

Six Foot Track, Blue Mountains: 1–6 July

Sunday the 1st of July 2001

I have started packing. I am having serious talks with myself about this walking business. I've read all the literature I can find on this 46km medium to **hard** 3-day walk. I must be going mad to think I can do this, but there is no turning back now, the plane is booked, the YHA is organised, and Diane is already on her way with Neville. I'll just panic quietly inside. At least the weather looks like it is going to be really good so I can calmly die under my pack on the side of the Blue Mountains in the sunshine.

I hope I've got everything. Just another pair of socks in case, and the foot massage cream, and my sandals, and the bottle for the wine..... I think I'd better leave some room for food.

Tuesday the 3rd of July 2001 (3am)

I'm too excited to sleep; at least I think its excitement - it might be hysteria. It's a bit early to get up - we don't have to pick Coralie up until 7:30. I don't think I need that long for a shower... I'll wait till at least 4am.

Well we have made it to Katoomba. All went really smoothly. Picked Coralie up at 7:30, got to the parking place by 11, straight into the little bus. The driver took great delight in telling us we were mad all the way to the airport. He had immense difficulty putting our packs into the bus and I think needed the rest of the week off to recover (I really didn't need his affirmation re our mental status at this time). The line at the Qantas terminal was nearly out the door but we were duly processed and had time for a coffee. Touch down in Sydney, bags retrieved, and straight onto a bus to Central Station, just in time for the Lithgow train. Booked into the YHA, a short walk up the street for yet another coffee, met Diane and Neville, had dinner and at last it was 8pm and time for bed. Well we had had a very big day.

Wednesday the 4th of July 2001 - Day 1 Katoomba to Cox's River (15km)

After a leisurely breakfast and stroll over to Diane and Neville's motel we were packed into Neville's car and heading off to the start of this adventure. Although Linda did ask Neville to take us to the end of the bitumen he decided that we really should start the walk from the beginning - not half way down the track. The essential "start of the walk" photo was taken, then Coralie and I went exploring the convict cemetery, while Diane and Linda chatted up some blokes with bikes. I think they were trying to get them to carry their packs. About 9:30 we were on our way (after leaving nourishment for the needy) we bid goodbye to Neville and headed down to the track head. A pleasant enough walk I was thinking, and then we started our descent of Nellie's Glen. A set of very long, steep, wet and narrow steps leading to the Megalong valley.

The rest of the day was spent walking through rolling farmland, and climbing over styles, which is no mean feat with a pack on. Looking back towards Katoomba the view was magnificent and the peace and serenity of the countryside was magic. The pleasant afternoon came to an abrupt end with the sight of Bowtells swing bridge. This awesome structure loomed before us daring us to conquer it.

Coralie went first, being very brave; I was next in line. This is when I tell you that I am petrified of heights and things that swing in the breeze, so with brave determination I ventured onto Bowtells Bridge secure in the knowledge that it was architecturally designed, and many have survived the crossing before me. (I couldn't see any memorial plaques in the bushes). All seemed stable enough in the beginning as I inched my way across this sleeping dragon. Then as I neared the centre the whole structure began to sway, the colour drained from me, my knuckles have still not recovered and the sweat poured from my brow. I thought I might just sit down and wait for the army to rescue me but then remembered that Bowtell's is a "one person at a time" bridge, so with all the tenacity I could summon I slowly crept to the other side, with Coralie offering encouragement all the time. With feet back on solid ground I could now breathe once more.



Linda and Diane then raced across to join us and we headed off to Cox's River camp, which was just a short stroll along the river. Upon arrival there were sighs of relief and delight, relief to be able to take our packs off, and delight at the luxury of this campsite. A composting toilet, a tank (with NO water), and two picnic tables under a shelter. Tents were duly raised and cups of tea were the order of the day. After a quick glimpse around night fell, dinner cooked dishes washed, teeth and bodies cleaned and it was off to bed. None of us thought 7:30 was too early to retire, as we all thought we knew what was ahead tomorrow.

Thursday the 5th of July 2001 – Cox's River to Black Range Camp (19km)

We awoke to a beautiful crisp morning, with the cloud hanging very low over the mountains. The morning ritual of food and packing proceeded and then we were off. As soon as we left the camp ground we started to climb further into the cloud. I was very grateful that it was not hot. After a couple of hours of climbing the road levelled out and we arrived at a U-turn and a cattle pen in the middle of no where. After a short rest off up another hill we went, where we met another walker coming down. Coralie said he was from NSW (it was the runners that gave him away). It was slow going but with plenty of rests and lots of drinks we made it to Alum Creek – flatter ground and just past the 20km mark from the beginning. When Linda and I arrived Coralie and Diane had a very welcome cuppa on the boil and a much-needed rest was embraced.

I didn't like what Coralie was now telling me - quote" we now start the steep bit" unquote. What have we just been doing I thought? Did Coralie get to Alum creek on a flat bit? Just how much steeper can it get? Well I found out pretty quickly. According to the literature the track rises 400 meters in 3km. It was now getting warmer. I was getting slower and my pack was becoming like a sumo wrestler that wouldn't get off me.

My walking mantra came in very handy, it went from "Om Mani Padme Hum" to "Oh lord I must be mad" to " Oh god help me out" and many more along those lines. Linda and I had decided that if we didn't catch up to Coralie and Diane by 1:15pm we were just going to

stop and have lunch. I don't know why we decided on 1:15pm as the magical figure but that was it. As we turned another corner and found another incline in the distance we spied something silver and shiny and to our delight it was Diane's tent hanging on a tree to dry. We had reached the top. A well-earned lunch break and chance to give the feet and backs a little rest was taken.

We arrived at Black Range camp about 4:30pm after a very long day but very pleased with ourselves. Again this camp ground was the height of luxury. A tank with plenty of water, composting toilets and the regulatory shelter with two picnic tables. We set ourselves up. Cuppas all round and splendid dinners once more.



The full moon came out over the top of the trees, quietness and peace took hold of us and we all retired to our own worlds and snugly sleeping bags. It rained during the night and I remember thinking how lucky I am to be warm and dry and rolled over to be embraced by sleep for a few more hours. I then heard voices in the distance, and slowly opened my eyes and ears. Did I hear right? It's snowing. A quick check of my boots, which were poking their noses out of the tent and all, was confirmed. It certainly was snowing and had been for some time. Our tents, the grass, trees and shelter were covered with a layer of whiteness. Oh what excitement. All was so still as soft flakes drifted leisurely to the ground. Linda, Diane and I were up making cuppas, having breakfast and taking photos as Coralie tried to catch some more sleep, after all it was only 5:30am.

Friday the 6th of July 2001 – Black Range to Jenolan Caves (12km)

Once Coralie emerged from her tent and Linda found out that you can't dismantle a tent from the inside out, we all packed up and headed down the deviation fire trail to Jenolan Caves. Only 12km to go and we have finished. The snow fell off the trees as we walked past and it all seemed like a wonderland. We soon came to the main road and crossed over to continue our gently downward trek to the caves. The wind started to pick up and things became rather chilly, it was good to be walking and keeping warm. Thoughts turned to bacon-and-egg sandwiches, hot chips and Lattes.

We eventually reached a sign - Jenolan 2km. These last two kilometres were slow going, not because we were struggling up hill but because we were sliding down hill. The views of the Jenolan valley were magnificent. We caught up with Coralie and Diane at Carlotta Arch grabbed an unsuspecting Irish tourist and had our photo taken and then headed down the paved path for Jenolan Caves House and Lattes. As I sat in the warmth of the Caves House with my second Latte I thought about the last three days. We had covered some beautiful country from the deep valleys, towering mountains, majestic trees, farmland, rivers and snow. I really felt I was alive.

Irene

Borella walk - Chinamans camping ground to Ben Nevis & back, Warak: 21 July

Walkers: Anne, Doug, Marcia, Lothar, Bill, Steve, Val with husband Leo; John (leader) & Glenda with daughter Sarah & boy friend Chris (with plaster cast over the wrist in which he had fractured three bones only six days earlier).

Leo, Doug and John drove us to Chinaman's Camping Ground, east of Ararat. After a quick lunch, twelve eager walkers set off to conquer Ben Nevis. We were soon confronted with our first obstacle: The start of the track follows a long, steep ridge (Sarah feels that to describe it as vertical is not too much of an exaggeration). Every one managed it, though, with a bit of help from fellow bushwalkers. After that, it was a lot easier. Those of us who were slow at the start caught up to the others about three quarters of the way up. While the start and finish of the walk follow foot tracks, the middle criss crosses between several current vehicle tracks and old log tracks. We all missed one turn on the way up, resulting in us walking up the road to the summit instead of going on the walking track.

The view from the top of Ben Nevis was spectacular, making it well worth the early effort. It was a bit hazy but Mt Sturgeon and Mt Abrupt in the southern Grampians were visible in the distance, with Mt Langi Ghiran prominent in the foreground.

We descended from the summit, along the walking track this time. After it joined a vehicle track, our leader faced a potential mutiny when he suggested that we follow an arrow directing us onto an old log track. Eventually, the group agreed to follow the arrow and this proved to be the correct decision.

Because it was slippery, the steep bit at the end was almost as much of a problem on the way down as on the way up. Many expletives were used as footing gave way, several people taking a tumble or two.

Back at the camp, every one enjoyed a well deserved piece of chocolate mud cake, feeling quietly proud that they had successfully conquered the walk as a team.

Chris and Sarah.



Halls Gap - Federation walks revisited, The Grampians: 4–5 August

Walkers: (Wimmera:) Graeme, Tim, Toby (Warrnambool:) Carloyn, Marg, Lothar

Saturday: Lothar, Carolyn and Marg drove to Halls Gap campground for a rendezvous with Wimmera Bushwalkers. There we met Tim, Graeme and Toby who arrived from Dimboola and Horsham. We agreed to follow a circuit path that Lothar chose and we set off in the direction of the road bridge over Fyans Creek. We took the track that followed the creek along to the Boronia Peak turn off.

The creek was flowing freely and the bush bursting with colour. There were various types of wattle, pink and white heath and plenty of thryptomene in flower.

The walking was easy and we shared news of our walking clubs. We soon discovered them to be about the same size and with similar aspirations. Their walk programme included Wilsons Prom, Major Mitchell Plateau, Briggs Bluff, Frenchman's Cap Federation Peak is their next stop. Tim and Toby planned to go caving at Naracoorte next weekend.

We stopped for a snack at the intersection to the peak. It was here that we had a glimpse into Graeme's *day pack*....50 litres, all 15kg of it. Happily he passed around a bag of sweets for us to try. It was a large bag of sweets of all sorts of colours and very tempting tastes.

At the summit of Boronia Peak we enjoyed great views of the landscape towards Pomonal, Stawell and Ararat. Looking down into the valley from the 500 odd metre elevation, we saw Halls Gap township and Lake Bellfield as well as out across the Serra Range. There was the Pinnacle, out next viewpoint.

Once down in the valley again we passed many kangaroos. We were lucky to be out there walking in sunshine as the forecast had predicted winter showers and wind. We had wet weather gear and jumpers packed and all the necessary items recommended for safe day walking.

We were still puzzled by the size of that backpack. What was Graeme carrying? More was revealed near the NP visitor Info centre where we had lunch. Out came an enormous lunch box containing delicious Brumby Bakery delights.

After lunch, Lothar directed us back across the Halls Gap road and up a side road which led to the walking track. Graeme soon took the lead but would wait patiently for us to catch up.

By the time we reached the Pinnacle the sky had clouded and it was getting cold. Several other walkers were at the newly fenced summit to see the views. For us it was time for another snack, replace bandaids on any blisters before we set off over a plateau to Signal Peak. From there we began the gradual descent to



Mackeys Peak. At a viewpoint we could see the township of Halls Gap lighting up for the evening. We knew we'd still be walking as twilight came but knowing it to be the night of a full moon, and each carrying a torch, we confidently began the steep descent back to the campground. 6.15pm was late enough to finish a wonderful day's walk.

Even though I'm sure that Graeme could have provided all the gear necessary for an overnight camp, Tim, Toby and Graeme decided to head for home. Carolyn, Lothar and Marg returned to the campground to pitch tents by the light of the park lamps. The rising moon made a brief appearance before the night eventually gave way to rain and the wind came up. We cooked tea in the shelter shed and warmed ourselves by the burning open fire. Later on we walked over to the shops for a cappuccino at the cafe that "stayed open until late", but we missed out at 8.30pm. Returning to the shed we just missed the company of the resident camp fox who'd left his wet footprints by the fire.

Sunday: We packed up amid gale force winds which snapped one of our tent poles. We scurried to the shelter shed for breakfast which included toast made by the fire.

Ken arrived promptly at 9:30 and the four of us started off along the same track as yesterday but without bagging Boronia Peak. In the strong wind we cautiously kept to the flat.

Near the peak turnoff we saw a herd of about 7 deer. Further on there were about 40 kangaroos grazing and sunning themselves. Clouds of white corellas shrieked overhead. There were magpies and kookaburras, but no koalas to add to the Grampians scene.

We called in to the Visitor Information Centre and we overheard a camper asking where were the Koalas. Carolyn cheekily joked that there was a (toy) koala for sale on the shelf. But like that visitor, none of us had seen a koala in the area for years.

From here we returned to town. After lunch Lothar suggested we drive up the Silverband Falls road. From the (Dairy Creek) carpark we walked through the fern and eucalypt forest beside Dairy Creek to Dellys Dell. The weather had cleared again and the forest was beautiful as filtered sunlight fell on the lush green mosses and fern fronds and the golden wattles added their colour. An hour later we returned to the cars to set off for home.

Our version of the Federation walks was terrific; good exercise, good company and we all agreed to return to the Grampians soon. Special thanks to the friendly Wimmera Bushwalking trio for their company and we invite them to be there next time.

Marg



Sheoak Falls area, Lorne: 12 August

Walkers: Bill, Doris, Lothar (leader) and Marcia

After picking up Bill and Marcia we headed off to Camperdown to pick up Doris. There was some quite thick fog about. We travelled via Colac and Birrigurra to Lorne, arriving there at 10am. We had a quick pit stop and then headed along the Great Ocean Road to the Sheoak Falls car park, about 5km past the Cumberland Hotel. After a quick morning tea with hot cuppas, home made biscuits from Doris, and fruitcake, we started our walk at 10:30am. Along the way I retrieved a walking stick that I had stashed 2 weeks earlier.



Once near the Falls we started our uphill climb. We took several breathers along the way - there were plenty of scenic views of the falls and rapids. While not as steep as the Chinaman's campground to Ben Nevis walk a few weeks ago, it was still hard work walking uphill. And worth it. After a side trip to the left, we descended to Castle Rock lookout. We were at the top of a cliff-face, looking down at holiday lodges and the view out to sea. We admired the views, took pictures, retraced our steps to the turnoff, and headed to Sheoak Picnic ground.

We had no more major uphill for the rest of the day. The walk to the picnic area was pleasant, and we had lots of unidentified birds singing along the way. Picnic tables, water on tap, kettle & Trangia, and toilets made for a very civilised lunch break. Marcia only wanted and had a cup of tea, but the rest of us fell on our sandwiches, biscuits, cake, fruit, etc.

From the picnic area we headed east along the dirt road for about 100m and took the turnoff to Henderson Falls. The walking track was mostly level/gently downhill from here. We paused briefly at the Won Wondah Falls before continuing. The vegetation changed from large eucalypts to ferns as we approached Henderson Falls. The actual falls are only about 10m high but there was plenty of water spilling over the top and they looked magic. Orchids were also growing out of the trunk of a fern tree. We took lots of pictures of course!

We returned to the Sheoak picnic area, had a pit stop, and then headed off via a different path towards Sheoak Falls. It was an easy going, (mostly) gently downhill path. Near the Falls we diverged to see the Swallow Cave - a large cave/overhang across the river. Parts of the roof had a honeycomb structure.

We crossed the river via large stepping stones, headed uphill and then down again until we reached the foot of the Falls. About twice as high as Henderson Falls, Sheoak Falls also looked great. 10 minutes later we were back at the car - a 5 hour round trip. I again stashed my walking stick...for the next time?

A short drive later we parked in the main street of Lorne. Like other tourists we sat down at an outdoor table, had cappuccinos and English breakfast teas and talked about our walk. We'd all enjoyed the day!

At about 4:10pm we headed home. Thanks for your pleasant company and the great outing!

Lothar



Halls Gap - Mt Rosea, The Grampians: 8–9 September

Walkers: Anne, Doug & Lothar

Weatherwise, we knew we were in for a shocker. Anne & Doug booked a cabin at Bellfield, and I booked into the new Grampians Eco YHA. We weren't going to muck around with tents and cooking - rain and gale force winds were expected.

We all met at the Rosea campground at noon on Saturday. There we all donned our wet weather gear and headed towards Mt Rosea, a 4-4.5 hour return trip, "easy" grade according to T.T.T. It did start off relatively easy with a gentle uphill walk. We crossed a flooded creek (with the water flowing across the path) and soon after started a steadier climb. Conditions weren't quite ideal - we had plenty of rain, hail, and wind to test us. Towards the peak the going got tougher as conditions became worse. It's not often you get to a peak where conditions are so bad you don't take any photos. I definitely want to go back though but on a more pleasant day!

The descent was a lot easier but a bit more treacherous because of the slippery conditions. The flooded creek we'd crossed earlier was now even higher. In spite of our wet weather gear we were all pretty damp when we got back to our cars. We arranged to meet for dinner and drove to our respective accommodation.

The YHA was excellent: great showers, twin kitchen and lounge rooms, a large dining area, TV room, and nice bedrooms. I had a shower, arranged my damp gear around a heater, and had a look around. Later I drove to the shops and met Anne & Doug for dinner. We all had drinks and a feast of Chicken schnitzels.

On Sunday we met at Dairy Car Park (about a kilometre north of Silverband Car Park) and did the obligatory walk to Dellys Dell. The walk is protected in the gully by ferns and tall timber. Many sections of the walk though were vey wet and we often strode through water a couple of inches deep that was running down the track.

After the walk we parted. I went back into town and had brunch and a cappuccino. It was a pleasant way to wind up.

Many thanks to Anne and Doug for making it an enjoyable weekend with a difference.

Lothar

Flinders Ranges: 20–30 September

Walkers: Chris & Lothar

Two days there and two days back, driving six hours a day. But when you're just starting to lose count of the number of times you've been there and you still find the place magic, it was well worth it.

The first few days we spent around Wilpena Pound. We did the gentler walks first (like a visit to the old homestead in the pound). We were also camped in a corner of the campground that was as far away from the toilet block, shop, and bistro as you can get...so we got plenty of exercise walking there as well. I also climbed Mt Ohlssen Bagge in 30+ degree heat...the day before the rain came down. We drove to the bistro for lunch that day.

We had a fantastic time when we drove to Aroona campground for a few more days. Clear spring water to drink. A creek flowing beside us. Wildlife. Level ground to pitch your tent on. And toilets nearby. Perfect! And walks! Views of the Aroona valley from the ruins of the old homestead. Sections of the Heysen Trail. A 4hr circuit walk and a sidetrip to Red Hill with its 360 degree views. We also followed the creek upstream, went past a gorge, and then crossed open country to the Heysen Trail to return to the campground.

In the evenings we chatted to members of the Warrnambool 4WD Club who were also camping at Aroona. We only saw them at night - they were 4WDing the rest of the time. Shane was very calm when I was frantic about losing water from the radiator.

It was also the first trip to the Flinders Ranges that we didn't light a fire. We didn't take a fridge either - we just had backpacking type food and a Trangia.

The day before we left we drove to Brachina Gorge and Bunyerroo Gorge/Valley again. The colours of the rocks, the parklands of native pines, the scenery all makes one *very emotional* about the area.

Yes, we'll be going back again....and again.

Lothar



Briggs Bluff to Plantation Camp Walk: 29–30 September

Walkers: Carolyn, Coralie (Leader), Margaret, Ron

6.15am Saturday –read the Age over cereal and a couple of coffees, then wait for and Margaret to collect me for my second walk with the club.

7.00am load Coralie's 1976 Escort with our gear and head north for the Grampians [I suggest – “for sale – 25 year old small car, only driven by little *old* lady to rugged bush hideaways on Sundays”]. I'm quickly put in my place by tales of extensive bike rides through to Penhurst and other more distant destinations by the two front seat occupants.

9.00am meet Carolyn at Halls Gap, have coffee, do car transfers, squeeze car into the only remaining car park and decant at the base of Briggs Bluff, slip, slop, slap and it's already bloody hot, the cool of the Beehives Falls is a welcome early rest point. I'm out of breath from the climb with an over stuffed pack; perhaps the Chardonnay or is it the constant stream of 'good mornings' exchanged with the crowd?

After the Falls the crowd drops off a little, while the climb increases a lot, I am very impressed by Margaret and Carolyn's capacity to climb and talk simultaneous and by Coralie's careful leadership, the heat has slowed us all down. Once over the first major climb the path stretches before us, so does the lines of walkers heading south, must have all been Collingwood supporters. As it turns out there are 32 walkers from Adelaide and I think we must have met them all on Saturday, we should have set up a toll-way at the turn off to the summit of Briggs.

We did little-lunch at the Arch and admired the valley and the plains to the north, then took great pleasure in the packless walk to the summit and the clear views, said goodbye a few more times, ate some more, collected our packs and then headed south again. Up hill again into heat via some hills described by Coralie [via Di] as easy climbs [not in this heat] and took pleasure in finding lots of running water on the north end of the range.

4.00pm we decided to set camp a little short of our planned site, this one had water and a view to the east for the morning. Carolyn showed us her new tent, Margaret moved in, we had a brew and some nibbles and wandered off for a short walk. The currawongs ate Margaret's food –she is a slow learner she told us, this was the second time she had lost her scroggin to currawongs. I agreed to move my tent to another site to allow us to spread out, we carried it Cleopatra style, only to move it back again when another group arrived. At last the chardonnay and Tim Tams made themselves welcome, so did the moon and a lovely clear, warm night under the stars.

8.00am Sunday, packed and heading south again, beautiful walking through varied terrain heavy with wildflowers, the cooler air holds a slight blue haze making the valley even more beautiful, we talk, we walk we look; moments of wonder, this is why we do it. A rocky clear spot with a view to die for presents itself as the tummies rumble for lunch and Margaret takes a sharp left for lunch, sudden

scream, 2 metre snake, statue positions all-round. With the snake under a rock we proceed to lunch, Carolyn exits for pee behind a bush [read twig] making 'a noise' as instructed, this turns to screams and great anxiety, followed by embarrassment, shorts down to knees and unable to move or hide, Carolyn is forced to admit that she has been attacked by the keys in her short's pocket bumping her legs. A little later I make an elegant swing with my pack onto my back and begin a rapid decent down the slope backwards. Our fearless and experienced leader has almost had her party reduced from 4 to 1 in less than 30 minutes.

Time to climb down, a steep decent without incident [or running water], back onto flat ground, through the remnants of a pine plantation and the most prolific field of white lilies we have ever seen and then into Plantation Camp to the Escort.

Coffee and farewells at Dunkeld and home by 6.00pm. Coralie had provided a great walk.

Someone said Brisbane won something on Saturday.

Ron