

# *The Bushwalker*



**Bogong Creek Gorge,  
Kosciuszko National Park**

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*Wouldn't you like to be here?*



Camp at the Pool of Memories with Mt Geryon in the background, Tasmania.  
Photo: Linda Groom, Canberra Bushwalking Club.



Mt Bowen from the beach, Hinchinbrook Island.  
Photo: Jacqui Warnock, Narrabri Bushwalkers.



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Bushwalking NSW Inc represents approximately 69 Clubs with a total membership of about 12,700 bushwalkers.

Formed in 1932, Bushwalking NSW 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 Executive Officer at:

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The Bushwalking NSW website **[www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au](http://www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au)** contains a list of clubs and lots of useful information on bushwalking, including the Australian Bushwalking FAQ.



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**Front Cover:** Bogong Creek Gorge, Kosciusko National Park. Photo: Roger Caffin.

**Back Cover:** Pic d'Anie, GR10, French Pyrenees. Photo: Roger Caffin.

## From the editor's desk...

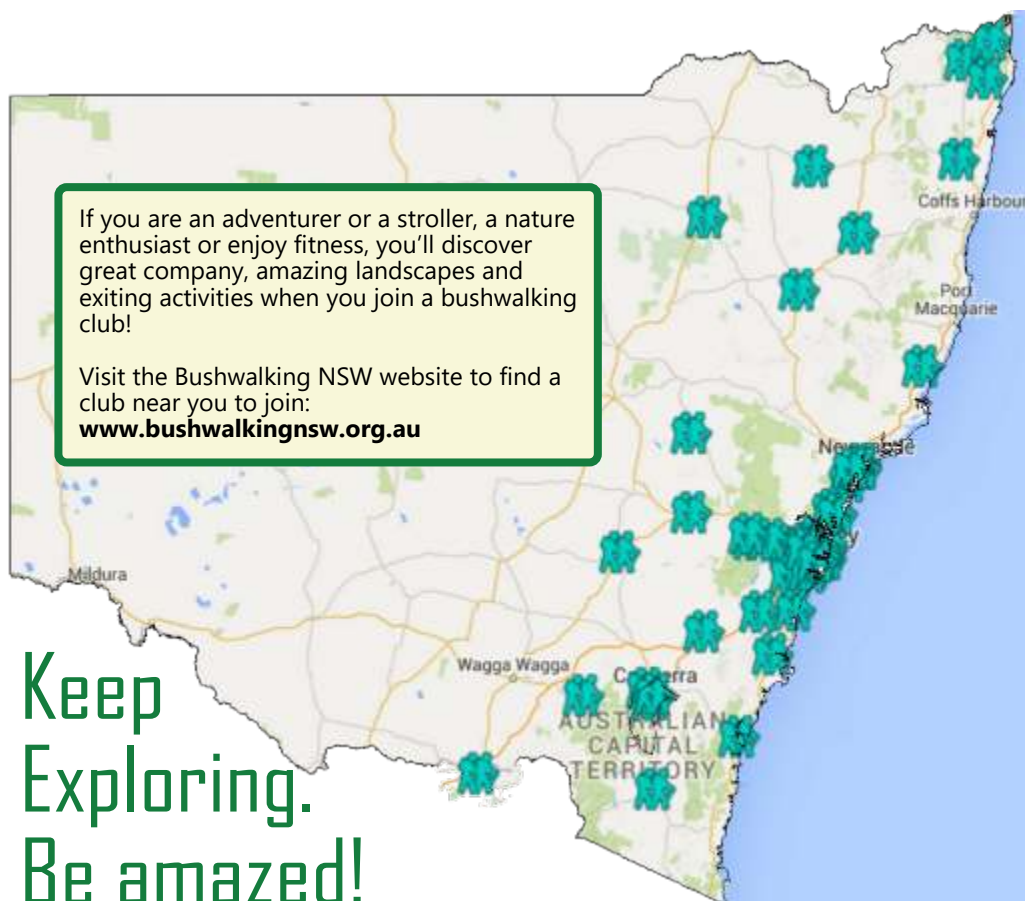
Recent times have seen an unmitigated assault on the environmental protection laws of NSW, at the hands of the Baird party. Do these people have no further vision than the profit to be made in the next quarter? Have they ever considered what (destruction) they are leaving for our grandchildren?

The same comments could (and should) be made about the yet-again resurrection of the proposal to raise the height of Warragamba Dam. A map of the effects on various National Parks is horrifying. What is worse is that it is entirely pointless: the water has to reach the sea sooner or later. It would be far better to do a controlled release *before* any vast river flow happens. The catastrophic floods not too long ago near Brisbane were almost entirely due to a failure to limit or reduce dam levels in the face of impending storms. It is not hard to imagine the same happening here.

To this must be added the experiences of the dams in the Snowy Mountains. On the topo maps there are these huge reservoirs covering vast areas. In reality most of those dams are nearly empty, and have been so for decades. Vast areas get destroyed for no gain to society at all. It is all very sad.

On a more cheerful note: the front cover shows Bogong Creek Gorge just north of Mt Jagungal. Our speed down the gorge was about 1 km/hr. How many of you knew or guessed we have such wild country in KNP? It is not just alpine meadows there. There are so many corners we have yet to explore.

Roger Caffin  
 Editor



## Keep Exploring. Be amazed!



# Skywalker Traverse

Michael Keats  
The Bush Club

Old Baldy and  
Skywalker Traverse  
from Newnes Hotel

Some of the very best 'new' bushwalks are 'discovered' in traditional walking areas. They remain 'undiscovered' because conventional thinking says that all the good doable walks have been done. How wrong this thinking often is! Recently, during a lull in conversation in a well-earned afternoon tea break, Yuri Bolotin had a long hard look at the cliffs visible from the verandah of the Newnes Hotel. The north east view is of the mighty imposing cliff line of Old Baldy. Old

Baldy is a name given by the rock climbing fraternity to a cliff face 1.3 km north east of Newnes. It consists of towering 360 m sheer cliffs. The first documented climb of it was in July 1960. Most bushwalkers regard it as 'off limits.'

Yuri had other ideas. He figured that to climb it there had to be a track to get to the base of the cliff, and just possibly that access may lead to a rock shelf or bench that is negotiable across the cliff face. There was only one way to find out – go there. And so it was on 23rd November 2015 that Yuri led a group of 8 keen participants on an adventure.

To emphasise where the walk was to take place, we met on the verandah of the Old Newnes Hotel for the briefing session. Sitting at the guest table we could look up to the north east and see the imposing cliff face of Old Baldy. When it was explained that that was where we were going there were gasps of incredulity from our two guest walkers, followed by questions about how it was possible. The map was laid out and Yuri explained the planned route.

The map put away, we drove to the eastern edge of the Little Capertee Creek Camping Ground, parked the vehicles, kitted up and were on our way at 0913 walking along the first section of the Pipeline Track as far as the driveway entrance to the former Fell House. John Fell was one time manager of the Newnes Industrial Complex early in the 20th century.

Soon the brick foundations of the former building and brick garden edges were seen. These features, together with the surviving exotic trees and shrubs, are all that remain of a once very attractive home. We walked on through the former curtilage and came across a unique item, the old tennis court. This would have been perceived by the workers at Newnes to be the height of luxury. It would have been almost unimaginable for them to contemplate having the time and energy to play games.

This was all very interesting history but our focus was the cliff line above. At 0944 we left the property area and noted a cairn at that had probably been built by rock climbers. We now embarked on a long steady climb to the base of the top cliff line. Here the topographic map is quite misleading. It shows a cliff line that simply does not exist. Brian commented that a lot of maps are now drawn by interpretation of stereo viewing of aerial photos to plot such features. Dense tree canopies can result in misinterpretation.

Our rate of climb accelerated as 4 twenty metre contours were crossed. When there was time we enjoyed great views over Petries Gully. Petries Gully is a watercourse rising north-east of the Newnes camping area. It is about 3 km in length and flows generally south then south east into the Wolgan River. This gully has also been referred to as Shale Gully.

By 1019 we had reached a high ledge that was also the base of the top cliff line and the point where a side gully and canyon allow access to the mid-tier ledge that crosses the face of Old Baldy. This location brought back memories of a visit on 9th April 2008 when a group of us attempted, ultimately successfully, to climb this canyon all the way to the plateau top.

This time we stopped in the large overhang just above the canyon for morning tea. Refreshed, we descended a few metres down into the canyon and began walking upstream along the dry canyon floor, an extremely beautiful place, I was tempted to stop often to take photos. After about 50 m there is a rising slot on the southern side that provides access to the next cliff line. This slot is marked every few metres by small totally unnecessary rock cairns: once you are climbing this slot there is nowhere else to go!

At the top of the slot a tree-covered talus scree slope stretches up to the top cliff line. Again unnecessary cairns mark the way.



Traversing the ledge - don't slip



They also misled us as they mark a rock climber's exit route from the top of the cliffs. Having gone to the base of the cliff line, we had to descend a few metres and then pick up the correct level where the ledge starts. Yuri commented 'this is the start of the Skyline Traverse.'

Walking the ledge after climbing and clambering was relatively easy. The ledge is generally wide and undulating and features an interesting variety of plant species. Where it is narrower it is generally devoid of vegetation so movement is easy. In part this is due to the continued activities of rock climbers. There was a lot of evidence of their presence including many marked spots with cryptic alpha numeric symbols and, at one location a fixed rope. Brian and I noted that high above this rope there was another fixed rope complete with foot loops. Neither of us was keen to test the strength of the fixed rope. We had no idea how old it was.

Twenty minutes of walking later we were still on the ledge. Trying to take photos showing just how high we were and how much more cliff was above was difficult. Here there was just too much vegetation.

At 1154, we entered a major overhang. Whilst there was no graffiti and no evidence of Aboriginal art, there was a fascinating artefact: a copy of the Sydney Sun newspaper from September 6th 1968. The paper was well preserved, an indication of how dry conditions in the overhang are. Daryl spent some time reading the advertisements, noting how cheap land and houses were in Sydney then.

Perhaps the most dramatic point along the Skyline Traverse is where a short spur juts out over the Wolgan Valley. The view is a commanding one over the camping ground (in Little Capertee Creek) and it includes the Newnes Hotel where we

stopped in the morning and, beyond that, you can look into the valley of Capertee Creek, trace the course of the Wolgan River and see glimpses of our vehicles nearly 350 m below.

Yuri named this spot Campground Point on a Bush Club walk 2nd October 2015 when he led a walk half way along Skywalker Traverse. This point had a protruding rock platform giving views of the valley and camping area below. Above Campground Point rising in a north west direction is a steep narrow defile, 400 m in length, variable depth of 80 m and width 10-20 m. Yuri also named this as Campground Defile. This was used as the exit point on 2nd October 2015.

After a thorough look around and trying to digitally capture the essence of this spot we moved on, now in full exploration mode. This was uncharted territory for bushwalkers. It might not prove negotiable. Certainly as we went further north west, the cliff line diminished in relative height and after about 300 m we changed direction to the north east. The view contracted to the immediate gully area and the vegetation became more dense. In places the ledge was anything but level. It was a nice change.

After another 200 m metres an open platform area was visited. The view was over part of Cathedral Canyon, a well-known access point to the top of Old Baldy, the Faberge Rocks and Mount Tricky. From where we stood it looked so close, maybe 200 m away. The reality was something else: we were still hundreds of metres above the valley floor and there were at least three drainage networks and several cliff lines between our location and the rain forest filled Cathedral Canyon.

No worries. It was 1258, arguably the end of Skywalker Traverse and definitely time for lunch. Not often do we have a long lunch but we did today: 27 relaxing minutes. [A very brief lunch - Ed] Knowing that the way forward from here was essentially downhill was a plus when it came to relaxing.

To thread our way from the lunch site to the entry point to Cathedral Canyon, we walked in a semicircle beneath some wonderful cliffs. Crossing the first of the drainage networks was under a delightful but tiny waterfall. At the base was a pool of clear, very drinkable water. I dunked my hat, and put it on full of water, savouring the spine tingling as the icy water flowed down my back. Refreshing, stimulating and just what I needed as a pick me up.

Back to reality, we continued to make excellent progress and encountered another



Newnes Campground and beyond from Campground Point

major overhang at GR 426 269. These spaces are good opportunities for a break in pace, conversation, and appreciation of nature. More cliff base walking and then we encountered another drainage system. This one was very familiar to Yuri and is known as Faberge Gully. It also meant that we were now very close to the point where we could access the descent provided by Cathedral Canyon.

At 1405, the ribbon of rainforest that we had sighted from our lunch spot was now literally at our feet - but there was little else at our feet. The access route has been scoured by overuse and is now very steep in the upper sections. Fortunately it was dry. Under wet conditions making a controlled safe descent would be nigh impossible.

The descent within the canyon took over an hour. There were few diversions but one that was quite amazing was a cluster of four mature puff balls, *Lycoperdon pyriforme*. These elegant natural wonders still gave out a good stream of spores when gently squeezed. The rainforest section ended soon after and we exited to the camping ground at 1530. ♦

## References

Taylor, Pete and Penney, Andrew. The Wolgan Guide, 1984, p. 25 & 61. Ben Bullen Topo Map. Top of Old Baldy GR 428 267. Map 5.

Carne, Joseph. Geological Map of the Capertee and Wolgan Valleys, 1901. James Ramsay Petrie (1851-1924) and his brother William (b1845) were born in Fifeshire, Scotland. James was the manager of Pumpherstons Oil Works, Mid Lothian, for 25 years. In 1910, the Commonwealth Oil Corporation was formed in London to work the vast oil shale deposits at Newnes. James was employed by the company as director and advisor in the manufacture and distillation of oil at the Newnes site. William Petrie was employed as a retort superintendent and works manager. Ref: The Sydney Morning Herald, 22nd August 1924, p. 11 and Local History Library, Blackburn, West Lothian, Scotland. Ben Bullen and Mount Morgan Topo Maps, headwaters GR 438 290, junction GR 440 265.

Beagle Head is located 400 m south east from the locked gate off Wolgan River Trail at Newnes, but 280 m higher. This huge undercut part of the top cliff face jutting out over the Wolgan when viewed from the north east resembled the head of a Beagle dog. Named by Brian Fox on a bush walk 28th July 2014. Mount Morgan Topo Map 438 265.

Mount Tricky is a hill at an altitude of 925 m located on a small ridge line 1.1 km north of Little Capertee Camping Ground at Newnes. David Noble called it Mount Tricky since it didn't have a name and was tricky to get off, particularly in the dark! That was when he was walking in a westerly direction. Ben Bullen Topo Map, GR 424 274.



Overhangs along the way



# The Northern Rivers Bushwalkers Club turns 40!



On the Milford Track, NZ"

Bill Boyd,  
President,  
Northern Rivers Bushwalkers Club

In 1976 a small group of bushwalkers, inspired apparently by a Sydney bushwalker David Brown who'd been transferred from Sydney to the far north coast of NSW, started what was to become a long-lived and vibrant bushwalking club: the Northern Rivers Bushwalkers Club. From an initial meeting of some thirty people, several walks later in the year took the incipient club to places we would revisit time and again over the next four decades, including our rainforest clad Nightcap Range and extensive coastal heaths. By late November of that year, a constitution had been drafted and the club had its first official walk, to Salty Lagoon in Broadwater National Park.

Thereafter, the club ran frequent day walks and weekends to near and remote places throughout the region. By 1996, on the 20th anniversary, there were records of cycle rides, abseiling and kayak trips to add to the walking and camping. It was considered appropriate in 1996 to run a

celebratory walk to Salty Lagoon, so now in 2016 we will be revisiting Salty Lagoon. The old track no longer exists, so a little inventiveness is required, but when has that ever stopped a bushwalking club?

I have only been a member for the last five years or so, and am in my third year as president. Nevertheless, I remain as much in awe of our club's vitality and energy as I was when I joined. As I read the accounts of the early days, courtesy of the 20th anniversary booklet compiled under the watchful eye of past president Barbara Worthington, I conclude that the club remains an excellent example of a friendly welcoming community of like-minded people, always supporting newcomers, regardless of age and ability.

The club has remained true to its purpose, to promote interest in bushwalking and related activities. We have a growing membership – 233 in 2015! – and continue to see members both volunteering to organise events and attending events (160 in the last year). Gone are the days when the list of coming events in our monthly newsletter was the final say: events are offered continuously, and our website listing has an impressive dynamism.



Enjoying the delights of New England (we do have rain)

Last year, we recorded over 1600 attendees at our events, representing an average of nine outings per member during the year.

And what are these events? They span the range of bushwalking and hiking at all grades, cycling, kayaking and abseiling. Our regular weekly walks include return trips to the Nightcap Range, especially around Rummery Park, Peates Mountain, the waterfalls and the Nightcap track, and to Mount Warning and its neighbouring hills. We hiked the length of the Northern Rivers coast, with several walks in the National Parks of Bundjalung and Yurigir, and along the Ballina-Byron-Brunswick coastal plain. I could go on.

The club also has a tradition of long weekends and longer trips - hiking visits to New England and Gibraltar (joint events with neighbouring bushwalking clubs), the Mount Barney, Moogerah Lakes and Main Range area of SE Queensland, and so on. 40 or so members are currently heading over to Poland to hike. New Zealand gets a look in periodically. ♦



On the way up Mt Maroon



# Climbing Kosciuszko:

Ayan Adak *Because it is there!*



The quad chair lift to the Eagles Nest

than hiking it – so they happily substitute the Kosciuszko in Australia with the much higher Carstensz pyramid (or Puncak Jaya) in Indonesia replacing continents with continental shelves (and thus trying to rob us hikers of our 15 seconds of fame). Nonetheless, it is a good experience to just go for the walk and boast to those who do not yet know that it is a climb to a hillock in the

is a cable car to the base and takes about 10 minutes. It offers wonderful views of blue-hued mountains far away, not to mention the quaint little alpine town of Thredbo. You can hike all the way from Thredbo as well, but I would recommend taking the cable car to spend most time on the top – if you are still eager after 14 km of walk, just walk down and enjoy the track. You will also find the Eagle's Nest Café at this staring point – that reputes to be the highest café in the entire continent.

The walk is actually quite comfortable and goes along steel frames laid on the track just until the end. While it makes the walk definitely easier, it does remove the natural feel, but then they stem the erosion of the sensitive ecosystem at the top. It also hints at the steps taken by the proactive tourism department here to popularize and commercialize the hike and the result is quite apparent. I ended up walking with hundreds of ramblers (including toddlers and kids who even overtook the unhealthy me). At times, it actually felt like a merry pilgrimage along a long sinuous track – I just missed the coffee and snacks counters on the way :P

But the landscape is beautiful, albeit in a sparse way. There are no trees to be found throughout the walk at this height, just snaking shrubs and alpine flowers sporting romantic names such as the billy button, the mountain celery, alpine marsh marigold, mint bush, anemone buttercup and the silver snow. Then there are the occasional streams snaking around, creating swampy bogs to beautiful blue rivulets along the way. If you are lucky, you might even spot a pygmy possum or a bright hued flame robin enjoying the

**Ok** – for all those of you who have made it to the Kosciuszko summit, you might be asking amusedly “What climbing?” I do admit – it’s not a climb exactly to the highest point of Australia (2228 m), but more like a walk in the park. Actually a very long 13.5 km walk in the park for the return hike. Add in a few more kilometres of hurt-my-knee-and-toes if you do not prefer the cable car that takes you to the start of the walk.

Whatever, ignoring the kilometres, a summit is a summit – a badge to display proudly that you have ascended to one of the seven summits – an admirable club of conquering the highest peaks in each of the seven continents. Some avid enthusiasts claim that pronouncing the peak is tougher

backyard!

My fascination with Kozzy (already tired of typing the name) started last Winter when I had been to Thredbo, the nearest town, to see the winter snows of Australia. This part of the Great Dividing Range – the Snowy Mountains – receives ample snow; naturally it is not possible to tread all the way to the peak. But being the experience collector I am, I couldn’t resist the temptation of ticking off this nice little box (remember the tag of the Seven Summits, mate!). So next summer, I was up with a motley group of friends to walk to the top and scream a-la-Hillary ‘Because it is there!’

We were blessed with a sunny day in an apparently cloudy - rainy week as the summit walk is quite windy and cold and a warm sun suddenly seems so cheery. There



Lake Cootapatamba



The summit boardwalk on a fine day





The yellow brick road to the Blue Lake

altitude on a quiet day. And then there are the boulders – piled, striated, cracked and lying like age old sentients watching time pass by. Long ago, during the glacial ages, these were dragged on for miles by the moving glaciers – today, they lie pell-mell all over the hills and create a beautiful, at times surreal lunar landscape of empty plains and piling rocks, conquered a bit more every winter, when melting snow seeps into the cracks, freezes inside, expands and cracks and splinters these to smaller pieces.

To be honest such an expanse moved me, and for a brief moment, I went astray from the normal path to climb a rocky hill afar, seeking my solitude away from the madding crowds. It felt ethereal to imagine this same place hundred and thousands of years ago – left alone to itself, all so quiet except for the gushing streams and whistling winds. And yet it opened up to the ancient aboriginals who claimed that this was where their spirits lived and danced in the bare and raw beauty of this endlessness. For hundreds of years, these tribes have also been congregating here to feast on the Bogong moths in summer and to conduct their spiritual rites. It took some time to break my reverie of ancient aboriginals, cave dwelling here and dancing with their primeval spirits under the starlight sky. I had to walk along and of

course, place a tick on my coveted seven summit check box.

The other moment of redemption that I had here was on seeing a large lake fascinatingly called Cootapatamba. Like other alpine lakes here, it was once a cirque – a hollow formed in the hills by glacial erosion and later collecting water to form a beautiful lake in the mountains (called a tarn). It was nothing significant – just a small body of water, but one that magically changed colours from moss green to muddy blue and then sapphire blue as you walked on and changed the angle of viewing it. I think what fascinated me once again was its antiquated past and the immense changes in the landscape it must have seen once. For the record keepers, yes, it is the highest altitude lake in Oz. The name is, as you would have guessed aboriginal in origin. (Talking of names, the peak itself was named by a Polish explorer, Paul Strzelecki, who decided to name it rather arduously after the Polish national hero Kosciuszko – I am confident any aboriginal name would have been equally tongue twisted and heavily multi-syllabic).

The way to the end is scenic all along – just before the summit, another dirt track joins it from Charlottes Pass and would be an excellent choice for those wanting a natural feel under their sole instead of the steel grilles.

I finally reached the top after 3 hours of slow steady walking after infinite clicks on my camera in a desperate attempt to hold on to all the raw beauty that was afloat. Reaching the top was my moment of satisfaction. So what if it is way easier than the Aconcagua? It is beautiful and deserves a walk, just for the serenity, for the ancient images it evokes in the mind, for the sonata of the wind and the waters under a smiling sun. Yes, it deserves a walk just because it is there! ♦

### Fact File:

- Nearest town is Thredbo, 6-7 hours from Sydney
- Alternately stay at Jindabyne (and enjoy its famed lake at dusk after the walk) which is a 30 minute drive away
- Once done with the walk, keep a day for Charlottes Pass, another small spot about 30 minutes from Jindabyne. It offers multiple walks in these hills: long ones include hikes to the Blue Lake via the Yellow Brick Road (10 km return) and an alternate route to the Kosciuszko (20 km return). There are numerous short walks too – we took one to Mount Stilwell and were rewarded with a beautiful, moderate walk but with far fewer people, allowing us to enjoy the hike on our own.



# The Grand Hinchinbrook Island Expedition

High Barrett, Narrabri Bushwalkers

The top of Zoe Falls and Zoe Bay

**T**he Hinchinbrook Battalion assembled in the Crossing Theatre car park and was underway soon after 7 am. Sherman the Chevvie and the tin tent led the convoy to Mungindi, pulling into the Designated Worrier's (DW) favourite smoko spot, carefully chosen above flood level, beside the Barwon River. The convoy proceeded without incident to reach Injune Caravan Park in the late afternoon.

The sky descended as the Forward Scout (FS) drove Neville the Navara towards Carnarvon Gorge the next morning, followed by the tin-tenters. Intermittent light drizzle led to the adoption of Plan B, whereby the features nearest the mouth of the gorge (Mickey's Creek slot gorge, Baloon Cave and the Nature Trail and Rock Pool) were visited first. Intermittent heavy rain then forced the adoption of Plan C, whereby those without a tin tent glamped in a safari tent at Takarakka Resort.

As soon as the rain lifted the next morning, the full company was off up the spectacular main gorge, visiting the Moss Garden, Amphitheatre, and Wards Canyon, en route to camping at Big Bend. About 20 creek crossings are involved and DW and FS each had an unscheduled swim. The Chief of Construction's (CC) Scarpas bit the dust,

loosing their soul. The Entertainment Officer (EO) produced an appropriate poem, Plan XYZ.

The company split into two platoons in the morning (Plan D), with the Tukka Wallah (TW), FS and The Captain (TC) mounting a brief expedition further upstream and deciding reluctantly that Battleship Spur (600m ascent) could be left until they return for the Carnarvon Great Walk, an 87 km circuit around the upper rim of Carnarvon Gorge, opened in about 2009. They followed the First Platoon down the gorge, taking a brief side trip up the ever-narrowing Boowinda Gorge and taking in the art work of Cathedral Cave and the Art Gallery before scampering up Boolimba Bluff at the mouth of the gorge.

The company regrouped in the morning, with one of the Glamping Brigade rejoining the Tin-Tenters who preceded Neville for the run up the Carnarvon and Gregory Highways. Smoko was taken just north of Springsure, overlooked by the

awe-inspiring massifs of Minerva Hills NP. The DW chose a pleasant spot for lunch adjacent to the artificial lake at Clermont, well below the level of the Great Flood of 1916 which carried houses off their high stumps and drowned nearly 70 people. Although another flood did not appear imminent, DW kept his eye out, just in case.

The convoy pulled into Belyando Crossing about 4:30 pm. Belyando has little to recommend it but everything you need. A flat spot was found for the tin tent and the second platoon headed for the softer looking ground, setting up tents adjacent to the septic tank outfall. CC headed in the opposite direction.

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At the mouth of the gorge



## Walk Safely—Walk with a Club

The assault on Charters Towers was underway by 9:30 the next morning and reconnoitring concluded by early afternoon. The town centre is dominated by beautiful old heritage buildings, dating from the discovery of gold in 1871.

The Tin Tent plus two took off for Mutarnee via Townsville the next morning. The remaining four piled into Neville for a quick run up Towers Hill to gawk at the view, ramble over the mining and military remnants, review the historical display, and annoy the rock wallabies. Neville then headed north-west past the tiny Dalrymple NP, which appeared a pleasant spot, or at least that part of it not obscured by caravans and campers. A dirt road wander through the hills led to Hidden Valley (think Deliverance). Fortunately, Sherman was intercepted coming the other way before reaching Hidden Valley, avoiding gunshots, with the reunited convoy taking in waterfalls, lookouts and an historical bridge in Paluma NP before descending the range to bivouac at the delightful Crystal Creek. The place is overrun by rampant scrub turkeys which ambushed the FS's pack, successfully destroying six of his eight packets of soup.

**T**he Tin Tank plus two then headed to Ingham and Lucinda, while the Waterfall Brigade inspected the rock pools and waterfalls of Crystal Creek before side-tripping via the delightful Jourama Falls and Wallaman Falls, the highest single drop permanent waterfall in Australia and a starting point for the Wet Tropics Great Walk (there's a thought).

Phil the Boatman was at the Lucinda jetty at 9:45 am the next morning for the 20 minute ride to George's Point on the southern tip of Hinchinbrook Island.

The company straggled up the beach for an hour and through the rainforest for an hour to Mulligan Falls campground, with the falls roaring in the background. The company worked its way uphill to the highest point of the track, 260 m then dropped down to cross Zoe Creek above the beautiful Zoe Falls, with views over the delightful Zoe Bay. The falls plunge into a crystal clear pool, made for swimming.

Again, it was up the beach briefly the next morning and into the rainforest.



North from Nina Peak



The cliffs lining the gorge

Oncoming walkers assured the company that wet feet would be the order of the day, as there were numerous small, and some large, creeks to cross, both muddy and rocky. The intrepid NBC members made it through dry footed, however, and thought of Stuart.

This was the longest section between camps, being 10.5 km, requiring a refreshing swim near the Banksia Creek crossing, in conjunction with lunch. Four of the party added a side-trip to the pretty Banksia Bay, where they obtained their first full view of the magnificent Mt Bowen (1121 m) and surrounding peaks, all basking in the sunshine. Meanwhile, CC and the DW forged ahead to mark out the bivouac area at Little Ramsay Bay, next to a couple of tired backpackers laden with UHT milk and canned food.

**A** meeting of the Mt Bowen Brigade (TC, TW and FS) that evening resulted in the adoption of Plan E whereby, due to a mild onset of knackedness, and in view of the task ahead, it was decided to forego the planned assault on Mt Bowen and opt for a day walk up Warrawilla Creek which leads to the saddle and ultimately the summit.

This proved to be an inspired choice, as the mountains unfolded ahead and the Coral Sea rose into view behind. After gaining about 400 m elevation rock-scrambling up the creek, it was time to turn around and head back to the Little Ramsay Bay campsite.

TC and FS took off on another excursion the next morning, backtracking to Banksia Beach en route to Agnes Island, supposedly joined to the mainland by a sand spit exposed at low tide. The tide was still up too much to cross after waiting an hour and a half, so they retreated to pick up their gear at Little Ramsay and followed the others to Nina Bay camping area. They arrived to find a magnificent

shelter erected from two tarps by CC and DW.

An expedition was mounted to Nina Peak the next morning. DW remained at the pass waiting for news of impending cyclones from newly arrived passing backpackers. The remainder ascended the 312 m peak, pausing for views over the expanse of mangroves to the north, with long estuarine fingers snaking in from Missionary Bay, and over Nina Bay, with Mt Bowen and its allies hulking behind it. The views from the top were well worth the effort.

**T**he assault party descended to the pass to relieve DW from his backpacker-watching duties and returned to camp, with the exception of FS, who checked out the track ahead to its terminal pickup point. He returned to camp somewhat sodden some hours later, then wandered off and plucked two black bream from the lagoon. TC picked up another nice trevally. All were returned unharmed and uneaten.

The rain and wind settled in in earnest overnight, with the shelters proving invaluable for packing up next morning. The company wandered off early to find the pickup boat already waiting amongst the mangroves. With a gale roaring down the Hinchinbrook Channel which, on the premise of a fine, sunny day, was to be the grand finale of the Hinchinbrook experience, John the Boatman, bless his cotton socks, elected to head for Port Hinchinbrook, near Cardwell, where a mate bundled four into his wagon and drove them to Lucinda. Port Hinchinbrook is an enduring monument to Keith Williams and Queensland's White Shoe Brigade, with the canal estate silted to the gunwales, making it an environmental and developmental disaster. TC and FS took one for the team and remained with John for the scenic tour up Hinchinbrook Channel, visibility near zilch.

And after a few more nights of camping, a happy return to Narrabri was made. ♦



# Katherine Gorge -

*where every ripple has added significance*

Kelvin Montagu and Liz Saunders,  
Springwood Bushwalking Club



A train, a plane, a 4WD and a helicopter – to go from Springwood to the headwaters of the Katherine River in less than 24 hours. What could possibly go wrong?

Like all of our trips (not) everything went without a hitch. Less than 23 hours after hopping on a train at Springwood the five of us were watching the choppers disappear and silence descend. A short walk brought us to the sandy backs of the upper Katherine River. This was the culmination of considerable planning: to convince NT Parks and Wildlife to give us a special permit while the lower gorges were still closed, to get the “goldilocks” water levels (not too high and not too low, just right while booking flights months in advance), arranging access to the upper reaches, and of course flying with Jetstar and their history of cancelling flights.

The Katherine River drains the back of Arnhem land plateau before cutting its way off the plateau, and in the process creating the 13 Gorges. Exiting the gorges, the river flows past Katherine then joins with the Flora river to become the Douglas Daly and discharge into the Timor sea.

The trip proper started with two days paddling above the gorge system. The river is not what you would expect of one of a plateau. River morphology in the 30 km segment was a classical flood plain. Long channels are fringed on both banks by natural levies dominated by large paperbarks and pandanus. Literally metres away from the river the vegetation drops dramatically in height and becomes tropical savannah. The river was an enjoyable flatwater paddle with long pools punctuated with rock races. The bird life was prolific.

Every ripple has added significance when paddling in the Territory. Salties are not known this far upstream but over the past 40 years since wholesale hunting stopped they have crept further and further upstream. That didn't stop us; it just meant some caution around the water, especially at night.

Above the gorges we only had to contend with ‘freshies’. On previous pre-tour trips many had been spotted. On this trip we saw just the one solitary ‘freshy’. The impact of cane toads on freshwater crocs, monitors and dragons was noticeable.

Our approach to the start of the gorge system was marked by fingers of escarpment outcrops intercepting the river. A highlight was a large broilga perched on top of one of the outcrops. The change in river morphology was distinct with the river becoming more constrained. A benefit of this was a quickening of flow and some fun rapids. During big wets this area above the Gorge system becomes an inland sea as the narrow rock entrance to the gorges system constrains the flow. The water level in April was a little more manageable.

The upper gorge system is a dramatic rock landscape. An almost unimaginable amount of wet season water is funnelled into a very constrained bedrock landscape. At times the entire flow of the river is forced through a 3 m gap. The result - a water sculpture on a grand scale - worthy of a full days wandering and exploring. Away from the river the fissured nature of the rock landscape creates an interesting mosaic of grassland and occasional pockets of trees.

Preparing for the trip I had indicated that we would have fish one night, and hence we could pack one less dinner. This was treated with some scepticism, until a lure was thrown in and first cast got a sooty grunter. A few more followed and dinner was sorted out.

With pack rafts the trip from gorge 13 down to gorge 9 was a breeze. The major portage around gorges 13 -11 was a pleasant walk and the brute of a portage into gorge 9 was made easy by the aerial capability of the pack rafts. As a result, we had plenty of time to explore the escarpment around gorge 11 and 12.



Friends and relations





Camp on the bank of the river



The contrast between the river and the surroundings

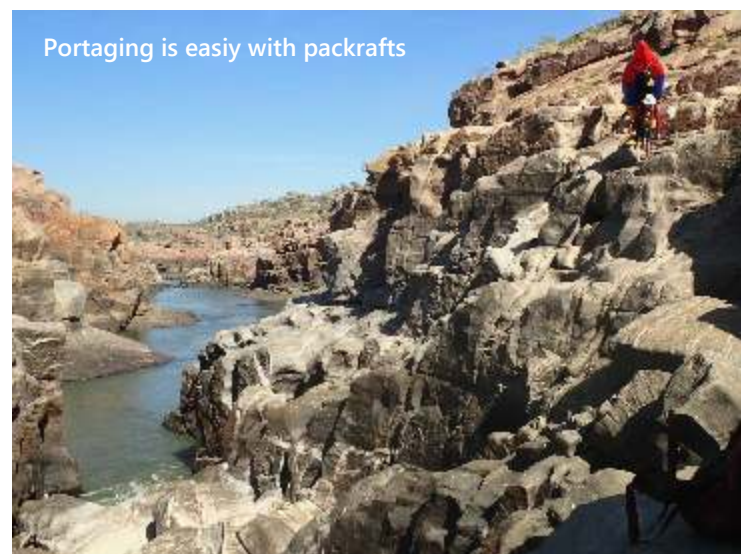
From gorge 11 the river is a bit more paddle friendly with some enjoyable white water as the river descends and the walls of the gorge rise. A compulsory portage past Eagle Rock and into gorge 9 brought us into our spectacular campsite for a couple of nights. The benign river conditions hid the tragedy of the rafting river guide who drowned 'trailing' whitewater rafting in the early 1990s. The moods of the river can be very different.

Camping for a couple of nights in gorge 9 allowed us time to watch the changes in colour of the gorge walls as the light varied. It also allowed for another walk about away from the river and some exploration of the country and billabongs away from the main gorge system. This is fascinating but harsh country.

The upper Katherine forms an important traditional route between the Kakadu flood plains, up the South Alligator river and over into the Katherine river. As a result there is considerable rock art in the area.

From gorge 9 down most rapids are paddled with each gorge having a different feel. From waterfall cascading down, to rainforest pockets, rock overhangs and walls and delightful beaches. But each ripple was having extra significance with the lower gorges (1-3) still closed for 'salty' checking and removal.

A pack rafting trip is not a pack rafting trip without a walk in or out. As we cheated with the flight in this left the walk out from gorge 4 (Smith Rock). An early walkout avoided the heat of the day and meant we were out by 10 am. But after seven days in the upper reaches there was the shock of running into the day trippers on the way out.



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With all river trips their complexion is very much determined by water levels. At the end of April and early May we enjoyed a river with reasonable flow but nearing the bottom of the range for being able to paddle most of the rapids. The unusual dry season weather also made the walking pleasant, even if Anne did find it a bit cold due to a last minute choice between her sleeping bag and "The Luminaries" (a good read Anne?). As a result, it was a very relaxed and enjoyable trip on the river in contrast to other times we have done this trip.

Having previously lived in the Territory, paddling the Katherine was one of our favourite trips. The first time we paddled the upper Katherine was 20 years ago in a Canadian with a four and six year-old. Returning with pack rafts (and no kids) made for a considerably easier trip. However, things had changed. The combination of 'salties' creeping further upstream and a more risk-adverse Parks Management meant the lower gorges were closed until well into the dry season, cane toads had decimated the reptile populations, and changes in access made vehicle access difficult.

But what a stunning trip, there are not many trips that we have done three times and would still do again. ♦



Sunlight on the gorge



Rapids - adrenaline territory!



The climb out at the end of the trip



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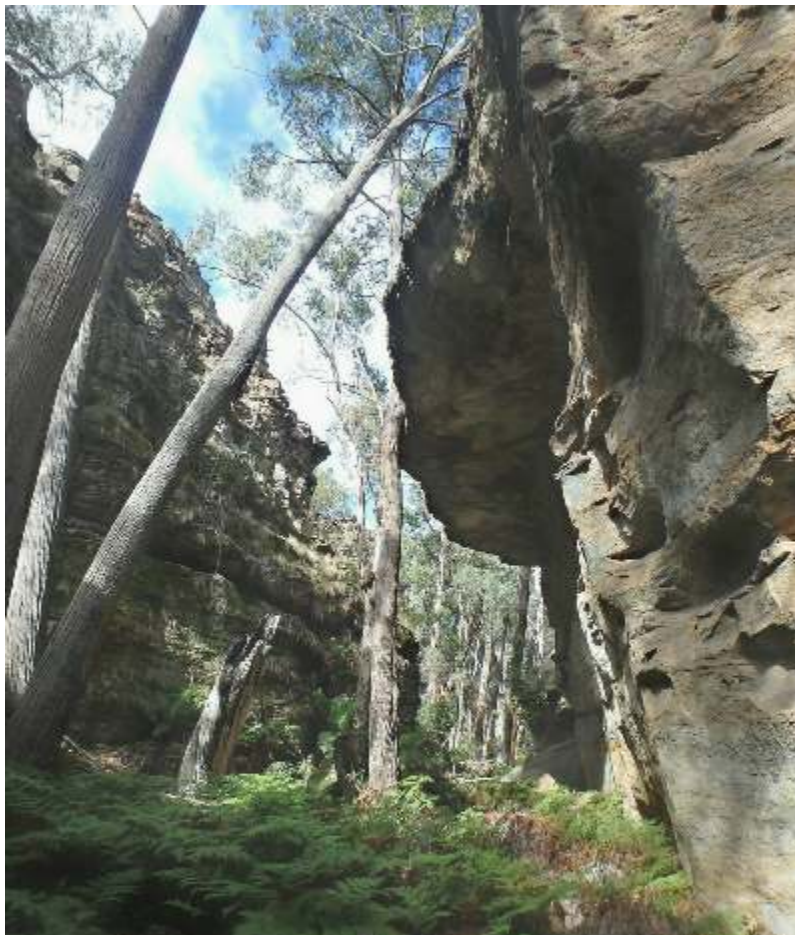




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## Catacombs of Temple Creek,

*just down from the Temple of Doom!*

Hugh Speirs,  
Blue Mts Bushrangers

Map: Cullen Bullen

**W**E parked in the Lower Vestibule (en route to Temple of Doom) at GR 321 095, walking by 0915. Headed eastwards to the end of the enchanting pagoda cluster, then climbed to pick up the bike track which leads upwards and to the Wolgan LO. This proved to be the same one we found last week. It seemed to aim in the direction we wanted, so we followed it to 327 095 where it came onto the old access road where we'd



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parked last week. 20 m to the left the bike track again headed off SE and we followed it for 150 m or so. It seemed an appropriate spot to head off-track down towards the Temple Ck. ...

Finding a descent point wasn't obvious and we spent some time on a broad headland looking longingly into some inaccessible fern-filled depths surrounded by vertical cliffs. Harold found a great slot, narrow, deep, but he thought it a possible way down. To quote Harold, as he licked his lips, "If the Bush Club blokes were here they'd be down this like a rat down a drain-pipe!!" We moved on a bit.



Harold pops out



Harold looking concerned: can Huey manage this?

We bush-pushed down for 10 min to the first level, but soon realised it was much further down to the creek. We then descended through thick ferns, heading generally NE as we looked for The Catacombs (see The Gardens of Stone National Park and beyond, Book 6, Michael Keats and Brian Fox, - thanks gents). It wasn't easy going. Either the ferns became higher or I found a lot of holes. That was possible, there's no way of really telling where you're putting your feet. The trick is to get someone else to go first and follow them closely. If they disappear it's usually a hole!! Waist-high ferns became chest-high, then head-high - even on me.

GPS checkings showed we were close. We'd actually come perhaps 50 m too far. Harold scouted brilliantly and found the winding tunnels and climbs, and tunnels, and more tunnels, that make this spot a challenge (for anyone around 2 m tall and sporting a back-pack), and a lot of fun!!

See the pile of huge fallen rocks, (difficult to see from where we'd been further up the slope), the crushing structure of the 'Catacombs' - and the series of 'tunnels' hidden beneath and between them. No, not visible.

This collection of massive fallen rocks leaves just enough access beneath them. One scrambles on hands and knees (and belly once or twice, in the mode of genuflection). Then one is inside, so to speak.

Almost at the end we came to an enclosed space that seemed to have no outlet. My first sight of it said to me, 'We'll have to re-trace our steps (or our belly wormings)!'. We looked upwards to our right where a large rock shelf hung. No way. But still there was one way, to our left, a hidden small opening to a short tunnel that took us out.

We looked at where we were - we were now at the S end of the tunnels.

We'd been here earlier and thought it couldn't be the right place to enter. It was 1300 and over time for lunch. And what a Lunch Spot!!

After lunch we needed to find our way out of the gully. We looked carefully at a slot Harold had discovered at the top. He'd been through it, but was obviously doubtful that I could do it without considerable difficulty. And if there's one place your geriatric doesn't want to find considerable difficulty it's in a 30m deep slot which is barely wide enough to squeeze through and having several near vertical climbs without footholds or walking frame availability (another would be when belly-worming through subterranean tunnels!!).

The upshot was that we wended our way back up the way we'd descended. On reaching the old access track we followed that back to the car, the long way round but it afforded us a good way to stretch the legs out. ♦

*[Highly edited to get it to fit - Roger Caffin]*



107 kg of ageing elephantine grace on a path of destruction



Standing room inside



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Pic d'Anie, GR10,  
French Pyrenees.  
Photo: Roger Caffin