

GSWW from Gorge to Nelson day walk: 9 April

Walkers: Lothar (leader), Linda, Karen, Marg, Chris

This is a lovely walk along the banks of the Glenelg, and one we've all done before. We were well prepared, with raincoats tucked in our daypacks just in case, and well fuelled with pre-walk tea. The weather was very warm, with a strong, dry northerly wind, but we were all carrying water to drink.

By lunchtime, I was tired, headache-y and a bit surprised that I had no desire for a toilet stop.

Despite a longish rest for lunch and again near Hirth's landing, I got more and more tired as we progressed, and by mid-afternoon was feeling nauseous, lightheaded and ready to lie down on the track and die! Lothar was carrying my tiny daypack by now, and had given me a reserve bottle of water. We took it quietly, and Karen went ahead to bring the car back to Simpson's landing. I was mortified to be such a weak link, but so glad to see that car! Within moments of finding a café, drinking several glasses of water, a bottle of bitter lemon and a strong sweet coffee, I felt human again.

What the leader did right: Lothar stayed with me, taking my pack. He was matter-of-fact, so that I didn't dissolve into helpless self-pity, but he gave me plenty of time to walk at my pace. He ensured I kept drinking.

What I now know: How important it is to keep up the fluids – you need to drink much more on hot dry days, and drink before you get thirsty. I probably also needed something to eat during the afternoon; next time I'll take some extra fruit, or scroggin.

Chris



Hepburn Springs Swiss-Italian Fiesta: 29 April to 1 May

Walkers: Lothar (leader), Liz, Linda and Doris.

After picking up Doris in Camperdown and stopping for delicious buckets of hot chips, we located Daylesford Caravan Park and our two cabins. Later nobody took up Lothar's idea of a game of cards so we had an early night, having eaten at a restaurant we would not recommend.

We were ready before eight to hit the town for breakfast. After breakfast we found the air was so cold we decided to enjoy the warmth of the second-hand bookshop in the main street for a while before heading for Hepburn Springs and the excited crowd preparing for the parade. After the parade, walking away from the microphone and people into the deep green yonder was a good feeling, and the views started to be delightful enough for Linda to photograph. Even the blackberry bushes covering many valleys added to the scenery. On discovering an apple tree loaded with apples, Lothar used his dexterity, ingenuity and his walking stick to get hold of quite a few of them. We walked up to Jackson's Tower and then along to Golden Springs with its mineral water pump which Lothar and Linda tasted. We found a lovely spot for lunch overlooking Spring Creek valley. We survived Breakneck Gorge and the Blowhole, walking through beautiful bush on the winding dirt tracks to the peaceful sound of the nearby creek, and came across the occasional disused mine shaft. After arriving at Tipperary Springs we decide to walk along the road into town for a coffee rather than arrive at the lake. I spied a taxi and, as I was the only one who thought it was a brilliant idea, I rested my sore feet while travelling in style up to the caravan park.

We ate handsomely that night at the Royal Hotel (highly recommended) and we deserved it as the total of kilometres walked came to 22 when we worked it out. (For me, of course, it was a bit less since I cheated on the last stretch.) On the Sunday, after a beautiful stroll around Daylesford Lake and breakfast, Linda bought a map of Federation Walk at the Information Centre. We drove to the Olive Grove delicatessen/restaurant in Ballarat for a bite to eat for lunch before heading home.

We all had a great weekend. Lothar promised to organise it again next year. Thanks heaps, Lothar. Don't miss it in 2006.

Liz

Cobden to Timboon Rail Trail: 8 May

Walkers: Doris (leader), Graeme, Heather, Helen, Karen, Marg, Ken, Caroline, Trevor and Joe Blake the Labrador.

The walkers met at Joe Blakes Corner in Cobden for the car shuffle. We were greeted by a large Labrador pup that made it clear he was coming too. He tried to steal some of the morning tea biscuits Doris had provided and then swiftly made off with Graeme's unguarded banana (he had just taken it out of his pack for a pre-walk snack). Just before 11am, ten walkers set off down the rail trail. The first section of walk follows the road and farmland but is visually cut off from these by fairly dense roadside trees and shrubs. The noisy birdlife also cuts off the traffic noise. After a couple of kilometres Joe Blake the Labrador had decided he should head back home (we were all glad of that but especially me, he kept stepping on my heels! Do dogs do that as a habit?). We continued on through this lightly forested area watching the farmers at work and surprising the occasional wallaby.

The late morning sun was bright and strong, we were in for a wonderful day. After a few brief stops we reached the half way point at Glenfyne where we had a leisurely lunch. One of Graeme's neighbours saw us from the road and stopped to have a chat. It turns out he was one of the people behind the creation of the rail trail so he was glad to see our group making use of it.

After lunch the scenery changed. We were in lush forest surrounded by birds, trees and ferns. There were many creek crossings here via the magnificent old wooden trestle bridges. There were a few bridges we had to walk around as they were unsafe to walk on, but the ones we did walk on were full of holes and loose planks of wood. It was interesting (if not dizzying) to look down through the holes to the creek below.

We traversed more beautiful bushland, crossed bridges, peered into crystal clear waters and bathed in the warm autumn sunshine. After a wonderful 18 kms 9 walkers arrived at the cars.

Thank you Doris for putting on a lovely walk, wonderful sunshine and a very welcome home made morning tea.

Karen

Camino de Santiago: May

Walkers: Marg

A few years ago I read a piece in the Travel section of "The Age" that described one of a number of medieval pilgrimages that crisscross Europe - to Jerusalem, to Rome, and this one to Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain. The tomb of St James the Apostle lies within the city cathedral. Armed with an English/Spanish phrasebook and with some school day French in my head I bravely set out on "The way of St James".

We walked over the Pyrenees Mountains on the first day, climbing to 1300m to encounter low cloud and a sprinkling of sleet among the cold showers. After that we basked in the warm sunshine of late Spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Began a day's walk at sunrise or an hour later and walked until early afternoon generally. Everything stops in Spain for the Siesta: 2pm - 4pm.

I stayed in Refugios or Albergues - pilgrim hostels which offer 9 bunks, tepid shower, cold water laundry, and sometimes kitchen facilities. If not the latter, picnic tea was eaten on the steps of the refugio or in a village plaza. Meals could be obtained at a cafe or bar if you could find one. Hotel accommodation is available in the larger centres and there are private hostels.

The comradeship in the refugios as well as along the way is friendly making up for a lack of fluent conversation. "Hola!" and "Buen Camino" are the familiar greetings.

I was amazed at the number of Europeans of all ages who had begun walking (or cycling) 6 or 7 weeks ago. They'd reach Santiago and some would walk home.

I walked from St Jean Pied de Port to Fromista in a fortnight (360km) not quite half way to Santiago.

The journey can be an assisted walk - tour companies will transport luggage, arrange for hotel accommodation and meals. May-June is a nice season in Spain before annual holidays and the heat of summer. As it was, some refugios spilled over to offer a mattress on the floor for late arrivals. Any others would be turned away to find another place for the night.

I would like to return next year to complete the walk to Santiago, but if that doesn't happen, I will cherish the memories of the trip.

Marg

Wyperfeld National Park: 11–13 June

Walkers: Lothar (esteemed leader & head chef), Chris (wife of esteemed leader & head chef), Mike & Liz, Helen, Di, Max & Liz C.

Lothar's report:

Chris & I travelled up on Friday - it rained most of the way there but by the time we arrived the rain had stopped. It didn't start raining again until we'd already settled down for the night. By then we'd set up camp, collected firewood, had dinner, and gone for a stroll. Later that night we had a spectacular thunder & lightning show and heavy rain for about half an hour before things calmed down and we fell asleep.

Next morning - beautiful day! We love the huge campground that swallows up endless groups of campers, and are looking forward to the walks. After breakfast Max & Liz arrived - they'd been caught in a downpour the night before & had to stop elsewhere over night - and then Helen arrived. Mike & Liz arrived towards lunchtime.

We went on the Lake Brambruk Nature Walk (as far as the Devils Pools), came back and had lunch, and then went on the Desert walk. The pre Desert Walk was eventful in that when we drove down the 1.3km track to the car park, the track gradually deteriorated and ended up in a muddy section that only 2 out of the 3 cars managed to negotiate successfully. After pulling the car out of the mud we drove the cars back to the bitumen and walked in instead (note: when we returned here on Sunday, vehicular access to the track had been closed).

The Desert walk is an excellent 6km circuit with lots of interpretive signs. As everything had been very dry (until the last couple of days) many of the plants were still not in flower. Nevertheless we went through Black Box woodland, stands of Mallee and tea-tree, and up and down sandy dunes.

After the walk we returned to the cars, collected firewood, and then headed back to the campground to start the fire and the evening activities....see next report.

Di's report:

I decided on the leisurely drive option to Wyperfeld this year. Consequently, it was after two by the time I sauntered into the National Park. I spotted three familiar cars parked on the side of the road, odd place to park, I thought – the sign indicated the Desert Walk car park 1 km down the dirt track. Why didn't they just go down there – little did I know. With aspirations of meeting up with them, I started to turn into the dirt track . . .then I noticed Lothar's very muddy car, and the deep tyre tracks in the mud . . Bad idea, I thought, so instead I found camp, set up and took myself on the Brambruk Lake Nature Walk. This is a charming and informative little wander. The track is lined with metal trays giving information about the flora and fauna around the area. Of course, the most abundant fauna happens to be the huntsman spiders that shelter under the flaps. Oh how brave was I – I opened every one of them –

found five spiders and discovered yet another use for walking poles (set on their longest extension naturally). Last year this walk was very dry so it was nice to see some water in the Devils Pools this year.

Campsite was abuzz when I got back – the happy wanderers had returned, with tales of woe – something about muddy tracks and a certain 2WD car becoming bogged. Hurrah for the 4WD who came to the rescue! So that is why Lothar's car was dirty – and we thought it was just for show! Being late afternoon, the focus was on preparing for the annual camp roast. Once the fire was roaring, the meat cooking and vegies prepared, the red wine and nibbles made their appearance. Once again, Lothar excelled himself and the roast was perfect. Sweets from the Hamilton bakery did well to top off a perfect meal. Best restaurant in Vic without a doubt. We were joined by three members of the Grampians Walking Club for our campfire evening chat. Liz was most disappointed to learn that the only male among them was married – oh well, better luck next time Liz!

On Sunday, we did the Cameron Track Circuit. We incorporated some of the Tyakil Nature walk as part of this. After lunch, we detoured to Western Lookout before heading back along the Cameron track to the (infamous) Desert Walk car park – which incidentally had been closed to traffic because it was too boggy?!? Some chose the option of a lift back to camp and some walked. Once again, we enjoyed nibbles and red wine while Lothar slaved over a hot campfire preparing his chicken soup. This is almost as good as his camp roast – so good in fact that a few of us had some for breakfast as well! While sitting around the fire we discovered we had a murderer in our midst – a poor very hot skink came staggering out from one of the logs on the fire. Fortunately, the skink rescue squad sprang into action and managed to save him from a very nasty death indeed. Our would-be skink murderer was severely berated. The skink snuk off once he recovered from his near death experience, what a tale he has to tell his mates!

After tea three brave souls went on a pygmy possum hunt (AKA night walk) we found none but completed the Nature walk in the dark and found it to be a very pleasant walk despite the lack of wildlife (of course the spiders were still there!).

Monday morning brought with it yet another fine day. We packed up, went for a short stroll to visit the huge Mallee Fowl nest, and sauntered through Mallee Eucalyptus before making our way back home. As per last year, we had fine weather for the entire weekend and drove into the rain on the way home. Very well organized Lothar!

The Wyperfeld long weekend is fast becoming an annual must do event and it is easy to understand why. We had a wonderful weekend – great walks, great company, great food (fitting for the porkers walkers) an overall great time. Thank you to Lothar for once again putting in a lot of thought and effort to ensure everyone enjoyed themselves. The weekend is a must do for next year with the possibility of some of us doing the overnight option. Of course, only those who were not scared off by the ranger shaking his head and muttering “uuuuurgh that is a pretty tough walk” Like what would he know anyway!!!????*#

Tasmania: South West Cape 10–17 Jan 2008

Walkers: Mabel M, Michael J and Coralie G

Progressive Dinner - Mafia/Italian Night: 18 June

Participants: Alan, Chris, Di, Heather, Helen, Irene, John, Ken, Linda, Liz C, Lothar, Marg, Max.

We were "held up" at Otway Road on our arrival. Helen, dressed as a gangster, pointed the pistol at us. We dined under a festoon of green, white and red balloons. Steaming hot, thick and tasty Minestrone soup and Garlic bread were served and wine and punch complemented our first course.

Rugged up in coats and scarves we walked over to Wanstead Street, taking the long way round to improve our appetites. A pizza was delivered and shared as we waited for the spaghetti to cook and be served with Bolognese sauce, pumpkin and pine nut sauce, salad and wine. Conversations lulled as we tucked in with enthusiasm.

We found our way back to Bostock Street to settle in for more chat and delicious cheese cake, fruit salad, chocolate Tiramisu, chocolates, coffee, port, and probably more wine, etc.

Thank you to the cooks, hosts, kitchen staff and such good company making for a great evening.

Four of us turned up next afternoon for a recovery walk. We enjoyed a leisurely stroll to Logans Beach to see the new (whale) calf with its mother, then headed back to Proudfoots for Coffee. Very pleasant.

Marg.