

Easter Alpine Walk to Mount Bogong via the Grey Hills: 3–7 Apr 2013

Walkers: Coralie (leader), Janice, Rob

Rob and I signed up thinking that following Coralie up and down ridges and spurs would be a good start to our training for the Larapinta trail. Little did we know how much up and down was actually involved, including climbing in and out of the Big River Valley via the notorious T Spur and Duane Spur.

Despite the challenging walking, there were many other people out and about in the mountains. We shared the summit of Bogong with two day walkers, one of whom had bagged 5 of the 7 highest-in-the-state peaks and the other was in skimpy shorts and bare feet despite the chilly conditions. We were entertained at the picturesque campsite at Cleve Cole Hut by 8 Air Force Cadets and their 2 leaders but they were much quieter the next night after their big day crossing the Big River Valley. Two young medical students generously shared their fire with us at Roper Hut, where we also continued our acquaintance with members of a group of 6 deaf hikers.

This walk was certainly one for the fit and experienced- by the end of it we had a bit more of both! However if someone talks to you about a trip to Bogong via Howman's Gap don't tell them they're dreaming, tell them it's a nightmare!

Thank you Coralie! The walk was certainly a good start to our training!

Janice



Great Ocean Walk—Cape Otway to Castle Cove: 13 Apr 2013

Walkers: Clive, Coralie, Janice, Jim, Kate and Lothar (leader)

As we drove into Cape Otway the devastation inflicted (by koalas) on the eucalypts in this area was jaw-dropping. We walked in intermittent rain in humid conditions. This proved to be something of a nuisance with raincoats being donned and discarded within a short time frame. The track widening and re-routing of this section of track meant we walked quicker than expected and were finished mid-afternoon.

Coralie



Camino de Santiago: 20 Apr to 24 May 2013

Walkers: Helen, Lothar, Marg

Hello Fellow Walkers (the letter said),

Just a quick note to let you know that I have finally completed the Camino de Santiago. 32 days. The shortest distance was 8 km (the first day and climbing up to Orisson in the Pyrenees) and the longest was about 37 km. I didn't take any rest days. I parted from Helen and Marg a few days before Burgos as they wanted to slow down to balance their itineraries whereas I wanted to accelerate in view of the approaching bad weather.

One day was pretty much the same as the next: up at the crack of dawn, underway by 7 am, have brekky along the way somewhere, and get into the next albergue after lunch. Do a round of washing, have a shower, maybe have lunch, see the sights and/or just relax until dinner time. Dinners were usually at 7 pm and it was into bed by 8:30 pm.

While I thought that my 13 kg pack was lightweight, on the Camino it is considered to be a huge weight and everyone lets you know this. No pressure! Anyway I like to take my own pyjamas and pillow cover. Not to mention a third pair of socks, etc. But my left shoulder is still a bit sore from the constant carrying.

I initially thought that the worst day was the 37 km day where I trudged many kilometres through the industrial outskirts of Burgos and got the back of my legs fried, but no. The worst day started in rain. This turned to sleet, which in turn turned to snow. I stuck to the roads that day and kept moving to keep warm. Many, many people took taxis off the peak because of the conditions. The snow event was even on national news. Anyway I make it to an albergue part way down the hill. The worst day also produced one of the highlights of the walk: ferried 100 m by van from the albergue to the restaurant and back, and a pilgrim's meal where you could have as much as you wanted for the first course as well as for the second course.



Many of the country towns were practically deserted: behind locked doors were empty buildings. Only what was needed to support the pilgrim infrastructure seemed to be occupied. But then again, how can one forget coming out of one dead town only to be joined by hundreds of primary school kids on some sort of field trip.

The last 5 days were a surprise: you sometimes thought you were walking in Australia. There were gum trees everywhere. Whole forests even! The whole countryside was beautifully green and/or cultivated. Grapevines, grain crops, grass, ploughed fields. You didn't see many animals as most were kept in large barns.

Cheers,
Lothar

PS: The walk started in St Jean Pied de Port in France and ended in Santiago de Compostela in North-West Spain.

Some basic costs:
O/N albergue accommodation ranged from 0 to 15 Euros/night. Three course evening Pilgrim meals (with wine and bread also included) ranged from 10–15 Euros.



Grampians—The Grape Escape: 3–5 May 2013

Walkers: Coralie, Irene, Linda (leader), Mabel

The only camping sites available for this weekend was at the Parkgate Resort unpowered camping ground. Irene and I went up on the Thursday (May race day holiday) and were directed to our site. The first problem arose when we were told we could not have a fire, and then we were told that the new shower block was locked because the doors had buckled and could not be locked from the inside; however the new camp kitchen was available and proved to be a life saver. That first night we froze, we actually slept with all our clothes, including socks on.

Friday morning saw a beautiful sunny day so Irene and I walked around the creek circuit, having a late lunch back in Halls Gap. Not long after we returned to the camping ground Mabel and Coralie arrived. Mabel was going to camp with us whilst Coralie was spending the weekend in some luxury apartment with a group of friends. They both went out for tea together.

Saturday arrived, the Grape Escape festival, but unfortunately Mabel was sick and ended up spending the day in her tent asleep. Coralie was with her friends and Irene and I climbed up Chatauqua Peak in the morning and spent the afternoon at the festival, where we ate a lot, drank a lot of cider and attended a cooking demonstration by Poh.

Once again, a big “Thank you” to Coralie, Mabel and Irene for making this a most enjoyable weekend!

Linda



The Beeripmo Weekend: 11–12 May 2013

Walkers: Coralie, Janice (Leader), Kate, Rob

'Twas a lovely Saturday morning as we set off to Richards Campground
But on encountering the road closed sign we had to turn around
Out came the maps with much discussion on what to do
To start from Ditchfields it was and walk in the opposite direction too!
At the hike in camp we collected plenty of wood
A nice fire was had before the blustery wind set in for good
But we woke to what seemed a fine day
And appreciated the views walking from the other way
We arrived back at the cars just as the sky started to drip
And with coffee and treats back in Beaufort, what an enjoyable trip!

Kate



Port Fairy Walk: 18 May 2013

Walkers: Coralie, Dina (leader), Di P, Irene, Jim, Linda, Rob

On a gloriously sunny, almost windless May morning, seven Warrnambool Bushwalkers set off from the far end of Pea Soup beach in Port Fairy for a stroll along the foreshore to Griffiths Island, which we circumnavigated. We then checked out all the boats at the Wharf before crossing the footbridge over the Moyne to Battery Hill and then dropped down to East Beach to reach our final destination of the Surf Life Saving Club.

Some liberties were taken with the original walk description (eg some rock hopping was included, and the viewing of the cannons was very cursory) but a great time was had by all!! The best bit was the late morning tea at Bella Clair (good choice, Di) and the yummy bread purchased afterwards at the Farmer's Market (good idea, Coralie).

Thanks to Jim, Linda, Irene, Rob, Di and Coralie for a very enjoyable Saturday morning.

Dina



Old Beechy Rail Trail from Beech Forest to Gellibrand: 25 May 2013

Walkers: Coralie, Dina, Jim (leader), Rob

The 7:30 start meant there were a few minutes before the sun was in our faces on our traffic-free drive to Gellibrand. One car was abandoned and we continued to Beech Forest. “Atmospheric” was the consensus on the weather as we gained altitude. And atmospheric it indeed was as we started our walk in the heavy mist. But that soon lifted and the perfect weather for the rest of the day meant parkas and then jumpers were shed.

Sometimes, as it bypasses private land, the rail trail isn’t really a rail trail, sometimes you can’t be sure, but for the most part it definitely is a rail trail, with cuttings, embankments and stations. Regardless, we had a most enjoyable downhill stroll through a variety of landscapes: cleared agricultural land, pine (and ex-pine) forest, and native forest, plus some views. We met a solitary cyclist and a large family cycling group. There was no need to badger the leader with the “how far to go” question—each kilometre a marker counted down from 45 to 27, a hundred metres before our ultimate destination, the Gellibrand coffee shop. Home by 5.

Rob



Grampians—Major Mitchell Plateau: 1–2 Jun 2013

Walkers: Coralie (pace setter), Janice (leader), Kate (housing), Rob (scribe)

You know training for the Larapinta is getting serious when the alarm sounds at 4 am. A missed text from Janice said that the rain meant the overnighiter would be two single day walks instead. My acknowledgement of her text was in turn acknowledged at 4:09. The two cats I had been minding were overjoyed to be fed at 4:19, little realizing it would be 18 hours before their returning owner would feed them again. And soon, cat sitting over, I had left Footscray and was alone on the Western Highway, only seeing three cars going my way. After three hours of almost continual swishing of the windscreen wipers, I was at Halls Gap to meet the others who had been staying at the gracious Château des parents de Kate in Pomonal.

We drove to the Jimmy Creek camping area, with a diversion to leave a car at the Mt William car park. A bit after 9 we set off on our stroll under grey skies, through grey mist, and generally grey-green wet vegetation. The occasional *Correa reflexa* with its red and yellow bells brightened the track for the first hour, and then the occasional pink Epacris took its turn to cheer us up. And up, up, up we went as we juggled the balance between staying dry and warm, but not too hot. Changing gear gave Kate ample opportunities to practice doing up all the straps of her double-breasted pack. The next band of flowers was *Correa lawrenceana* (yellow-green bell and stylish brown calyx), then a couple of white Epacris, and flower-wise, that was that. We continue ever upwards in our hundred metre wide grey mini-world.

Our 1 pm-ish lunch at the plateau's edge marked the change from walking in damp light grey mist to walking in wet dark grey cloud. We had two views during the day: the clouds parted slightly for 10, maybe 15, seconds to show a small portion of the plain below, and later, just as briefly, the black silhouette of the Serra Range appeared against a dark grey sky. Around 4, at the First Wannon Creek campsite, the rain became heavier and overpants were donned. "It gets ugly up ahead" was Coralie's encouraging mantra.

Onwards and ever upwards until at 5:20, a minute before sundown is reputed to have occurred, we reached the road and a tied-down helicopter hired by Parks Victoria for "night cart" duties. The final 2 km down the road were done in fading light, as we upgraded the walk from "long" to "epic" and met three people who asked if there was any flat ground around.



After retrieving the other car, it was back to Pomonal to incongruously eat our rehydrated hiking meals in our palatial “tent” and wonder some more about how and why the three people we met were there.

The sun was shining on Sunday. We made a leisurely start for the 6 km loop from Halls Gap to Clematis Falls, Chatauqua Peak (opposite), Bullaces Glen and back to Halls Gap—sunny views although cloud still scraped the Plateau and Mt William. Coffee and cake followed soon after to complete (but not undo) a good training walk.

Many thanks to Kate’s parents for the use of mod cons not usually found on epic walks! The Grampians were resplendent as these views from the Jimmy Creek to Mt William track show.

Rob C



Mt Eccles: 15 Jun 2013

Walkers: Dina, Helen, Jenny (visitor), Jim, Rob (leader)

After exploring the cave at Mt. Eccles, a group of 5 walkers set out in an anticlockwise direction to check out the lava tubules/gorge, braving the onslaught of all those leeches. Along the way, a rather large pile of scat alerted us to the presence of a koala in the tree above, and there were multiple sightings of kangaroos and wallabies.

Instead of taking a rest at the top of the gorge, our esteemed leader opted for further cave explorations, managing to clock his skull on a rock on the way out; much fun and interest was derived from the explorations of our First Aid kits looking for an appropriate dressing, which was duly applied. Once we scaled the mount and utilised the bench there provided, the group was then “unwound” as we walked clockwise round Lake Surprise on the crater edge, then rewound anticlockwise as walked on the Lake’s lower path.

One member of the party (of the male species) who reported he was never bothered by leeches was somewhat surprised to find not one, but two bloodied socks when his boots came off at the end of the walk. Lunch was eaten in the well-equipped camp ground shelter, before returning home. Thanks to Rob for organising the walk, with other members being Helen, Jim, visitor Jenny, and Dina.

Dina



GOW—Gibson Steps to Princetown: 22 Jun 2013

Walkers: Alan D, Chris, Coralie, Di P, Helen (leader), Irene, Linda, Suellen, Wally

Again it was a good turnout for this activity. At Gibson Steps we could see the progress being made on the underpass linking up the new track to the Twelve Apostles. We really enjoyed the fine sunny weather – as did the whales we watched for several minutes lazily swimming by. Lunch at Apostle Whey Cheese was a good time to socialise and enjoy the local fare after nibbling on our purchases from Gorge Chocolates. Then off to Timboon for coffee and cake.

Thanks to all for making this a very enjoyable day and I hope to see Chris, Wally and Alan on another walk soon.

Helen



Warrnambool to Port Fairy via the rail trail: 29 Jun 2013

Riders: Coralie, Diane, Jim, Marg, Rob and Steve

"Two single and four return tickets to Port Fairy please!"

Our train trip (self-propelled) set off from the breakwater just after 9. The clouds and fragments of a rainbow soon disappeared and the day remained perfect for bike riding. Water birds were all along the Merri and in Kelly's Swamp, with even a flock of magpie geese in one paddock beside the rail trail. Our ascent of the hills to Koroit was rewarded by a cafe stop. Marg's rear tyre also took a liking to this soft life: it had to be pumped up three times before we reached Port Fairy, where a search for a spanner and repairer was successful.

After a leisurely lunch, two of the party left to return home by non-leg powered means. The remaining four faced the daunting 17 km long 0.4% average gradient climb to Koroit and again rewarded themselves with a cafe stop. After a couple of downhill stretches, a forgotten uphill bit, and lots more riding along the flat we reached Warrnambool at 5:15.

As we separated to pedal to our homes, we thanked Jim for getting us onto our backsides.

Rob

