The Bushwalker

Colo River in Flood
Bob Turner Track, Wollemi NP

Volume 36
Issue 1
Summer 2011

Did you really want to be here?

Bulley Creek near Cobberas, KNP. *Photo by Roger Caffin*

Colo River at Canoe Creek, Wollemi NP. *Photo by Roger Caffin*

Highlighting our recent heavy rains and floods. You normally step over Bulley Creek without noticing it. The high sandy beach at Canoe Creek is many metres below the surface. A little ford on the upper Capertee River: a 4WD was lost in the river nearby.

Capertee River, Capertee NP. *Photo by Michael Keats*

The Bushwalker
The Official Publication of the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW
Volume 36, Issue 1, Summer 2011
ISSN 0313 2684

Editor: Roger Caffin
editor@bushwalking.org.au
Graphic Design & Assembly:
Barry Hanlon
Proofreader:
Cindy Wilkinson
Confederation Officers:
President: Dodie Green
Administration Officer:
admin@bushwalking.org.au
Website: www.bushwalking.org.au

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 bush-walking 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.

Subscribe to The Bushwalker

Keep up with all the news and developments happening in the NSW bushwalking scene for only $10 per year. This is to cover posting and handling: the magazine itself is free.

Send your name and address and cheque or money order to the **Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW Inc**, PO Box 119, Newtown NSW 2042. The new phone number is 9565 4005. Make the cheque or money order payable to the **Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW Inc** as well: please do not abbreviate the name!

Please indicate which issue you want your subscription to start with. We don't want to duplicate copies you already have.

Front Cover: Colo River at Bob Turner Track, Wollemi National Park. Photo by Roger Caffin.

From the editor's desk. . .

Well, the recent rains have been ... interesting. The front cover shows the bottom end of the Bob Turner Track (off the Putty road) when the Colo went from its normal quiet 0.9 m at the Upper Colo river gauge up to a peak of 10.5 metres. We went up there at the peak to take photos, not to get in the river! It was, as I said, interesting to see.

The inside cover photos are more of the same. You normally just hop over Bulley Creek (beside the Cobberas) in Kosciusko NP, but the ground was already saturated and we had experienced a heavy thunderstorm during the night. The lightening was directly overhead, and the flashes nearly burnt out my eyeballs - through my closed eyelids. Our guess was that Stoney Creek and Limestone Creek further south along the AAWT would be impassible. We had morning tea on the rock shelf above the Canoe Creek junction and watched huge trees float down the river. The foam swirled across the surface. As for the Capertee River near Macquarie Park - well, it isn't normally quite that large. There is a story about someone who unfortunately tried to drive through it further on in a petrol-engine 4WD, but had to abandon it half-way across. The car was written off, but the passengers escaped.

The bottom line is ***"Please take care"***.

Articles for Publication

I would like to thank the people who have been sending in articles for publication recently. I can't get all of them into a single issue, so I have had to hold some in reserve for another issue. But rest assured that every one of them will get serious attention.

We had an article recently about Volleys and footwear. This seems to have spurred some people to start writing, so expect some more amusing articles on this subject soon. Some interesting historical photos have been found featuring leather boots, hobnails and the like as well. Fortunately, big heavy boots are a thing of the past.

Anyhow, please keep those articles rolling in. We need them. *Plain text please, and original unedited photos direct from the camera.* If you want to include a DOC file or a PDF (in addition to the plain text) to illustrate the sort of layout you have in mind, please do so as well.

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, if he can find them.

Roger Caffin, Editor

Index

Errata: The recent article "Wandering the Snowies" was wrongly attributed. Our apologies about this. Graham Lee tells me that the correct attribution is Joan Young of the Happy Wanderers. *Ed.*

Budawangs

Steve Deards
Sutherland Bushwalking Club

Dummal Creek waterfall

The walk started at the Mt Bushwalker car park in fine weather. We followed the track past Mt Bushwalker to a nice lookout point above Claydon Ck with good views of The Castle, Mt Talaterang & Pigeon House.

After consuming morning tea, we continued to Gadara Point, then down onto a ridge which we followed to the base of Mt Talaterang. It is quite a steep scramble up to the cliff line at the mountains northern end. Somehow we missed the obvious pass up onto the mountain top 200 m to the south, so scrub bashing was the order until we could pick up the faint track which leads to the visitors book. We also missed the book this time but the track, which is now becoming overgrown, could be followed to the south-western point where there is a pass down to the lower levels. I had been told that another pass existed to get onto the southern end of the mount, but that's all I knew. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but eventually we found it by going down the top pass then contouring around to the east.

Once onto the southern part of the mountain, we had to pick a way through the thick scrub to our goal of a camping cave at the southern cliff line. Things were going well until we realized that the rocky leads had pushed us too far down, so we had to push through thick scrub again to the top. However, once at the top, we were rewarded with fantastic views over Byangee Walls & Pigeon House, both just across the valley. We could see the creek that we were aiming for, but getting there proved to be difficult due to thick scrub & many small ravines. Once at the creek, the cave wasn't immediately obvious, but it was found a little higher up the slope above the creek. From the cave, it was only 100 m to the cliff edge & great views. Water was also abundant. Pigeon House was painted red when the sun set behind the Castle.

Next morning we had to negotiate our way back across the mountain to the pass of yesterday, then down the pass & northward to the saddle above Dummal Creek. Some of us had been here before, so we knew that we had to stay high under the cliffs to avoid the thick lawyer vines lower down. When the saddle was reached, we walked down the ridge above the creek, keeping clear of the thick growth in the creek. After about 1 km, we descended into Dummal Ck, hoping to enter it below a small waterfall which is difficult to get around. Dummal Ck is very steep & choked with slippery boulders, so progress with heavy packs is slow. At one point, we had to detour around a drop in the creek & descend a mildly hairy slope back into the creek below the drop.

The creek bed is an obstacle course & very tiring but eventually it flattened out just before the junction with the Clyde River. We had lunch here & contemplated the next stage of the walk, a 4 km traverse along the river up to Claydon Creek. Refreshed & ready to go, we followed the river upstream, crossing from side to side as necessary. Surprisingly, there are river terraces along much of this section, so walking was fairly straight forward, with only an occasional obstacle or thick scrubby patch to avoid. At one rest stop, I found the body of a bird minus the head. Col noticed that it had been banded, so he removed it. Subsequent enquiries revealed that it was a racing pigeon from the Yagoona Pigeon Club! I know that many pigeons are taken by Peregrine Falcons, so I guess that the pigeon had been one of those. Claydon Creek was reached mid-afternoon, & we found an acceptable camp in rainforest about 200 m upstream from the river junction on the true right.

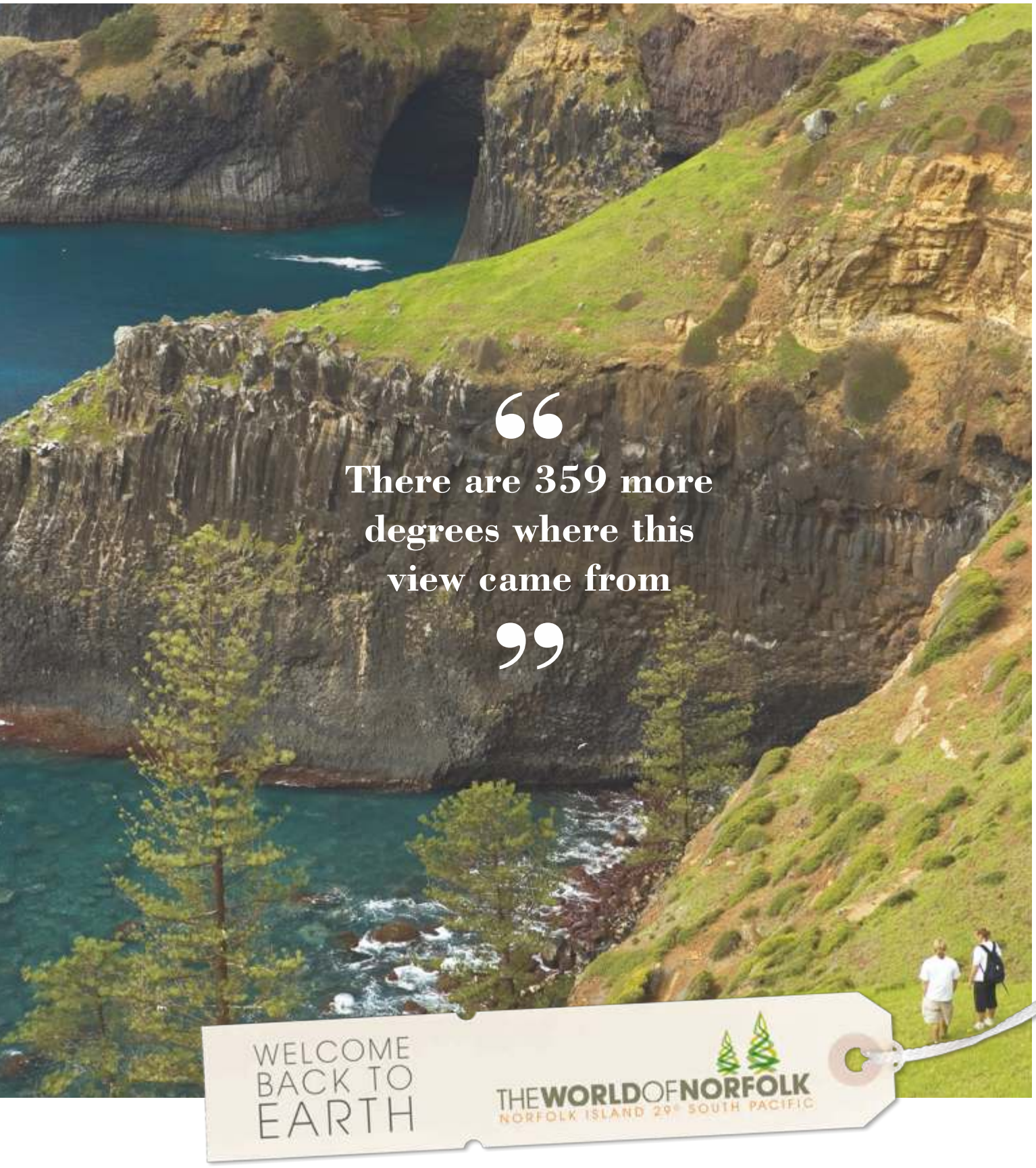
On the third day we continued upstream, crossing it as necessary. The creek banks weren't as clear of undergrowth as those of the Clyde, but we made good progress, reaching the junction with an unnamed creek by lunchtime. We all had wet feet except for John, who had gone to extreme lengths to stay dry. There is supposed to be a track from this creek junction up to Gaol House Pass, and thence up through the cliff line back onto Mt Bushwalker. We couldn't find the lower section of the track, so we had a tough climb up to the bottom line of cliffs, contouring across the steep slope & finding a route through the massive boulders that had fallen from the tops above.

Once at the cliff line, we headed east along the base until we came to a creek & waterfall which flowed from the plateau above. On the other side of this, we picked up the track at last and after some very steep walking and occasionally losing the track, we reached the pass. The route here is cairned in places and the pass is quite an interesting place. The track weaves in and out of grottos, ravines and rainforest. When we reached the main track again, we had lunch and thought back on our 3 day adventure. All in all, it had been a challenging walk but with many rewards.

Well worth the effort.♦

Pidgeonhouse Mountain

Camp in the rainforest



Come and lose yourself in the ultimate playground for any bush walker. Wander the array of tracks that crisscross hectares of untouched bush land and the breathtaking coastlines of this Pacific hideaway.

Explore with a local guide

Add to your walks by taking photographic workshops and tours or immerse yourself in a spot of bird watching with a local expert.

Explore by yourself

Lose yourself in 5 generous hectares of National Park and Botanic Gardens crisscrossed with walking trails or peruse the array of coastal tracks.

For bookings to visit Norfolk Island see your local travel agent, or call **1800 214 603**

theworldofnorfolk.com.au

Wollomombi Gorge

A Day of the Senses

Ian Smith

It was raining.....again or still, take your pick. I'd parked at the end of a short dirt road where the Armidale Tree Group had their headquarters. It was quiet but muddy and the rain, light now, was consistent. Not a good day for photographing birds, more your day for waterfalls. Thus it came to pass that I headed out for Wollomombi, arguably Australia's most spectacular gorge.

As I did I reflected on what I'd heard the night before from one Don Hitchcock. I learned that for every 100 metres you descend into the gorges you can add one degree of temperature. I learned that the "island" separating Chandler and Wollomombi gorges isn't actually an island but a ridge and that years ago the University Climbing club were out there taking photos on the end of the ridge just before they packed up and moved on. 30 seconds later the section where they'd been suddenly collapsed entirely into the gorge below. Whether there was a mass purchase of lottery tickets the next day isn't recorded.

I learned that a lyre bird, the world's greatest mimic, used to whistle a flute solo from Vivaldi that a wood worker from England used to play every afternoon. I learned that when he goes walking, Don uses the minimalist approach to the point where he manufactures his own gear. If you buy a "lightweight" tent from a retailer it weighs 1.2 to 1.6 kg. Don makes his own and it weighs in at 450 g, 600 g with the pole. He imports his fabric from a place in America.

The *piece de resistance* however was when Don climbed down beside Dangars Falls at the start of a multi-day hike. His first night was beneath the cliffs on a rock strewn area. No sooner had he set up his tent on his li-lo (the only time he has ever used it) when the rocks started to fall. Turns out they were coming from feral goats on high. The torrent continued until one smashed a hole in his tent. So terrified was he that he clasped his EPIRB next to his chest with the thought that if some rocks came and trapped his legs he could still set his beacon off. Needless to say, there was no sleep that night.

As my motorhome splashed along the Gwydir highway my sense of anticipation rose, especially when we crossed the farm streams running a bunker where there had hardly been any water for the previous decade. At least their dams would be full, something that hadn't happened according to the ABC local radio I was listening to. They specifically mentioned that the Wollomombi area had missed most of the recent rain and that the dams weren't yet full. They must have been the only ones in the entire Eastern Australia region that weren't. The

Mist on the plateau

small causeway just after the turnoff even had water over it, something I had never seen before. It augured well.

I was a tad surprised to see an early model Mitsubishi campervan already in attendance with the occupiers having breakfast in the covered picnic area. It was real "Gorillas in the mist" type stuff. I opted for a nap before heading out, by then the rain had eased to almost nothing but the fog was still intense; though I noticed that over the 10 minutes I took to get ready, visibility had doubled to about 200 metres, so I took a punt and headed out. No sooner had I alighted than I heard a reverberating crash in the forest. How many times had I seen fallen trees and wondered if they made a racket when they fell. I had a first hand answer now, and it was awesome as the heavy branches wrought havoc amongst nearby vegetation, though all invisible to me.

Off along the trail I trod, through the Spanish-moss covered trees whose twisted trunks lent a ghost like quality to the experience. Choughs scattered before me as I walked further, their squawking the only noise I could hear above the almighty roar of Wollomombi. It was simply an unforgettable sensory experience to hear one of the great waterfalls of Australia so close yet be unable to see it. The mist closed in again as I neared the lookout so I fiddled around taking atmospheric shots of the vegetation that clung in desperation to the cliffs, eking an existence out of the sparse soils that lay upon the top of rock remnants. A small flock of thorn bills cheekily bounced around the branches beside me while all around the dogwood displayed its beautiful yellow hues.

I turned around to pack my camera away and there, right before me, was the

↑Wollomombi falls through the mist

Junction of Wollomombi and Chandler Gorges→

might of Wollomombi revealed in all its glory, framed by the drifting fog. The water furiously threw itself down the cliff face in ever-changing patterns of foamy maelstroms. Wave upon wave alternatively advanced and retreated, seemingly reaching for some kind of freedom in an epic display of nature's might, sending out wispy furls like moist sunspots. The raging waters of the river were the dark brown colour of the soils they carried seaward from the plains above.

The jagged spur that splits the Wollomombi and Chandler gorges stood like a sentinel over the scene, parting the two great conflicts until they could be managed more easily downstream.

The afternoon before I'd spent in much more tranquil surroundings, surveying the limpid waters of Beardy Waters and watching the many types of dragonflies darting around to the symphony of a few birds that chirruped in the background. The bleach white cumulus were reflected in the ponds but all too soon they became cumulonimbus and an ominous grey band descended from the west. It had dumped its load overnight and that led to the rushing waters of today.

I had lunch back at HQ and set out again, this time with a DECCW (NPWS) worker called Matt. He was going to see if the bridge across the Wollomombi was still there. It was, but it was in trouble as the raging waters tried desperately to remove it. A couple of other tourists contemplated the torrent in awe, an emotion I suspect we were all feeling.

A little further down it made normally pleasant rapids a seething maelstrom with swirling, crashing volumes of brown sludge cascading onwards, drawn inevitably by gravity's force. To the side there were a few rivulets whose paths I'd noted before but never seen running. Today they were happily gurgling through the forest, painting a more benign picture than that into which they flowed. Tiny wildflowers sought sunlight here and there, a somewhat futile exercise on an overcast day like this.

It was a memorable experience, one I hope the photos reflect. ♦

Bridge across the Wollomombi

Western Arthurs, July

Nina Gallo

Here's what I expected. We would leave the warm comfort of our rental car to embark upon our bold voyage. The yowling jaws of the Western Arthurs would rise to meet us, its serrated ridges and tortured crags lying in wait with the patience of a predator. We would be welcomed, much as the Hobbits were welcomed by Mordor. Thunder would roll, dark clouds would circle, gather and release a fury of hail and sleet.

Welcome, my pretties, to the Western Arthurs in winter. One of the most notoriously challenging, difficult walking routes in Australia. We would enter of our own foolish volition and we would be in its thrall, where it could have its violent way with us. I was convinced it was a bad, no, heedless, no, completely bloody preposterous idea.

Sun - or rain?

I figured we would probably die, but not before spending days struggling desperately, facing challenge after challenge, each more perilous than the one before. We would traverse gullies where the sun never shone; we would

A bit steep here - don't fall!

broach voids of such profound inky blackness that their depth was beyond comprehension; we would teeter across unsteady logs covered in moss and slime; we would squirm and struggle up boulder-choked chimneys to find ourselves at an impasse. We would front point across vertical cliffs covered in verglas, hundreds of metres above an alpine lake, which was home to nineteen crocodiles five metres long.

One of us, delicately rearranging a foot, would slip and go tumbling like a rag-doll down the vegetated cliff face, saved only by the quick and forceful drive of an ice axe into a tree root. We would struggle, we would fight the good fight, a valiant fight, and then, with the car in sight, believing that maybe, just maybe, we had triumphed– perhaps my friend and I could even exchange a veiled look of excitement: 'This is it! We made it!' - it would take us down. A ferocious storm of seven days, a crumbling foothold, a root which had just had it with being used as a handle: whatever. There were so many ways we could go.

Yep, based on all the reports I'd heard of hiking in the Western Arthurs, I thought this was a pretty reasonable approximation of what we'd encounter. To say I was a little intimidated would be an underestimation. It was all good for my mountaineer friend who had come up with the fanciful idea. She was used to hauling half her weight up mountains, only to find herself in the grips of a seven year storm: she'd come home raving about how much fun she'd had. I, on the other hand, was more of a climber than a hiker, and my walking experience was limited to a couple of overnighters in the Blue Mountains and some teahouse trekking in Nepal. Nevertheless, I was bored, and figured that a hike in the Arthurs was a great, if terrifying, idea.

Across the moors on a boardwalk

The first day was a baptism of fire, and my fantasies were immediately disproved. We would not stumble straight out of the car into the jaws of the range. No, first we would endure a day of slogging, stumbling and tripping across the mudbog of a plain which is the approach to the range. There was a lot of sinking, squelching and darting from slat to submerged wood slat – what was obviously once a boardwalk, but has long since been buried by tonnes of mud. It was not at all what I had expected, and it shocked me right out of my Mordor imaginations.

A view of Federation Peak

Mist boiling up one side of the range

A harsh land, but beautiful

Our first sight of the range came as a surprise. We just looked up from our mud-clodded boots after hours of flat terrain and there it was. Its flanks rose dramatically from the mud flats and dark clouds huddled around its highest peaks. Wisps of mist circled the lower ridges, which extended as far as we could see. It was still, and it was silent, and it was magical. Without going into too much detail, as I wouldn't want to spoil the excitement for you, I will say this: hiking the Western Arthurs traverse took us into some of the most rugged, twisted and awe-inspiring landscapes I have seen in Australia. It is terrain that really can't be experienced in any other way.

We were lucky enough to have stellar weather for almost the entire trip, although the rain did close in as we walked back out along the plains. Our ice axes and crampons were not required. Even so, it was no walk in the park. I remember thinking a few times, as I was hanging off a couple of wiry tree roots, descending a near vertical gully of eroded mud, 'man, they call this a bushwalk?!' Walking in the Western Arthurs requires complete focus and commitment, and it had much more in common with my climbing experiences than hiking. Some sections were exposed and tenuous, and there are many sections where you're very much in the no-fall zone. But the navigation is straightforward - in many places the only way to progress is along the single narrow path which weaves through terrain that looks just as inhospitable on approach as it does looking back. In other places the route is marked by cairns.

I think what I loved most about walking in the Western Arthurs was the meditative absorption of every moment. The days passed unthinkingly as we negotiated the drops and climbs, set up pack-hauling and lowering systems and made our steady progress along the spiny range. The nights were gobbled up in eating and sleeping the sleep of the utterly spent.

Despite its physical difficulty, the Western Arthurs, far from being a ferocious opponent, was a kind of refuge. In that remote wilderness, existence was pared back to its most essential components. Walking, eating, sleeping, companionship. The rhythm was simple, the air was clear, the land was alive and amazingly, at the end, so were we. More than ever. ♦

Acclimatising with a view

Breathless on Baruntse

Richard Pattison
Sydney Bushwalkers

On the summit

Baruntse (7,129 m), a rarely-climbed peak in Nepal, is as a mountain should be: remote, quiet, challenging, and demanding a tough approach trek to earn your presence.

In early October of 2010, six Australians gathered in Kathmandu to join a commercial Baruntse expedition. Two of the intrepid adventurers had never worn crampons previously – they were certainly in for a steep learning curve! The team was truly international, with representatives from nine countries. Of the 14 climbers, only a father and son from Sydney knew each other prior to the trip.

I always find it fascinating to discover so many people with similar personalities and values from such diverse backgrounds, some as far afield as Norway, Greece and Hong Kong. However, the introduction phase of any team always presents some uneasy moments and challenges as you get to know one another, and the team establishes itself. You must adjust to customs and attitudes from different societies, accept the good differences and attempt to ignore the less agreeable differences for the 'greater good' of team spirit. Things such as snorting, spitting and lack of pleasantries become part of the rich tapestry of human behaviour. Each new day on the trek becomes more comfortable and enjoyable surrounded by new friends.

Baruntse, located halfway between Everest and Makalu, lies near the head of the pristine and remote Hunku valley, possibly the windiest valley in the world. It also boasts views of five of the six highest mountains in the world (Everest, Kanchenjunga, Lhotse, Makalu & Cho Oyu). The Hunku valley has no villages or tea-houses, robbing us of the cultural experience of meeting locals on our journey, usually a highlight of any travel experience. However, it did enable us to become closer to our team of porters, cook staff and climbing sherpas. The trek requires complete self-sufficiency, and as such we were entirely reliant on our team to carry our food and gear to base camp. The size and weight of the loads the sherpas carry is staggering. The Sherpas are so warm and friendly, always looking to help with a smile.

Climbing up from base camp

The trek through the Hunku valley follows a vague trail along river banks of glacial melt water, underneath impressive Himalayan giants. The views were constantly impressive, but lead to internal debate - should I look north or south, east or west, up or down?! It was a special experience to travel through this beautiful valley, especially knowing not many trekkers have gone before. Baruntse base camp is located by a glacial lake with a perfect yet daunting uninterrupted view of our mountain. We were delighted to reach our base so we could unpack and take care of laundry and personal ablutions over a couple of rest days.

Before any expedition sets foot on a mountain in the Himalayas, it must first hold a Buddhist Puja ceremony. This is a traditional ritual, offering gifts and prayers to the mountain and requesting safe passage. By showing respect for the mountains and the mountain gods, in return we hope our faith will be rewarded with compassion. The mountains are the most spiritual places I know on earth, more so than churches. I believe they are the grandest of all cathedrals. Perhaps climbers need mountain gods in the same manner that everyday people search for god in the lowlands. Mountain gods give climbers hope. Hope that there is a grand plan for all overhanging ice cliffs, hope that life and death is controlled by a higher source, hope that the division between life and death is not by chance.

The wind did not rest, so we pressed on with our plan regardless. The crux of the climb was just below camp 1, climbing a gully of mixed rock and ice up to the west col, protected by a fixed rope. It was a climb of around 100 vertical metres at an average angle of 40 degrees, so not terribly technical, but with 20kg packs and lack of oxygen at 6,000m, it felt more challenging than it looked. A few tumbling rocks added to the excitement so we were glad to reach the safety of camp 1 unscathed, situated on the large plateau with a perfect view of Makalu just to our east.

We melted snow for water and dined on de-hy meals as we hunkered down and waited out a day of serious wind, all the while being blasted by 100kmph wind and spindrift. The inside view of a tent becomes quite monotonous, but we slept and chatted away the restless hours. Eventually, when the wind abated to a milder 40kmph, we packed our gear and made the short journey to camp 2 at 6,400m, ready for our summit attempt. Camp 2 is situated on a smaller plateau in view of the summit ridge we would traverse the next day. We fought the wind to establish camp, before retreating to our calmer canvas cocoon. The wind blasted the tents all afternoon and night.

We planned a 3am alpine start for the summit, but spindrift filled the tent at 2am when we opened the flaps for a weather check. It was agreed it was probably a good idea to hold out a bit longer!

At dawn, the wind had rested a little, but was still gusting to over 60 km/h. We had come this far and would at least "give it a go". We gained the spectacular summit ridge above, and found the east side to be relatively sheltered. The ridge was an undulating obstacle course of steep and narrow excitement. We breathed heavily due to the altitude and exposure, but we were a match for the climbing that Baruntse offered, and were grateful to mother nature for the exhilarating views awaiting at the pinnacle of our expedition – a full 360 degree view of the Himalayas. With fingers and toes beginning to numb, it was time to descend to the safety and artificial world of the tent.

Nearing the summit

Then the celebrations began. We celebrated back at base camp, we celebrated at the first village we reached, we celebrated at the second village we reached and finally we celebrated in Kathmandu! We were 14 climbers of different backgrounds, experience and ambitions, but we formed a strong bond driven by a common desire for a Himalayan adventure. We're definitely all richer for our blustery and breathless encounter with Baruntse. ♦

Walking in the outback

Rob Jung

Outback walking - it's all about water. The 'outback' is the three-quarters of Australia which is arid or semi-arid. This sparsely populated area is one of wide spacious landscapes, often punctuated by low ranges, where long droughts and pitiless heat in summer is normal.

What is arid? It is where evaporation very greatly exceeds average annual rainfall. The more sophisticated definitions use vegetation, but a simple one uses annual rainfall: <250 mm per year in southern Australia, or <350 mm in the north. For semi-arid landscapes the deficiency is just less extreme.

Aboriginal wells were not confined to arid Australia - this one is near Yarrawonga. It was built by enlarging an existing trough in the rock using repeated fires and digging, and is near the base of a large granite slab that provided its catchment. It holds approximately 20,000 L.

Outback areas containing low ranges interest me. They have enough elevation to gaze out over the landscape, provide ecological diversity and often interesting gorges which offer a cool refuge and possible water. Yes, water is present in arid Australia. The Aboriginal groups who inhabited our great desert areas could find water and live there. This article is about using the available water resources, rather than carrying it long distances.

Thirst can drive a man to make ethically questionable decisions. David Carnegie explored some of our most difficult country on his great trek through arid Western Australia, from Coolgardie to Halls Ck and return (1896-7). After a period without finding water he resorted to desperate measures, capturing the local experts - the desert Aborigines. When his tethered captive still did not lead to water, he was fed salted beef and little water until he did. Afterwards Carnegie let his prisoners go.

Sources of Water

The types of water sources Carnegie found are typical of those in other parts of arid Australia. A quarter of them were constructed native wells. They were also reported by other explorers (eg Giles) and were common in the Bourke-Cobar region (Gunderbooka). These days, dams, bores and wells constructed for the pastoral industry can also provide water.

When preparing for an outback trip I start with water sources, checking available maps for watercourses, tanks (= dams) and waterhole locations. None of them are guaranteed to actually contain any water. Different rock types hold and express water differently, so that carrying a geological map on a trip can be worthwhile.

Excellent outback walking routes exist in National Parks such as Gundabooka, Mutawintji, Flinders Ranges, MacDonnell Ranges and Karijini. Going there simplifies access issues as there is just one authority. Some Parks have restrictions over routes and camping (e.g. Mutawintji). Park staff are worth contacting about regulations and waterholes, although their knowledge is often second hand. Let them know your car's registration and for how long you will be out. Chat to them after your trip.

Walking recognised tracks provides valuable experience. The Larapinta Trail (LT) near Alice Springs (see Vol 31 Issue 3) is an excellent walk, with a transport infrastructure, extra water provided in tanks, and escape routes.

Arid landscape: Mt Giles MacDonnell Ranges, rainfall 320 mm/yr

For some of the more visited arid areas magazines or books may have route and water information. The internet can be helpful, and visits to good public libraries such as the Mitchell in Sydney can also be worthwhile, even if only for historical background. The accounts of most of

Arid landscape: gibber plain, Gammon Ranges, rainfall 220 mm/yr

Water near the base of Gammon Falls - a 75% probability waterhole

Spectacular Yackie waterhole gorge - a 90-95% probability waterhole

Australia's major explorers are available at:

http://gutenberg.net.au/explorers-journals.html.

Current and historic rainfall and temperature data are available from the Bureau of Meteorology via the internet.

Unless there has been heavy rain I restrict my outback walks to the cooler months: May to September or narrower. Comparing rainfall for the past year with long term averages helps assess the likely state of water sources. Remember that rainfall is often patchy. I'm conservative when visiting a new area, or one which has been dry for a long period. In July 2007 I visited the Gammon Ranges, which we knew had been dry for a long time. In severe droughts even the few waterholes may dry up. We used my car as a mobile waterhole with >25 L per person. We set up two short trips, leaving a reserve for emergencies.

On each walk in the Gammon Ranges we set off with 2 days water (winter, ~6 L each) and 3 days food. We mostly followed stony creek beds, maximising our chances of finding waterholes. On the first trip, along Arcoona Creek, we found no water so we returned to the car on the second day. On our next trip, up Gammon Creek, we noted pools in a couple of places on our way to Gammon Falls. That water was not very inviting, being fouled by (a lack of) goat hygiene. Fortunately there was fairly clear water near the Falls, so using this as a base we were able to spend the next day further exploring the area. We reached the spectacular gorge around Yackie waterhole, where there was also water.

We used "*A Walking Guide to the Northern Flinders Ranges*" by Heard, 1990.

Etiquette around waterholes

Water is the most precious commodity and should be treated as such. It may be of dubious quality with the presence of dead animals near it or in it. Introduced animals such as goats, cattle, camels, sheep and horses are all more destructive than native animals. From accounts of the explorers we know waterholes were in better shape in pre-European times when traditional owners managed them. They kept the entrances covered with sticks and bark, which kept animals out and the water cool.

When the waterholes are few, avoid swimming in them; instead do all washing some distance away.

Camp away from the water as well, and not where the animals walk. Wild horses through your campsite in the middle of the night can be scary to say the least!

Be careful consuming outback water, especially from still bodies of water. These are more susceptible to contamination by

Water and rock type:

Waterholes are more abundant in the hill country near Arkaroola (above) than they are in the nearby Gammon Ranges (below).

In the Northern Flinders Ranges wells are a useful water source. The author uses a light-weight water collector: it is more effective than a billy with handle. The well in the photo is 12 m deep, which is typical. A narrower version of this collector can extract water from 10 cm diameter bore casings where a billy will not work at all. It is made of a light waterproof nylon. A small stone is put inside to make it sink, and heavier one is put in a bag on the side to make the rim tip over when it reaches the water.

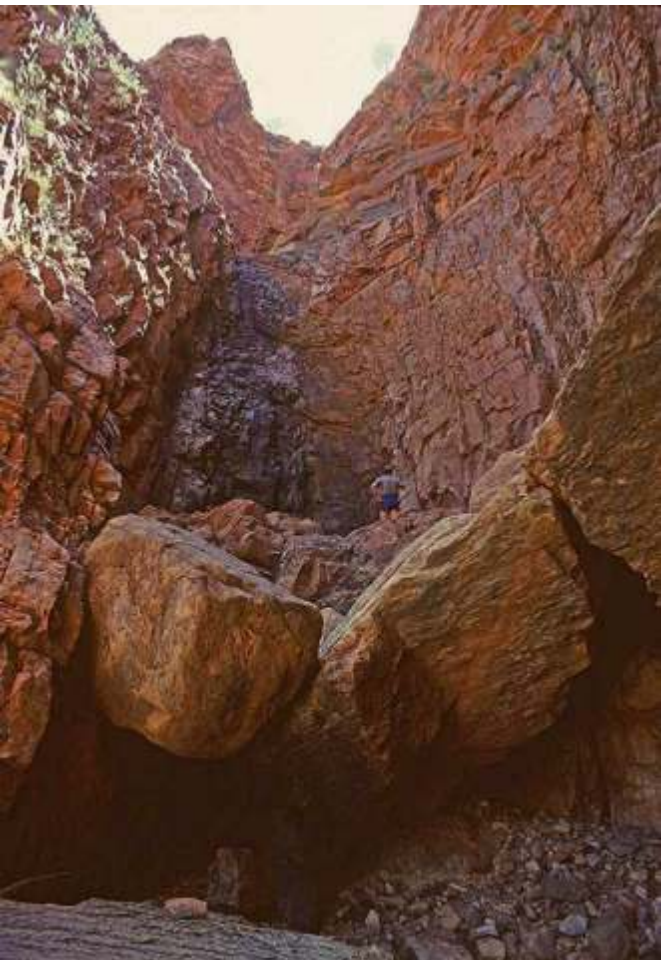
In Gibson's desert (annual rainfall 250 mm) the land sets the travel rules. It was named by Giles after his partner who perished there in April 1874. Giles and Gibson were reconnoitering a route west when they pushed too far. The effort to regain their main camp 100 miles away became desperate, having limited food, water and now only one horse. They separated, with Gibson riding ahead to get help and Giles going on foot as best he could. Gibson, with their only compass, lost his way and was never seen again, but Giles survived.

animals and humans because the supply is finite and not replenished. Ponds exposed to sunlight are warmed, and this accelerates the growth of hazardous organisms. Many books describe hazardous organisms in water and their effects, ranging from mild headaches, gastro-intestinal disturbances and fatigue, through vomiting to severe fever, cardio-respiratory problems and even death. So you should treat the water - boiling the billy being the customary and most effective way. Remove any scum which appears. Other known methods may be used too.

Naturally occurring chemicals in the water can also be a problem. In some parts of Australia concentrations of arsenic, fluoride and uranium exceed safe levels. For example, there are radioactive springs in the vicinity of Arcaroola. Sometimes maps show this information, at other times local authorities may know, or they may not. ♦

Magnesium aluminium sulfate precipitating in a pool, Karijini. Such efflorescence was widespread on our Karijini walk in May 2007. In this pool, crystals were forming in the water. The taste was often quite (unpleasantly) strong.

Groundwater often contains high concentrations of iron (above). It can be detected from its bitter "metallic" taste and the rusty look of the water as the iron precipitates when this water comes in contact with air. Sometimes this is due to iron-loving bacteria, but they leave the water quite drinkable.



On and off the Larapinta trail. Mt Sonder (below) is on it while the canyon (left) is not.

Jungaburra in the Snow

Hugh Spiers

Ever walked in snow ALL DAY!? Neither had any of us before today. But to start at the beginning... An 0830 start at Wentworth Falls had been promulgated, and by that time only four foregathered there to face the icy blast. Not quantity, but quality, including Hugh - lovingly referred to as il Commandante. A minor gale at the carpark, 2 C, and bits of snow flying around led to some erethism. Anyone not on time would miss out. It was no day to sit around - so - off! We collected Tony found lurking around Gearin's Pub. Only five, but at least today we wouldn't be hampered by people confusing Saturday walks with Interpretative walks.

Leader il Commandante had nutted out five possible walks, all off-track, with the choice was to be made on the day depending on who turned up and what they looked like. The violent winds eliminated two walks, leaving Kamarah Canyon, Boyce's Gully, and Jungaburra Brook. The decision was made en route.

Jungaburra Canyon headwaters

Four fit and capable walkers (plus il C) could tackle the last named.

Snow storms in the valley as we sped along Darling Causeway hit us as we stepped out of the car: a major SW gale and snow - a true blizzard. This, of course, did not deter us from the need to form an introductory circle for prayers and thanks and the customary hortatory admonition against treading on native plants; but the hasty donning of gaiters distracted the attention of some from the service. Then the feckful pentad was off along Jinki to the Wilkinson Hill turn off. Downwards now, and at 494 865, not claiming fatidical powers and feeling unusually exorable, I asked the group whether they felt adventurous enough to attempt entry into Jungaburra from a little further north than might enable a through road. Their positive and apparently fidimplicitary response was gratifying.

The going through the dry sclerophyll was not too difficult and we found a way down to the creek c 494 868. A narrow, anfractuous gully awaited us. Marvellous! Without going any further the scene here would be reward in itself for a short walk. We looked at the thick undergrowth. The snow had ceased for a moment. Was that sunlight? Surely not!

We pressed on into snow and the beginnings of Jungaburra Canyon. The going was difficult as expected, flexuous, with many creek crossings. Lotti suggested a stop for M/T. Fair enough, it was the first place we'd found where a stop was even possible. We had the palatial spread prepared, the lobster dishes looking so fine on the tablecloth

Dining in style - so to speak

embroidered with pink rosettes, a choice of Waldorf or Caesar salads set out and the Mateus Rosé poured, when the snow thickened again! With no shelter it was possible only to pull up the wet-weather gear higher around the head and finish the hot drinks.

We started off W but before long came across a not unexpected obstacle: a delightful little waterfall and chute sided by steep cliffs. No way. There was a creek crossing not far back so we climbed the low cliff on the S side and followed the spur westwards. Access to the creek is possible at the nose. We pushed on around the gully. The going was as bad as the worst parts of our Victoria Brook jaunt, and it was unrelenting. So was the snow which was to continue from the M/T break until we finished the walk. Our motto 'fortiter in re' sustained us, but hopes of progressing much further faded and we made for a long overhang cave. 100 m took about half an hour. Festina lente may be a more apposite motto! Diary excerpt: The Lunch Spot is magnificent and quite dry. Some foregoer once made a comfortable campsite here, who knows - an Agapemone perchance? A spectacular high nose towers above us on the other side of the creek, though today it looms misty and menacing through the thick snow.

The joys of canyon walking

With appropriate caution we lit a fire. Necessary nepenthe for the soul! We warmed our spirits, dried our clothes and burnt our gloves! Such a warm, happy time. Emanuel turned a visit to the Gents' into a recce and discovered, as is his wont, a nearby exit line up the cliffside. Lunch over, we managed it, the oldest member being assisted by a safety tape around the base of a tree later described as 'not too stable' (I hope they were referring to the tree). From on top there's a grand view down the canyon and, importantly, the possibility of a steep

Do you think the weather is improving?

descent to the creek where 'perhaps' the undergrowth might be easier going on a recce planned for another day.

The vertical back to the road is about 200 m. Generally the walk is graded 3/4. Today it was made more difficult by the wet rocks and moss, the wet undergrowth, the cold, and the snow. It was made easier by the presence of our mountain climber Agonistes, as well as all the others. As they used to say, we fadged pretty well. Thanks all. ♦

Il Commandante, leading bravely

NAVSHIELD 2011

July 2nd / 3rd

Keith Maxwell, BWRS

Are you a bushwalker or just a follower? Do you enjoy many bushwalks but have precious little idea of where you went? Are your bushwalks on tracks as cross country travel is a mystery? Could you locate where you are on the map by checking your immediate surroundings? Does 'back bearing' mean remembering your way back home after a party?

If the answer is "yes" to any or all of these questions then you should be practicing your bush navigation skills within a team from your Club at NavShield 2011 on 2nd / 3rd July.

NavShield is an annual remote area navigation event for the Emergency Services that is open to members of Confederation Clubs run by Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad (BWRS). You can enter either the one day or overnight event where teams attempt to find as many as possible, randomly scattered 'checkpoints' set in typical bushwalk country. Unmarked maps are supplied.

Many teams return year after year to take up the challenge of checkpoint plotting, route planning, successful navigation to each of their selected checkpoints and returning to base camp before the event deadline. Finding a checkpoint is a great confirmation of good navigation. Each year BWRS aims to set an accurate course with a range of easy to hard checkpoints. They also aim for a safe but friendly event with 'radio checkpoints' which you must report to but where you can also socialise with other participants. Most overnight teams elect to camp at a 'radio checkpoint'.

NavShield is not an orienteering event where you rush / run to complete a set group of checkpoints on a fixed course. At NavShield you choose how few or many checkpoints you want to find and adjust your pace accordingly.

Bushwalker appetites can be met at the end of NavShield with the optional catering. Event Registration is easy at www.bwrs.org.au . Extra information is there, of course, regarding frequently asked questions, minimum equipment and details of previous NavShields.

Taking the mystery out of cross country travel opens up much more bushwalking country. So if you want to stop being just a bushwalking follower and get so much more out of your bushwalks you should really be part of a Club team in NavShield 2011. ♦

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

I respect and admire Tom Gleeson greatly. I'm sure that he was born with walking shoes on, he runs an active club and is always willing to share his walks via photos and description. He once joined two old codgers on a wander in Koscuiszko National Park. He showed them the spartan delights of lightweight bivy bag camping and they were most grateful for his youthful energy as he made the going up through the regrowth on the south-west flanks of Round Mountain - I know, I was one of those old fellows.

Everything that Tom states in his The Bushwalker Winter 2010 "Bush Navigation and Wilderness Walking" article concerning navigation and cairns is factual and true. Being a late starter to bushwalking, I know only too well that I need to improve my bush navigation. Reading the lie of the land and map and compass work are both learnt skills and arts to be applied, applied, applied.

But surely there can be some compromise. Marker cairns and tapes (judiciously and sparingly placed) can be a great confirmation of navigational bounds for we 'newbies' and I'm the first to admit that there is some relief when a marked point is reached. In addition, being primarily a day walker, I find that a marked route into a remote area gets me there quicker and with more time to reach a distant objective. I will continue to document and publish marked routes in Namadgi National Park on Johnny Boy's Walkabout Blog: (http://jevans.pcug.org.au), with the proviso that we start from the premise that a cairn means 'someone has been here before'.

It would be a pity if Tom's article incited an anti-cairn zealot to dismantle a well known cairn, say, marking the exit route from a high mountain, which would be useful in a descent under adverse weather conditions.

John Evans

Dear Editor

John Evans is a remarkable man, with great enthusiasm for the bush. However, I find the third paragraph of his letter to be in general opposition to the principles of minimal impact bushwalking as it does not promote self-reliance, and does not encourage walkers to join a bushwalking club and learn navigation skills safely. The Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW is the body to which (most) NSW and ACT clubs are affiliated, and it has produced two documents which address the responsible use of our natural areas. I quote from two of them below.

BUSHWALKERS' CODE:

Become proficient at bush navigation.

If you need to build cairns, blaze trees, place tags, break off twigs, or tie knots in clumps of grass to mark your route, you are lacking in bush navigation skills.

CONFEDERATION POLICY ON NATURAL AREAS:

Self reliance of users encouraged. Minimal and non-specific promotion. In particular no through route guides. *Printed guides*: Detailed route guides are permissible so long as they give due regard to protection and conservation. Limited to general description of the terrain etc, with only broad suggestions concerning route possibilities. Where a well established route passes through wilderness, supportive material should contain sufficient detail to guide the walker through.

In light of the above statements from the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW, I cannot justify building cairns, placing tapes, nor publishing detailed track notes. In the ANU Mountaineering Club, as in the Sydney University Bushwalkers, trip leaders like myself go to a great deal of effort to educate and mentor new walkers in the ways of minimal impact bushwalking, including quite a lot of time spent teaching map and compass navigation skills. I am very impressed with how my walkers are going and am proud to say that the "Walk safely, walk with a club" message is having a positive impact.

Press on regardless,

Tom Gleeson

Editor's comments

Clearly this is a difficult area, engendering much debate. For what it is worth, I draw some distinction between off-track navigation in a declared wilderness area (eg deep in Wollemi) and navigation on a known and published track (eg through Blue Gum Forest). But whether tapes and cairns are needed in either case is another matter. Who has not laughed at the cairns you sometimes see on the track through Blue Gum Forest?

Do we have places where a single cairn serves a really useful purpose? I can think of a few: the engraved termite mound on Gingra Spur comes to mind. Can I navigate that area without the 'cairn'? Yes. Could novices? A good question. Perhaps there is some distinction between building lots of new cairns and leaving some old traditional cairns in place.

We welcome continued debate on this subject. *Ed.*