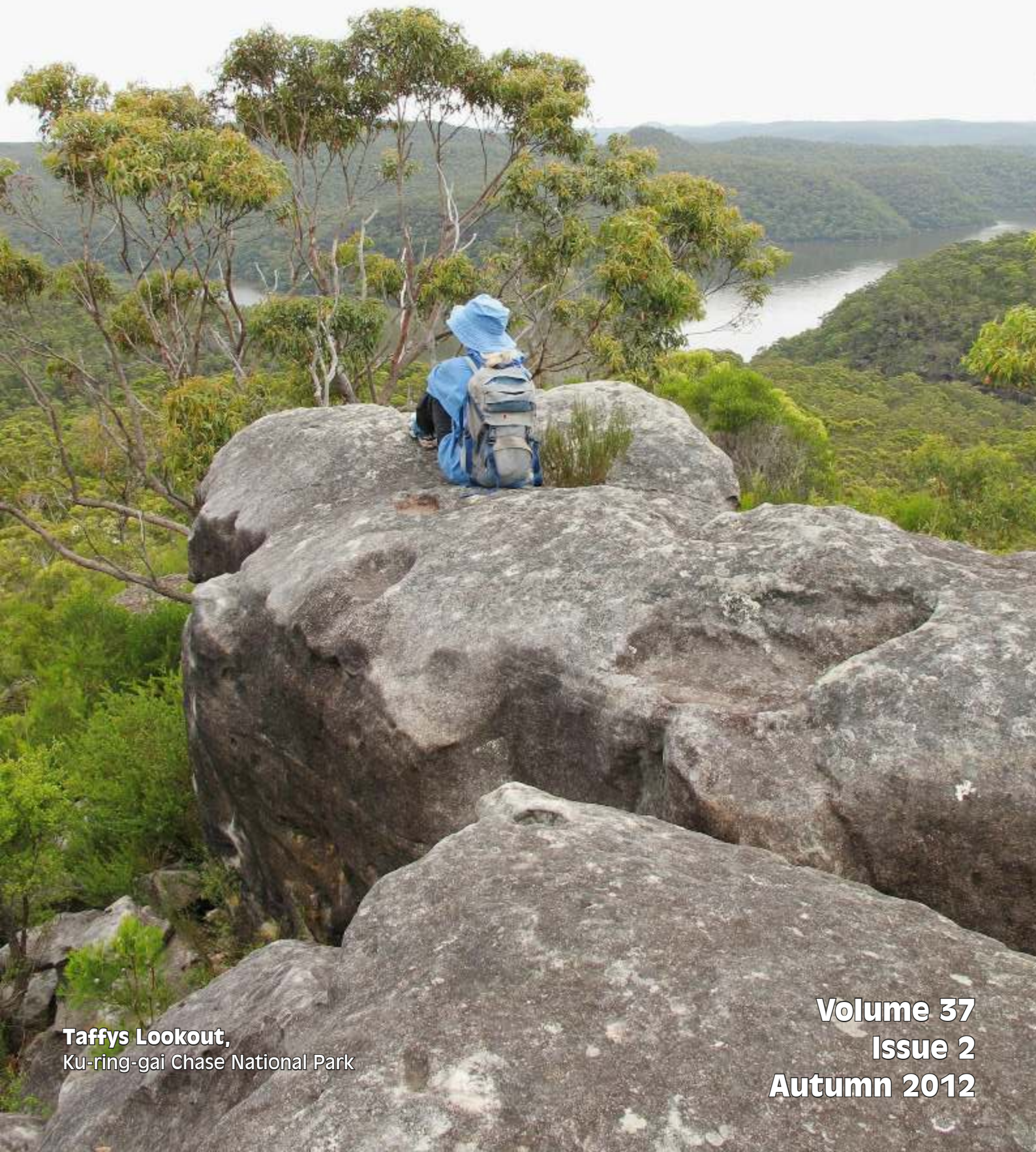


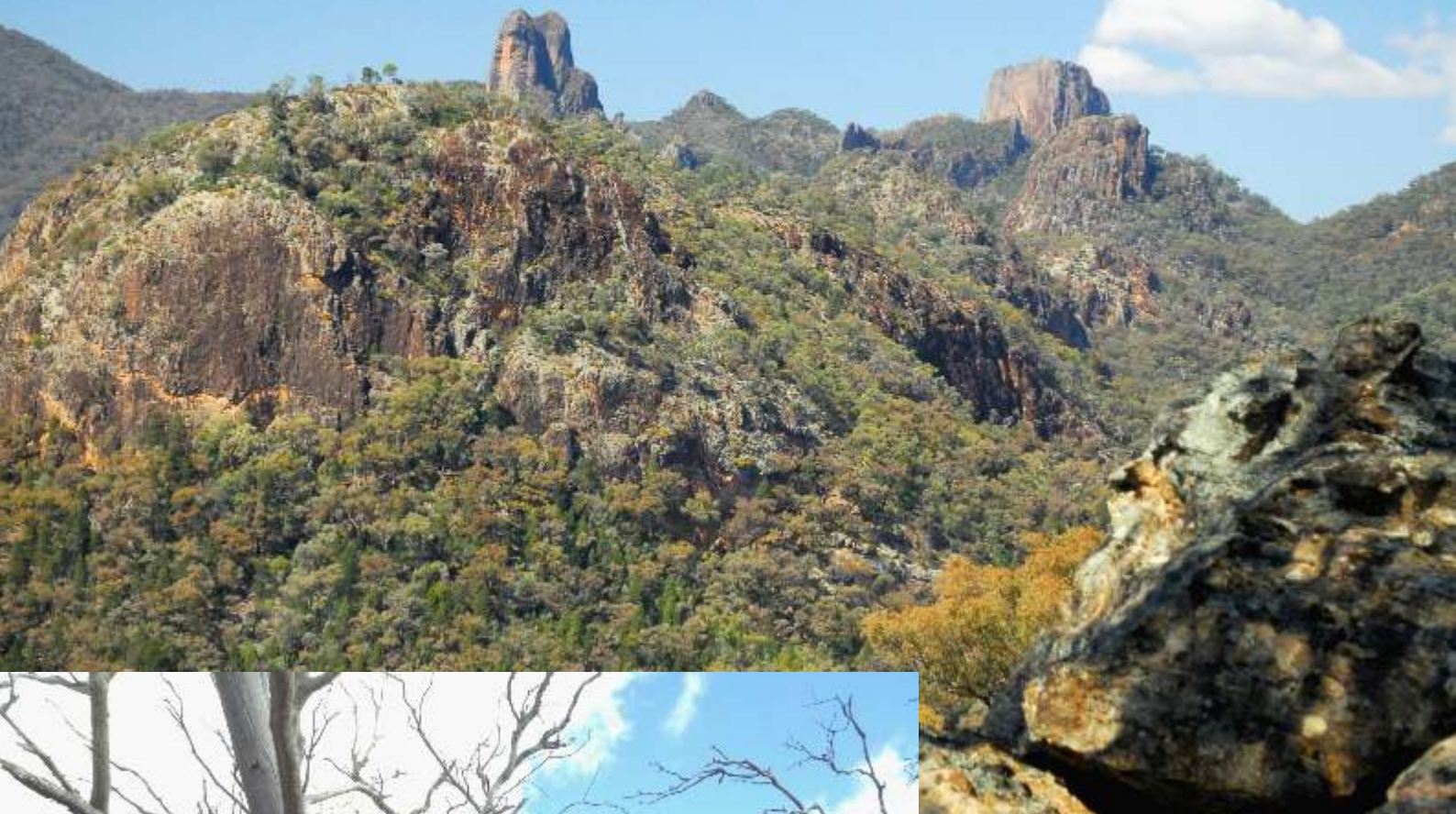
The Bushwalker



Taffys Lookout,
Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park

Volume 37
Issue 2
Autumn 2012

Wouldn't you like to be here?



▲ Fay's horizon walk. Warrambungles.
Photo: *Ian Smith*

◀ John Evan's party on Mt Yarara,
ACT/NSW border. Photo: *John Evans*

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

Front Cover: Taffys Lookout, Kuringal Chase National Park. Photo: Roger Caffin.

From the editor's desk. . .

Looking back over the last few issues, it seemed that we hadn't had much in the way of classic Hawkesbury sandstone country for a while. So in this issue the front cover features a very nice spot near Cowan: Taffys Lookout, looking north out over Porto Bay. There's an unofficial track out along the ridge to here: it's a nice little walk. From here we dropped down into the valley to the west and climbed up onto the next spur. It looks simple, but like anything in this area 'some effort is required'.

I will add that the COWAN 2nd Ed 1985 topo map I still use for this area has the lookout in the wrong place: they show it half-way along the ridge instead of at the northern end. There's an old survey peg in the rock at the northern end too.

Anyhow, looking at the terrain around Sydney, it struck me that people in Sydney are extremely lucky. How many cities have opportunities like this at their back door?

I had better explain the photo of Mt Yarara, on the ACT/NSW border. John Evans had been walking the border, looking for all the markers. He sent me a close-up of part of the old metal trig flag which they found lying on the ground here. On it was my name in pencil and the date 28-May-1961. Was this me, he wanted to know. Yes, it was, and I can sort-of remember being there. Pencil lasted that long? Blimey! Graffiti that old has got to be national heritage stuff ...

Articles for Publication

I would like to thank the people who have sent in articles for publication recently in response to my plea. But I got some good news on Xmas Eve. As I wrote last time - when we came back from Europe I found that my network had taken a lightning hit through the local grid, and the main disk drive had been damaged. It wasn't even spinning. My Maxtor NAS backup unit had really weird software which simply deleted the backup folder when I tried to access it from another computer. Thanks Maxtor! (Never again!) But some Data Recovery folk managed to get most things back - for Xmas Eve!

So if you have sent me stuff before August and it hasn't been published, please consider sending it again anyhow.

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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The party on the Clarence Arch

Michael Keats
The Bush Club

The Clarence Arch and other backyard treasures

It was a fine, warm day with increasing cloud; about midday several rolls of thunder were heard in the vicinity, the humidity was most oppressive when the intermittent light breeze dropped, and the temperature ranged from 18 to 22. The highlight of the day would be our first destination, the Clarence Arch.

At 0818, GR 415 918 we set off down a well made and maintained dirt road. This road is one of dozens that have been pushed through to provide maintenance access for the State Rail 11 kV power line. We moved on for several hundred metres when Steve said that we needed to be lower. After clambering down a distance, a mighty cliff was encountered, so we retraced back to the access road. We then walked north to a track junction, and headed down another similar road in a SW direction to its terminus at a power pole. This decision was also wrong, as Steve saw the Clarence Arch to the south and about 100 m away on the far side of a steep ravine.

Before heading off for the arch, we took stock of our position and noted that there were great views of the upper reaches of Reedy Creek that would only get better as we moved around the headwaters. Also Emanuel and I both thought we had seen another arch off to the west about 100 m back up the road, so before heading off to find Clarence

involved a descent into a ravine and then a corresponding climb up the other side. The understorey was dense and the rock faces wet and slippery. It is the old story: you have to work to earn a good experience. We arrived at the Clarence Arch at 0906. To set the scene, Steve pulled out of his pack a copy of an old photograph, circa 1905, of a group of a dozen or more hatted and suited railway workers sitting and standing on the Clarence Arch. It was a great photo and one we intended to replicate. What was even more interesting was that the photo showed below the arch several tents that were presumably worker accommodation during the construction of the line and the building of the tunnels.

In the hundred plus years that have passed, there have been a few changes, a huge tree to the west has died and collapsed without trace. Where the tents were pitched is now a forest of Black Wattle (*Callicoma serrata*), and on the east side of the arch, multi stemmed Brigalow type trees have grown up and obscured a large part of the dramatic view of the arch when viewed from up the hill.

Given all those changes we still managed a whole series of excellent photos showing the full extent of this amazing natural arch. For the statistically inclined, the arch is about 15 m high, 14 m long and about 1.5 m wide. It is easy to walk on and off at the northern end, but

the southern end involves a pagoda climb. The south end also is undercut with a very pleasant ochre coloured, curved semi cave. Taking photos with this feature included are very nice indeed.

At 0945, we climbed down into the creek system below, noted the total obliteration of the former campsite, and then pressed on wanting to reach the railway line near the entrance to Tunnel No.7. At GR 413 912, we came across a small section of excavated ground and a rock wall that appeared to be part of an abandoned road. We pushed on down the creek system, encountering several hand cut steps in the sandstone on our way to view the western entrance of Tunnel No.7. It was unclear as to why such effort would be made in such a remote place. It could well be related to an access route for tunnel construction works.

After viewing the drop between our position and the railway line, it was quickly determined that we were not going to make it down to the railway line at that point, so we threaded our way back up the creek system to the track terminus at the power pole. After a quick drink stop we then headed west seeking a way across the north-south valley and ridge system, and hence down to the railway line that we needed to cross. At 1057, we came across a drystone wall designed to provide a level area within an overhang. Again, questions arise as to why someone would expend so much effort in such a remote place. Hard to tell but it appeared to be a similar age to other stonework. Perhaps it was built by a railway worker who wanted to be alone.

At 1148, we started a short walk up the bed of the former incline railway. This incline stretches for just over 100m (map distance) in an east west alignment at a very steep gradient. The incline railway was built to bring in the several million bricks and other building materials required for lining the tunnels.



Engineers quarters during construction



The Dreadnought bricklayer



Pagoda Land

Steve produced a copy of a picture of the incline railway when it was operational. This helped us to understand the rock retaining walls and the occasional rail line that we walked over as we climbed all the way to the top.

As well as the image of the actual incline railway, Steve had a picture of a device called a Dreadnought. This contraption was a form of mobile scaffold that enabled the bricklayers to work simultaneously at several levels as they created the arched brick structure that would become the tunnel lining. The device was very large, bulky and capable of being moved along as the work progressed. Given the number of tunnels (10 in all) the quantities of all materials required would have put a huge strain on resources.

At 1310, we resumed our adventure, walking back up the service road to the Mount Clarence turnoff and then turning slightly east of north down the modern service road to tunnels No.8 and No.9. As we walked down there was a lively discussion about Wilf Hilder's grandfather, who completed an oil painting of three of the tunnels, possibly No.s 7-9, either when under construction or soon after they were completed. The painting shows a completely denuded and raw landscape. I know Wilf tried on several occasions, without success, to try to locate the spot where his grandfather could have sat to execute the painting.

As we moved along the railway line, Steve invited us to look up to the north at an unusual sight. Perhaps 80 m above us was an overhang under a pagoda that had been 'made safe' by the installation of eight brick pillars. Irresistibly, it reminded me of the Porch of the Caryatids(1) annex of the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Greece! Heeding the advice from Steve, we checked the railway lights and having determined it was safe to cross did so smartly. We then had to walk up a parapet sandwiched between a railway line cutting and a steep flowing drain. It is a right of way used regularly by railway maintenance staff, but it is a bit hairy, particularly the section with no railing. This right of way becomes a crude track that joins yet another access road for the railway power line. During this climb, the sun poked through the cloud and the humidity soared. We sweated buckets.

The access road we had joined at this point runs parallel to the Bells Line of Road but below it so it is not seen. To reach the Porch of the Caryatids, as interpreted by State Rail engineers, we

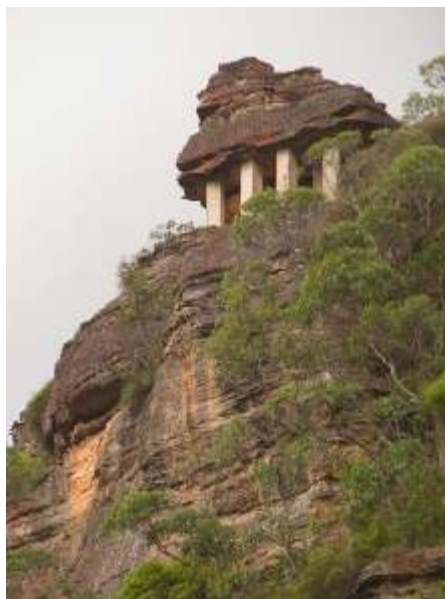
needed to cross yet another tributary of Reedy Creek. At GR 407 922, an inviting ridge to the east was followed. We were all rather surprised to come across a very rundown and seemingly abandoned tiny dwelling, complete with skirting rubbish that reeked of poverty and decay. We hurried on although there was little reason to do so.

Almost inevitably, we came across another power line service road. This road quickly took us south towards our objective, the Porch of the Caryatids. Predictably the road finished at a power pole. We then did a bush bash for about 50 m to reach the Porch of the Caryatids.

Forget the classical references, this is an amazing and surprising piece of engineering that has to have been a retrofit demanded by modern OH&S requirements, to prevent the possible collapse of the pagoda down onto the railway line. If the overhang had been considered an issue in 1905, or earlier, a stick of gelignite would have solved the problem. As it is, at great expense eight substantial brick columns have been built to stabilise a natural structure that really needs no stabilising. The bringing in of men and materials to build these columns must have been a major exercise. We took many photos, including a series looking down onto the railway line.

Energetic Brian then suggested we should go and explore the series of pagodas that cover the crest of the ridge to the south. This was one of the highlights of the walk. From a height of 1072 m, there are views down the valley of the western arm of Reedy Creek all the way to Mount York. To make for a delightful situation, the sun kept disappearing and then reappearing out of the clouds, illuminating successive ridges, and at times the whole catchment of the River Lett. ♦

1 Caryatids are female figures serving as supports. The most likely derivation of their name is from the young women of Sparta who danced every year in honour of Artemis Karyatis ('Artemis of the Walnut Tree')



Porch of the Caryatids

NavShield 2012

How can I be there?



You have decided to be part of that great bush navigation training event for the emergency services "NavShield" but you are unsure of how to enter. You know that NavShield is a great way to practice bush navigation in a friendly atmosphere and great location. You want to improve your navigation skills as you want to be a better bushwalker and not just a follower of others through the bush.

Remember **FOUR** things.

ONE, team registration is via the website "www.bwrs.org.au" Look for the NavShield link. You will find all the information you need about NavShield 2012 at this website from Event Rules to catering menu etc. As in all bushwalks you must go as a group. You will need a team of 2 - 4 bushies for the ONE DAY event OR a team of 4 - 6 bushies for the TWO DAY (overnight) event.

TWO, it takes floods (as in 2005) to defer NavShield from the first full weekend in July each year. Thus, in 2012 NavShield will be held on July 7th / 8th.

THREE, late entries incur penalties. NavShield is a large event and demanding of BWRS resources. Don't run the risk of a penalty. Please give BWRS time to process your team entry by planning to register and pay before the second last Friday of June (June 22nd).

FOUR, don't ask where NavShield will be held. The location will be revealed one week before NavShield. Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad (BWRS - the search and rescue section of Confederation) needs time to set the course without conferring any advantage to local teams. NavShield will be held within three to four hours (maximum) driving from Sydney.

BWRS tries to make NavShield a friendly event with the course set in great bushwalking country. It is a highlight for many emergency services personnel who return year after year to NavShield. Check points are deliberately set so that all levels of bush navigator, from beginner to experienced, will get good navigation practice.

Remember to register your club team for NavShield via www.bwrs.org.au; lock in July 7th / 8th as the NavShield date; register & pay on time then look forward to a unique navigation challenge, NavShield. BWRS would love to see you and your club at NavShield 2012.

Keith Maxwell,
BWRS President.

Australian Alpine Walking Track, in Winter

Bob Manks, with notes by Roger Caffin



A training ski trip being led by Bob Manks

I (Roger) have been asked a number of times whether anyone has ever done the AAWT in winter, in the snow. I have only been able to find evidence of one party ever doing the whole track, in 1981, and even then that trip did not go north of Mt Kosciusko. By way of explanation, at the time the AAWT did not go past the Tom Groggin Station. A pity, as the next section to at least Kiandra is arguably the best bit of the whole track.

The party consisted of five lads from the Bendigo College of Advanced Education, and predictably they were doing an outdoors leadership course. The party consisted of Jack Langedyk, Bob Manks, Mark Skinner, Andrew Lewis and Tom Daniel. I was able to contact Bob Manks and got some information from him: mainly PDF copies of old newspaper cuttings. Sadly, actual original photos

were not to be found. I have tried to reproduce some of the very grainy newspaper photos anyhow. To add some other views of the country they traversed I have also included a few colour photos from an autumn traverse of the AAWT my wife and I did in 1999. I will quote mainly from an article written by Bob Manks shortly after the trip. I am not sure about the source, but it may have been “Ski Tour 1981”. It was typed, not printed. There are a few interpolations in square brackets: they are my explanations.

“On Saturday the 15th of August, 1981 four fellow students and myself from the Bendigo College of Advanced Education headed off from Walhalla on an expedition that helped confirm to us that although not great in height or grandeur compared to European or Asian standards, Victorian mountains can be just as dangerous, terrifyingly beautiful and challenging as possibly many of the major ranges around the world. it may be too easy to underestimate the potential dangers these mountains can offer.

This expedition could be said to be the culmination of two years work. It took into account planning and preparation, safety and skills. All were tested along the route.”

In fact, travelling through the Victorian mountains in winter is made more difficult by the relatively low altitudes encountered. When you get above 3,000 m the snow is usually good, but down in the Victorian mountain ash forests you get soft wet snow and it



The party with some gear before the trip

can be just plain hard work! Adding to the hassles of the soft snow were their packs: typically starting at over 30 kg per person. Some synthetic clothing was used, but they also used wool and padded jackets, eschewing only cotton. So much of their gear was rather heavy by today's standards. They used food drops as well, allowing for over 50 days.

“We left Walhalla in conditions that



The Crosscut Saw, autumn 1999

were good. This soon deteriorated over the next three days, strong winds and blizzards made the Baw Baw Plateau more of a task than we had expected. Finding fresh snow down to 1000 m, lower than we had thought it would be, made snow shoeing difficult. The next four days were also poor. On the night of Friday the 21st August, we were hit by heavy snow which continued all the next day making the descent down Champion Spur To Black River difficult. However, not as hard as the river crossing made on a large greasy log which had to be straddled.”

I have walked down that spur in fine weather in Autumn, and that was hard work. It's very steep! Maniacal bulldozer drivers, and straight into the river.

“We reached Mt Skene on 22nd August and were disappointed not to have skis, but possibly not as disappointed as we were not to find a hut



Descending from Mt McDonald

we were expecting. Mt Skene offers beautiful clear tracks for skiing, gentle and steep slopes and good views. An area I would definitely visit again in winter, this time with skis.

Apart from poor weather everything had gone reasonably well so far. We reached Mt McDonald on 25th August. It provided excellent views all round with Mt Buller and The Bluff fighting for dominance over each other. Fine weather provided unexpected problems - mainly slushy snow making snow-shoeing difficult. Seven kilometres in six hours is not exactly fast. We reached Mt Howitt on the 27th August in white-out conditions. A strong blizzard was experienced all this day making the crossing of the Crosscut Saw difficult. After three attempts to start, we finally made it but not without incident. We had just unroped when I slipped down an icy slope 100 feet below. I stopped having fallen 30 feet [in] free-fall on the way. That's life, thank God. Mt Speculation, Mt Despair and The Razor all had a couple of good tests for us but nothing instep crampons couldn't fix." The colour photo of the Crosscut Saw illustrates the problem nicely. You can slide a long way down on either side: the side to the right is actually known as The Terrible Hollow. This would have to be one of the most exposed traverses in Australia.

"We reached Hotham fairly worn out but possibly not as much as Jack's feet. They were numb, infected and changing colour regularly. They had been wet for about 15 days continually. Because we had nordic ski boots the tops were soft. The snow shoes were designed to pull up on the boot. Instead our feet were being used. Jack's feet were a mess, so much so that he was given medical advice to not go on."

In another article it was suggested that Jack had suffered some frostbite of the toes due to a broken binding on the snow shoes. This had meant he was tightening the straps a lot to compensate, and this had restricted the blood flow. Mind you, the design of their snow shoes was very old anyhow.

"This was real injustice for him as the following 14 days were good. I only put my Japaras [jacket or overtrousers] on once. We picked up our skis at Hotham and had a delightful ski across to Falls Creek where we had our food drop. We then skied to Big River and then up to Cleve Cole Memorial Hut. A really beautiful trip. The weather was so good a nighttime assault on skis to Bogong was carried out by myself and another nordic skier found staying in Cleve Cole. This trip to Bogong is still one of my major highlights of the whole Alpine Track.

After Bogong, the scenery was not good until Mt Gibbo was reached. At Mt Gibbo the whole Kosciusko range opened up before our eyes - a magnificent sight. We then descended to the rich farming land of Tom Groggin - the end of the actual Alpine track [in those days]. A relief to reach it but not the place to end such a long trip. Mak and myself wanted

Kosciusko so we hitched up the road to Thredbo Alpine Ski Village and caught the Crackenback Chairlift. It was windy on Mt Kosciusko but well worth reaching as it provides excellent views. It is also the gateway to all those NSW ski fields just waiting to be devoured. It won't be long before our skis will be heading north again.

However, 33 days in a row with only one shower is quite enough for one season. NSW will still be there next year as will Mt Skene and the High Plains. I think a nice trip down by the sea is in order for me, the Otways are nice at this time of the year."

A note appended to the article by one Tom Kneen (an acquaintance of mine from our Melbourne University Mountaineering Club days) pointed out that 1981 had near-record levels of snow, and that this usually meant that there was a lot of bad weather. We move on to another article published in 'Adventure Sports'.

"As we travelled over the Baw Baw Plateau, over Mt Erica, Mt Talbot and Mt St Phillack, the winds became stronger and stronger. So strong, in fact, that despite our relatively sheltered campsite, the two Jansport traildome [tents] we were using were blown flat during the night."

The Jansport Traildome was a very, very early version of a geodesic tent, albeit rather like a pop-up tent. I could not find a picture of it on the web, but I note that several other companies (eg Kelty) market a tent with the same name.



The Viking, autumn 1999

Jansport dropped out of the tent market in 2010.

"After camping in a large saddle between Mt Buggery and Mt Speculation, we headed off early only to find the going tough as vertical walls of snow and ice blocked our way. After trudging up Mt Speculation, we began the slow trip down the other side, to be confronted with another trek up Mt Despair and the The Razor. The place names echoed our feelings and the monotony and exertion of climbing up and then down like yoyos was wearing, physically and mentally."

They also noted that the Barry Range, notorious in summer for being very dry, was "just low enough to miss out on snow". They had water problems there as well. These days there are some strategically-placed water tanks for walkers, but you need to know where they are as they are hidden. In the colour photo of our Barry Range campsite the water tank is just out of sight to the left. We got there early, and had a washing day.

If anyone else has done the AAWT in winter, I would love to hear about it. ♦



The Barry Ranges, autumn 1999

Ordinary?

I don't do ordinary!

Ian Smith - Grey Nomad in a Camper van

It was a nothing sort of day. I found it hard to get motivated and only managed to travel up a few kilometres from where I'd slept in Springwood. I got to the Conservation Hut, stuffed around and then went to sleep for 1 ½ hours before deciding to have lunch.

It was near the end of that, as I was finishing my Tasmanian story for the magazine, that I thought how ordinary the day had been. Nothing had happened, hadn't done anything exciting, it was so un-Ian like. Around then the light dimmed, noticeably. I glanced outside, saw clouds first and then couldn't help but notice the number of cars in the car park. The first lot of thunder rolled in and the lighting followed soon after. Someone was going to be in trouble I thought. The radio blared out a "weather event" warning (we used to call them storms) and said it might be extreme.

It hailed not once but three times, each about five minutes apart. Because you're closer to the clouds up here the lightning and cracking thunder was scary; one of the top ten worst storms I've ever been in. I watched ice bouncing off the cars next door; somewhere nearby they were apparently as large as ping pong balls but

here on the edge of the cliff we only had small hail.

A couple of hours later it finally eased up and I contemplated moving. I decided Leura Cascades would be the go and went to exit the car park. However, I couldn't help but notice the police rescue vehicle coming down the road towards the other two that had arrived earlier. It didn't look good from where I viewed it so I went to find out what had happened.

I asked one of the police what the problem was and apparently there were walkers trapped in the valley by the flood waters - a fact that didn't surprise me. I noticed a couple on the verandah of the hut and started a conversation. It turns out they were from Holland and they'd been caught for two hours between waterfalls and felt lucky to escape. They'd been drenched.

They'd also been in New Zealand for the previous month bushwalking but, like me, they found it scenically beautiful but boring compared to Australia because their forests are so sterile. They'd also spent some time in Costa Rica and raved about the walking over there; they said the wildlife was fantastic; monkeys and other animals everywhere.

It seemed to be clearing a little so I decided to go to Leura and ended up at Gordon Falls. I walked the 200 metres and 50 or so steps and was rewarded with a view I'd never seen before; not one but two falls though I suspect the second was ephemeral.

There was a sign pointing to Leura Cascades so I headed off: couldn't be far I thought as fresh thunder rumbled. Splish-splash along the track, over tree roots, slipping on mud and brushing past wet ferns I trudged. Eventually I came to a turn off for

Bridal Veil Falls and chose that option.

Wow, what a waterfall: I'd never seen this Bridal Veil version before (there's another one over at Grose Valley) and today water gushed over the semi-circular rock formation in a spectacular display. On I walked, coming across another four lookouts I'd never seen before, including Elysian with its unusual rock shapes. There's something quite magical about drifting mountain mist wafting and sliding its way across the forest roof between sheer sandstone cliffs. It vanishes and reappears and constantly adjusts its shape in a mesmerising display.

More thunder rumbled, the occasional drop splattered on my shirt but I plunged on, sure that Leura and safety couldn't be too far away. An hour passed and still signs pointed onwards; light, what there was of it, started to fade.

Then I came across a Spaniard; he was slightly hysterical and obviously in a hurry; he pointed back and said he'd just seen a dingo and hurried off. I retorted that they wouldn't hurt you but checked



Three Sisters



Leura Cascades



Gordon Falls



Bridal Veil Falls Leura

that my tripod was fully extended, imagining yet another use for it other than the snake prodding I'd done in Tasmania.

The bird life was prolific but every time I went to shoot one there was something not right with the camera; it didn't stop me trying. I had been almost within arm's length of a lyre bird; had yellow-tailed black cockatoos only ten metres away and wrens almost at my feet and stuffed it all up.

Then I finally got to the cascades after well over an hour. My reward was a rush of water such as I'd never seen here before. Usually there's a delicate flow that provides background music to the sounds of the forest. Today it roared through the sandstone canyon and pushed aside the adjacent ferns in its haste to reach the valley floor.

I went a bit berserk with the camera then had to walk back, this time along the road where I hoped I might get a lift but all I did was have a brief conversation with a kiwi who was running by and she ran here regularly but didn't actually know where it was she ran.

I wondered where all the Australians were. The first person I'd seen the previous afternoon was from Chile and she loved the Australian bush and said it was so much better than in Chile because we had maps and signs, something they apparently don't have. She also said you couldn't go down the trail at Springwood we both wanted to because water had closed it. Then today I hadn't spoken to one local, only the English couple

I'd seen at Gordon Falls had a dialect I was comfortable with.

Finally, I made the motorhome after walking down the road and went over to some other people in camper vans. Naturally enough, they were from Switzerland.

So I went and switched on the radio and learnt that the Katoomba Aquatic Centre roof had collapsed under the weight of ice. The only real water I'd been soaked in was sweat and I couldn't help think what an exciting day it had been! ♦



Yellow tailed black cockatoo

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Growing up in Sydney

Michael Smith

“If you remember the 1960's, you weren't really there”. Fortunately I kept a diary of my bushwalking back then. Thus I recall walk number 29, five days of bushy magnificence in the Blue Mountains.

I was one of the rock climbers from all over Sydney who would gather in Katoomba, pool resources of ropes, slings and carabiners, and disperse to the cliff faces of Narrow Neck, the Three Sisters and Mount Victoria. By today's standards, we were lucky to have survived. Leaders claimed a three strand, laid, nylon rope while the rest made do with a manilla rope. Helmets were unknown, Volleys were king. It was 1966, I still had two years of school to go. With four others, on a frosty Blue Mountains Saturday, I climbed 'one hundred foot slab' (Piton Gambit start). Then we moved on to ascend the first of the Three Sisters. For me, rock climbing was hugely character- building. I was constantly challenged, threatened. It was often necessary to drag from my body, prodigious physical feats to extricate myself. I learned to trust my life to another, and reciprocate by devoting my fullest attention to their welfare. I came out of it bristling.

That night Rick Jamieson drove myself and Jim Gaffy to Kanangra Walls, saw us safely into the cave, ate a jelly sandwich and left. Jelly crystals were also a staple for my fellow walker Jim. A popular refresher was to be had by emptying the packet into a pot-sized rainwater rock pool, the lot to be sucked up with a length of plastic tubing carried for the purpose. On awakening next morning we investigated a cough and found two blokes and four girl bushwalkers in our cave, curled up against the freezing August crisp. They had with them a portable stereo record player. This was the famous dancing cave.

Then it was off to the Coxs River, over High and Mighty, Stormbreaker, Rip, Rack, Roar, Rumble, Cloudmaker and the baffling Dex Creek. Myles Dunphy's Gangarang map was our guide through these Mountains. I was impressed with the detail and sheer practicality of the map. I would later become a surveyor, navigator, and go on to draw bushwalking maps for others to follow.

My bony sixteen-year-old body was pretty spent by the time we made Konangaroo Clearing. It is the lot of a school boy to make do with the equipment his mother chose to buy him. Think cotton school football jersey and a sleeping bag filled with 'cotton wadding'. Up went the borrowed japara tent among the wombats, cattle and horses. Next morning, on our frosty river flat, we discovered two chaps who were doing the same walk. We swapped contact details and for years afterwards they joined me on other walks and canoe trips.

Even then the Coxs River was too polluted to drink. We followed the water upstream, crossing it shoeless many times, marvelling at the big trout swaying in the current. By dark a horse trail led us

Top: Rock climbing in the 60s.
Centre: Across Kanangra Tops
Bottom: Ah yes, the map

to Carlons Farm, home also to the dogs Baldie and Tess who we knew from previous walks. Next morning our stroll through the Megalong Valley was shortened when a couple of charming matrons gave the four of us a lift to Blackheath Station.

We still had two days to spare and the 4 of us spontaneously decided to charge down to Bluegum Forest for the night. The scenery was superb all the way from Govetts Leap. Wild horses were still living in the forest and we scattered a few. Luxury, dinner was eaten in daylight for the first time that trip, under the blue gums. Our fourth night was spent in the rain, wet patches getting bigger on our sleeping bags. Last breakfast, in the tent, don't touch the roof or it will start a leak, a slushy world of fog and rain outside. Pack up, don the cape groundsheet and dash outside to drop the sodden tent. We recrossed muddy rapids, now much deeper. Bridal Veil Falls was a roaring fury of mist and spume. The trip ended in the waiting room of Blackheath Railway Station where we waited 3 hours in front of the coal fire for something to clatter down the permanent way. By the end of the sixties Americans had walked on the moon and I stopped writing up my walks at number 50. ♦

[I still remember the 60s, and I (think I) was there. Cable-laid nylon rope to BS3104, Japara tents, 'cotton' wadding, and all- Ed]

Log book at Cloudmaker



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Iceberg Lake

As part of my job in recent years, I've regularly travelled to California. When people think of California, images are usually conjured up of hippies, movie stars, clogged freeways, LA gangs, and stoned surfers. Whilst there likely is all this and more, California is also a state of great natural beauty and highly accessible wilderness areas. Most of these are in the significant mountain ranges that extend from the central north of the state down through the eastern side along the Nevada border. The ranges, collectively known as The Sierra Nevada, take in some of the most visited and scenic parks not only in the continental USA, but the entire world.

My trips to California invariably include some visit to the Sierras - in winter time, when I snowboard in the ski resorts around Lake Tahoe, or in warmer times, when I have undertaken hikes throughout many parts of the Sierras, ranging from Trinity Alps in the north to Mineral Springs in the south near Mt Whitney.

The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) is a long distance trail that runs along the Sierras and the Cascade Range (and further north). The PCT also encompasses the

famous John Muir Trail, named after the founder of one of the first environmentally-aware outdoor clubs (The Sierra Club). The John Muir Trail starts at Yosemite Valley, and extends southward for 340 km to Mt Whitney. Many smaller trails traverse and interlink with the PCT and the John Muir Trail. A number of popular National Parks are contained within the Sierras, as well as National Monuments and a significant number of Wilderness Areas. One of the very attractive aspects to the Sierras is their accessibility. From the Bay Area (part of the greater San Francisco area), it only takes 3 hours driving to reach the edge of the Sierras, so it is very easy to escape for a overnight hike on a weekend.

It is clear that glacial action was the primary force that shaped these mountains; they are many deep carved valleys, U-shaped hanging valleys, glacial cols etc. The rock is mostly white hard granite, easy to walk on, but definitely harsher on the footwear than we are used to here in Australia with our softer sandstone. The Sierras experience a significant winter snowpack, so in the spring and summer there are many rivers that are swollen with snow-melt, and

Sierra Hiking

Andrew McRae,
All Nations Bushwalking

early in the hiking season great waterfalls can be seen. The Sierras is also home to many lakes, small and large, which are refilled each year by the melting snow. Climatically, California has clearly defined seasons, with winter bringing snow and rain, and summer being almost completely dry (though summer thunderstorms can occur in the peaks of the mountains). The almost complete absence of rain in the warm summer means hiking is a very popular pastime. In fact, I have rarely if ever carried any wet-weather gear on my hikes there. The abundance of snow-melt also means that water is never far away, though filtering is necessary because of the wildlife. The altitude of the Sierras is also something one has to be aware of, with some high passes topping 4000 m (13,000 feet). Once above the tree line the white granite can reflect the warm sun, so walkers have be mindful of not having a combination of heat and altitude (and jetlag!) causing dehydration or other issues.

Wildlife is also common in these parts, though not as much as one would think. Most people think immediately of bears (much as visitors to Australia focus on sharks and venomous

Large Bear



Cathedral Peak





Mist Falls



Aspens in autumn

crawlies), but California is fortunate to only have Black and Brown Bears - there are no Grizzly Bears. Californian bears are best thought of as 200 kg possums, which really just want to raid your gear for food. Hikers are required to store any food or consumables such as toothpaste in Bear Canisters, strong plastic containers that

are bear-proof. At night these containers so bears are not attracted to tents. Back-country campsites may also have bear lockers, large metal containers where campers can store their food. I have seen far fewer bears than I expected to.

Other wildlife is commonly seen, such

as chipmunks, squirrels, deer (white-tail), and more rarely marmot and coyotes. I have only seen rattlesnakes twice, and they at least are polite enough (unlike the Australian snakes) to clearly signal their presence audibly, so there are rarely any issues with them. I would dearly love to see a Mountain Lion in the wild, but these

WILLIS'S WALKABOUTS

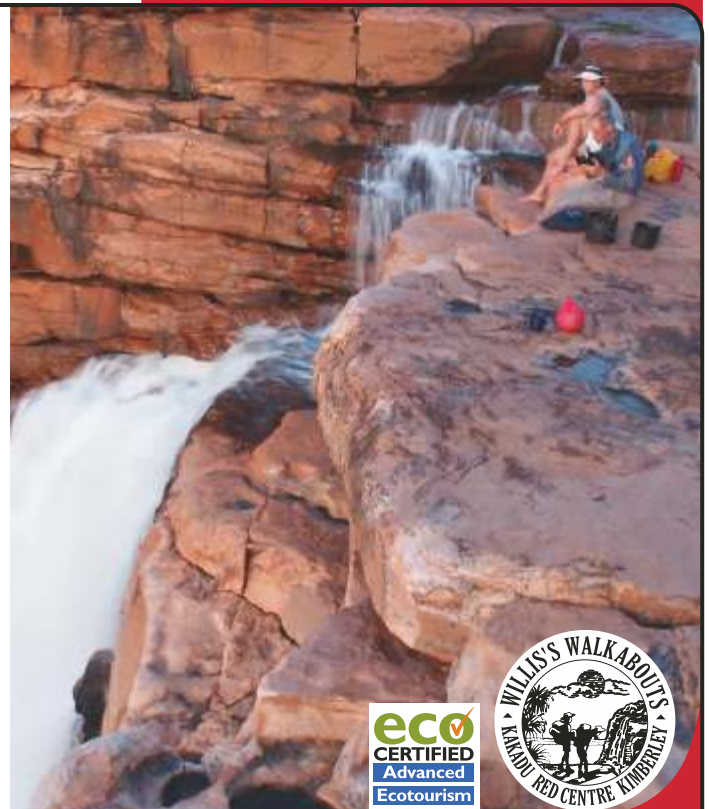
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Round Mountain Circuit

Paul Ellis,
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Canberra Bushwalkers



I was up at 6.00 am to meet some members of the Canberra Bushwalking Club at the intersection of Nerriga Road and Endrick Road. These were all off-track walkers who regularly walked in excess of 20 km and scaled ascents of more than 500 metres on a typical walk so I knew I was in for a rough day. Most of these walkers were also aged in their late 60s to mid 70s and were as fit as mallee bulls.

Recent rainfall had swollen the nearby Endrick River, altering the itinerary. A scrub bash to the western cliff edge of Round Mountain and try to find a way to the top, down the eastern side to the fire trail, check out the Endrick River and return to the cars via Stone Cottage (once known as Michael Dowling's Hut). From the locked gate on Meangora Road we set off down the nearby Alum Fire Trail for about 200 m before we headed off in a south-westerly direction through the thick bush.

Most of the trees were scribbly gums but it was the lower growing ti tree (Melaleuca) that caused the going to be rough. The ground was wet and soggy from the recent rain. There were minor (normally dry) rivulets to cross, which we managed easily. The 1880s water race was pointed out: built for the gold fields but not used as they failed to build the dam on nearby Sallee Creek for the water supply. It's over 20 km long and on the 600 m contour, one of many in the area.

Ascending a small ridge the country opened up and the going was much easier. It was nice and quiet here, save for the breeze in the tree tops, the call of nearby Kookaburras and the chatter of my walking companions. At the top of a short rise (GR 394062) our leader stopped suddenly, confusion on his face. When I caught up I realised why: a sheer drop to 'Running Creek' below. The area was one large deep gorge; to the east we could see the cliff tops of our destination, Round Mountain.

I removed my thermal top while they cogitated.

We followed the cliff line to the east, to find a way down about 300 metres away. A steep gully that we negotiated carefully but with little difficulty to the raging torrent that was Running Creek. This is normally a little trickle, but now was quite loud. We found a suitable crossing spot with some large rocks and safely crossed with the aid of sticks, trekking poles and the helping hand of Max. We scrambled up the other side of the gorge onto the rocky scrub-covered plateau for a drink break.

Moving off we seemed to head off in the wrong direction, away from Round Mountain, but we were in fact avoiding more scrambling. Our route took us in a kind of arc where we crossed more of the water race, sections of it still filled with rain water. We also saw many wombat burrows flooded out. The vegetation on this side resembled more the heathland found on Little Forest

creatures are evidently quite shy, and normally keep well away from hikers.

Several areas I have hiked in are especially memorable. Trinity Alps in the North part of the state is a relatively unvisited area, but abounds in alpine lakes; most of these lakes are shallow and warm in summer, so are great for swimming. In other parts of the mountains the lakes are often colder, which makes for a refreshing but sometimes brisk dip.

Desolation Wilderness is an area west of Lake Tahoe that I have hiked several times, and it has great lakes and mountains with easy access. The north section of the Sierras has lower altitude, making the passes easier to cross. The Pacific Crest Trail traverses this area.

The Eastern (Nevada) side of the Sierras is known for its aspens, which in late autumn turn a wonderful gold colour; in a breeze, the leaves will shake slightly, giving the impression of the

leaves shimmering in the sun - hence they are also known as Trembling Aspens.

Further south, the John Muir Trail passes through the Kings Canyon and Sequoia National parks, home to the Giant Redwoods. These parks receive a large number of visitors, but hikers can easily walk up the valleys into the backcountry areas where the Trail crosses several High Passes. The Rae Lakes loop is one such walk, a 4 day circuit (that I did in 3 days) that takes in rugged back country valleys with extensive lakes above the tree line, with some High Passes thrown in.

Around Yosemite Valley there are many trails, some of which take you up into the high country around Cathedral Peak and Tuolumne Meadows, great for getting away from the day crowds in the most popular National Park in the world.

So the Sierras give an almost perfect combination for hikers - seasonally predictable good weather, lots of water, fabulous views, great mountains, easy access, and a large range of tracks to avoid overcrowding. I can highly recommend it for any walker! ♦

Looking down the valley



Plateau and the trees were more Sassafras and Turpentine than the scribbly gums. We seemed to be following a negotiable route across this plateau and soon we found ourselves standing on an earthen ridge (GR 399061) that just did not look natural. Long and thin and about 2 metres high, it resembled a defensive barrier around an English castle. It was obviously built around the same time as the water race, but nobody knew why.

Up hill through light forest, the ground cover and fallen timber doing its best to trip us over, to open forest. We stopped for a 10 minute morning tea break at a clearing (GR 401054). We were still a fair distance from Round Mountain. We soon noticed house-sized rocks to our left - obviously chunks of the Round Mountain cliffs. One large moss covered rock resembled a house: a square shape with a peaked roof. The scrub got thicker as we ascended: a constant battle though thick ferns that sometimes hid fallen logs that bashed the shins if you were careless.

We finally reached the foot of the cliffs on Round Mountain's western flank (GR 409038) and followed them looking for a possible route to the top. We made our way south through fern-covered overhangs and past cascades of water. The towering cliffs had been impressive in hues of ochre, red and grey. Some of the overhangs were excellent camping caves and had fireplaces of loose stones. One had a cascade of water falling to a large pool. We came across another cave where the roof had collapsed very recently. Rainwater had seeped in and weakened a fault in the rock until it all failed.

Before we realised it we were standing at the southern end of Round Mountain (GR 412035). There had been no route to the top unless we become mountain climbers. We decided to go to the eastern side and use the track there. We descended the ridge to Round Mountain Fire Trail and went northwards for several hundred metres. The fire trail was more like a creek than a track.

After about 1 km we came to a small cairn on the side of the trail (GR 416045), marking the now non-existent track up to the top of Round Mountain. We took a

'negotiable route' steeply uphill on the north side of a deep gully. The ascent was tiring and since I hadn't done much bushwalking recently I found myself huffing and puffing and falling behind. Thankfully the others patiently waited for me to catch up.

We battled thick melaleuca after passing a recently used rock overhang and finally stepped out onto some open rock shelves and ascended to an open rock platform on Round Mountain's north east side. We found another stone cairn where we stopped for a 25 minute lunch break at 12:50 pm (GR 410044). The views from here were quite splendid. To the east, massive cliff lines and Quiltys Mountain; to the north, Sassafras Plateau; to the west, the plains towards Tarago and wind farms. It was quite cold up here despite the sun. I put on my new down parka while I enjoyed cheese and salami tortillas.

After lunch we went for an unsuccessful exploratory across the top of the mountain, hoping to get views to the south, but the high heath was near impossible to break through. We did find the official top of the mountain with the remains of an old cairn (GR 412041). We also found a stone arrangement like at the Bora Ground atop Quiltys Mountain. It resembled a fish but was deemed a fake as it was not there several years ago.

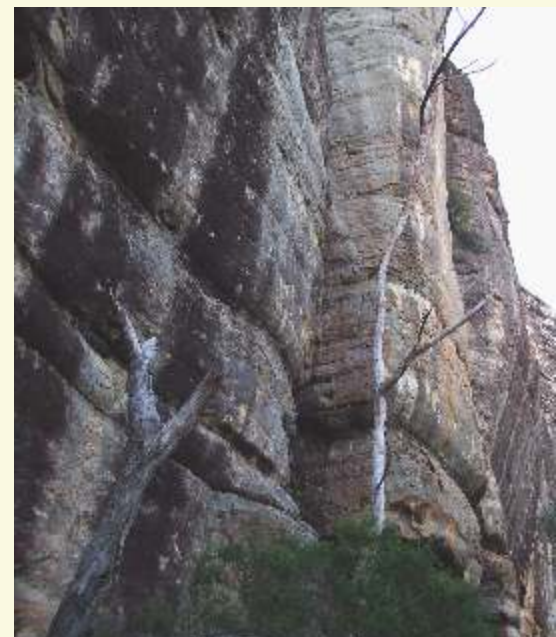
Back to the fire trail and head north. Time did not let us walk down to the Endrick River. Instead, we cut away from the main trail (GR 416052) and bashed our way west to link up with our inwards route. The country here was relatively flat and the forest open, but with much fallen timber. We trudged on and on, and when we stopped for a drink my GPS said we weren't far from where we'd had our morning tea break. A quick stroll through some thick countryside suddenly found us standing on the earth work we had found this morning (GR 399061). We stopped for afternoon tea and I found I had less than a mouthful of water left in my 3 litre hydration bag. I hoped we would be crossing Running Creek again and soon.



We followed a track a way, possibly an animal pad, but with some orange plastic markers on the trees. Then we turned away from the markers (worry!) and started scrub bashing again gently downhill towards Running Creek, albeit not to the same place we crossed this morning. We suddenly came out onto an open fire trail

(GR 397071) just above where Running Creek joins the Endrick River. Most of my companions were concerned about how deep the water was, but all I could think about was topping up my water bag. The water was not deep, coming up to my boot laces.

I didn't know that Michael Dowling's hut (now Stone House B&B) was only about 800 metres behind me: maybe next time. It had been a long day and I was certainly getting tired, but happy to have got a decent strenuous walk in for a change. Finally, at 4.35 pm a familiar blue gate with some familiar vehicles appeared. Fresh clothes, remove boots off to the nearby Nerriga Pub for a refreshing lemonade. ♦



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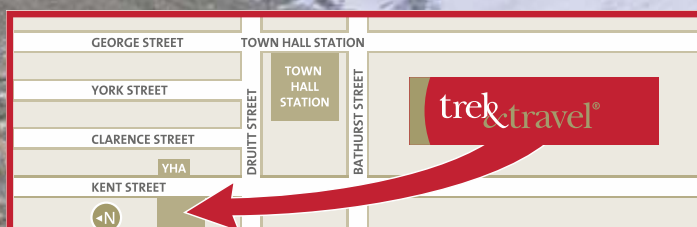
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