

The Bushwalker



**Near Cesjacks Hut, May 2011,
Kosciusko National Park**

**Volume 36
Issue 3
Winter 2011**

Wouldn't you like to be here?



Point Perpendicular, Kattang Nature Reserve. *Photo: Ian Smith*



The view from Mt Stillwell Trig, Kosciuszko NP. *Photo: Debbie Rodden, Goulburn Bushwalking Club*

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.

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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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Front Cover: Near Cesjacks Hut, May 2011, Kosciusko National Park. Photo: Roger Caffin.

Volume 36, Issue 3, Winter 2011

From the editor's desk. . .

Well, what a summer, as I said in the last issue. But the Autumn hasn't been a real lot better, has it? As I write this, it has been cold rain around Sydney for the last few weeks.

We went for a nice autumn walk up around Mt Jagungal in May, and at least it didn't rain. It was -2 to -3 C overnight for the first two nights, -8 C for the third night, and the fourth night we got maybe 200 mm of nice fresh snow. That left us walking out on the fifth day in the snow, wearing our low-cut joggers. You know something? Fresh dry snow isn't bad for walking in joggers. Our socks stayed dry. Must say though: we saw practically no-one else the whole time. Where was everyone?

Articles for Publication

I 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 carried some forward. But rest assured that every article you send it will get serious attention.

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



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Treking in India

Jim Cameron.
Lake Macquarie Bushwalkers



Valley of the Flowers

I have a friend in New Delhi with whom I often trek. Normally September - October is the perfect time for trekking as the wet season is over and winter has yet to come, but this year all hell broke loose with flooding rains out of season. The trek this time was to The Valley Of The Flowers and to Hemkund Sahib Lake.

Day 1: By local bus from New Delhi to Rishikesh, about 220 km.

Day 2: Left at 7.00 am by jeep for the town of Joshimath approximately 260 km north in the Himalayas. At 9.30 am we struck a landslide and the traffic was already built up about 1.2 km in front of us. The temp by now was ~32 C and still rising; we only had the one large water bottle with us and no shade, with a steep drop to the river below us. The traffic behind us went off into the distance. The blockage was cleared and we started moving at 3.00 pm. Changed jeeps at Chamoli for the rest of the trip to Joshimath. The rain had also started and the ride in the dark was even more scary: you could see large

boulders on the sides of the road and nearly every bit of bitumen had been damaged. This was the main highway! Eventually we reached the Chardam Yatara - an Eco Tent lodge in a rose garden with all facilities.

Day 3: Drizzling but beautiful views up and down the valley as the clouds intermittently cleared. Today was to be a get-fit day so off we went in the drizzle, to do about 12 km and 1100 m each way.

Day 4: Up at 6.00 am, breakfast, into town with packs to board a jeep for Ghovinghat, via winding and damaged roads. Left Ghovinghat at 9:10 am for the 15 km, 1248 m climb to Ghangaria, at 3048 m. Arrived there at 4.20 pm exhausted, cold and wet from rain and sweating, found hotel lodge and booked in for 3 nights. Our hotel was opposite a Sikh temple with loud speakers going until 10.00 pm. From Ghangaria you can do day trips to the Valley Of The Flowers National Park and to Hemkund Sahib Lake and temple: a sacred pilgrimage place for Sikh Indians.

The route today had been on a man-made stone pathway, steep in places and with a few hundred steps. This trekking trail can have up to 6000 persons per day on it. Some people pay to ride ponies, some pay to have ponies take their luggage while they walk, others pay to be taken in carrier chairs carried by Nepalese porters, and others like us carry our own gear and walk.

The river was still raging, the scenery beautiful with forest and lots of side waterfalls, birds, tea houses and eating houses and farm houses with women carrying bundles of cut grasses for the ponies and farm cattle. Some parts of the track had washaways and diversions, and repairs were in progress. The Indians do these treks with thongs, sandals, sandshoes and barefoot - maybe because their footwear had failed as you could see lots of discarded footwear on the side of the track. The only ones I saw with substantial footwear were westerners and 2 groups of army soldiers doing their pilgrimage. As for westerners, you probably saw one for every 300 Indians.

Day 5: The Sikh temple loudspeakers started prayers at 4:30 am, so that was the end of sleep. But the clouds had cleared and we could see that the sun would shine at least for some time today. After yesterday's hard walk we chose the easier trip to the Valley of the Flowers, 4.5 km and 450 m each way.

We left at 8.00 am for the Valley of the Flowers National Park and clouds returned with cold drizzle. The entry fee for westerners was 650 rupees; for Indians 15 rupees. Through a beautiful thick green forest of large trees, ferns, flowers, mosses,



Landslides on the highway

then across a steel footbridge to more forest, and up through this huge gorge which opened into the Valley of the Flowers. By 9.15 am the sun had come out and we were hot. It was mainly green open country with views to glaciers and waterfalls. We saw only a few birds but heard lots more singing. Flowers had blossomed and died, but there were still plenty more blossoming. Looking everywhere you could see white flowers opening across the valley against a beautiful green background.

The Valley of the Flowers would probably be about 12 km long with a river, glaciers, waterfalls, snow-capped peaks, birds, butterflies, but best of all, only a handful of people. We walked a bit further across a few creeks with temporary pole bridges and stopped at 10.30 am, climbed a boulder in brilliant sunshine and stayed there for an hour eating and absorbing this wonderful pristine scenery with only the noise of nature. We then head back slowly, looking at any other miniature flowers and plants we had missed on the way up. Arrived back at 1.30 pm: it was much easier going down hill. We saw all of about 30 people today in the park - possibly 20 westerners and 10 Indians.

For every person who goes to the Valley of the Flowers 70 to 80 would go to Hemkund Sahib Lake: it is a pilgrimage trek for them. To think they have travelled this far up into the Himalayas and not done the short trek to the Valley of the Flowers is just amazing.

Day 6: Another short sleep night with the Sikh temple active again. Today we went to Hemkund Sahib Lake, 6 km and 1330 m each way. I was told this is about the steepest trek in India: other treks certainly go higher but not as consistently steep. Sunny but very cold when we left at 7.20 am. Plenty of action and bartering at the stables. Owners waiting for people to hire their animals, and Nepalese porters with their carrier chairs, but we walked on by with our day packs. This track too is a paved pathway, again with washaways and repairs. First we went through thick green forest for just over 1 km at a steady climb, and then into open country to see the steep climb zig zagging up the mountain into the distance.

The scenery was waterfalls, low-growing clusters of flowers, a white eagle, doves, crows and 5 other species of birds, and the white/grey monkeys. Within the first 2 km some people were turning back as they thought they would not make it. Some were quite elderly; a couple where the woman was pregnant; another couple with a 4 year old daughter trying to walk it. In the last 1.5 km we (and everyone else) had quite a few breather stops: it was warm in the sun and we were nearing 4500 m. Arrived at 11.30 am to lots of people and noise. All the people on ponies who had overtaken us on the way up were there. More loud speakers at the Sikh temple and more reconstruction work.

The small lake is on this small plateau, and the water just waterfalls over the edge. The water just off glaciers was very cold, but quite a few men were stripping down to their undies to go for a quick dip. Some women too, but they were behind a corrugated iron wall. The men came out shivering and dressed



The track to Hemkund Sahib Lake

very quickly. My friend filled 2 bottles of this special pristine water to take back to New Delhi for his friends and himself. We then went into the Sikh temple and the Hindu temple for prayers and gave donations. After a short rest and lunch we left at 12.15 pm reaching Ghangaria at 3.15 pm, taking our time. ♦



Hemkund Sahib Lake

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TASMANIAN
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Woolpack Rocks

Ian Smith

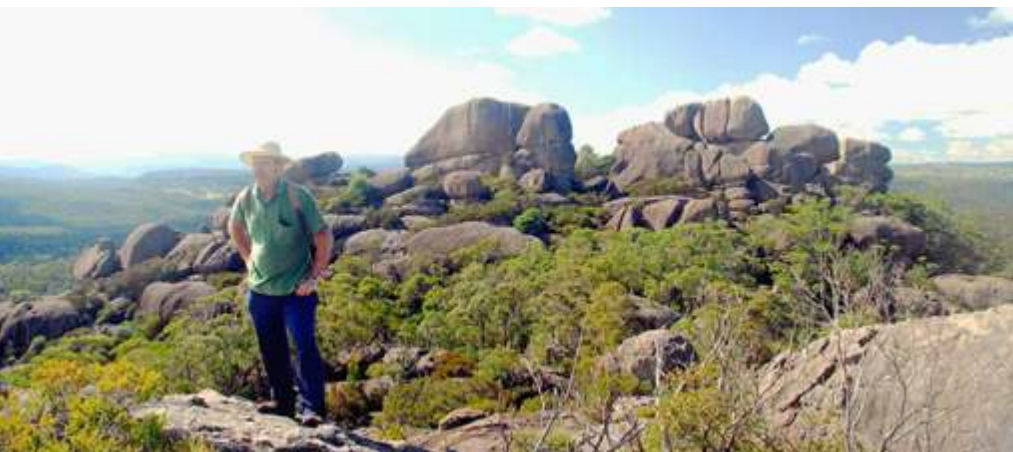
It had rained; lord it had rained. The portents in the form of thunder had been around for hours before it finally arrived but arrive it did, some time in the middle of the night.

I awoke about 4 am and wondered if I'd be able to drive off the area I was in - which was, wait for it, the local cemetery. Though the rain was heavy and noisy, I wasn't bothered by neighbours.

I later learned from a guy who stayed at the local caravan park just a few hundred metres away that he'd had to slosh around in mud. Me, I had the

door to the day's expedition. Dorrigo was where I had a cup of hot chocolate, meeting the Argentinean with the exotic bike collection and a wealth of life knowledge that he was only too happy to dispense to you, whether you wanted to hear it or not. Why his life had led him so far away to a secluded village atop the Great Dividing Range would be a story I had not enough time for, so I headed off as soon as I'd downed the beverage.

At the start of the walk I met up with Julie and her son Dylan, both of whom were familiar with a bushwalking site I



Woolpack Rocks

grassiest field in all of Dorrigo. Creative thinking.

Still, it looked like my mooted walk to Woolpack Rocks, a place I'd never seen before, was in serious jeopardy. I'd been to Cathedral Rocks twice before but Woolpack had eluded me. I stayed awake and watched the European football featuring yet some more Messi magic before I had my bowl of Weetbix just as the heavens took pity on me.

The sun was desperately trying to shine and push the clouds away and it eventually succeeded, thus opening the

Deep in the forest



was on. We walked off together through the bush and swamp land that alternated until we started to climb. It was here we came across two National Parks workers, one of whom had taken the famous photographs of Ebor Falls when they had iced up completely a few years ago. The pictures made the front page of all the local papers, and with good reason as the event is an extreme rarity.

We moved on up the climb though I sidetracked down to a streamlet that gurgled attractively enough to lure me to its cool splashing waters, drooping ferns and decaying branches. It wasn't a permanent stream but it was nice when it did run.

It sits at the bottom of the granite outcrop called Woolpack Rocks. The trail immediately begins its uphill transition though it takes less than ten minutes to ascend, at times through narrow clefts and up ladders.



High on the Rocks

On high it's a different world. The vegetation is negligible; it's the rocks and their endless variety of shapes that grab their attention. On the exposed portions the wind was noticeable, its cooling effect in contrast to the sweat I had exuded on the climb. There was no animal life visible save for an eagle that appeared and soared around the outcrop on the updraft, eyes keenly focused for the possible movement of prey below, its tufted wingtips flexing in the breeze.

Your mind starts to drift in places like this. Life's problems take on a different dimension; the vastness of the continent is clearly visible from on high; there's time for reflection as you recharge your mind. After about 45 minutes on top it was time to leave, but the memory lingers still of another place in Australia's wilderness, where the scars of time are there to be seen. Yet, somehow, the granite seems timeless. ♦

Penrose Gully South

Michael Keats
The Bush Club

Wolgan Walls



Research for this walk included a close study of various aerial photo Internet resources. It was clear from the hidden dark sections on any one of them that this adventure contained a lot of unknowns and was potentially an impossible assignment. On the day we achieved it all, and had experiences way beyond the norm. Yes, the rope did come in for use, and yes, there was some exposure and yes, I was pushed to the limit of my comfort zone from time to time. That said it was an experience I will relish forever.

Driving into the Wolgan Valley the grasslands were lush and vivid green. The season had been bountiful and every square metre of pasture could have supported livestock. Way back in the late 1820's when James Walker annexed the Wolgan Valley as an outstation of his spread at Wallerawang (original name for Wallerawang), this would have been his vision - a part of old English verdure capable of supporting many hundreds of cattle.

Opening the vehicle doors after parking at the point for crossing the Wolgan River, the noise of water rushing down had us questioning whether we could cross it in safety. Although the

crossing proved easy the force of the water was much greater than anticipated.

The first stop was at an old coalmine site at GR 415 205. This mine was an exploratory mine operated by Coalex from 1972 to 1974. After closure the head works were dismantled, the site filled in and later still planted with native trees.

Leaving the coalmine we headed NE to the junction of the Old Coach Road and the alignment of the former Wolgan Valley Railway, at GR 418 208. The perfect grade old railway bed is readily discernable (despite numerous rock falls) with sections of old wooden sleepers all the way to the point where it crosses Penrose Gully. A massive rock and earth fill bank carried the former railway line across Penrose Gully. Since the line was abandoned the creek has cut a 20 m deep vertical slot through the embankment. We stopped here to take pictures and note the beginning of our serious climb into the southern arm of Penrose Gully.

For the next two and a half hours we climbed. It proved to be one of the most interesting and diverse climbs in the area. It had been my intention to stick to the base of the cliffs on the western side of the gully. Staying at the cliff base was fine until the valley narrowed at the junction

WILLIS'S WALKABOUTS

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

It's green again and I'm going

The amazing rains of 2010 have continued into 2011 making this another great year to visit the Centre. Waterholes are full and wildflowers are spectacular. It's too much for me to resist.

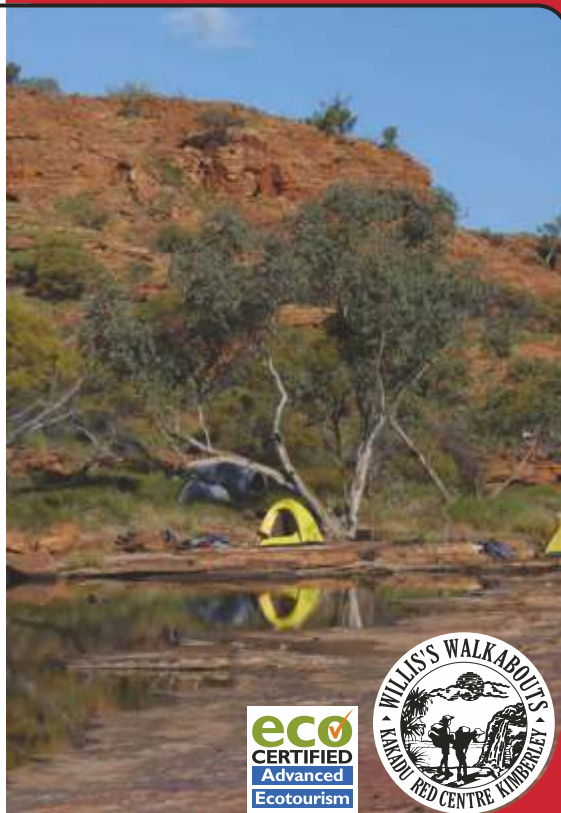
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Russell Willis



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Tour guide, preacher, or orator?

with the eastern branch of Penrose Gully. Here huge boulders forced us into the creek bed. Some clambering later the valley widened out and we found a small pleasant flat area with natural stone seats and a well mulched floor to have morning tea.

Such easy conditions did not last and soon it was back to creek walking. Marion went exploring through a stand of King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) and reported progressive water levels from ankle to thighs. At this juncture we decided there had to be a better option so a bit of back tracking was undertaken. A small cliff climb followed and again the way upstream looked good. Again this did not last. A huge tumble of rocks several metres high looked as though it would put an end to our adventure. Searching into the depths of a very dark tunnel above the creek, Steve's torch failed but there was enough natural light to work out that we could possibly negotiate a wet squeeze.

Brian went ahead and dislodged several loose rocks, opening up the way through. This was exciting stuff. Unfortunately none of the photos taken in this area were any good. Looking back after we were all safely through, it appeared that the tunnel was the result of a recent major rock fall including several large chock stones and fallen trees, creating an amazing dark wet world.

Once through the tunnel we entered another world dominated by great drifts of ferns and huge soaring eucalypts, many over 40 m high. Enclosing this world were two 50 m high vertical rock walls. We were again on the western side and

by constantly climbing and seeking the base of the cliffs we did ourselves a great favour finding a small waterfall at GR 428 199.

Past this waterfall we climbed up about 3 m onto a ledge. Progressively this ledge gave us an extra 10 m of elevation and also provided what turned out to be a wonderful but very narrow walkway. Stopping at a clearing on the ledge we looked across to the east wall of the now very tight ravine and noted a comparable ledge on the other side. There was, however, a significant difference - the ledge on the east side was devoid of vegetation and looked very scary to negotiate. On our side there was a lot of leptospermum growth and the ledge appeared to be a bit wider. Even if it was not any wider we had plants to hang onto if the vertigo got to you. The ledge was a photographers dream - every few metres there were great views of the soaring trees, deep recessed impossible vertical slots and side canyons. Miraculously we passed around the back of a small stringing waterfall. And still the ledge continued.

As the 'ravine end' of this south branch of Penrose Gully tightened more, and swung to the SE, the great eucalypt trees were supplanted by rainforest trees - coachwoods and sassafras and giant tree ferns. At 1210 the ledge finally ran out. We could not at this stage determine how far we were from the end of the ravine: the old GPS could not track enough satellites. After some debate we took a decision to descend a 'non return' descent working on the theory that in an extreme situation we could always walk down

the creek if that became necessary.

Down on the ravine floor and deep under the tree canopy we entered a rich, dark, humus covered world. Great lianas hung from trees, a dry creek bed undercut the cliff on the now southern side of the ravine. This is indeed a very special place. A further 200 m on we had a heart stopping moment. We looked up and saw that on three sides - left, right and straight ahead we were surrounded by sheer, vertical 50 m high cliffs. Was this the end of our forward journey?

Well, when it looks as though you are at the blind end of a deep canyon /ravine it is always a good idea to check it out thoroughly. As we approached the very last 30 m of the ravine, it made a 90 degree bend to the NE revealing an inclined ramp. The big question was did it go all 50 m to the top? Well there was only one way to find out - go climb. The ramp traveled in a curve inside a huge hemispherical cave and terminated with a



Deadends in the canyon



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1.5 m high and possibly climbable, very slippery and wet, rock face.

Brian, the most agile of the group climbed it and pronounced it doable. Steve decided to explore the possibilities of the very exposed continuation of the hemispherical cave; practical Marion was busy unpacking the 11 m rope. Me - I was busy taking photos.

After Steve reached the top of the exposed hairy route, he checked out that there were no further problems in reaching the plateau. Once that issue was resolved affirmatively the rope was emplaced and we all made the ascent. The actual point of ascent is GR 431 197. It was 1210 and we had successfully completed an adrenalin filled speculative adventure.

Moving to get a super view of the ravine and our ascent path we walked out onto a pagoda on the cliff edge. The views here are dramatic and the position was just right for an early and deserved lunch. Over lunch we studied the map and looked at possible routes for returning. We noted that the Old Coach Road was only slightly more than 900 m to the west. However, in that 900 m the aerial photos showed a complex knot of pagodas. All very interesting. As we put away the lunch boxes the sky began to leak a bit and threatening weather from the SW looked like getting a bit serious. Given that, I decided that although it was a longer route, it would be easier and possibly a lot drier to follow the Tiger Snake Canyon Track back to the junction with the Old Coach Road.

At 1308 we set off travelling due east towards the Tiger Snake Canyon Track, reaching this at GR 433 197 at 1317. The

junction with the Old Coach Road was made half an hour later. The last part of the track walk to the junction was notable for the huge diversity and beauty of spring wildflowers.

It is sometime since I walked the Old Coach Road, and never had I walked it with the intention of seeking industrial archaeological treasures. We had only gone 50 m when we found a telephone pole complete with insulators and wire. Several more were located and identified as we walked. At GR 421 189 we noted with interest a bridge like structure over a deep ravine. The structure was made of railway line welded together and initially appeared to have no logical reason for being there. We went to have a very close look and noted a concrete pad at the south end and a shallow channel dug into the rocks at the north end.

Along the roadside at irregular intervals were substantial steel rods cemented into the rocks. We puzzled about all this until much further down the Old Coach Road we located a set of 4 spaced steel trestles that were supports for the petrol pipeline from Glen Davis to Newnes Junction. A check with the map made it all abundantly clear - the builders of the pipeline in the 1940s had no need to follow the route of the 1906-07 Wolgan Valley Railway line through the Glowworm Tunnel - the Old Coach Road provided a perfect short cut with a built in maintenance track to boot.

These finds were a bonus to a very enjoyable day exploring the south arm of Penrose Gully. However, we were not finished with industrial archaeological work for the day. At 1502



The canyon from above

we stopped off at the old coalmine site once more this time to photograph the old concrete water storage tank and note that it was manufactured in Orange. A final wet crossing of the Wolgan River was made at 1520 and the vehicles reached a minute later. ♦



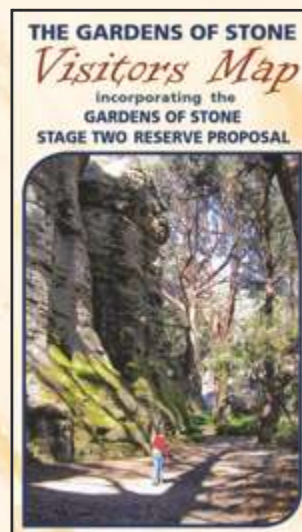
Narrow vertical slots up the sides

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Teddys Hut

Mike Robinson
Bankstown Bushwalking Club



I recently spent a lovely weekend visiting Teddys Hut (Chimneys Ridge 203563) which is on a high plain to the south of Thredbo Village. The topo notes this hut as a “ruin”, which until a few years ago was sort of correct (it only had 3 standing walls). After the fires in 2003 National Parks have rebuilt a few of

don't cross the bridge but instead continue along the northern side of the Thredbo River, following a well formed track that heads off to Boggy Plain. This track is often used by brumbies and it's quite common to see them through here. After a few km you come across a small rock cairn on a large flat stone. It's in the middle of nowhere, which leaves you wondering its purpose. If you ignore the cairn and continue walking you'll quickly discover the reason behind the naming of Boggy Plain, so crossing the river here is the best option.

On the southern side of the river there is no track as such. Multiple brumby tracks yes, distinct trail, no. That doesn't matter, it's lovely walking through the buttongrass heading up to the source of the Thredbo River. The walking gets steeper as you tackle the saddle between Mounts Leo and Terrible. The saddle, once gained, is rather flat and boggy so you need to choose your path carefully. Teddys Hut sits in the open on the far side of the saddle overlooking Wombat Gully as it descends quite steeply to the Mowamba River.

It's only a small hut and rather oddly positioned in relation to the topography around it. Dirt floor, low squat table, a sitting log and the usual saws, axe, candles, left over matches and other hut trinkets. Just enough room to cook a meal, stay warm from the frosty outside air and appreciate how wonderful it is to be there. Judging from the Visitor Book very few people visit the hut. Quite a few cross country skiers in winter are recorded, but only three walkers in the previous three months prior my visit.

Come the morning and the reason behind the hut's placement is revealed. With a hot cuppa and sitting on the steps in the open doorway, the rising sun pops over the ridge and straight onto your face, gloriously warming the skin as the

drink warms your insides. And what a magical morning it was.

For the return trip I thoroughly recommend walking via Brindle Bull Hill. From behind the hut its quite easy to access the high open plain on the northern flank of Mount Leo and skirting Brindle Bull Hill before following the ridge directly back to the carpark. The



Paddy's Rush Bogong, and across to Threadbow

the damaged huts, with Teddys being one of them. The missing wall has been replaced and the fireplace rebuilt, making it a cosy spot to spend a night.

I parked at the Cascade Trail carpark and followed the road to the bridge. You



Camping at Teddys



Mt Terrible from Teddys Hut

panoramic views through here across to Mount Kosciusko and the Ramsheads are superb and provide a perspective of that area not often experienced.

Next time you're visiting the Thredbo area, don't just think of the north. There are many wonderful walks to the south that deserve attention too. ♦



Some snowgums survived the fires



Gundabooka

Rob Jung

Gundabooka National Park is located 50 km southwest of Bourke. Its climate is semi-arid. However because of its highly variable rainfall, it is truly arid for about one in every three years. Boom and bust describes the conditions.

Since its declaration in 1996 a number of short walking tracks have been developed by park management and, as well, a car camping area at Dry Tank. Although interesting impressions of the Park may be gained from these, there is much more on offer to the able walker,

one who is prepared to spend at least several days exploring within.

My preferred time to visit is the cooler months, from May to mid September, after a short period of above average rainfall.

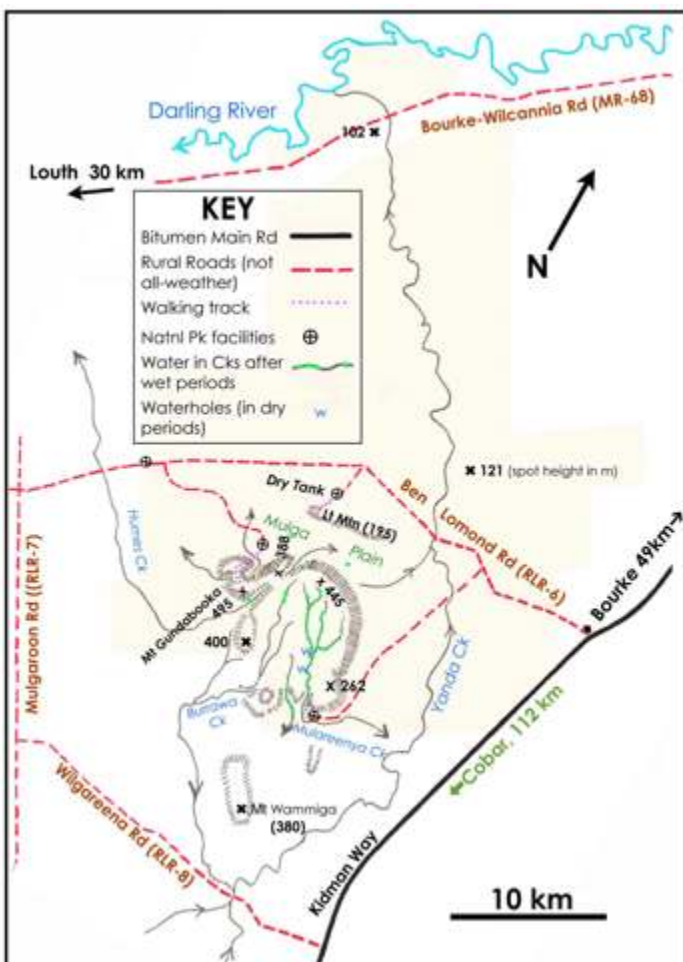
A brief history of the park

Gundabooka and especially Mulareenya Ck was for the Aborigines a very important link in a chain of permanent water-holes and food, from the Darling River across to the Byrock waterholes and elsewhere. Sturt was the first European to visit and that was during severe drought

Pastoralists arrived soon after Sturt and began occupying land, displacing Aborigines from their cultural sites such as Mulareenya Ck. During the goldrush years labour deserted and the Aborigines were able to re-assert themselves.

However soon there was an overwhelming invasion, aided by riverboat trading, good seasons and dingo control measures. What followed was a continual ebb of the pastoral industry, affected by pests (rabbits), droughts and a flow, abetted by politics (post World War 1 soldier settlement), and some good seasons.

Eventually there was recognition that both its natural and cultural values also had merit. Continued drought helped lever out the farming. The purchase of four properties lead to the formation of Gundabooka National Park. The first two of these were acquired in 1996.



in 1829. At this time the Darling R had stopped flowing and some of its water holes were too salty for his horses.

Mulareenya Creek with water





Crossing the Mulga Plain. Above left (Jun-05), after a long dry period and then the Queen's birthday storm, the ground was bare, paradoxically with occasional sheets of



water. Above right in spring (Sep-05), after above average winter rain, there was a spectacular difference. This display extended for kilometers.

My first impressions

My three trips to Gundabooka have covered different phases of the drought-wet cycle: June-2005, September-2005 and September-2010.

My first trip was with Steve in June 2005. This followed a long dry period. As we expected to find little surface water, we planned to carry enough to last us for the whole long weekend. We would take 12 L to a high point on the range (hill 388), camp and then explore for the whole of the next day. The following day we would walk out and drive back to Sydney.

It was a long way from Sydney: 850 km to Dry Tank via Cobar. By overnighing at Wellington Caves, the remainder to Dry Tank was an easy half day's drive. The first heavy rain for months fell, as Steve and I drove to our destination. It was easy traveling on the bitumen, but as soon as we entered Ben Lomond Rd, one of many infamous red-clay rural roads of Western NSW, the game changed totally. Not far in we made the mistake of leaving the middle of the road. As we did, the 4WD inevitably slid down the gentle camber into ever-deeper mud. It looked like we would be stuck for the weekend, but we did get out, and then more gingerly we proceeded to Dry Tank.

These Rural Roads are closed during wet periods. There is a website showing their status. Vehicles damage these roads when wet and there are fines for using them when they are closed.

Once we arrived, the clouds seemed to lift. Because of the rain on the drive in, we were tempted to ditch some water.

However, since it wasn't that far to walk, we compromised a little and shouldered our heavy loads including 10 L. At first we followed the walking track to Little Mountain and took in the view from there.

We then crossed the Mulga Plain. Within that there was no view – perhaps it was even claustrophobic. People have been lost within this area (requiring searches), but our progress was simple using a compass.

By the time we reached the main range, the sun was out. We climbed onto the range via a dry gorge, passing many goat carcasses as we went. Although it had rained, there was no surface water. Then we climbed back onto the ridge before camping near hill 388. There were fine views from our campsite, but so there are from many other parts of this range.

Nearby was Mt Gundabooka. Charles Sturt and Hamilton Hume climbed Mt Gundabooka in summer in 1829. Sturt's description of his view fitted ours too: "... It rises like an island from the midst of the

ocean..." The next morning over breakfast, we watched the fog slowly dispersing from the mulga sea below.

Our day trip followed down into the basin of the horseshoe, which is again described well by Sturt: "... The central space forms a large basin in which there are stunted pines and eucalypt scrub, amid a huge fragment of rocks". We followed the rocky ridgetop (left) down through the rocky and sandy watercourse of Mulareenya Ck. Ultimately in the creek, we reached special sections of low gorges, overhangs and

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Gundabooka rises like an island above the sea of mulga



The top of the range

pavements. This was also a place of permanent water: the kind of place we did not want to leave.

Unsurprisingly, it was these kinds of places the Aborigines liked as well, and there they carried out ceremonies and painted impressive galleries of rock-art, in the style of the Cobar district.

We left the range via a small gorge near hill 262, then skirted the NNW face of the range. We scrambled up a steep gorge through the face - not all of these go. We then followed the range top past hill 445 and back to camp.

Our walking was carried out in balmy weather. It was clear and fresh after rain, and pleasantly cool, but sunny. But there was a surprise awaiting us yet. In the near dawn hours of Monday, a violent thunderstorm swept through. It poured, and forked lightning jagged across the sky. How glad I was we had not camped ON hill 388!

We survived, and later packed up in weather reminiscent of mountain Tasmania: cold, wet, windy and misty. As we walked down from our hill, it was through a very wet landscape with water running down between the gibbers.

Other impressions

I have returned for longer trips in September with Dave. Both of these have been after wetter periods, and how different the country looked. Tussocks of grass covered bare gibber hill-slopes. Dry sandy watercourses were replaced by gently flowing brooks. Water raced across rock pavements. There were spring flowers beautiful in their variety and in places through their vastness. George Main's book 'Gunderbooka: a stone country story', 2000, gives a good account of the history. It was available at the Bourke NP office in Sep-2010. The Gundabooka 1:100,000 topographic map is also recommended. ♦

Wildlife in Gundabooka

More than 130 species of bird have been identified in Gundabooka National park. Three threatened bird species have been recorded; the pink cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*), pied honeyeater (*Certhionyx variegatus*) and painted honeyeater (*Grantiella picta*).

Pink cockatoos are found sporadically in woodland and tree-lined watercourses over a wide area of western NSW and beyond. They depend on fresh surface water and tree hollows. The main threats to their populations are clearing, grazing (which inhibits regeneration of future nesting trees) and illegal trapping.

Pied honeyeaters, although

widespread across arid and semi-arid woodlands, are rarely seen. They follow rain and flowering shrubs, predominantly various species of *Eremophila*. They are threatened by a reduction of food supplies through the clearing of shrubland/woodland.

Painted honeyeaters are distributed across western NSW, mainly throughout forested drainage lines and are dependant on the fruiting patterns of mistletoe (*Amyema* sp.) infestations. The threats to this species are largely unknown, however competition with other species, clearing and selective thinning of infected trees may all be factors.

Vulnerable or endangered species that have been sighted in the park include:

- hooded robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*)
- brown treecreeper (*Climacteris picumnus*)
- Major Mitchell's cockatoo (*Cacatua leadbeateri*)
- diamond firetail (*Stagonopleura guttata*)
- Hall's babbler (*Pomatostomus halli*)
- grey-crowned babbler (eastern subsp.) (*Pomatostomus temporalis temporalis*)

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Ben Alsup on Mount Northcott, Main Range Track, Snowy Mountains, NSW
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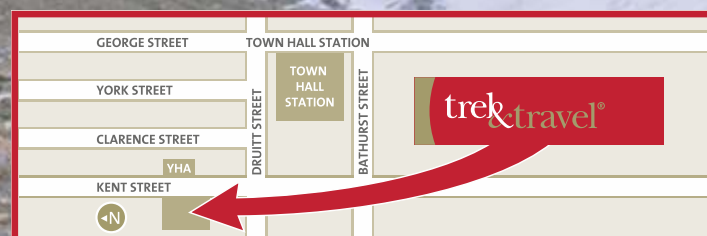
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