



President's report

Despite a disappointing snow season, the winter walks programme has been a great success, with the number of participants on walks generally being well above expectations.

Spring is by far the best time to walk in Victoria. It is the one time of year when conditions are perfect throughout the state. The longer days and warmer weather mean that the mountains are accessible again, while there is plenty of water everywhere, even in the drier areas.

After a break of a few years, we have revived the club's tradition of a formal dinner at a mountain hut, this year at Craig's Hut on Mt Stirling. (*see back page for more details*)

We are also returning to Cope Hut on the Bogong High Plains. Our club is the official caretaker of this historic hut. We have managed to secure a grant for a new Coonara wood heater to replace the inefficient stove, but there will also be a great deal of maintenance work and socialising to be done. There is no fee for this work party and the club is subsidising petrol costs.

On Cup Weekend this year we are going to East Gippsland. You have the choice of a pleasant four day walk along the deserted coast or day trips from a base camp. For those who can't get Saturday off, we are also running a three day trip to Melville Caves and Mt Kooyara north west of Bendigo.

Looking ahead to 2007, for the annual Easter ski resort based trip we are negotiating with lodge owners at the Mt Mawson ski resort in Tasmania's Mt Field National Park. Mt Field is unique in having a wide range of walks in a spectacular mountain landscape, complete with jagged cliffs and dozens of glacial lakes, all within easy access of a small ski village. The accommodation will be self catering and rather modest, sadly there are no restaurants, nightclubs and 3½ star accommodation like we had at Thredbo this year! The good news is the price, we are looking at a land cost of under \$100 plus ferry or airfares.

David Sisson



The bare summit of Mt Stirling, mid-July "snow-walking" weekend. (*photo: Andrew Stevenson*)



Bruce and Gillian take advantage of perfect winter weather to climb Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak, Mt Pelion East in the background.

(full story: pages 5-6)

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YHA BUSHWALKING COMMITTEE 2006/07

President	David Sisson
Secretary	Stuart Hanham
Treasurer	Cynthia Bell
Walks Sec. (Weekends)	Paul Gottliebson
Walks Sec (Sundays)	Sing Wong
Clubnight Coordinator	Catherine Koh
Social Secretary	Andrew Stevenson
Search & Rescue Rep	Simon Walliss
Website	Hooi-Soon Khoo
General committee	Ron Bell
	Ken Sussex

Yeti Editor (non-committee) Stephen Smith

CONTRIBUTIONS TO YETI

These articles don't write themselves y' know, nor are they all plagiarised from the internet (well some of them aren't anyway). If you've enjoyed yourself on one or two YHA trips or have some thoughts about bushwalking which you'd like to share, then here's your opportunity to do so. Find a spare moment, jot them down then email them to yhambush@bigpond.com

Deadline for the next issue is Nov 30th 2006.

YETI ONLINE

"Yeti" has its own website www.vicnet.net.au/~yhayeti containing an online version of the latest issue as well as archived articles from past editions. The web versions are well worth visiting, as they often include additional photographs not able to be included in the print version for reasons of space, as well as superior reproduction.

TRIP LEADERS

Take advantage of the opportunity to promote your upcoming trips in YETI with a more detailed description than space in the programme allows. Please contact the editor with the details.

YHA ACTIVITIES CLUBNIGHT

Is held on Monday nights at the YWCA building, 1st floor 489 Elizabeth Street in the city, from 8pm to approx. 9:30pm. Special events start at 8.15pm sharp, everybody welcome.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

If you recognise an article in this newsletter it is probably because it has been plagiarised from another source. This is the only way we can bring you this newsletter. YETI makes no apology for any offence caused.

YETI THANKS

The following contributors to this issue:

Ann Crawford
Bruce Meincke
David Sisson
Andrew Stevenson
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50 YEARS AGO

Date (1956)	Place	Time	Transport
Oct 21	Mt Piper – Hume & Hovell's Lookout – East Kilmore		Public
Oct 27-28	Cumberland & Evelyn Falls – Mt Arnold	6.30pm	Van (25/-)
Nov 4	Mt Morton Lookout Rock	8.45am	Van
Cup Day	Hewatts Lookout	8.45am	Van
Nov 10-11	Golden Mountain, Crystal Mine	6.00pm	
Nov 18	Sylvia's Falls	8.45am	
Nov 24-25	Buffalo Rock, The Pinnacle	6.00pm	

Bushwalking By Rail (*The Hosteller - August 1956*)

On Saturday July 7, seven members (Dawn Nichols, Roy Busby, Peter Dunbar, Bell Keatley, Eric Quinlan, Peter Ralph and Greame Wheeler) went on an outing different from the type of trip usual for a Y.H.A. activity group

With the help of Mr Doug McLean, a member of the Australian Railway Historical Society, it was possible to join in the excursion ran by that society to enable members and their friends to travel over four sections of line which have no regular passenger service. The Inner Circuit between Northcote Loop Junction and Royal Park has had no passenger service since 1948, Kew Branch since 1952, and the Newport-Sunshine loop line and the Albion Broadmeadows goods line have never had a regular passenger train service, although passenger trains have been diverted over them and many picnic trains have used them.

Many people were interested in the history of the route and of the rolling stock used. Half the small boys of Melbourne seemed to be there....

It is not the wish of the Bushwalking Committee to use this column as a medium for constant moans but it has been found necessary to issue this warning to all bushwalkers.

Over the past few months several trips have been delayed because of people becoming separated from the main group. Fortunately the only inconveniences caused so far have been that some trips have had to be cut short and in other instances a late arrival home.

It is the duty of the person concerned to inform the leader if he or she feels unable to keep up with the rest or of any difference of opinion as to the direction taken. Too often we hear the cry of "I know a short-cut" or "I'll go on ahead" and perhaps after gathering together a few cronies, off they go, not bothering to inform the leader or make sure of his route....

Remember that the leader knows where he's going and that he is responsible for you until the completion of the trip. (*October 1956*)

Since the circulation of the new programme, six trips have so far been conducted, all with great success and an average attendance of twenty (not counting dogs and bird watchers). This seems a pretty good average considering that most prefer to sleep in a warm bed rather than brave the elements at this time of year

Ivor Sulkin induced a few nurses to join the throng for his ramble around Mt Hickey way. The girls considerably brightened things with a few new songs and some rather peculiar camping gear, nevertheless they enjoyed themselves thoroughly and are now trying to wrangle more off-duty weekends.

Those unsuspecting bods who booked for the Convenor's day walk with thoughts of a pleasant Sunday stroll, have now become more suspicious of the word "undulating"...

Spring Social Activities

Are you looking for something a little different from walking? Well then, why not try one of YHA Bushwalking's great variety of social events!

Start by going along to Roundstone Winery in the Yarra Valley for lunch and a wine or two on Saturday 18th of November. This includes a lesson on how to make wood fired pizza and wine education, great value for \$25! Please book with Catherine Koh by November 10th.

Still hungry?, then come along to Montezuma's Restaurant in Richmond, on Friday 24th of November, for a feast of Mexican Tacos & Tequila until you drop with yours truly; book by Nov 20th.

Then it's the Social Event of the year with YHA Bushwalking's Christmas Party & Break Up at the Imperial Hotel, Melbourne on Saturday 2nd of December, with a 3 course dinner and maybe a little dancing as we have our very own Bar & Dance floor! There will be Prizes Galore, including wine, Hydration Packs, with your chance to win your very own Black Wolf two-season sleeping bag and a brand new Fairydown Attack tent, now a collectors item! Prizes to the value of over \$600 kindly donated by Anaconda.

But you must book early, or face major disappointment, so contact the Social Secretary Andrew Stevenson for bookings and payment before the 24th of November. Please note that you will not be able to pay on the night, so remember the early bird gets the worm!

I would like to thank every one who has volunteered to help and run a social event and given me input into upcoming activities. It's been great fun, so look out in the future for Moonlight Cinema, Jazz at the Zoo, Trivia Nights, Wine & Brewery Tours and the odd Walk with a Pub Lunch!

Andrew Stevenson

Digital Projector for Clubnights

The Bushwalking Club has purchased a digital projector and laptop, allowing digital photographs or DVDs to be readily included in Clubnight presentations. Now all we need are a few guest speakers – this could mean you? Many of our most memorable presentations have been from our own members, recounting their travels or other outdoor activity experiences. Even in the heyday of film, most people took prints rather than slides, limiting the sharing of their photos to an album. The advent of digital photography has made it easier not only to distribute pictures but present them to a group.

If you've been anywhere exciting or done something interesting, have a good collection of photos from the experience and are willing to give a short talk (30-45mins) about it, then contact the Clubnight Secretary (Catherine Koh) to arrange a date.

We still have a slide projector; slides still provide superior quality to the current generation of consumer range digital cameras and projectors, so if you still taking slide-film (or have a collection from the pre-digital days) then by all means arrange to show them as well.

The Day of the Shrinking Socks.

Saturday, 15 July 2006.

It has been pouring since 7.30 and now that I'm ready to leave the house, I can see the sky is covered in black low clouds: no hope of the weather improving.

I meet the group at Lilydale Station. Not many are prepared to challenge this wet day: there are only six people. We drive to Marysville where we will meet the leader. The rain does not stop falling. At Marysville we are met by Ron Bell who is still willing (and eager!) to lead the walk to Lake Mountain. After morning tea at the Bakery, we drive up the mountain once again. As always Ron points out to his passengers beautiful spots and remembers how the scenery has changed from years ago.

It's raining, foggy, and cold. And it gets colder as we reach the starting point of our walk. We put on heavy raincoats, warm socks and gaiters. Ron lends me a pair of gaiters because, in my trust in the gods and good fortune, I have never bought a pair of this mysterious item of clothing. For the first time since I have started bush walking (many, many years ago), I decide to use an umbrella to protect myself from the rain instead of the hood of my raincoat. A few walkers prefer this method of protection to using their raincoat's hood because their vision is not impeded and because it is cooler, the hood not preventing the air to travel freely around the head.

The ground is soggy and the vegetation soaking wet and splashing us when we brush against it. The track is muddy and slippery but the conversation is warm and friendly: catching up with news and gossip is good fun. Walking quickly is the best way of warming up. Most of us are well covered up with hats and waterproof gloves. As we begin to climb higher, some of us slow down. It's not so easy to walk uphill encumbered by heavy clothing. It is still foggy and hard to see anything. The rain keeps coming down at a steady heavy pace. I think the gaiters are a fantastic invention and I will definitely buy a pair: they are shielding me well from the wet plants and the rain.

We have lunch at Keppel's hut, the famous Keppel hut I have heard so much about and never seen, even though I have walked Lake Mountain before. Andrew shares around his strawberries dipped in balsamic vinegar. (*cont'd overleaf*)



Sharing sophisticated snacks (photo: Robert Yuen)

The Day of the Shrinking Socks. (*cont'd from p3*)

You can't get more sophisticated than this I think, when I notice that Andrew has also brought an Italian coffee-machine. I'm also impressed by the speed with which some of the guys light a fire: I didn't even have time to blink my eyes and the hut was glowing and warming up. Some of the experienced walkers cook their food on portable stoves and warm up with hot food.



Warming up inside Keppel Hut (photo: Robert Yuen)

After lunch, we start the serious walk to the top. It is still raining steadily and at times this implacable steadiness changes into pouring torrents. The ground is now a mixture of rain and snow: an icy slosh. We have to be careful of where we put our feet, as the terrain is uneven and dotted with holes. We are wet to the bones now and most of us are swimming in their boots, the rain, the slosh and the little rivers of melted snow having soaked the heaviest boots. Strangely enough, my feet don't feel cold, just wet.

My gaiters are thoroughly soaked as are my pants underneath. I think that may be I haven't put them on properly but I'm told that everyone is in the same predicament. Well then, after all, I will not buy a pair of gaiters, I say. Of course, Ron, the eternal optimist, answers that gaiters are very good in summer to protect your legs from thorny vegetation, mosquitoes, leeches, snakes, etc. I have folded my dainty umbrella because the wind has been blowing in gusts and throwing it inside out a few times and the path we are following is narrow and flanked by bushes laden with snow that will fall on me when brushed by the umbrella. The hood of my raincoat keeps my head warm but not dry for long. We really couldn't get more wet than this, could we?

As we climb higher and higher the slosh changes into solid patches of snow and I begin to feel excited. The mountain and the trees laced with snow are beautiful. I begin to smile like an idiot at the whole world.

When we reach the lake and the top of the mountain, the snow covers everything and it is about 5 to 10 cms. deep: the whole mountain is white and wonderful even though the rain keeps falling. We stop at some ruins, we climb in their circle to protect ourselves a little from the rain and the cold, and the race to take photos begins. There is a little snowball throwing but we are too wet and cold by now and soon enough begin the descent. Now we only want to reach the starting point and the cars. We go fast and a little recklessly

The waterproof gloves worn by some walkers have got wet; raincoats too are not waterproof any longer: we are soaked to every single little bone of our bodies.

When we reach the cars, everyone tries to strip off the wet clothes and put dry ones on. You all know what a slow process this is when your clothes stick to you like glue and your hands are frozen. I take the unimaginably wet gaiters off and my drenched pants stick to my lower legs like an icy plaster cast. My boots come off easily; I notice that my white woolen socks have become grey, dyed by the boots. I begin to pull off a sock, but nothing happens, it does not move at all. I pull and pull using more strength each time but the sock is stuck to my foot like a second skin. I try to roll it down my ankle and then pull it off from there with both hands but the sock won't budge, it's sticking to my foot with all its mighty pure-wool strength. My fingers are not exactly very nimble and are getting colder by the second as I handle the soaked sock. I try to pull off the other sock repeating the same pulling, pushing, rolling, sliding movements I used with the other sock. Nothing.

Not a ripple. I can't get them off. They have shrunk so much they just do not want to come off. I'm beginning to feel short-tempered and ask if someone has a pair of scissors so I can cut them off me. No one has scissors. Will I have to leave the icy wet socks on and put my dry shoes on them? Ron comes to help. He grabs one of my feet and starts pulling with manly strength on the sock, but, again, nothing happens.

He tries the other foot, same thing. He grabs one of my legs, lifts my foot and starts pulling the sock from behind: nothing. He perseveres and pulling, pushing, squeezing, rolling and pressing down the flesh very, very slowly the socks come off. These socks are made with pure-wool and have been knitted by hand by my mother; being pure wool they do what they normally do and have shrunk...quite considerably. However, really and truly, they have kept my feet warm, even through the wetness. A couple of days later I notice that around my ankles, when Ron pushed and pulled most, there are a few bruises.

Back at Marysville our David, full of ideas, leads us to The Neutral, a pub-restaurant frequented by bikers. There is a potbelly stove surrounded by benches in the centre of the large room. We stand around its roaring fire with our backs to it, turning like spit-roasts to try to warm ourselves in the round. We eat and drink extravagantly for the same reason. I order a bowl of chips, no ordinary chips: they are very long, very thick, tender and crunchy at the same time, divinely hot from the oven and from the spices sprinkled on them. They are so good and so plentiful, a few people dip in and we don't stop eating until the last one disappears.

Night has fallen and Marysville is dark and swept by cold snow winds. Well fed but not yet dry we are ready to face the long drive back, our bodies cold and weary but our spirits high.

Vanna Walsh

P.S.: It took the boots one whole week to dry. I put them beside a heating-duct at night and on the window sill of the warmest room of the house during the day if there was sun or wind.

Winter on the Overland Track

Sitting in Windermere hut reading accounts of other walkers arriving drenched or blasted by horizontal ice, then glancing optimistically at the grey lake outside to see if the sun was finally going to put in an overdue appearance for us; why would anyone want to walk Tasmania's Overland Track in winter? We'd been walking for two days and it would take another three for the answer to become apparent, but when it did, it fully vindicated our decision to do the trip.

Bad weather occurs year-round on the Overland Track – the cases described in the log-book were dated November–December and were far worse than anything we experienced. Fine sunny weather also occurs in all seasons; it is just a matter of patience. Bruce Meincke, the leader and veteran of ten Overland Track hikes, understood this well and allowed nine days for the trip; a moderately fit group could complete it in four but with strong odds they wouldn't see very much.

The weather driving up from Launceston and Devonport was sunny, but Cradle Plateau was a very different matter, a classic example of a mountain region making its own weather. Taking the relatively sheltered route via Hansons Peak, it was difficult to stand at times on the exposed ridge leading to the summit. Brief patches of sunshine occurred, however the iconic Cradle Mountain remained covered by cloud (one walker we met had done the Overland Track several times yet never seen Cradle Mountain, and was beginning to question its very existence!) We'd hoped for snow, as there had been nothing on any of the peaks earlier in the week, and were getting our wish. It had been decided not to take snowshoes or iceaxes; this proved correct, as although there were some sections of snow-walking, it wasn't deep enough to be a problem with just walking boots.

Overland Track Facts

- Opened in 1935, the 80km Overland Track links Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair.
- YHA Bushwalking ran a Christmas – New Year Overland Track walk in the late 1960s, attracting over 60 people, all camping!. Attitudes to large group sizes have become more enlightened since then.
- Since 2005 a permit is necessary for anyone walking the full Overland Track between 1st November and 30th April, with a fee of \$100, departures limited to 50 per day and a requirement to walk from north (Cradle Mountain) to south. The status of available places for dates during the peak season is available at www.overlandtrack.com.au; not surprisingly the post-Christmas 2006 and New Year dates were almost fully booked in August.
- With cheap airfares to Tasmania via Jetstar, and regular Taslink bus services connecting Launceston-Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair-Hobart, logistics for an Overland Track walk are fairly straightforward, and total transport fares (ex-Melbourne) possible for as low as \$250.

For the first few days, the weather remained cloudy, varying between occasional snow or rain showers. We advanced by just one hut per day, hoping to at least get a clear view of Barn Bluff before we'd progressed too far. With only 2-3 hours walk between huts, we'd arrive at our overnight stop by lunch time, however there were side-trips in the afternoon from both Waterfall Valley and Windermere huts. A climb up the hill behind Windermere hut was particularly rewarding, with a small tarn and views of Mt Pelion West and Barn Bluff providing plenty of photo opportunities even in the less than perfect light.

The most frustrating moment was at Windermere; we noticed a sky full of stars just before going to bed, but by next morning it had changed again to the worst conditions yet for the walk to Pelion Hut. This section has some of the most spectacular views of the Overland Track, but all we saw was low-level cloud.

Signs of improvement appeared on day five, with a southwesterly wind change bringing fresh snowfalls but clearer skies for the walk over Pelion Gap, with half-decent views of Mt Pelion East and Mt Ossa. The payoff, the reward for five days of patience, arrived the next day, with superb blue skies, no wind and the surrounding mountains capped with recent snowfalls. We headed back uphill to photograph the views. Thickly frosted vegetation lined the track, our boots shattering frozen puddles all the way back to Pelion Gap. Cradle Mountain was finally visible on the horizon, although shy Barn Bluff still covered itself in just about the only wisp of cloud present.

Wallabies grazed amongst the patchy snow that still remained, with the nearby peaks of Mt Ossa and Pelion East tempting us into a full-day expedition. Although an easy side-trip in summer, with its steep gullies and traverses, the route up Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak (1617m) can be a tricky climb in winter (particularly with our ice-axes back in Melbourne!). Today however conditions were ideal, with deep soft-snow allowing footsteps to be readily cut (mostly by Paul in the lead). The air had a clarity that only occurs in the cool temperatures of winter, allowing sharp views of the many distant peaks of the Tasmanian highlands. This was the reason for doing the Overland Track in winter.

(continued overleaf)



Exploring Mt Ossa summit

Winter on the Overland Track (cont'd from page 5)

Another advantage of winter is being able to take full advantage of the huts; although numbers on the Overland Track are now regulated during peak season, most of the huts can barely accommodate one third of the maximum number of walkers allowed onto the track each day. Yet for half of our eight nights we had a hut to ourselves, and even when we'd share with a couple of other small parties, there was still adequate room for everyone.

There were times when walking across deserted plains, it was easy to forget this was one of the world's most popular long-distance tracks.

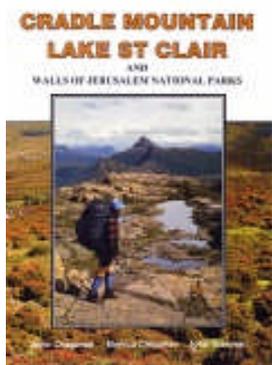
As well as fewer people, the leeches which are a feature of Tasmanian bushwalking were also in abeyance; just one half-heartedly latched to my boot in nine days, about 1% of the attention you'd expect in summer.

The sunny weather continued for two more days, allowing similarly spectacular views from Pine Valley and the Labyrinth.

After arriving at Narcissus Hut another cycle of rain started, so rather than slog the final 15km around Lake St Clair to Cynthia Bay and a long-awaited hot shower, we radioed the ferry. Many thanks to Bruce for organising the trip and sharing the benefits of his experience.



After six days of walking, Bruce decides to put his feet up!



Book Reviews

John and Monica Chapman, John Siseman. *Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair and Walls of Jerusalem National Parks*. 5th edition. John Chapman, 2006. 192 pages. \$35

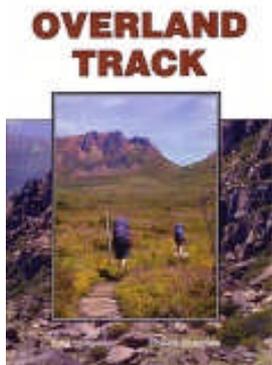
At least 40 club members have visited Tasmania on walking trips in the past year, over half of them on private trips. So with summer approaching, I'll break with my habit of reviewing Victorian guidebooks and venture across Bass Strait.

John and Monica Chapman have been producing guidebooks to the more remote parts of Tasmania since the late 1970's. In addition to five editions of *Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair*... written with John Siseman, John Chapman has also written and published four

editions of *South West Tasmania*. More recently they have written a couple of excellent guides to Victorian day walks and a book covering a selection of the best extended walks in Australia.

The new edition of *Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair*... is a stunning contrast to the rather basic and monochromatic book design of previous editions. Not only has the title been thoroughly revised and its coverage extended, but it now features colour on every page with gradient profiles, photos, good clear maps and diagrams of seasonal weather conditions. The book essentially covers the mountains north of the Lyell Highway. It includes the Overland Track and other routes between The Cradle and St Clair. In addition it covers the Penguin - Cradle Trail from the north coast, the Walls of Jerusalem area and alternative access routes, including a couple from the Central Plateau near Great Lake. The walk descriptions are clear, complete and unambiguous.

In the past I've written some rather scathing reviews of guidebooks, but this is one book that is hard to fault. If pressed, I'd offer that it might have covered a little more of Tasmania's Central Plateau and there could be a few more suggestions for campsites.



John and Monica Chapman, John Siseman. *Overland Track*. John Chapman, 2006. 64 pages. \$18.

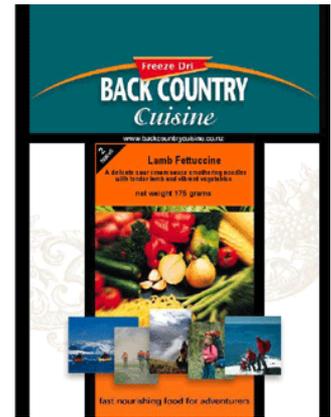
The *Overland Track* is a cut down version of *Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair* intended for those who only plan to walk the Overland Track without venturing further afield. It excludes walks beyond the Overland Track, Pine Valley and side trips. It also omits some interesting but peripheral information such as the natural history section. It is produced to the same impressive standard as the other title, but is half the price and less than half the weight.

David Sisson

Taste Test - Back Country Freeze-dried meals

Once upon a time, freeze-dried meals were an indispensable part of any long-distance pack-carry, being about the only option for a lightweight meal, even if their palatability was somewhat dubious. Nowadays, even without a food-dryer, tasty, nutritious but still lightweight (100-200g) main meals can be prepared from ingredients readily obtainable in supermarkets at a fraction of the cost.

So why bother with freeze-drieds? Their main advantages are their convenience to both pack, as everything is contained in a single bag, and prepare – pour a cup of boiling water into the foil pouch and 15-20 minutes later dinner is ready. Hence it isn't uncommon to take a couple of freeze-dried meals on longer expeditions (but anyone resorting to them for a weekend trip should seek culinary help urgently). Also, some of the dishes do sound tempting, but do they taste anything like their description? Here's the verdict on the commonly available Back Country range as determined by a panel of YHA and other bushwalkers; most dishes were sampled by at least two tasters with similar scores awarded, but please note this is a subjective guide and may vary from your own palate.



Thai Chicken **** ; good strong flavour, recommended

Beef Enchiladas ****

Beef Pasta Hotpot *** ½ ; nice gravy, visually appealing

Sweet and Sour Lamb *** ; can taste the pineapple

Lamb Fettucini **½ ; edible but not memorable

Beef Teriyaki **½ ; doesn't taste much of beef or teriyaki

Taste Ratings

- * A hunger strike would be more attractive
- ** Edible but only just, you need to be cold and starving to appreciate it.
- *** Acceptable
- **** Worth carrying, a tasty meal in its own right
- ***** So good you'd serve it at dinner parties

Lamb Roast **½ ; not like mother used to cook. The lamb is like meat loaf, vegetables OK but a bit bland. Potato is packaged separately, good for presentation but loses the advantage of being quick to prepare if in a hurry.

Chicken Tikka Masala ** ; bland flavour, disappointing given that its description suggests there would be at least a hint of exotic spices. The "chicken" is compound meat with a foam texture, another disappointment. Chicken isn't well suited to warm-air drying, but works well when freeze-dried; there have been freeze-dried chicken dishes which appeared to use real chicken pieces, why isn't it possible with Back Country (even the Thai Chicken fails in this respect, but has flavour to compensate).

The Tale of Lenny the Adventurous Leech

Lenny wasn't like other leeches. In fact he wasn't like any of his brothers and sisters (who numbered 822 at their last family reunion). His mother, Leonore, was always going on at him "Lenny, remember to eat your dinner quickly – leave your host to clean up". Or "Lenny, if I've told you once I've told you a thousand times, don't eat on the run you could end up anywhere!". But see, this was precisely what Lenny had in mind. Oh how he longed to see the world. The world outside the bog.

It was a delightful lush boggy stretch of birch forest, with a trickling creek nearby and best of all an appealing sitting log where weary hosts would come and offer their calves and shins as entrees, main and dessert. Traditionally all the leeches in Lenny's community would line up and wave from a mossy fern, grab a quick bite then detach before the provider went too far afield. If they got too far (or were particularly greedy) they would have to hitch a lift (and supper) back to the ferny bog and the family. Which is precisely what Lenny practised (and got into trouble with his mum).

Little did Lenny know that they people who ran the track where the bog was located had decided to make the hosts (or 'takeaways' as Lenny called them) walk in only one direction. They could only walk north to south. So, one day when feasting on a delicious B-positive (his personal favourite), Lenny realised he was being a guts and was carried away (literally) by his host. "Oh, I am so bloated", said Lenny as he considered an emergency detachment. Suddenly he realised he was a long long way from the bog, further than he had ever been before. Instantly the darkness inside the sock and boot of the Takeaway seemed very dark indeed.... (to be continued)



(reprinted from an entry in one of the Overland Track hut log-books)

A Feathertopping Weekend

It had been a long drive, but there wasn't much further to go now. Locking his vehicle, the only vehicle at the Stony Creek car park, he left a note on his windscreen indicating his intentions, before setting off alone for one last trip to his favourite place.

This year's Mt Feathertop snow walk was once again led by Bruce Meincke. As well as the traditional route up Bungalow Spur, a small group of us decided to go via North-west Spur, a longer steeper track with a potentially tricky final stage if the snow was deep or icy. As we set off, we heard that a Search and Rescue party was also in the area. A note had been found on a vehicle, clearly stating that its author was heading for Mt Feathertop but did not intend walking back.

As well as having steep sections, the ascent via NW-spur also drops down into a couple of gullies, temporarily losing the hard-won altitude. Still, it wasn't that bad, and shortly after lunch we reached the treeline, with the peaks of Mt Feathertop and the Fainters coming into view. From overhead came the noise of helicopters, scanning the ridges and gullies for signs of the missing person, search techniques designed to find the physically lost but of little effectiveness in locating the spiritually disoriented.

Any hope that a dazzling snowscape would expel any of the blackness which had pervaded his soul was dashed as he approached the summit. Apart from a narrow band along the south-west ridgeline, the slopes on either side were patchy at best, while the Razorback was bare, stretching dark and desolate into the distance.



We reached MUMC hut (above) at 2pm, without encountering even the slightest trace of snow. We were the only visitors, although a sign "warned" outsiders to keep clear during the annual party weekend on the August full moon in a couple of weeks time. Inside the hut were a series of memorial plaques to those who had lost their lives on the mountain. This weekend's weather was fairly benign, as Mt Feathertop loomed large in front of us, however the summit was largely obscured by cloud. From time to time it cleared, revealing the ant-like figures of Bruce's party making their way along the ridgeline towards the summit. Moving on to Federation Hut, patches of snow finally appeared, but any concern about having to do an icy traverse of Mt Feathertop was for nothing. The only section with consistent enough cover to

make snow-shoes worthwhile was the final few hundred metres between Little Feathertop saddle and the hut.

The Mt Feathertop summit doesn't contain any cliffs that can be dramatically leapt off, and even the treacherous cornice was absent this time. He couldn't stay long on the summit however for risk of being spotted. The beckoning of the steep southeastern gullies grew too strong to resist, as he began the next steps towards his ultimate purpose.

Federation Hut resonated with the sound of a few parties of campers chatting away and preparing their evening meal. A group of snowboarders were also spending a weekend at Feathertop; they would have been a bit disappointed in the snow cover as the little there was offered limited runs about as challenging as the beginner slopes of Mt Hotham, but nevertheless had no trouble entertaining themselves.

No moon, no stars, just darkness overhead and silence surrounding him. It was probably cold as well, but he didn't notice it anymore. The pills washed down by a final swig of whisky were starting to take effect. Drowsiness enveloped him – maybe he'd regain the ability to dream - as he found eternal warmth at the bottom of an icy gully.

Sunday morning the sky had cleared, so everyone was keen to return to the summit for a better view. The effort was worthwhile. On the other side of the Kiewa valley, the Bogong High Plains had fared much better than the almost bare Razorback; the snow probably wasn't very deep, but it appeared as a wide expanse of snow in an arc from Mt Jim to the Fainters. This was one of the poorest snow seasons for some time, but the view was still one of the most awe-inspiring in Victoria. Feeling enlivened, we started heading back to camp to finish packing up and dash down Bungalow Spur for lunch.



From his new vantage point he looked down on the group as they left the summit. He watched the Search and Rescue helicopter resume its circling of the area, wryly amused at how much money and attention was being lavished on him for his final weekend. They were very close now to finding where he lay, but too late to take him away from the mountains.

Another annual Feathertop snow-walk ended, not one of the better years for snow, but part of the lure of this trip is the variation in conditions from year to year; maybe next time we'll be up to our waists in fresh powder! Just as we were leaving the car-park, news came through that the missing person's body had been found in Hellfire Gully. No suspicious circumstances; he'd Feathertopped himself.

Tips for Better Bushwalking

#5 Safe River Crossings

Without the benefit of a bridge or ford with large, easy stepping stones, it is important to know how to cross a river safely and, even more importantly, when not to attempt it.

Lesson one is not to be afraid of wet feet – many inexperienced walkers take greater risks attempting a tricky “dry” route across a river (eg edging across on precariously balanced logs or jumping between wet slippery rocks) than simply wading across. If a river is too dangerous to wade, it shouldn't be crossed using anything other than a secure bridge.

Survey for the best crossing point. If a track fords the river, the ford will probably still be the best spot when the water level is higher than usual. A good crossing route needs to have an easy entry and exit point, with no large underwater obstacles or sudden changes in depth. Avoid bends; the widest straight sections of the river will be shallower with less (and more uniform) current. Don't cross where there are hazards downstream (eg logs, rapids), or you can't see the bottom. If there is a strong current, do not cross anything greater than knee deep (a rule of thumb is to throw a stick in the water and assess whether you would be able to keep up with it by walking alongside on the bank).

Keep your boots on – removing socks is OK, however a river should not be crossed in bare feet. Boots provide better grip and protect from injury caused by sharp objects on the river bed. Firmly fastened gaiters will slow the penetration of water into the boots, very effective if the crossing is short and not much greater than ankle-deep. If it is known that the walk will involve frequent river crossings (black marks against the leader if you weren't told!), take a spare pair of shoes (runners or sandals – not thongs) for this purpose. If you are swapping your boots for other footwear, stow them securely, don't simply carry them. Make sure that any valuables (eg camera, GPS) are also safely packed away in waterproof bags.

The following three techniques are suitable where a crossing isn't trivial.

Solo unaided; where you need to cross on your own and don't have a pole for assistance. Choose a route, angled downstream at approx 45 degrees, however keep your body side-on to the current as you cautiously proceed across.

Pole or stick method (*photo right*). If you aren't carrying a trekking pole, try and locate a sturdy stick approx 2m in length to assist your balance and test the depth of the water. Angle the pole upstream, forming a triangle of stability with your feet, moving just one point at a time.



Linked group (*photo above*). Where a river is moderately-fast flowing (and provided it isn't above knee level), greater stability can be gained by crossing in groups of threes or fours. Unfasten the chest straps and loosen the shoulder straps of your pack. The hip belt can be left fastened provided it is quick-release. Form a line parallel to the current, with the tallest/heaviest people at the ends, then either link arms or place arms around each other's waist, grasping something secure such as a hip belt.

If the current is slow (ie you don't feel any threat to your balance), a crossing up to waist deep is safe, however anything deeper is best done as a swim/pack-float.

Rivers are normally at their peak levels in spring. Any walk with unavoidable river crossings is best done in late summer or autumn, however heavy rain at any time of the year can mean the difference between a straightforward crossing and an impassable barrier. If such a situation occurs there are basically three options; turn back, detour to a safer crossing or wait for the river to subside (water levels that rise quickly after rain will often drop back within a day or two of the weather clearing). These options may mean a late return or an additional night in the bush, but the option you don't have is to jeopardise your safety or that of the group by attempting an unsafe crossing.



Spring Programme Highlights

Explore East Gippsland on Cup Weekend

East Gippsland has a wealth of areas for bushwalking, starting with over one hundred kilometres of unspoilt coastline then heading inland and uphill through ancient forests and rugged gorges, with boulder-strewn granite peaks offering commanding views of the area. Unfortunately its distance from Melbourne precludes it as a destination for ordinary weekends, so take advantage of the Melbourne Cup long weekend (Nov 4-7) to explore this region.



Relaxing at Wingan Inlet, Croajingalong national park

For pack-carriers the Croajingalong Wilderness Coast walk is a must. Numbers are strictly limited to 8 (by the conditions of the walk permit), so book early if you are interested.

A base-camp, staying at Cann River and Mallacoota, offers day trips to a greater variety of East Gippsland's national parks. Spend a day amongst the sand dunes and coast of Croajingalong, then visit the lush temperate rainforest of the Errinundra plateau, climbing Mt Ellery for views (on a clear day) to the coast. Coopracambra national park offers some challenging but very rewarding day walks to its peaks of Mt Denmark or Mt Kaye.

Bookings: Paul Gottliebse 9537 1001 (coastal walk) or Stephen Smith 9387 6481 (base-camp).

Navigation without tears.

A day of training in route finding and navigation is available for small groups of four to six people. The day is fairly laid back, but it is *not* a social event and participants should be there to learn. The aim is to give you a grasp of navigation and route-finding techniques in a fairly relaxed day. The course is broken up into small units with a break and a walk before moving onto the next section. It concentrates on map reading, gaining a feel for the shape of the land and selecting practical routes, although there is a *small* amount of work with compasses. The only requirements are that everyone should already know a little about map reading and navigation and that most of you can bring a compass. Maps and detailed notes will be provided.

Contact **David Sisson** to arrange a date and venue.

Craigs Hut Formal Dinner

After an absence of a couple of years, the Formal Dinner walk is back Oct 14-15th. For those unfamiliar with the tradition, it involves an overnight pack walk to a scenic mountain hut. As well as gore-tex, fleece, gloves and other standard bushwalking clothes, also buried somewhere in everyone's backpacks are dresses, jackets, white shirts and ties for changing into after setting up camp. The food is also a cut above average – a shared feast of entrees (biscuits, exotic cheese, dips, paté, even caviare) and desserts, washed down with champagne, fine wine and cocktails is usually enough for many not to need to cook a main course as well.



For the first time, Craigs Hut (*above*) on Mt Stirling will be the formal dinner venue. Built for the "Man from Snowy River" films on a site chosen primarily for its scenic backdrop, it is normally a popular campsite for 4WDers. During October however, between the end of the ski-season and the re-opening of the 4WD access road on Melbourne Cup weekend it should be relatively quiet.

Antarctica Slides - Oct 30th

One of the first presentations using the club's new digital projector will be Antarctica, October 30th by Ann and Lindsay Crawford.

We've had some good Antarctic slideshows previously, but Ann and Lindsay were lucky enough to have a well above average amount of fine clear weather during their trip in February 2006, at times providing views 150km away. Also featured is Macquarie Island and the sub-antarctic islands of New Zealand.



Hovering about Mt Erebus – photo: Lindsay Crawford