



2007's remaining walks

Once the winter snow begins to melt and the daytime temperatures start hitting 20 degrees again, it's alarming how quickly the year can draw to a close. Perhaps because spring is such a good time for walking is why it seems to pass so quickly. Inside this edition, three pages are devoted to highlights of the spring programme. And while you may not want reminding that Christmas and New Year are just around the corner, it is important to start planning now if you want to do any of the walks during that period in order to either book flights, get fit or simply secure a place on them. (→ pages 3-5).

First Aid training

The YHA Bushwalking Club is running a remote area first aid course for walk leaders from 9.00 - 4.00 on Saturday 15th September at the First Aid Management & Training Centre in Blackburn. The course costs \$75, but thanks to subsidies is being offered free to anyone who has led a walk for the club this year, \$25 to others. Participants will receive a "Certificate 1+".

Places are limited, so if you want a spot, please contact David Sisson 9380 8126, or email dma_sisson@hotmail.com with your name and contact details.

The club intends organising regular first-aid training. If you can't make (or obtain a place on) this session, it's worth registering your interest in order to get plenty of notice about the timing of any future courses.

New Sunday Walks Secretary

After coordinating the Sunday walks programme for the past year and a bit, Sing Wong has headed off on an extended overseas trip (taking one of our Sunday walkers with him we hear!). Hopefully we'll have him back again one day, but in the meantime Martin Cousins has kindly volunteered to take on the Walks Secretary role. By the time you read this Martin will have hopefully managed to find sufficient leaders for the Spring programme, but it isn't too late to provide assistance for the next one. There always seem to be a few people offering feedback about the walks being too easy or always revisiting the same places, but unwilling to help do anything about it. Thanks to Martin for taking on this role, please give him plenty of support.

Trekking Australia's Rugged Heart



(l-r) Colin, Stephen, Sandy, Jill, Bruce, Michael, John & Peter on section 9 of the Larapinta Trail, Mt Sonder in the background. (photo: Stephen Smith)

For most groups trekking the Larapinta Trail, the first decision is which end to start from: Alice Springs or the imposing peak of Mt Sonder at the western extremity. We started near the middle, with a five-day pack carry between Standley Chasm and Ellery Creek. This account begins in the middle day of this trek, however the walk was anything but middling, encapsulating in 14km a series of waterholes, gorges and lofty ridgetops amidst the rugged heart of the MacDonnell Ranges.

YHA Bushwalking first ran a Larapinta Trail walk in 2000, covering seven out of the eight sections open at the time. These were spectacular enough, however the 80km "missing link" west of Standley Chasm promised to venture through the more remote parts of the MacDonnell ranges inaccessible by 2WD vehicles and tour buses. After its eventual completion in 2002, the new sections gained a reputation as the best part of the trail. We were keen to check this claim for ourselves – it wasn't exaggerated. (→ continued pages 7 & 8)

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**YHA BUSHWALKING COMMITTEE
2007/08**

President	David Sisson
Secretary/Website	Hooi-Soon Khoo
Treasurer	Cynthia Bell
Walks Sec. (Weekends)	Paul Gottliebsen
Walks Sec (Sundays)	Martin Cousins
Clubnight Coordinator	Jane Bateson
Social Secretary	Andrew Stevenson
Search & Rescue Rep	Simon Walliss
General committee	Ron Bell
	Ken Sussex
	Sing Wong

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 yhabush@bigpond.com

Deadline for the next issue is Dec 17th 2007.

YETI ONLINE

"Yeti" has its own website www.yhabush.org.au/Yeti 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 Jasper Hotel (formerly 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:

Paul Gottliebsen
Catherine Koh
Henry Lawson
Louise Reynolds
Andrew Stevenson
Ken Sussex
Simon Walliss
Vanna Walsh

Expect the Unexpected

Vanna Walsh's account of a recent Sunday walk to Gembrook

As always when it has been raining for days and nights fewer walkers than usual turned up. Twenty is a very respectable number but it is usual for day walks to attract between thirty to forty people.

When we left the house, it was raining heavily and we started wondering if we were motivated by an unconscious wish for punishment.

A couple of people were already at the meeting place when we arrived. It is a strange fact that in weather extremes, some regular walkers don't come and some walkers who have not walked for quite a time suddenly turn up. Who knows why?

Our stalwart leader was wearing shorts as always, attracting snide comments. The rain had stopped but, for the first time in years, I had put on my raincoat: a psychological defense against the dampness and the leaden dark sky. We had met at the picnic ground but as soon as we started walking alongside the creek, the bush surrounded us. We had to walk in single file because of the narrowness of the track and this heightened the feeling of being swallowed by tall trees and thick bushes. Very straight, tall mountain-ash were alternating with other shorter and bushier species some of them living in a symbiotic relationship with very thick vines.

The creek was bubbling and rushing full of water. We hadn't seen a creek as full of water as this in a long time. The madly running water was whitened with foam where it hit stones, rocks and tree trunks fallen in and across it. Our creeks are silent creeks or gently murmuring ones but this was running noisily and wildly. It reminded us of European rivers. The usual types of ferns were growing along side it but as the banks of the creek became damper another kind of fern was taking over. It is such a shame that we know so little about native vegetation. Some of us were wishing that our own botany expert, Elsie, were with us. Indeed, where is she when we need her? The wattle was just putting on its golden flowers, the wedding-veil bushes had a scattering of white little flowers and our national emblem, the heath, was appearing in different colors. The perfumes of these flowers were wafting and mingling in the damp air. The bush, and its very soil, emanated stronger than normal scents because of the copious rain. We had seldom seen the bush so green and luxuriant; never seen and heard so much water. This made us remember the drought and the bush we are used to: bone-dry and brown.

We had lunch at Ship Rock and then headed back. The path we were following was wider and more open than the track alongside the creek so we could walk side by side and chatter. We saw a dead horse. Although no one likes to see dead animals, we are used to seeing dead wild life, but to see a dead horse was upsetting. We wandered what had happened.

Before ending the walk, we went to see Kurth Kiln. An appealing building in its simple, strong, utilitarian lines.

We went to Charlotte's, in Gembrook, for afternoon tea. Over the years, we have exclusively patronized this little tea-house when walking near Gembrook and we were surprised to see some changes had been made to the small teahouse plus craft-shop cottage: a coffee cart had been installed taking away some display space, but the food and service were as good as ever. We stayed on for a long time remarking how lucky we had been with the weather. It had started to rain heavily again soon after we had finished the walk. We weren't expecting to be so lucky. Fortune favors the brave. This often happens. It's a case of saying 'Who dares wins'.

Or do some bush deities look after us?

Vanna Walsh

Formal Dinner Oct 6-7th

The weekend of Oct 6-7th has a few walks to choose from. Those in the club's older demographic will love Mt Disappointment, cosy accommodation a short drive from Melbourne where they can enjoy a roast lunch and once again do walks to the old plane crash site or Diggers Creek falls. This won't appeal to everybody however; anyone under forty will probably feel more at home attending a Bindi Irwin concert. Also, if you like a glass or two of wine with your meal, sorry but the venue owners are religious fundamentalists who will cast out anyone caught imbibing the demon drink, so it will have to be a dry weekend.

So to cater for the rest of you, welcome to the 2007 Formal Dinner walk, this year led by Catherine Koh at the Mt Cole forest near Beaufort 150km west of Melbourne. The way the formal dinners work is this: everyone brings a selection of their favourite delicacies, which are spread out as a feast for all to share. All who are properly attired that is, in a dress or jacket and tie. Usually all the food, wine and good clothes have to be carried to the campsite (along with the famous table), making for some quite heavy packs, however this year's trip is a base-camp. This should ensure wider appeal and some even more adventurous dishes (although it is surprising just what has been able to be carried up a mountain on some of the previous formal dinners).



Revellers gather for some pre-dinner drinks and nibbles at last year's formal dinner. (photo: Bruce Meincke)

In order to ensure everyone builds up a good appetite (and burns off their overindulgences the following day), two outstanding walks will also feature. As a starter, the 20km Beeripmo circuit walk through the Mt Cole state forest. A forest in peak spring bloom, with towering eucalypts, lots of tree-ferns, several spectacular lookouts and Raglan waterfalls – small wonder why Catherine and a few of our other leaders have done this walk before yet keep wanting to go back for seconds.

On Sunday pack the leftover food and drink (no formal dinner walk has ever been undercatered!) in a day pack for a picnic with 360 degree panoramic views on the summit of Mt Langhi Ghiran, one of Victoria's best day walks.

Catherine will be overseas until the beginning of October, so Stephen Smith will act as booking coordinator for this trip; enquiries 9387 6481.

Baw Baw accommodated weekend Nov 16-17

Located only 180km from Melbourne, the Baw Baw plateau is another alpine region that provides good bushwalking opportunities outside the snow season. Being a few hundred metres lower in altitude than the Bogong High plains further north, much of the plateau is forested, hence walking is limited to established trails such as the alpine walking track, however good views can be had from major summits such as Mt Baw Baw and Mt St Gwinear.

Taking advantage of considerable off-season discounts, Louise Reynolds is running a Mt Baw Baw accommodated weekend based at Ed Ski Lodge. Accommodation will be for Friday and Saturday evening. There will be a full day medium grade walk on the Saturday on a section of the Australian Alps Walking track and a half day walk on the Sunday. The Sunday walk will likely use the cross country ski trails of Mt Baw Baw.

The lodge supplies blankets and pillows. You will need to bring your own sheets and pillow case or a sleeping bag. The weekend will be self-catering so you need to bring along your own supplies for breakfast and lunch. The lodge has a fully equipped kitchen and dining area. It also has a billiard table and games as well as a TV and video room. There are a number of restaurants nearby so we will try to organise a group meal out on the Saturday evening – more information about this option will be available once the bookings are finalised towards the end of October.

If you are interested in coming on the weekend please lodge your expression of interest as soon as possible as the trip may be cancelled if there is not enough interest. The cost is \$58/60 (members/non-members). An initial booking has been made for 20 people with the possibility of obtaining extra beds if any are still available. Bookings close 20th October. More information – Louise 9527 3514.

Falls Creek beginner pack-carry Oct 13-14

The most suitable walk on the 2007 spring programme for anyone wanting to try an overnight walk for the first time is Ken Sussex's Falls Creek trip Oct 13-14th. A full pack only needs to be carried for an 8-9km section each day, from Watchbed Creek to a campsite near the former (but not yet rebuilt) Ropers Hut site. This section is on track, with only one major uphill part (downhill coming back!) on Mt Nelse. The other good reason to start with this trip is that having been labelled "beginner", there are likely to be several first-time pack walkers, so the leader will be paying special attention to them and setting an easier than normal pace. You still need to be reasonably fit however – the walk is "medium" grade - and have good boots and wet weather clothing as this is an alpine area subject to snowfalls at any time of the year (more sheltered options are available if the weather is unfavourable)

This walk won't just appeal to beginners however – side-trips from the campsite to Timms Lookout at the northwestern edge of the Bogong High Plains and down to White Rock Falls make it a fulfilling weekend for experienced walkers as well. Enquiries: Ken 9495 1350.

Switzerland Ranges pack-carry Sept 29-30

The Switzerland Ranges are located just north of Yea, about 150km from Melbourne. From the south they appear as pleasant rolling hills overlooking the Goulburn Valley, but hidden away within them are some surprisingly rugged, steep gullies and spectacular waterfalls. The absolute jewel of the region is a natural amphitheatre with waterfalls flowing into it from several directions, converging to another waterfall downstream, making it one of the most magnificent campsites in Victoria.



Cooling off beneath Stony Creek Falls



A relaxing view across the Goulburn Valley

One of the reasons the Switzerland Ranges area is not widely known or written about is that it spans a patchwork of public and privately owned land. Some of the most scenic sections are on private property, with more than one landowner. Ken Sussex has obtained permission to lead a limited number of walkers through the area, it is an opportunity any serious pack-carrier shouldn't miss. Being close to Melbourne, departure isn't until Saturday morning; the walk is graded medium as there are a few long climbs. Bookings & further information – Ken 9495 1350

End of Year Walks

A deficiency of the walks programme in recent years has been the lack of an accommodated walk over the Christmas – New Year period. This is remedied in 2007 with a Falls Creek trip staying at low cost in a high quality lodge, even featuring twin-share accommodation. Each day both an easy and a more challenging walk will be offered – the options in the Bogong High plains region are almost endless, with plenty of huts, peaks and trails to explore.

These types of trips have been extremely popular at Easter – late December is an even better time, as the alpine flora are nearing their peak and the weather is milder (although a final snowfall for the year is still very possible). Book early in order to ensure you don't miss out – prices will be confirmed shortly, expected to be \$25-\$30/night. More information: David Sisson 9380 8126.



Tawonga Huts – photo Tom Lun



A challenging pack-carry has been a feature of end of year walks for a long time, and 2007 will be no exception. The Western Arthurs Traverse is regarded as the most spectacular walk in Tasmania, and one of the toughest. There are 30 picturesque lakes and many high craggy peaks. The 10 day walk (Dec 26-Jan 5) traverses the entire length of the Western Arthur Range in the South West National Park. The range is only 23km long, but the rugged topography forces walkers to constantly descend and ascend. Some parts are steep which will require pack hauling. Walkers need to be experienced and prepared for wet and cold conditions. Anyone wishing to participate in this walk must demonstrate they have adequate fitness and pack-carrying ability – if you haven't walked with YHA recently (or at all), you will need to go one of the spring pack-carry walks. To join this walk requires a flight to Hobart departing no later than 8.30am Dec 26th; a busy travel period so book early. Enq: Paul Gottlieb 9537 1001.

Cup weekend in the Blue Mountains



Above the ashes straight and tall,
Through ferns with moisture dripping,
I climb beneath the sandstone wall,
My feet on mosses slipping.

Like ramparts round the valley's edge
The tinted cliffs are standing.
With many a broken wall and ledge,
And many a rocky landing.

Now pouring down, now lost in spray
When mountain breezes sally,
The water strikes the rock midway,
And leaps into the valley.

Now in the west the colours change,
The blue with crimson blending;
Behind the far Dividing Range,
The sun is fast descending.

extract from 'The Blue Mountains' – Henry Lawson

Throughout the history of Australia, the Blue Mountains west of Sydney have been a source of frustration and inspiration. The attempts to find a passage through the maze of canyons into the fertile western plains of NSW are some of the epic stories of early exploration. Since then countless numbers have been captivated by the region's majestic scenery. The Blue Mountains have long been a playground for Sydneysiders, with some walking tracks dating back to the nineteenth century. After many campaigns to recognise the unique conservation values of this environment, it was eventually declared a World Heritage area in 2000.

This Melbourne Cup long weekend (Nov 2-6th) YHA Bushwalking is providing the opportunity to do some of the more accessible but nevertheless very spectacular day walks in the Blue Mountains, staying at the Katoomba YHA hostel. Three main walks, "medium" grade, are planned, based around the highlights of Katoomba, Blackheath and Wentworth Falls.

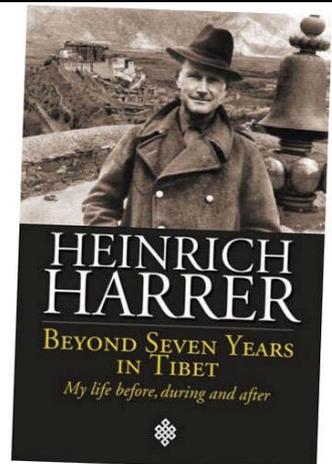
From the doorstep of our accommodation in Katoomba, a 14km circuit walk takes in many of the clifftop lookouts, Leura Cascades, Giant Stairway and the Three Sisters, using the Scenic Railway to regain lost height. At Wentworth Falls it's another walk along cliff ledges on the National Pass circuit, heading down to the Valley of the Waters. More iconic views beckon at Blackheath, taking the Grand Canyon track, to views such as Govetts Leap and Evans Lookout (photo, above-left).

The trip cost (accommodation + booking fee) is \$120 members/\$135 non-members. It will be up to individual participants to arrange their own transport – the recommendation is to fly to Sydney then take a train to Katoomba. Transport for the walks themselves will be by train, with the occasional short taxi ride (total cost \$10-15). A more detailed information sheet is available for anyone interested in this walk – contact Stephen Smith 9387 6481.

Beyond Seven Years in Tibet - Clubnight Sept 17th

One of the 20th century's great adventurers, Heinrich Harrer is best known for "Seven Years in Tibet" an account of his experiences in that country from 1944 until the Chinese invasion in 1951. The film of the same name in 1997, starring Brad Pitt as Harrer, brought his story to a widespread audience.

Tibet was however just one episode in Harrer's long and adventurous life which also included mountaineering in Alaska and the Andes, exploring the Congo with King Leopold of Belgium, an expedition to West New Guinea where he made the first ascent of the 5000m Cantenz Pyramid and narrowly escaped death in a plunge over a waterfall, the first crossing of Borneo and many more. These are all recounted in his autobiography "Beyond Seven Years in Tibet" published before his death in 2006 at the age of 94, but not available in an English language edition - until now.



YHA Bushwalking's Simon Walliss, in between running numerous walks (and getting married) embarked on an adventure of his own, organising the translation, publication and distribution of the English language version. Currently only released in the UK, an Australian launch is imminent. Clubnight Sept 17th Simon will talk about the life of Harrer (who he briefly met) and the task of publishing, which included obtaining a foreword from the Dalai Lama exclusive to this edition. Rrp of the impressive hardback edition is \$65, however copies will be available at a clubnight-only discount price of \$50. A highly recommended clubnight for anyone interested in tales of modern travel, exploration and adventure.

Tips for Better Bushwalking

#2 Safe Drinking Water

“Is this water OK to drink” is one of the most common questions asked of a leader. Due to its weight, most walkers prefer not to carry more than a litre or two at a time and rely on being able to regularly refill their water bottles. So how do you decide whether or not the creek you just passed is OK to drink without boiling or other purifying treatment? And what about all the “Do Not Drink” signs that have appeared over the past couple of years next to taps at many huts and camping areas, taps that seem to have been put there for the purpose of providing drinking water?

When assessing a natural source of water, you need to be aware of whether there are possible sources of pollutants both upstream (eg a town, mine or farming land) and locally (eg a popular campsite). Judging water by its appearance isn't a reliable guide as to whether or not it is drinkable. A brown tinge due to tannin from surrounding vegetation is common and harmless. The presence of wriggling larvae may not look appealing but is actually an indicator that the water is clean. The things that can hurt you are invisible.

When at a campsite, fetch water from upstream. Where possible use a tributary of the main water course, as its smaller catchment area (provided it is within the park or reserve) means fewer opportunities for contamination. Remember that you can do your bit to avoid adding to the pollution by not washing dishes directly in a water source and (if facilities aren't provided) burying your toilet waste at least 100m from any body of water.

In Australia we are still in a fortunate situation where water in most of the major national parks and forest areas is safe to drink. Some notable exceptions are rivers in the Blue Mountains and SE NSW, polluted by settlements on inland plateaus, and the Main Range around Mt Kosciuszko, where the lack of proper waste disposal by snow-campers has resulted in giardia contamination. In Victoria, apart from coastal and the Wimmera-Mallee regions, most national and state parks are in raised country above surrounding farmland and don't have water quality problems at present.

Where there is a settlement upstream or the source is a lake or waterhole, it is recommended that some form of treatment be applied. The three main options are purifying tablets, a filter pump and ultraviolet sterilising pens. These are all effective against the most common bacterial or microorganism contamination (E.coli & Giardia) but not algal bloom or chemical pollutants.

Boiling – needs to be done for several minutes to be effective if the water is seriously contaminated, longer at high altitudes (above 1000m) due to the lower boiling point.

Purifying tablets – \$25-30 - the cheapest and most lightweight option if purification is only occasionally needed. Iodine or chlorine are the usual active ingredients. Their main disadvantage is the aftertaste and the residual chemicals – not recommended over a prolonged period. They also require up to 30 minutes to take full effect, unlike the next two methods which are almost instantaneous.

Filter-pump - Cost between \$90-250. Check the type of filter to see what they claim to remove – only the microfine (and most expensive) filters remove viruses, although in Australia bacterial contamination is the main risk. Filters need replacing periodically, the interval dependent on the volume of water pumped and how contaminated it was.

UV light SteriPEN – Cost ~\$250 These pocket light sabres are simple to use and very effective; now anyone can use their force to defeat a galaxy of bacteria and viruses. Requires batteries to operate, so don't get caught out without a fully charged or spare set (although it is a lot more obvious when batteries require replacing than a filter).

Recently there has been a proliferation of “Do Not Drink...” signs attached to tanks at many camping areas, and even next to some creeks. Bushwalkers have drunk from these sources for many years without ill effect - what has happened to make the water unsafe? Nothing. The water is as drinkable now as it was then, and of better quality than 70% of the world's population have to survive with, yet we are told not to drink it – why? Simply put, it is a defence against litigation from campers who fall ill as a result of their own poor personal hygiene practices but blame the local water because it hasn't gone through the rigorous treatment required for the mains supply.



Ludicrous signs now present throughout Victorian NPs.

Similar notices are used in each state however Victoria's is the most extreme as it is the only one to outrightly state “Do Not Drink” - others either advise that water should be filtered or purified before drinking or simply state that the it is untreated. Untreated doesn't mean unsafe, however it can't be *guaranteed* that the water hasn't been contaminated. Observation at a few campsites shows that most people are ignoring these signs and living to tell the tale. The risk is very low – no mass outbreaks of gastro have occurred on any YHA Bushwalking groups from untreated water, however because it isn't zero, the lazy way out is to post signs like these every mountain stream. Maybe the authorities doing this should visit places like Africa or China or Italy if they want to understand what dangerous drinking water really means. The risk of this “cry wolf” approach in Victoria is that it will be difficult to effectively warn about water that is known to be contaminated and a serious hazard to drink.

Perhaps a final tip from a group of blokes (not YHA!) observed at Lake Tali Karng who solved their fluid needs for a weekend outdoors by each carrying in a slab of VB!

Trekking Australia's Rugged Heart

(cont'd from page 1) The day began at our campsite next to Birthday Waterhole, a semi-permanent pool circled by greenery that is one of several attractions only reachable as part of the Larapinta Trail. Arriving early the previous afternoon gave everyone plenty of time to relax, so all nine in the group were ready to leave on time. Our packs put on a bit of weight just prior to setting off, as we had to fill up with enough water to last until lunchtime the following day. Water tanks are provided at the beginning of each section of the Larapinta Trail and at mid-points on some of the longer ones. This section (five) was only 16km, but it was more than could be comfortably walked in a day. Setting off along a dry creek bed, a line of river red gums along each bank formed an avenue to the main trail. This section of the trip was rated as the hardest, but everyone had handled the climbs and descents of the first two days without major difficulty or injuries (they would come later!), so I had confidence in the group's ability.

Within an hour we arrived at the entrance to Spencer Gorge. Much of the Larapinta trail is on a formed track however in the gorges, while there are arrows pointing out the general direction to head, it's a case of picking your own route over boulders, branches and piles of debris left over from periodic flash floods. The sun was high enough to illuminate the red quartzite cliffs forming the western wall. The real attraction when this occurs is the opposite side, where the unlit rock glows orange from the reflected light of the sunny side. Spencer Gorge ended all too soon, after which the climb continued up a more open gully where grevilleas still continued to flower, even though much of the desert bloom resulting from some heavy rainfall last summer had faded away. At the top of the gully was "Windy Saddle" – unlike most features along the Larapinta Trail there wasn't a signpost for it, but subtle clues such as having to hang onto our hats to stop them blowing away suggested we were in the right spot. A further climb led to Razorback Ridge and what the map indicated enticingly as a scenic lookout.

Near the top of the hill a 2m King Brown snake by the edge of the track became aware of me before I became aware of it and slithered away, disappearing into a rock crevice. So much for winter hibernation, even though the temperature was only about 16 degrees. This wasn't a trip where much of the stories about it centre around coping with incredibly bad weather; every day for two weeks was sunny with maximum temperatures in the 16-20 degree average range for the time of year. Heavy rain and temperatures approaching 30 degrees are possible for Alice Springs in June, but you'd have to be unlucky to experience them.

The top of Razorback Ridge was (despite some close competition) the most scenic of our lunch spots over two weeks, gazing across the maze of ridges and gorges of the Chewing Range. Across the ridges, rock strata sloping in all directions clearly showed the ancient pattern of upheaval which squeezed the MacDonnell Ranges into existence. Originally several thousand metres high, subsequent erosion has worn them down considerably, while carving out a series of gorges and gaps through which water from Central Australian deluges escapes on its way to dissipate in the

desert plains further south. It may have taken 13 years from when the Larapinta Trail was first conceived to the opening of the final sections, but being on Razorback Ridge gave a perspective of it as something 350 million years in the making.



Razorback Ridge and the Chewing Range, valley on right leading to Hugh Gorge. (photo: Bruce Meincke)

The descent from Razorback Ridge was quite tricky due to slippery loose shale, but we made it down in one piece (just!). From there it was a relatively easy five kilometre walk up a valley towards a sheer cliff face at the end which marked Hugh Gorge and another outstanding campsite. It was difficult to decide which was the favourite campsite – there was a range of opinion within the group. My choice was the 1206m summit of Brinkley Bluff on the first night, with commanding views that allowed us to be first witnesses to the surrounding ranges being bathed in dawn's red glow. Birthday Waterhole was very attractive, however the towering red cliffs of Hugh Gorge surrounding our tents also gained a few votes. These were the rewards for carrying four nights supply of food.

Although Alice Springs has 1½ hours more daylight than Melbourne in winter, there was still plenty of time to admire the night sky. As well as the crystal clear constellations and planets, shooting stars were a common sight – we even saw bolides, a word I'd never had to use in Victoria, meaning a category of meteor so bright that it only takes one person to spot and point at it for the rest of the group to look up and instantly see the ball of fire hurtling through the night sky. As well as sights, night-time also had its sounds, with the howling of dingoes reverberating around some campsites, particularly Ellery Creek. At one stage the howls seemed uncomfortably close, until we realised it was just John Belfio trying to start a conversation with them.

Next morning it was another two hours down Hugh Gorge to the trailhead and water supply. The gorge had several large pools, although they can't be relied on. From speaking with other groups we met, it seemed a common plan to complete section 5 in one day to avoid a dry campsite. This is one of the biggest mistakes anyone could make on the Larapinta Trail. It is a long day, but a fit group could do it, however the gorge junction campsite we stayed at is far more attractive than the one at the trailhead. A highlight of the trail (the highlight in the view of some of the group) is a one hour side-trip to the upper end (→ p6)

Trekking Australia's Rugged Heart *(cont'd from p5)*

of Hugh Gorge, where the cliffs are at their most imposing and converge to a narrow chasm filled by a pool which requires either wading or swimming (no-one tried) to go any further.

Another detour worth mentioning, as it wasn't covered in any of the trail notes, is Stuarts Pass, the north-south passage taken through the MacDonnell Ranges by the first exploration team led by John McDouall Stuart in 1861. This was the originally proposed route for the Overland Telegraph before Alice Springs, with its better water supply, was eventually chosen. The Larapinta passes just to the south of Stuart's Pass, but it is worth a fifteen minute excursion through the gap to experience its historical ambience. Being well away from even a 4WD track, it would have remained relatively untrodden until the completion of the Larapinta.

After the stunning section 5, section 6 by contrast is arguably the least interesting part of the trail, a 30km meander across arid plains to connect the remote Chewing Range with the more accessible Heavitree Range at Ellery Creek Big Hole. Even so it still had its merits – those wanting to get the feeling of being dwarfed amidst a vast ancient landscape shouldn't miss this bit. Camp was at a place named Rocky Gully – a water tank was all it had going for it.

As well as Rocky Gully the Larapinta also features Rocky Cleft, Rocky Talus, Rocky Bar Gap – anyone see a pattern emerging? Maybe the early explorers were Sly Stallone fans, (after all those movies go back a long way), although on reflection there is probably a more straightforward reason. Whatever the explanation, the Larapinta delivers a heavy pounding to boots, landing a knockout blow on one pair. No-one in the group attempted to show how tough (ie stupid) they were by trekking in runners, but a couple used boots which should have been pensioned off some time ago. Checking his boots at the end of one day, Sandy discovered that the 20 year union of a sole with its upper had come to an end. Fortunately this was one of the few days we stayed at Alice Springs, so although it was 5.30pm on a Saturday, the proprietor of one of the outdoor equipment shops was still locking up and quickly understood the sign language (dangling the wreckage of a boot in front of the window) that indicated a guaranteed sale. Michael's footwear should also have been consigned to Boot Hill some years back as it was older than some of our members, but he managed to nurse his boots through the Larapinta by using a couple of dozen small screws to fix the soles in place. Each lunch time, out would come a Phillips head screwdriver to retighten everything for the afternoon's walk.

After finishing sections 4-6, we completed several other stages as day trips, base-camping at Ellery Creek and Ormiston Gorge. This was made easy as Peter and I both had our vehicles with us, particularly as Peter's was a van capable of seating 5-6 plus packs (by reclassifying John Belfio as luggage on one short section, we even fitted in seven). The 220km trail is divided into twelve sections, the junctions determined by vehicle access points, however each section surprisingly has its own character and distinctive features – there isn't any sameness that creeps in.



Sunset gathering on Brinkley Bluff summit, just metres from our tents, Larapinta Trail section four. (photo: Sandy Dance)

The views on sections 8 (Counts Point), 9 & 12 (Mt Sonder) are unmissable, whilst section 7 winds through dolerite rocks different to any of the other stages, and section 10 features the (normally dry) Finke River and wetlands. Whilst walking the Larapinta end to end is certainly an achievement, a great feature of this over other long distance walks is how rewarding and relatively easy it is to do many of the sections as day walks. Only the 30km section 9, between the Ochre Pits and Ormiston Gorge, is too far for a day trip, and is also the longest stretch between water points, a lot of groups skip this. Section five through Hugh Gorge is most practical as a pack carry like we did, as 4WD is required to reach either end and no charter bus companies currently offer services into it.

Since completion five years ago, the Larapinta Trail has steadily gained in popularity and international recognition, but the number of walkers is still a fraction of the Overland Track. We generally passed just one other pair of walkers per day, aiming to walk most or all of the Larapinta but heading in the opposite direction towards Alice Springs. There were a few large groups, including another Melbourne bushwalking club and a couple of commercial tours, however most of them were just doing the easier day walks. There is debate over which is the best way to walk the trail. My recommendation is to start at Alice Springs if you can, that way the views get steadily better as you proceed and you are facing towards the Alice Valley and Mt Sonder. The majority of full trail walkers start at Mt Sonder and walk towards Alice Springs; this is much easier logistically, as food drops can be done along the way and there is no need to be picked up at the end. Unfortunately the finish to 220km through some of the most spectacular scenery in Australia is a major anti-climax, as hills fizzle out and the track seems to meander endlessly through a series of rocky outcrops on the outskirts of Alice Springs.

We finished our two weeks on the summit of Mt Sonder, stopping off for a drink at Glen Helen homestead before heading back to Alice Springs. There were other walks we didn't have time to do such as Mt Giles or the area east of Alice Springs, so no doubt it won't be too long before some of us, or others, give in to temptation and venture here once again as a respite from the southern winter.

Stephen Smith

Grumpy Old Bushwalkers

It's Friday afternoon, the end of another long working week. A day or two in the bush should be the ideal way to forget the office, escape the city, relax and rejuvenate. Some people however, don't quite see it that way.

Weekends in the bush often begin with a long drive. The person giving you a lift wants to beat the traffic, so you have to sweet-talk the boss into letting you knock off an hour early. An hour after you are ready to be picked up, your driver eventually arrives, mumbling an excuse about something cropping up at the last minute. Oh well, at least you're finally on the road, a chance to snooze for a few hours, but you do need some dinner, as the supposedly early departure meant you didn't have time to prepare anything yourself.

I was looking forward to a reasonable dinner, but the driver's promise of a stop for a counter meal turned out to be the counter of a grease-joint well away from the decent-looking places at the other end of town.

You eventually find the Friday night campsite and set up tents in the dark. Your torchlight doesn't reveal that you've erected your tent across a thin but hard tree root, or the depression under the spot where your head goes when you lie down, but you are too tired to get out and move.

Never mind – after a few hours of tossing and turning, you can't wait to get up early and be one of the first packed and ready to leave on time. There's always one or two fuffers in the group however that spend ages rummaging around fitting the last few items into their pack while the rest of the group stands around impatiently.

The walk is finally underway and you find that everyone else is either too fast, racing miles ahead or too slow so that you keep getting cold waiting for them catch up. Why is it that no-one else but you is capable of walking at a reasonable pace?

There was one person who walked at the same pace as me – I spent the whole walk having my face slapped with branches he'd brushed past or dodging being stabbed by his walking poles.

You'd think that an outdoor activity such as bushwalking would mean a lot of fit well-toned bodies to admire. This isn't always the case.

The guys who put their flesh on parade are the ones that most need to stay covered. One overweight bloke had this thing of stripping down to his jocks and doing head-stands around the campsite. And don't mention the bumcrack.

No traffic noise, no bright lights, no being woken by drunken neighbours staggering home at 3am – a night in the bush should be a chance to enjoy a long restful sleep.

No matter where I put my tent it ends up being next to an industrial-strength snorer. I tried waiting for all the known offenders to erect their tents before choosing a site for mine, but then one of them always discovers their spot is too rocky, too wet, too ant-infested or too something else wrong and shifts camp to the vacant patch of ground next to me.

The weekend is now half over, but meanwhile back in the city, some more grumpys are getting ready to go on a day walk.

First comes the car-pooling – you need a lift but aren't quick enough to grab a spot with the drivers who seem attractive. You also miss out on the ones who drive a company car and misguidedly believe that they get their fuel free so they don't charge passengers for petrol, instead landing a spot in a monster 6-cylinder 4WD that consumes half a tank a fuel just to get past Ringwood. Oh well – at least you might have some interesting fellow passengers to chat to.

The proportion of "eccentrics" who go bushwalking is about the same as the small percentage in the overall community. So why is it that I always seem to be end up in a car full of weirdos? – the person who by the smell of him hadn't washed for several weeks, another one who five minutes after being introduced made conversation by showing me nude pictures on his mobile phone, and the last one who within ten minutes managed to steer the conversation around to his pearls of wisdom about female orgasms.

At least the driver shows keenness to get to the start of the walk. As a result the leader's and your carload arrive at the start of the walk on time – and then spend another hour waiting for the last car to arrive because the driver didn't think to bring a Melways and got lost trying to get past Ringwood.

Now comes the actual walk – what do you mean it wasn't what you expected?

I'm perfectly capable of doing a "medium" grade walk as long as it doesn't involve going up a hill. And when they said "river crossings" I didn't know that meant getting my feet wet.

And as usual the weather forecast got it wrong

It said a pleasant 25 degree day for Melbourne so I didn't think I'd need a fleece, but it was nowhere near that warm on top of Lake Mountain.

Eventually the walk ends. You're tired and cold and desperate for a hot chocolate, but your driver is hell bent on getting back to the city as soon as possible, so it's a non-stop two hour drive. A pity you couldn't have swapped with another driver who really wanted a break, but was nagged by some old biddy to get her back to the city in time for the last train to somewhere daft like Warrnambool.

You vow never again to go bushwalking with this lot, but a few weeks later here you are ready to do it all again.

It beats having a boring weekend at home

Spring Social Activities

YHA Bushwalking has a great batch of social events coming up this spring, leading up to the social event of the year the YHA Bushwalking Christmas Party!



Mmm Lovely! Come along to the Jam Factory on Chapel South Yarra for an afternoon of Pancake Parlour decadence and watch a latest release movie with Sarah Kim on September 8th

Sarah Kim 0434 234 201 or sarah.kim@ubs.com



Visit and enjoy this popular Mexican Restaurant on Friday September 28th 7.30 with Louise Reynolds at Mexicali Rose in Richmond, regarded as one of the best Mexican restaurants around.

Louise Reynolds 9527 3514 or lourey@dodo.com.au



We go back to the trendy Chapel St for a night of fine food from Thailand with Sarah Kim on October 12th 7pm at the popular Patee Thai Restaurant in Prahran with a 3 course banquet \$28

Sarah Kim 0434 234 201 or sarah.kim@ubs.com



On October 26th from 7.30pm John Sloan is going along to the famous Dragon Boat Restaurant in China Town for some fine Asian cuisine, book by October 19th for this one.

John Sloan 9435 4965



Explore the mysterious Hanging Rock at Woodend with the YHA Bushwalking Picnic at Hanging Rock.

Come along for the day and bring along some gourmet goodies to share on November 10th with Andrew Stevenson.

Andrew Stevenson 9530 3129 or svenlobster@yahoo.com.au



Get ready for the festive season with the YHA Bushwalking Christmas Party at the famous Redback Hotel in North Melbourne on Saturday 1st of December at 7pm.

Enjoy a delicious 3 course meal for \$38 per head, \$33 for leaders and drinks at bar prices at one of Melbourne's most popular venues.

Bookings are essential for this event, as last years was sold out!

Andrew Stevenson 9530 3129 or svenlobster@yahoo.com.au

Next Issue (Summer 2007-08) will be published at the beginning of January.

If anyone has a planned walk, social event or clubnight activity between January – April 2008 that they would like to promote in a bit more detail (one or two paragraphs, with perhaps a photo), email an article to yhabush@bigpond.com by Dec 22nd 2007.