

June 2023

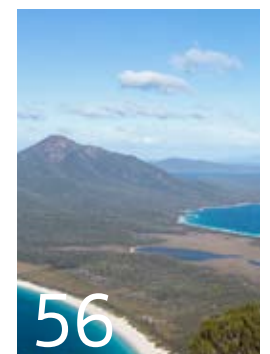
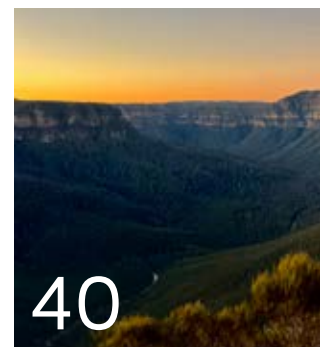
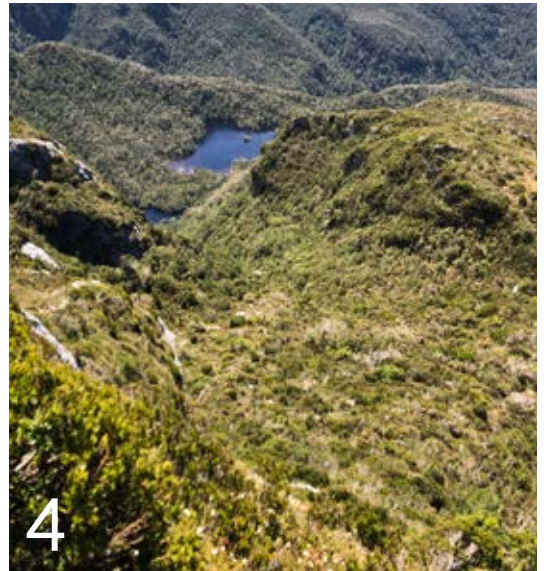
Rushwalk

Trail Trials



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**Always Was
Always Will Be
Aboriginal Land**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of this vast land on which we live and explore. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this great south land.

Editor's Letter



Hi,

I hope this edition finds you well and ready for some winter adventures.

In this edition, Bede takes us on another Tassie trip, venturing into the wild Eastern Arthurs - a magical untouched corner of the world. Rob takes us into the stunning but easy-to-underestimate Budawangs, giving an honest take on a memorable trip (for all the wrong reasons) through rugged terrain in soaking weather. Sonya is back in the Snowies, taking us on an Easter trip with an unexpected snowstorm adventure beyond the comforts of the Schlink "Hilton" in Kosciuszko National Park. Our ever-reliable author, Ian, offers a change of pace, checking out the stunning wildflowers and tracks at the coastal Heathland Reserve near Ulladulla.

Gregory dives deep into the stealthy privatisation of our national parks as many states start trading wild paces and equity of access for the elusive ecotourism dollar. I also get up close and personal with some leeches, getting to know these little suckers better. You will also find all the usual other bits and pieces in this edition, including the stunning and diverse images from our photo competitions.

This magazine is written by bushwalkers for bushwalkers. If you've got a story or ideas to share, please reach out. Even if this is your first time writing, we can help.

Happy reading and walking.

Matt :)

Matt McClelland (aka Wildwalks)
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Cover image
The South Cracroft Valley
from the top of Geeves Gully
Rob Deed



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Please send any articles, suggestions or advertising enquires to Eva. We would love you to be part of the magazine. Read our [Writer's Guide](#) to get started, and we are here to help.

Declaration

The opinions stated in articles are those of the authors and not of those involved in the production of this edition. If you are worried about transparency or any editorial aspect please either write to me or raise the issue on Bushwalk.com. The bushwalking community is a small world and paths often cross. To improve transparency I thought it would be helpful to list my main associations within the outdoor community.

I operate [Bushwalk.com](http://bushwalk.com), [Wildwalks.com](http://wildwalks.com) and [Overlandtrack.com](http://overlandtrack.com), a number of other smaller websites (and related apps) and have written several walking guide books, published by Woodslane. I contract to National Parks Association NSW and I am a member of the Walking Volunteers. I have had contracts with state and local government departments regarding bushwalking and related matters. I have also partnered with a large number of other organisations in environmental campaigns. Any commercial advertising or sponsorship will be clear in the magazine.

Warning

Like all outdoor pursuits, the activities described in this publication may be dangerous. Undertaking them may result in loss, serious injury or death. The information in this publication is without any warranty on accuracy or completeness. There may be significant omissions and errors. People who are interested in walking in the areas concerned should make their own enquiries, and not rely fully on the information in this publication.

The publisher, editor, authors or any other entity or person will not be held responsible for any loss, injury, claim or liability of any kind resulting from people using information in this publication.

Please consider joining a walking club or undertaking formal training in other ways to ensure you are well prepared for any activities you are planning. Please report any errors or omissions to the editor or in the forum at Bushwalk magazine.

Reflections on The Eastern Arthurs

Text
Bede House

Photos
Rob Deed

Walking is an individual thing, and each walker's goals are so personalised that it is impossible to list walks from worst to best. However, it cannot be refuted that few walks garner such respect as the Eastern Arthurs. This is because it is a place that resisted human overrun longer than many peaks in the Himalayas, and almost as long as Everest. It took many intrepid and unique characters to reach the greatest of the Eastern Arthurs crags, Federation Peak, and to traverse the range itself.



The Dial, The Boiler Plates and Lake Gaston from the top of the Southern Traverse



Uncle Rob, Bede and Drew

I am now 18, and I have finished school and am about to embark upon a degree. To complete this pivotal period, I felt it was time to pit myself against this beast, and in particular the jewel of the range, Federation Peak. The plan was simple: traverse the range - Scotts Peak Dam to Farmhouse Creek - and climb Federation.

“

The plan was simple: traverse the range - Scotts Peak Dam to Farmhouse Creek - and climb Federation.





I enlisted two people. The first was a relative whose title is rather unclear, so I just call him Drew. He is a passionate walker, and good company. The second was my Uncle Rob, with whom I had scaled Mount Anne the previous year.

Day 1: Scotts Peak Dam to Cracroft Crossing, 26.7 km, 8.5 hours

I had been religiously watching the weather forecast for days. At first it was really rather bad, but it quickly became clear that it was all a hoax, and the weather was actually going to be rather good, with a prediction of a little rain on the third and the fourth days, but very sunny after that.

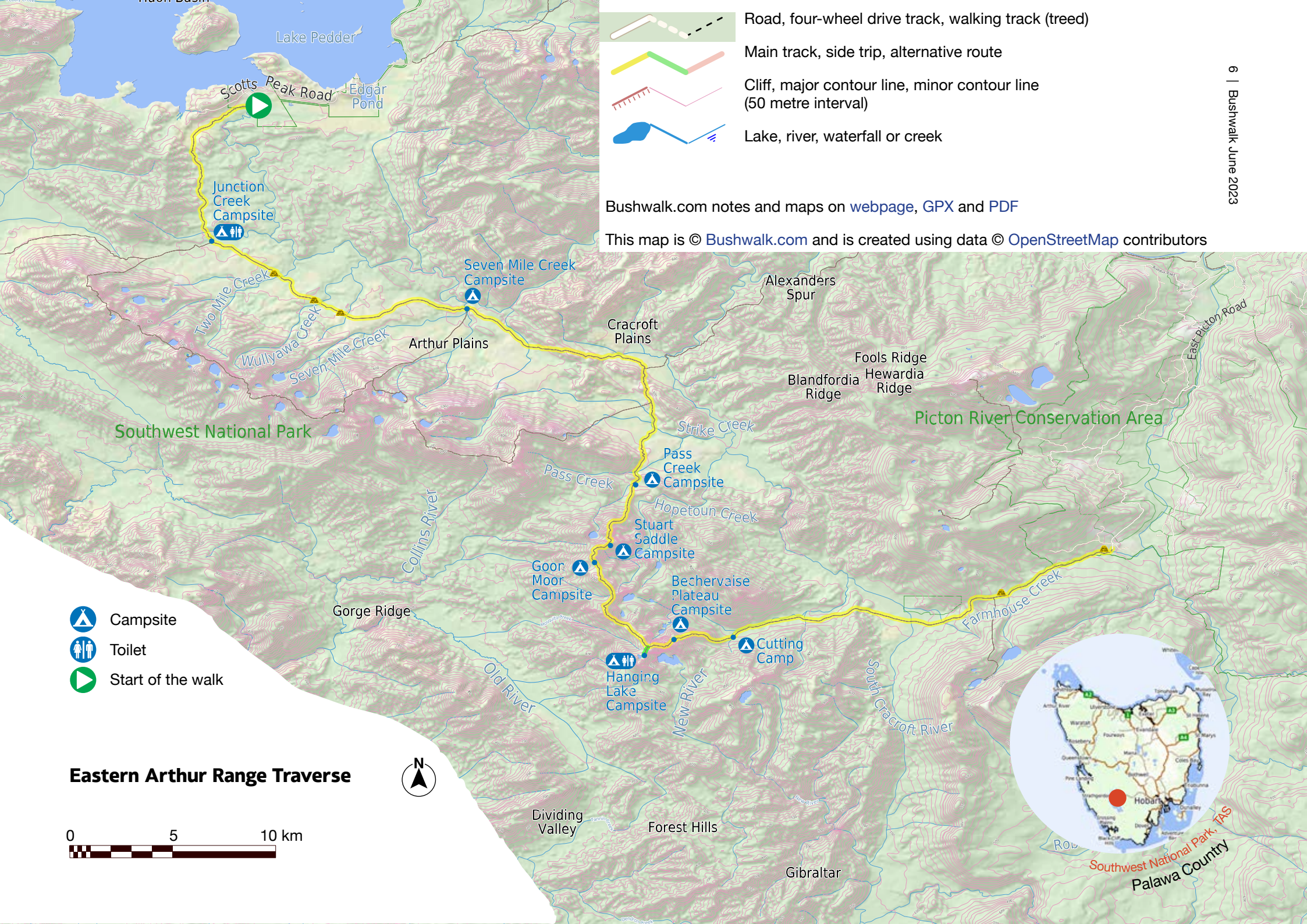
I talked often with the team, and everyone was ready to go on the morning of 3 January 2023. We left early from The Huon Valley in light drizzle, and picked up Drew from the St Ives in Hobart, arriving at the dam at 9 am.




It was a slow start. We chatted, holding off saddling packs for as long as possible. The loads weren't getting any lighter, and it was three grimacing men that signed the log book at the start of the track proper and made their way over the first, wooded, knoll. We made swift progress initially, but it was no more than five minutes before we met our first person, an education ranger.

-  Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)
-  Main track, side trip, alternative route
-  Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (50 metre interval)
-  Lake, river, waterfall or creek

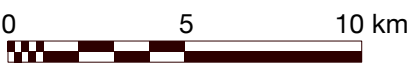
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-  Campsite
-  Toilet
-  Start of the walk

Eastern Arthur Range Traverse



The forest continued unabated, until suddenly we came out onto an open buttongrass plain dotted with small, grassy knolls. This is a plain like few that I have ever seen, deeply rutted with small soaks rather than being merely a flat expanse. My grandfather left us and wished us good luck. We were now in the thick of it, and there was no turning back. We crossed the small plain over a two kilometre stretch of board walk alternating with loose gravel until we plunged once more into a thick enclave of trees. What followed was a mottled affair as we moved through thickening and thinning scrub and forest with many small creek crossings.

Up to this point we had neither gained nor lost significant altitude but finally we began to descend until we reached Junction Creek. The time was 11 am and we were ready for a cup of tea. It was here that we had the first of a number of unsettling encounters. A large group appeared and after a little chat we mentioned we were off to Feders where they too were going. "You going to climb it?" he asked. "That's the plan." "Cool, I climbed it once, but I'm too scared now." Tea was silent after that until we decided to be on our way.

The next stretch was the long Arthur Plains. It was a continuation of the plain walking we had already done, except for the fact that you were accompanied by wonderful views of the Western Arthurs and that the amount of forest encountered significantly reduced.

The sun had come out now, if only for a minute, and the plains had heated up to a balmy 17 degrees. We sweated our way through and were relieved as it began to cloud over a little and abate the full force of the sun. We crossed many small creeks and trudged through much mud and knee-high scrub as we made our way toward the mighty Razorback which could be seen off in the distance.

It was about an hour and a half after leaving Junction Creek that we met a rather enthusiastic young rover. He told us that he had come off the Western Arthurs at Moraine K and was heading back to Scotts Peak, and when we mentioned we were headed for Federation he said, "Oh yeah, I have been eyeing it off the whole walk. It just wants to be climbed. It's just been there, this big sexy mountain." A big sexy mountain indeed; I will never think of it any differently.



The Western Arthurs from The Arthur Plains

We crossed more creeks and plains, heading east until we hit Seven Mile Creek where we stopped for a late lunch at 3 pm. Here we debated as to whether to continue or to make camp, as I had travelled the next section the previous November and it had taken four hours. We decided that if we walked hard we could make it by 6 pm.

The track headed along the plains a little further before scaling The Razorback, an open ridge separating the Cracroft and Arthur plains. We reached the top after 90 minutes and stopped briefly to take in the view. The wind had picked up and the clouds were lower in the sky. The outlook was altogether bleak. We quickly saddled packs again and made our way down the slow descent which runs along the flank of the Razorback ridge to the junction with the Huon Track. Here, it began to rain so that the last 200 metres were in light drizzle, which went unabated until we were in bed. We had Burritos (except for Drew who had a dehyd), a G and T each and decided on a leisurely start the next morning.

Day 2: Cracroft Crossing to Stuart Saddle, 10 km 8.5 hours

Day two dawned overcast but dry, but we still made a late start, around 9 am. The weather improved as we mounted the Razorback further east and got our first view of Federation Peak at the low saddle.

The descent and then the long amble parallel to Strike Creek was difficult as disuse of the track by walkers and confusion from numerous faint animal pads impeded progress, so that it was a frustrated party that finally found the track on the opposite bank later than expected. The track improved quickly, however, as we made our way to Cerberus Hill and found some delightful duckboard as we contoured around it into the valley of Pass Creek where we lunched in the hot sun, all the mountains staring down up on our exposed position.

The openness of the country was exciting, as one could see virtually all the way down the Pass Creek valley and all the way up it, as well as being able to spy the tall peaks around us, West Portal and the Boiler Plates being most prominent.



The Eastern Arthurs from The Razorback



Luckmans Lead

We could also see the steep climb that is Luckmans Lead, so we had a long lunch, hoping we would be suddenly transported to the top. Alas, that never happened and we eventually packed up and made our way along more duckboards up along the left stem of Pass Creek. It was at the end of this narrow valley that we had another unnerving experience.

Two walkers were making their way off Luckmans Lead, and we met them here. After some pleasantries, I asked them if they climbed the peak. "We got up there and we were really tired and we were just like nah," was the man's response. "It's really scary around there," was the woman's. More votes of confidence.



Goon Moor and The Needles from Stuart Saddle

We continued along the duckboard towards the imposing ridge that was Luckmans Lead until we finally hit it, and began a steep and seemingly endless climb across an open slope. The track was rutted and large white stones were littered across the grass.

It was a slow climb until we finally came to a new weather observation system, which we had a great time procrastinating with. We continued up, finally, and entered thick forest, a particularly painful affair due to the roots and over growth constantly entwining itself in packs, and it was a relief to escape for a drink of water and a biscuit.

We then continued across more semi-open country to the boiler plates, entering a small glade where the Luckmans Lead campsite is, and where we stopped for tea. It was now 4.30 pm, and any hope of making it to Goon Moor was dashed, but we were determined to make it to Stuart Saddle.

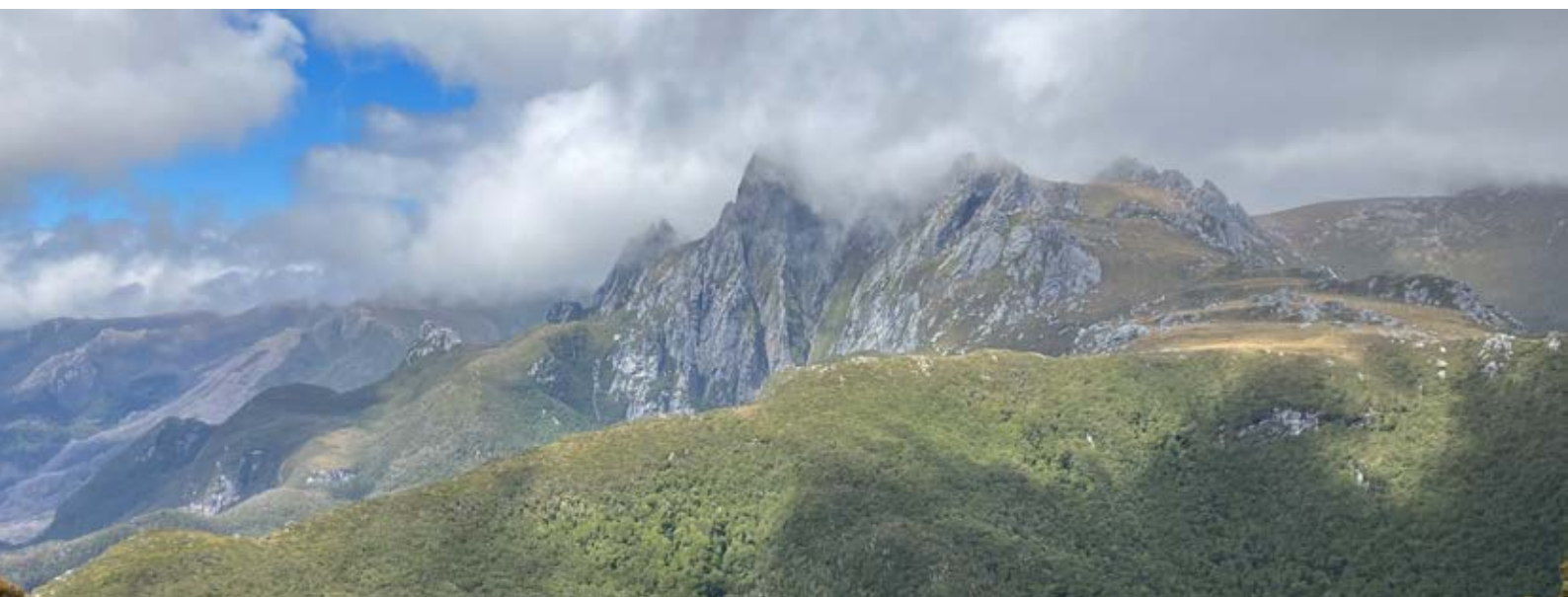
The Boiler Plates loomed, and it was an impressive site as we made our way through these large slabs of rock, following a steep and at times mildly exposed route, an exciting but tiring affair. By the time we topped out I was buggered. Making our way around The Dial above the beautiful Lake Leo, shimmering like a jewel, was a slog, but we finally made it, and set up camp in brilliant sunshine, looking up at the impressive face of the western-most needles.

Day 3: Stuart Saddle to Hanging Lake, 7.1 km 9.5 hours

We had hoped for good weather. We were out of luck. A heavy mist had descended overnight and a light rain was dripping. We lounged in the tent until it lightened a little, and went about breakfast. It clagged in so we lounged some more, before biting the bullet and packing up in the wet, donning heavy rain gear and beginning the tiresome but very exciting route underneath The Needles. We clambered up a boulder-strewn gully to the saddle in the middle of The Needles, and crossed to the other side, being teased by small views to the east as we went.

It was here that the weather showed some signs of fining up, but as we descended under the west side of The Needles, it clagged back in again and even lightly rained, and it was a dreary sight as we came into Goon Moor. Here I filled my water bladder for the first time, but it proved to be unnecessary weight, as 3 litres rather than the 6 would have easily sufficed. Crossing Goon Moor was a tiresome business, the buttongrass pushing back against our feet, and sapping valuable energy.

The climb over a small knoll to the east was rewarding, as by the time we came to the Gables the cloud cover was lifting, revealing the full splendour of the range, and Federation Peak lay in a cloak of mist, peeking through like an enigma.



Federation Peak from the saddle with The Gables



The Eastern Arthurs from the top of Thwaites Plateau

It was a little after the saddle with The Gables that we had lunch, and the sun came out, drying our wet clothes and warming us up. Looking south there seemed to be no further cloud approaching, and we hoped this would mean a free run to the summit the next day.

We were now entering one of the more difficult parts of the traverse, the Four Peaks, infamous for its technical climbing, both up and down, and for the slow going of the terrain due to scrub and constant rocky ascents and descents. We made our way over a small knoll, and got our first look at the first of the peaks, a bulbous rock formation like a belly. It all seemed easy enough until suddenly it wasn't. A near vertical, razor-thin wall barred the way. Climbing over it with a pack was tricky enough, but then came a steep and loose descent down a steep gully.

It was like this for a number of hours, up tenuous ascents and down climbs whose technicality should not be underestimated as we contoured around the western side of the Four Peaks massif, until finally we came out onto easier ground around Thwaites Plateau.

After a slug of water we three weary travellers made the slog up Thwaites Plateau and passed the Devils Thumb, taking a moment

to enjoy the impressive scenery of the lakes below and the Forest Chute. We took this until we made it to the turn off with the Hanging Lake track where we stopped again and joked about a late afternoon ascent of Federation, an idea that was not without its merits.

The short walk to Hanging Lake was quite pleasant. After setting up camp a hot dinner was welcome as we looked out at the view, basking in the good weather, an incredible sight being a small wisp of cloud settling over the summit of Federation and glowing yellow in the dying light.

Day 4: Hanging Lake to Bechervaise Plateau, 2 km 6 hours

D-day dawned cool and clear, the perfect weather for a summit attempt. The pressure was on, and I felt it keenly as we packed up and made our way quickly back to the top of the main ridge. The path we followed was initially without issue, just a steep slope, and then we rounded a hunk of rock, and below was a serious drop. I stopped a moment, contemplating, before continuing on, hoping that was the worst. It wasn't.

What followed was a thin razorback traversed by a series of climbs and descents poised ominously above steep drops to ledges

below, and below those ledges was seemingly nothing but the forest many hundreds of metres below. According to my uncle, it was looking more and more like Federation Peak.

To say it was an exhilarating experience is one way of putting it; scary was more appropriate.

But finally, we came into a group of tall spires and traversed our way through them and with that the country levelled out except for a brief climb across a steep gully. The country among the spires was impressive, and as we came between the last two, we got our first view of the direct ascent; looking up to where people attempting the most difficult part, coming out across a ledge with many many metres of exposure below.

As we came underneath it I felt much apprehension, but all that could be done was to go or not, and I decided I would at least try. We got together some essentials, and then started up. From the get go it was exposed, and it only got worse as we continued up. We sat down about half way up and marvelled at the steepness and the exposure all around us, it was as if we sat on a small blade amidst nothing. But up we must go and up we did until we came to the fabled ledge.

“

This moment had been a goal since I was a child, an odd goal, but there we are.

It was remarkably unmemorable as we made our way up the most exposed section, the infamous groove, and from then on the climb levelled out considerably, and it was a mere walk for the final 100 metres to the summit.

It was a moment I will never forget, to finally stand where I had always wanted to. This moment had been a goal since I was a child, an odd goal, but there we are. We sat around, made calls, procrastinated descending and basked in the joy of the moment. It was my uncle's second time at the summit, and for Drew it was third time lucky. Thirty minutes later we began the descent, and other than getting a little lost we made it back down unscathed.

The sun was now heavy, and so we found a little shade and made lunch. It was a joyous time to sit and contemplate our victory and to frolic in the warmth. We had come a long way,



The tent drying at Bechervaise Plateau



Looking up at the beginning of the Southern Traverse from Bechervaise Plateau



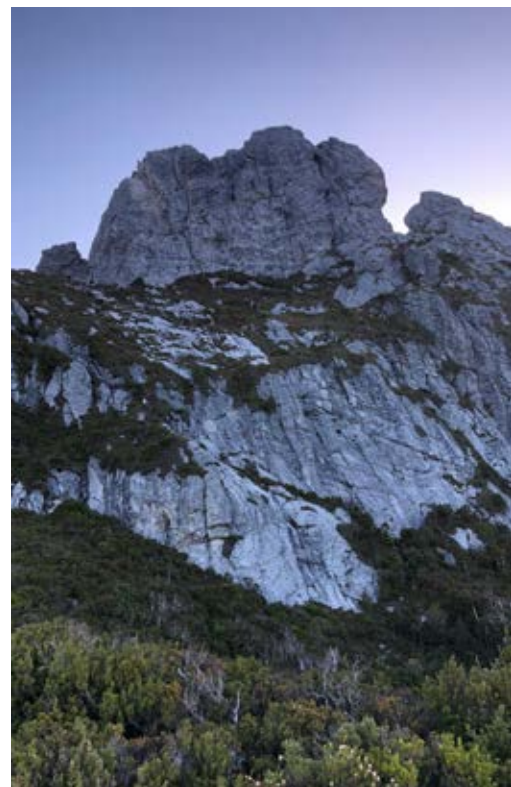
The author and Drew in Chockstone Gully



The author and Drew descending to the floor of Geeves Gully



The top of Geeves Gully



Federation Peak from Bechervaise Plateau

and it had not been for nothing now, as it very well could have been. Another hour passed and we packed up, and decided on a leisurely afternoon.

We made our way down Chockstone Gully enthusiastically, and took photos beneath the chockstone which gives it its name, before popping out at the floor of Geeves gully. It was here that we had some navigational trouble. It was clear enough that we made our way up the gully, but the question was whether or not to take the more exposed route.

We made our way up angularly so as to avoid the nasty drop, but quickly came to a dead end. To continue up required traverse across a very technical climb, especially with packs. Having decided that this was not the route we made our way down to the more exposed climb. It was simple enough from there, and we soon found ourselves popping out below the notorious climbing gully, “the original chink in Federation’s armour” according to Kevin Doran. It was on this little platform that I rang my father and told him of our success, much to his delight, and then we descended to Bechervaise where we lulled away the afternoon with cups of tea and tall tales.

Day 5: Bechervaise Plateau to The South Cracroft Campsite, 9.7 km 9.5 hours

We woke to another perfect day, and set about breakfast and packing up quickly, eager to make the most of the good weather. We left at the usual time of 9.00 am, and made our way down to Lower Bechervaise where we ran into some fast people who had made it to that point in two hours from Cherry Creek. We chatted for a little while and then continued down.

Moss Ridge is infamous for its up and down nature and its erosion, and we found just that. The most difficult section was to the top of the final tooth, where we encountered many steep descents and ascents, many bordering on vertical, and made very little overall downward progress. We sat at the top of the tooth and admired the peak and the ridge we had traversed. You could see everything, and we spent ample time dawdling to take it all in. It had also become hot, and as we descended the next section it got hotter.

The section to Cherry Creek was far steeper, and many trees lay over the track, impeding progress substantially. It was about half-way through this section we reached the Moss

Camp, a large divot in the ridge that provides ample protection from the weather. Having said that, getting both in and out of it is tricky, with near vertical climbs on both sides.

“

We descended through strange, deep ruts, before the final climb up to the crest range, and our final view of Fedders.

It was a long slog by the end, and we took a brief break only to be informed that our lunch spot was five minutes further on, but then apparently, according to another walker, it was 20 minutes, so who could tell? Luckily, it was not 20 minutes away, and we settled in at Cherry Creek for a leisurely lunch. In the valley it was hot, and the flies buzzed around us as we ate, trying desperately to take our nutrition from us.

We got back on the track again, following Cherry Creek to its confluence with the

South Cracroft River. It was pleasant walking amongst the tall trees, but eventually we were pulled out into the hot sun on the plains, and sweated until we came to a nice little creek where we dipped our heads in and refreshed.

Some passers by informed us of a helicopter evacuation at the South Cracroft River. A young man had fallen and dislocated his shoulder. His friends passed us, and fell in the creek on the way.

We descended through strange, deep ruts, before the final climb up to the crest range, and our final view of Fedders. The striking thing about this part of the walk was how damaged it was by the recent fires. The damage was terrible, the fauna was only just recovering, and the burnt scar sucked much of the natural beauty one is used to in this area.

We descended into the valley of the South Cracroft River, and staggered the last kilometres across the plains to the campsite, where we found a river choked with dead trees, with barely enough space for a swim.



The Eastern Arthurs from Moss Ridge

Day 6: The South Cracroft Campsite to Farmhouse Creek, 9.5 km, 5 hours

Today was a short day across the Picton Saddle and down to The West Picton Road. We had arranged a ride at noon so we left early, around 7 am in anticipation of a five hour walk.

The initial section crossed the plains of the South Cracroft valley. The country was scrubby, but relatively simple to traverse, with no significant foliage across the track. It was tantalising to see the saddle we wished to be in so close.

We soon came under the canopy of dense forest, the temperature dropped and the humidity increased, making for pleasant walking considering the now steepened terrain. We walked fast, discussing films and actors until we stopped for a rest close to the top of the saddle.

We came upon the top shortly, and began the deceptively long walk across it. The track became boggy and indiscernible in places, and it was a great relief to come across the top of Farmhouse Creek where we drank and downed a little scroggin.

It was a gentle walk down Farmhouse Creek. The sun was shining high by that point, and except for one small section the track was easy enough to follow. We met another party in the final moments before coming out onto the West Picton Road. We quickly filled a couple of water bottles and then walked 3 kilometres of the road as a landslide had made it impassable beyond a certain point.

“

It was tantalising to see the saddle we wished to be in so close.

We rounded a bend, a single figure coming towards us, clad in a red cap and a scuffed button shirt. It was my grandfather, the man who had taken us out six days before was here to welcome us home, a fitting, circular end to one of the most memorable weeks of my life.



Federation Peak from The South Cracroft Valley



Bede being a dill in The South Cracroft Valley

“

Bede lives in Brisbane, Queensland. He grew up in Tasmania where he got his passion for bushwalking. He likes bushwalking because it's exciting, allowing him to have many great adventures seeing the most beautiful and remote parts of Australia. It also gives him something to have a good chat about after the walk.

Budawangs at Their Best and Worst

Text
Robert Wildman

Walkers:
Rob Wildman,
Helen Jones,
Frank Neri, Josh Neri

11-14 March 2023

The decision to do a
four day loop in the
Budawangs was not
taken lightly.



Frank and Josh on the road bash to Newhaven Gap



Pigeon House on the left and The Castle on the right from Graeme Mitchell Lookout

Like many other walkers throughout NSW, we had been struggling to deal with the loss of many of the old tracks and finding nothing but uncomfortable conditions since the rains which followed the fires in 2019. For a short time, it was heaven getting into areas, like Ettrema, where the thick scrub was wiped away and we could breeze through areas we very rarely dared to approach.

But with the loss of the canopy in most of the forests came the growth of an amazing list of ground plants and nursery trees, like acacia and quick-growing gums. As well, the growth of vines like hardenburger (that one with the lovely purple flower) and lawyer vine (so aptly named) were now unimpeded in their spread across the forest floor.

So the questions about going back into this wonderful area were about our ability to be able to actually get through. In December of 2021, due to the atrocious scrub we turned back on a walk into the Claydons Creek area after walking just 3 kilometres in three and a half hours. What could we expect this time?

Driving in

To get to this magical place, one has to head south-west from Nowra on the Braidwood Road. After about an hour's drive, at Sassafras, on top of the range, we turned left onto a very bumpy 2WD track. To our delight, the numerous frustrating gates had been dispensed with and the surface had been tarted up somewhat; it didn't compare to the boggy, boulder-filled track which took walkers in for many years. From the picnic area at the locked gate 3 kilometres from the main road, it is now a 7 kilometre road bash to Newhaven Gap, which used to be the adopted camping area before the Budawangs Wilderness Area was proclaimed in the Morton National Park. This is where the Folly Point track, which has been maintained by the Coast and Mountain Walkers since 1965 (thanks to them), veers off and follows the ridges for another 8 kilometres to the jumbled, convoluted, but totally fascinating spot called Folly Point at the end of the ridge.

Day 1: Sassafras to Folly Point, 16.6 km, 6.3 hours

We left at around 8.30 am from the car park under a cloudy and humid morning and hit the walking track at around 10.30 am. From what we had read, it would seem the track has had some shepherding into shape for most of the way but may descend into scrub towards the end. Clearly, the track has had work done on it and for the most part was a joy. The regrowth of Australian native grasses, where there had only been banksia, hakea and other unfriendly plants, made this surreal. Page 17 is the view from Graeme Mitchell Lookout on the Folly Point track looking south, with Pigeon House (Didthul) on the left and The Castle on the right. These views are only possible now after fires. We ambled through delightful fields until the rock platform started breaking up and we had arrived at the first night's camp. Our only companions on this stretch of the walk were some big buzzing march flies which we dubbed the "B52's".

Did I mention the baths? Folly Point is unique in that just next to the camp spot runs a small stream which makes its way off the plateau via a series of small waterfalls with very deep pools below them, each of them about two

metres in diameter. They are perfect for the after walk freshen up and in several of them you can immerse yourself completely without touching the bottom.

Day 2: Folly Point to Angel Creek, 10.5 km, 8.25 hours

With an overcast day and cool conditions, we found that the route to Watson Pass was quite easy to follow and by now there was a better pad showing the way. This pass is one of the best for sheer beauty and exhilaration. Clambering down the iron spikes and into the exit gully, the leaf litter and presence of rock orchids gives this an atmosphere not unlike the Green Room in Monolith Valley. The route down has several sections where pack passing is necessary and an ability to scramble through tight fissures is helpful. Daunting at first, the way is actually quite easy and you drop into a beautiful gully with walls covered in multi-coloured lichen and overhanging ferns.

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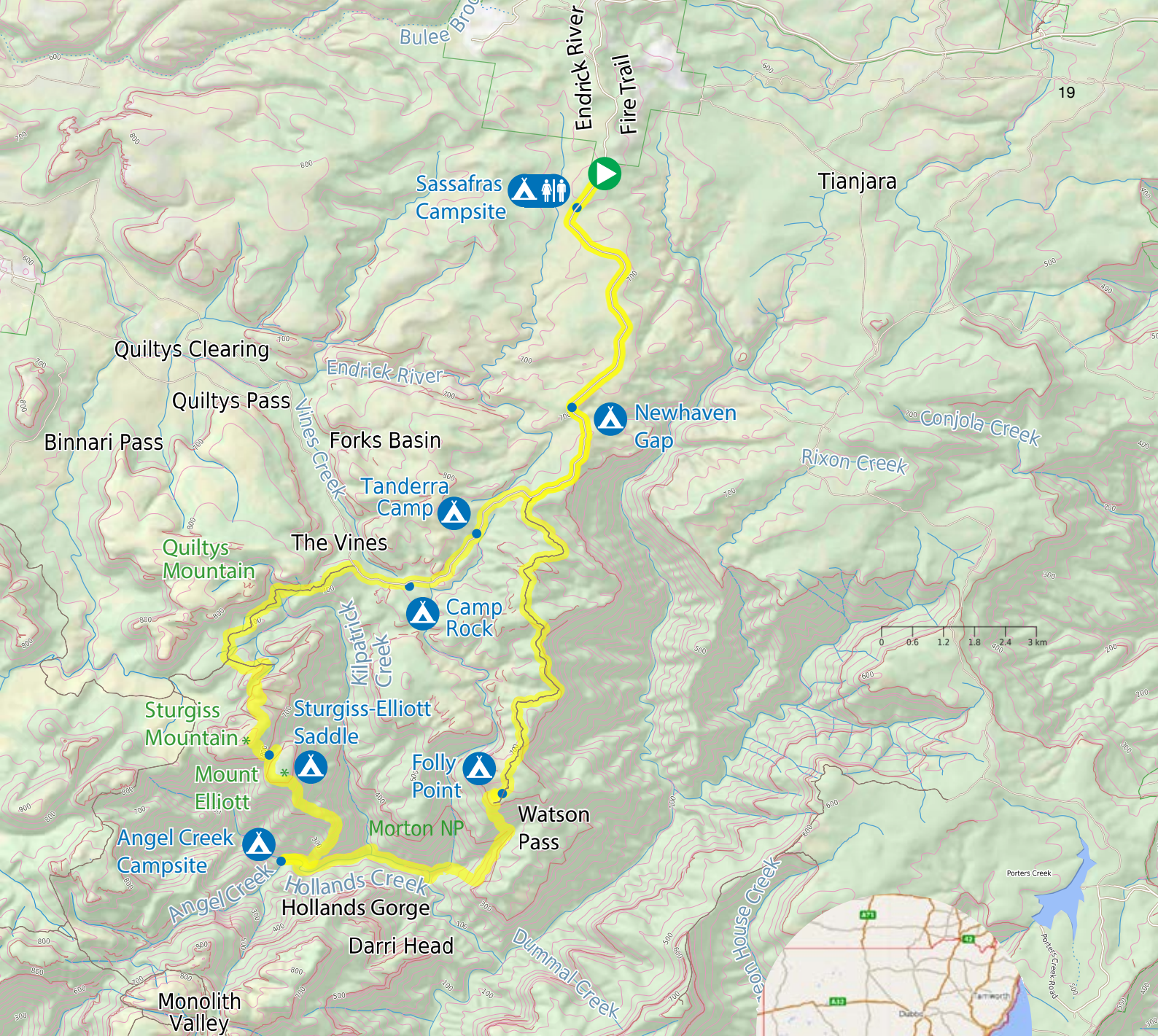
This pass is one of the best for sheer beauty and exhilaration.



Josh and Helen enjoying the fire at the Folly Point camping area



The bathing pool with a view at the end of Folly Point - fabulous after the walk



Budawangs



Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)



Main track, side trip, alternative route



Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (50 metre interval)



Lake, river, waterfall or creek



Start of the walk



Campsite



Toilet



View from Folly Point with The Castle on the left and Hollands Gorge below

We followed the gully to the external cliffs and then glued ourselves to the walls in attempting to get to the corner before the drop down. Of course, with very few traces of anyone else having been there, we went too far but decided we would just head down trying to reach the cave in the cliff 500 metres below. While this was a lovely clear spur once, it was now so thick with regrowth and vines that we

hauled out the secateurs and attempted to make a path. About half way down we came across the three large boulders which have been a signature feature of this short spur, surrounded by a clear, leafy patch complete with old cairns guiding the way.

When we reached the cliff above the cave, we saw that what remained of the original



The Folly Point track with new grass growth and better views than before the fires

glade that surrounded the stream was totally destroyed by fire and was stark with fallen logs, loose scree and patches of dead scrub.

Dropping into the cave, the Illawong Venture scouts had kindly left an exercise book for fellow walkers to record their adventures. A busy place it was not, having the last entry sometime in 2022. However, some recognition of other bushwalker names gave us some comfort that we weren't alone.

The task now was to sidle down to where the stream opens up and provides a flat shelf for us to cross to the other side and traverse to the ridge which leads down to Hollands Gorge. Again, where this had a clearly marked track once, nothing was left of this, making crossing the boulder-filled rills which flowed down from the walls above, quite difficult. At least the scrub had eased up.



Helen in the exit gully at the base of Watson Pass, on the right



Frank and Helen in the exit gully from Watson Pass



Helen, Frank and Josh in the camping cave half way down from Folly Point to Hollands Gorge

Turning towards the creek we met our old friend; the scrub. Once off the very steep section, it was probably no more than 400 metres distance to the creek and flat ground but vines and downhill didn't go well, with most of us taking falls. Unexpected falls like this sap confidence quickly, so reaching the creek became a desired necessity to reduce our anxiety about the rest of the trip.

We lunched just next to the old camping spot at the junction of Camping Rock Creek and Hollands Creek leaving this watery dell around 3 pm to head up the gorge.

Hollands Gorge is one of those gems in a sea of difficult country that just lets you relax and enjoy the sheer beauty of your surroundings. The creek was up high enough to force us to wade all the way but we weren't complaining, enjoying the cool clear water swirling around

our ankles, finally arriving at Angel Creek at around 5.15 pm. I had passed through this delightful camp spot twice before on other walks promising myself that one day I would return to actually camp there.

“

... one of those gems in a sea of difficult country ...

While we couldn't see the clouds through the foliage, we could feel the humidity close in on us and knew we were in for some rain. We had time to organise ourselves, have dinner, a discussion on the state of the world and a swim in the big pool before tucking into bed. It came about 8 pm and was light but consistent, with a reassuring tap tap on



Angel Creek Pool

the tarpaulin. In the morning, we realised we hadn't constructed our wet cover that well the night before so we woke to find everything at the bottom of the shelter had got wet, including our sleeping bags and dry clothes. A good mood starter for what was another big day!

Day 3: Angel Creek to the Sturgiss-Elliott Saddle, 4 km, 7.5 hours

And then, a request was shouted from the other tent: "Wildman, I think we should set off the EPIRB!" With the experience of the scrub from yesterday and the prospect of worse today, add a topping of rain, the plea at first seemed reasonable. But we were at the bottom of a very steep valley, none of us was injured and we had enough food even if, in the end, we decided to exit via the same route. The underlying issue was the potential for an injury or getting stuck on a ledge on Sturgiss Mountain. We huddled down, tensely discussed the pros and cons, and emerged not entirely happy but most voting to go on.

Climbing out

Overnight the creek had risen by at least five centimetres making the few hundred metres back down the creek to our ascent ridge a lot more dangerous and slippery.

The route up the ridge to Mount Elliott was off track, steep and full of incredibly thick, viney regrowth which meant we were using the secateurs all the time and stopping

while we untangled ourselves. A sense of claustrophobia takes over as you stand amongst the dark mass of bush dwarfing you while waiting for the lead walker to push on. There was some apprehension in the group at this stage as we had no idea where we would find a camp spot in this country. We'd thought we might reach the relative safety of Hidden Valley but that was still a very questionable destination.

“

A sense of claustrophobia takes over as you stand amongst the dark mass of bush dwarfing you while waiting for the lead walker to push on.

Half way to Mount Elliott we reached a set of cliffs straight in front of us barring our route. Luckily, the topography of the hill made it possible to traverse to the left and work our way back up to the ridge a little higher. Above the cliffs lay a flat plateau of burnt banksia and wonderful grasses but this time with a view to kill. Looking to the west we could make out Styles Creek swamp and then all the mounts circling around to The Castle in the distance. On the other side, we could see the cliffs we came past yesterday on Castle Head all the way back to Folly Point.

When the slope kicked up again towards Mount Elliott the regrowth returned and we bashed our way to the cliff edge and lunch under a rock overhang. The rain had restarted an hour before and was now relentless. A can of tuna doesn't quite do the trick when you are cold and wet with more to come.

We worked our way around the cliff edge, which was of course full of ups and downs with thick growth interspersed with open spaced areas at the foot of the massive cliffs above. Turning the corner of Mount Elliott revealed a fairly flat and grassy section which went all the way under the tsunami-like cliffs above. We even found an open cave which could have served as a camp for the night. Finally, we approached the narrow mouth of the entrance to the saddle between Mount Elliott and Sturgiss Mountain with ominous cliffs closing in all around. The sheer scale of the place filled us with awe. The climb up to the saddle sapped most of our remaining energy until we popped out onto a clear rocky area right in the centre of the saddle. By now it was 4 pm and we couldn't possibly attempt a crossing of Sturgiss Mountain in the rain and the mist, so camp was made. In the end, despite all having misgivings about our situation, after the gardening was done it was a nice spot. Water was plentiful, given the rain that was streaming off the rock walls. We knew this would not have been the case

if it had not been raining, but another water source existed in the cave we passed on the way to the saddle. Worn out, we each settled into our shelters, scoffed the laksa for dinner and listened to the spats of rain which continued for most of the night. Finding a spot to camp with enough water for the night was a stroke of luck, not to be relied on in other conditions.

We did the sums on our day's effort: 7.5 hours to walk 4 kilometres! Ouch!

Day 4: Sturgiss-Elliott Saddle to Sassafras, 21 km, 12.5 hours

This sounds like a cheap novel but it was a bright and sunny morning with the sun striking the walls of Sturgiss Mountain, towering above us to the west. The saddle was really a special place. We knew we had a big day so we were ready and walking by 8.10 am. The first target was to find the "staircase", a sloping fall of rocks and earth which conveniently leads from just north of the saddle to a point which allows access to the top. But the access is via a scramble of roughly five metres which is quite hard even in the dry. In the time it took to get to this point, the clouds had quickly moved back in and the fog was starting to descend. Using a rope was the only way to get all four of us up with packs, slipping and sliding on the now wet surfaces.



About an hour up Hollands Gorge is this constriction with a beautiful pool in the middle



Josh and Frank wading up Angel Creek just before camp

It took us around one and a half hours to reach the top of Sturgiss Mountain.

While Ron Doughton in his guide book *Bushwalking in the Budawangs* suggests never to walk on Sturgiss Mountain in a fog, we had other ideas – well, we had no choice if we wanted to get out.

“

This sounds like a cheap novel but it was a bright and sunny morning ...

On top we spent the first 3-400 metres passing through a belt of thick growth, even though the fires had eliminated the tough

banksias from the mix. Once on the rock platform on top, we got confirmation of a route from a set of cairns which started just as we broke into the open, and followed this spaghetti line across a narrow isthmus and onto the last platform. Picture this: flat rock platforms with long shallow pools of water broken by small patches of black burnt bush, festooned with thousands of intricate spiderwebs loaded with water droplets, and the contrasting yellow of the new grass growth. We were walking in the clouds. Even though we were wet through and cold, we could still garner some excitement for this amazing country.

“

We were walking in the clouds.



Helen under the tarp at the Elliott-Sturgiss saddle camp

The route then went down a gully, which looked like several we had passed already. We descended gently until we met a two metre drop down to a wide ledge beyond which there lay a thirty-nine metre fall to the valley floor. Given the “narrow ledge” description of part of the route in Doughton’s book, we headed off to the right on the ledge as this appeared to be the correct direction. It did go for quite some time broadening into a large expanse and narrowing to a point where crossing the gap above a hole was truly a frightening experience. Is this what Doughton meant when he said you needed a “head for heights”? We bumbled around at this high level, constantly following what looked like possibilities to get down and which all ended in dramatic drops. Defeated, and surrounded by low mist and rain, we considered setting off the EPIRB and waiting for a mythical chopper rescue. “Give me half an hour,” I said and took Josh with me to see if we could find the lost cairns. We went right back to the first contact with the ledge and this time went left. Within seconds there was the magical pointer to the correct way down. This led through staggered ledges down to a final short slide, complete with the old track taking off into the scrub ahead, at last on the valley floor. This slide was more difficult than it first appeared and I suspect this is the spot where Doughton mentions getting assistance from a chain, which is no longer there, perhaps melted during the 2019 fires. We had wasted nearly an hour on top; we knew we couldn’t afford this amount of time but while energy was fast disappearing, resilience, relief and humour were taking over.

“

Within seconds there was the magical pointer to the correct way down.

The way from here back to Camp Rock was once a quick and enjoyable shady, cool walk. This time however we would take many more hours than we expected. Hidden Valley itself is now full of regrowth and we ploughed our way to the exit which, surprisingly, was much

the same. Even the track was visible and we started zooming along; we made all kinds of fantastic estimations of our arrival time, shower, beer and dinner by maybe 7.30 pm. As soon as we passed the old Hidden Valley camping spot, now unrecognisable, the track descended again into much thicker scrub. We were lucky we had an old GPS track guiding us through this as the scrub just seemed to go on and on. We finally reached the old timber-getters road, recognisable only by the cleared forest floor, not more than five hundred metres from Hidden Valley itself.

We expected again to be able to follow the now well used pad but it took us three attempts to find the right one even then. The track moved us on a slightly downhill route and for the most part, kept going. Every now and then it would just stop, usually because of a fallen tree, and we would be back in the thick of the regrowth again until we dropped out onto the worn path again. When the slope started to descend more sharply, we knew we were finally heading down to the beautiful, fern-filled crossing of Kilpatrick Creek. In better weather this would have been a delight. With the rain back again, we took a minute to have a cool drink and rest before our last section to the road near Camp Rock.

But we weren’t the only ones out with the rain. The creek valley was a haven for leeches and Frank and Josh, who were wearing only shorts, were copping them one after another on their exposed legs. Everyone made friends with them, even Helen, who seemed to only attract them to her stomach. Grimacing, she would lift her top to allow us to rip them off.

Here the path follows the old road much closer as it passes through quite steep gradients and several more creek crossings, by this stage getting deep and dangerous.

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The creek valley was a haven for leeches and Frank and Josh, who were wearing only shorts, were copping them one after another on their exposed legs.

The initial sections of this road were generally enjoyable but more and more we found ourselves crawling under fallen trees and losing the track as it passed through thicker scrub. At times, we couldn't walk more than twenty metres before we stood perplexed in front of yet another massive tree blocking the track.

“

The next 4 kilometres would probably be the hardest to mentally endure.

The next 4 kilometres would probably be the hardest to mentally endure. We were all getting very tired by this stage and when the track just stopped, leaving us bashing through scrub again until we crossed it at some point, the levels of enthusiasm were very low. At one point, poor Josh, who had done so much of the leading, had come to a standstill when the track yet again disappeared, a look of

complete despair washed over his face, and it was only through Helen spying the track behind him were we able to push on. This time we didn't lose the track and finally at about 5.15 pm we broke out onto the road just before The Vines. We were all freezing as the rain had not let up and our reserves of energy were now at such a point that even walking wasn't keeping us warm.

So now it was just down the road to the car! Just 13 kilometres down the road. Only more surprises lay in store. The NPWS had decided to repair this old road and from Camp Rock to Newhaven Gap, a distance of about 3 kilometres, we encountered new blue metal which had been laid on the road to assist in the boggy sections. Not little blue metal but boulders – well it seemed like that at the time, making us search out the smoother sections on the sides.

Again, we were fooling ourselves into believing we would make the car by 8 pm at the latest. About half-way back, with about 4 kilometres to go, we discovered that a grader had trimmed the surface. With the rain, which



Helen, Frank and Josh take a break from the fog and rain on top of Mount Sturgiss just before the descent

had been falling on and off for more than two days, the road was now starting to look like a World War I trench. As we turned on the head torches, which mainly only showed the rain in front of us, we started slipping off to the side and kept trying to find the driest part with very little success. The last insult was the final hill up to the car; slipping and sliding we arrived at 8.30 pm caked in thick mud. But with the car facing downhill away from the way we wanted to go, our next fear was that, after all this work, we would get bogged with no reception.

Luck was on our side at this point and we were able to turn around. Except for the thick fog across the top of Sassafras Hill, we crept our way safely back to the welcoming bright lights of Nowra.

We had spent inordinate amounts of time and energy to cover what was actually a short distance in the end (like 12.5 hours on the last day alone covering 21 kilometres) and while I know the Budawangs can never be underestimated, this was probably my hardest and riskiest walk in this area ever. It was, in the end, a challenge for all of us. We often questioned whether we could go on or simply turn around but as the conditions got worse and worse, we just had to find the resilience in ourselves to keep moving and just get there whatever it took.

It was the Budawangs at their worst but despite all this, we had seen fabulous country, castle-like cliffs disappearing into the fog above, superb camping spots and serene glades along the creeks. And we learned just that bit more about each other.

In the News

NSW Great Koala National Park to go ahead

The Great Koala National Park proposed more than a decade ago is now [likely to become a reality](#). The proposed GKNP would connect 175,000 hectares of state forests with existing national parks, creating a nature reserve of more than 300,000 hectares.

Alone winner

[Gina Chick](#), the [winner](#) of the SBS Alone Australia show reflects on her journey into wild existence.

Around the world for nearly 10 years

In October 2013 Thor Pedersen of Denmark set off to go around the world [without using any planes](#). He recently finished his trip and documented it all in his blog [Once Upon a Saga](#).

Platypuses return to Royal National Park

After more than 50 year's absence at Royal National Park, platypuses have been [re-introduced](#) there by UNSW Sydney scientists.

Kosciuszko Schlink Hilton

Text and photos
Sonya Muhlsimmer

As a leader for the Upper Blue Mountains Bush Walking Club, I have committed myself to trying to organise a multi-day hike in the Kosciuszko National Park each year. This was my second attempt with the club to walk the Main Range and to climb Australia's 11 highest mountains over three days, 7-9 April 2023.



Not far now to Horse Camp Hut



Horse Camp Hut turnoff

Showers and snow were forecast so Plan B was activated, staying off the Main Range and being more sheltered walking up to Schlink Hilton, making a base camp and seeing what the weather would bring over the coming days. Maybe I will summit the Main Range peaks next year ...

There were seven of us, attempting to be brave and fearless whatever the weather would bring. The night before our hike we stayed at the Jindabyne NRMA park, a great place. A few of the group walked over to Nuggets Crossing to get a few more rations for an extra day of camping and for dinner but it was just on 9.00 pm, and everything was shut.

Day 1: Guthega Power Station to Schlink Hilton Hut, 12.3 km, 4.5 hours

On Friday morning we left Jindabyne around 8 am, stopping to get coffee, food, breakfast and firewood for our last night camp at Island Bend and finally we reached Guthega Power Station around 10 am. After a quick repack of my pack, deciding to pack my winter sleeping bag rather than my quilt, we were off. From the power station it was all uphill, for quite some time. Gore-Tex was on, then off, then back on again as the weather was not

favorable. There were two people in the group that decided to pack umbrellas, which actually worked extremely well as they keep dry. They also had their Gore-Tex but the umbrellas gave them an extra layer of protection. If the umbrella was not needed or it was too windy, they could be used for a walking stick, a multi-purpose tool really. I must consider this for another time. After about two hours Horse Camp Hut was reached, a great spot to stop for lunch, out of the rain.

Another party of about eight on a day hike arrived, so we decided to pack up and go on our way, letting the other party into the hut to dry off a bit. We went to Schlink Hilton along the Aqueduct Trail as it was more sheltered in the trees and under the lee of the hill, out of the wind. The sun even came out and it was just enough to dry us off before the next lot of drizzle and showers came. Finally, Schlink Hilton was reached and we quickly lit the fire to warm up and dry everything out, again. It was not long before we got into our rations of a hot cup of tea, American Honey whiskey, chocolate brownies, a fine array of chocolate, pretzels and homemade biscuits; being on rations is tough ... There were parties of one, three and four at the hut. It amazed me how

many other hikers were out in near sub-zero temperatures. During the night we were, I guess you could say, blessed with a bit of a snow blizzard. Schlink Hilton is so called due to being one of the best huts in Kosciuszko National Park. The hut was built for the Snowy Mountains Scheme, with several rooms, beds, and mattresses. Many years ago the south part was open, more rooms. This part is now locked and is for people working in the area. It is a great hut to use as a base camp in bad weather.

Day 2: Schlink Hilton to Valentine Hut return, 14.2 km, 6 hours

I was hoping to take everyone to Mawsons Hut for lunch, which is all off track navigation over The Kerries ridge, however due to the very cold, wet conditions and very minimal visibility it was off to Valentine Hut for lunch. Prior to our departure we all jumped in and collected, chopped and stacked some firewood for the hut. It's easy to get from Schlink on a track to Valentine Hut, where it was nice to have lunch under shelter. As we



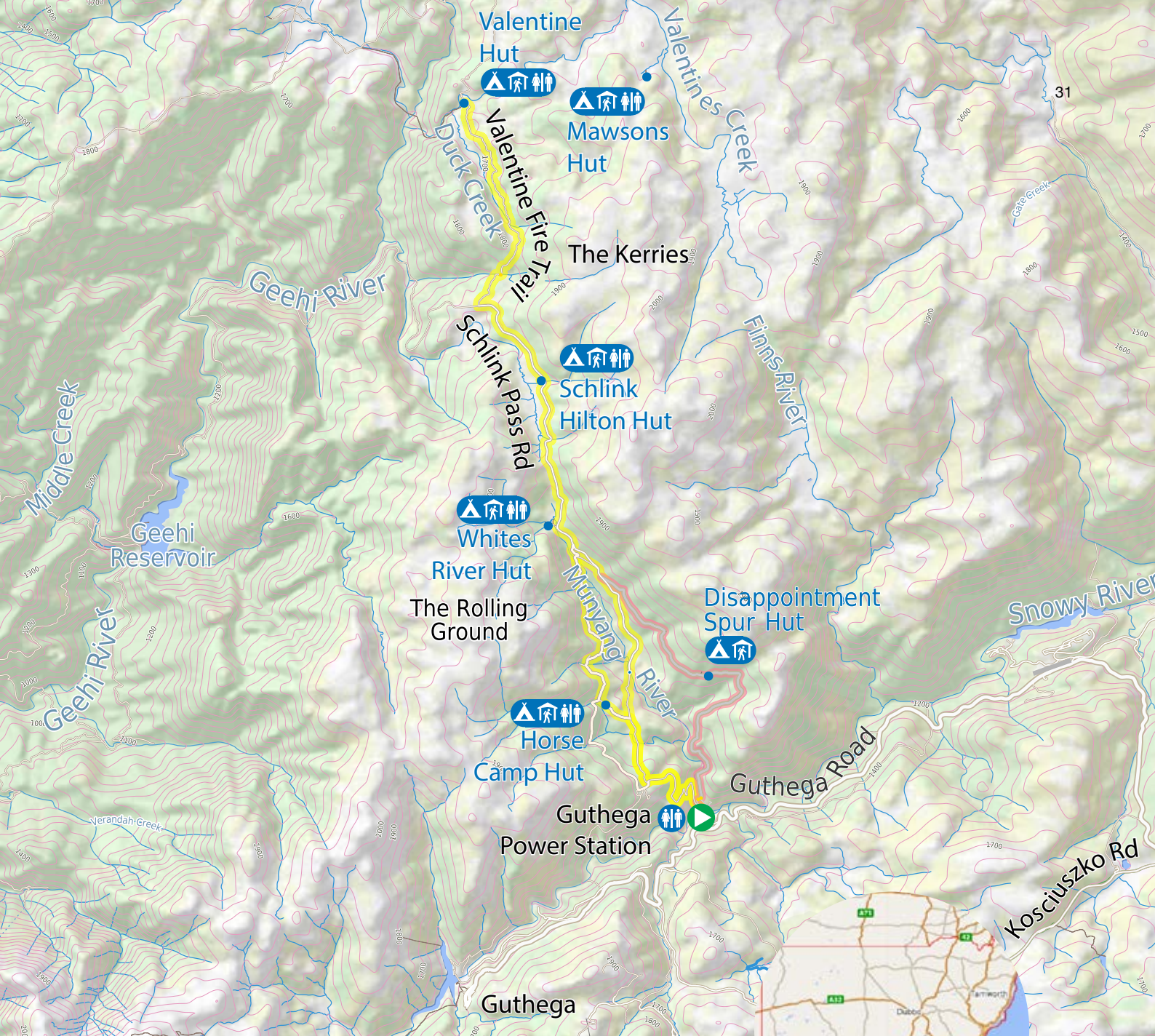
Schlink snacks



Cutting wood at Schlink Hilton



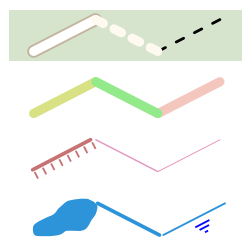
Yidan, Onni, Lingling, Luisa, Joana, and Sonya at Valentine Hut, which was closed for renovations and is now open



Guthega Power Station to Schlink Hilton and Valentine Hut



0 km 1 2 3 4 5 km



Road, four-wheel drive track, walking track (treed)

Main track, side trip, alternative route

Cliff, major contour line, minor contour line (50 metre interval)

Lake, river, waterfall or creek



Start of the walk



Campsite



Hut



Toilet

Bushwalk.com notes and maps on [webpage](#), [GPX](#) and [PDF](#)

This map is © [Bushwalk.com](#) and is created using data © [OpenStreetMap](#) contributors



Waterfall at Duck Creek

got there, a party of 11 youngish boys were just leaving, having camped there the night before. We were considering going to look for the Valentines Falls, however a couple of the boys had attempted this and got soaking wet and gave up, so we decided against this. After lunch two of our party made their way down the track back to Schlink Hilton and as the rest of us were about to start walking, we decided to quickly go down to see Valentines Creek where a few photos were taken and then it was back to Schlink. On the way back, the rest of us spontaneously went off track to check out some amazing waterfalls and then decided to walk back to Schlink off track along Duck Creek. Back at the warm and cozy hut some dark clouds were rolling in - we were in for some more snow. We were all warm in the hut in front of the fire with the rations for the day, waiting to see what the weather would bring us. I hoped everyone's tents would be secure enough for snow tonight. In saying this two of the party decided to sleep in the hut that night.

Day 3: Schlink Hilton to Guthega Power Station, 11.2 km, 3 hours 45 minutes

When we woke up it was a winter wonderland, snowing then and for most of the morning. We were heading back to the power station and had discussed going down Disappointment Spur. However, when we got to the turnoff there was a sign saying that the bridge had been removed over Munyang River. With the wet weather and snow we had over the couple of days we erred on the side of caution to keep walking on the easy track - I didn't know how high the river crossing would be. I have never crossed the Munyang River there without a bridge before so I didn't want to risk it. Anyway, there is a reason why they call Disappointment Spur that name, the name is quite appropriate. After reaching the power station, I went to check if we could cross the river. I do believe it would have been possible. I took some photos and will remember this for next time. Back at the cars, we dropped our pack and had lunch on the picnic table, then we drove to Island Bend as some of us were camping here the night.

Island Bend was a township and home to many during the construction of the Snowy Mountain Hydro scheme. It had an air strip, school, shops, a community centre and just over 100 houses, now all gone. It makes the best camp site as there are plenty of areas to choose from. After a bit of a drive around the area some of the group were on their way home and the remainder of us stayed. We collected water from the Snowy River and enjoyed the night in front of a fire, with our last rations of chocolate, whiskey, cheese and crackers.

Although the trip did not go to plan, it was a great long weekend spent in one of my favourite areas with a great bunch of friends. Can't wait for attempt three on the Main Range next year.



How cold it is outside? Admiring the snow from Schlink Hilton



Cold morning at Schlink

The Heathland

Text and photos
Ian Smith

It was COVID-19 time and I moved into a house sitting job at Narrawallee, near Ulladulla on the NSW south coast. The very next day came lockdown. A fortnight's sit turned into a two month's sit. During that time benign weather conditions allowed me to explore almost every day. This spot was my favourite.



Rennies Beach

Native fuschia (*Correa reflexa*)Hedgehog wattle (*Acacia echinulia*) with rice flower

Having researched the location I picked something I would remember, Hollywood Street, no boulevard here. The street I wanted was two past that. I'd chosen not to use google maps in order to save batteries, don't want to run low while I'm taking photographs. The Princes Highway was busy despite lockdowns so I gratefully turned off and headed up Dowling Street to one of two main entrances.

It was there I was stunned. For decades I'd tried to get a meaningful book on wildflowers, I'd even spent money for heavens sake. Yet, for some reason, I could never crack a relevant one. In Thredbo I was assured that the volume I'd just purchased would identify plants I'd seen and photographed that day. It didn't.

“

For decades I'd tried to get a meaningful book on wildflowers ...

So, imagine my surprise when I stopped at the entrance to South Pacific Heathland Reserve. Here were some laminated sheets with relevant plant information but, just in behind them, was a free pamphlet that identified half the plants that I'd seen today. If there's an annual contest for the most useful brochure, City of Shoalhaven would surely romp in. There was a map as well, take a bow Shoalhaven.

The trustees in charge of the reserve won a best in the state award in 2017. The brochures, track and lookouts are all well developed and when you get a brochure it actually relates to the trails. There are appropriate signs so it's almost impossible to get misplaced and you certainly can't get lost because you're only





South Pacific Heathland Reserve

ever 500 metres from an intersection. In the whole reserve there's less than 4 kilometres of trail, no hills, protected by the forest. No wonder it's popular with locals.

There's only 14 hectares of the reserve but it's clear that people care about it, particularly bearing in mind that there was a protest just two days ago about developers wanting to clear more of the wonderful forest that's left at Narrawallee just down the road. It's always sad when some of the reasons for people moving to an area disappear. Glossy black parrots are already endangered here and the bushfires didn't help.

“

There's only 14 hectares of the reserve but it's clear that people care about it ...

“

Getting there *is* half the fun.

Rennies Beach was my ultimate destination, so I thought. I didn't even know it existed until one week earlier. There's many kilometres of coast around here and everywhere I've been, you can't help but notice there's small unnamed islands and adjacent rock shelves in many places. Their influence on wave patterns is undeniable but, today, the swell is having a day off. However, on the plus side, the colours are brilliant, the blues and greens as stunning as any you'll see.

Getting there *is* half the fun. The recent sunshine has sparked interest from the plants of the coastal heath. Windblown though it is, flora survive and thrive here on either side of the narrow bush trail that I decide to

ride. Here in the land of acacia, she-oaks and banksia there's any number of flowers competing for space on the floor. On the reverse side, the fire, started by arsonists in 2018, has left its scars on more than one place and the remnants of the banksia stand like wizened old men at odd angles. In time, their seeds will take hold and it will all come again but, for the time being, the low growing flowers are having a field day, literally and figuratively.

The wash sound of the sea floats up the escarpment, enchanting in its own way, controlled by the offshore winds that were dipping over the hill to the waters. Sitting on the cliff edge on this gorgeous day I took time out just to recharge my batteries.

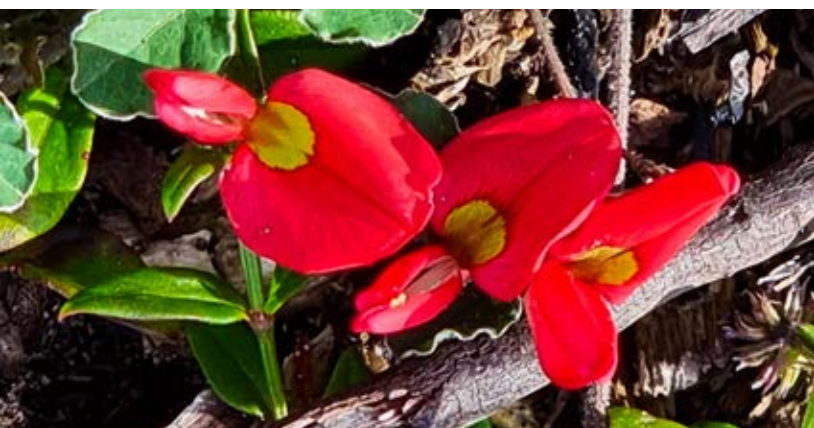
The lookouts here and on Wardens Headland appear to have no maintenance schedule as the vegetation steadily climbs in front of the lookouts, blocking some of the view on all but one I'd been to. Many are the feet that

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Here in the land of acacia, she-oaks and banksia there's any number of flowers competing for space on the floor.

have gone outside the protective barriers in order to get a decent shot. Still, parts could be viewed and the presence of that ocean sound just wafted all over you, something soothing about being beside an active sea.

However, not far away, along a narrow unnamed track, there's a better viewpoint because of the fires. Naked banksia branches indicate dead trees whose seeds will take a few years to re-emerge. Meanwhile, the view is significantly enhanced so I sit down with a pie and drink and soak it all up.



Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*)



Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*)



Sword bossiaea (*Bossiaea ensata*)



Jervis Bay grevillea (*Grevillea macleayana*)

Just north nearby is Rennies Beach, access to which is via a steep path off Dowling Street but, from this viewpoint, defining individual beaches is problematic, especially when you're not a local. What you see is a long stretch of sand interspersed with small headlands and/or a rock shelf. It's quite

beautiful, enhanced by the sublime colours of the ocean, changing from green to blue the further offshore you look with dark patches indicating rock slabs. It's the definition of sublime, and it would draw me back time and time again.



New Holland Honeyeater



Waratah (*Telopia speciosissima*)



Purple Coral Pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*)



Wedding Bush (*Ricinocarpos pinifolius*)



Rennies Beach



In the News

Victoria native forest logging to end

The Victorian government will [end native forest logging by 1 January 2024](#). Environmental groups have fought for decades to end native timber logging in Victoria, with some launching several legal challenges in a bid to force the government's hand.

Warragamba Dam wall plan shelved

The controversial plan to raise Warragamba Dam's wall is [dead in the water](#). The NSW government decided not to proceed with the project due to huge costs and environmental and heritage concerns.

Falls Hotham plan under review

The Falls Creek to Mount Hotham track has been under consideration since 2016, with strong opposition from conservation groups. Parks Victoria is now working on a [revised concept design](#) that takes into account the feedback received.

Heat stress danger

Authorities have [warned hikers](#) to be prepared for hot weather in Central Australia after a 22-year-old man died and two different groups of people required assistance for heat stress within a week.

Bogong High Plains Road open

The road between Falls Creek and Mount Beauty was closed to the public since October 2022 due to a landslide. The road [opened on 23 April](#).

Cradle Mountain cableway funding deadline missed

The Tasmanian government has missed a deadline to provide information to the Commonwealth about the proposed cableway for Cradle Mountain, and [\\$30 million funding has been withdrawn](#).

New Mirima National Park walking trail

A new [\\$150,000 walking trail](#) has been unveiled in Kununurra's Mirima National Park in the heart of Western Australia's East Kimberley.

Litchfield National Park weed problem

New research has estimated that almost one third of Litchfield National Park may be lost to a [noxious weed within a decade](#) if urgent action is not taken to eradicate it.

Lamington National Park rescue

A woman in her 60s suffered [injuries from a fall](#) while bushwalking in Lamington National Park and was rescued in a 15 hour operation.

Photo Gallery

Photos
Bushwalk.com photographers



Check this and
other entries at
Bushwalk.com
Photo competitions



Falls Creek - dawn by moonlight
Michael Firkins

Landscapes

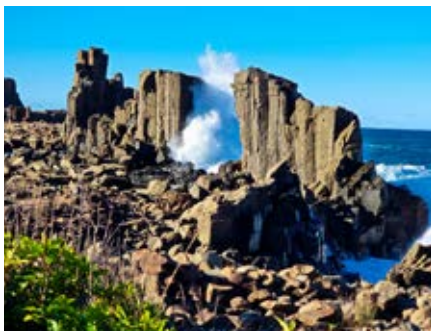
June 2022

Winner

Sunset from the fortress

Osik

After a brilliant day of climbing we were about to start the walk out and timed it perfectly to get the golden evening light.



Kiama Coastal Walk - Bombo
Rocks
landsmith



Hugh Gorge
Ribuck



Water and sky
Tom Brennan

Non-landscapes

June 2022

Winner
Eastern Spinebill
Brian Eglinton

The Eastern Spinebill is a very pretty bird which I have not often seen. This one was kind enough to let me get a photo on a walk at Morialta Gorge.



And in the morning there will
be a star ... well, a planet
anyway ...
landsmith



Minimalist campfire
Ribuck



Austraya!
Tom Brennan

Tasmania

June 2022

Winner
A way to go yet
Osik

Doing the Freycinet circuit in an afternoon was tougher than expected, especially when you try and run as much as possible. Our legs were definitely suffering, but the wonderful evening vistas offset this.



Other States

June 2022

Winner
Clouds over valley cloud
Tom Brennan

A chilly but still morning atop Glen Trig high above the Capertee Valley.



Luge Gorge, NT
Ribuck



Late stroll through the
Xanthorrhoea
John Walker



On the way back from
Mount Hay
Osik

Landscapes

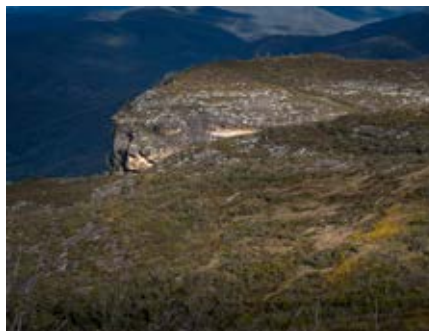
July 2022

Winner
Mutawintji Gorge
Rob Croll

The gorge was a natural choice to visit, but there is a lot more to see than just the gorge in this splendid outback Mutawintji National Park.



Valley stroll
John Walker



Light and shadow
- cliffs of Morton
Tom Brennan



Marking the way
North-north-west

Non-landscapes

July 2022

Winner
House hunting Corellas
Rob Croll

Lake Pinaroo, Sturt National Park, was full for the first time in a while. These two Corellas looked like they were investigating various hollows and trying to make up their mind which hollow was best for raising a family.



Late Buck Moon
Gayet



Down by the river
North-north-west



Drop bear scratchings
Tom Brennan

Tasmania

July 2022

Winner
Mathinna Falls
North-north-west

One of those "I have to go there one day" places that I finally went to. A rough road and an even rougher climb up once the track ends, but the falls keep goiing; this was at the top of the second level ... or was it the third?

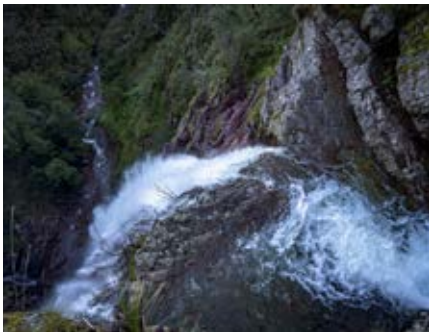


Other States

July 2022

Winner
Outback night sky
Rob Croll

The night sky in outback Australia, with its perfectly clear view of the Milky Way, never ceases to amaze you with just how many stars there are. It's hard to believe that once upon a time, this is what it looked like everywhere.



Margaret Falls
Tom Brennan



Down by the pond
John Walker

Leeches

A Tale of Two Suckers

Text

Matt McClelland

Leeches may seem creepy, but they are fascinating creatures that [deserve more admiration](#). I know many people freak out when they see a leech on them, but I hope that we can learn to appreciate these amazing creatures - maybe even grab a selfie with them. Yeah, I know, that seems crazy.

I have the great privilege of living near a popular bushwalking trailhead. I often witness the amusing "leech dance" performed by walkers as they discover leeches upon returning to their cars. Arms flail, occasional screams fill the air, and sometimes people abandon their leech-infested shoes. I've seen individuals accidentally injure themselves in a frantic attempt to remove a tiny leech. But do these little creatures truly warrant such dramatic reactions?



Leech on leaf
Pavel Kirillov, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)



Leech on moss
Doug Beckers, [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

Contrary to popular belief, leeches don't bite; they latch onto your skin using suction. Most people don't feel a leech feeding until they see the blood afterwards. Leeches can cause itchiness for a few hours or even a day, but removing them calmly and safely can minimise discomfort.

Habitat and distribution

Leeches thrive in diverse environments, from freshwater bodies to wet rainforests and marine settings. Terrestrial leeches are often found in moistened areas of drier forests or burrowed in soil, while freshwater leeches prefer still or slow-moving water. Some leeches, considered amphibious, can be found in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Leeches are found in various habitats across Australia, except for permanently arid regions.

Feeding and diet

Most leeches feed on the blood of different hosts, including humans, mammals, fish, frogs, turtles, and birds. Depending on their feeding mechanism, leeches can be categorised into three groups: jawed leeches, jawless leeches, and worm leeches. Leeches can ingest several times their body weight in blood and can survive long fasting periods due to slow digestion.

Hungry leeches are highly sensitive to light and mechanical stimuli, constantly changing positions and exploring their surroundings. They respond to disturbances from potential hosts by "inchworm crawling" until they make contact with the host and attach themselves. Aquatic leeches display more "pursuit" behaviour, while land leeches often attach to hosts accidentally.

Biology

Leeches belong to the segmented worm family and share similarities with earthworms but display unique physical and behavioural traits. With more than 500 leech species globally, leeches can be found in freshwater, marine, and terrestrial environments.

What sets them apart?

Leeches have muscular bodies that are usually flat and segmented. Their body shapes and sizes can vary significantly, ranging from elongated worm-like forms to broad, pear-shaped figures. Leeches have two suckers: one at their mouth end (oral sucker), and a larger one at their tail (Caudal sucker). The tail sucker is not as strong, but it allows them to walk. Unlike other segmented worms, leeches don't have leg-like structures or bristles except for *Acanthobdellida*.

Types

The two main types of leeches are like different families within the leech world: “true” leeches are the most common, while Acanthobdellida leeches are a bit different. Among “true” leeches, there are two groups: one with a nose-like structure called a proboscis (*Rhynchobdellida*), and another without it (*Arynbobdellida*).

Leeches in action

Leeches breathe through their body walls, with slow undulating movements assisting in gas exchange. Their sensory organs detect changes in light, temperature, vibration, and chemicals, helping them navigate their environment. Some leeches can change colours, though the purpose of this behaviour remains unknown. Leeches move through either wavy swimming motions or inch-worm-like crawling using their suckers.

The leech lifecycle

Leeches are hermaphroditic, possessing both male and female sex organs. Mating involves intertwining their bodies and exchanging sperm. Fertilised eggs are deposited in a gelatinous cocoon, and after hatching, the young emerge as miniature adults. Leeches typically die after one or two reproductive cycles.

Minimising Leech Encounters

Although leeches are amazing creatures, you may still want to avoid them hitching a ride or feeding off your blood. Prevention is a good starting point.

We know leeches are typically found in warm, moist areas and use heat and carbon dioxide sensors to locate hosts. They usually wait on the ground or plants, attaching to passing people and migrating to places with softer skin. Being aware of that will help, but two other steps that can help are thinking about clothing and repellents.

Clothing

Wearing long pants tucked into socks or using anti-leech socks and gaiters can help prevent leeches from finding soft skin to latch onto. However, covering up also makes it harder to spot a leech if it does attach.

Repellent

Applying insect repellent before heading out can discourage leeches from latching on. Some clothing can be treated with repellent, and it can also be applied to the skin. However, using repellent to remove a leech is not recommended due to the risk of infection from regurgitation.





Leech (*Haemadipsa zeylanica*)
Bernard Dupont, CC BY-SA 2.0

Removal rationale

There isn't much medical research on the best techniques for leech removal. Using methods harmful to the leech, like applying salt, fire, pulling, or sprays may cause the leech to regurgitate. A leech regurgitating into a wound, especially before removal, may increase the risk of infection. Breaking the suction with a fingernail or credit card can remove the leech more quickly without giving it time or reason to regurgitate. There is no rush; when you find a leech, chances are it has been attached for a while, deep breath and take a few seconds to check it out. Grab a selfie - there are bonus points if your leech has yellow stripes.

First aid for leech "bites"

1. **DRSABCD:** Follow standard initial first aid procedures.
 2. **Reassure:** Calm the person, as the sight of a leech can cause anxiety. Talking to the person with the leech through doing these steps themselves can help some people. If they can stop and admire it, then great, but if not, then now is not the best time to try.
 3. **Taut skin:** Gently pull the skin under the leech until it's taut, and maintain for the next step.
 4. **Slide a fingernail:** Gently slide a fingernail under the leech's mouth to separate it from the skin. Encourage the person to use their own fingernail to remove the leech, but if they can't, then consider using a credit card or the back of a knife (not the sharp edge) to avoid the risk of infection. Alternatively, you can wait for the leech to fall off naturally, which usually takes about 30 minutes.
 5. **Flick away:** Flick the leech away in a few seconds before it reattaches.
 6. **Clean the wound:** Wash the wound with water and apply an antiseptic to help avoid infection.
 7. **Cover the wound:** Use a simple adhesive pad; if blood soaks through, add another absorbent pad and bandage.
 8. **Monitor:** Seek medical aid if there are signs of allergy or infection. Itchiness is common after removal; avoid scratching the site.
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Videos



How to prevent blisters

In this video [Set To Hike](#) goes through seven things that you can do to help prevent blisters. We are all different and may have different tolerances to getting blisters, the fundamentals remain the same.



Why you should use walking poles

[Walking poles](#) are quite often an overlooked piece of kit and can come with a bit of a negative stigma. Paul discusses why walking poles are useful.



Bushwalking safety

While the gear and safety advice in [this video](#) is based around the Bibbulmun Track in Western Australia, all or nearly all applies to Australian overnight walks.



Best hiking backpacks:

7 hiking backpacks (2023 buying guide)

Are you looking for a hiking backpack? Here are top 7 hiking backpacks on the market this year [by Globo Surf](#), based on price, performance and durability.

Published

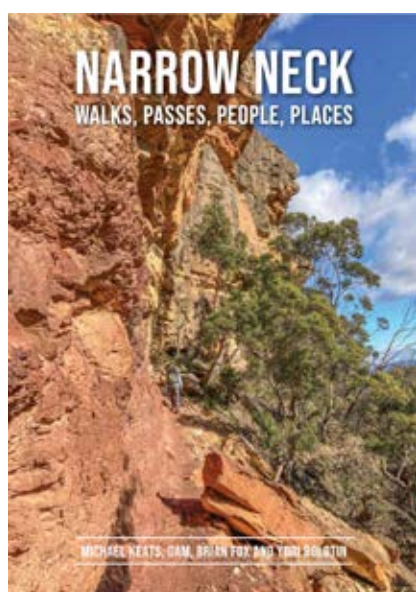
Narrow Neck Walks, Passes, People, Places

Narrow Neck is a spectacular landform, easily accessible from Katoomba, and a gateway to a great variety of Blue Mountains bushwalks.

This new book is for the lovers of the Blue Mountains, a tool to learn the early history of the region and an essential aid for planning walks in and around Narrow Neck..

Soft cover, full colour, 284 pages.

Price: \$50. Free delivery Australia wide.



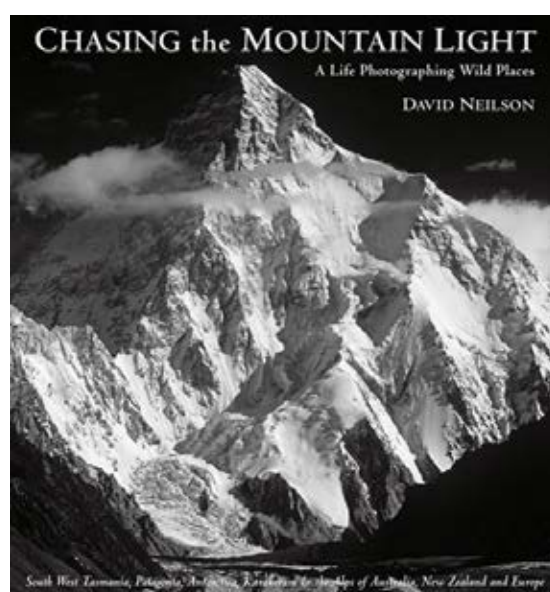
Chasing the Mountain Light

is written by photographer and mountaineer, David Neilson. Since his childhood David has been motivated by his twin loves of mountaineering and photography.

This book follows him along world's mountain tops on a lifelong quest to capture the mountain light and encourage the preservation of wild places.

Hardcover, black and white photos, 264 pages.

Price: \$85. Free delivery Australia wide.



"Stealth Privatisation"

Australia's national parks in several states are under siege from privatisation by stealth. Developers are using the [lure of ecotourism](#) to build posh private lodges with exclusive access deep inside many iconic parks.

Text

Ralf Buckley

Alienor Chauvenet



Wineglass Bay and Mount Freycinet from Mount Amos, Tasmania



Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory

The problem is, not everyone can afford private lodges. There's a real danger in letting developers take over precious parts of nature. We know nature is good for our mental health – and the wilder the better. One in five Australians report [at least one episode](#) of mental illness in the previous year.

Our [new research](#) shows protected areas in Australia boost the mental health of visitors, seen in productivity gains of up to 11% for people who visit at least once a month. Nationwide, that means our national parks give us a productivity gain of 1.8% and cut healthcare costs by 0.6%. We found the therapeutic effects of nature for mentally unhealthy park visitors are 2.5 times greater than for mentally healthy visitors.

Access to nature in national parks is one of the few free mental health boosts available to the less well-off as well as the wealthy. If creeping privatisation takes root in our parks – replacing campsites with expensive accommodation – those who most need the boost from nature will find it harder to get.

The public doesn't want private development in parks

In national parks, the [public wants](#) signs, tracks, toilets, and tent sites, run by parks agencies and available to everyone. The public almost always opposes permanent accommodation in parks, whoever owns it, based on the belief private lodges and camps should be on private land.

“

The public almost always opposes permanent accommodation in parks, whoever owns it ...

But state governments in New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia have enabled this regardless. Think of the pristine Ben Boyd National Park near Eden

in NSW, slated for eco-tourism cabins [at the expense](#) of campers. Or of the Cooloola Recreational Area in Queensland's Great Sandy National Park near Noosa, where [luxury cabins](#) are planned.

The examples go on: [ecotourism cabins](#) in Main Range National Park in Queensland, Tasmania's private [Three Capes walk](#) in Tasman national park and a resort in Freycinet National Park, as well as [Kangaroo Island](#) in South Australia.

“

Private developments exclude the wider public, both physically and financially.

While visitors to ecotourism developments [report improved wellbeing](#) and mental health, the issue is about who gets access. Private developments exclude the wider public, both physically and financially.

Some 70% of Australians visit a national park [at least](#) once a year. These visits reduces our healthcare costs by A\$12.3 billion a year, and increases economic productivity by A\$35 billion a year.

Worldwide, [we have estimated](#) the money saved through better mental health deriving from visits to protected areas to be around A\$8.5 trillion per year.

Socialise the costs?

Private lodges impose costs on cash-strapped parks agencies, due to their fixed footprints, permanent occupation and need for new access roads and paths. Lodges can also increase management costs for park staff through weed control, pathogens, feral animals, noise, bushfires and water pollution.



Main Range National Park, Queensland

When some in-park enterprises collapse, they can leave large clean-up costs for the taxpayer, [as we've seen](#) at Queensland's Hinchinbrook Island.

Parks agencies sometimes have to buy back rights given away free, such as [after the collapse](#) of the Seal Rocks centre on Victoria's Phillip Island.

Private development also comes with increased legal and financial risks for the state, such as [after the Thredbo landslide](#) in 1997.

All these costs cut into funds allocated for conservation.

If we let the tourism industry take greater control over park access for private profit, we risk turning famous natural places into exclusive havens for people with money.

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If we let the tourism industry take greater control over park access for private profit, we risk turning famous natural places into exclusive havens for people with money.

This is not to say tourist ventures have no place. Commercial nature tourism businesses can benefit, and contribute, by guiding inexperienced visitors to visit national parks.

But the parks themselves, and all their facilities, should remain publicly owned and accessible to all.

National parks are a major tourism drawcard. Commercial enterprises benefit from visitor spending along access routes, in gateway settlements outside park boundaries, and by operating mobile guided tours inside parks under similar conditions to independent visitors. Private lodges inside parks compete with these existing businesses.

We don't have to give private interests everything they ask for

While some other countries do allow private lodges in national parks, the models are very different from those in Australia.

In Botswana, for example, private leases in protected areas are short, facilities are fully removable, and private tour operators pay 80% of the parks agency [budget](#).

For comparison, proposals for a [private island heli lodge](#) in Tasmania's Lake Malbena offered only A\$4,000 a year.

In the US, the National Parks Service subcontracts visitor services to private concessionaires, but owns the facilities, requires bonds equal to 100% of capital value, and sets all conditions and prices.

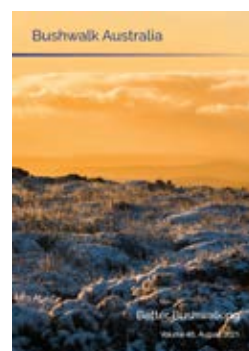
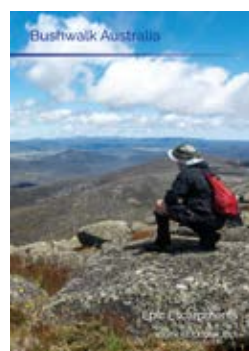
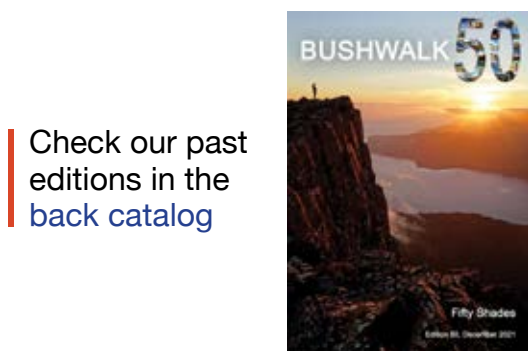
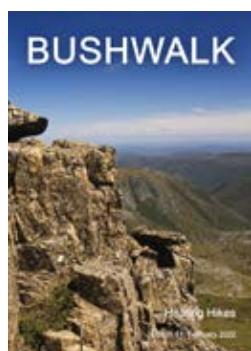
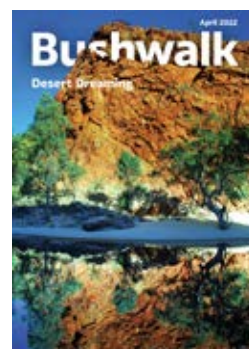
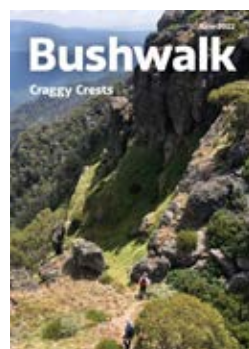
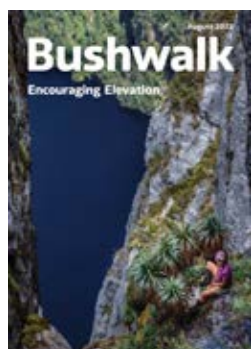
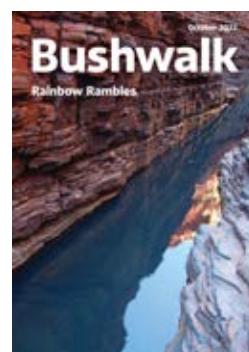
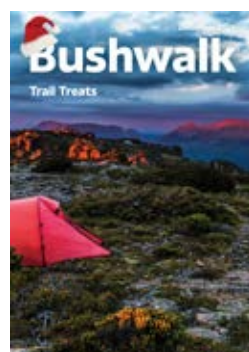
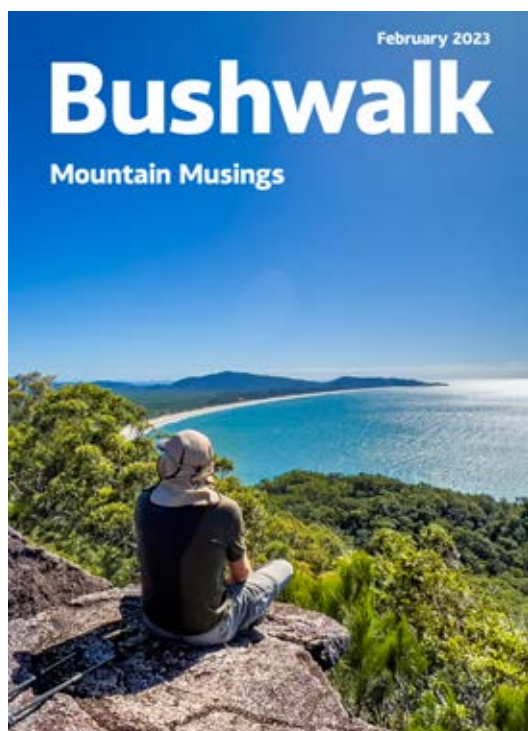
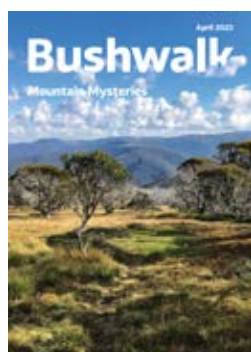
In India, luxury lodges must generally be located outside park gates, while private hotels inside parks in China have been removed by the parks agency.

The quiet privatisation of access to national parks risks restricting nature's mental and physical health benefits to the well-heeled. We need to protect public access to wild places meant for the public.

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