

April 2024

# Bushwalk

Trail Tales



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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 and that you were able to enjoy a good Easter break.

In this edition, Terry takes us on a 13-day, 220 km expedition along McMillans Track through central east Victoria. Rob and his gang head to Tassie to guide us for an 8-day walk through the middle of the Walls of Jerusalem NP. Sonya and her club head to her favourite parts of Kosciuszko NP to enjoy walking, caving and swimming. Ian is back overseas, in the UK, helping us enjoy the rugged coastline on the short Ilfracombe Torrs Walk.

You will also find a colourful array of images from our amazing photographers at bushwalk.com. Caro from LotsaFreshAir tells us the story behind her new podcast series, "Rescued", where her guests share experiences we can all learn from. This edition's video collection focuses on overnight walking preparation and coping with the culture shock of returning to "normal" life. Finally, read about the extent some Aussie critters will go to reproduce, or perhaps to get out of parenting.

Happy walking,  
Matt :)

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Cover image  
Laura in front of Halls Buttress  
Rob Wildman



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Please send any articles, suggestions or advertising enquires to Eva. We would love you to be part of the magazine 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](http://Bushwalk.com), [Wildwalks.com](http://Wildwalks.com) and [Overlandtrack.com](http://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.

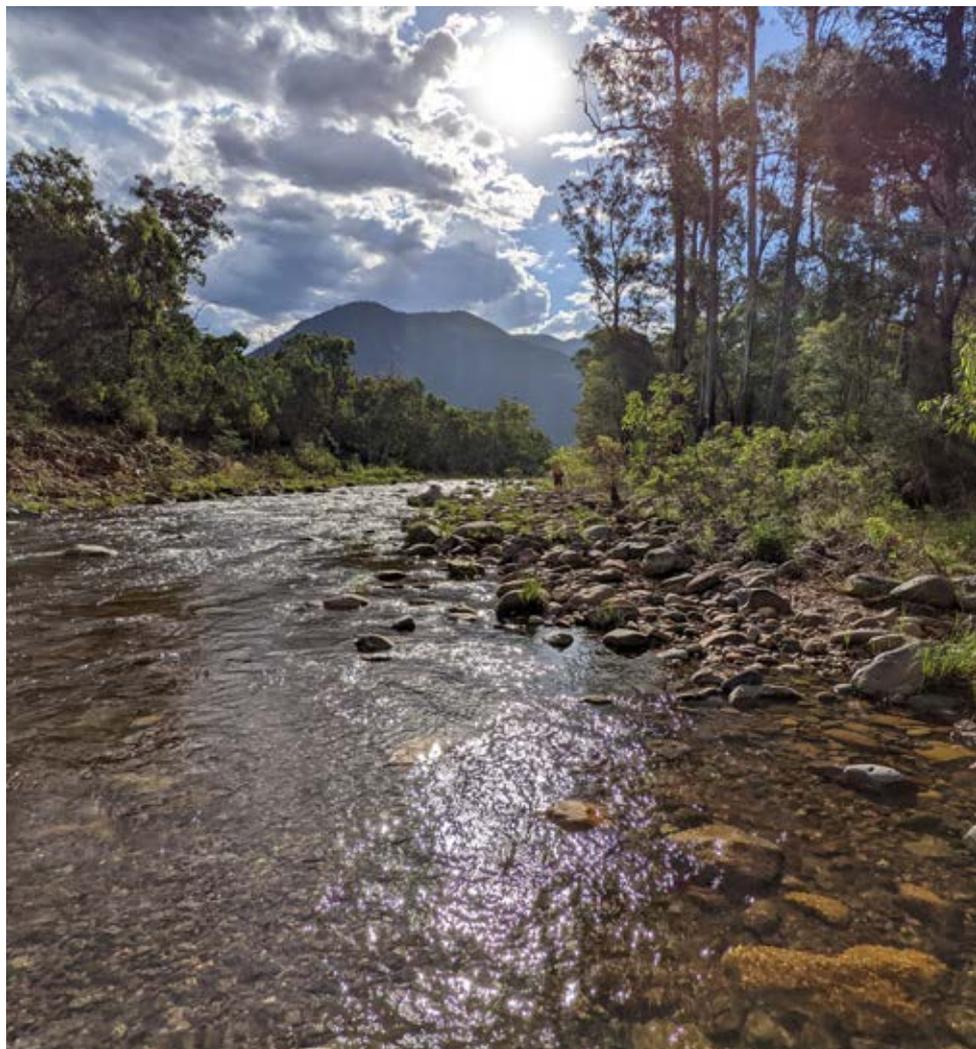
Please consider joining a walking club or undertaking formal training in other ways to ensure you are well prepared for any activities you are planning. Please report any errors or omissions to the editor or in the forum at Bushwalk magazine.

# McMillans Track

Text and photos  
**Terry Cornall**

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I perpetrated this blog, about a trip in January 2022 when I completed a 13-day hike with Gordon Bedford. We hiked the McMillans Track in Victoria, Australia. It was a bit of a mixed bag, and now I want to share the good, the bad and the ugly of it all with you.



Moroka River



Terry by the walk's sign    The hike compared to most of the rest of Victoria. Big, isn't it?

The McMillans Track is one that I know my friend Gordon has had his eyes upon for some little while. I personally had never heard of it until he started to mention it occasionally when we were out doing some other adventure. It sounded long and bush-bashy, but one attractive feature was that it was all within Victoria. After almost getting locked out of our home state during the COVID border-closure ructions in Jan 2021, we were keen to avoid a repeat.

It's 220 km long and travels from near Mt Hotham to Woods Point over many roads, 4x4 tracks, bush tracks, trackless tangles and even some virtual tunnels carved through the living bush. It goes up and over a lot of ridges, contains a lot of nice rivers and flats, has great views, interesting geology and biology.

It was hard on the feet, generally easy to navigate but in places very hard to find a path. Parts of it I loved, parts I hated and parts were plain boring. I'll never ever do it again. Once was sufficient. I might do sections of it again though, armed with a machete perhaps.

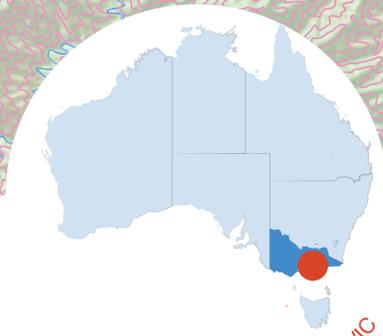
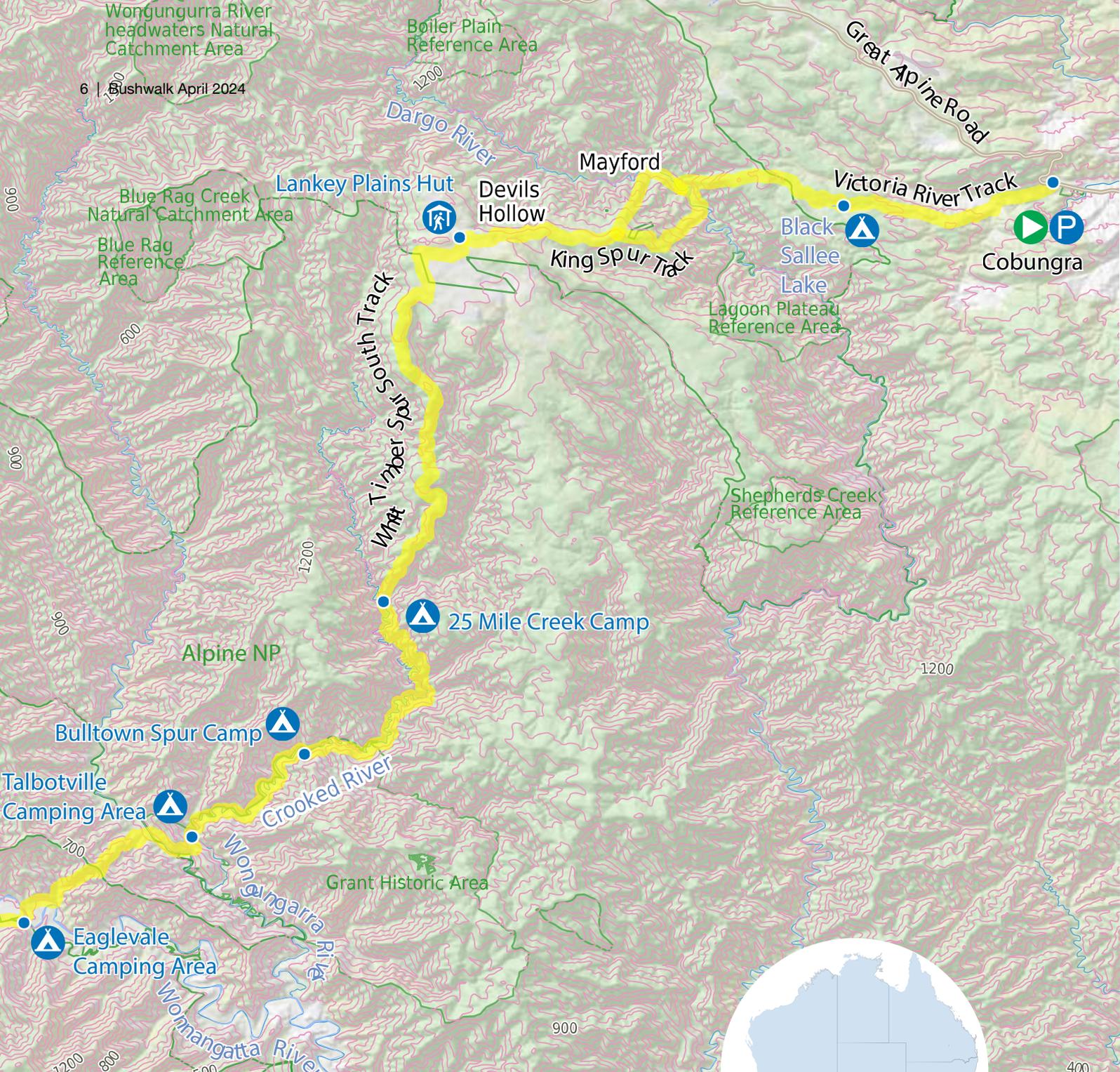
### Why, why why?

Why what? Why is a duck? Because one of its legs is both the same, of course. Why this blog? Why do a 13-day hike? Why go hiking with Gordon? Why go in summer when it's hot?

“

The question stuck in my mind, and I decided to give it a go.

Life is full of 'why' questions and I had a bit of time to ponder these during the hike. As for why this blog - well, you can blame a nice man at Eaglevale campsite on the Wonnangatta who, after his wife suggested it, came over to offer us some cold water and have a chat. This guy was full of questions, and one of his first was 'Are you going to blog it?' The question stuck in my mind, and I decided to give it a go. I love writing. A Bachelor's, a Master's and a PhD theses, two



Alpine National Park, VIC  
 Taungurung and Gunaikurnai Country

### McMillans Track, part 1



-  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

-  Start of the walk
-  Hut
-  Campsite
-  Toilet
-  Parking

not very successful Kindle sci-fantasy novels (shameless plug: [Damsels & Dragons](#) and [Dragons' Pyre](#)) and many, many megabytes of technical documentation have not blunted my enthusiasm for getting words and images down and bashed into shape. Besides, it gives me something to do that will help me remember the trip. I have a terrible memory which is one more reason why I write things down.

Why do this hike? Or any hike at all, really. Why not car-camp like all the others we saw on this trip. Well, apart from a few exceptions, like the cold-water guy and his wife, all the car-campers we saw were sitting around their vans drinking or tearing up and down the track or playing in the mud in their 4x4s and that seems like a very boring sort of holiday to me. I like to get out into it and enjoy the scenery and the weather, even if it does turn to crap sometimes. Some of my best memories are about being miserable. Hmm, that doesn't sound like a good comment on my mind-state, does it? Perhaps I should say that triumphing over adversity gives me a smug sort of pleasure. Ok, I'm digging myself into a hole here. Coming across as being all weird. Maybe I am. Anyway, I'm pretty sure that the 4x4-ers never discovered the half of what was out there in the bush. The vistas maybe, fleetingly from a scenic lookout or the midst of a dust cloud, but they didn't see that huge bluetongue lizard unless they ran over him, and maybe not even then. They didn't battle blackberry bush tendrils with a stick wielded like a cavalry sabre, working on the backstroke as if cleaving orcan helms. They didn't have to fight off the face-hugging spiders on the bush tracks. They didn't hunt for thunder eggs whilst wading up a freezing river. Actually that bit was kinda nice, I must be getting soft. They never got to go spider-fishing for a ginormous mouse-spider. They never stumbled across the remains of someone's bush camp in the middle of a trackless wilderness that contained three huge frying pans, a hammer and a strange collection of ointments and vitamin supplements. They didn't have to push on walking even though their feet had been worn down to bleeding stumps. They never struggled through wet bush to climb a fantastically shaped mountain in the mist,

all for nothing because there was no view to be had other than what looked like the inside of a ping-pong ball, now did they? They didn't EARN it. And maybe that sums it up. Deliberately undergoing adversity and triumphing makes all the good things more meaningful and intense because you know you earned them. A healthy dose of masochism helps too, I suspect.



He's willing to listen to my suggestions and concerns, and compromise when needed.

However, there are limits. Too many blackberry brambles, too hot conditions, too steep roads, too heavy pack, too many kilometres per day, too much pain in the feet/back/whatever, too little food, too cold conditions, too grumpy/talkative/careless/thoughtless/selfish companions, all these can ruin a trip. Fortunately, we got the balance more or less right on this one. And that leads me to a very important "why". Why go hiking with Gordon? (Substitute name of hike buddy(s) as appropriate). Because I know him well, know his judgement is to be trusted, especially when it comes to hiking, planning, navigation and path finding. He isn't bossy except when it really counts. Like, no Terry, that overhanging icy cornice is not a good place to be under. He's willing to listen to my suggestions and concerns, and compromise when needed. Plus he laughs, well, grins, at at least some of my jokes. I know of people who refuse to do hikes/bike-rides/camping with strangers. I have some sympathy for that point of view, though it begs the question of how you get started to know someone well enough to accept them. Just imagine getting stuck for weeks with someone you grow to dislike. What a nightmare. What a theme for a movie...

### **Loggy sticks**

Planning and logistics for an almost two-week hike is conceptually simple. Know where you are going, arrange to get there and get back home again at the end, take enough food, gear and information to survive in relative

comfort and help you not get lost and get you rescued in case of an accident. In practice it's a bit harder. What's the weather going to do? What clothes do I need? Which boots/shoes to take? What food and how much? What tent, sleeping bag, raincoat? Who brings what? What sort of hiking? Dry, wet, open tracks, bush-bashing through blackberries, wading across/up rivers? All of the above? Will I need a machete? Light-sabre? Batteries for devices? Which devices? I got lots! Track notes? Water availability, campsites, resupply? So many questions to ponder. I have a friend whose mantra is "I'd rather be looking at it than for it". My response, when it comes to camping should be "OK, but you gotta carry it". Taking too much stuff seems to be a continuing fault with me, as you'll discover in my musings below or in the gear article in the next edition of the magazine. Perhaps if I laid it all out on the floor before packing and then divided it into 'Stuff I absolutely need to survive', 'luxuries I must have', 'things I might suffer from if I didn't have', 'luxuries I'd miss', 'things I probably won't need'. Even that approach fails me, as you'll see. The category I fail in most is the 'things I might suffer from if I didn't have'. E.g. extra clothes. Planning for contingencies is a good thing, don't get me wrong, but you can go too far.



Planning for contingencies is a good thing, don't get me wrong, but you can go too far.

### Food me, Marge

It helped that Gordon and I had done this sort of thing before (The Australian Alpine Walking Track (AAWT)) plus numerous others over the almost 50 or so years we've known each other. So divvying up the provisioning was fairly simple. He does breakfasts because I can't cook porridge without burning it, and I did dinners because I know how to boil water. We did our own lunches, no cooking involved, just salami and cheese on VitaWeet biscuits for me. Fruity Filled Bars from Aldi appeared to go down well also. Freeze-dried meals from Backcountry Cuisine and Outdoor Gourmet

featured heavily for the dinners, plus some home-designed desserts (Coles Chocolate Mousse made with Amyam dehydrated coconut milk anyone?) to look forward to every other night. And Snickers bars to bribe Gordon into carrying all of the tent.

Soup every night was a must and something we both looked forward to. I like the Continental Soup Sensations brand, especially their various creamy vegetable soups. Yum. Available from Coles and probably other outlets as well.

### Chapman's track notes

McMillans [Walking Track](#) is an excellent resource giving good detailed track notes. One thing we noticed though was that we usually took a bit longer to complete a section than the notes suggested. Maybe we took longer breaks, or I was just plain slow. Also, anytime it mentioned 'track may become vague or choked with blackberries' we knew it was going to be a monster. 'Steep short ascent' should be read as 'brutal' and 'challenging' means exactly what it says. 'Interesting' needed to be treated with caution.

### Going forth. Enough prep, let's do it!

Hike prep finished with a drive from my home in Lysterfield in Melbourne, down to Gordon's place in Warragul, to do a drive up past Licola to place resupply barrels at about halfway. Food, water, gas, rechargers, fresh undies, drop-day celebratory items like orange juice and pineapple pieces and chunky soup-inna-can, that sort of thing. Duly waypointed on various GPS devices we camouflaged the drop barrels in garbage bags and hid them as best we could, and then abandoned them to the weather for the next week. I left wondering how the cheese would fare in the heat... it went fine, just a tiny spot of mould where it had been cut. Next time I'll get a smaller block and won't open it.

A few days later, along with my wife Jennifer, who was going to drive my car home, I drove down to Gordon's place again. Then along with his wife Heather, he and I drove up to Cobungra, near Omeo, to start the hike. Clearly, an important part of the undertaking was keeping in sweet with our spouses who did the car shuffling for us. Thanks, ladies.



Black Sallee Lake

### Whoa oh Black Sallee, wham da lam

#### Day 1: Cobungra to Black Sallee Lake, 8 km, 2 hrs

It was a short, pleasant walk from the Cobungra turn-off from the Omeo to Hotham road to the first campsite, along Victoria River Track. The lake was dark and gently misted when we got there, as the air had turned cold. We saw what we initially took for brumbies on the other side of the water, but it turned out they were riding horses, and we saw and heard people once in a while.

Getting water from the lake was a bit dicey as the edges were soft and it looked a little manky anyway. So I found the inlet stream which was flowing weakly and followed it upwards a bit to get to somewhere that looked better. I had to throw away the first water I got because I also found a dead deer leg just upstream from it, but then even further upstream I found better-flowing water anyway. I tried the Lifestraw filter bottle I'd brought to clean it up a bit, but it was way too slow. I got about 2 litres through it before my hands started cramping from squeezing it and deciding that this was silly, and just doped the

water up on iodine and/or chlorine pills. The filter bottle got put away and abandoned in a drop-barrel at halfway. I doubt I'll ever use it again, except maybe as a personal drink bottle, which is probably what it was designed for, to be fair.

### Road, him go up, him go down again

#### Day 2: Black Sallee to Lankey Plains Hut via King Spur Track, 17 km, 8 hrs

I've decided that a lot of the roads in this part of the bush must have been built by a primitive race that hadn't invented contouring. Either that, or some guy in a bulldozer had been instructed to minimise distance, tree-felling and rock cutting. We called him George, but learned later from the cold-water guy that his actual name was Aubrey. Many of the roads we encountered took the shortest path from A to B, and if that resulted in a 25% or more grade, well, too bad. Greater than 25% means it rises more than 1 m up for every 4m forward, which doesn't sound like much, but you try walking up it for a few kilometres in the heat! It's not as steep as a staircase, but it feels like one without treads! A bit of rain then turns it into a rockface in some

cases. If anyone knows why it was done this way, we'd love to know. It can't have been for logging trucks, it's too steep. Fire access, maybe? Kept open now for tourism?

In this case, on the track we came down on day 2 after a nice hike from Black Sallee, the road had been closed, reportedly because it was too steep and people kept dying on it when their cars rolled. It had revegetated somewhat, but it was a doozy, and I was too busy trying to stay upright to take a photo of it. To keep people in cars off, they felled logs and dug berms across it and generally turned it into something even 4x4 drivers would hesitate at and say, 'Whoa, now, let's have a think about this!', which takes some doing. It wasn't fun to walk down either. Here's what Parks had to say about it (found here: [Mayford Spur Track Via Dargo High Plains | 4x4Earth](#)): "The track from the Dargo River up to the Dinner Plain Track has now been shut for many decades and will not be re-opened. During its time open it posed many challenges for managers and due to grade was a safety risk. We utilised the road as a fire containment line during the 2003 fires and even then, it was risky for staff and contractors on machines."

You can get an idea what it was like from pictures in this link [Mayford - Mayfords Spur Track CLOSED \(4x4earth.com\)](#).

After a rest at the bottom of the closed Mayford Spur Track, we eschewed the usual path going on to Mayford Flats, and then up Treasure Spur as we were worried that the spur would be choked with regrowth. We chose to go up King Spur Track instead, which was obviously open because the 4x4s were roaring down from it. A few river crossings and a long hike up the road got us to Long Spur Track and then a flattish path alongside Devils Hollow. We were greeted by a number of the many car-campers ensconced there, one guy waving beer in the air. Tempting, but no. We wanted to finish the day. This eventually led us to Lankey Plain Hut, which was in the middle of a muddy moat, dug by thoughtless drivers and currently occupied, so we pushed past it and up onto a tussocky field for the night. After arguing with the ants we finally got the tent up. I tried some astrophotography on my Pixel



We camped on this tussocky paddock, not far from the nice water

5 after dinner to see if I could get the dead trees starkly outlined against the Milky Way. Useless camera app interface defeated me, not for the last time.

### **Timber!**

#### **Day 3: Lankey Plain Hut to 25 Mile Creek via White Timber Spur South Track, 20 km, 9 hrs**

Down Dargo High Plains Road a little and then off into tussocky plains to find a boundary fence which we followed until it got us to White Timber Spur North Track. The tussocks were a complete pain and made for slow going. The road and fence were such that we actually went some way along the fence more than we needed to, before doing a hairpin turn on the road and coming back. We were looking for the turnoff, but it was bit too low down for us to see.

Then down that track to Ritchie Road and over it to White Timber Spur South Track. It was a hot day and my feet were killing me already. I was really glad to see the end

of the road but then we had to descend a really steep single-track, which zig-zagged down through the bush to 25 Mile Creek. Even though some of the zags were pretty precipitous, it would have been a nice section, except it was at the dirty end of the day. Then across the creek to a tiny campsite, just barely big enough for our tent. Baths in the creek followed to wash the trail dust away. No nudie photos. I do have some sense of good taste.

### Here be dragons

This big water dragon I didn't even have to sneak up on. After making soup, I sat down exhausted on a nice rock to rest my feet, and there he was, only a coupla metres away. It even stayed still long enough for me to get the camera out and snap a few shots. That's star quality that is.

### Blackberries, benching and Bulltown Spur Day 4: 25 Mile Creek to Bulltown Spur, 13 km, 8 hrs

Parts of the track on the next day's first section had nice stonework holding it up and making for a good benched track. We did have to carve our way up out of the campsite through blackberry bushes to get going, but I managed to find a jewel in the brambles, a small raspberry with some tasty fruit on it. Yum. After all the bush-bashing to get to it that morning, this clear part of the track was delightful walking. This photo shows where it had probably been recently restored.

### Walk a crooked mile

On to Thirty Mile Creek and then to Crooked River, hiking on reasonably good tracks high above the river. No real crossings until we got to Bulltown Spur that evening. When we got to where we were planning to stay after fording the creek, there were a few blokes sitting at their cars and vans, playing gin rummy or something, and I bellied up to them and asked brusquely, "Are you blokes going to be partying noisily all night, or what?" They answered "No, certainly not" or similar, with affronted mien, to which I responded, "Bugger that then, I'm not staying here". After ensuing hilarity (wry grins, 'cos they were laconic Aussie blokes), one of them pointed out a nice grassy campsite a few hundred metres down the track. It was one of the better spots we camped at. Nice starscape, too.



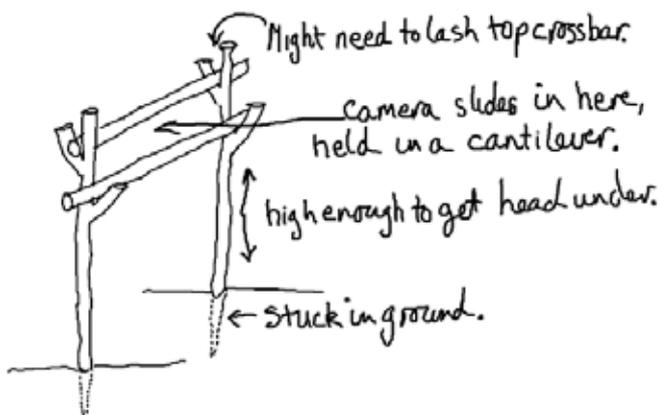
He was pretty chill



Nice work

## Astrophotography

I love the astrophotography feature on my Pixel 5 phone's camera app. Well, let me rephrase that. I love the results when I can get them, and I hate the user interface. Here's how I would describe the process: Open the camera app and select 'night vision'. Keep the camera very still in a dark place and magically it will decide to go into astro mode, which takes multiple images and 'stacks' them and does other automatic editing tweaks. Dare to move it whilst trying to press the 'take the bloody picture' button, and it'll drop out of astro mode back to single-shot and admonish you for not keeping still. Now imagine doing all that whilst the camera is pointing straight up. That's where the stars are, right? So, the screen with the button and the icon indicating astro mode is pointing straight down, which means that to see it, you have to have a tallish tripod (nope, left it behind, too heavy), or you've managed to balance the expensive phone/camera overhanging enough from a rock or log with enough room to get your head under it to see what's going on. Or you manage to use the timer feature and hope that it goes into astro mode and doesn't just take a single night-vision shot. All the while you are standing on your head in the dark, the mossies are sucking you dry, and you are freezing to death. Slight hyperbole there, it was actually fairly warm. The mossies were real though... Oh, and if you do manage to be lucky enough to start the photo in astro mode, it does it all silently, so you don't really know it has worked until you wait for three minutes and then pick it up and have a look. I ruined a couple of tries by picking it up early. Of course, it does tell you what's going on, but it's all on the screen you really can't see because the camera is on its back on a log!



I spent a good part of my walking time during that hike composing a scathing letter to the idiotic developers of that app asking why they couldn't just have a fixed astro mode instead of one that turns itself on and off! Also designing a makeshift 'tripod'. After I got home, I discovered that I could have pressed the volume button to take the photo, there's a setting in the camera app... That would have helped a bit. Anyway, here's my 'tripod' design. Yeah, yeah, only has two legs... You know what I mean, stop being pedantic. That's my job.

I have since learned that the best way to use the Astrophotography mode on the Pixel, if you don't have a tripod, is to face the camera down on the grass, pointing at the ground so you can see the screen. In the dark and not being jostled, it goes into astro mode and then you can press the 'go' button, flip the camera the right way up again and point it at the stars. It seems to work well. Maybe even use the shutter delay feature, though it doesn't seem to care.

The photo on the next page was taken at our campsite near the Bulltown Spur on Crooked River at the end of day 4. I managed to 'paint' the trees with my torch just at the right time to get them lit up in the photo. This was a matter of luck. It doesn't spend all its time acquiring, so a brief flash might get missed. There is some blurring on the leaves, but who cares. It's a marvellously starlit image from such relatively unsuitable camera hardware (small lens, small sensor, low exposure time) without needing a tracking mount, thanks to the 'stacking' methodology and other tweaks. Google 'astrophotography on Pixel' to find out more. Pity about the useless user interface, but now that I know better, I'll use my 'facedown' trick, or I'll take a superlight tripod next time.- Or a phone holder I can clamp to a hiking pole, a tree or something. Maybe one with a Bluetooth shutter trigger. K Mart has one for \$25 with said accessory. I got one a few weeks later and it does the job. It is light, has a good smartphone adapter that works with my thickly armoured Pixel, and the Bluetooth trigger just works. Nice.

### Why did the hiker cross the river?

**Day 5: Bulltown Spur to Eaglevale Camping Area, 17 km, 8 hrs**

In the section down the Crooked River on day 5 there were 23 fords to cross. It was a hot day, and the rush of the cool but not cold water wasn't too challenging most of the time. It was fun. I did have to watch out for 4x4s coming thundering over the banks and running us over though. Gordon was halfway across when one pair of cars came through, but they slowed down and didn't swamp him. At another crossing, I had to hold onto a lively young pitbull puppy that had come wagging across the track to greet us, just as a convoy came recklessly splashing across the ford. Doggie wanted to run back to his boss, right under the wheels of the cruisers, didn't he? I barely managed to hold him and didn't get bitten even once.

I could usually tell how high the water was by sending Gordon first and checking the pitch of his voice. When it reached soprano, I knew it was too deep.

### A plum spot

Talbotville made a nice lunch spot on day 5 after all the river crossings in the morning. There was a big open parkland with lots of people having a good time. We found a delightfully shady place in an old orchard that had ripe plums to eat, but unfortunately unripe pears and figs for us to only contemplate. The plums were delicious. I've often come across fruit trees at old settlements and this was the first time they've been ripe. If only Bloody Baron Von Mueller ([Introduced plants | Ergo \(slv.vic.gov.au\)](#)) had thought to send out packets of apple seeds instead of blackberries to be sown in the wild, things might have been much better.

### Oh, the horror!

After our restful lunch, we metaphorically girded our loins (how exactly do you do that?), and then we had to toddle along Brewery Creek Road for a bit to then divert off onto a short section of the Bicentennial Trail that coincides with McMillans Track. We bashed through insane blackberry and bush regrowth down to the Wongungarra River to get from Talbotville to Station Track. Yuck!



Then there came the horror of Station Track, which was another of those 'straight up to the top' roads, but with added spice of a very hot day and very little shade. We must have looked in dire straits as we struggled up it from tree shadow to shadow. A convoy of 4x4s came down and the lead one stopped to offer us some water. When finally we made it up and recovered, it was down from the Cynthia Range Track almost to the Wonnangatta River. We walked along a private fence through horrible long grass to the suspension bridge, and then into a nice open flat, accompanied by 'doof doof' music from the car-campers. This is when the 'cold-water guy' that inspired me to perpetrate this blog came over and had a chat.

I tried again to do some astrophotography that night, but the useless interface defeated me. It would only have been boring stars without any landscape anyway. Pah!

### **Moroka River, hunting thundereggs**

#### **Day 6: Eaglevale Camping Area to Carey Creek**

**13 km, 7 hrs**

Day 6 found us going up the Moroka Junction Track (road) until it abruptly stopped being a road and turned into a walking track. We

rested there for lunch and were amused by the 4x4 drivers that roared in, had a look and then roared out again.

After lunch we tried to walk alongside the Moroka River, but failed to have a lot of fun. The track was indistinct and there was plenty of bush to push through. We found it a lot easier to go down to the river and either wade up it or better, walk on the pebble shingles. This is where I first realised that gaiters and rushing currents were not a good combo.

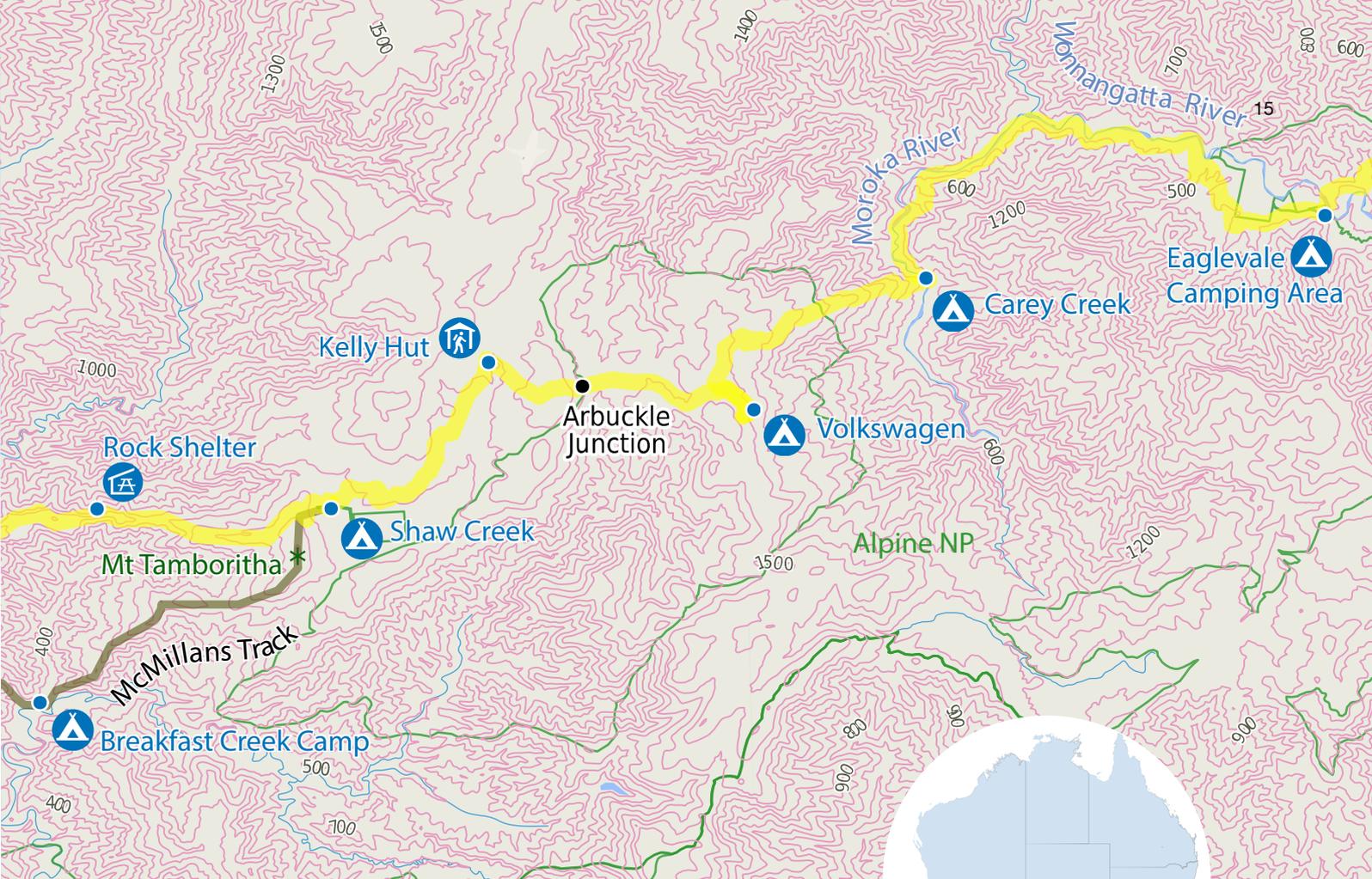
#### **Rollin' stones**

I knew from notations on the maps that thundereggs (geodes) could be found around here and I kept my eyes open as we waded up river, possibly accounting for how slowly we made progress. We didn't find any conventional ones, but did find some unusual opaque, white, egg-shaped pebbles, possibly river-tumbled amorphous quartz or quartzite. They had what looked like a web of harder, probably quartz veins embedded in them and slightly raised on the surface in a polygonal pattern.

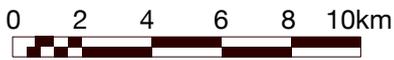
Using 'lens' image search on the phone, the best hits I got were for geodes, but none of the returned hits had that polygonal 'web',



Rocks in Moroka River



## McMillans Track, part 2



- 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

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- Start of the walk
- Hut
- Shelter
- Campsite
- Toilet
- Parking



Wading up the Moroka River

so I am still puzzled. My guess is that they were formed by hot fluids depositing the veins within a slightly softer matrix of quartz or quartzite. Then tumbled in rivers for millions of years.



I shall call them dragon-eggs until I get a better classification

### Shelob and her spawn (caution, upcoming arachnid images)

At the campsite for day 6 at the confluence of Carey Creek and Moroka River, I sat down with a tree at my back. I had a much needed coffee and happened to glance down and find a silken tube about 4 cm across, sticking up dangerously near my groinal area. Rather than mindlessly panic (which I really should have, but I needed that coffee. It'd been a hard day), I finished my coffee, and then, after wisely retreating a bit, I tickled the edge of the nest with a stalk of grass to see who was home. The big maybe-female-mouse-spider critter that came thundering out covered in spiderlings, I called her Shelob. After teasing her out of her nest I relented and left her alone. Poor thing, all those kids constantly on her back and with a wandering spouse, she didn't need people knocking on the front door all the time.

Here's [the video](#) of Shelob attacking my grass. I'd put my hand down there for scale, but no, I'm not going to do that. Don't play it if spiders scare you. Oh, too late... Also, the video is part real-time, part slow-mo, just for kicks. You can tell which is which when the birdsong goes all 'bwahh, bwahh...'



Hey Mama. What big fangs you have, and those evil glowing eyes!

### Drop barrel day!

#### Day 7: Carey Creek to Volkswagen 16 km, 8 hrs

Day 7 was drop barrel day and we really had to earn it. We started well with a wander up the Moroka River, but then we decided to bypass Playboy Creek and the dubious 'interesting' bit up a possibly poorly defined D4 Track. We climbed up the Moroka River Track to meet Doolans Plains Road and then a bit back down Moroka Road to Volkswagen instead. It's named after a long-removed junk vehicle. That climb was a nightmare for my poor feet, but we got it done and then we could celebrate with some orange juice and some lovely chunky soup in addition to the usual freeze-dried Lamb Roast with Vegetables (or whatever), followed by juicy pineapple pieces. And I changed my boots. I love drop barrel day!



Mmmmm, drop-day goodies

### Remember the log?

#### Day 8: Volkswagen to Shaw Creek

18 km, 8 hrs

From Volkswagen, we marched up through Arbuckle Junction the next day and then over Mt Arbuckle, had lunch at Kelly Hut. It was unattractive on the inside, so we sat on a nearby log, and this morning was some of the nicest walking we did. Maybe the drop-day celebratory feast helped. Gordon reminded me that we'd been here before when we went skiing on Mt Reynard a few years back. I remembered the log.

Then on toward Shaw Creek. We had a chat on the road with another 4x4 driver who expressed some interest in the McMillans Track, despite his little girl urging him to "let's go Daddy, stop talking to those weird men". Then into the campsite, where we found a few car-campers sitting around and one of them trying to catch fish. We camped a bit away from them on a tussocky hill and hoped that they didn't decide to shoot at the deer that was bugling nearby in the middle of the night.

### Petticoat junction

#### Day 9: Shaw Creek to Long Hill,

14 km, 7 hrs

We decided to 'skirt' the part of the McMillans Track that went via Mt Tamboritha and Breakfast Creek in favour of going around via Long Hill and Mt Ligar (The Crinoline). Gordon

didn't like the Breakfast Creek route (long and boring) the last time he did it, and besides, this gave us a chance to summit on Ligar and take in the views. Hah!

On the way, we stopped for lunch at the Rock Shelter. A nice spot with good shade on a hot day. Actually, it was almost cold, but that was a welcome relief.

We were lucky to get this vista of Mt Ligar (The Crinoline) on day 8 from Long Hill, because the next day, when we climbed it, it was all misty and we could see nothing. D'you reckon it looks like a lady's petticoat? Well, actually, see some of the images in [Death by Crinoline? - Molly Brown House Museum](#).

When I went back to the area a couple of weeks later to retrieve the drop barrels, I climbed the Crinoline from the other side, starting at Breakfast Creek. I wrote it up separately, so if you are interested in what the view should have looked like, look for it here: [terrycornall.wixsite.com/website/post/petticoats-in-a-twist-on-the-crinoline](http://terrycornall.wixsite.com/website/post/petticoats-in-a-twist-on-the-crinoline).

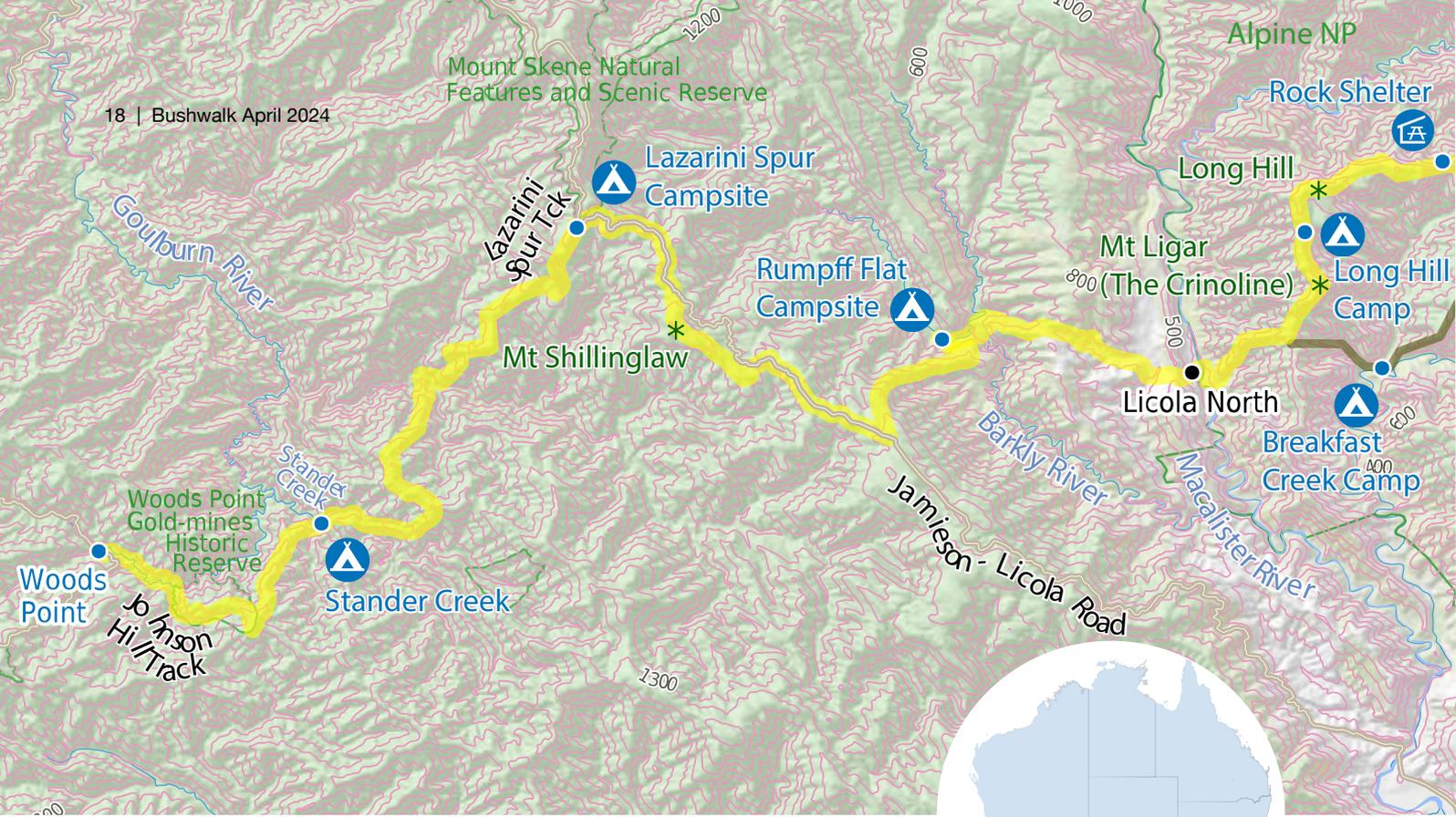
After Rock Shelter we had an issue with the path going invisible, and eventually we just followed the rim around to the campsite. Getting water wasn't fun because although there was a blazed tree showing where to go to get it, the path faded to nothing after a



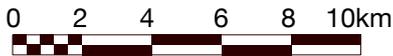
Rock Shelter - a welcome shade, but that block there looks a little loose, d'you think?



Does this look like a ladies petticoat to you?



### McMillans Track, part 3



- Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)
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Terry wondering which excess baggage to leave in the drop barrels

few hundred metres, and I just had to keep heading east, pushing through the bush until I got wet feet to find it. Nice water though. Cool on the toesies.

### **Misty Mountains**

#### **Day 10: Long Hill to Rumpffs Flat Campsite, 17 km, 8 hrs**

Day 10, and from the camp on Long Hill we went up Mt Ligar in the mist after a bit of a bash through wet bush. We had the morning bath at the same time. Getting to the summit wasn't hard, even though we couldn't see much. Once we got across the narrow ridge that joins Long Hill to Ligar, the bands of rocks that give it the Crinoline monicker make nice terraces, with a bit of a scramble to get up between them in a number of places. The difficult bit was working out what path to take to get from band of rock to band of rock. Gordon did a great job of pathfinding and we didn't waste a lot of time searching for these transitions. In places, the path goes up slopes of gravelly rock that slips under your feet, and some short climbs are required. It's not terribly exposed, or shouldn't be if you are taking a good path. There are good steps and handholds, and occasionally making use of some handy vegetable handholds helped.

There's a nice copse of trees on the summit of Ligar that would make a reasonable campsite if the winds weren't too strong. From there,



Hmm, the path is around here somewhere

following a fairly well-formed path along the ridge down the southwest side gets you to a junction with McMillans Track again. This path is nicely zig-zagged and not crazy steep anywhere. Another little rock down-climb is needed, but it's easy. Do be careful though. I make light of the difficulty, but in a number of places on Ligar, a slip would result in a painful and possibly dangerous tumble. Just take it thoughtfully as you go.

Then down to the Macalister River, and after a pause under the porch of a farmer's caravan/hunting-hut/retreat overlooking the river, we went up the long dull, soggy Glencairn Road to Middle Ridge Road and then to Rumpfffffs, Flat, or however you stop spelling it. A couple of 4x4 drivers asked us if we were OK on the way past but didn't offer us a lift. We would probably have said 'no thanks' anyway,—at least the first time.

### **A maze of twisty little passages, all alike**

#### **Day 11: Rumpffs Flat Campsite to Lazarini Spur via Mt Shillinglaw, 20 km, 9 hrs**

The next morning we endured a long, steep climb out of Rumpffs Flat along McMillan Spur Track to get to the Jamieson-Licola Road, and then we were almost back on familiar territory for me, as the AAWT intersects McMillans Track near here. I still have post-traumatic flashbacks about hauling our drop-day barrels and water over the Rumpff Saddle on that particular trip. (Bad planning to leave drop barrels too far from camp, and the Barkly River Jeep Track there is a perfect example of why you don't make roads so steep that they erode away to rockfaces. Besides, it turns out that there is a perfectly good drivable Barkly River Logging Road that could have gotten us all the way to the camp to leave barrels there, if only we had known. Anyway, on this trip we didn't go so far up the Jamesion-Licola Road, turning off to go to Mt Shillinglaw and then camp at Lazarini Spur instead.)

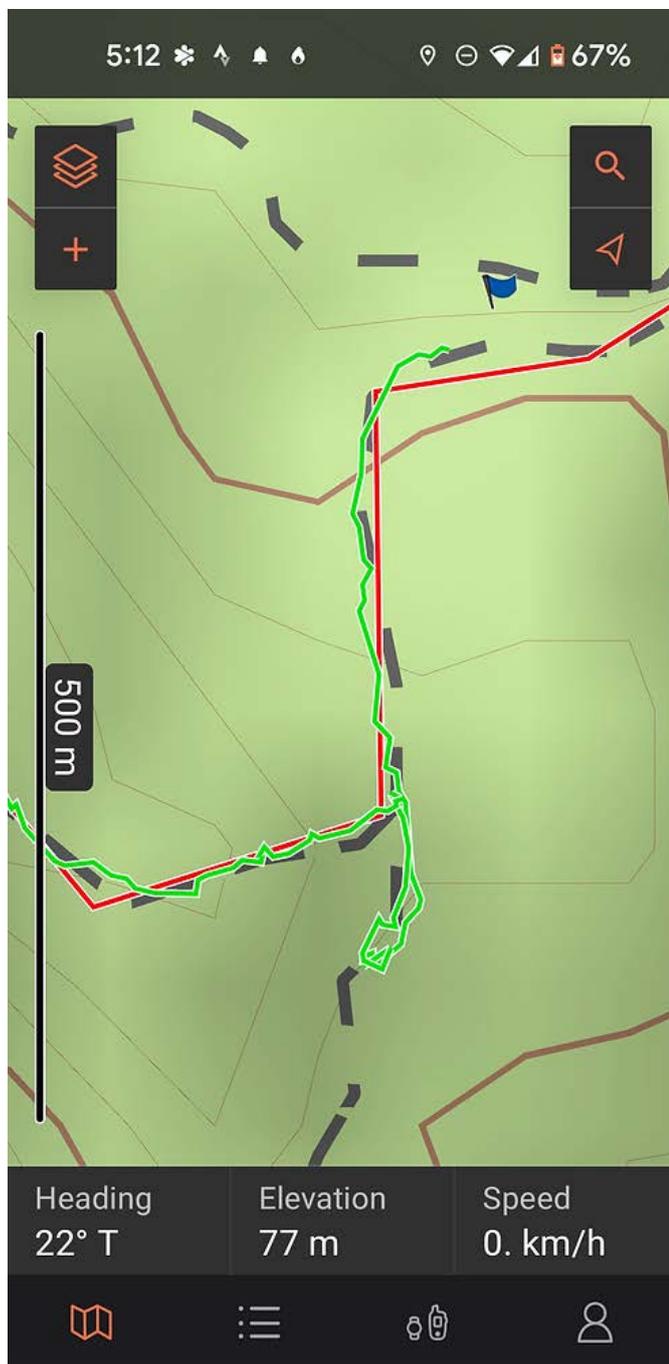
For some reason I don't have photos of them, but on this day, we traversed bush tracks like the imaginatively named No 18 Track that is maintained apparently by driving down it in a golf-buggy sized vehicle with whirling blades all around it. They were like green tunnels cut through the living bush, and apart from some

fallen logs and sapling stumps to live things up, they were easy walking. We did get so engrossed in whacking blackberries on one section that we missed a turn-off, but that only cost us a few hundred metres and some embarrassment.

I did get yet another fine photo of my favourite stinkhorn, *Aseroe rubra* somewhere in that section, too.

We got water before the camp at Lazarini Spur by going down a small track that went past a couple of caravans, apparently lodgings

for weed-spraying contractors. I hope that they were there to get the damn blackberries. There was good water there, but also a LOT



Shouldn't we have reached that turn off by now?



Stinkhorn

of leeches, and we were lucky to get away without getting sucked dry. That evening, when choosing a tent site, we were repelled from the best choice by an ants' nest. Gordon found an alternative, saying 'this looks ok, a bit soggy, probably why there aren't any ants here'. It rained that night and guess what happened... Yup, we discovered whether the tent could float. Fortunately, it could.

**Welcome to Tombstone, population you**  
**Day 12: Lazarini Spur to Stander Creek,**  
**18 km, 9 hrs**

From Lazarini Spur we went down to Black River and up again the next day. I vaguely remember some nasty 'short steep' bits and a bit of scrambling, but don't recall it being too horrible. I must have blanked it out, because Gordon reminded me again about the short, overgrown but steep bit out of the Black River. Look at these two consecutive track elevation profiles. What do you think? Nasty? Well,

almost every day looked a bit like this, so no wonder it has all blurred in my memory. Toss in blackberries and regrowth, and it becomes the stuff of PTSD.

Oh, and there were leeches waiting for us at the bottom, around Black River. I unknowingly picked one up inside my gaiters despite

vigilance and didn't find it until later after we'd climbed all the way out. It didn't survive the experience.

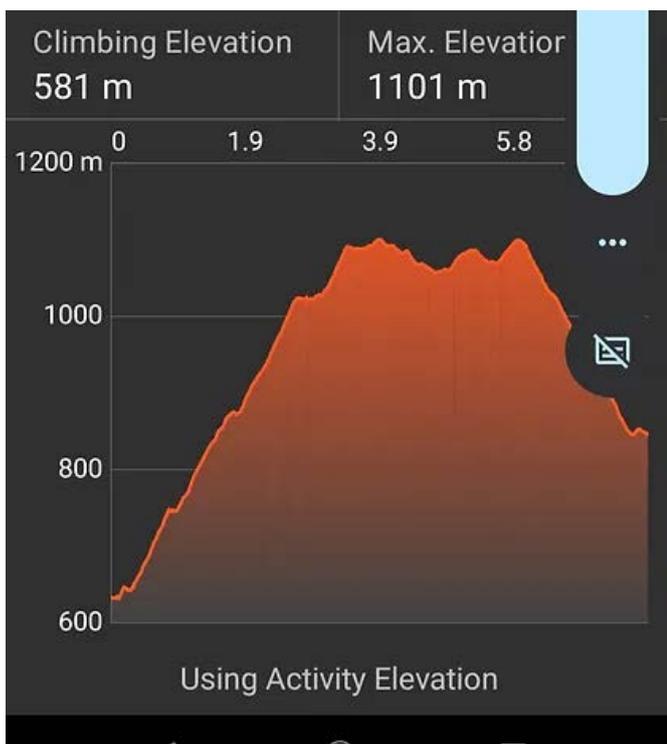
After the brutal scramble out of Black River and dealing with that impertinent bloodsucking hitch-hiker, we were sitting under some Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) trees, all of which were unfortunately bare of fruit. Except for one that improbably had just two of its tiny little red inside-out fruity goodies that caught my eye. They were tasty, but that was all there was. I didn't share this slim bounty, which earned me a glare from Gordon.

On another cheerful note, I took this photo on day 12 somewhere between Lazarini Spur and Stander Creek where all these tombstones were poking up out of the ground. Spooky.

Although they look it, these bits of rounded sticky-uppy rock are not man-made, but rather something like a metamorphic mica-rich schist that has been tilted up and weathered. There was a whole graveyard of them. I could make a pun about a pile of old schist, but that wouldn't be gneiss....



Let's go down to the river



Going up!



Here lies Fred. Climbed this hill and now he's dead

Then we came across this old ore crusher just before crossing the freezing Stander Creek at the end of the day's walking.

However, this was one campsite distinctly over-endowed with verticality and somewhat lacking in horizontality. This was night 12



Leichardt Gold Battery ore crusher at Stander's Creek.  
How on earth did they get it in?  
The tracks are really steep.

at Stander Creek. Hah, standing room only creek... The only spot that looked at all possible for the tent was a narrow terrace, a relic of gold mining activity. We looked up and down the track for alternatives, even going to the point of walking further up the steep track to see if it topped out onto something usable. Nope. So back we went to this site and got paleolithic on its grass. I.e. we dug it up and extended it, using flat pieces of rock as shovels, some flakes of slate that happened to be handy. After half an hour's grunt work we had a platform that might do, but it meant one side door was unusable and that the tent roof on that side was a bit wonky, but we decided to leave it at that. It was at least level on the floor, kinda. Well not really, I had to wodge clothes and stuff under my sleeping

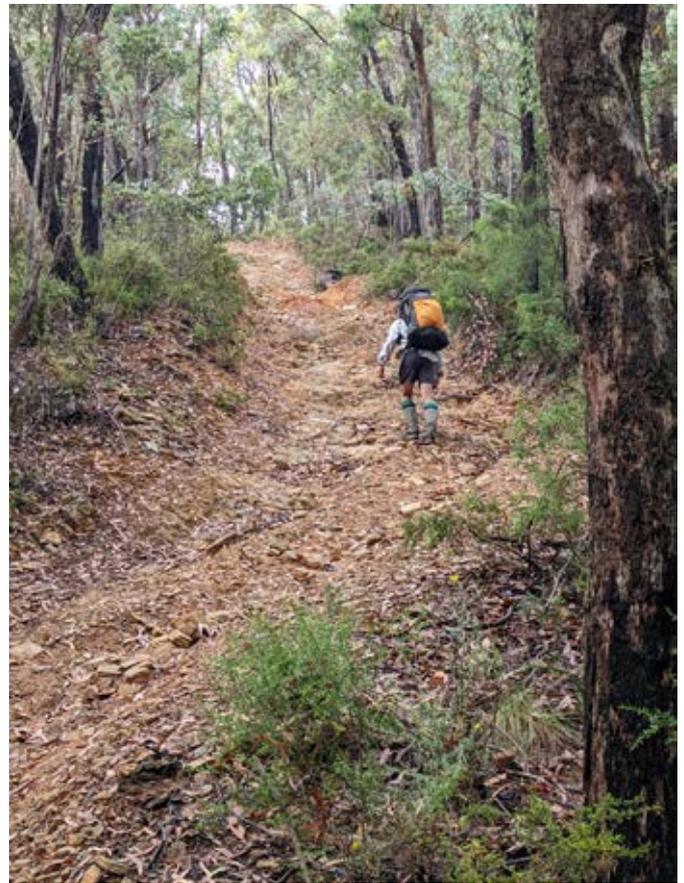


Only slightly wonky...

mat to stop myself from pushing Gordon out his side of the tent. It rained that night and a big pool of water gathered in the tent fly. We were lucky though that it didn't rain too much and we didn't get inundated.

**Oh, you take the high road**  
**Day 13: Last day!**  
**Stander Creek to Woods Point,**  
**10 km, 4 hrs**

The last leg of our trip on day 13 was up the monstrous slope of the Abbott Creek Track out of Stander Creek and then along a flattish bit until we got to Johnson Hill.



Yep, I was so impressed with this bit that I walked up and down it twice

Then along the Johnson Hill Track and then the Goulburn River into Woods Point. At one place we chose to take the road above the creek. Looking down to the valley flats showed another road that crossed the river a few times. It looked quite attractive and we wondered if it might have been better.

At this point, at an old reconstructed miner's hut just before Comet Flat outside of Woods Point, we read Chapman's notes and got quite confused by them. Eventually we worked out what he was trying to say, though some of his comments didn't make sense to us at the time. Looking back at the notes now, they seem perfectly straightforward. We must have been brain-fogged by the thought of almost being finished... Nonetheless, we took his advice about keeping to the right on the road climbing above the river. It merely meant that we could follow a road above the Goulburn River and keep our feet dry. Going the low route meant a few more creek crossings, which wouldn't have been terrible.

### I'm not a celebrity, but get me out of here anyway

Once the hike was done, we needed a retrieval. Gordon's son James did us the favour of coming up to Woods Point to get us, and then regaled us with stories of being a ski bum in Japan. So jealous.

And that's it, apart from going back to retrieve the drop barrels one day real soon before everything in them goes mouldy. I'll wait for some good weather though, and summit Ligar again, and see if I can get some good photos this time.

Like I said above, I'm glad I did it. I had fun on some bits, hated others and wouldn't do it again in its entirety for a great big clock. Life's too short. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a nice little 28 km trail run down on the Mornington Peninsula to prepare for. Bye for now. Terry.

The original article can be found on [Terry's blog](#).



Hmm, ambulance eh? Maybe... And I have to remember to get more photos of me on these trips. Can't let Gordon hog all the limelight.



Terry was caught up in mountain pursuits as a teenager, involved with the Shepparton High School Mountaineering Club under the stern eye and rigorous tutelage of Don Moore. That's where he met Gordon. They did numerous hikes and camps in the snow, culminating with a trip to NZ to climb Mt Cook via Zurbriggen's Route at the tender age of 16. Between university, marriage, jobs, raising a family and retirement, he managed to stay in touch with Gordon, and they regularly did a hike or ski-tour every year if they could. Over a few summers starting in 2016 they hiked the AAWT together, a few hundred kilometers at a time. Since retirement, his focus has been on trail running, and he recently tried (but failed at the 140 km mark due to broken running poles, broken body and severely dented spirit) to complete a 160 km run in the Grampians. He swore never to do that event again, so naturally, he just signed up for the 2024 event to try again.

# Walls of Jerusalem End to End

Text and photos  
**Rob Wildman**

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Walkers: Rob Wildman (leader), Chris Smith, Laura Ruiz Espinosa and Peter Laffan

Transport: Kirsten Baker and the old Nissan

Dates: 2-9 February 2024 inclusive

As the plane wiggled and jostled on its descent to Launceston airport, fighting with a strong westerly, I still remained optimistic of being able to do our walk in the Frankland Range. We were met by our fifth member of the group, Kirsten, who had pulled out of the walk with hip issues, but had decided to become our local transport to the start and the pick up at the end. We were ever so grateful of this generous offer and thought it would be a simple affair of one drop and one pickup; not so.



Old directions sign, Dixons Kingdom



Frankland Range

**D**espite the persistent wind, the clouds had parted and we saw blue skies everywhere. But then we were still in the northern part of Tasmania and we knew this was not a reliable indication of the southern part, with its bruising westerly storms which come in at a moment's notice.

As we approached the summit of the range which leads into the valley containing Lake Pedder, three and a half hours after leaving Launceston, the first flurries of rain started. Approaching Strathgordon on the eastern side of the lake - the main town for supporting all the hydro dams in the area - we decided to pull into a small national park layover on the shore of the lake, Teds Beach. This had a shelter shed and, amazingly, dozens of big vans, either glued to the back of 4WDs or on trailers, and they had the same idea as us in hiding from the terrible weather.

We just looked at the range we were intending to climb on the other side of the lake; totally covered in cloud and a howling gale now rushing down the valley and thumping into our little shelter. We were worried but

optimistic – aren't we all when faced with mounting evidence that what you are about to undertake is, basically, just plain wrong.

The next morning's conference, with everyone standing around with glum faces, confirmed what we had all individually concluded. After calling some friends who were local bushwalkers, we piled into the transport and headed four hours north. So yes, we had a plan B, officer! We were now on our way to the start of Higgs Track which is just 28 kilometres from Deloraine. There wasn't a feeling of disappointment like I expected, as we just wanted a decent walk, and it really didn't matter where it was. Even though we had allowed an extra two days for bad weather, the forecast on the Frankland Range had predicted high winds, cloud and in a couple of days, a complete dump of rain.

“

We were now on our way to the start of Higgs Track which is just 28 kilometres from Deloraine.

### Day 1: Higgs Track to Lady Lake Hut, 3 km, 1.5 hours

The ascent to the top of the Western Tiers on the Higgs Track is the complete opposite of what we were experiencing in the south west. The forest we glided through was serene, a brook completing the almost fairy tale scene; moss-covered rainforest intermingling with pines and gums at lower levels and a pleasant, warm envelope of a track to follow to the top. At the top of this climb the forest disappears and you break through onto a small boggy flat which contains Lady Lake. A short walk from the top and you are standing in front of one of the most picturesque huts I've ever seen. It has all the right proportions, nestled in under the thick scrub which climbs with the hill behind it. The hut even has a little water tank – so convenient! We arrived early and decided this was a nice reward for us enduring a four hour drive to the Franklands and another four hours to Higgs Track, traversing the country from north to south and back. We had to thank our driver, Kirsten, for making such a huge effort though.

The hut faces a carpeted low valley with a stream dawdling through it. After following it for a hundred metres, the small creek immediately drops down cliff faces and finally into the pastoralised open plains behind Deloraine.



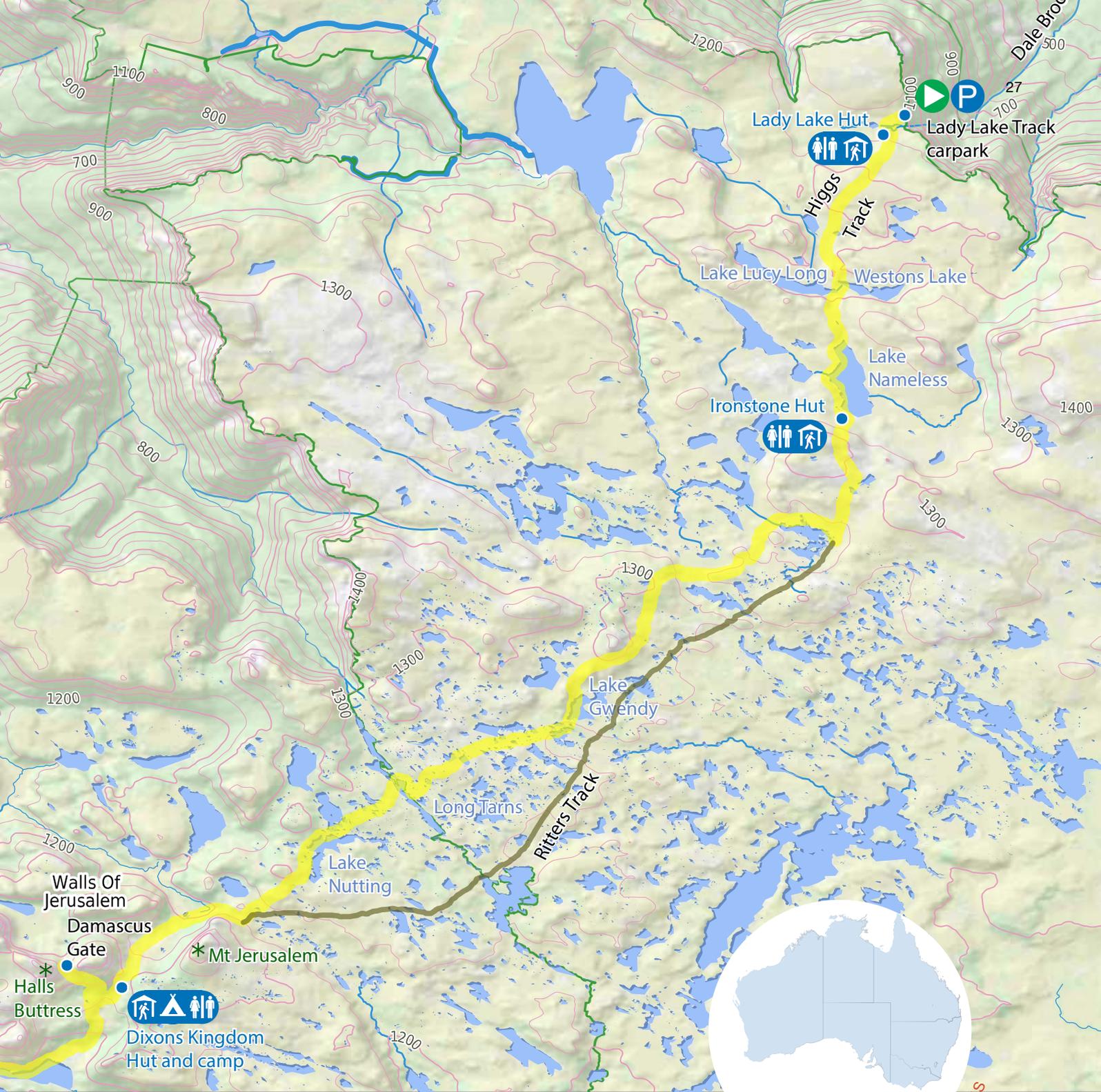
Looking east from Lady Lake Hut



Rob, Laura, Peter and Chris



Lady Lake Hut



### Walls of Jerusalem walk, part 1



-  Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)
-  Main track, side trip, alternative route
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-  Start of the walk
-  Hut
-  Campsite
-  Toilet
-  Parking

**Day 2:**  
**Lady Lake Hut to 7 km past Ironstone Hut,  
14 km, 7.5 hours**

Having had a great night's sleep on the included cushioned mattresses (wow!), we then started into our eight day adventure; following the Higgs Track over the first long hill, past Westons Lake (with a great campsite) and then passing through a tight valley into the area which contained Lake Nameless and Ironstone Hut, arriving there in time for lunch. There was still a very cool breeze coming in from the west so we tucked down into the sunny eastern wall.

According to Chapman, the next 15 kilometres are "poorly cairned" and we were expecting to spend at least two nights on the plains. The whole area is a former glacial plain in which thousands of lakes have been left in all the oddest of places. The route we were trying to follow was based on Ritters Track, named after a cattle owner who led his herd this way every year to the green pastures of the Walls of Jerusalem (WOJ). Peter had actually walked this route some five or six years earlier so we felt confident – dare I say it, a bit cocky – about finding the route.

So I sent Peter ahead and we immediately took the wrong set of cairns – a route had been established which led straight up to the summit of Forty Lakes Peak behind the hut.



Morning at Lady Lake Hut



Camp spot on Westons Lake



On Higgs Track near Lady Lake Hut



Old Pencil Pine by Westons Lake



Breaking camp on day 3

“Pete, shouldn’t we be going around the hill and not over it?” I queried. Obviously not wanting to backtrack – who ever wants to backtrack? - we drove on and headed down over the other side toward where we thought the cairned route would have taken us. And success! Bolstered now with a sign of where we should have been, we continued to pick off cairn after cairn as it casually followed a gentle sloping creek towards the end of the first big lake. There was even a set of cairns placed on two big rocks together like guiding harbour lights for a ship.

When we got to the other side of the lake still heading south, I recalled Chapman’s warning: “beware another cairned route which heads south to Pillans Lake”. Were we on this instead of the Ritters Track? We had no idea so, reluctantly, we reverted to using the GPS to bring us back in line with a drawn route which basically went south-west all the way to Zion Gate under Mount Jerusalem. This would have to be our guide and we would surely come across some cairns as we went, wouldn’t we?

So the slog began. Up little hills with almost impenetrable scrub and around boggy swamps with small tarns, all the while trying to see the mythical cairns. After several hours, we climbed a long, open hill to give us relief

from the scrub around the watered areas. In the distance we saw ... another hill. But in between lay a most tranquil small tarn with amazingly some adjacent cleared and grassed areas. This was very rare in this country. By now energy was low and it was getting on to about 4.30 pm so we pitched our first night’s camp, soaked our toes in the cool water, prepared the mushroom risotto for dinner and collapsed into a warm tent – even before the daylight was gone!

**Day 3:**  
**7 km past Ironstone Hut to Central Plateau,**  
**10 km, 7 hours**

Climbing the small hills on this route brought some genuine surprises; as we crested what we thought was the summit, another small tarn would appear. This phenomenon was repeated all through this intriguing country. So many places where the water remained meant that these little lakes didn’t drain at all but maintained their level, probably even through summer as well.

At some point we dropped down to the shore of a named lake, Lake Gwendy. Not 50 metres from the shore was a conical built rock shelter which clearly was a lone fisherman’s shelter, now collapsing with age. These lakes are quite often occupied by keen fishing people bent on spending some time alone living off their

catch. The edge of Lake Gwendy came with a small enticing camping area and astoundingly, a walkable track around the shore – a contrast to what we had seen so far. But the pad disappeared soon after and we found ourselves passing through the picturesque Pencil Pine Tarn, stopping for lunch on the way.

Our next goal was a set of lakes called the Long Tarns. This was a low lying streak of water which went right across the plain – finding a crossing point would be interesting as it is nearly impossible to see a break in the water anywhere along it. We deviated from our intended route and ended up standing on a cliff top overlooking a water course which extended both left and right into the distance. There appeared to be a protruding piece of land which came close to the other side so we bashed our way toward it. Fortuitously, it led to a small gap separating the long lakes where we knew we were going to get wet feet. At one point Laura slipped, Pete grabbed her and then he started to slip so I grabbed him, all of us straining to avoid being dragged in, laughing as we collapsed together in a heap. This definitely wasn't Mr Ritter's route but it was fine by us all the same.

An hour later we were standing on a long ridge overlooking Lake Nutting, nearing the end of the off track section. In the distance



Chris overlooking Lake Gwendy



Lake Nutting



Chris, Peter and Laura resting just past Long Tarns



Tarn at camp spot on night 3

loomed the magnificent Mount Jerusalem, our destination. A large pencil pine forest occupied the western shore and for a long minute we contemplated charging down to the lake shore hoping that there would be an edge track and a possible camp area. Instead, we decided to stay the night nestled alongside a beautiful little tarn where we washed and made ourselves comfortable for the night.

**Day 4: Central Plateau to Lake Ball,  
12.6 km, 7 hours**

Enthusiastically, next morning we bounded down to the lake, our hopes all up for a swift stroll around the lake. The scrub started just as we entered the forest and got so thick at times we were just falling into it for some comic relief. Looking back at the GPS track we generated here looked like we must have been drunk with the weaving path, and it took some time before we dropped onto a high, flat and grassy section which spelled the end of the scrub.

The rest of the walk to Zion Gate, where we knew we would meet a track of sorts (from a previous walk of mine), was just up and over the last remaining knolls weaving through the sometimes thick vegetation. We had now made it through the whole Central Plateau without seeing a single cairn and we weren't going to start looking for them now.

The change in the landscape was now startling as we wandered down to the old Dixons Kingdom Hut through glades of grass and pencil pine, disturbing the first of four tiger snakes we saw on the walk. The authorities have, I think, rightly banned camping in this area now – when I was here several years before there were people everywhere. They have now built platforms for something like 25 tents complete with toilets and a camp kitchen (open top). The old walking track to Damascus Gate has now been diverted to pass through the new tent platform area, a little disappointing but understandable. Parks have taken an approach which restricts walkers in this area by insisting on booking the camp sites at the WOJ and at the same time providing what you would imagine to be enough camping facilities for big weekends.



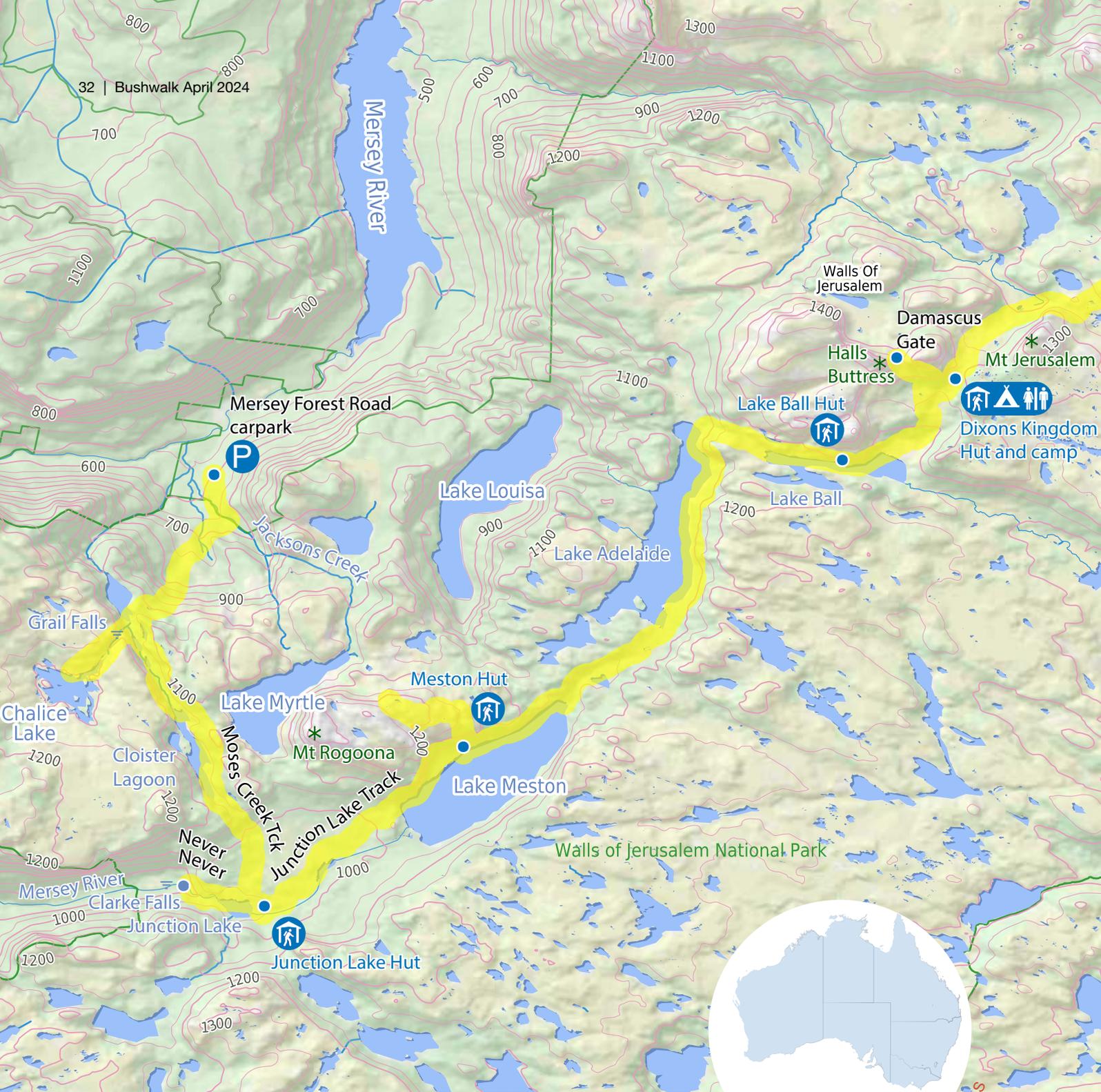
Dixons Kingdom Hut



Looking down toward Lake Salome  
from Damascus Gate



Dixons Kingdom



## Walls of Jerusalem walk, part 2



-  Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)
-  Main track, side trip, alternative route
-  Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (50 metre interval)
-  Lake, river, waterfall or creek

-  Start of the walk
-  Hut
-  Campsite
-  Toilet
-  Parking

We took up Peter's offer to mind the packs while the rest of us took an hour to head up to Damascus Gate and back, passing through the "little village" of tent platforms on the way. Damascus Gate is a special place in the Walls and it was important for the others to be able to peer down into the vale of lakes and tended fields for the first time.

We had no intention of staying here however, especially after our last two glorious overnight stops under the open skies on the plateau, and so headed down the new track to Lake Ball. Again, this new track has been necessary because the old track forced you to cross waterlogged plains and could get nasty. We didn't bother going all the way to Lake Ball Hut deep in the forest, and pitched instead on the small grassy knolls at the end of the button grass plains on the lake shore. A lone walker came hurtling through on his way to his booked site at Dixons; he was intent on completing the circular track in one weekend so he had places to go!

**Day 5: Lake Ball to Lake Meston,  
13 km, 6.5 hours**

Waking to frost and ice all over the tents and a low mist on the lake surface, confirming why it felt so cold in the night, we plodded our way down the track towards Lake Adelaide. Not having to think about navigation any more,



Looking back from the button grass meadow on Lake Ball to the Wailing Wall and Halls Buttress



Mist on Lake Ball

we just enjoyed the scenery on the route down; lots of fagus, which would have been something to see in a few months from now and skipping past Lake Ball Hut snuggled deep in the forest like a hand in a glove. Somehow, simply following a track and not finding it yourself seems to lose something in the experience – like a flat beer, tastes like the real thing but no fizz. You don't have to train your eyes to every detail of the landscape or the vegetation and it becomes more about time and kilometres covered than where you are right now.

Lake Adelaide edge track was longish and left us finally at the Lake Meston Hut, after having surveyed the camping spots at the south end of Lake Adelaide and the north end of Lake Meston, both excellent places to stay. Time enough for a wash and a chatty dinner on the comfortable furniture provided (logs).

**Day 6: Lake Meston to Junction Lake, 5.4 km, 2 hours**

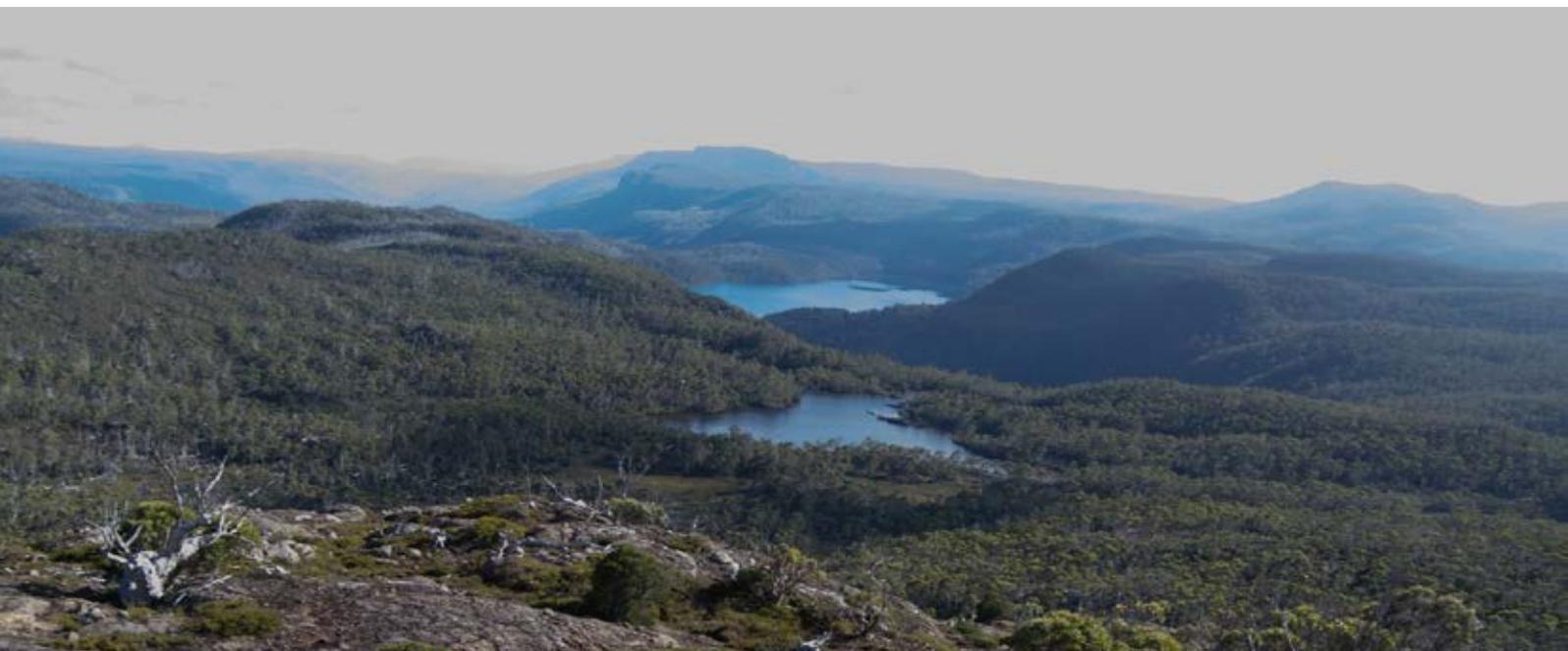
By now we were making plans to fill the last few days and we had all sorts of options available. As it was, we went on to climb Mount Rogoona for some fine views over the lakes to the north and somewhere out west was the Overland Track, and then pushed on to Junction Lake. On the way back from the climb we met a young guy who told us he was starving and hightailing it out to somewhere



Lake Meston Hut



Cascade below Clarke Falls



View from Mt Rogoona over Lake Poa and Lake Louisa

he could get a decent meal. I think his fishing net and rod were indicative of his desires for a naturally fuelled stay which didn't quite work out, sadly for him.

At Junction Lake, it was still early afternoon, so we did the loop down to the torrent that is Clarke Falls and back, touching the edges of the Never Never, and then over to the hermit-like Junction Lake Hut. This has to be one of the most beautiful huts in this whole area, hidden and mysterious, nestled just above the Mersey River, like something from a fairy tale. Entering it is like walking into a sacred place where history is oozing from the walls.

**Day 7: Junction Lake to Grail Falls,  
7.7 km, 3.5 hours**

The trail up to Grail Falls from Junction Lake is also very special, passing through grassy creek beds, mossy rainforest sections, open sclerophyll forests and yes, some bogs. When you have been taken a hundred metres above Cloister Lagoon and you then sidle the edge of a lovely high tarn, it makes this a marvellous and scenic path. Arriving at the falls, we scrambled up the short, sharp ascent to the top and then followed the gurgling alpine stream up to Chalice Lake – yes all



Cloister Lagoon



Peter, Chris and Laura on top of Grail Falls



Waterless tarn on Moses Creek Track

the geographical significant places have place names with a religious theme, including Convent Hill. Here I showed the others the tiny square of possible camping on the shore of Chalice Lake and we viewed the mountains around us: Cathedral Mount, Twin Spires and Bishop Peak before heading back for our last dinner at the foot of the falls.

### Day 8: Grail Falls to Moses Creek car park, 5 km, 3 hours

The final day involved a splendid stretch of Tasmanian forest from just after leaving Grail Falls to the picturesque Jacksons Creek, complete with large oyster fungus clinging doggedly to the pines along the route. You notice the drop in height here by the plethora of tree ferns which fall across the path like curtains to a stage. After crossing on the sturdy steel swing bridge over Jacksons Creek, you know you are almost there as the track turns into the old road and you finally reach the wash down station just on the edge of the turning circle at the end of the Mersey Valley road.

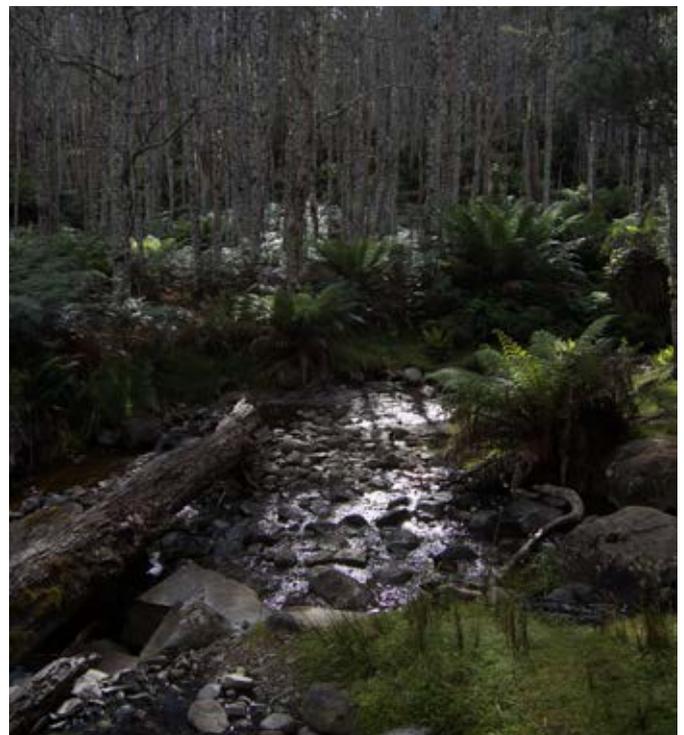
We had arranged to meet our lovely transport at this car park at noon and when we arrived an hour early, I offered to cook up my spare meal, Penang curry and rice, for all to enjoy or criticise. They were too embarrassed to complain.

It is so rare to be able to do a walk covering only 83 kilometres over eight and a half days and not have to retrace your steps. We'd all done some sections of this route at some time in the past, except Chris who had never been to Tasmania. But this was a special trip for her as this was my thanks to her for taking care of our shared mother over many years.

I would have to say that the open plains of the thousand lakes we covered in the first few days was quite special and a surprisingly enjoyable way into the Walls, with unexpected camp sites right next to crystal clear tarns. And while I have been through the Junction Lake area on previous occasions, it was rewarding to see the joy others got out of seeing it for the first time.



Rob and Chris



On Moses Creek Track



Celebratory dinner

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# News & Upcoming Events

## Sections of Kosciuszko National Park closed for feral animal control

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service will be conducting aerial shooting operations of horses, deer, pigs and other feral animals in Kosciuszko National Park (KNP). The operations require the closure of the area north of the Snowy Mountains Highway and east of the Goobarragandra Powerline Road to the KNP boundary between [Thursday 4 April and Friday 4 October 2024](#) inclusive (including the usual winter closure period from 10 June to 4 October, 2024).

## Grand Cliff Top Walk

A new walk was opened on 24 March 2024 in Blue Mountains National Park. This [19-kilometre-long walk](#) connects Wilson Park Picnic area and Scenic World. It is designed as a 2-day walk with an overnight stay in Leura, Wentworth Falls, or Katoomba. The cost of this project was \$10 million, funded by the NSW Government and executed by NPWS.

## Surf Coast Trek, VIC

**13 April 2024**

Join this challenging and rewarding [community event](#) and walk 40 kilometres from Aireys Inlet to Torquay or 26 kilometres from Anglesea to Torquay.

## WalkFest in Belair National Park, SA

**14 April 2024**

Discover bushwalking clubs and hiking opportunities in South Australia at this [hiking expo](#).

## Kokoda Challenge, QLD

**20-21 April 2024, Sunshine Coast**

**1-2 June 2024, Brisbane**

Australia's toughest team endurance event just got tougher. Besides their regular 18, 30 or 48 kilometre events they now organise a special pinnacle event.

## Great Aussie Hike, VIC

**26-27 April 2024**

The [Great Aussie Hike](#) is a team challenge where hikers can walk either the entire distance or just a section of it, allowing each member to choose how far they want to walk.

## Three peaks Challenge, ACT, NSW, VIC

**1-5 May 2024**

Help transform lives by [conquering three mountains](#) across three states in just three days.

## Coastrek, NSW and VIC

**3 May 2024, Sydney**

**24 May 2024, Mornington Peninsula**

The iconic hiking challenge is organised by [Wild Women On Top](#). Join this adventure with your group of friends and be charitable at the same time.

## The Bloody Long Walk, VIC, QLD

**19 May 2024, Melbourne**

**2 June 2024, Sunshine Coast and more**

Organised by the Mito Foundation, this 35 kilometre walk is an opportunity for your group to be charitable while having fun on track.

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# High Plains Kosciuszko Trip

Text and photos  
**Sonya Muhlsimmer**

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I had the absolute pleasure of spending a magical weekend at the Blue Waterholes with a few good folk recently. It was my commitment as a leader of the Upper Blue Mountains Bushwalking Club to lead a group in Kosciuszko National Park on an annual basis. I take a bunch of fearless people somewhere remote and show them some of my favourite areas in the park.



Blue Waterholes



Clarkes Gorge

The High Plains are a little less visited in comparison to the Main Range circuit. It is a little further away and more remote, along a very long dirt road and down a steep and somewhat rough track where a 4WD is recommended, as if you get some wet weather a 2WD may not be able to make it. There, at the end of the road, you will come to some pretty spectacular gorges.

I arrived at the Blue Waterholes in the early afternoon, not long after a couple of people in my group turned up and slowly, one by one, the rest of the group arrived for the night. I was expecting one more person, but she was coming in the morning. We all pitched our tents and some organised their camper trailer, got the fire going, cooked dinner, then we all enjoyed the fire until it was time for bed. It was good getting there on a Thursday, as not many people were around.

The last group member turned up around 10am the next morning and we were off to explore Clarkes Gorge. The walk starts at the

campground and follows Cave Creek, walking along the towering and narrow limestone cliffs till you reach Coleman Falls. Clarkes Gorge was cut by Cave Creek and apparently the rock features and many caves along the way were formed more than 400 million years ago. So, as you can imagine, the walk down the gorge has many creek crossings. I lost count of the amount of time we crossed to the other side, only for the ground to run out due to the cliffs and to cross back over. It was wet feet all day. Once we reached the waterfall, it was time for a break to take it all in. I went on ahead to see if we could go a bit further, but I could not find an easy way down so I decided not to continue. For the more adventurous hikers, you can continue this walk to the junction of Cave Creek and the Goodradigbee River, but we just stopped at the waterfalls. The 15-metre waterfalls were impressive enough. After a break we scrambled back up the side of the falls, crossed the river and explored Fish River Caves, a small but interesting cave, then we continued back to camp.

After reaching camp I spoke to some fellow campers and they gave me a hint that at the top of the hill was where we could see some wild brumbies. They said they saw a few hundred at least. A few of us decided to explore while others stayed back for a rest and a bit of a swim. From the campground, a fire trail was followed uphill for just under 3 kilometres. There the bush disappeared and the high plains opened up. A couple of people in my group went searching for the brumbies on a side track, through some bush, and they were in luck. The rest of us missed out. Once the brumbies noticed they were being watched, off they went in the other direction.

Once back at camp, it was time for a swim in the icy cold waters of the Blue Waterholes, aptly named as the water has a beautiful blue hue to it. This blue colour is due to its high calcium carbonate content from the limestone. The water is always very cold here as Cave Creek runs underground up to the waterholes. After a bit of a dip it was back to camp to warm up by the fire and settle in for the night.

The next day was down Nichols Gorge, where the scenery was completely different. The walk follows Cave Creek, but the creek is underground, so the track follows a dry creek bed. As you start the walk, Cooleman Caves were reached, so on with the head torch and in we went. The cave can be explored for about 50 metres or so, and it was worth doing. The cave is still active, so with a little bit of light, the calcite walls sparkle with thousands of little water droplets. It was stunning.

After exploring the cave, we followed the dry creek bed down along the gorge and eventually reached Murray Cave. This cave is deeper, darker and fairly narrow and I must say a little more spectacular. Again we put on the head torches and went in for just under 200 metres. You can walk all the way till you reach a siphon blocking the rest of the cave system. This is a good example of the underground creek systems in the area. Our group didn't quite get to the end as we were all very busy looking for fossils along the walls and floors and admiring the



Cooleman Falls



Start of the walk



Campsite



Toilet



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



Main track, side trip, alternative route



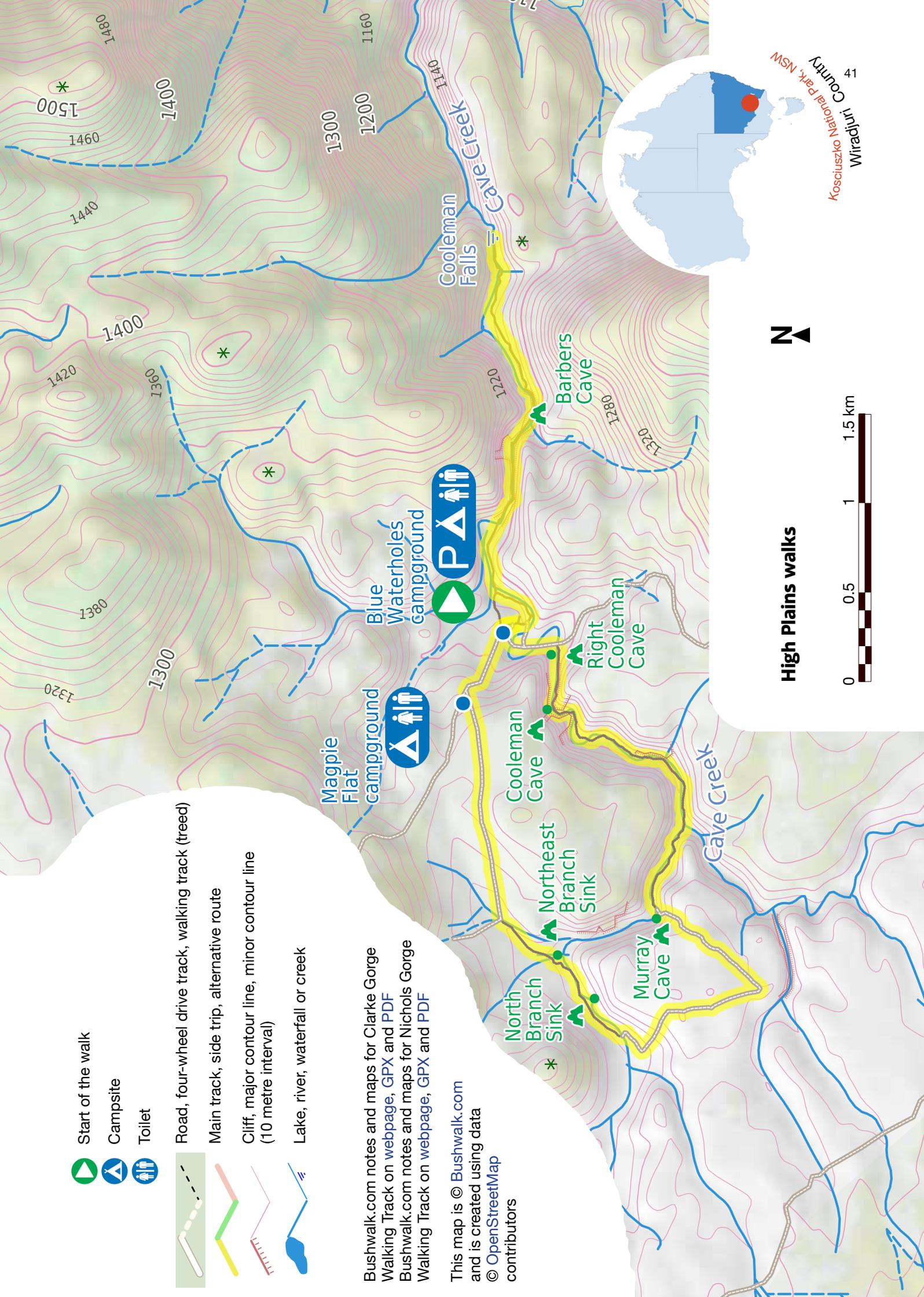
Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (10 metre interval)



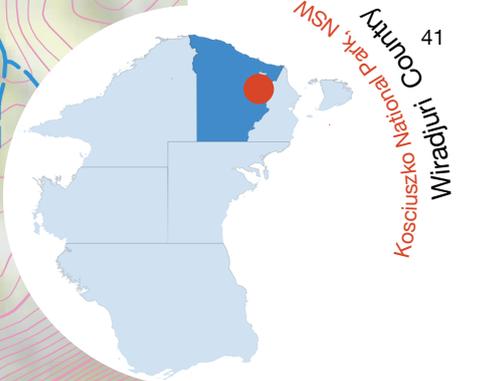
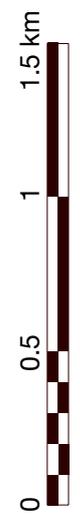
Lake, river, waterfall or creek

Bushwalk.com notes and maps for Clarke Gorge Walking Track on webpage, GPX and PDF  
Bushwalk.com notes and maps for Nichols Gorge Walking Track on webpage, GPX and PDF

This map is © Bushwalk.com and is created using data © OpenStreetMap contributors



### High Plains walks



Wairdri Country 41  
Kosciuszko National Park, NSW

sparkling water droplets on the thousands of stalagmites, stalactites, flowstones and columns. As a small kid I learnt how to remember the difference between stalagmites and stalactites. A stalagmite, just might grow to the top whereas a stalactite, it has to hold on tight. Quite a nifty way to remember don't you think.

From here it was out of the cave and climb a small hill to the open plain, a perfect spot for lunch, then back to camp for another swim. When everyone was settling in for the evening, Maria and I decided to search for the brumbies and this time we were in luck. Along the same track we saw approximately 50 or so. It was hard to gauge how many exactly, but what a sight. We were also lucky that we didn't manage to step on a healthy-looking Highland copperhead snake, which was a very good size.

Sunday was time to go home, but not before stopping at the Coolamine Homestead. This homestead is a fine example of what buildings were like in the late 1800s. It has a long

grazing history however, prior to that, it was home to Aboriginal folk living off the land. I can't imagine how hard it must have been to live here, mustering cattle and the likes. The homestead also has a very interesting double toilet, where you could share the room and sit beside your companion and talk business, I guess ...

Finally, we left the long plains and stopped in at Yarangobilly Caves, which was literally a few kilometres down the road. Some of the group parted here as the sign at the entrance to the caves said the road was unsuitable for caravans. The remainder of us went to explore the self-guided South Glory Cave and swim in the thermal pool where the water sits at around 27 degrees, permanently heated by a natural spring. It was the best way to end the trip.

I really enjoy sharing my favourite spots with like-minded people. This is a spectacular area and I really can't wait for the next Kosciuszko trip, which will probably be in the winter. Til next time.



Exploring Murray Cave



Wild Brumbies



Nichols Gorge

# Storming The Torrs

The 3.2 kilometre long  
Ilfracombe Torrs Walk  
in United Kingdom.

Text and photos  
**Ian Smith**





Flowers on the zig-zag route to the lookout



Zig-zag route to the lookout

Our legs ached and we'd only walked just over a kilometre. It was a legacy of wandering around London for days. Still, the scenery was distractingly taking the pain away. It seems it doesn't matter where you look in Ilfracombe, there's beauty or stunning scenery to behold. We were more on the stunning scenery route today, zig-zagging up the side of a cliff with the sea, shrouded in thin misty cloud, splashing happily on the jagged rock formations far below. The wind was slowly increasing, to the point where it was cold on the exposed parts, but it was shifting the mist.

We'd first walked through the town and then up a sharp hill where our car was parked. Ilfracombe must be one of the worst places in England to find a legal parking spot, and woe betide you if you are errant, because every time you go for a walk you'll see the parking police actively pursuing their task. I wondered in silence if they were on bonuses for the number of bookings, so enthusiastic did they seem.

Back on the trail, some gulls squawked nearby and took to flight on the brisk wind. It's a sound heard around coastal England, firmly embedded in your brain. They flew off uplifted rocks that were once caught between two converging tectonic plates, were compressed and their minerals re-crystallised and re-oriented. This resulted in the more mud-rich dull grey rocks developing the ability to easily split, which is known as slaty cleavage. Here and there, en route, barriers and bolts have been affixed to protect people from flaking shards, but you wouldn't notice them unless you were specifically searching for them. It was nature in charge there.

“

We were more on the stunning scenery route today, zig-zagging up the side of a cliff with the sea ...

Though mostly solid, the narrow trail was rutted occasionally, the walking wasn't always even. At times, there was a radically steep drop beside. Higher we went through the spring flowers, most of which we couldn't name, but sea campion, scarlet pimpernel and gorse bush were three of them.

Somehow the trail didn't seem to be overly steep to the point where you constantly stopped for breath, but when we reached the top of the tor at the viewpoint, we were happy to sit down. Here the view was expansive in all directions. It's easy to see why people rate the Torrs as the best walk in this area of many splendid hikes. It took minutes to gather it all in, and the variety from town to farm to cliffs to the sea was splendiferous.

We tarried awhile, taking in all angles, soaking up the call of nature as the waves splashed far below. Unlike the Australian bush, there were few insects here. We figured it had to do with the cold.

On the return, we passed a few other hikers tramping up and exchanged cheery greetings, as you do on the trail in any country. I scampered down to the sea at one point to some steps set improbably in a rock wall that led to a small grey sandy section about 20 metres across. Just who would want to go there and how they justified the steps remained a mystery to us, so we headed back to Ilfracombe, totally sated, and eventually ended up at the Admiral Collingwood Hotel, arguably the busiest such establishment of its kind in this city.

It owes its name to the man who fired the first shot in the battle of Trafalgar and who took over when Nelson lay mortally wounded.

By 7 p.m. we were asleep in bed. Oh dear, what happens when you exercise!



Lorraine at the lookout over Hazel Bushes Bay



Excursion to the rocks below the lookout



Signs at the start of the path

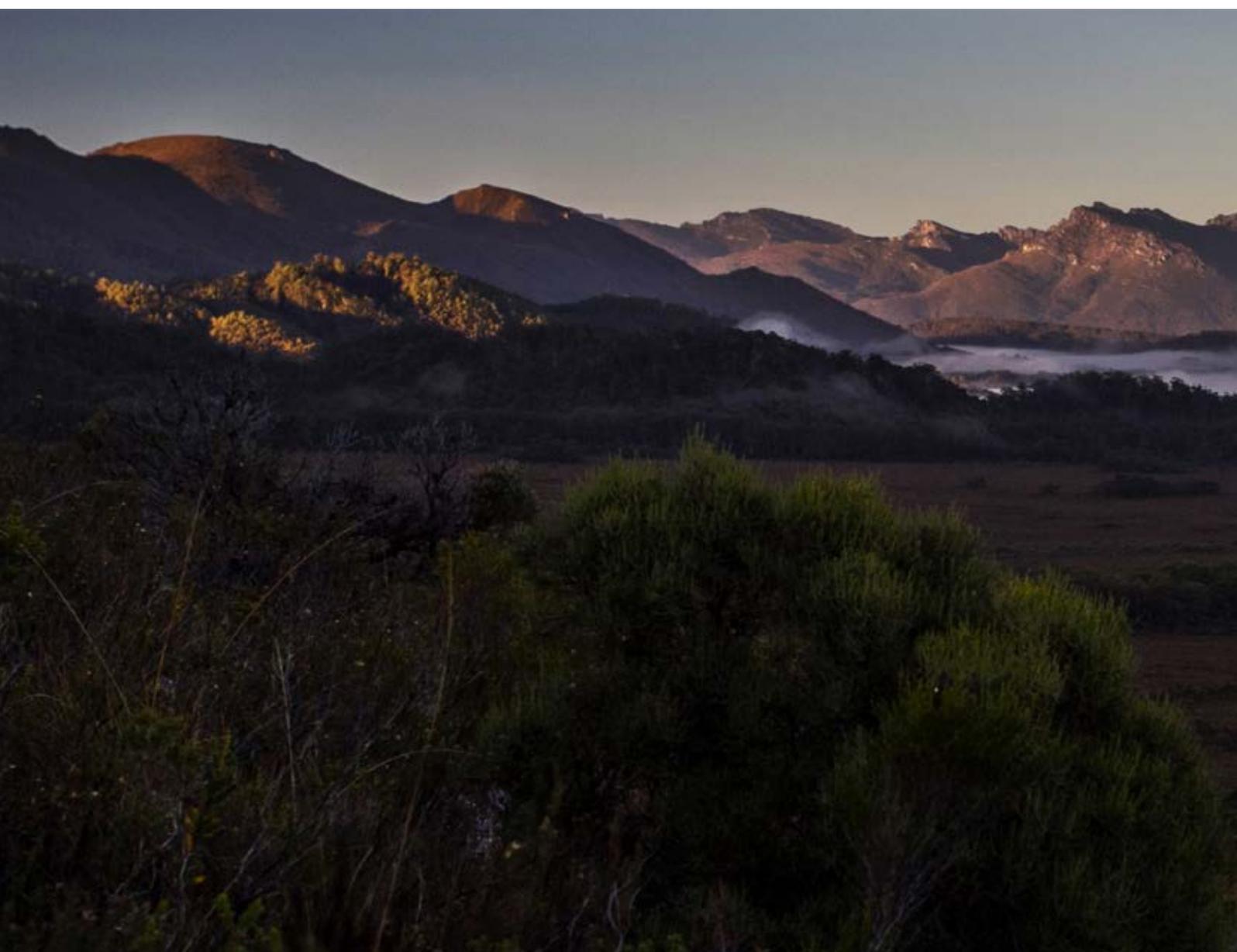


Real estate with a view



# Photo Gallery

Photos  
**Bushwalk.com** photographers



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



Misty morning on the Arthur Plains  
North-north-west

# Landscapes

## April 2023

Winner  
Boat Harbour, Gerringong  
**landsmith**

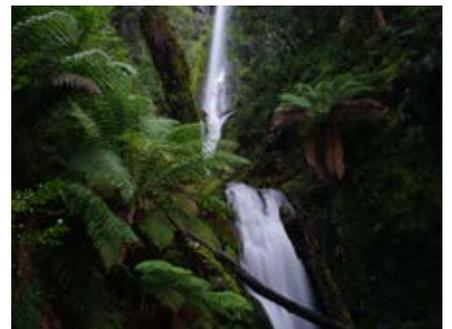
Imagine you've just woken up in your motorhome, put your dressing gown on, looked out the window and seen a great sunrise. Then you put on some thongs with your socks still on and stumble 30 metres to the foreshore. That's what it took to get this shot!



A bizarre landscape -  
Pinnacles Desert WA  
**John Walker**



Last night from a hidden  
plateau in Kakadu  
**Osik**



Quaile Falls  
**Teak**

# Non-landscapes

## April 2023

Winner  
Katydid  
Joe J



It's mine! - Rottnest Island  
WA  
**John Walker**



An unexpected display  
**Osik**



Kosciuszko National Park,  
Easter Weekend  
**SonyaM73**

# Tasmania

## April 2023

Winner

King Billy surveys his realm

**Teak**

This photo is from a walk to Mount Murchison. This view is part way up looking toward Tyndall Range. There are some King Billy pines growing in this area.



Bent Bluff  
**Brian Eglinton**

# Other States

## April 2023

Winner  
Start of the dry in Nitmiluk  
**Osik**

A few months in the area gave a wonderful opportunity to see the dramatic changing character of Nitmiluk Gorge.



Cope Saddle Hut  
**Joe J**



Nullarbor dreaming - Cook  
SA  
**John Walker**



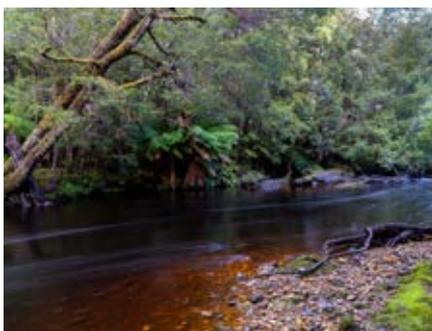
Pretty Beach sunset  
**landsmith**

# Landscapes

## May 2023

Winner  
Clearing ... maybe  
**North-north-west**

It did eventually, but the icy wind just got stronger, so this was not an extended visit. But these sorts of conditions still make for great images.



River in South Tasmania  
**Kwad12**



Gorge meets sky  
**Osik**



Morialta Gorge  
**Brian Eglinton**

# Non-landscapes

## May 2023

Winner  
Banksia time  
John Walker

I had been dealing with the ongoing effects of previous surgery, compounded by a deteriorating knee (now recently replaced). Despite the limitations I was keen to try and maintain some level of bushwalking activity. So I returned to an old haunt of Heathcote NP in southern Sydney for an easier stroll to a couple of the pretty and less visited pools on Heathcote Creek. It was heading into winter, and on the walk out along the Pipeline Trail, I noticed some lovely stands of *Banksia ericifolia*, which were asking to be photographed. The afternoon light seemed to fall the right way to accentuate their colour.



Fall Rainbow  
Brian Eglinton



Yellowbelly Falls  
North-north-west

# Tasmania

## May 2023

Winner

Looking out my front door

**North-north-west**

Camping at Oenone and feeling decidedly unenergetic the morning after romping around on Olympus, led to the use of the lazy person's technique: camera on tripod, attach remote, stand tripod outside tent and snap away whilst still snug and warm under the quilt. Not a bad way to greet the day.



# Other States

## May 2023

Winner  
Last views  
**Osik**

One of my favourite lookouts, a world away from flatter landscapes to the north and south.



Mini cascades  
**John Walker**



Lit Up  
**Brian Eglinton**

# Rescued Podcast

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Dropping into podcast feeds in 2023, [Rescued](#) - an outdoor podcast for hikers and adventurers, regularly finds itself charting as the #1 wilderness podcast in Australia.





Host Caro Ryan  
Ben Cirulis

**D**rawing on the power of storytelling and its ability to drive change, host Caro Ryan (outdoor advocate from [LotsaFreshAir](#)) sets out to create an intimate campfire-like experience where guests feel comfortable sharing their very personal journeys of when something went wrong in the bush.

The opener for each episode explains: "Rescued is a podcast of conversations with rescuers and those who've been rescued. It's about the lessons we learn about ourselves, the places we go and why – without judgement or shame – to help us have better adventures, manage risk and deal with the unexpected."

“

Rescued is a podcast of conversations with rescuers and those who've been rescued.



Apple Podcasts Chart positions

"We get to hear from people who've gone through incredibly powerful (and in some cases, life-changing) experiences, understand what happened, what they learnt, how they felt and their journey back." Caro says.

"These are traumatic experiences, and I'm so humbled that guests are willing to go there so we can all learn."

Inspired by the work of Ashley from the US-based climbing podcast, [The Sharp End](#), and the warm, unfolding style of ABC Conversations, Caro comes full circle in the space, including episodes with experts and emergency services workers.

"There are three types of episodes and guests on the Rescued Podcast," she continues, "First-person accounts of an incident, interviews with emergency services personnel and experts in associated fields."

Season one, which launched in 2023, opened with a compelling double episode from former Police Rescue operator [Matt U'Brien](#). Kicking off with timeless messages around safe bushwalking and a humorous—but cringe-worthy—tale of a mountain biker, Matt then shares his dark memories of the time he went from being a rescuer to needing rescue. We hear about his tough challenges with mental health and his 2023 [Heart to Heart walk](#), where he set off from the Lambert Centre of Australia to walk 2,400km (90 days) to Parliament House in Canberra to highlight the plight of first responder mental health.

[Episode 3](#) brings the listener along on a lovely, sunny day in Spain, as Jane sets off alone on an easy tourist walk through a walk-in canyon, 'Rio Chilla'. It's a trip that should have taken about 4 hours. Well-prepared and loaded with research, Jane shares her story of what she learned from a long, painful and lonely night when she found herself waking up to a dog licking her face, the threat of wild boar and what items she's added to her packing list since.

Back to Australia, [episode 4](#) brings us along on the Australian Alps Walking Track with Owen, an experienced bushwalker familiar with the route. On day 24, he shows us that

even with great first aid skills and lots of preparation, there are some things that no first aid kit can prepare you for.

The first of the experts for the series, Linda from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), steps us through the world of PLBs (Personal Locator Beacons) and SEND Devices (eg: ZOLEO, InReach, SPOT) in [episode 6](#). She unpacks what happens when someone activates a beacon or SOS and reveals some exciting tech developments in the near future.

"I was stoked to hear that the AMSA episode with Linda is now part of the TAFE Outdoor Leadership course resources," exclaims Caro.

“

I was stoked to hear that the AMSA episode with Linda is now part of the TAFE Outdoor Leadership course resources ...

"It's at the heart of why I started the podcast in the first place. Learning and sharing so we can have great adventures in the bush, safely."

Season 1 wrapped up with James and Dylan in [episode 7](#), speaking of the nightmare when James was buried alive in a snow cave high in Kosciuszko National Park. Relatively close to the ski resort of Charlotte Pass and with clear conditions forecast, James experienced the longest, dark night of the soul, where escape wasn't the end of it.

With Season 2 set to launch in March 2024, thanks to sponsor Paddy Pallin, listeners can expect vivid and inspiring stories, loaded with change-making insights to power their future adventures.

Subscribe and listen to Rescued on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you get your podcasts. Download transcripts at [lotsafreshair.com/rescued-an-outdoor-podcast-for-hikers-and-adventurers](https://lotsafreshair.com/rescued-an-outdoor-podcast-for-hikers-and-adventurers).

# Videos



## Tips for beginner hikers and backpackers

Some lesser known tips that might come handy to beginner hikers or to those looking to improve their hiking skills.



## 20 thru hiking tips in 6 minutes for your first thru hike

Try these hacks and start hiking smarter.



## Overnight hike to Lake Rhona - solo hiking in Tasmania

Georgina takes us on an overnight hike in Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park.



## After thru - the other side of long distance hiking

Courtney talks about the challenges of getting back to "normal" life after a thru hike.

# Suicidal Reproduction

If you are exploring our beautiful Australian wilderness this year, keep an eye out for animals behaving in interesting ways.

Text  
**Andrew M. Baker**



*Antechinus flavipes*



Footage from the video

**Y**ou never know what you might see, as our research team discovered. In 2023, our colleague from Sunshine Coast Council, Elliot Bowerman, took a two-night trip to [New England National Park](#) – its 1,500 metre-high mountain peaks are some of the loftiest on Australia’s mid-east coast.

On the afternoon of 17 August, Elliot trekked the path to Point Lookout. While inspecting some plants on the trail, he heard a rustle in the bushes ahead and peering more closely, saw something of interest. A small mammal had abruptly appeared, dragging the carcass of another mammal, which it then began to devour.

“

Mammals eat each other all the time.

At first glance, this was not so strange. Mammals eat each other all the time. However, it *is* unusual to see small mammals during the day at such close quarters, so Elliot recorded the scene, taking a video on his mobile phone.

It was only several days later when looking over the footage that our research team realised it featured something rarely seen in the wild, the record of which is now published in the [journal \*Australian Mammalogy\*](#).

#### **A native marsupial ... cannibal**

The furry critter on film was an [antechinus](#), a native marsupial denizen of forested areas in eastern, south-western and northern Australia. Antechinuses usually eat a range of insects and spiders, occasionally taking small vertebrates such as birds, lizards, or even other mammals.

But this [camera footage](#) clearly showed a mainland dusky antechinus (*Antechinus mimetes mimetes*), and it was eating a dead member of its own species!

Antechinuses are perhaps best known for exhibiting [semelparity](#), or “suicidal reproduction”. This is death after reproducing in a single breeding period. The phenomenon is known in a range of plants, invertebrates and vertebrates, but it is rare in mammals.

Each year, all antechinus males drop dead at the end of a one to three week breeding season, poisoned by their own raging hormones.

This is because the stress hormone cortisol rises during the breeding period. At the same time, surging testosterone from the super-sized testes in males causes a failure in the biological mechanism that mops up the cortisol. The flood of unbound cortisol results in systemic organ failure and the inevitable, [gruesome death of every male](#).

“

Each year, all antechinus males drop dead at the end of a one to three week breeding season, poisoned by their own raging hormones.

Mercifully, death occurs only after the males have unloaded their precious cargo of sperm, [mating with as many promiscuous females](#) as possible in marathon, energy-sapping sessions lasting up to 14 hours. The pregnant females are then responsible for ensuring the survival of the species.

So, exactly what was happening that day at Point Lookout – why had an antechinus turned cannibal?

### Cheap calories

August is the breeding period for mainland dusky antechinuses at that location. Intense mating burns calories, and at the end of winter it is cold and there isn't as much invertebrate food about.

If there are male antechinuses dropping dead from sex-fuelled exhaustion, our thinking is that still-living male and female antechinuses are taking advantage of the cheap energy boost via a hearty feast of a fallen comrade.

After all, animal flesh provides plenty of energetic bang for the buck, particularly if its owner does not have to be pursued or overpowered before being devoured.

In many areas of Australia, two antechinus species (of the known fifteen) occur together, and usually their breeding periods [are separated by only a few weeks](#). One can imagine a scenario where individuals may not only feed on the carcasses of their own species but consume the other species as well.

Each species may benefit from eating the dead males of the other. For the earlier-breeding species, females may be pregnant or lactating, which is a huge energy drain.

For the later-breeding species, both sexes need to pack on weight and body condition before their own breeding period commences.

Plausibly then, antechinus engage in orgiastic breeding and, when opportune, cannibalistic feeding.

So, the next time you are out and about in the bush, keep your eyes and ears peeled – you never know what secrets nature might reveal to you just around the next corner.

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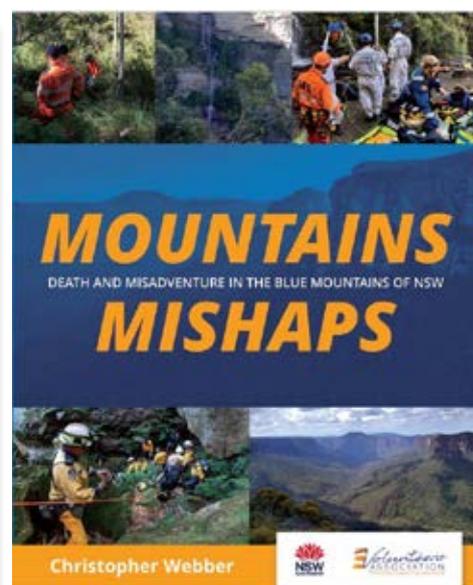
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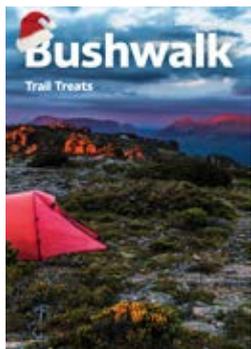
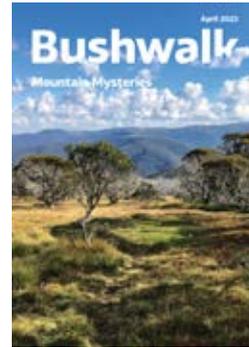
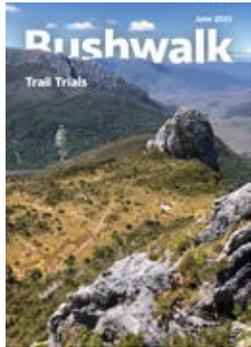
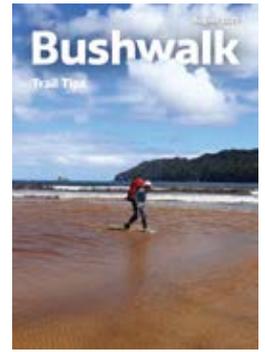
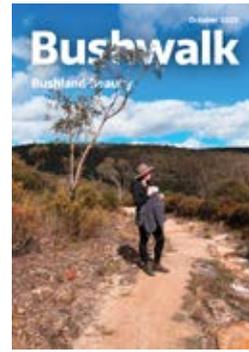
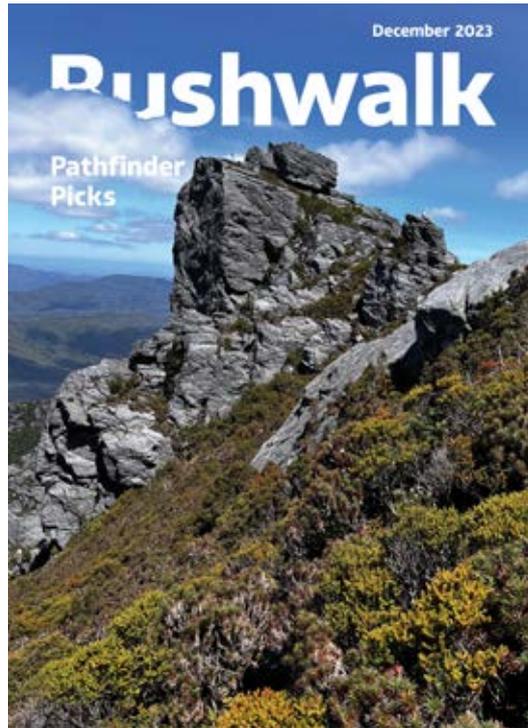
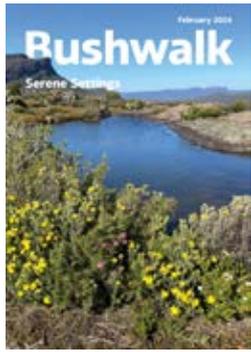
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