

GSSW from Cape Nelson to Portland 1 July

Walkers: *Marg and Ken F, Lothar S, Di F, Graeme W.*

With some trepidation about what weather the day would bring, five of us set forth to walk the 18km Cape Nelson to Portland section of the Great South West Walk.

After leaving Di's car at our Portland waterfront finishing point, we travelled in Ken and Marg's car to our starting point – the Cape Nelson lighthouse. Right on cue the rain started. The decision whether or not to put on waterproof over pants was quickly resolved (in the affirmative!). A quick cup of coffee (courtesy of Marg) was most welcome. This allowed Lothar the time to display his mechanical aptitude by fixing a reluctant zip on Di's overpants.

The first hour of the walk was in almost constant rain and wind. Fortunately, as a result of Marg's careful planning of the walk, the wind was at our back, making conditions much more tolerable.

This Cape Nelson – Portland section of the GSSW has some spectacular coastal scenery. The track largely follows the tall cliff tops overlooking the ocean. The route skilfully uses the remnant native vegetation, giving a satisfying bushwalking experience.

Lunch was had at the platform overlooking "Yellow Rock", one of the many points of interest along the way. Watching the hardy local surfers catching the waves off the beach below provided some interest, taking our minds off our wet feet, but still largely dry bodies.

As the afternoon progressed, the Portland Smelter buildings that had been dominating our view got closer and closer whilst the lighthouse retreated into the distance. Eventually, we passed by the smelter on our left and continued along the coast through a range of native vegetation types. As we got closer into Portland, the native vegetation was replaced by the urban area.

We passed the Pivot fertiliser works, the port area, until eventually, tired and wet we reached Di's car. Fortunately, one of the local cafes allowed our wet, cold and now somewhat dirty group in. Here we had coffee and cake, rounding off a most rewarding walk and day.

Graeme W

BBQ and Working Bee with Friends of Tower Hill : 15 July

After the talk about the restoration of Tower Hill by John Sutherland at the June meeting, we thought it would be a good idea to combine a BBQ at Tower Hill with the next working bee of the Friends of Tower Hill.

John, Di, Dianne, Coralie, Mike, Liz, Linda and Irene enjoyed a BBQ (without the emus) in the sunny picnic area at Tower Hill. We were joined by a group of young people from US and Britain, who were visiting parts of Australia during their Summer holidays. They thought our winter was fairly similar to their summer.

After the BBQ and coffee, we joined John Sutherland, Daphne, Peter Coverdale and two young volunteers in planting Manna gums. Often we were replacing plants, which had been planted 12 months ago, but had succumbed to the drought. This time each tree was planted with a handful of hydrated granules in the bottom of the hole, to give it a reasonable chance of survival over the next 12 months. Trees were also guarded against the attention of roos, wallabies and emus with wire screens held in place with steel posts.

The working bee concluded with tea and coffee, date scones and chockie biscuits, and a chat together. It was very satisfying to be able to assist with the replanting trees, and helping to improve the flora of Tower Hill, as over the years many of the trees have died and now need replacing. Liz and I have joined the friends, and will keep you informed about future working bees.

Mike H

Mt Stapylton Overnighter (or GOG and MAGOG Overnight): Jul sometime

After several aborted, alternate plans, Diane Drake led a long weekend overnighter in the Mt Stapylton region. With five eager starters we left the Stapylton Campground and began the slow climb past the Mt of Olives.

Walking was straight forward on the well formed tracks in this area and we enjoyed fine conditions despite the weather being at its wintry best earlier in the week. The situation changed somewhat as we hit the overgrown 4WD track that would take us around the back of Mt Stapylton and to the rocky out crop known as Gog and Magog. Although it had been some time since Sandra had carried an overnight pack, she found the trail to her liking. Forging ahead, whilst the rest of us constantly had to disentangle ourselves from the vegetation overhanging the path, earned her the nickname of “the Wombat”.

After a few hours of walking, we descended sharply on very rocky terrain. A short time later, Diane selected a flat campsite a little beyond the rocky bulk of Gog and Magog. It was still a little damp from recent rain and seemed to be formed from a clay base. Unfortunately, I had forgotten a ground sheet and the clay stuck fast to the tent floor and subsequently required numerous washings back at home.

Once our tent city had been established, we got down to the serious business of afternoon tea. Whilst we were sharing pumpkin scones, Tim Tams, chilli and lime cashews and the like, a group of mountain bikers swooped and hollered their way down to us. We could hardly believe that they had ridden the rough trail we had just walked but they bore the ripped T shirts and assorted scratches and bruises to prove it. At this point Linda, returned to the Mt Zero road to retrieve her car and drive home and Mike, Diane, Sandra and I set about testing our rock climbing skills on the lower slopes of Gog and Magog.

Later that evening as we cooked dinner, we were treated to a beautiful changing light display on the surroundings rock faces as the Sun slowly set in the west.

The next morning we walked around to Hollow Mountain and Mt Zero before completing the circuit past Mt Stapylton and back to the car.

Thanks to Diane for leading this trip at short notice and acting as the main driver and to Mike, Sandra and Linda for their entertaining company.

Coralie G .

Halls Gap—Pinnacles Walk: 5 Aug

Walkers: *Di F (leader), Ken and Marg F and Di D.*

Di F and her passengers set off to go to Halls Gap to climb the Pinnacle and return. We left on a cool overcast morning which stayed that way for most of the day. On the way up there were quite a few kangaroos on the road between Dunkeld and Halls Gap. On one occasion a kangaroo must have felt the warmth of Di F's car engine as the animal squeezed between our car and one coming the other way. It was close and thanks to Di's good driving that we missed the kangaroo. We arrived without further trouble.

After a much needed coffee and cake break we walked from Halls Gap camping ground to the Wonderland car park then up to the summit of the Pinnacle. The walk was busy with people going up and coming down. Lunch was had at the top of the Pinnacle, no one went on the Nerve Test as we did not have the nerve to do that exercise. So we all made our way down to the bottom surveying the wildflowers as we descended.

A coffee break was most welcome when we reached ground level and no further incident happened as we made our way home.

Thanks Di for the walk and it was enjoyed by all present.

Ken

Wartook Weekend 21–22 July

Walkers: Steph (leader), Coralie, Mabel, John, Linda, Irene, Helen, Sandra, Tony, Lothar, Dianne, Diane.

On Friday afternoon Irene, Helen and I left just after 2pm and travelled, via Cavendish, to Emu Park Holiday Park. We got the fires going inside and out then settled down to drinks and bickies and dips. It was not long before the others arrived and everyone settled in for a quiet night. Some camped outside in the frost whilst others had booked a cabin.

After breakfast discussion took place as to where we were going. We initially split into 3 groups. One group left straight away for Mount Difficult, another group had not finished breakfast so they headed to Mount Difficult a bit later; the third group were yet to decide where to go. The second Mount Difficult group met the first group not far from the start as they had been to look at some falls and then bush bashed back to the main track where we met them. Although the sign said it was only 5km to the top it took us about 2 ½ hours to get there. There was a lot of rock scrambling and it was up hill most of the way.

The reward at the top was well worth it. The sky was crystal clear and we had views that were breath taking. There was a slight breeze blowing which made it freezing so we did not stay long and we headed down again. I always find going down harder and this was no exception.

We stopped at the Wartook coffee shop for a late afternoon tea, then back to camp. We found the others had walked from the camp ground to the coffee shop for lunch and had had a great day as well.

The fires were already blazing and Lothar set about cooking the camp roasts and vegetables. Everyone enjoyed sitting outside by the camp fire whilst tea was being prepared. The feast was huge, meat, vegetables and an egg plant lasagne; this was followed by three different types of sweets. The Warrnambool Porkers lived up to their reputation.

Breakfast was well catered for with waffles, bananas, mascarpone cheese, maple syrup, yogurt and as if that was not enough, bubble and squeak.

Thanks to Steph for putting the weekend on, it's been a while since we have been there and it was great to see the number of walkers supporting the activity.

Linda H

Briggs Bluff . . . AKA . . . Ratattackie Walk! . . AKA the Creation of the VOCA club (Victims Of Critter Attack)! 1–2 September

Walkers: Leader: Coralie

Seven hardy souls met up at the coffee shop (naturally) at Halls Gap for final refreshments before heading into the great wilderness. Little did they know what lie ahead! I swear there is something in the Grampians that brings out the best (& worst) in all of us. What can one say about a walk that elicits such comments as “Look at the Thryptomene that is not out yet” Yep, we all looked – but oddly enough, we could not see any flowers! Oh well, anticipation is often the best part of a trip! The weather was perfect for walking – not too hot, not too cold, and definitely not wet – just right! We had a wonderful walk in, admiring the wildflowers (even some that were yet to bloom) and generally catching up. We reached the first campsite just past the Briggs Bluff turn off and decided to stop for the day there. Tents were soon erected; afternoon tea was shared and enjoyed by all! We then set off for the Bluff we all reached the top and were amused by the antics of a few of our crew who decided to see who could squeeze through the smallest hole in a rock! Oh, the things one sees when one does not have a camera! Three out of seven made it through– the rest of us had a laughing competition!

It was when we arrived back at the tents that disaster struck – our esteemed leader unzipped her tent and let out a blood-curdling scream! We all courageously dashed to her rescue – with thoughts of the tent scene in Psycho (or was that a shower scene) and the like. . . . in time to watch the fattest, happiest RAT (four legged type) seen in many a long time. This RAT had literally scoffed himself on so many nuts that he could not even run away – he waddled! According to the victim herself, this RAT was actually wiping his whiskers as he waddled out – using the door in preference to the hole he made to get in(yes, it definitely was a male RAT, female RATS have much more decorum!!). Well, there was a happy RAT but an unhappy leader. As if the Currawong’s were not enough to contend with, this was attack from all angles.

We decided to restore order over tea – as any bushwalker (and RAT) knows – food heals many wounds! We traded tales of RATS, critters and walks along with a few laughs. After tea a few of us decided to go for night wander – to look at the night sky and collect water before going to bed. We left the camp in the capable hands of a few who decided to stay behind! Some guard people they turned out to be! While they were sleeping in their tents that *#@%&* RAT came back for more! Yep, this time he went for the pack – nothing is sacred in the RAT world! By this time, our leader was mumbling about him having a terminal case of indigestion! Unbelievable. That night I slept with my pack in the tent, firmly under my feet.

The morning dawned – with no more incidents, we decided to pack up and get out of there! Again, the weather was perfect for walking. Some members scurried up Mt Difficult while others minded the packs for us – and they did a much better job than their predecessors did!

It was a great walk, lovely weather, wonderful wildflowers, great company, pity about the wildlife. If you are thinking of walking the Briggs Bluff Circuit, I know a great little camping spot

Thanks Coralie for a wonderful walk. I am sorry about the critter/vermin damage. Welcome to the VOCA club, it is quite exclusive. They say bad luck comes in threes so you have had your share now.

Quotes of the walk:

“Look at the thryptomene that is not out yet”

“The huts are good and you get comfortable with the other people on the walk because you sleep with them every night!?!#”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!!!!!”

The Grampians Three Peaks Challenge of Mt Abrupt, Mt Sturgeon and the Piccaninny: 16 September

Walkers: Dianne F, John L, Tony & Sandra D, Ken & Margaret F, Liz & Mike H, Mabel M, Coralie G, Helen A, Linda H, Diane D, Doug W and Anne M.

Organisers: Dianne F and Sandra D

Report 1: Freshly mown lawns greeted us as we pulled in to the luxurious camp ground just behind Sandra and Tony's Dunkeld home. With Tony in attendance, the fire was already roaring as we selected sites for the tents. It was then on to complete a circuit of the town's arboretum before a pre-dinner drink with the rowdy locals at the Royal Mail Hotel.

Back at the camp site we settled in to the serious business of eating, drinking and cooking our barbecue fare. Well, we would have if Ken's very large T-bone steak hadn't taken up most of the available cooking space! Eventually fed and watered we retired for the night; Ken & Marg to the inside accommodation (the excuse offered was 'forgotten tent pegs') and the rest of us to our tents.

The wind howled most of the night but fortunately no one experienced tent lift-off and we were all packed ready to go by the time the first cars from Warrnambool appeared. Morning coffee at the Royal Mail preceded the ascent of the first and highest peak for the day, Mt Abrupt.

Twelve walkers assembled for the photograph at the base of Abrupt and we were soon climbing steadily. A few stops were taken along the way as we adjusted levels of clothing, sipped from our drink bottles and generally drank in the views. Sandra took a tumble on a rocky section but was soon patched up Mabel and ready to go sporting only a small cut and a bruise on her head.

The clouds darkened as we neared the summit and it was necessary to add layers of clothing to keep warm as we snacked before the return journey. We reached the base around 12 o'clock and decided to lunch at the Mt Sturgeon car park. Here we were met by Doug and Anne. Linda left for Koroit, Helen, Sandra and Ken returned to Dunkeld on afternoon tea duties and the rest of us tackled the second peak of Mt Sturgeon.

The climb was made more pleasurable by the fields of native orchids, wax-lips and greenhoods were especially plentiful. Nearing the last gully before the summit, the light rain became heavier and we were forced to don rain coats. The rain persisted on the descent and there was some thought of abandoning the third peak.

The bad weather abated, however and we were able to meet up with Helen, Ken and Sandra at the turn off to Piccaninny summit. They had trekked in with bottles of champagne, scones, jam and cream. Celebrating on the third peak for the day we reflected on a great activity. It was very successful because

- it was a challenge to complete all three peaks in a day,
- people could join for the parts that suited them,
- it was only an hour's drive from home,
- it wasn't expensive and
- it provided an enjoyable social outlet.

Long live the three peaks challenge! Thanks to all who helped turn this into a wonderful club event.

Coralie G

Report 2:

Sandra and Tony invited us to camp on the back lawn at their holiday house at Dunkeld. Six of us took up that offer. Tony had the fire burning on our arrival after 3pm on Saturday. Slight hiccup – I'd forgotten the tent poles! Sandra ushered us indoors!

We walked over to the Arboretum to enjoy the scenic area that reflects the mountains in the lake. Old gum trees, birds flitting about, so peaceful. We followed the track through the campground and along the creek, edging our way to the Royal Mail. We ordered drinks just as Mabel and Coralie arrived.

The backyard fire was hot on our return, ready to barbeque, share aperitifs and salads. A crescent moon shone when the sun went down. We drifted indoors for pavlova and coffee and chocolates.

In the morning we were to meet Michael and Liz at the Mt Abrupt car park. Dianne, Diane and John arrived well before so we sauntered up to the Pub for another coffee before hitting the trail.

In sunshine we scaled Abrupt enjoying the display of wildflowers: Wattle, Banksia, Heath, Grevillea. No one else was on the mountain. Clear views along the Serra Range and the salt lakes beyond the green Victoria Valley were brimming.

Linda left whilst the rest of us drove to Sturgeon carpark for our lunch. Anne and Doug were waiting. Helen and Ken returned to Dunkeld with Sandra. We others set off through the low slopes of Sturgeon admiring the myriad of orchids. Pale pink and deeper pink and cream Caladenia, patches of Greenhoods, and searched for Leopard Orchids that Mabel had seen the week before. Gorgeous.

The sky clouded as we ascended and rain was falling as we neared the summit. Abrupt was shrouded in cloud and rain whipped across the summit. However a while later when we crossed towards the Piccaninny the rain ceased. Doug and Anne continued back to their car. Coralie scouted ahead followed by the rest of us keen to finish our challenge.

Near the Piccaninny high point we met Sandra, Helen and Ken. It was 3:30pm just as Dianne had anticipated. The contents of the three daypacks were revealed at the summit. Glasses, Champagne, pumpkin scones, raspberry jam and whipped cream! Sandra, what a hostess!

Thanks to our hosts and a wonderful day out together bushwalking. Thanks President Di for offering us the Three Peak Challenge. A Great Day.

Marg

Great Ocean Walk: 26 September to 3 October

The weather certainly tried everything it could to challenge us and lots of time was spent drying the tent and items of clothing! Spring is a time of uncertain weather and maybe not the best time of year to undertake this walk. The prevailing wind is usually from the south-west and being restricted to walking from east to west meant we battled head winds every day and some were gale force at times.

Coralie, Marg and Mabel took the bus from Warrnambool to the beginning at Apollo Bay. It was raining and windy as we set off but the tide was low so we were able to go the very interesting beach route to the first stop at Elliot Ridge.

Day 2 was spent mainly on wide tracks. The old logging track from Elliot Ridge was very wet and muddy. The morning was dry and we had lunch overlooking the beach at Blanket Bay. This GOW camp site is still incomplete. The camp sites have been done but not the shelter – we really needed the shelter as it poured just as we were about to eat our evening meal and everything got soaked. The camp sites are made of compacted clay and the water lies on top – one of our sites flooded and we had to move a tent.

On day 3 we got to Cape Otway Lighthouse late morning after walking through hail, rain and very strong winds. The toilet at the GOW camp had been burned down the week before – they did supply port-a-loos as a replacement. At the campsite there were 2 koalas, one with a small baby but very little food – they had stripped all the trees. We spent the afternoon at the lighthouse – well worth a visit. The highlight was trying to walk around the top platform of the lighthouse in the strong wind. We also saw a ringneck parrot that obviously had been blown well off course.

The next day walking in sunshine, we met up with Liz, Mike (day walkers) and Sandra (heading east) as we walked towards Aire River – as well as lots of syrup cake, pumpkin scones and muffins for immediate consumption they also brought supplies and fresh clothes for the walkers. We shared the shelter with a bird family – the parents working very hard to feed 3 youngsters.

Another day of bad weather followed. It started raining through the night so we packed up wet gear and headed towards Johanna. Bend Café was closed so no treats along the way. The walk along Johanna Beach was difficult – high tide, gale force winds and rain. All the creeks and rivers along the walk had lots of water flowing in them and the Johanna River was no exception. Wet and miserable Sandra and Marg accepted the very generous offer of a lift back to Apollo Bay from the Park Ranger. Linda called in and left a note in the log book but headed back to warmth and shelter. The sun god shined on Coralie and Mabel and they were able to dry out that afternoon.

It was uneventful from there until we got to The Gables. It was high tide and we couldn't walk along Wreck Beach. The inland route is along muddy 4WD tracks that have been bulldozed into 2 lane highways. It was very uninteresting and long – 4 kms. The compensation was the view from the loo at Devil's Kitchen camp, the track down to the beach and Wreck Bay. On the last day we were very disappointing to see what has happened to the Old Coach Road – it has been bulldozed and the sides of the road is now covered in dead tea tree instead of being a garden of wildflowers is. It is sandy, muddy and water lying everywhere.

Arriving at Princetown at 9.00 am and having many hours to spare Mabel and Coralie spent a very relaxing morning in the Do Duck Inn Café enjoying good coffee, good food and friendly staff. Meantime, unbeknown to them, Linda and Helen had walked from Glenample to Princetown and back looking for them. Linda and Helen enjoyed the comforts of the café while Mabel and Coralie finished the walk. A gale was blowing and it was hard to stay on track but the view along the coast towards Port Campbell was spectacular.

Mabel