

Port Fairy to Warrnambool: 5 January

Walkers: *Anne, David, Doug, Irene, Karen, Linda, Lothar (leader), Marg, Val, Viviane*

Car shuffles were arranged between Thunder Point and Port Fairy, and between Killarney and Port Fairy for those that were only walking to Killarney.

We left the car park near the new Surf Lifesaving Club on Port Fairy's East Beach at 2pm and headed down the cliffs to the sand. The starting time was planned to coincide with the low tide at Thunder Point at 7:30pm and so we had a falling tide. The sand was generally pretty firm and it was fairly easy going.

After what seemed like an eternity we reached the rocks at the end of the long bay and had a 5 minute breather. When we reached Killarney we headed to the playground area at the oval/campground and sat around the picnic table and had snacks (which included slices of Stollen - a dry Christmas fruitcake made in Germany).

For Linda, Irene, Anne & Doug this was the end of their walk. For the rest of us, we were not even half way yet! So after 20 minutes we said our goodbyes and headed off again.

An hour later we reached the cutting - where the Merri River used to come out - our half way point. From here on the sand became a little softer but it was still good to walk on. The fine, not too hot weather was great but the constant headwind coming from about a 2pm direction cut our speed a bit and became annoying by the end of the day.

About half an hour before Levi's Point we just had to have another break. We signalled Karen to stop (she was often miles in front!) and all sat in a line at the edge of the sand dunes, looking out to sea, as we munched more goodies and downed drinks. Only another 60-90 minutes to go!

From Levi's Point onwards we had more and more rocky outcrops with soft sand in between. We scrambled over or around the rocks and near Shelly Beach left the water and walked to the top of the cliffs. Within 15 minutes we were back at the Thunder Point carpark.

We were all a bit tired and sore but otherwise charged up from having successfully completed the 5 and a half hour walk. Marg decided at this stage to walk home (another hour away!) and Karen kindly drove me to Port Fairy to pick up the car.

Thanks to all for a great walk and for the pleasant company during the journey.

Lothar

Breakwater to Proudfoots: 12 January

Walkers: *Anne, Bill, Doug, Irene, Jenny, Linda, Lothar (leader), Mabel, Viviane*

It was a scorcher, but thankfully the day before the really bad total fire ban day. About 35 degrees I reckon. We met in the shade beside one of the 5 trial "bathing boxes" and got underway at 2pm. There were thousands and thousands of people in the water and along the beach for as far as we could see.

Before the surf club Mabel joined us. We had a drink stop at the water tap just before the Flume, and another at Granny's Grave. After that a cooler breeze started but we were still all extremely hot by the time we reached Proudfoots. Brocky's had taken over the lease and the downstairs airconditioned chapel area was open. We ordered drinks and cooled off.

We were reluctant to leave but after about half an hour we started back. The group divided after the bridge. About half of us detoured to the mouth of the blocked Hopkins River to catch the views, and to climb up to the trig-point to also catch the views.

On the way back we fantasized about getting bottles of Rose, glasses, bottle opener, cheeses and crackers and sitting in the shade in the Botanic Gardens and consuming all these goodies. Instead when we reached FishSails we met Linda & Irene again and decided to stop here (and put off the Rose, etc, until next week).

We sat in the shade and had refreshing drinks and enjoyed the cool sea breeze. After most of the Walkers had gone home Bill, Mabel and I did a loop of the breakwater area before we too headed home.

Thanks to all to for a very very pleasant Sunday arvo.

Lothar

Lorne area - Waterfalls weekend: 28 February to 2 March

Walkers: Coralie, Janice, Lothar, Mabel, Marg

Marg's report 1:

Coralie picked me up at 5pm on Friday evening and we met the others at Cumberland River Holiday Park, pitched tents on two sites and then cooked tea over the Trangia. By then it was dark and the sky above us was clear and brilliant with a million stars. The Milky Way was white and dense.

We wandered down to the sea across the winding Great Ocean Road. Coralie led the way through the undergrowth and we followed by torchlight. We reached the beach where the winding road folded back not too far from the bridge at the park entrance - a much shorter way!

Standing on firm beach sand we gazed up at the stars in the sky. There was the "Coal Sack". Suddenly Mabel shrieked, Coralie tried to jump clear, I panicked, stumbled and fell face down knocking Lothar, all of us soaked and saturated by the huge rogue wave that caught us. We had dripping, sandy clothing strung across tree branches before the walks had even started! Hot showers at the park were very welcome however.

Overnight there were frequent heavy showers but it had cleared up by morning. Janice arrived and pitched her tent with us.

There were to be no other starters (due to wind and rain in Warrnambool) so after a delicious coffee in Lorne we drove on to Big Hill carpark to walk the Horseshoe Falls Circuit. Mabel and Janice carried loaded backpacks, and the rest of us day packs.

After the (5 minute) shower of rain and hail cleared we walked in mild weather, the sun making an occasional welcome breakthrough. The track was through bush then on an undulating 4WD track which we turned off at the tree marked with an indistinct "V" but luckily an orange ribbon had caught Coralie's attention.

The bush track descended steeply and we trod gently on slippery damp leaf mould. The track finally led us down a near vertical slope to the river and Horseshoe Falls that fell over a massive crescent of tall rockface.

We sat under the rocky overhang to feast on a simulated "Overland" lunch of Vita wheat biscuits, peanut butter, dates and dried banana. Rain began to fall softly making bubbles dance on the pool at the base of the falls.

When the rain stopped we retraced our steps (instead of completing the circuit) and called into the Lorne Bakery before returning to camp. Coralie headed on to Geelong to compete in the 100km Audax Bike ride the next day.

Mabel, Janice and I, in practice for next week's Overland Track walk, cooked over the Trangia making and mixing a tasty rice/salmon/red lentil Dahl concoction. We played UNO in the camp shelter before turning in at 10pm.

I was to learn another lesson overnight. My still soggy, sandy boots and inner soles left under Mabel's car, were dragged out by a cheeky fox that chewed off the back tabs, gnawed the elastic and nibbled a chunk of sheepskin inner sole. Luckily Janice retrieved the shoes before they reached his lair.

Sunday was fine. We packed up and drove 2-3km to the Sheoak carpark and electing to walk the steep section early in the day, headed to Castle Rock. Mabel and Janice increased their load, I carried a half filled backpack whilst Lothar always carries the lot. The four of us set off up the steep staircase to the Rock which overlooked last night's campsite on the Cumberland River.

We lunched early at Sheoak Picnic Ground then proceeded to Won Wondah Falls, Henderson Falls, down through the canyon amongst mossy boulders, tall tree ferns and Mountain Ash, and on to Phantom Falls. Just a few trickles of water fell over the falls and the main pond mirrored near perfect reflections of the rockface that was brown and olive green with moss, the tall gums high up in the gorge and the dry logs protruding from the still black water.

From there the track followed Parkinson Creek back to the apple and walnut orchard at the Allenvale Mill site. Blackberries that grew along the river bank were ripe and sweet.

None of us enjoyed the 2km uphill slog along the gravel road to the Sheoak Picnic ground but a snack and Mabel's Thermos revived us. That left the track through the bush to Swallow Cave and Sheoak Falls to complete the 15km figure eight loop.

We returned to the bakery for more coffee and scones and were entertained by raucous sulphur crested Cockatoos playing acrobatics in the trees in the street. We'd also spotted an echidna in the bush during the day, seen and heard a TreeCreeper and there was a collection of Gang Gangs drinking in a roadside puddle in the hills before Deans Marsh.

We were safely home by 7:45pm. Coralie and Lothar had been very patient all weekend as we planned and plotted for next week. The Port Fairy Folk Festival is the next local feature and Coralie is training for the "Murray to Moyne" bike ride at the end of this month.

Coralie's report 2:

Friday evening saw the Warrnambool contingent arrive and set up camp at the Cumberland River Holiday Park. After the evening meal a quiet walk to the beach and to view the stars was agreed upon. A beautiful starry night saw us trying to identify constellations and the Coal Sack when Mabel started to blubber. Fearing a fit or worse we turned towards her as she took off at a pace back to the road. A moment later it was all too evident what had prompted Mabel's strange actions – the rest of us were engulfed up to our knees by a rogue wave. Some made the matter wetter by falling over in the race for the dry sand.

Heavy rain fell that night but by morning the weather looked reasonable enough to stick to our plans to complete the Big Hill – Horseshoe Falls Circuit. Janice joined us shortly before we left in Mabel's 4WD vehicle to rendezvous with a group travelling from Warrnambool that morning. Whilst enjoying coffee in the mild sunshine we learnt that the others had been put off by the constant rain and were still tucked up in bed at home (wimps!).

Leaving out the first part of the walk due to high tides, we followed an old 4WD track (Packhorse track) climbing gradually until we reached Bill Hill Track. We trekked along this undulating route for another hour, constantly altering clothing layers in accordance with the changeable autumnal weather.

Not long after meeting Reedy Creek Track, we found the bright pink ribbon marking the way down to Horseshoe Falls. This track was seriously steep and some armed themselves with walking sticks to ease the descent on the knees and ankles. The falls and the surrounding pool, however, drove thoughts of the steep return climb from our minds. Marg, Mabel and Janice compared the contents of their lunchbox with an eye to suitability for their upcoming Tasmania adventure in the tranquil, ferny glade. Sitting under a rocky ledge near the falls, even the rain didn't spoil the picnic as Lothar and Mabel shared hot water from their thermoses so we could all enjoy a cup of tea.

The steep ascent didn't seem too bad on the way back as we paced ourselves and didn't lose the track as frequently as on the way down. A precipitous descent on the circuit route awaited us. We decided to look after our knees and retraced our steps to the car instead.

Clean Up Australia, Killarney: 2 March

Walkers: Dianne F, Karen, Friends of Tower Hill & Killarney Coastcare

We all met at the Killarney Beach carpark and split into two groups for the clean up. One group worked around Killarney Beach, the second group at the jetty east of the beach. Armed with rubber gloves and rubbish bags we scoured the beach front for a couple of hours picking up packaging tape, fishing ropes, drink bottles, cans, an exhaust pipe, and lots of plastic bags – some of which had to be dug out of the sand. The teams regrouped afterwards at the camping ground for a barbecue and chat. Killarney Coastcare members thanked the helpers from Friends of Tower Hill and the Warrnambool Walkers for their assistance. Although the beaches along Killarney are fairly clean we still managed to fill five large wheelie bins with rubbish.

After lunch Dianne decided that a walk to Port Fairy for coffee and cake was more enticing than the originally planned walk to Thunder Point. I couldn't agree more. The weather had held off all morning and we had earned a nice cuppa.

After walking some distance from Killarney we noticed there was still a bit of rubbish about. We found a net bag and starting filling it up with the usual suspects, packaging tape, plastic and bottles. It was full by the time we reached Port Fairy. We had certainly earned a coffee break stopped at Rebecca's Café in Sackville Street for apple/banana crumble (with cream of course) and a blueberry muffin.

Filled with energy and with the wind behind us, we set off for the return trip to Killarney. This time we could admire the pristine beach and the birdlife. There were Pied Oyster Catchers, a lone Tern, Hooded Plovers and Sandpipers frolicking along the beaches and rockpools. Again as we neared Killarney we picked up rubbish we had missed earlier, including a large plastic packing box to collect it all in. We found a large rubber thong and then a small but dead banjo shark, then an old gin bottle. We figured the small shark might have eaten a large drunken sailor who had fallen overboard, the shark succumbing to too much food and too much drink.

We had a wonderful day and had cleaned up the entire stretch of beach between Port Fairy and Killarney – at least until the next high tide.

Karen

The Overland Track, Tasmania: 8–15 March

Walkers: Carolyn, Graeme, Janice, Mabel, and Marg

After day two we agreed that if the heavens opened, we'd be happy. We had climbed Cradle Mountain on our way to Waterfall Valley Hut on our first day and followed that up by including the majestic Barn Bluff on our itinerary whilst walking on to Windermere for our second stop.

Mabel had been through in 1996 with "Cradle Mountain Huts" and she had missed this scenery due to low cloud and fog. I had failed to complete these climbs in 1999. This time, with a little help from my friends, I too saw the high points that look out across a magnificent wilderness of mountain peaks. Janice was on her first overnight backpack trek and Graeme has been everywhere else but never to



Tasmania. With reluctance and our disappointment, Carolyn needed to retrace her steps and return to Dove Lake next day to be at work in Launceston on Tuesday.

Fine weather was with us for the entire week. We were in good company meeting local as well as International and Interstate walkers so that when we summited Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest mountain (1617m), the mountain top was abuzz with a large group of happy walkers. "Peak baggers" of Launceston Walkers would have registered 12 points by then. 4 points each for Cradle, Barn and Ossa. Our walk to Gould Plateau from Narcissus Hut on day 6 would have earned us another 2 points.

Each night there was room in the huts for us, our food rations lasted the distance and towards the last days those packs must have been lighter.

Thank you Lothar, Coralie, Diane, Carolyn, Ron and others who helped us get ready for the walk and to my companions on the Overland Track for a memorable adventure that I'll never forget.

Marg



Teddy Bear Gap: 15 March

Walkers: *Dianne F, Karen (Leader), Linda, Lothar*

Lothar and I arrived at Karen's in good time to set off for the Grampians. We collected Linda at Koroit making up the mandatory four-person walk. We arrived at Jimmy's Creek in time to have coffee to provide sustenance for the upcoming walk.

The walk started with a steep long climb to the top of the range. This got the legs warmed up and the heart pumping. It also helped to work off some indulgences of the night before perhaps???

The climb was definitely worth it as the views were pretty spectacular. We reached Serra Road around lunchtime. Lothar and Linda decided to enjoy a leisurely lunch while Karen and I explored the track up to the very top. This track starts out OK but peters out about two thirds of the way up. From that point we utilised our rock scrabbling skills. Our efforts were rewarded with more spectacular views all round.

We were able to relocate the track back down to join the others for lunch. After lunch it was (nearly) all down hill (the walking that is). Initially we were on the gravel road but soon turned off onto the Ingleton Track, which is a more open forest environment.

While sitting and contemplating the walk at the picnic ground back at Jimmy's Creek we were lucky enough to see a deer. Karen tried out her deer catching skills but unfortunately (or fortunately?) she needs a lot more practice. However she made the day for one snap happy tourist who got a great pic (of Karen or the deer??)

The Teddy Bear Gap is a charming walk, well worth spending an afternoon on. The only disappointment was that we didn't see any teddy bears???. Perhaps they were out on a teddy bears picnic?

Thanks Karen (Better luck with the seals!!)

Dianne F

Barham River, Apollo Bay: 22 March

Walkers: *Jeff Kennedy (from Apollo Bay), Doris, Karen, Naomi, Karina, Andrew and Drew*

Our first destination was the Mariners Falls along a wet, ferny track, crossing the creek at well placed stepping stones. The overnight rain created a cool, green and lush atmosphere and ensured the waterfalls were at their most picturesque. Many photographs later we headed back towards the carpark, only to veer off a side-track climbing up and away from all the tourists. Winding around a hill and along steep gullies the going became quite slippery with most of us having a slip and slide or two (we lost count of how many times Karina fell). It was difficult to hang on to anything or put your hands down for support as there was lush growth of nettles along the track. We all had stinging hands after a short while. Poor Kate (the dog) had sniffed out a few nettles and was busy rubbing her nose into the soil to try to rid herself of the pain.

The scenery was spectacular, tall manna gums, tree ferns and other lush undergrowth as well as a profusion of different fungi. Soon we came to a creek crossing, this time with stepping stones mostly under water. It was difficult not to get your feet wet and soon we were all plunging into the water rather than trying to negotiate the slippery rocks. We had quite a few foot cleansing rituals throughout the day as befitted the watery theme of the walk.

Jeff pointed out a small group of 'slender tree ferns' that had survived land clearing and damage from decades ago. He said this type of tree fern was rare in the area as they were more delicate than the common 'soft (trunk) tree ferns' that were thriving along the creek. But there's something else that thrives in damp, ferny forests. LEECHES! We soon found out there were plenty of these after some screaming and yelping, the girls (one with ankle socks and cropped trousers) were crawling with them, not just one or two but half a dozen latching on to each leg. We all had them, they would crawl up waterproof pants until they found skin (I had 8 around my waist and a few more down my boots). So the walk continued more as a skip and a jump as we felt our skin crawling with leeches. Doris decided to do more than skip and jump, she did a triple somersault back flip and pike backwards over a log. Thankfully, no damage done. We eventually found a clearing where we could de-leech. The girls had picked up dozens of them, their legs covered in them. A good dose of salt soon got rid of slimy creatures.

Our thanks to Jeff and Doris for organising the walk. Doris' daughters Naomi and Karina and their partners Andrew and Drew were great company and laughed the whole way. We had a lot of fun and saw some spectacular countryside.

Karen