is very broad and swampy. The Mount Royal Range on the northwest side of the river is banded with yellow broom; this contrasts with the various shades of green and brown in the swamp proper- all very colourful even in the persistent drizzle. At the road crossing there is a link track to the Barrington Trail as well as the track to Junction Pools. The river is wide and about 1 m deep at the ford. We crossed about 200 m further downstream where there is a choice of two stepping-stone crossings. We took the first one and crossed with dry feet.

Once over the Barrington River the basalt country gives way to more familiar alpine granite. As you approach Junction Pools the granite outcrops increase. Below the Junction Pools camping area the riverbed is full of large rounded granite boulders. Good swimming pools with sandy bottoms make a marked change from the swampy conditions higher up. Another stepping-stone crossing of the Barrington River led to a 'snack rock' which both parties used, then there was an easy ascent up Aeroplane Hill on a very nice grassy track free of all wheeled vehicles. Aeroplane Hills are very nice, even in the mist. There are meant to be bits of a crashed aeroplane up here - somewhere in the lawyer vines.

We had originally planned to go down to the Big Hole on the Barrington River. No such luck: the track to Big Hole is closed due to a phytophthora quarantine area being enforced to try and control an outbreak of the disease that is killing off the eucalypt forest. Instead the route leads to the Black Swamp - a seriously mis-named area.



One party went along the Gloucester Tops Walking Trail to seek brief access to the Kerripit River. The prospects looked grim with nothing but a thick green wall beside the track loaded with lawyer vines. Eventually an opening, just the slightest reduction in the density of the brush, presented itself. Well sort of. In the lead I was reluctant to pull back as we appeared to have a way forward, and what we could see got us quite excited. Ahead was another Nothofagus moorei forest. This forest was different. Each and every individual tree and shrub was dripping with mosses. The understory was a carpet of mosses or sprouting with brilliant pink ferns! I don't think we were hallucinating but it is possible. We had entered an 'enchanted forest'.



The other party camped at the Black Swamp, next to the outlet. The views in the evening were a little lacking, but they were very fine the next morning. Why 'Black' we wondered? The swamp was a beautiful green and yellow, grasses and mosses and tarns.





After a long day out in the rain and mist we were now in a place where the rain possibly never stops. The ground is supersaturated so every step is a squelch. We became very excited and pushed along deep into the course of the Kerripit River. I thanked my lucky stars that my camera was waterproof to 10m. I could use it with impunity trying to capture the kaleidoscope of changing imagery and the fantastic beauty of this place.



After spending time capturing hundreds of images we had to think about getting out. This was no easy matter. The forest is capable of total disorientation and we almost had a row over which way was north! Having finally resolved that issue we then had to agree on the direction to get back to the Gloucester Tops Track. We went through a wet version of hell for about 100m, as we had to penetrate the lawyer vine barrier beside the Trail. I am used to scratches and bloodied limbs but nothing quite compared to the criss-cross of red lines sustained this time. We made a pledge to never criticize the people who maintain trittered tracks - we were very happy to find this track on this occasion.

We arrived back at the Wombat Creek camp at 16:30 pm, euphoric, transcendental, wet, and more than a bit hungry. The campfire was most welcome and the canopy for some protection from the rain even more so. Grilled sausages and mash may have seemed a luxury when I was carrying them up The Corker, but tonight they were the finest fare I could have wished for. Our cask supply of red wine was soon exhausted. (Disgraceful! Ed) Again at 20:00 pm it was not hard to say good night and crawl into bed. Warm dry and cosy, I went to sleep with the rain pattering on the tent and the rising wind foreshadowing another wet day.



Day 3 dawned with a different outlook: the light seemed very bright. Opening the tent flap revealed a brilliant blue sky and shafts of sunshine making patterns on the ground. It was a fine day! Over breakfast we had a hurried consultation. We would strike camp as soon as possible, and start the walk out. At the junction turn off for the Careys Peak track, we would leave our packs and race up to the top of Careys Peak for another look at the view.

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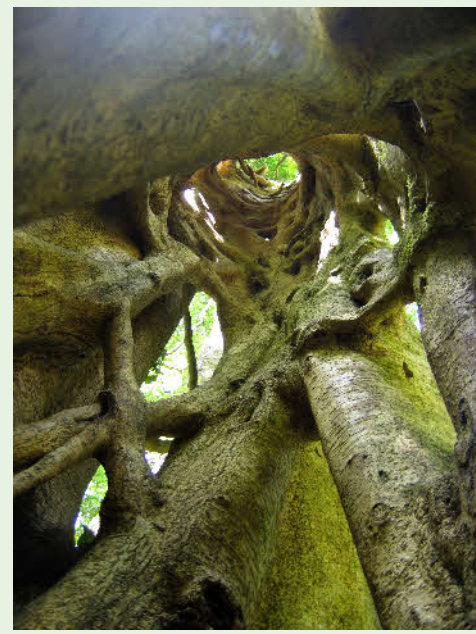
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By 07:55 am we said farewell to our campsite, having cleaned it up. I was carrying the compacted refuse from a few users who had left it in a disgusting state. In the sunshine our spirits lifted and we made top progress, arriving at Careys Peak at 08:30 am. The views were panoramic and stunning. There were just a few clouds floating by strategically so that photos looked good. Unfortunately there were dense clouds over Stockton Beach so we could not see that landmark., but no matter.



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What we did see was a lot of opportunities to walk in a whole lot of areas in the Barrington Tops. By 09:00 am we had returned to the junction, collected our packs and set off on the big descent. Given the excellent clear weather conditions, we stopped at strategic spots on Corker Mountain and the Corker Trail to take photos of Careys Peak as well as many other 'must do' ridges and high points. The descent is grueling, never ending and requires the utmost concentration on the wet and steep sections. It is perhaps just as well that motorised vehicles are not allowed to wheel-spin up and down on this track.



We found one strangler fig which had survived the loss of its original host. The gum tree had died and rotted away, leaving a hollow matrix of fig roots reaching into the sky. There is a sign on the Rocky Crossing track saying 'Figtree' which points to this one. Further down we started to meet tourists, both Australian and international, and the numbers grew as we approached the Barrington Tops cabins. Sadly the old Barrington Tops Guest House nearby is gone, burnt down by fire, and it does not seem likely to be resurrected. We (all) then repaired to Dungog for some light refreshments. ♦



From the road at Lagoon Pinch we dropped back into the humid rainforest. The trees were still huge, with one fallen gum tree having created a huge amount of chainsaw work to keep the track open. It seems the strangler fig had weakened the gum tree, and parts of both had come down.



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 **Air Niugini**



A walk to Sphinx Rock

Ringed by sheer cliffs and rising 800 metres above the surrounding farmland, Mount Burrell looms as an impressive landmark. I can see it from my place and have often wondered what it would be like to be up there in a lost world. Too inaccessible, it has never been logged or farmed. I only know a few people who have been up there. They spoke of an ocean of lawyer vines. There were some who claim to have been on the top of Mount Burrell, but when questioned details became vague. It was as if their memory had been erased. A few mentioned not being able to go further due to a paralysing fear. There is a sacred cave up there somewhere. Others reported seeing little shrines and meditation places where locals come to be with the universe, or something.

Mount Burrell (possibly derived from the Aboriginal word 'burrul' meaning wallaby) is in the north-eastern corner of NSW and dominates the skyline to the north of Nimbin. Most locals know it as Blue Knob. Mount Burrell is the highest

The Mt Burrell or Blue Knob trig.

point on the Blue Knob Range and forms part of Nightcap National Park. However, access to it is limited because it is largely surrounded by privately-owned land. Most of these land owners are concerned with liability and that is reason enough to deny entry.

I put an advertisement in 'The Nimbin Good Times' newspaper for a walking companion to spend two days on the mountain and three people responded. Between us we knew enough people in the surrounding communities to get permission to start the walk at one place and finish it at another. The plan was to walk the whole length of the Blue Knob Range (4 km) and try to get on to Sphinx Rock from the west. Sphinx Rock, another remarkable landmark, is a mysterious, enigmatic slab of rock that resembles, in profile, its namesake in Egypt. I knew Neil (new tent, rucksack and sleeping bag), from us both being members of the Nimbin Bushwalkers Club. The other two were teachers at a local High School who I had not met before.

So early one morning four bods silently padded past the shacks, dwellings and steep driveways of community people and climbed the ridge that would take us up to the top. Afoot were clumps of soft grass and centuries-old blackboy trees. We met with a fixed rope on a vertical cliff face and took our chances. If the rope breaks you are dead. A madness of fear and adrenaline got us all up the roped sections and on to the Range proper.

From civilisation below, Blue Knob has the shape of Ayres Rock, looming and spiritual. From the air, Google

Michael Smith
Nimbin Bushwalking Club

shows it to be scorpion-like, long and narrow with leg-like buttresses each side, and a tail leading to Sphinx Rock, the stinger. Along the top we passed through eucalypt forests, then rain forest, the ground littered with kilometres of lawyer vine. We wore tough clothing and leather gloves to deal with the backward-facing hooks on this slasher of flesh. We could have come across anything here. You will find this hard to believe, so check it out at www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/02/26/2172927.htm where you will find fifty accounts of Tassie Tiger sightings in the area around this mountain.

Rob (new volleys) kept them away with his 'Condamine bell' a clipped-on metal mug that clinked and chinked against the embracing undergrowth. Huge trees, after growing unmolested for centuries, had died, collapsed and rotted where they were born. Scrub turkey nests were everywhere. Catbird and wampoo pigeon called to keep in contact. Olivier (new tent and sleeping bag), a stick-insect of a man, high stepped the forest litter in his size 13 shoes. His blue foam sleeping mat, strapped outside his rucksack, was losing chunks to the spiky undergrowth and ended up looking as if he had used it to fend off a mob of snarling thylacines.

We were seeing the 'Big Scrub' as it had always been. Nearing the top the loamy soil gave way to rocks and finally, after six hours of walking, a trig station called Blue Knob. I left a visitors book here and we put up our tents. We had walked the scorpion's back and it was time to slide down its tail to the stinger, Sphinx Rock just visible a kilometre away. The ridge we trod was narrow, about 5 metres wide, and had a steep drop on both sides. Half of its length was covered in a type of giant lily with stiff leaves three metres long. At times these leaves embraced us or tried to push us back. It got more and more serious, until we found ourselves on the knife edge of the Mount Warning caldera. We propped in very fear at the prospect of going further.

Just 200 metres short of Sphinx Rock was a ledge, one metre wide, bare but for loose dirt and crumbling rock, with a sheer drop of 100 metres on both sides. I offered to rope somebody up if they wanted to cross it. No one was game. We took it in turns to cling to the last stunted tree in this wild and spectacular place and





The Sphinx close up



Returning home in the fog

gaze upon Sphinx Rock in its terrible isolation. Rob wandered back to a spot where he could not see the anxious place we had ended up, and sat down, leaning up against an improbably placed scrub turkey nest. A metre above our heads we heard a whoosh as a falcon tried to see us off. It was time to play happy campers and return to our tents to enjoy the vibe of this special place, 933 metres above sea level.

According to Bundjalung mythology there is a sacred cave high on the

mountain at Blue Knob (a dangerous place). It is home to an old woman who had a role in training the men who wanted to become clever men. They went to this witch to learn the things that such men should know. At the finish of the training the final test came when the witch threw them over the cliff to see if they could save themselves. Whatever the outcome the witch used her magic power to stop them from coming to harm.

At nightfall it got windy and a deep cold came over us. We crawled into

our tents just as it started raining. My home-made shelter, weighing just 400 gm, was now being tested. Through the night I listened to heavy forest-drops of rain hitting the material. This would send a fine, barely noticeable, spray of condensation over my face. Warm and snugly, I drifted off, to dream of a family of thylacines wandering through our campsite. We woke in the clouds. I (new EPIRB) set a compass bearing that would take us down the correct ridge. We were home to our other lives before lunch. ♦

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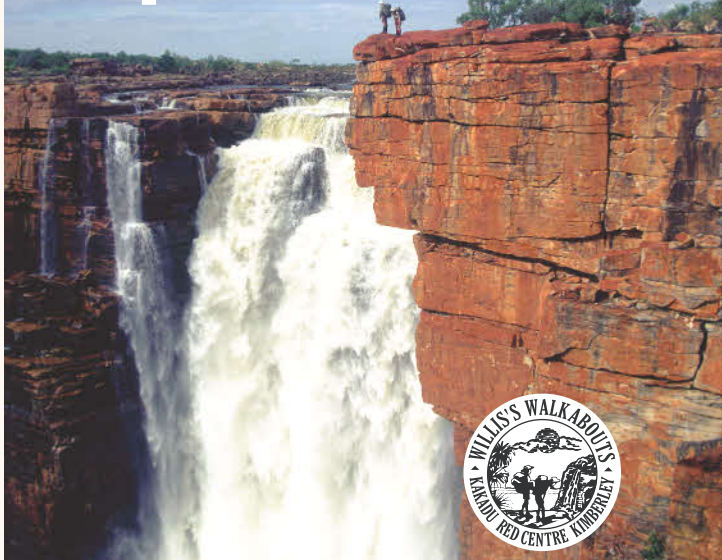
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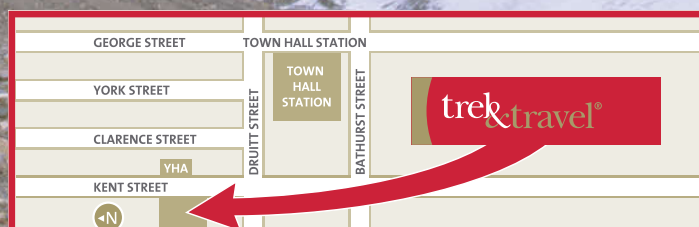
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