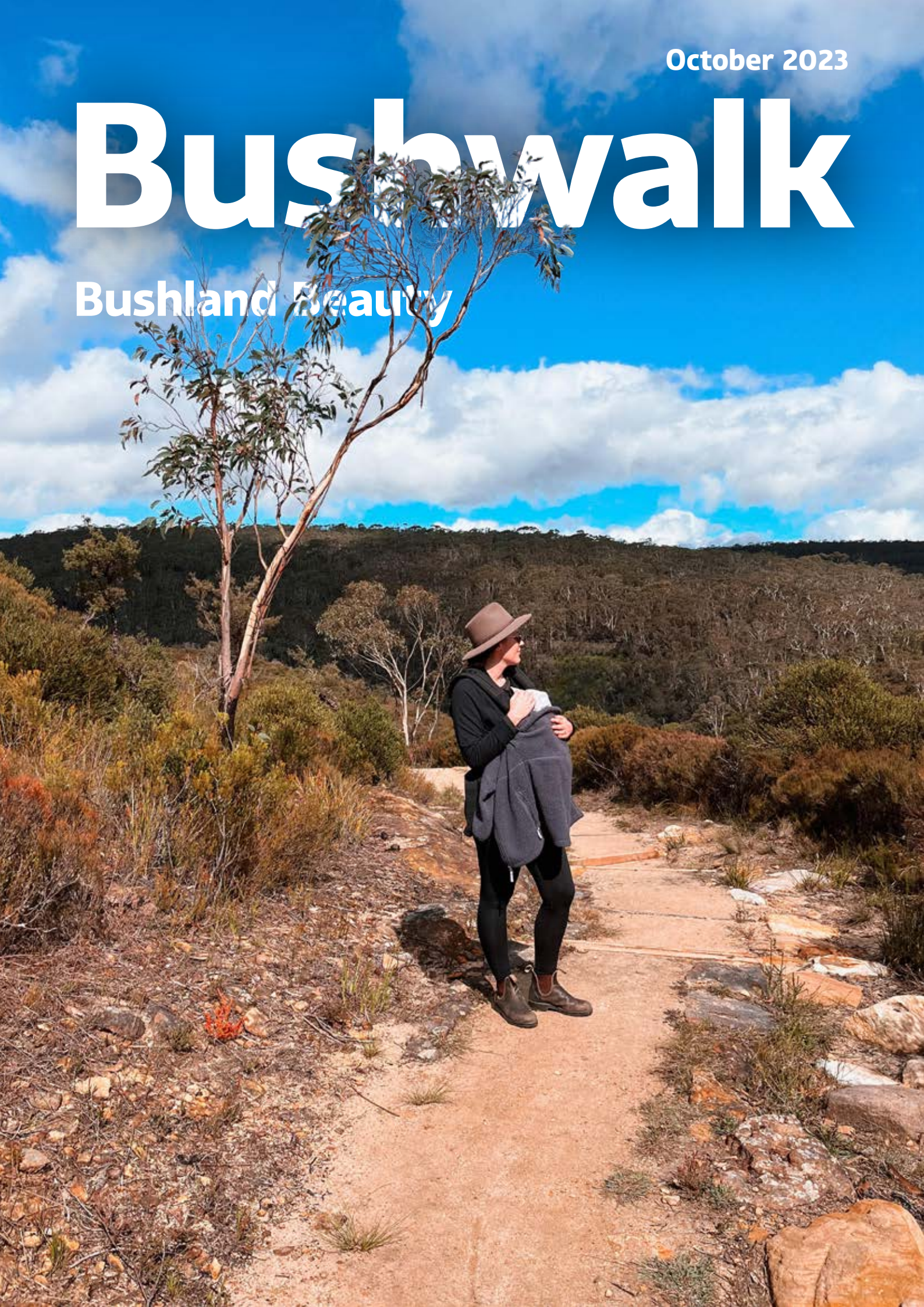


October 2023

Bushwalk

Bushland Beauty



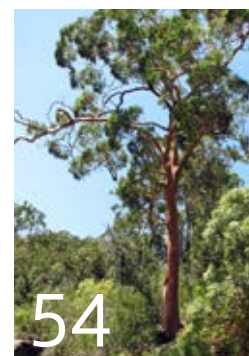
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**Always Was
Always Will Be
Aboriginal Land**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of this vast land on which we live and explore. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this great south land.



Editor's Letter



Hi

I hope this edition finds you well.

In this edition, Monique gives tips to make bushwalking with a small baby easier. Phillip undertakes a very challenging Kanangra Walls walk in the Kanangra-Boyd NP. Sonya walks the Larapinta Trail in the Northern Territory and discovers some of its sacred places. Ian goes further afield in Iceland finding spectacular waterfalls while Tracie shows us what is involved in looking after the bush and how we can help. Read about the late Phil Ingamells from the Victorian National Parks Association. Although he is not a household name, outside conservation circles, we owe him a huge debt for their work. I hope his legacy inspires you.

Please share this edition with your bushwalking buddies. If you have an adventure to share with bushwalkers, please reach out - we would love to help.

With the El Niño very settled in, summer conditions are likely to arrive sooner across much of Australia. We are likely looking at a warmer/drier time than normal. Stay well hydrated, and keep an eye on those forecasts.

Stay safe and happy walking

Matt :)

Matt McClelland (aka Wildwalks)
matt@bushwalk.com

Cover image
Monique and Owen on the Walls Cave walk
Nick Vincent

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Please send any articles, suggestions or advertising enquires to Eva. We would love you to be part of the magazine. Read our [Writer's Guide](#) to get started, and we are here to help.

Declaration

The opinions stated in articles are those of the authors and not of those involved in the production of this edition. If you are worried about transparency or any editorial aspect please either write to me or raise the issue on Bushwalk.com. The bushwalking community is a small world and paths often cross. To improve transparency I thought it would be helpful to list my main associations within the outdoor community.

I operate Bushwalk.com, Wildwalks.com and Overlandtrack.com, a number of other smaller websites (and related apps) and have written several walking guide books, published by Woodslane. I contract to National Parks Association NSW and I am a member of the Walking Volunteers. I have had contracts with state and local government departments regarding bushwalking and related matters. I have also partnered with a large number of other organisations in environmental campaigns. Any commercial advertising or sponsorship will be clear in the magazine.

Warning

Like all outdoor pursuits, the activities described in this publication may be dangerous. Undertaking them may result in loss, serious injury or death. The information in this publication is without any warranty on accuracy or completeness. There may be significant omissions and errors. People who are interested in walking in the areas concerned should make their own enquiries, and not rely fully on the information in this publication.

The publisher, editor, authors or any other entity or person will not be held responsible for any loss, injury, claim or liability of any kind resulting from people using information in this publication.

Please consider joining a walking club or undertaking formal training in other ways to ensure you are well prepared for any activities you are planning. Please report any errors or omissions to the editor or in the forum at Bushwalk magazine.

Hiking With a Newborn

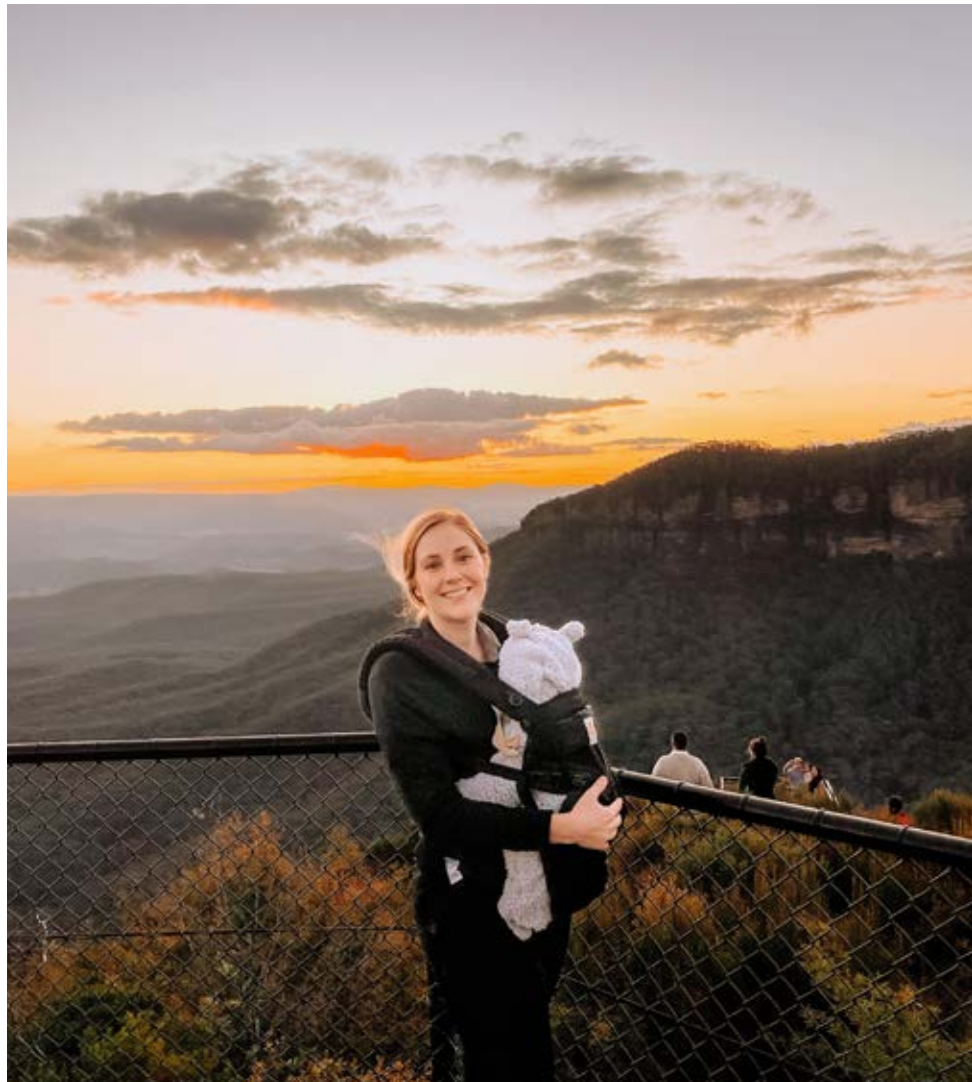
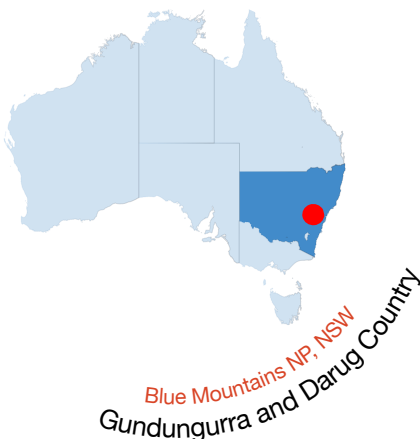
Text

Monique Vincent

Photos

Monique and Nick Vincent

My husband Nick and I work full time but are expert life “filler uppers”. We have spent the last 11 years together filling life to the brim with travel, nature and adventure in every little bit of spare time we get. We have been capturing these adventures on [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#) for some time now as “Vinceventuring”.



Monique and Owen at Cahills Lookout



Owen and Nick at Sublime Point

In February 2023 we welcomed our baby boy Owen into our family. As Owen's due date got closer, so many people said to us “that’s the end of all the adventures then” and “you won’t be able to do that sort of thing with a baby.” I know right, how dare we keep doing the things we love and involve our baby!

I would be lying if I said I wasn’t starting to question if we would still be able to get out and do the things we used to, so, we decided to book a trip to the Blue Mountains for when Owen was eight weeks old to go hiking. Yep, two first time parents with no clue what parenting was going to be like thought it was a great idea to book a holiday with a newborn. (Spoiler alert: it was a fantastic idea.)

“

I would be lying if I said I wasn’t starting to question if we would still be able to get out and do the things we used to ...

We decided on the Blue Mountains because it is one of our favourite places in Australia, we have spent a lot of time there over the years and it’s a great spot for a weekend trip. The Blue Mountains isn’t too far from our home in Lake Macquarie, it offers some incredible hikes and outdoor experiences, not to mention the cool, cozy and quirky feel of the place.

There were a few things that I was a little anxious about before going on this trip, as follows:

- Will Owen be warm enough?
- Will we need to feed/change him on the hike?
- What if he gets upset in the carrier half way through a hike?
- Will I be physically fit enough to hike so soon after giving birth?
- Won’t it be awkward/dangerous not being able to see my feet with the carrier on?
- Will he be able to nap on a hike?
- What extra things will we need in our hiking backpacks?



Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)



Main track, side trip, alternative route



Cliff, major and minor contour line (100m interval)



Lake, river, waterfall or creek

Wynnes Rocks Lookout

📍 90 m return ⌚ 1-2 mins



Fairfax Heritage Walk

📍 2.3 km circuit ⌚ 1 h



Walls Cave Track

📍 1.9 km return ⌚ 0.75-1 h



Point Pilcher Lookout

📍 300 m return ⌚ 5-8 mins



Cahills Lookout

📍 300 m return ⌚ 10 mins



Overcliff Track

📍 3.1 km return ⌚ 2 h



Rocket Point Lookout

📍 2.4 km return ⌚ 1 h



Sublime Point Lookout

📍 450 m return ⌚ 20 mins



Blue Mountain walks



0 km 1 2 3 4 5 km



Warmth

Our trip was in late April and the Blue Mountains are well and truly starting to cool down this time of year. With our baby being still so small and new, I worried he wouldn't be warm enough on our hikes. One thing I hadn't considered was how my body heat would affect his warmth in the carrier. I actually found myself having to take layers off him rather than put them on. I also found that draping my fleece over the front of the carrier was handy because it was easier to remove this fleece if he got too warm than to take off the carrier completely and have to take layers of clothing off Owen. It doesn't hurt to throw a jumper, beanie and booties in the hiking pack for peace of mind too.

Feeding and changing

There are no parents' rooms on a hiking trail so feeding and changing seemed like two tricky things to need to do mid hike. I was fortunate enough to be able to breastfeed and I can definitely recommend practising feeds standing up at home before you go. Knowing I was able to feed well while standing gave me a lot of confidence that this wouldn't be an issue on the trail. Changing is slightly trickier. We packed a waterproof travel change mat that we didn't mind getting a little dirty on the ground as well as a travel pack of wipes, a few nappies, hand sanitiser, bags and a spare onesie (in case of a blowout). This set up was light to take with us and worked really well. I will say, where possible, try to feed and change before you head out, this might buy you a few fuss-free hours.

“

I found myself worrying “what will I do if he gets really upset ...

Crying

I found myself worrying “what will I do if he gets really upset during a hike?” which in hindsight feels kind of silly. You just do what you would at home! Is he hungry, tired, does he need a change, is he comfortable, is he warm enough? All of those things were easy enough to troubleshoot while out on a walk. Owen is a big fan of the carrier and we did

a lot of practice walks at home, most of the time he falls straight to sleep and doesn't stir too much. If he was getting restless, a dummy bought us about half an hour more time until we needed to take him out of the carrier.

Postpartum fitness

I was lucky to have a pregnancy without morning sickness but that also meant food tasted better than ever, by the time I had given birth I had gained 24 kilograms! I was starting to feel so unfit and out of breath towards the end of pregnancy, I wondered how long it would take me to be back to having a reasonable level of fitness again. I also had to have an emergency caesarian which made recovery a lot slower than I was expecting. Despite all this, I started to go on short walks the week after giving birth and I was able to go on a short hike with the carrier at six weeks postpartum after getting the all clear at my six week GP check up. I really surprised myself with how well it went. My main advice here is to listen to your body and start small - you'll probably surprise yourself too!

Walking with a carrier

It was daunting to think about walking with a brand new baby strapped to me and not being able to see my feet on an uneven trail ... but, I hadn't seen my feet for months so I was already one step ahead. I actually felt really safe and confident walking with him in the carrier. Owen seemed much more comfortable with me carrying him as opposed to Nick for what we assume were two reasons: I smell like milk and the milky area acts as a soft pillow. Truth be told though, I love having my baby close by so I didn't mind the extra weight of carrying him at all.

Naps

I will preface this by saying that our baby is not the best sleeper, but, since Owen was born we have been trying to get him to nap anywhere and that has worked well for us. We don't stick to strict routines with napping and he doesn't seem to mind falling asleep anywhere and everywhere. He actually seems to prefer naps in the carrier, pram and car rather than naps at home. Most of the time when we are out hiking, he is napping peacefully in the carrier which is a real bonus for us because when we are done walking we have a happy well rested little guy.

What we packed for bub

- Waterproof change mat
- Small pack of wipes
- 3-4 nappies
- Hand sanitiser
- Nappy bags
- Baby SPF and insect repellent (be sure to patch test beforehand)
- Hat, beanie, booties, spare set of clothes and a jumper
- Muslin wrap

Hikes and lookouts we visited

Rocket Point Lookout via Chester Trail

One of the most iconic views in the Blue Mountains is Wentworth Falls. This grand waterfall is a must-see if you are visiting the area. From Rocket Point Lookout you are treated to not only the full length of the main drop of the falls but also incredible views of the Jamison Valley. Wentworth Falls can be quite busy at times so we decided to take an alternative route to the Historic Rocket Point Lookout via Chester Trail instead. This was a fantastic decision, we did not pass a single other hiker the entire way! To do this walk you park at the end of Chester Road, there you

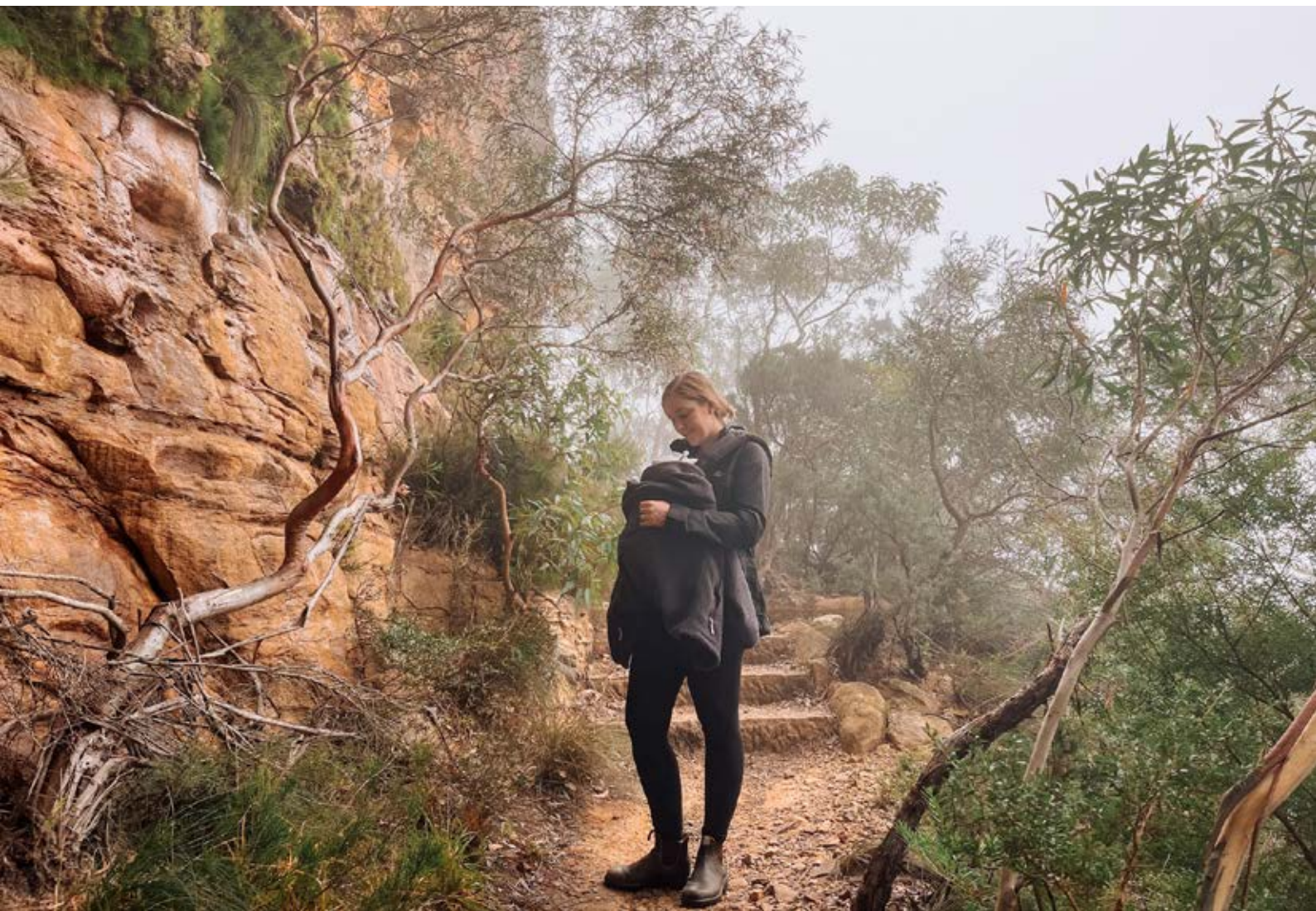
will see a fire trail which you follow till you reach the sign to Rocket Point Lookout and from there, it is well signposted to the lookout. If you are feeling energetic, there is also the option to extend your hike to one of the many incredible trails in the area. Overall this is short - around 3.5 kilometres return - and easy fire trail walk with a few stairs to the lookout. This is a great one to get your confidence up walking with a carrier.

Sublime Point Lookout

You can't visit the Blue Mountains without seeing the famous Three Sisters, but, did you know there is a lookout away from the main viewing platform that offers a unique view of the sisters minus the crowds? Sublime Point lookout is, well, sublime! We have never had trouble nabbing a park nearby and a short (mostly) paved walk will lead you to a beautiful view of the Three Sisters to your right. We have had a lot of luck here seeing lyrebirds and black cockatoos. If you have some time up your sleeve, grab a pie from Bakehouse on Wentworth and soak in the views over the valley.



Rocket Point



Overcliff Track

Fairfax Heritage Walk (pram accessible)

Truth be told, to our knowledge the Blue Mountains doesn't offer a lot of truly accessible walks so this one is probably unique in that you are able to make it to the lookout with your pram on a paved path the entire way. This walk leaves from the Blue Mountains Heritage Centre in Blackheath and leads you to George Phillip Lookout and the recently restored Govetts Leap Lookout. This walk is a very easy approximately 3.5 kilometre round trip. Keep your eye out for Waratahs here in spring.

Cahills Lookout

If you are after the best sunset in the Blue Mountains, look no further than Cahills Lookout. It's a good idea to get here a little early as there is not much parking in this area but don't let that put you off. This gorgeous

lookout has multiple vantage points to enjoy the views of the Megalong Valley and it offers a great view of the Boars Head rock formation. This lookout is paved but because of stairs isn't pram accessible. Because we wanted to stay here for a while and watch the sunset we found that bringing the carrier was a good idea.

Overcliff Track

This extremely scenic walk leaves from Conservation Hut in Wentworth Falls and really allows you to "choose your own adventure" in that there are multiple options to extend or shorten your walk. This is very handy when you are hiking with an unpredictable baby, we had set out to do a very short walk when we visited but Owen was having a great nap so we continued on longer than what we had planned. There are

several vantage points across the Jamison Valley and this area is typically booming with bird life in the early mornings. This walk is slightly trickier terrain than the Rocket Point and Fairfax Walks but is by no means a difficult walk.

Point Pilcher Lookout

The phrase “hidden gem” gets thrown around a lot but trust me when I say that this is really one! If you aren’t afraid of a bit of a bumpy dirt road, make sure you head to Point Pilcher for a picnic at the newly restored picnic area. This lookout offers uninterrupted views of the Grose Valley and peace and quiet too. No need for a carrier or a pram or a picnic rug, this lookout has everything you need.

The Walls Cave

The Walls Cave is one of my absolute favourite walks in the Blue Mountains. Leaving from Blackheath, it is a short but

steep 2 kilometre or so return walk on a well maintained trail that takes you through a beautiful canyon into one of the most spectacularly huge caves I have ever seen. Because this track is all down on the way there and all up on the way back, although the hike is short, it’s a solid workout when you are carrying a baby.

Wynnes Rocks Lookout

We weren’t ready to leave the mountains but needed to start heading home so we stopped into Mount Wilson which is quite stunning in autumn because of the many deciduous trees planted in the elaborate gardens in the area. Wynnes Rocks Lookout has views over the entire Blue Mountains which was a perfect spot to say our last goodbyes before making our way home from our trip. It’s a very short walk to the lookout so you might even want to leave the carrier in the car.



The Walls Cave Walk

Top tips

- Practice with the carrier at home and on small walks first.
- Try feeds standing up so it's easy on the trail.
- Baby will be warmer than you think with your body heat so don't overdress them.
- Get a small changing set up together so it's light in your bag.
- Make sure your change mat is waterproof as the ground might be damp or dirty where you need to change.
- Start small and build up your fitness and confidence with hikes.
- Listen to your body, don't overdo it.
- Try to get your baby used to napping anywhere and everywhere.

While we are no means expert parents, or expert hikers, I hope that through our experience and tips we leave you feeling more confident and excited about including your little one on your adventures.

If you want you can watch [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of our Blue Mountains trip.

“

... I hope that through our experience and tips we leave you feeling more confident and excited ...



The Walls Cave Walk



If you have any questions, please do reach out to us at vinceventuring@gmail.com or through our [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#) sites. If you are interested in following along with our family adventures hiking, camping and travelling, please be sure to follow and subscribe.

Kanangra Walk

The planned route was Kanangra Walls, Gingra Range, Kowmung, Ti Willa Plateau, Cloudmaker, Gangerang Range, Kanangra.

Text

Phillip Hellman

Photos

Chris and Phillip Hellman



Chris, looking to Crafts Wall and Ti Willa Walls from Brennan Top
Phillip Hellman



Chris in the dingoes' lair, near Compagnonis Pass
Phillip Hellman



Drying clothes in the dingoes' lair
Phillip Hellman

The walk was on 22-24 September 2022 and was at the request of my son Chris who after travelling from Melbourne was set to complete it, rain, hail or shine.

The last time I visited Cloudmaker was 55 years ago as a 15-year-old with three school mates. In May 1967 we climbed up from Thunder Bend to Stormbreaker and then down Ti Willa via Cloudmaker with an epic 42 kilometres last day from the Gingra Creek junction with the Kowmung to Katoomba and then catching the 3 am Mudgee Mail to Central.

Day 1: Kanangra to a saddle, 10.5 km, 8 hours

Unfortunately, the forecast for rain for several days was quite accurate. We set off at 9 am in the rain from Kanangra on Thursday 22 September. The aim was to reach the Kowmung that evening.

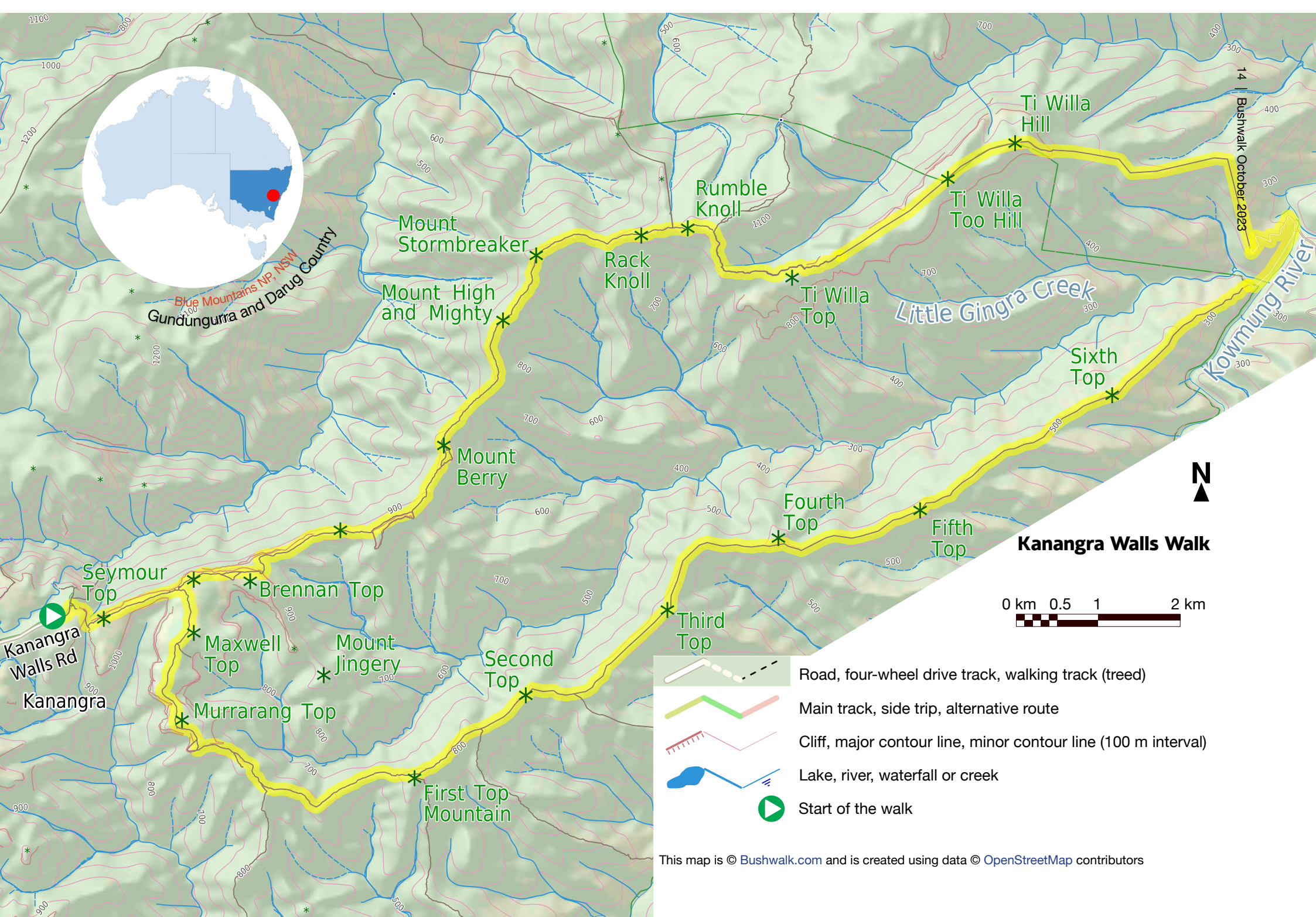
Memories of the Gingra Range from 20 years ago suggested that it would be an easy walk, not so. Just below the coal seam, south of Murrawang Head, we encountered dreadful secondary bushfire re-growth that obscured just about everything, even the sky on occasions. Due to the poor visibility our

map and compass were of limited use. Chris's Garmin inReach was a lifesaver with the route appearing along with contours.

“

The ridge route was mostly impossible to follow and frequently impassable by fallen trees and branches covered by an anastomosing network of vines ...

The ridge route was mostly impossible to follow and frequently impassable by fallen trees and branches covered by an anastomosing network of vines, weedy shrubs and small saplings. The feral pigs had created pseudo-tracks that seemed to criss-cross everywhere. Even though we had limited water, we decided to make camp on the saddle between Fourth Top Ridge and Fifth Top Ridge about 5 pm. As it continued to rain, we debated whether we were likely to make it back on time given the slow pace and the dreadful conditions. It was possible to be only a few metres away from the old route and to be completely bushed.



Day 2: A saddle to Kanangra, 11.5 km, 10 hours

We left at 7 am, dreading the descent to the Kowmung which did not disappoint. It took two to three hours fighting our way through seemingly impenetrable jungle. Based on our expertise gained on the day before, we developed several techniques. The “Breastroke” was good for dense saplings that were mainly vertical and were relatively vine-free. A bow wave could be created by holding two hands in a V and charging ahead. Being shorter than Chris, the “Wombat” was better for me. This technique requires basically crawling on hands and knees. The “Stomper” was best for Chris who could raise his legs and squash the undergrowth. When all else failed, the “Swan-dive”, although a bit risky, could flatten the opposition for at least a couple of steps. Regardless of approach, the vines resulted in being either coat-hangered around the neck, lassoed around the legs and torso or having one’s pack captured.

Gingra Creek saw us desperately taking on water ready for the ascent up Stockyard Spur. We took advantage of the track to the top shed associated with the gauging station; this saved us about 500 metres of fighting the undergrowth which, however, soon appeared with a vengeance. The intensity of vines had increased from day one as did the rain. The climb to Compagnonis Pass must

be the worst experience we have endured either bushwalking or bike-packing, and that includes carrying fully laden bikes up the Dzhuku Pass in Kyrgyzstan!

Crazy thoughts went through our heads by the time we had only achieved two to three kilometres in about five hours – turn back, no, the thought was unbearable or walk out via Scotts and cadge a lift from Yerranderie? By 4 pm we still had not reached Compagnonis Pass, the torture continued and we couldn’t even see the cliffs. At 4.15 pm and getting darker and still raining I caught a glimpse of a cliff base. This spurred us on. By this stage we had given up all hope of making it to the 100 Man Cave. I had a vague memory from 1967 that there is an overhang somewhere.

We emerged, completely soaked, through a tunnel in the undergrowth at 4.45 pm and, after a quick reconnaissance, we settled in what is probably a smelly dingo’s lair under a nice conglomerate overhang under Ti-Willa Walls complete with a steady drip of water that filled up our water containers. Given the state of the bush we had no confidence that the next day we would be able to climb from our campsite to Cloudmaker and reach Kanangra. Sleep was interrupted by sliding off my air-bed due to the sloping nature of the cave floor as well as feeling a writhing grape-sized squishy leech well down my sleeping bag.



The view east from the dingoes’ lair.
Note the regrowth after the 2019 fires.
Phillip Hellman



The view east from the dingoes’ lair,
near Compagnonis Pass
Chris Hellman

Day 3: Kanangra to an overhang at Ti-Willa Walls, 15 km, 10 hours

We left at 7.30 am in light rain, found the pitons and climbed the Compagnonis Pass. To our great relief the vegetation along the Ti Willa Plateau was manageable and we vowed to do our best and reach Kanangra by night-fall using torches if necessary. Ti Willa Hill, Ti Willa Too and Ti Willa Top were reached without any issues apart from a few hundred metre patches of dense saplings here and there which, given our newly acquired expertise, were brushed off as mere distractions. The plateau west and south-west of Ti Willa Top required some concentration to avoid heading too far south given the lack of visibility.

Cloudmaker was welcome though my knees protested along the Gangerang Range. There were only a few patches of regrowth encountered though, due to the increased bushwalker traffic, these had been mostly flattened. With great relief we arrived back at the car at 5.10 pm.

“

Cloudmaker was welcome though my knees protested along the Gangerang Range.



Phillip, looking to Crafts Wall and Gingra Creek
Chris Hellman

Afterthoughts

Curiously, I saw only one small cairn during the walk. I remember many more from 1967. These would have been invaluable in the extreme conditions and, possibly, life-savers in areas such as at the top of Compagnonis Pass or the base of the Gordon Smith Pass to assist with navigation in inclement conditions. Given the effect of rampaging pigs and their wallows, heavily eroded bushwalkers' tracks on Kanangra Plateau and the widespread devastation

of the area by the bushfires of 2019 it is hard to understand objections to these inconspicuous helpmates.

It would be hard to recommend this walk given the present state of the bush though the constant rain has probably coloured our assessment. If objectives are not met due to slow progress I can envisage difficulties in hot weather when water could be a real issue. I wondered if a sign should be placed at Kanangra that warns about the regrowth.



Cloudmaker and the Gangerang Range from Kanangra Plateau, about 4 pm on the last day
Chris Hellman



Kanangra Walls at about 4.45 pm on the last day
Chris Hellman

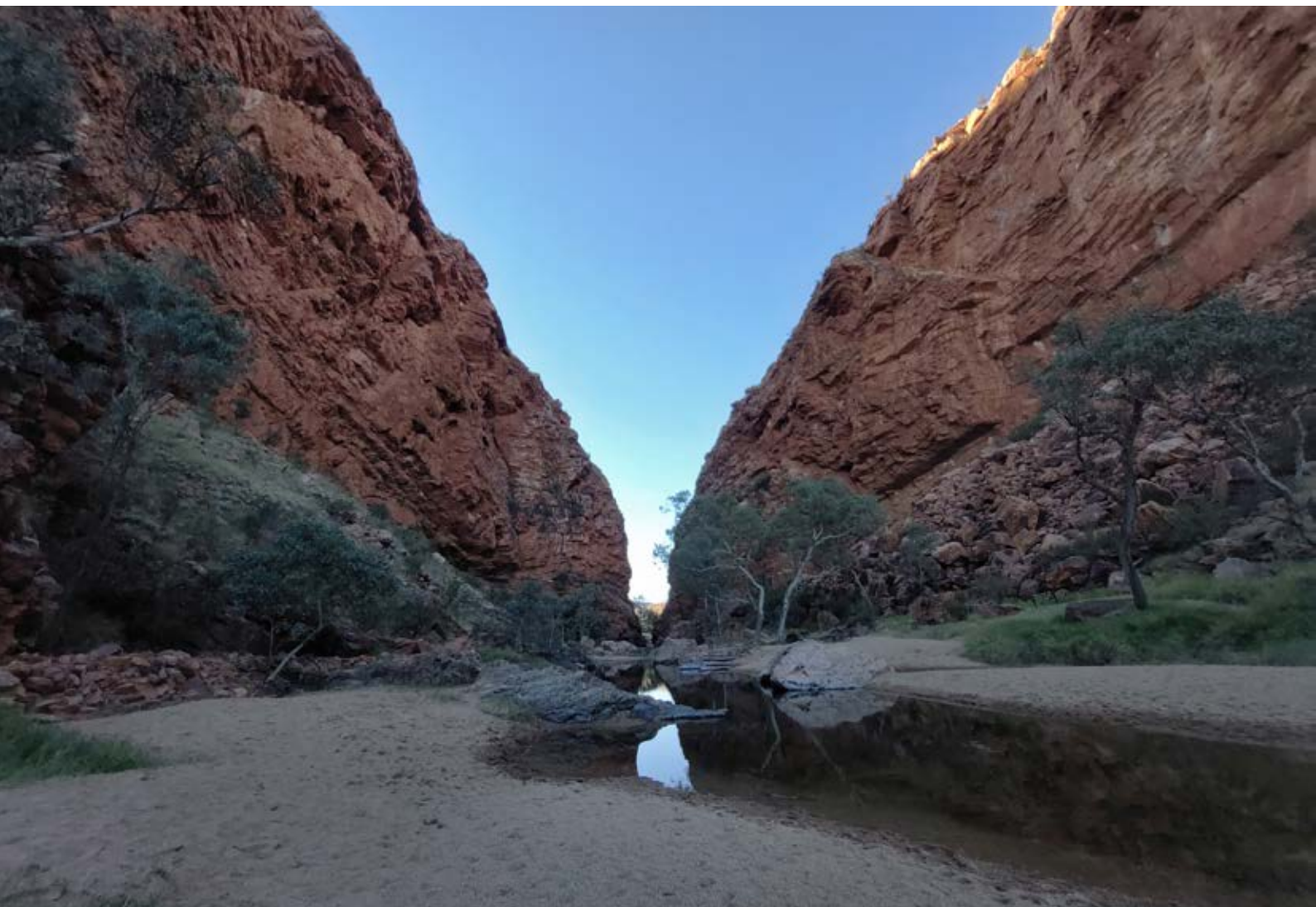


Phillip's introduction to bushwalking began as a 13 year old at Sydney Grammar School where maths teacher Adrian Cooper led the school's Endeavour Club and inspired generations of boys to bushwalk, kayak, rock-climb, cycle and ski-tour.

Larapinta Trail

Text and photos
Sonya Muhlsimmer

I would like to start by paying respect to the traditional owners and custodians of the Central and Western Arrernte Country.





Day 2 - Arenge View with Elsje. Lunch spot

Larapinta is named after the traditional custodian's name for the Finke River. This river is thought to be the world's oldest river, following the same course for over 350 million years, in the land of the Arrernte People. The Arrernte have generously allowed walkers to pass through some sacred sites, and the walk also follows some Dreamtime song lines. Arrernte mythology focuses on the landscape. Altijira is the creator being of the Inapertwa, the ancestral creatures that formed into humans and all living creatures.

“

This river is thought to be the world's oldest river, following the same course for over 350 million years, in the land of the Arrernte People.

In July 2023 my friend Elsje and I spent 16 days walking in the MacDonnell Ranges, Northern Territory, completing the Larapinta Trail, 231 kilometres, plus 27 kilometres

of side trips. The walk starts at Telegraph Station, just a few kilometres outside Alice Springs and ends at Redbank Gorge where you climb the fourth highest mountain in the NT, Mount Sonder, 1380 metres high. The trail passes through some amazing countryside, crossing over open desert plains, rocky creek beds, high rocky ridges and through some pretty spectacular gorges.

“

The outback is a magical place that will get under your skin.

There are twelve sections of the Larapinta Trail and at each trail head there is a shelter, some of which have a solar charger but not to be relied upon, water tanks, pit toilets and campsites maintained by the NT Parks. There are costs involved in walking the trail end to end such as walking, camping and park fees in which all revenue raised will help manage the park's camp sites.











Also there are the food drops, pick up or drop off that you have to organise. You can complete the walk self-supported which we did, or you can go with a guided tour. Also, you don't have to do the whole walk, doing as much or as little as you like, but I recommend doing the whole walk to experience the true variety of what the desert, and the walk has to offer. There are many other areas to camp along the way, and you don't need to make the trail head each day. It is not a technical walk, there is a well-marked trail but it is rocky in many areas and there are some large hills to walk up too, it is just the kilometres, oh and

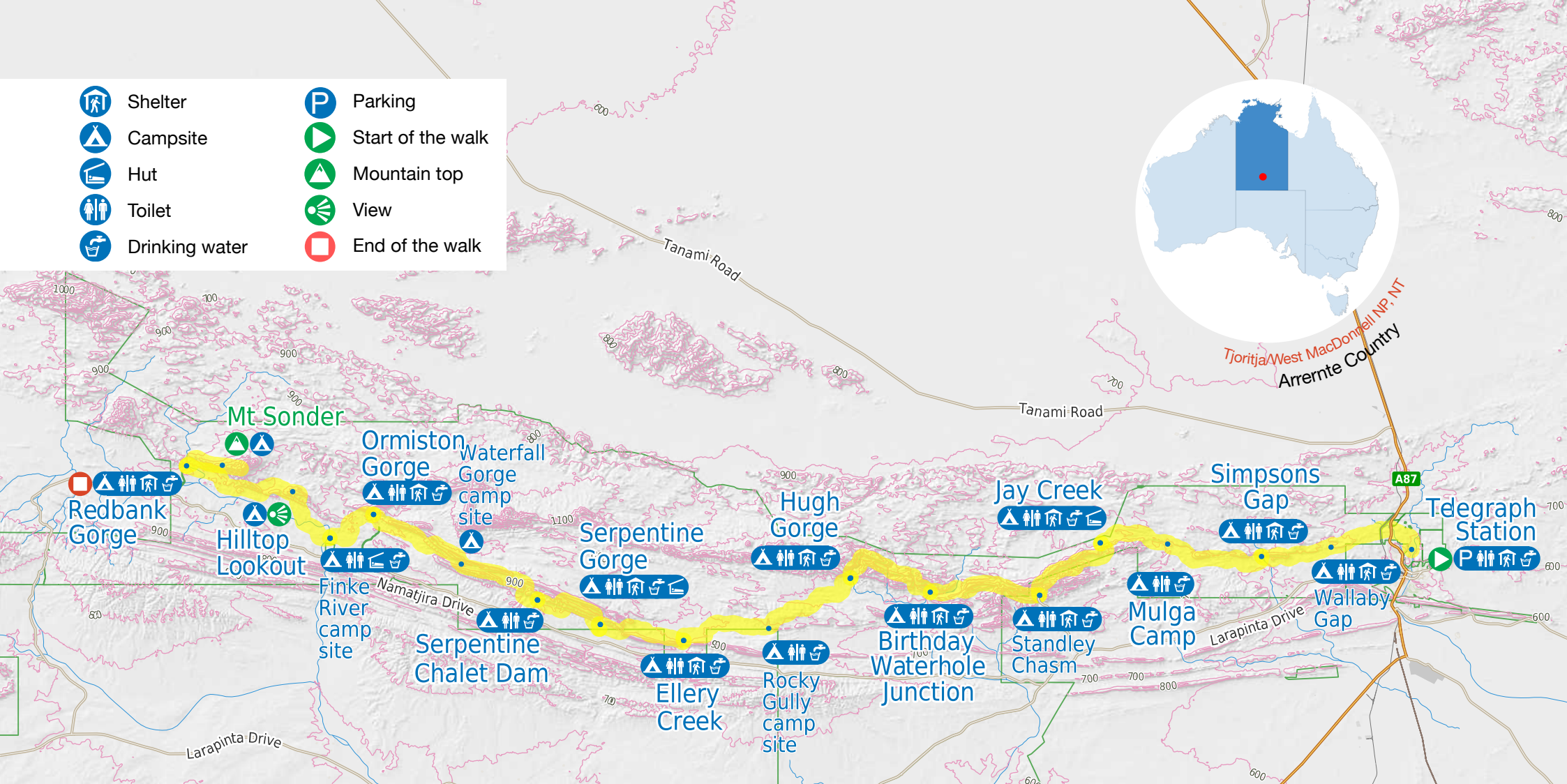
the rocks that make it difficult. It is well worth it and I suggest to take your time and factor in some rest days. The outback is a magical place that will get under your skin. This is the third time I have been in the outback and I dare say, it won't be my last.



It is not a technical walk, there is a well-marked trail ...

Day	Section	Details	Distance km	Time	Elevation (max and min)	Grade
1	1	Alice Springs to Simpsons Gap	23.8	9 h	777 577	Medium
2	2	Simpson Gap to Jay Creek	25.1	9 h 40 m	812 606	Medium
3	3	Jay Creek to Standley Chasm	13.6	8 h 10 m	958 716	Very hard
4		Rest day				
5	4	Standley Creek to Birthday Junction	17.9	9 h 20 m	1195 693	Very hard
6	5	Birthday Junction to Hugh Gorge	16	9 h 35 m	789 733	Very hard
7	6	Hugh Gorge to Ellery Creek North	31.2	9 h 50 m	871 666	Medium
8	7	Ellery Creek North to Serpentine Campsite	13.8	4 h 5 m	762 658	Medium
9		Rest day				
10	8	Serpentine Campsite to Serpentine Chalet Dam	13.4	6 h 56 m	1142 726	Hard
11	9	Serpentine Chalet Dam to Ormiston Gorge	28.6	11 h 50 m	1073 650	Hard
12		Rest day, Ormiston Pound	9.4	3 h 25 m		
13	10	Ormiston Gorge to Finke River. We did 19.1 km and camped at Hilltop Lookout	9.1	7 h 20 m	996 629	Medium
14	11	Finke River to Redbank Gorge. Starting at Hilltop Lookout we did 15.8 km.	26	5 h 10 m	992 662	Medium
15	12	Mount Sonder day trip	15.8	7 h	1344 670	Hard
16		Pick up, to Alice Springs				

- | | | | |
|---|----------------|---|-------------------|
|  | Shelter |  | Parking |
|  | Campsite |  | Start of the walk |
|  | Hut |  | Mountain top |
|  | Toilet |  | View |
|  | Drinking water |  | End of the walk |



Larapinta Trail



0 km 10 20 30 km

Bushwalk.com notes and maps on [webpage](#), [GPX](#) and [PDF](#)

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Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)



Main track, side trip, alternative route



Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (100 metre interval)



Lake, river, waterfall or creek

Day 1: Alice Springs Telegraph Station to Simpsons Gap

After leaving the creature comforts of the motel, the taxi dropped us off at Telegraph Station around 7.30 am where the walk officially begins. Telegraph Station is one of the original sites of European settlement and was established in 1872. It is an interesting tourist destination if you have time. However, onwards we go and in no time we reach Euro Ridge. This ridge provides sweeping views back to Alice Springs and the highest points of this ridge represents the head and back of the Euro ancestor. This spirit created the water holes around Alice Springs while digging for water. Wallaby Gap was reached around lunch time and provides a perfect spot to stop with a shelter, appropriately named as I saw a wallaby. Coming down the hill to the camp spot a little willy wagtail bird was following me; he even came and sat on my pack for a free ride for a bit and tried to share my lunch with me at the shelter. After lunch it was onto Simpsons Gap, or Rrengetyirpe as

it is known. This is a sacred site and I can't quite name the feeling I had when I sat next to the waterhole, but it had the most peaceful feeling to it, a stunning and magical place. Back at the walker's campsite, two solo walkers Gina and Darryl were there. It was funny as during the trip we ran into these two quite a lot. Apparently late at night there was a lot of noise coming from the carpark, which was a few hundred metres from the walker's campsite, however I did not hear a thing.

“

This is a sacred site and I can't quite name the feeling ...

Day 2: Simpsons Gap to Jay Creek

Section two is mostly flat with a few points of interest such as Bond Gap, Arenge View and then Spring Gap. Also this section is the home of some brushtail possum colonies which is



Day 3 - Looking back at the Chewings Ranges



Day 4 - Standley Chasm

quite rare in this part of Central Australia. The waterholes had water after all the rain from a week prior and made a stunning sight. Bond Gap is a permanent waterhole but Spring Gap is not so it was good to see it with water in it. Lunch was called around Arengge View, which is not far before Mulga campground, oh what a view we had. Onwards we walked until Jay Creek.

Day 3: Jay Creek to Standley Chasm

Today was a lot harder than the first two days. It is the steepest, roughest and most rugged section of the trail through the Chewings Ranges. The guide book tells me Jay Creek to Millers Flat climbs up to 210 metres with a descent of 140 metres. Starting at Jay Creek, a sandy creek that leads to a permanent waterhole known as Fish Hole. In the Dreamtime a serpent found this passage, it is a sacred site. Past Fish Hole the track follows a rocky creek up the gorge, then climbs a spur, then descends then climbs

up into a saddle then descends into the next rocky creek. Then the track rises to a saddle then down into the next rocky creek until the track finally reaches Millers Flat. There was scrambling involved in some areas and it was unrelentingly rocky. From Millers Flat to Standley Chasm, this part of track rises with an ascent of 180 metres and a descent of 230 metres, here we go again.

“

It is the steepest, roughest and most rugged section of the trail through the Chewings Ranges.

After lunch at Millers Flat the track again meanders up and down over a saddle and down the rocky creek through to Fig Spring with more scrambling involved. Just when you thought you have had enough scrambling the

track seemed to disappear, I thought I had lost the track at some point but no it was more scrambling a few metres up the left side of a water hole, along another rocky creek bed and then a steep climb up a dry waterfall around 10 or so metres high, it was challenging.

Once out of the gorge the track opens up and climbs to a saddle. You guessed it, then back down into the gully and back up a spur. This is now a lookout point near Standley Chasm. The GPS tells me we are not far from Standley Chasm, about 1.5 kilometers, but that is the way the crow flies. The track goes steeply down, then steeply up then steeply down again. By this time, we were totally exhausted, and completely over it but we finally reach Standley Chasm and set up camp. The next day is a rest day, thankfully. There are showers, a washing machine, a café and our first food drop at this camp site so a little bit of luxury with a real coffee, oh and a cider and yummy snacks too. Guess who we saw here, Gina and Darryl.

Day 4: Rest day

A rest was definitely needed today so it was taking it easy in the morning, indulging in a shower, real coffee at the café, doing some clothes washing, cooking pancakes, eating snacks and walking to Standley Chasm, which is all flat ground and only a short walk away. Gina had a rest day with us but Darryl continued on to the next campsite along the way. Standley Chasm, or Angkerle Atwatye, the Gap of Water as it is known, is an important cultural site for women and the area is privately owned by the local community members.



... an important cultural site for women and the area is privately owned by the local community members.

The chasm itself is 80 metres tall and around three metres wide at the narrowest point. There was a pool full of water through the chasm so unless you swim, you couldn't get past. The walls in the chasm change colour depending on where the sun is and around

noon the walls light up to the most amazing red colour. It is spectacular to see, but a very busy place at that time. It was nice to visit the chasm again in the afternoon after all the tourists left.

Day 5: Standley Chasm to Birthday Junction

Section four is graded very hard due the ascent and descent. Brinkley Bluff is one of the highest summits on the trail at 1209 metres with many false summits, and coming down near Reveal Saddle it is very rocky and steep. The walk starts just out from the entrance to Standley Chasm walking down a rocky creek bed, then the track continues to rise to the numerous saddles and follows narrow spurs then passing a few knolls up to the summit.



To see the waterholes you have to walk about 900 metres away from the shelter, passing smaller waterholes along the way.

The views are amazing up here and Brinkley Bluff is a great spot for lunch, again the track is a very steep, zig zag descent. After a while, the track starts getting easy all the way to Birthday Junction, it was a real pleasant flat part of the trail. To see the waterholes you have to walk about 900 metres away from the shelter, passing smaller waterholes along the way. The first waterhole makes a fabulous camp spot for the night, you guessed it, Gina and Darryl were here too.

Day 6: Birthday Junction to Hugh Gorge

Section five gets talked a lot and Hugh Gorge is a real highlight of the trip, and I must say it was spectacular. There is also a swim through cold water. The length of the swim and the depth depends on how much rain the desert has had. I packed a dry sack for the pack just for this section. Not too long after leaving the junction the rock scrambling through Spencer Gorge begins. It is not a long gorge, just over a kilometre but the amount of boulders you have to navigate will slow you down. However, the different plant species growing and the



Day 6 - Camp at Birthday Junction Waterholes

rock formations it is worth a slower walk to take it all in. Once out of the gorge it is a climb to Razorback Ridge, this is an impressive, thin ridge line with amazing views which does involve a little scrambling. The track descends into the gully, cross Fringe Lilly creek and soon the track gets to the Hugh Gorge junction. We finally reach the water so we scramble on the right side for as far as we can, take off our packs and investigate. Gina was walking with us and there were also two other people we have met previously, John and Peter, a father and son duo. On the bank, after the swim there were two other people, Amy and Hien who we have met before and they instructed us on what to do. Amy waded through the water to the boulder, Gina lowered her pack off the boulder, Amy grabbed the pack and walked to the bank. Gina then jumped into the water to swim around the boulder, it is only about a two metre swim and then once around the boulder, the water

is waist deep. I am waiting on the boulder for Gina to take my pack, I jump in and swim then go to the other side of the boulder to get Elsie's pack and so on. It was easy with the few of us. From here it was not long to the camp site.

Day 7: Hugh Gorge to Ellery Creek North

Once out of the gorge, the landscape opens up with less scrub and wide open plains, looking back to the Hugh Gorge, at Hugh View was impressive. However, in one part, a recent fire has cleared a lot of the shrub and all that was left was red dirt, rocks and burnt shrubs, it was quite surreal as in a sense this is what you expect the desert to really look like. It was hard as there was no shade and full sun so the walking was tiring. Passing through Rocky Gully was just that, a rocky gully, but it did have a little bit of water in the creek. Ellery Creek North was reached and our legs were sore and we were tired. It was good to get to camp.



Day 8 - Ellery Creek North

Day 8: Ellery Creek North to Serpentine Gorge

After packing up camp, it was down to Ellery Creek to check out the gorge and oh my it was gorgeous. Oh and the birds that were around in this campground, in the creek and in the gorge, there were so many. We saw Galahs, Black cockatoos, a Falcon and Budgerigars too, such a special place full of life. On the way we stop to look back at Ellery Creek at the lookout, which is on the top of a



The Dreamtime story is of the Carpet Snake, the story can only be told to an initiated Aboriginal man.

hill. The scenery is really something out here, I am in awe. A little while later Spring Gap was reached and a small scramble is required then it was not long to our next campsite. Another food drop is waiting for us here with some yummy snacks and a small bottle of cider.

Day 9: Rest day

It was good to sleep in a bit and not have to pack up camp. Today is just about relaxing, walking to the gorge, up to the lookout to see down into the gorge and that's it. Serpentine Gorge, Ulpma as it is known, is a permanent waterhole and is a refuge for rare plants and lots of animals. The Dreamtime story is of the Carpet Snake, the story can only be told to an initiated Aboriginal man. Swimming is forbidden. Gina and her dad Monty turned up tonight. Monty started the walk at Ellery Creek South and will be completing the walk.

Day 10: Serpentine Gorge to Serpentine Chalet Dam

Doing the walk east to west is a great way to build up to climbing Mount Sonder as from certain vantage points, such as Counts Point you can see it in the distance and at each vantage point from here in the Mountain gets bigger and bigger and the excitement grows to climb it. Counts Point is well worth the side trip and a great spot for lunch, it has majestic views. On the top of the ridge there are numerous stones that show erosion marks of ancient sea beds, it was quite interesting to see. Down past Lomandra gully there was another section that was burnt out. However, according to the guide book, this is common for this area and why the trees are fairly small in this area. Once at the camp site and after a bit of a rest it was down to see the remnants of the Serpentine Chalet Dam. The dam was built in 1960 to open the area up to tourism, however the chalet was only operational for a few years due to lack of business and lack of water. All that remains here is the cement wall of the dam. I took my shoes off and walked into the water for a swim, I only got as far as my knees as the water was too cold.

Day 11: Serpentine Chalet Dam to Ormiston Gorge

Today was very long, perhaps too long. However, the highlight for me was walking through the Inarlanga Pass. This rough pass marks the boundary between two different tribes. Custodians of the Ochre Pits do not go through the pass unless given permission or invited to attend ceremonies at Giles Springs.

“

Custodians of the Ochre Pits do not go through the pass unless given permission or invited ...

The landscape was different on either side of the pass and walking through it had such a special, spiritual if I can say feeling and I could not help but wonder about the men that used to walk here, how they would have felt passing through this area. What a powerful feeling this area had on me. Then there is the scenery, it took my breath away seeing ancient cycads and river red gums dwarfed by the vertical bands of red rock.



Day 10 - Counts Point with Mount Sonder on the left skyline



Day 12 - Ormiston Pound walk

Day 12: Rest day. Ormiston Pound return

Ormiston campsite has a shower, café and a food drop, and today is a rest day. After a long hot shower, a real coffee and brunch at the cafe, it was off to explore the Pound walk. At least there was no pack to carry. Ormiston Gorge is a sacred site and a permanent waterhole and the walk through the gorge takes about three hours and involves a deep wade. The track starts climbing around the range for some absolute amazing views then the track follows down into the pound with some towering red rock walls, it is a loop walk. After you start walking through the gorge you come to the waterhole, which was around 15 metres wide but can vary in width or depth at any time of the year. The water was so cold, I had to climb out on some rocks half way to get some feeling back in my feet. From here it was only about 30 minutes back to camp, for a long hot shower and a cider. In the afternoon it was down to the waterhole, not for a swim but to take in the stunning sights of this gorge.

Day 13: Ormiston Gorge to Finke River

This is the shortest section, but you could add on a side trip to Glen Helen from here if you wanted to camp at Finke Creek. However, our plan was to walk a few more kilometres, camp at Hilltop Lookout as this will reduce the kilometres the next day. The Finke River is one of the four main rivers of the Lake Eyre Basin, the river contains some of the largest permanent waterholes in Central Australia. It's Arrernte name comes from Lhere Pirnte, taken as Larapinta, which means salty river. It is thought to be the world's oldest river following the same course for around 340 million years and the Finke was formed when the rainbow serpent thrust north from Lake Eyre. It was absolutely beautiful and such a special place.



It's Arrernte name comes from Lhere Pirnte, taken as Larapinta, which means salty river.

Section 11: Finke River to Hilltop Lookout

Along this section the views over to Mount Sonder gets better and better and camping at Hilltop Lookout was the highlight campsite of the trip for me. The sunset and the sunrise made carrying that extra water up a hill well worth to reach a height of 1010 metres. Watching the colours change over Mount Sonder at sunrise was spectacular, the Mountain changed into so many different shades of red with the changing sun, it was a real highlight.

Day 14: Hilltop to Redbank Gorge

After packing up camp, it was down the hill and through Rocky Bar Gap. Soon after the track follows the base of Mount Sonder and into the Redbank Gorge campsite. After a bit of a rest it was time to explore Redbank Gorge, known as Yarretyeke, a sacred site. Again there is a lot of scrambling involved to get to the gorge and the main swimming hole. The huge bright red walls are something of

a must to see and the water is very cold too, but hard to resist. Depending on the level of water you can swim a long way through the gorge. When I was here about twelve or so years ago I could do that, but the water level did not permit me this time. The cliffs seem to get narrower as you swim through and when you look up the cliffs seem to glisten, like little diamonds sticking out of the rock and sparkling in the light and the rocky red cliffs are just breath taking. It is truly something special here and that strong, powerful, somewhat peaceful feeling that comes over you is such an experience to feel. I can somewhat understand the meaning of having a connection to country.

“

... that strong, powerful, somewhat peaceful feeling that comes over you is such an experience to feel.



Day 15: Mount Sonder return

Mount Sonder, known as Rutjupma, is called as the pregnant lady due to its shape. It has many tracks of the Dreamtime ancestors from Western Aranda people. This is the story of Mount Sonder from the information board, prior to climbing. A man/Euro (Hill Kangaroo) dreaming. The central figure was originally a man who came from the sand plains 300 kilometres to the west. On the way to Rutjupma the man, now turned into a euro, passed a collection of rocks. There a party of men looked up and saw him. From earth to sky, these men are touching that connection says the custodians.

It was a 3.30 am start today to watch the sunrise from the summit and it was so worth it. After returning to camp and having a rest I went back up to Redbank Gorge and found myself a small waterhole to swim in. It was cold but so refreshing. It was a fitting end to the trip.

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Mount Sonder, known as Rutjupma, is called as the pregnant lady due to its shape.

Day 16: pick up, home and summary

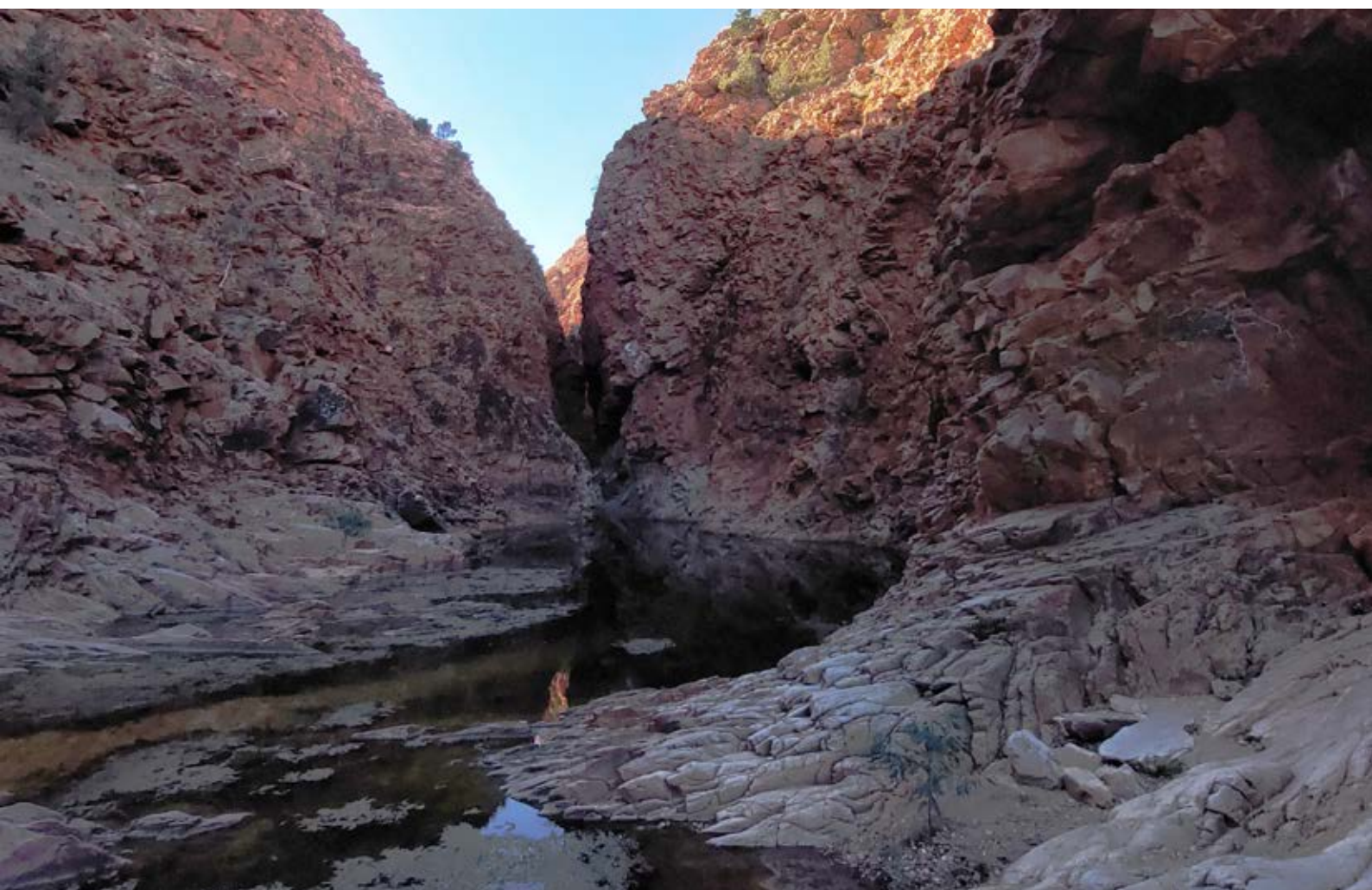
The pick-up van is scheduled for 10.30 am and Gina, Monty, Else and I headed back into Alice Springs. I got in contact with a friend of mine, Girija, who has been living in Alice Springs for the last year, so after a bit of a rest we all meet in town to have dinner. The next day I flew home and back to reality. What an amazing and stunning trek this is. The colours and variety of scenery of the desert are just beautiful. If you are thinking about doing this walk, stop thinking about it and do it.

“

What an amazing and stunning trek this is.



Day 14 - Mount Sonder at sunrise from Hilltop Lookout



Day 15 - Redbank Gorge. Yes you can swim through that gap

Resources

You can find more information about the Larapinta Trail on the [official website](#) or the [national parks page](#). For more information about transportation contact [Outback Elie tours](#), [Larapinta Trail Trek Support](#) or [Trek support](#). Check the park's website about [park pass fees](#) and always [book campsites](#) before you go.

Costs

The walking fee is \$25 per person per night up to a maximum of \$125 per person, so after five nights the fee does not increase. Pay at [Park bookings](#).

Most campsites have camping fees of \$10 per night, except Standley Chasm which is \$18.50. Pay at [Park bookings](#) except for Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge where you pay there at the kiosk.

Park fee NT Open Pass (valid 12 months) is \$60.00, get this through [Park bookings](#).

Food drop fee and retrieval fee per drop or pick up is \$65, Locker key is \$70 including a \$50 deposit via [Outback Elie tours](#) or whoever you decide to travel with.

Pick up fee is \$210 from Redbank Gorge to Alice Springs with [Outback Elie tours](#) or whoever you decide to travel with.

Iceland

Text and photos
Ian Smith

It's a strange sight. For 3.5 kilometres, dotted along this lightly-trafficked road, humans dressed in all manner of clothing (except summer) are stretched out as far as the eye can see. Still they come, with the shuttle ferries at the wharf delivering them for hours on the promise of a 45 minute walk to a foss of some sort, the Icelandic word for waterfall.



Gufu Foss (falls)



The road walk to the falls



Gufu Foss

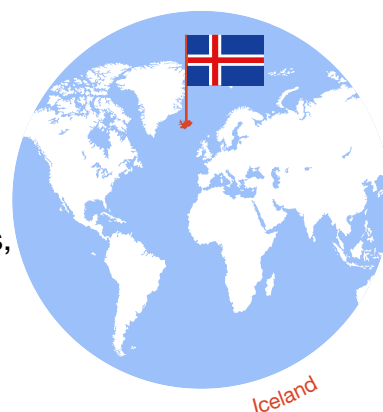
Some are striding with purpose, others dawdling, some quit en route, others will constantly wonder just how far it is. We fit comfortably into the latter group after emerging from the first shuttle ferry. Everywhere in Iceland is exposed to the wind and we're moving steadily into a brisk one. It wouldn't be cold without it. The clouds are few for the first time in a week and the blue sky is a treat for the eyes.

Our group of about thirty or so is strung out over about 1.5 kilometres. There's an old lady in front struggling with a walking stick, which greatly impresses us. We haven't caught up to her, which serves as an indicator as to just how fast we're not going, but we're definitely in the front half of the first dispatch.

There are virtually no trees in Iceland, so the views are unrestricted. Mountains rise from the valley floors, scoured out millennia ago by glaciers and now streaked with the melting snows of spring. The town we've just left has a population of around 270, but it's a bank holiday, the third we've struck in four days!

Its name, written in English, is Seydisfjörður, but since there's a couple of letters with funny things hanging around them when written in the local lingo, it's nothing like that and we haven't learned how to pronounce it, nor probably ever will. For the record, in Icelandic the spelling is [Seyðisfjörður](#).

It wasn't on our original destination plans, but the ship changed course between Norway and Iceland. We don't know if it had anything to do with the storm we sailed through overnight. However, we were given a list of highlights and the hike to the waterfall was rated. We've seen a couple of the other highlights and know we've been duded. For instance, there's a church that rates highly on their list; apart from its delightful soft green colour and general cleanliness, there's no reason to visit whatsoever.



The trek goes on. We pass a row of black cottonwood trees, incongruous in this windswept landscape because there are no native trees. The road starts to rise. The Chinese lady with the walking stick slows, allowing us to pass her. Lorraine is going much better than expected and continues with determination, though the breeze, now brisker than before, has her holding up some paper by her ear to prevent pain in that area.

I pull my hood up off my jacket to fend off the wind and take a few photos - surprise! There's still no waterfall in sight after about 40 minutes but far ahead we can see small rivers cascading off the mountain and correctly suspect that where they meet will be our goal. Up and up until we reach a bend and here the fall becomes immediately apparent. Relief is palpable as we go through the small carpark and out to the viewing area.

It's not the most scenic we've ever seen but you can't deny that there's a lot of water coming over. We'd been told that it's possible to walk behind but it's plain to see that that's not going to happen. A couple of adventurous males have headed out there and reluctantly turned back. Because the waterfalls are young and the rock is fracturous, the spray doesn't undercut.

It's good to be out in the open and hiking though and, further downstream, some first arrivals have started to follow a worn path that seemingly leads to more drops. We head off after them. It traverses the spongy tundra, through wildflowers so tiny if they weren't clustered together you'd never notice them.

The third fall is split into numerous arms and it's a bit of a scramble down a rocky ledge to get the best shot, but it's the most scenic. Several photographers have made it before us so it requires patience to get the best angle. On high in the background their source is ever present. The windblown snow-capped slopes are daunting by their presence.

Out on the road the trickle of walkers is endless. Of the total 6000 people on the ship, it seems a few hundred have chosen this journey. Since there's no path, all traffic is confined to the road and cars have to zig-



Alpine Azaleas (*Kalmia Procumbens*)

zag to avoid "pedestrian splatter". Unlike Norway where there were bends and foliage continually, it's fortunate that there's nothing blocking the landscape.

We stroll by the golf course, amazed that there's enough enthusiasm to even make one here, let alone maintain it. The grass must be hardy to say the least.

The view is majestic back down to Seyðisfjörður and the ship anchored just offshore and at least the breeze is following now so one can enjoy the splendour. Still the passengers head up the other way and we stop to chat with more than one, passing on advice from our recent perspective.

Back at the Seyðisfjörður there's a rainbow road that's been painted to show support for the alternatives in our current lives. On one side there's a building painted in imaginative black and white scenes. Out of curiosity I stick my head in. There's a triple zig-zag queue waiting in line for beverages all the way back to the door. Moving on, we reach the church but spend little time there.

Apart from a seemingly abandoned fishing boat there's another significant waterfall just on the outskirts but we're both almost wasted by now. The queues to the shuttle ferries are long but they do keep moving and waiters are on hand with hot chocolate and the like. Back on board it feels wonderful just to relax and reflect on what an enjoyable experience our first footsteps on Iceland were.

2024 Calendar

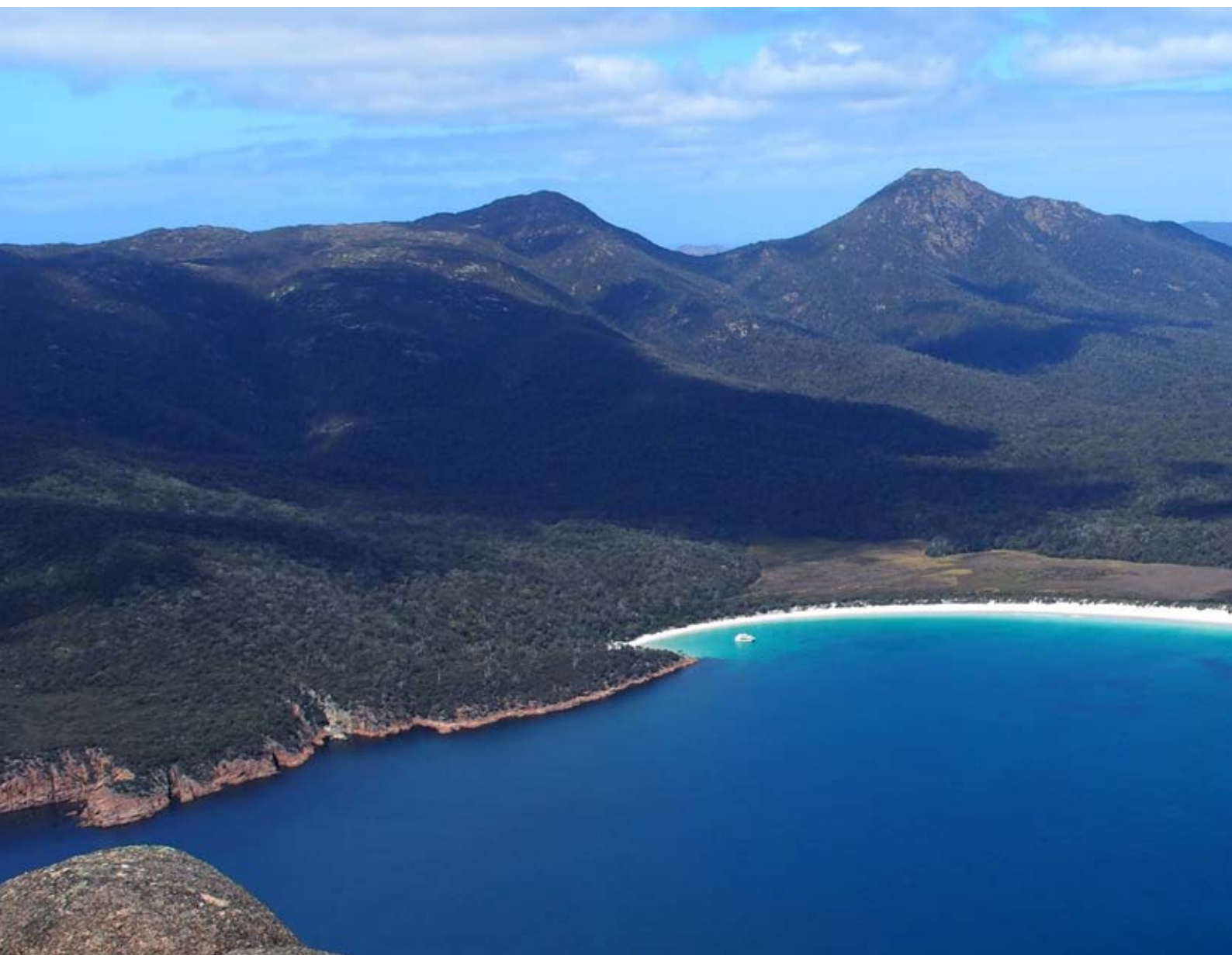
Can't wait for the 2024 calendar with amazing bushwalking images? Here's the Bushwalk calendar with pictures from the winners of the Bushwalk.com photo competitions.

To enjoy this amazing imagery, order your copy at \$17 including postage in Australia by emailing Eva at eva@wildwalks.com or click **PayPal** to order it straight away.



Photo Gallery

Photos
Bushwalk.com photographers



Check this and
other entries at
[Bushwalk.com](https://bushwalk.com)
Photo competitions



Afternoon in blue
Charles Chadwick

Landscapes

October 2022

Winner
Walk on the beach
Rob Croll

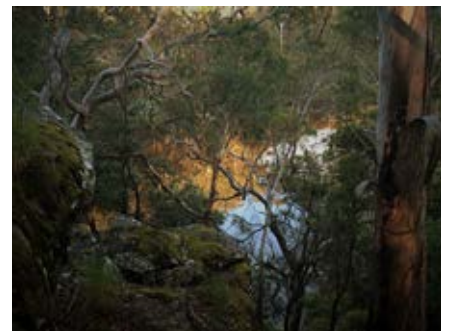
The far north coast NSW comes across as being very urbanised, but quite often you'll walk around a headland and find solitude.



Lost World sunrise
Tom Brennan



A view over The Guardians
Graham51



Secret River
John Walker

Non-landscapes

October 2022

Winner

As the Pink Panther tune goes ... Dead Ant! Dead Ant! Dead Ant Dead Ant Dead Ant!

Tom Brennan

Lucky timing! An Eastern Water Dragon's tongue shoots out to grab one of the ants crawling over the rocks above the Wollangambe.



Sand and Rutile
Rob Croll



The devil is in the detail
John Walker



Golden Whistler
Brian Eglinton

Tasmania

October 2022

Winner
Mount Gould
Graham51

After traversing the summit ridge to reach the summit of Mount Gould our group returned to camp at the Gould Plateau tarns. This is a beautiful, secluded campsite with magnificent views in all directions.



Milkshake time
North-north-west

Other States

October 2022

Winner
Sun reflections
Tom Brennan

Sunbeams reflect off the water in the middle of the day in Serendipity Canyon, also known as "Why Don't We Do It In The Road? Canyon".



Mid-north Heysen ridges
Brian Eglinton



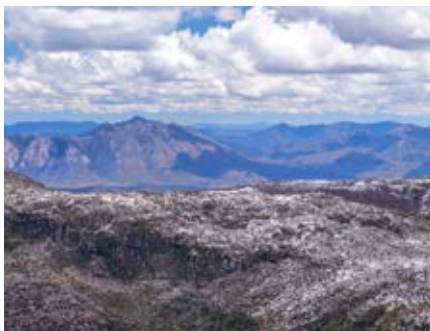
The Glen
John Walker

Landscapes

November 2022

Winner
Clarke Gorge
Rob Croll

The road leading into this magic limestone karst area was closed, so it seemed a perfect time to avoid the crowds, and spend a few days exploring the caves, waterfalls and gorges.



Good day to be in the
Southwest
North-north-west



Kaiser Boulders
Brian Eglinton



Convergence
John Walker

Non-landscapes

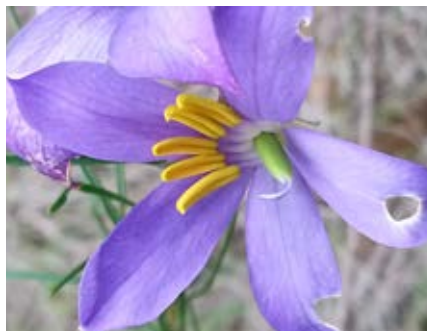
November 2022

Winner
Tied down
North-north-west

Scoparia season is really variable. You can never be sure what you're going to get - I've seen it flowering at Pelion Gap midwinter. But this cold, late spring day at Lake Dobson it decided to turn on a show, and this specimen wasn't going anywhere.



Murray Cave
Rob Croll



Belle of the Bush -
Cheiranthra alternifolia
Vagrom



After the rain
Brian Eglinton

Tasmania

November 2022

Winner

Slow going up there

North-north-west

Summer snow in our higher areas is common although not long lasting. There's always more than you would think when looking at it from a distance. Mawson wasn't too bad, but the ice and drifts on the Rodway Range made for hard work. Florentine, Naturaliste and Field West were a lot of (slippery) steps too far for a day walk.

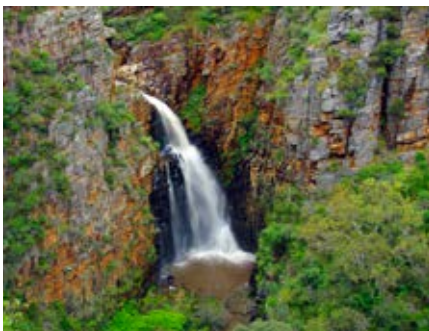


Other States

November 2022

Winner
Coolleman Falls
Rob Croll

After walking through the gorge and crossing cave a dozen times, you end up at this pretty waterfall. It continues to cascade down into a ravine on its way to Goodradigbee River.



First Falls
Brian Eglinton



Callistemon season
John Walker

Phil Ingamells

1947-2023

Text

Matt Ruchel

Executive Director, Victorian National Parks Association



Phil at a cattle grazing public meeting in the Alpine National Park, 2011
Victorian National Parks Association

Phil Ingamells, our long-time Parks Protection Advocate, friend, mentor and ally, died suddenly at home on 25 August 2023.

Phil was a legend in conservation circles and a tireless campaigner for parks and nature. We all owe him a great debt of gratitude for his work. Nature in Victoria is better for his efforts, and we are all the wiser.

A thoughtful, persuasive writer and eloquent speaker, Phil played a critical role in protecting Victoria's natural places and national parks. With his rare skill for clearly explaining complicated (and often dry) policy conundrums, his pieces in Park Watch transported us to the heart of Victoria's natural places.

He was a warm friend and colleague, a lover of robust conversation and argument – a talent that was not lost on ministers and officials alike.

With expansive skills and knowledge honed over the past two decades at VNPA and beyond, Phil played a key role in numerous park management plans.

He filled his hours advocating for action to protect the incredible wildlife and places he spent so much time hiking, photographing and surveying.

Some of the memorable highlights of his time with VNPA include the long-and-hard-fought campaign to remove cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park, not once but twice. He pushed back against the seemingly endless development proposals in our national parks' estate and always promoted why these places are so special.

Phil's special love of Wilsons Prom compelled him to fend off development proposals in the 1990s and again in 2013. More recently he pushed government to control the feral animals destroying the Alpine landscapes that bewitched him so. He also tackled the extremely difficult issue of fire management in his usual evidence-based way.

He never played favourites, in Phil's mind all of our protected areas are important, the corner stone of our efforts to protect nature for all people to respectfully enjoy.

Technically retiring as a paid staff member in late 2021, Phil remained active on our various committees, was a frequent visitor to the office and a prolific contributor to Park Watch.

While Phil certainly didn't get enough time to enjoy his hard-earned retirement, he always had time for nature. His wisdom, dedication and tenacity will be sorely missed.

I would like to give Phil the last word, which is what he would no doubt expect.

It's been a huge privilege to spend time as a spokesperson for the VNPA, and I'll remain forever grateful for that opportunity. I've been able to engage with so many interesting people, tasked in so many ways with the protection of Victoria's great natural heritage.

I've had remarkable access to the expertise of ecologists and other researchers who have been happy to entrust their knowledge to the VNPA. And similarly, I've had access to the formidable understanding of so many of Victoria's amateur naturalists. And though it's not always easy to find yourself trying to enlighten people who see the natural world as a resource, an opportunity for exploitation or simply a troublesome in-the-way bit of bush, knowing that I was backed by the strength and passion of our members and supporters has made it all seem possible.

Thank you, and I hope to see you somewhere along the track.



Phil on Erith Island,
Kent Group NP, Tasmania
David Tatnall

Remote Bushcare: Why?

Text and photos
Tracie McMahon

Planetary Health Initiative writer Tracie McMahon talks about her experience as a Bushcare volunteer with Remote Bushcare programs run by the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). These programs are protecting habitat for koalas and other species, and ensuring we protect our native biodiversity.

Writing is my weekday job and, as strange as it may seem, the reason I became a Bushcare volunteer.

When I began writing in 2021 I would spend hours crafting words, hoping to bring the stories of nature to life through fiction.



The NPWS Bushcare team at Govetts Creek in the Blue Gum Forest ready for a day's work in October 2021.



Katoomba Creek waterfall. The group checks the edges for weeds to ensure nsure that they do not go downstream.



The NPWS Bushcare group near the site at the headwaters of the Grose River in Mount Victoria.

Fiction writing is competitive, and I aimed high. I planned to enter a competition for *Island*, an Australian literary magazine for nature writers, and enrolled in a pre-competition webinar to hone my entry. At the end of the webinar, an attendee asked: “Does writing about nature really make a difference?” The panellist replied that whenever he questioned his work, he went out and pulled a few weeds with his local Bushcare group. It reminded him that both actions and words are important.

Getting involved

The next day when I sat down to write, I also sent an email to my local NPWS office to ask about weeding. I’m a bushwalker and spend a lot of time in the Grose Valley so that seemed a good place to start. The ranger was quick to reply and asked if I wanted to join the remote team.

Remote Bushcare involves working in areas which are usually at least thirty minutes from emergency assistance. The work requires high levels of fitness as it can involve bush bashing, scrambling, rock hopping, working in

creeks and camping. It also involves visiting some of the most beautiful places in the Blue Mountains, many of which are only accessible to remote groups.

In September 2021 I joined the Great Grose Weed Walk for National Parks and became a remote Bushcare volunteer. This program has been in operation across the Blue Mountains for over two decades. At the time, the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20 followed by flood had revealed a seed bed of gorse and broom which was previously considered under control. Without the cover of natives, the weeds were sprouting and threatening to take over the Grose Valley.

What’s involved

Our group of six camped near Acacia Flat for three days, criss-crossing Acacia Flat and Govetts Creek to remove gorse and broom seedlings. Each was only a few centimetres high, but the ground itself was bare, making them relatively easy to spot. The ranger and more experienced bushcarers provided training to identify and treat the weeds appropriately.

My first year as a remote Bushcare volunteer was revelatory. I was learning about native flora not from books and pictures, but with all my senses. The NPWS staff and other volunteers would take the time to point out the smell and the feel of the weeds, and how they can be differentiated from native flora. Everyone was happy to answer my many questions and discuss their own experiences. My fellow volunteers were a diverse lot. Many had science and ecology backgrounds, but there were teachers, lawyers, business managers and students, eager to get away from their desks.

Remote Bushcare activities usually operate on weekends and are seasonal or monthly, so people with weekday commitments can participate. The Acacia Flat three day camp is one of my favourite activities, particularly as it has allowed me to see the Blue Gum Forest recover after the recent fire and flood events. On our last trip in March 2023, gorse and broom were no longer the priority. Crofton weed and Himalayan honeysuckle are now the focus.



A BMCC remote Bushcare group at Birdwood Gully, Springwood, July 2023



A NPWS Bushcare team treating Crofton weed in the Blue Gum Forest, March 2023

Staying involved

BMCC also has a remote Bushcare program which operates monthly. The sites vary each year, depending on anticipated infestation and time since the team last “worked” the area. Sites can involve rough inaccessible terrain like Katoomba Creek or an offtrack bushwalk at Mount Wilson.

Steve Fleischmann, Bushcare Officer at BMCC explains that the goal of the remote program is to “keep an eye” on areas where problems can eventuate including sites of high ecological value. He says it is like “infection control in hospitals.” The topography of the mountains, as well as proximity of natural areas to urban settlement, can result in waterways becoming “vectors” for invasive species to enter bushland reserves and national parks.

Other sites have critical species populations or habitats. For example, Knapsack Gully in Glenbrook is a part of an endangered shale-sandstone transition forest, a unique ecological community found only in the Sydney Basin of NSW, and Burgess Falls in Hazelbrook has an extensive and diverse mycological (fungi) “forest”.

The remote program allows BMCC to target their resources to optimise their awareness of problems and be prepared to act quickly.

I’ve managed to get to two of their events in 2022-23 and was fortunate to be introduced to unfamiliar terrain in the lower mountains. The Bushcare Officers happily shared their knowledge while we worked, from the fungi on the forest floor to the bush tucker dangling overhead.

At Burgess Falls in Hazelbrook, activities were focused on arum lily. The lily, which is common in household gardens, had made its way into the bush and was blocking the flow of water through the creek.

As we chatted over lunch at Springwood July 2023, I asked the group about other sites they have visited during the year. At Knapsack Reserve in Glenbrook, the group tell me they had only travelled a hundred metres before being faced with a “wall of lantana”. This site is home to a known koala population and is also a critical “vector site”.



Arum lily blocking the flow of Burgess Creek



The lily is removed and treated to ensure the creek can flow effectively



Bushcare Officer Steve Fleischmann demonstrating how to treat a large privet



Removing Crofton weed and Himalayan Honeysuckle near Mount Victoria, April 2023

Steve explained that African olive, lantana, and ochra are frequently found in this area distributed by bird droppings. Each of these species can out-compete native species 'simplifying' the landscape, which means an abundance of those species that can co-exist with them and a loss of diversity within the ecosystem. This endangers the endemic flora and fauna, including the koalas. The group of eight worked on the lantana, making a substantial difference to the area and the site will be revisited to ensure the treatment is effective.

At Mount Wilson earlier in the year the site was relatively weed free and the team instead enjoyed a stunning guided bushwalk through the rainforest area, with explanations from the Bushcare Officer.

Even though they found very little at Mount Wilson, the Bushcare officers consider this a good use of volunteers' time. It is far better to keep visiting the offtrack areas of sites that are known to have problems or that are high impact, than to wait until someone reports a problem in an area which is walked regularly. Often the weed sighting that is reported is just the tip of the iceberg. By going offtrack and checking regularly, BMCC can treat infestations before they take hold and move into areas which are completely inaccessible.

The NPWS also focuses on ensuring weeds are stopped before they travel into inaccessible locations. Their remote program includes activities from the headwaters of the Grose at Mount Victoria through to the edge of the Grose Valley wilderness.

During a thank you event in June 2023, Monica Nugent, Senior Field Officer at NPWS, explained the importance of volunteers to weed management in the national park. Volunteers in the Upper Mountains Area contributed almost 3000 hours of bush regeneration during the previous year, allowing national parks to target their own activities to sites noted by the volunteer teams for intense work or follow up.

As I tap out the last few words of this article, I am thankful for the gentle reminder of that panellist from the *Island* webinar. I am grateful that I am physically able to volunteer for the remote Bushcare program, but also that I have the opportunity to share that experience with words.

The BMCC Remote Bushcare is now a regular group on the second Saturday of the month. It is organised by Steve Fleischmann, who can be contacted by email sfleischmann@bmcc.nsw.gov.au.

Monica Nugent at NPWS remote Bushcare program can be contacted on 4787 8877 or monica.nugent@environment.nsw.gov.au.



Tracie in her first NPWS Volunteer Bushcare shirt. A very proud moment!



Tracie McMahon lives, walks and works on the unceded lands of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Wiradjuri. She is a writer with the BMCC Planetary Health Initiative team and *The Moving Pen* and a bushwalker with the Upper Blue Mountains Bushwalking Club.

This article was first published by the Blue Mountains Planetary Health Initiative in *Springwood Area Local News* on 27 July 2023.

In the News

Great North Walk Community Proposal

Since the Patonga ferry stopped it's been difficult, expensive or involving a roundabout route to join the Great North Walk. There is a petition to use the Little Wobby track, the original 1980s proposed track. You can read more and sign the petition at [Change.org](https://www.change.org).

Stanwell Park to Wodi Wodi Track

A new track from Stanwell Park to the beach and Wodi Wodi Track is finished, an extension of the Royal National Park Coast Track, NSW. The [Newcastle Weekly](#) has details.

Off course

A [mid-winter trail runner](#) in Mount Hotham is a long way from the intended route.

Australian Geographic's best 2023 nature photographers

From under the sea to a bush toilet, the beauty of nature can be found everywhere as [these talented photographers](#) have revealed.

Call for nationwide end to native logging

A number of entities want native forest logging to cease in Australia. Logging interests say that if timber does not come from Australia then it must come from overseas, with a [significant environmental impact](#).

Burning the desert the right way

In the Northern Territory, dozens of Indigenous ranger groups across 12 Indigenous Protected Areas have been hard at work in an unprecedented collaboration, burning to [reduce the fuel load](#) before the summer's heat.



Yilka Rangers burning using drip torches
Rohan Carboon/Indigenous Desert Alliance, [CC BY-ND](#)

Illegal Killing of 265 Trees

Text
Gregory Moore

In most illegal tree removals, you might see perhaps a handful of trees removed or poisoned. That's why the recent felling and [poisoning of 265 old trees](#) in Sydney's Castle Cove has been so breathtaking and appalling.

This act – perpetrated by persons unknown – was not vandalism but theft of valuable community assets.



Angophora costata in Garigal National Park, Sydney
Eug, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Future generations have been robbed of the benefits these trees – some of which were more than 80 years old – provided to our environment, the climate and as habitat for other plants and animals. It was theft on a grand scale.

Tree loss will cost us as the climate changes

In contrast to Indigenous people, most Australians have undervalued large old trees for nearly two centuries. But many of the ecological and environmental benefits these trees provide increase as they age over decades and perhaps centuries. These benefits are crucial to urban liveability and sustainability.

A global movement is gaining momentum in urban forestry to preserve old trees for as long as we can to maximise the benefits they provide.

“

... most Australians have undervalued large old trees for nearly two centuries.

It is not about preservation at all cost, but a recognition that in a proper cost/benefit analysis, large old trees outperform younger trees. Unnecessary removal of large old trees is unsustainable both environmentally and economically.

This does not mean we should not replace dangerous trees or those that are rapidly declining.

It does mean, however, there should be no removal of large old trees without significant and demonstrably sound reasons.

Too many large, old, urban trees are being removed unnecessarily because other management options are not considered.

Whether via theft or bureaucratic-sanctioned tree removals, the general loss of old trees will cost us and our society dearly as the climate changes.

Old trees do things that young trees simply cannot

One of the significant benefits that trees provide over other vegetation types is that their leaf area is often more than double their canopy cover. This creates a great cooling

effect via both shade and evapotranspiration (the movement of water into the atmosphere, some of which comes through leaves).

Large trees are unequalled in cooling the environment around them. Old trees simply do things on a scale that small young trees cannot.

This means a slow-growing old tree can take in and store more carbon than a quick-growing young seedling. Every gram of carbon stored in this way is carbon saved from going into the atmosphere as greenhouse gas emissions.

Both carbon stores and shade are crucial to mitigating future climate change.

All of this is lost when trees are illegally or unnecessarily removed. The impact is felt not just now but for decades into the future.

The loss of even a single tree comes at a huge price

The loss of **so many trees** in Sydney's Castle Cove represents theft of environmental benefits and services from at least two, if not more, future generations of Australians. The trees lost were largely native coastal species that had decades (and in some cases more than a century) of growth before them.

We have known for many decades trees are often associated with between 30 and 50 other species – birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, fungi, algae and others. The removal of a tree affects most, if not all, of these other species. Some of these plants and animals will die as a result.

The number of associated species increases as the tree ages, and we have probably been underestimating species lost with large old tree removals in urban and natural forests.

Oaks in the UK, for example, are associated with over 2,300 other **species**. One can only wonder how many other species will be affected by the felling and poisoning of the trees at Castle Cove. The illegal loss of even a single tree comes at a huge price.

Simply planting new trees doesn't fix the problem

We tend to undervalue the shade provided by trees when considering urban development, or even road works. But tree removals lead to more **urban heat**, which usually means higher electricity bills (as people crank up the air conditioner).

Large old trees are seen by some as an expendable nuisance. Some local council laws aim to protect trees of a certain size, but fines for illegal removals are small.

In some instances, a one-for-one tree replacement is offered. But to replace the carbon stored in one large, mature tree would require a vast number of seedlings, many of which **fail to survive** the first few years.

And it can take many years before planted trees reach carbon neutrality. The production, planting and maintenance processes all use resources, energy and fossil fuels, which means it can take **decades** before a tree is carbon positive.

This situation is unsustainable environmentally and ludicrous economically, but it seems to go largely unnoticed. We accrue all of the costs of these plantings and recoup precious little benefit.

It would be far more sensible and sustainable if we retained our large old trees, making every effort to maximise and prolong their life spans.

Gregory Moore

Senior Research Associate, School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences, The University of Melbourne

This article first appeared in **The Conversation** on 5 September 2023.

Published

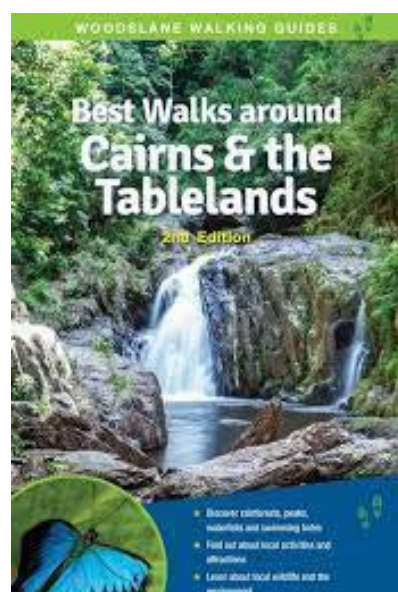
Best walks around Cairns & the Tablelands Second edition

By Carmen Riordan, Sally McPhee and Beth Watson

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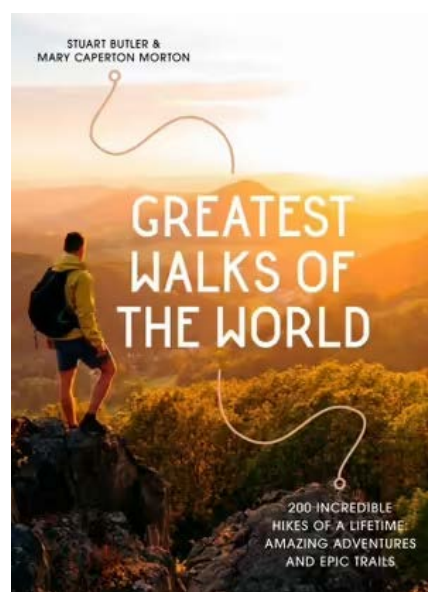
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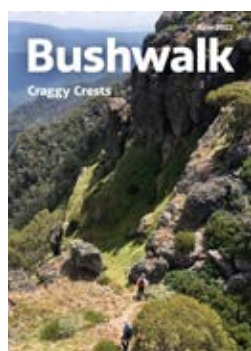
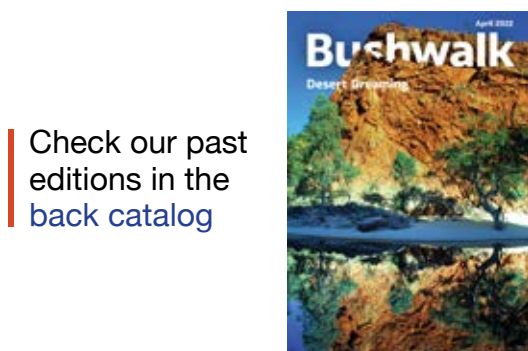
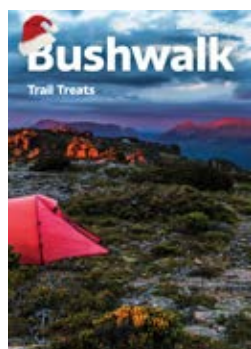
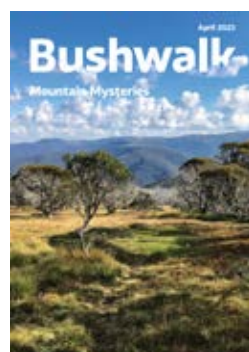
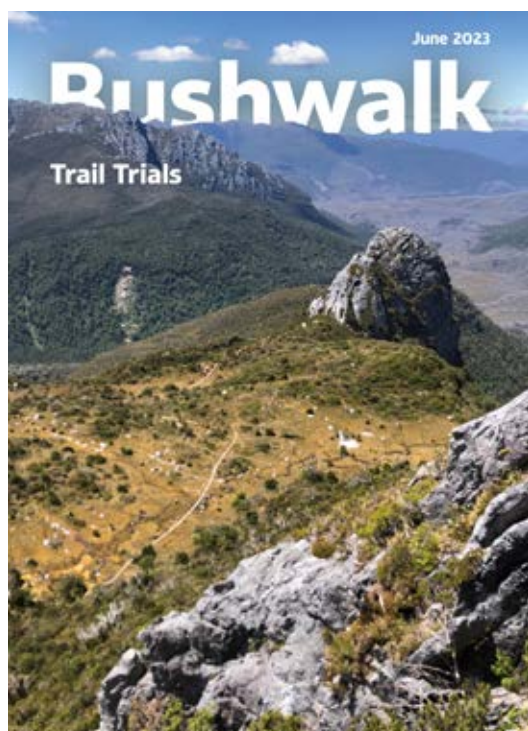
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