The Bushwalker

Morning Tea,
Mount Blanche

Volume 42
Issue 1, 2017

Wouldn't you like to be here?

The Trident, Koopartoo Mesa. Photo: Brian Fox

Riverbed, Larapinta Trail. Photo: David White

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Front Cover: Morning Tea. Photo: Roger Caffin.

Back Cover: Fourways from McAlister Saddle, Kosciuszko National Park. Photo: Roger Caffin

From the editor's desk. . .

OK, THERE has been a bit of a change here. We are of course dependent on you our readers for articles, but the supply has dried up. We have not published any issues this year so far. So I have raked together what I could for a final print issue: this one. I guess it is 'So long and thanks for all the fish'.

The front cover needs some explanation. You may have noticed a 'blue gnome' somewhere on almost all front covers - my wife, she likes blue. *Editor's privilege*. So this front cover is a portrait of the two of us having morning tea and coffee on a scarp on Mt Blanche, to say farewell.

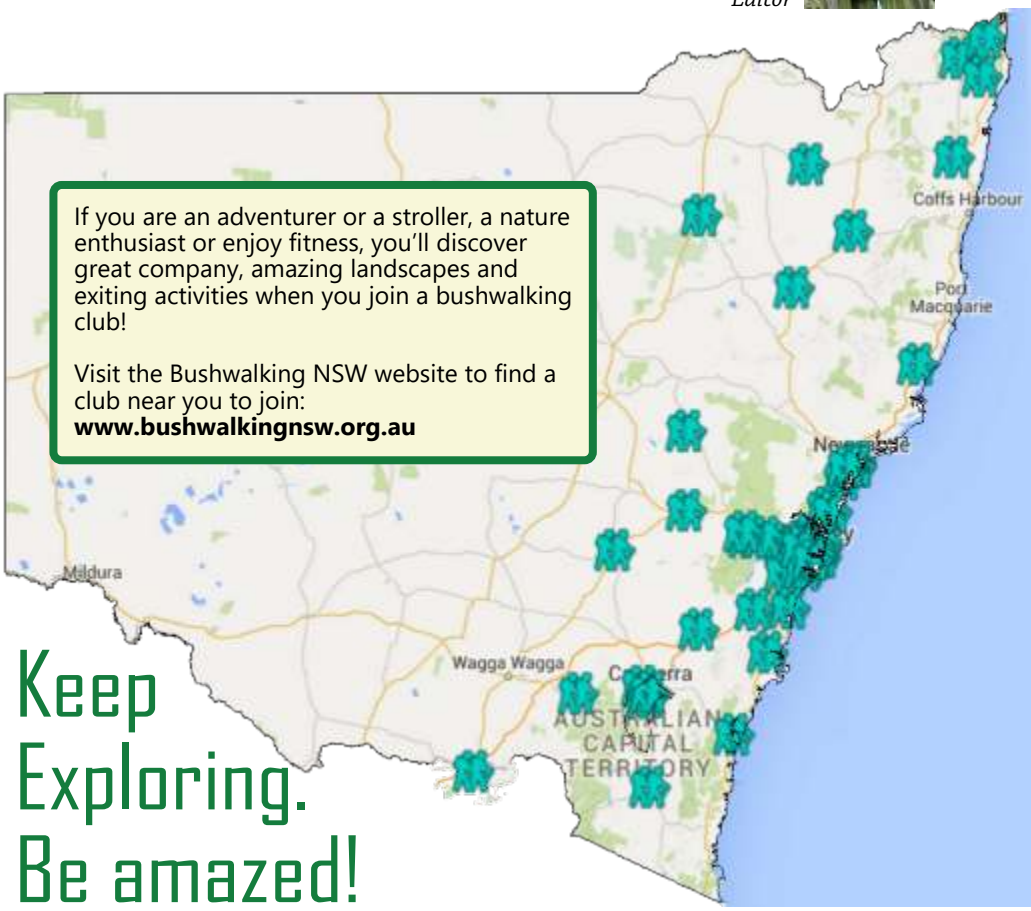
OK, but why is Sue laughing her head off? Well, I had set the camera up on a little Joby tripod, pressed the shutter with a 10 second delay, and scuttled back to sit down. Unfortunately, in my haste I had 'kicked the bucket', and sent the kettle which had been sitting on the stove next to me flying. That's it out front - now empty. The windscreen is also off to the side.

The photos on the inside front cover are also 'specials'. The huge bit of rock has been called The Trident, on the Koopartoo mesa, east of the Newnes Plateau. (I think the name may be restricted to a small group of Michael Keats' friends. My thanks to Brian Fox for this photo. The desert landscape is Central Australia and part of the Larapinta Trail. It's different country. Under the right conditions (which are unlikely), the sand underfoot could even flow with water. My thanks to David Whyte of the Watagan Wanderers for this.

The rolling grasslands on the back cover balance out the others. That photo was taken from McAlister Saddle in Kosciusko NP, pointing south. The low point in the middle is known as 'FourWays', because four creeks join together there as part of the Upper Geehi River. It's a much-loved spot for many of us, and pretty good when covered in snow too. The hills in the background are (from right to left) Tarn Bluff, Cup and Saucer, and Mailbox. In the distance, between Tarn Bluff and C&S, you can make out part of the Kerries. We do carry maps in this area, but we rarely glance at them.

Since this is the final issue, I want to express my sincere thanks to Barry Hanlon and Roy Jamieson for all the assistance they have given me over the years. Thanks Guys..

Roger Caffin
Editor



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We are likely to make *The Bushwalker* an online only publication.
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Exploring the Upper Endrick River within the Budawangs

Ian Barnes
Batemans Bay Bushwalkers

The Endrick River is an eastern tributary of the Shoalhaven River and its upper catchment is bounded by the Nerriga/Nowra Road and Endrick Fire Trail. This area is within the 70,000 hectare Budawang Wilderness Area.

The Upper Endrick River catchment is an area of solid rock plateau sandstone geology, broken only by cracking and sculpting of wind and water and mostly covered by a thick blanket of heath and woodland vegetation, periodically rejuvenated by high intensity wildfire. Nevertheless, some large areas of solid rock persist, particularly where watercourses have cut down into the solid rock and it is these features which have particular interest.

Exploring a natural Arch

Battleship Rock

Much of the area was historically visited by graziers and timber cutters in association with their activities in the grassier nearby valleys, but they have left decades ago. In the 1960-70 period, military artillery training was conducted on the fringes of the area but the core area of the Upper Endrick catchment remained untouched.

Because of the restricting nature of the dense understorey, very few bushwalkers seem to have ventured into the area. No doubt they did but there are few records available. The Shoalhaven Bushwalking Club visited the area in the 1970's for a day of rock climbing.

Recently, four Batemans Bay Bushwalkers spent three days exploring the creeks, clifflines and rock shelves of the area. Because of wet weather on the first day, and an aversion to pushing through wet bush, we approached from the west by walking a circuitous 15 kilometres of the Endrick River Fire Trail from the Sassafras car park. This allowed us to visit the well known features along the way such as the upper Clyde Gorge, Red Johnnys Cave, the Vines rainforest and the pure and handsome Brown Barrel regrowth forest, an artefact of the once busy local sawmill, down the Vines Creek valley.

We left the firetrail at 451044 and bush bashed two kilometres up the banks of the Endrick River. We found our planned campsite of two nights at 469457, fortuitously later proving to be the only comfortable creekbank campsite in the area.

The next day we ventured upstream through the river gorge but soon tired from pushing through thick undergrowth and scrambling over creekside boulders. Instead, we cut through the low clifflines to the south and explored the rock massif between the Galbraith Plateau and Battleship Rock. There were some fine views, particularly from The Loaf at 477047, so

Brian Mercer samples a pagoda

named by us because of its resemblance to a loaf of bread. It was perched on the lip of the gorge just across from the imposing Battleship Rock.

On the third day we cut eastward across the Endrick River headwaters. This was a very tiring route, with very thick undergrowth in places, climbing and descending rock platforms. Navigation needed to be of pinpoint accuracy to find the few narrow passes between the valleys and clifftops.

However, it also proved to be the most enjoyable day. A forensic stereoscopic examination of the 1970 aerial photos had indicated there were some scenic payoffs

The author at the Upper Endrick River upper cascade

along the way and the photographs proved valuable in finding the few rocky passes between clifftops and valley crossings.

Working our way to the clifftop north of Battleship Rock rewarded us with long high rock platforms with speedy walking. It gave us wonderful views southward across the river gorge to Galbraith Plateau and we had a close up view of the appropriately named Battleship Rock. Nearby, another lower rock of similar, but smaller shape, menaced the valley to the east. In keeping with the local marine monicking, we named it Submarine Rock.

Further east, from a clifftop point at 481049, we gazed upon the Endrick River's confluence with Newhaven Creek and admired the rugged nature of the surrounding valleys and gullies.

We crossed the river upstream at 484050, not only because it was one of the few easier river crossings available, but also to see the small, but delightful, narrow rock ravine in which the river has dropped and cut through the solid rock. After examining its large and peaceful waterhole at the exit we climbed the surrounding rock platforms and walked the inlet with its wonderful potholes. We also gazed further upstream where long waterholes curved through rocky troughs.

We had enough time to drop packs and bushbash the half kilometre to the south where the river drops a second time through the rock platforms. It proved to be a cascade with a towering overhang but from our high vantage point we decided not to explore it in detail. Instead, we explored a natural arch and nearby, on a small cliff ledge, a large and healthy Diamond Python was curled up in the warming sunshine keeping a close eye on our intrusion.

Overlooking Battleship Rock

We headed east to the firetrail, uneventful except for very heavy undergrowth between the few rock platforms that we stumbled upon and could stitch into our intended route. At times the heath was 2-4 metres high, and too often we had to backtrack a few metres to relaunch our attack. It was equal to the heaviest we have experienced in the Budawangs and gained a speed of less than a kilometre per hour.

Exhausted, mid afternoon, we suddenly popped onto the firetrail, exactly where we intended, and slogged home.

In summary, most walkers of the Budawangs Wilderness stick to the few tracks and routes available. Few will venture into the intervening chunks of broken rock and clifflines. The Upper Endrick River area is one of those areas. In three days we saw evidence of previous visitation of only a possible old rock cairn of many decades age plus a small iron fragment near the fire trail, an artefact of the previous use for military training centred on Bhundoo Hill.

The view of Battleship Rock and its surrounds from the clifftop was worth the trip. The solid rock bed of the Endrick River upstream of its confluence with Newhaven Creek is worth further exploration, as is possibly the nearby Middle Creek. From our sampling, the base of the clifflines have some, but not many, overhangs of interest. Despite checking all overhangs and rock platforms encountered, we saw no evidence of previous Aboriginal occupation.

We saw very little evidence of fauna – a bit of wombat on the creek banks, few insects, no fish, no macropods, no raptors, not even an owl call at night – only honeyeaters on the plateau and of course, the python. In contrast, the vegetation abounds in heath and understorey species.

A wild and interesting place, best visited after a bushfire. ♦

Upper Endrick River Valley

Spurs South of Kangaroo Creek Gardens of Stone

Hugh Spiers
Blue Mountains Bushrangers
Photos by various members of the Bushrangers

There'd been walking sorties a-plenty into Kangaroo Ck. On the map, to the south of the Creek, the ridges interested me and there we were headed.

"Dirty Big Tree", Emanuel

Knowing nothing of the area except from studying maps, we snuck into it from the north, descending via a fascinating tributary gully down to Kangaroo Creek. This gully encloisters the DBT (Dirty Big Tree - pictured on a later day when we couldn't get enough folk to encircle it! and also the MRR (Mossy Rock Ravine, where one could almost get lost in its tangle of huge rocks). Ideal for M/T (morning tea!).

Farther on, as we wound steeply down to the creek, through an adjoining crevasse encircled by massive cliffs, we passed the GKP (Giant Kebab Pillar).

The gradual climb out starts at the creek - a bike track eases the ascent, but, not wishing to remain on that for too long, eventually we turned off-track to find a way out and up through the cliff-line to our right.

"Elaine Rock", Elaine

By good fortune we found a slot enabling us to scramble up to a pagoda that we now refer to as Elaine Rock, celebrating our fellow walker's iconic photo. Approaching it we still had no idea of the stupendous scene awaiting us. It's hard to imagine, even to remember, the thrill at seeing these apparently unknown - headlands, certainly unreported so far as I can find... for the first time.

This was my first sight of the Heads area.

"Here be much rock", Hu

Just a few metres onwards and upwards... We're looking across the gully we've just travelled up, towards a part of North Head. And from here on we'll leave the pics talk for themselves with occasional captions.

"South Head, you can't get there from here", Hu

"Giant Kebab Pillar", Emanuel

"Foot placement can be important", Bob

"The (slightly more) distant view", Emanuel

And the close-up view", Emanuel

"Hugh Spiers demonstrating some extremely advanced bushwalking techniques", Alice

Back to the Cave Man

Ian Smith

I'm meeting Gerry today, a 65 year old Tasmanian who's seen most of the island state, way more than I'll ever cover in a lifetime. I'm tagging along with him to Julius Creek, a semi-obscure destination that he wants to return to – and who am I to argue? It's mildly famous among the bushwalking fraternity because it has caves so I'm expecting to be in a dark place sometime in the ensuing hours.

We meet at Allendale Gardens, a truly magical place I visited over a decade ago. It's a ramshackle plot of rustic visual delights hosted by its creator, a white haired lady named Lorraine who, if she's not tending her plot, is apt to be talking to visitors, engaging in discourse covering many subjects, not the least of which is the time she slept with a platypus. Her infectious enthusiasm makes it hard to leave after she greets me but eventually I'm sent up to the house where Gerry is working on their computer, trying to rectify some virus or other.

I'm offered a cup of tea and gleefully accept, the mood soon replaced when coconut milk is added and I taste it for the first time, immediately deciding it will never be a part of my diet.

We're somewhat tardy in heading out and I'm not sure exactly what we'll be doing other than the caves; I'm just happy to have a guide. Our first stop is Edith Creek general store/café/service station – you name it they'll have a go. In fact, talking to one of the owners later, he's managed to start a profitable business utilizing the wood that the forestry company doesn't want, finding many uses for the initially rejected timber.

Gerry however, is taking me to what the tourist image of the fabled Tarkine is, pristine Gondwana forest swathed in lichen and moss. There's a new loop road not far from Edith Creek. Actually, it's not new, but the sealing of it and promotion as a tourist destination is. Where Gerry's taking me will not be on any serious promoter's list in the foreseeable future though; I figure that out as we turn off one road onto another, then another and it's a dirt road in the midst of becoming overgrown by forest with grasses and reedy-type plants as high

as the bonnet running down the middle.

For some unknown reason I thought we were headed to a less obscure destination but here, the only way you know you've arrived is if you happen to spot the one lone piece of pink ribbon affixed to small branch. Had Gerry not mentioned it I'd have driven right by but there's also a slightly wide part of the road, so called, where, after several backwards and forwards motions, you can actually turn around, which is just as well because I wouldn't fancy reversing up our route.

This walk is as close to virgin as you can get; the track, such as it is, can only be followed if you keep your eyes out for the ribbons because there's little wear and tear in some places, especially where a log has fallen down and alternate routes have been sought. This is wilderness in it truest form and we make our way down and across a small watercourse, so obscure you can walk across it and not get the top of your shoes wet.

Some creek or other has to be negotiated further on, a couple of times in fact, before we find ourselves at the last descent. At the final bit it's a mite tricky, slippery under foot, but we negotiate it with enthusiasm and find ourselves near one of the many caves that dot the area. I'm shaking my head, not for the first time this trip, and uttering that 'wow' word again.

It's brilliant, the epitome of ancient land as our ancestors would have found it and natives would have walked it. The rush of the water is the only sound and Gerry would later say, 'You just don't want to leave'. He got that right. It's magical, enchanted and spiritual, all at once. It wraps itself around you and draws you in, leaving you gazing in wonder that such places exist, though you know they do, you just haven't had anyone to guide you in before.

We spend half an hour, or was it three quarters, adjusting tripods and shutter speeds to get the required exposures, constantly checking the results on the

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camera screen because, who knows how long, if ever, it will be before we see such a place again.

On Gerry's advice I don't go into any of the caves as its the river here that casts its net around your soul and taunts you constantly and I don't need the added burden of removing some clothing and sloshing my way into a cave that's not all that brilliant anyway.

It's almost sad to be leaving, though that is pushed into the background at the thought of seeing the exposures later on. Gerry is now taking me to the Julius River Conservation Reserve, a more tourist oriented track with toilets no less. It's the same river, just further upstream.

Once there, there's an easy-to-follow half hour stroll through more forest, crossing the water twice via well-made bridges. It's a relief in one way not to have to scramble somewhere as I have in previous days and earlier this day. Normal walking is not something I've done in a forest for some time.

I get off on manferns (dicksonia antarctica), locating a couple growing out horizontally over the river that have much appeal and can't stop taking pictures for five minutes. I remember one at Horseshoe Falls in Mount Field National Park that someone had photographed well and I was trying to emulate that shot.

There's much to recommend this half hour stroll through the woods; it's pretty, it's civilized, but you still get that wilderness feeling.

Our next stop was Dempster Plains Lookout, an interesting panorama over, amongst other things, vast fields of buttongrass, flowing down the hill and onto a plain. Little else can grow here and little else does yet, immediately either side, trees, I suspect melaleucas, are flourishing. I can't help but wonder what the missing ingredient is that causes the dividing line.

Next we pull up at a sinkhole, something I've heard of before but never seen or, more precisely, taken notice of. Part of a dolomite karst system, the water beneath dissolves the minerals and moves them along so that there's a void into which the above layers collapse. There are hundreds of them in this area but only two, this one and Lake Chisholm, hold water. Surrounded by the forest, it has created a

virtual permanent mirror, except in extreme weather, because it's so sheltered. I love it and wish there were more but am so happy to have seen this one.

We also crossed the main artery of the Tarkine, aka the Arthur River, somewhere on the route. Downstream it becomes quite navigable and two cruise boats vie for the tourist dollar, but that's something I'll have to do another day. For this time I have to be content with getting back to Edith River and reflecting over the day's events with Gerry in that ever-so-bucolic café (dinner available on Fridays) and its effervescent hostess. ♦

Kosciusko Gorges

Roger Caffin

[The directions in this article have been deliberately left a bit vague. It's wild country.. - Ed]

There are some archetypal ideas about the landscape in Kosciusko National Park (KNP). They seem to feature open rolling grasslands, sometimes a bit steep maybe, and lots and lots of granite boulders. *[Picture 1 "Near Four Ways"]*

Well, that's all true of course, and it is beautiful walking country, but you have watch the weather. This is alpine country, and the weather can change rather quickly. This picture shows the dirt 4WD road at the Cesjacks gate into the Park - in early May. You have been warned. *[Picture 2]*

There are some exceptions to this nice idea of gentle rolling alpine country. The Western Fall running along the Main Range features Hannels Spur, the biggest climb in Australia; about 1550 m from Geehi Flat (the grasslands) to Byatts Camp (camera position). That was a fairly long climb. *[Picture 3 "Looking down Hannels Spur]*

Further to the north the scarp edge above the Yarrangobilly River is very distinct but less than half the height (say around 630 m). The scrub can be terrible, but you can go down via the Coppermine FT (right). We did not find any water on the way down.

Then, there are valleys dropping into the Tumut River, just above the Happy Jacks Pondage. These are only about 350 m from the top of Farm Ridge to the Tumut - surely pretty tame in comparison? We shall see.

First I must explain about the Tumut Valley, upstream (west) of Farm Ridge FT. Most of it is a flood plain: a broad flat valley, very flat, very tussocky, and slow walking. There are two big sets of falls to negotiate at the top end. The ones on the left are the lower part of the first falls, while the ones on the right are the second set. See how the rock barrier which makes the falls makes a flat valley upstream. *[Picture 4 "Tumut Falls"]*

However, below the ford of the Farm Ridge Fire Trail (east of it) the valley narrows, rather a lot too, and the sides are suddenly quite steep. They are mudstone, and not very good mudstone either. In places the sides seem to be coming down around you. Some of that may be basalt scree runs, but other bits seem to be crumbling mudstone.

Now, looking at the maps one can see two rather tempting large creeks going N: Bogong Creek and Doubtful Creek. These go from the high plains to the south, around the E side of Mt Jagungal, and run N to the Tumut. Bogong Creek starts at Jagungal Saddle, heads N and crosses the Grey Mare FT near O'Keefes Hut. It continues on and eventually it joins the Tumut in that broad flat valley. Doubtful Creek starts at McAlister Saddle, passes below Cesjacks Hut, and heads N to cross the Grey Mare FT and hit the Tumut somewhat to the east of Farm Ridge.

We have been down a bit of Doubtful Creek from Grey Mare FT to near Doubtful Gap in 2012 (mainly via spurs), and we found it 'interesting country'. However, that time we went up the side valley to Doubtful Gap, so we didn't get to see any further north. The country was rocky, but surely not too bad? *[Picture 5 "Looking up to Doubtful Gap"]*

So in March 2016 we tried going down Bogong Creek. There's a bit of scrub in the Bogong Valley south of O'Keefes Hut and the Grey Mare FT, but you can finesse that via the spur on the west side. After lunch at O'Keefes we went to the Bogong Ck crossing and headed north. The country started to look more interesting, then it became 'difficult'. The water was icy and the rock on the hillside was loose. Getting past some buttresses required using both hands and feet. There were a few instances of scrabbling feet on loose rock. Travel slowed right down. *[Picture 6]*

With some enthusiasm we got to a big U-shaped bend before the Hut Creek junction, but we had been doing about 0.5 kph for some time, the day was getting a bit advanced, and there were no campsites within range. Part of the problem was that the water was just a bit too fast and deep (and cold) for our liking. We decided since this was just a reconnaissance that it might be wise to pull out a bit earlier than planned, up onto the Farm Ridge FT above us. *[Picture 7]*

Good idea, but it wasn't half steep! Hands and feet were required most of the way. There's lots of nice flat camping space on top of Farm Ridge, but very limited water. Climbing out like that let us follow the Farm Ridge FT north to where it makes a big dogleg bend to the west. WE took an old FT going to the east there - up to a basalt cone! Piles of flat layers of basalt! There had been a full volcanic eruption here. *[Picture 8]*

From there we went north and east to the junction of Doubtful Creek and the Tumut River. The scrub was not bad along the ridge, and there was a large range of different rock types down at the junction, of great interest to the Wombat geologist. We looked up the end of Doubtful Creek (where it joined the Tumut): it looked 'reasonable'. So we went up and over Far Bald Mt (for the Nth time) and went home. *[Picture 9 "The last drop into the Tumut"]*

In May 2017 we decided to try to do a full 2-creek loop from Cesjacks: down Doubtful Creek to the Tumut, up the Tumut to near Bogong Creek, up Bogong Creek to Jagungal Saddle, and back home. Please note the word 'try'. Google Earth made it look easy - but who trusts Google Earth?

Going down the Doubtful Creek valley from Cesjacks to the Grey Mare FT is fairly easy if you stay a bit out of the actual valley, more on the tops. Good skiing too. North of the Grey Mare FT we stayed this time beside Doubtful Creek, and the way became a bit more 'interesting'. 5 or 6 km later we reached the side creek which came

down from Doubtful Gap. We had been here before: so far, so good. However, once past that side creek, the valley became a gorge. We don't mind gorges, but this one was steep and the rock was mudstone - both very loose and very sharp. Yes, I had thought of mudstone as crumbly, but that is 'mudstone', loose and sharp. An accident here would be unfortunate. *[Picture 10]*

We did get a bit further down the gorge, but for the last 1 - 2 km we had been travelling at below 0.5 kph. What you cannot see is the extremely poor footing under the grass: it's all sharp loose rock. There was another 3 km to go before there was any real possibility of a campsite, and the afternoon was rolling on. The Wombat was not happy. *[Picture 11]*

Just to the south there was a nice gentle side creek going west, forking about 0.5 km up the creek. We decided to return to that and go for the north arm, and ran bang into a steep climb with a tiny waterfall running right down the middle. The photo shows about 1/3 of the fall - through hard mudstone of course. It was quite gorgeous. (Why does the word 'gorgeous' seem to derive from 'gorge'?) Once again, the valley above was fairly flat - and a bit windy. *[Picture 12]*

The next morning was thick fog and cold. You could not see much. We went up the valley to forest cover near the top (remember frost hollows?), and broke through that to eventually find the Farm Ridge FT. OK, once again we would take the FT to the Tumut. We passed the basalt hill we had found last time but stayed on the main FT this time. Once past the big dogleg we started to descend a bit, and suddenly found ourselves slightly below the ridge, and below the cloud layer too. A bit of skill and we even found a spot (mostly) out of the wind for morning tea. Important stuff, coffee. *[Picture 13]*

The final ramp on the FT down to the Tumut was on mudstone, but at one stage I looked at the incut and Bingo! You could see a thin basalt layer over the top. This was where a layer of molten stuff from the basalt hill up top had poured over the surface. It's not hard to see the difference between the two types of rock. Fascinating stuff. *[Picture 14]*

The Tumut was 'boring' and a slog for several kilometres, south to the first sharp bend where a side creek comes in from the east. Google Earth had shown something 'interesting' up this valley, and in fact the old 1:50k topo map showed signs of that as well. So our idea was to go east up this valley, inspect the curious stuff to the north, then take the south arm over a saddle back to the Tumut just north of the Bogong Creek junction. *{Picture 15]*

It was nice alpine country, and the 'curious stuff' turned out to be several huge basalt scree runs. In fact we were just to the south-west of the basalt hill, so it obvious where all that had come from. We came back to the south arm and went up it. Near the top the angle was over 50 degrees!

We went quickly down the valley to the south. It was steep at first, but eventually we found somewhere level enough for camping. It was getting late, so we did. I overlooked the possibility that any bare


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valley this steep might have a serious frost hollow wind ('katabatic wind'?) down it. This was a bit of a mistake on my part: it was somewhere between -8 and -10 C overnight. We had our summer gear for this trip - 600 g & 700 g down quilts. Solo would have been terrible, there were two of us with two quilts: we snuggled very close with most of our clothing on and put the two quilts over both of us. It worked, we slept.

In the morning the tent was a thick layer of solid ice. Warm milk for muesli, then we packed up - in the shade, I folded the tent up and put it on top of my pack, and we both sprinted for the sunshine below. It was wonderful when we got there! *[Picture 16]*

We did consider our options now that we were in the sun, and decided to try going up Bogong Creek as planned. We started with a whole series of nice little waterfalls, which were quite fun, but the hillside got steadily more serious. It wasn't the grassy bits but the loose rock and sub-zero water in places. *[Picture 17]*

Eventually the Wombat said 'up', so we did. If there had been anything solid to belay onto I might even have offered a top-rope, but there wasn't. Anyhow what with water collected from the creek and the frozen tent, I couldn't keep up with the Wombat. *[Picture 18]*

That warmed us up nicely, so we had morning tea in the sunshine near the top - and I put the tent out to dry. Then along the ridge for some kilometres back to O'Keefes hut for dinner. Next morning it was still freezing cold (there's no stove in O'Keekes) and the Wombat wanted breakfast in bed. I got kicked out to make it. Oh well. *[Picture 19]*

On the way back home I went to get some water from a tarn for morning tea. My cup bounced off the surface. I had to smash around to remove the ice: it was over 5 mm thick. But we didn't care: we had had lots of fun, we were in 'home territory' and the sun was shining. *[Picture 20]* ♦


19


20

It's been 40 years!

Colin Ridley and Tim Hager
NSW Nordic Ski Club

Leaving their stocks standing up in the snow, the skiers were understandably tentative, practicing their skills on a gentle slope without the support of their poles. Having their heels free and not locked down to the ski was a new and strange experience for those who had previously skied only on resorts using alpine or 'downhill' skis.

While this group were learning basic skills, a short distance away, behind Mt Perisher, another group were practicing telemark turns in an intermediate instructional day.

Both groups of cross country skiers were taking part in an instructional weekend with the NSW Nordic Ski Club. Over the forty years since the Club was formed, many hundreds have attended instructional events and learnt cross country skiing techniques as well as back country camping and survival skills. Having the skills to cope with different terrains is vital to taking part in the many trips organised by the Club; trips that range from gentle day tours 'bushwalking on snow' to extended back country camping trips.

This year the Club again ran the all-time classic extended ski tour – Kiandra to Kosciuszko. Basically a traverse from one end of the snowy mountains to the other, the 'K to K' usually takes 5-8 days. The first crossing was by Dr Schlinck and others in 1927.

It was back in 1975 that a dedicated group of skiers decided to form a cross country ski club. The NSW Nordic Ski Club held its first meeting in January 1976. Names from that time include the likes of the legendary Peter Harrington and Wilf Hilder. Back then, skis were long and skinny, boots were made of leather and clothes were mostly knickerbockers with long socks and knitted jumpers. A popular alternative to bought knickerbockers were woollen pants from an army disposal store, cut shorter and worn tucked into long socks. New synthetic fabrics have largely taken over in the clothing stakes. Most members now have skis that tend to be shorter and wider, lending themselves more to turning than to track skiing.

Snow campers have a natural affinity with the huts scattered through the alpine region. It's a great luxury to have a hut in which to prepare meals and dry gloves in front of a fire. Four Mile Hut would have to be the Club's favourite, perhaps because the Nordic Ski Club is the official caretaker.

Situated just 7 km from Kiandra beside old gold diggings, the hut was built by Bob Hughes in 1937. He used it mostly in the summer months as a base for gold fossicking, fishing and rabbiting. Nordic Ski Club members have a strong interest in its history and have sought out Bob Hughes descendants to understand what it was like in the Kiandra area in Bob Hughes' time.

Each autumn the Club runs a special trip to do maintenance on the hut and restock firewood for winter travellers. During the winter, camping near Four Mile Hut has become a regular destination for the Club's 'introduction to snow camping' trip. The skills new members acquire on instructional trips provide a sound foundation for venturing further into the back country. Opening the door of your tent to an alpine sunrise or carving the only tracks for miles around on an isolated peak is a memorable experience.

The Main Range has something for everyone and is a natural focus for the club's activities. It

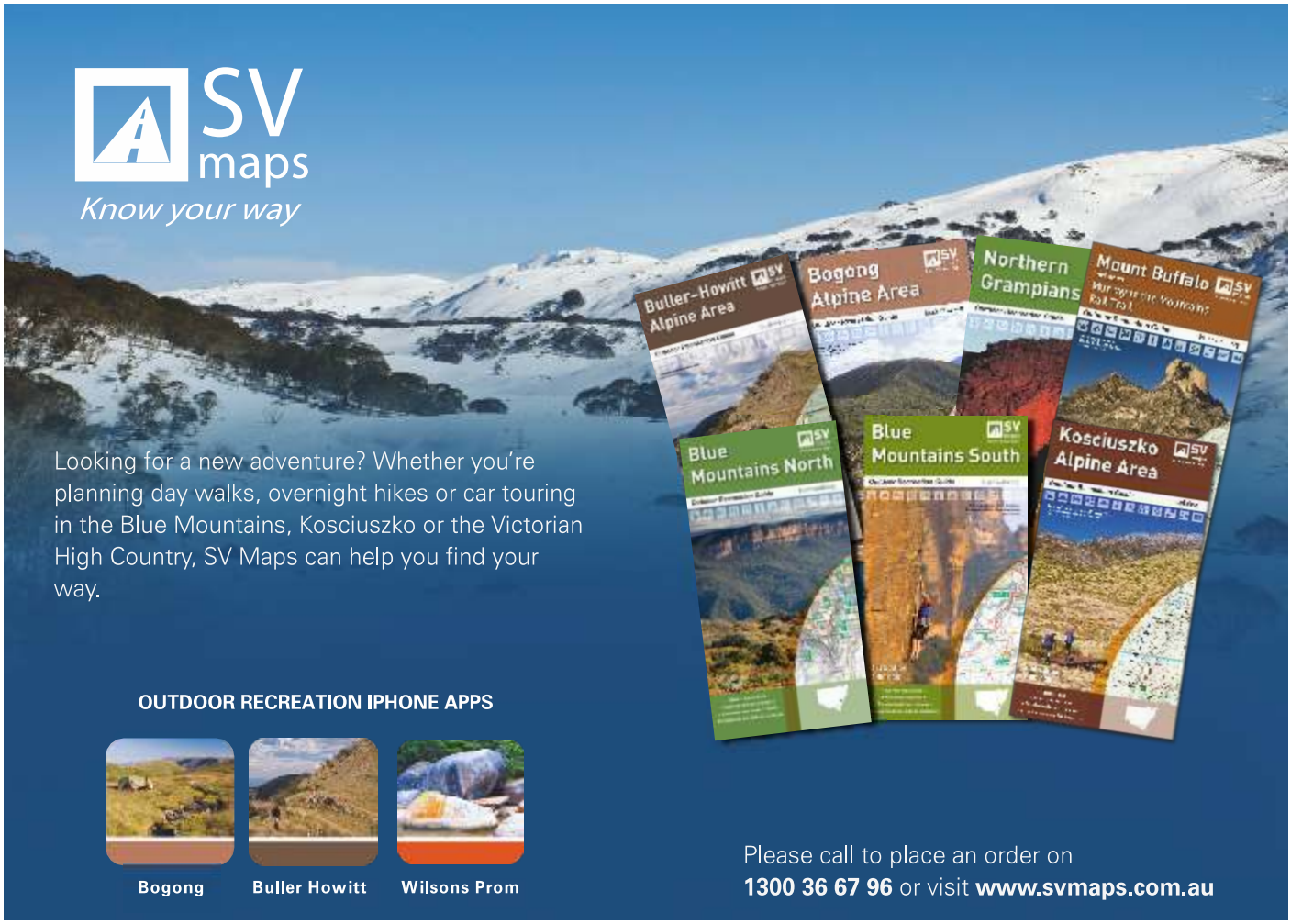
arguably offers some of the best back country skiing in the world when the snow starts to soften in late winter and spring. For those who seek long steep runs, the western fall from spots like Watson's Crags, Mt Townsend and Twynam offer great telemark runs right down to the tree line. Then there is the grandeur of the mountains to soak up on the long climb to regain the tops. But there is also an abundance of gentler runs in the numerous bowls on the eastern fall of the Main Range and the Ramsheads. These are a delight for skiers of all standards.

We also get together to explore new horizons such as the remote Broken River area in New Zealand. And when the Australian summer turns winter into a distant memory, we are drawn to iconic northern hemisphere experiences like the powder in the Japanese Alps or the extensive network of trails in Sweden.

As well as valuing heritage in the alpine area, the club also has strong environmental values, promoting minimal impact touring and camping to protect the unique alpine environment. The Club promotes these principles on all trips and assists new members to adopt low impact skills on instructionals. In 2016, the Club hosted the Back Country Film Festival for the first time. These films focussed on low impact recreation in the world's alpine regions and highlighted threats such as climate change. These themes dovetail with the Club's minimal impact ethos and with the observations of longer term members on the retreat of the snow line. It was also a successful fundraising activity for Friends of the Earth.

Skiing with a free heel has been central to the Club's activities for much of its history. But more recently, alpine tourers have also been welcomed into the Club. Members on 'AT' gear are able to lock down their heels to do parallel turns on steep downhill runs. It's a change for the Club but embraces trends in the skiing world and provides members with the opportunity to develop new skills. And most importantly, the same theme still runs throughout all the club's activities – getting away from crowds at resorts and out into the back country. The supportive culture and shared love of the back country within the Club has helped to create long friendships on and off the snow.

During May to September the Club meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at McMahon's Point Community Centre, just a short walk down Blues Point Road from North Sydney station. Members and others are kept in the loop by the Kick & Glide newsletter; the Nordic and Back country skiing Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/nordicskiclubnsw/; and the Club's website, www.crosscountryskiing.org.au. Anyone interested in finding out more about back country skiing is welcome to call in at a meeting or contact us via the website. ♦



Frenchmans Cap
with a bit of rafting

Michael Smith
Northern Rivers Bushwalking Club

Ten members of the Northern Rivers Bushwalking Club had a crack at Frenchmans Cap. This is what happened.

On the banks of the Collingwood River we fed the mozzies while pumping up the two 5 m rafts that hopefully would see us safely down the wild Franklin River. There were other rafting and kayak groups sharing the river making some competition for the few campsites. We decided to push on an extra four hours to get ahead of them and get the best site. Soon we learned that rafting was a delicate balance between fun and fear.

First to fall completely out was Alan

(splendid specimen). I saw him standing on a rock in the middle of a maelstrom. His raft came close and plucked him from an early death. Our first portage was "The Logjam". Here we walked while the guides roped the loaded rafts down. "Nasty Notch" had us stopped for an hour, carrying 200 kg of gear over slippery rocks and manhandling the half-loaded rafts over the rocks.

Doug (strained thigh) wasn't in the raft long before he became the second to fall out and be heaved back on board, with a fresh

hole poked in his thigh. Joy (dodgy back) was the next to be baptised in the champagne waters. She managed to hang on to the perimeter rope until yanked back on board by Lucy (broken heart). None of this was clumsiness. We were sliding over rocks and falling into big pressure waves and suck-holes then thrown into the air.

All garbage and toilet waste was to be carried out in the raft. Our guide demonstrated how to do this with a freezer bag (large). Surely not (but yes).

Next day we set off in the rain to climb Frenchmans Cap, a 7 hour 1000 m climb. The muddy hillside was covered with a snowy spray of white wildflowers. Christmas Bells, trigger plants and sundews commanded attention. Punctuating the track were the poke-holes of yabbies, carnivore scats and Wombat cubes. We saw the Franklin from above. A frigid wind and low cloud joined the rain. It was becoming a cold, wet, gut-busting epic with no chance of a view from the top. We turned back after climbing 600 m. For Tina it was her third unsuccessful attempt to summit.

A muddy, 2 hour crocodile slide, and a barefoot river crossing saw us all safely under the tarps for a second rainy night. Each morning at first light Lucy could be seen, statue still, rugged up, on a cold rock next to the raging water, getting some meditative healing done. A little later Sue (crook hamstring) would salute the sun and treat the troops to a flexible yoga display.

On day 4 David (dodgy knee) turned 60, and as he and Tina (dodgy other knee) were the only ones to share a tent we cannot be sure what his present was. That night he got a card, cake and candles. Next day it was Sue's birthday, another card signed by us all, cake, candles and fuss. We were to have a busy day. At "The Churn" a portage was required. Half the luggage was carted along a goat track in the gorge. This emptied one raft which was then lashed on top of the other, and the pair carefully roped down a number of un-shootable rapids. Two hours of hard work. There were to be many similar portages over the next days.

The first challenge on day 5 was "The Faucet". In a dramatic plunge the back half of the raft folded up, throwing Joy into Michael's (crook shoulder), and guide Jeff a metre forward into the luggage pile. The raft was full of water and Margaret was violently thrown out. The raft was about to crush her against a rock wall when Lucy plucked her out of the cold water. You might find this hard to believe but the water drained out of the raft through holes in the floor.

This is what we wear on the water. Neoprene socks inside Volleys. Swimmers and a rash shirt under a long, thick wetsuit. Shorts and a parka over this and an extra-buoyant life jacket. Finally, sailing gloves and a peaked cap and sunglasses under a plastic crash helmet. All this was put on wet and cold in the morning. The water was 8 C. Each morning it took 2 hours for each of us to pack our personal gear into a 60 L waterproof bag, then pack the raft with all the other gear. In each raft 6 bags were lashed to a metal frame which was then inverted and another 6 bags, drums and eskies tied on top. In doing this we learned how heavy food for 12 people for 9 days is. The poo bag got heavier each day.

We might be experienced outdoor types, but here in this world of gorges, canyons and stoppers we were babes in the wood. Our river guides, Robin and Jeff, had the job of keeping us safe. On board the raft their conversation went like this ... right forward left back, relax, paddle hard, paddle easy, hard forward, get down. On shore they were ever loading, lifting, cooking and working for us. In the rapids our life was in their hands. They picked the course through each rapid. From them we learned words like "Pura Vida" (pure life), "Steazy" (style with ease) and "lilly dipping" (feeble paddle strokes). Total paddling was 115 km.

We drank the river water untreated, camped on coarse gritty beaches, and in small forest clearings. At one campsite we were visited by a much-photographed quoll. One raft spotted a platypus. We made it to the even colder Gordon River, and at St John's Falls were picked up by Rick in his 500 hp 'M V Sophia" for a 80 km boat trip to Strahan. Then bussed 300 km across the island of Tasmania to Hobart to rejoin society. ♦

Book Reviews . . .

Back Country

trek through the Deua and Wadbilliga

John Blay

ISBN 9780995418608, 270 p, paperback
Canopy Press, southeastforests.com.au,
$30 inc pp

This is a strange book. John is not selling anything; he is just telling part of his story - a long distance trek through that country back in the 80s. Before he started he was talking to some people who offered him an unbroken 3 year old mule Zac to carry his gear. Apparently the mule's father had beaten an expensive stallion to the punch with an expensive brood mare ... All he (John) had to do was break him in to the packsaddle. Yeah, right. In the end, the horse trainer seemed to be glad to get rid of the pair.

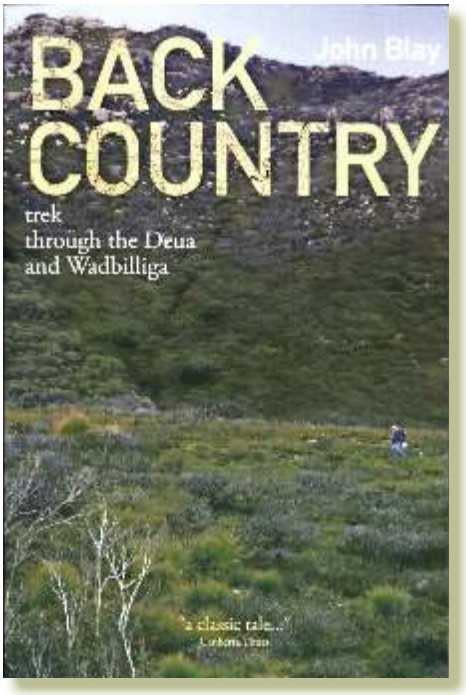
So John then describes how he and Zac set off - in poor weather, and how they had to get used to each other. It seems there was a certain amount of running away, hauling on a lead rope, wondering where Zac had go to, and a bit of yelling and screaming. But they survived, and travelled.

John explored some of the caves in the limestone area, and ran into some of the 4WD owners. His comments on the differences between what the 4-wheelies say about being careful of the countryside and how they absolutely trash the joint are not restrained. They are rather similar to his comments about some of the departed loggers with their bulldozers.

In his travels he saw what he thought was a Bettong - supposedly extinct in this area. Staff at the Australian Museum refused to reconsider the matter unless John brought them a freshly collected pelt. Somehow, that did not seem right. Staff at the Australian National Wildlife Collection were more helpful in identification, and were eventually willing to consider changing 'extinct' to 'possibly extant in Deua'. It's very remote country.

Near Tuross Falls John found the remains of many bulldozed tracks in what is now a National Park. He claims that they were were apparently put in by some local Forestry staff when they found that the area was to be taken away from them for preservation.

John describes the many flowers, trees and birds he meets. A new wattle he found, growing to over thirty metres, was named Acacia blayana in his honour. He also mentions how his several pairs of 'leather workboots' gave his feet hell. At the end of the book he describes seeing Zachary B. de



Mule some 20 years later - still just as stubborn.

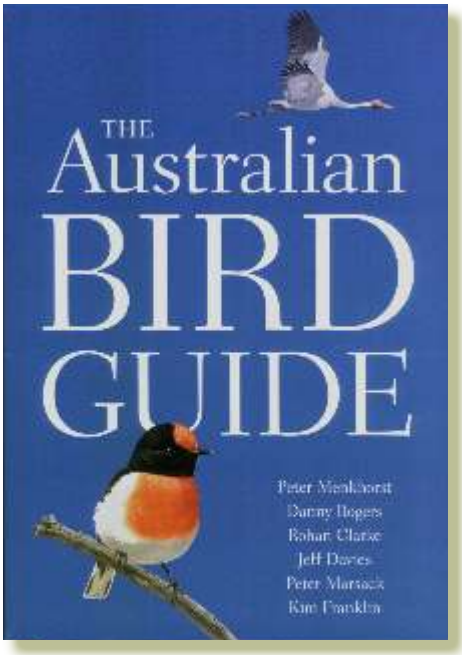
It's a curious book, about some really wild country.

Roger Caffin

The Australian Bird Guide

Peter Menkhurst, Danny Roger, Rohan Clarke, Jeff davies, Peter Marsack, Kim Franklin.
ISBN 9780643097544 Hard cover, 566 p, colour. CSIRO Publishing, 450

One does wonder when one sees a list of authors that long, except that this book comes from CSIRO. One does get such large groups of academics working on something like this. I cannot imagine a private company producing a book like this for less than double the price.



The book starts with some birding theory: how to identify birds, the evolution and classification of birds, and so on. The technical details on how to identify a bird, and what all the important little bits are called, are actually useful and clear.

However, the bit which moves this book to the front of my bookshelf are the illustrations. With most bird books you get a photo or a drawing - some of which don't seem to match what I see in the field. That happens: a juvenile male in the spring is not going to look like a mature female in the late autumn after all. But in this case you get a large number of accurate drawings of both sexes, on the ground and in the air. You also get a locality map for each species.

Take the common Brush Turkey we get wandering around our house: there are two full drawings, 3 different head details, a juvenile and a drawing of a turkey mound. Then there's the Australian Wood Duck: we usually have a flock them on our dam or grazing around the house. One drawing of a juvenile, drawings of male and female adults and an extra drawing of a non-breeding male ('faded' colouring), and drawings of both males and females in flight. Or maybe the Tawny Frogmouth, a pair of which nest near our house each year. Seven separate drawings indicating variants, plus one of a frogmouth nesting with a baby. A large goanna got the first cluth of eggs last year, but the parents got stuck back in so I wrapped chicken wire around the tree trunk, and that foiled the goanna for second hatching.

A weak point is the fairly small index at the back. This happens sometimes: the authors are too close to the subject to realise that others lack their huge in-depth knowledge. Nothing is perfect. But the illustrations ...

Roger Caffin

BUSHWALKING NSW

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Fourways from McAlister Saddle,
Kosciuszko National Park.
Photo: Roger Caffin