



President's Report - Kris Peach

It is with great sadness that I advise one of our walk leaders, Jonas Lea, has died. He was a great contributor to our club, much liked and a wonderful role model. The club honoured him with a memorial walk to Sailor Falls on 8th April which attracted 50 walkers and raised \$545 for the Royal Melbourne Hospital's emergency department. We have also expressed our condolences to his family. A full tribute is on page 4.

Such a sad loss reminds us to focus on how to best achieve any bushwalking and other life goals we have.

Survey Feedback

Turning to our more normal activities, we received an excellent response to our recent survey on how to improve our club. It was very pleasing to note that 92% of our 126 respondents would recommend our club to others. However, improving the Sunday walk meeting and carpooling arrangements, clarifying the shared petrol costs calculation and improving Clubnights and communications were identified as areas to work on.

I will be updating you on the progress that your committee has been making, in this report and future communications.

We have used the survey feedback as a valuable input to our recent strategy day. The committee spent a day identifying our mission and key strategic directions. The draft outcomes have been circulated for your feedback.

The proposed mission statement and strategic directions are listed on page 3.

We think it's important to have complementary social activities on our bushwalking program to help foster friendships and build a community of walkers. Accordingly, we will be looking to expand our range of these activities in future programs. → *continued page 3*



Winter is Coming – and Kris is prepared!



Oops! Congratulations to Jan Huang for this winning entry in the 'People' category of our most recent photo competition. In the judge's opinion: "This picture has a lot going for it, the colours are beautifully saturated, exposure is well controlled and sharp throughout. The most endearing aspect is the humour in it that evokes a physical reaction".

For various reasons, judging of the competition took much longer to arrange than expected, but at last the results are in. Bruce Meincke was awarded the best "Landscape" photo, whilst for "Wildlife" it was a case of 'Oops, I did it again', as Jan also won that category.

The other winning pictures are on page 19 along with a list of the runners-up. All prize-winning entries can be viewed on our website's [Photo Gallery](#) section.

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YHA BUSHWALKING COMMITTEE 2017/18

President,	Kris Peach
Secretary	David Louwrens
Treasurer	Jon de Jong
Walks Secretary	Tobias Ziegler
Club Communications	Sonya Radywyl
General committee	Jayne Anderson
	Craig Beer
	Jan Huang
	Lutz Lademann
	Ken Sussex
Non-Committee:	
BSAR Contact	Paul Gottliebse
Trip Cards	Bruce Meincke
Yeti Editor	Stephen Smith

CONTRIBUTIONS TO YETI

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 your experiences or advice down then email them to yhabush@bigpond.com

YETI ONLINE

"Yeti" has its own website
www.yhabush.org.au/Yeti

containing downloadable copies of the latest issue as well as archived articles from past editions. The web sites is well worth visiting, as it often includes 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.

YHA ACTIVITIES CLUBNIGHT

Is held on a Monday night once a month at Mail Exchange Hotel, corner Bourke & Spencer Streets, CBD from 7.30pm to approx. 9:00pm. Special events start just after 7.40pm, everybody welcome.

YETI THANKS

The following contributors to this issue:

Tanveer Ahmed
Mark Beyer
Marina Carpinelli
Hannah Chong
Basia Dziedzic
Stuart Hanham
Jan Huang
Elizabeth Jarman
Chris Marney
Bruce Meincke
Gillian Meincke
John Morris
Kris Peach
Louise Reynolds
Lisa Steinberg
Andrew Stevenson
Robert Yuen

From the Editor

Welcome to Yeti #50, also known as the Golden Yeti. Rather than mark the occasion by filling this issue with excerpts from the past 49 editions, it only features new articles - but quite a few of them, making it the largest Yeti yet.

In an age where news items real and imagined can be rapidly posted online and distributed, is there still a point in producing a newsletter? If it's just to provide information about activities that will be obsolete in a few weeks or months time, the answer is no. But if there is an ongoing need to capture the soul of YHA Bushwalking through stories by its members, then that is the reason Yeti, like newsletters still produced by many similar organisations, needs to continue. As those who've read the last few issues know, YHA Bushwalking's history dates back to the 1940s. Researching the earlier decades was aided considerably by minutes and correspondence being meticulously typed up, filed and archived. This extensive paper-based resource fizzled out by the 1990s, and the loss of YHA Victoria's 'Hosteller' magazine left just our own newsletter as the main record of our club this century. Conversely, as the words dried up, pictures proliferated. Since the advent of Meetup, it isn't uncommon for close to a hundred photos to be uploaded after a walk. If a picture is worth a thousand words, what do a thousand pictures say? Way too much to convey a story, hence the need for a few well chosen words to accompany the most representative pictures in order to capture the experiences our walks provide. Long after emails are deleted, web-pages updated, photos shared and forgotten, a regular newsletter is the best means of chronicling our club.

The milestone of Yeti #50 is also marked as being my last one as editor. Fifi Lim has volunteered to take over from next issue, aiming to produce more frequent and trimmer editions than mine have become! Please give Fifi plenty of support by providing her with material. As well as promoting upcoming activities, the heart of the magazine is the articles from its members - opinion pieces, advice, accounts of adventures with or away from the club. Trip reports aren't the sole prerogative of the leader - the most interesting ones tend to come from participants, particularly those new to the activity and seeing bushwalking through fresh eyes.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Yetis I've had the pleasure of producing. As stated earlier, there won't be a best-of compilation in this issue - nearly all of the previous Yetis are downloadable from our website. The current location is

<http://www.yhabush.org.au/Yeti%20backissues/backissue-index.htm>

although this may change when the new website is launched. They should still be easy to find from the new menu, so if you'd like a hike down memory lane or to learn from others past experiences, please seek out and discover them for yourself.

Stephen Smith



A YHA Bushwalking Trip Card saves having to pay a booking fee whenever you go on a walk.

At just \$15/year for YHA Members, it isn't even necessary to walk very frequently to save money - just five day walks or three weekends is enough to break even.

Trip Cards can be ordered from our website; choose one of twelve new designs for 2018.

<http://www.yhabush.org.au/TripCardRequest.htm>

President's Report (cont'd)

New Car-Pooling formula

One issue we have addressed is car-pooling costs. We have revised the policy to be clearer and simpler for both drivers and passengers. From the 31st of March 2018, the policy is that each person in the car reimburses the driver based on 30c per kilometre + tolls, divided by the number of people in the car. The 30c is the Transport Accident Commission advertised rate. We are very grateful to our drivers as they enable passengers to participate in walks they may not otherwise access.

Sunday walk meeting point changes

To address issues with Sunday walks occasionally not having enough car drivers, our winter program will trial some alternative meeting points at train stations nearer the start of a walk. Accordingly not all Sunday walks will start from Flagstaff. We want to retain the unique features of the Sunday walks, including not having to book in advance. Based on your feedback, we are hoping that having suburban meeting points closer to the walk will encourage car-pooling from drivers reluctant to travel into the city because for them it is the opposite direction to the walk. We will be providing more details in emails and Meetup posts.

Our leaders are critical to the success of our club. I would like to thank those leaders who provided helpful feedback on our draft leaders' guide. We are currently finalising the guide to assist leaders and standardise the way we organise trips. Please let either the Walk Secretary or myself know if you are interested in becoming a leader.

We are also in the process of updating our website to make it more user friendly for both leaders and walkers.

AGM 4th June

Please note our annual general meeting will be held on 4 June 2018, in conjunction with our Clubnight. We will be seeking some new committee members as a number of the current committee will be stepping down. Please let me know if you are interested, or would like to assist the club in other ways.

I hope you are enjoying the current walk program and look forward to hearing more of your feedback. Please contact me at President@yhabush.org.au.

Kris Peach

YHA Bushwalking Strategy 2018-2020

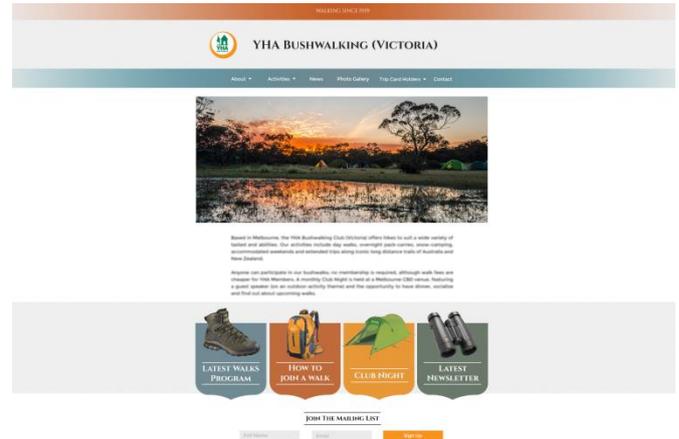
As mentioned in the President's Report, a draft mission statement and strategy have been circulated for comment, it is expected that these will be formally adopted.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Victorian YHA Bushwalking Club provides safe and enjoyable bushwalking experiences, fostering friendship and appreciation of our natural environment.

New Website & Mailing List

The YHA Bushwalking website is being given a much-needed makeover (the current one dates from 2006), so watch out for the new website launch later in 2018.



As well as a more modern appearance, the new site will have mobile and tablet-friendly displays and menus. Other planned improvements include a members (ie Trip Card holders) area with access to a full copy of the walks program and easier booking on trips. Content management will be easier, allowing more regular postings to the club's News (blog) page.

It will still be possible for anyone to enquire about a walk or join the mailing list without being a paid 'member'. The current Yahoo! mailing list will be replaced by a website-based one. The present list was workable when introduced, but after a series of changes made by Yahoo! over the years has become very user-unfriendly and difficult to join. Once the new mailing list is established, the Yahoo! one will be phased out – those on the old list will be notified that they need to enrol in the new one if they still wish to receive YHA Bushwalking group emails.

Strategic Directions

1. Provide a structured program that offers a diverse range of walk locations, caters for different levels of ability and is safe and enjoyable
2. Provide a structured program of complementary social activities
3. Develop a loyalty program that will attract and retain walkers
4. Provide a supportive environment to recruit and retain walk leaders
5. Improve communications to foster a sense of community
6. Develop and maintain efficient processes to support and sustain safe and enjoyable bushwalking experiences and other club activities
7. Continue to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with YHA Australia

In Memory of Jonas Lea

Jonas Lea passed away on 25th March 2018 aged just 41. His involvement with YHA Bushwalking was barely three years, but in that period he made many friends and wasted no time getting involved leading walks. Many members either attended his funeral service or the memorial walk at which close friends Hannah Chong and Chris Marney delivered eulogies. This tribute is a combination of their speeches.

Chris: I first met Jonas on 12th July 2015. I remember the day well, as I was leading the annual sausage sizzle walk on what turned out to be the coldest and wettest day of the year. Jonas volunteered to drive, something for which I was grateful, as the club relies on willing drivers for carpooling. Jonas was also the first to step up to help cook the sausages in the pouring rain. These are great examples of Jonas' eagerness to help out wherever he could and to see whatever he took on through to completion. This perseverance was demonstrated later that day, with most walkers going home after lunch dispirited by the weather. Jonas, however, was keen to continue with the original plan to reach the summit of Mt Donna Buang, which we managed despite heavy snow and fading light.

Jonas told me that day he'd already agreed to lead a walk the following week. The club relies on volunteers to lead walks but we usually find it takes people a few years walking with the club and a bit of gentle persuasion before they agree to lead anything. This was not the case with Jonas, he'd done one of Ken Sussex's navigation training days a few weeks earlier then volunteered to lead even before coming on a walk.

Jonas' first walk as leader was the Steiglitz circuit in the Brisbane ranges in July 2015. He went onto lead seven more Sunday walks for the club in locations such as Bells Beach, Arthur's Seat, Daylesford, and an exploration of the Maribyrnong river near his home in Footscray.

Hannah: I only knew Jonas for a year. Easter 2017, we went to Pink Lakes and Mildura together. I remember vividly that we chatted non-stop in the car. I learnt about his life, travel experiences and most of all his ill health. Having received a new gift of life with a bone marrow transplant at 27 years old. Jonas was very passionate about Life. He tried to live every day to the fullest of his capacity, however, each day brought its own uncertainty depending on his health. During days that he woke up feeling good, he would go for a swim, a walk or read in the library. Sometimes, he would join us for day hikes or overnight camping trips. I am inspired by the fact that he embraced life passionately despite the uncertainty and challenges that his illness brought to him. Jonas was also very compassionate. He told me that he wanted to help other people who are disadvantaged or handicapped but he could not really commit himself to regular duties. He had taken up a few voluntary positions like working as a guide in the NGV, a librarian in the Athenaeum library, serving in the Swedish church or leading local walking groups around the Maribyrnong River.

Even in his discomfort and pain, he was thinking of others. He found much joy serving in the Swedish church. I was touched by his selflessness and generosity of spirit. Jonas often took time with people. He had a lot of people skills, connecting with people from different walks of life.



Jonas crossing over, Cape Schanck walk – (photo:Basanth)

He also got along very well with the nurses in the ward during his hospitalisations. He got so excited when a Swedish nurse spoke Swedish to him. Jonas was very protective of his friends too. He was always loyal to them. He also displayed much generosity towards them. He gave me a bottle of vintage red for Christmas. I brought it to a New Year hiking trip and everyone really enjoyed it.

In February Jonas was scheduled to lead a walk at Cape Schanck, but was unwell so I led it for him instead. I was pleasantly surprised by the number of comments that I received that day. Mostly they really enjoyed the hike. They had walked through a varied landscape, seeing spectacular trees and coastal cliffs, bird life, having a picnic and swim in the sea before ending up at the light house. I told them that Jonas had planned it all. He was always patient in replying to questions that hikers have in regard to a walk. He insisted on typing out his replies in capital letters as it sounded more professional and formal.

Judy, Jonas' mum wants to thank everyone in the YHA Bushwalking Club who had been Jonas' friend.

His presence will be much missed, but we can take comfort that he is now in a better place.



Jonas with Hannah

Jonas came on a couple of my weekend trips including hikes and bike trips. On one hike, a walker broke her ankle and a helicopter was called. The group was split into two teams, with the first team despatched to bring in an ambulance team if the helicopter was delayed. The rest of us waited with the distressed hiker until the helicopter arrived, eventually returning over three hours late. Jonas was in the initial rescue team, and he was the only one who waited the full three hours in winter for the rest of us to return.

He was always up for a beer and he welcomed everyone. He will be missed'. – Craig Beer, Walks Secretary 2015-2017

Upcoming Events

Clubnights May - August

For at least the remainder of 2018, the Mail Exchange hotel will remain the Clubnight venue. Situated on the corner of Bourke and Spencer streets directly opposite Southern Cross station, it's about as good as it can get for accessibility by public transport. Presentations start at 7.30pm, with the option of dinner from 6pm for anyone working in the city or able to get there earlier. The entrance is from Bourke St, head left to a function room directly facing Spencer St. If you are having a meal, a YHA Bushwalking table is usually established in the dining area adjacent to the function room.

Monday May 7th, Tanveer "lost boy" Ahmed will present a slideshow of his 500km adventure along California's Pacific Crest Trail. Hiking tales are always more interesting when things don't go smoothly; if you prep yourself by reading Tanveer's account on page 15, you'll realise that this will be a very interesting talk. There'll be plenty more photos to see than are able to be included in "Yeti".

The advent of winter will feature annual talks about **Snow Camping (June 4th)** by Bruce Meincke and **Cross-Country Skiing (July 2nd)** from the separate YHA XC Skiing activity.

Environmental campaigner and Back Country Film Festival organiser **Cam Walker** will be the guest speaker **August 6th**. The festival is a showcase of Australian backcountry skiing and snowboarding films Cam will present a short film and provide information about this year's upcoming film festival September 1st at Falls Creek. If there are any budding filmmakers, here's an opportunity for questions about getting onto the program of future festivals.

Snow Train: Saturday 28th July

Come on a vintage steam train journey through the Latrobe valley before disembarking at Moe and travelling by coach to Mt Baw Baw. Once at Baw Baw it's on with the snow shoes and off for a few hours on the cross-country ski trails.



Enjoying the 2017 snow train excursion (photo: Leonie)

This is a great introduction to snowshoeing – no experience is necessary, just appropriate warm clothing. Mt Baw Baw is fairly sheltered, so even if conditions aren't as perfect as last year, it should still be a fun day.

Return is by the same means – the train has a licensed bar to relax in, arriving back at Southern Cross around 8pm. Cost will be approx. \$145, book early as places are limited to 12.

Grading: *Easy-medium* **Enquiries:** [Andrew](#) 0423 796 211

Lorne accommodated w/e (9-11 June)



Lorne is a perfect base for exploring the eastern section of the Great Otway National Park over the Queens Birthday weekend. The Park is known for its rugged coastline and terrain, temperate rain forest, waterfalls and walking tracks.

The initial accommodation booking consists of a self-contained rental house comprising four bedrooms with a maximum allocation of eight people. Cost is \$135 + trip fee for three nights. Additional accommodation may be booked subject to demand and availability.

The walk itinerary is subject to change but will generally consist of:

1. Teddy's lookout – Phantom Falls – The Canyon – Won Wondah Falls – Sheoak Creek – Swallow Cave- Sheoak Falls

Beginning with a lookout over the coastline, the walk follows the George River through the forest visiting various falls, The Canyon (sheer walls), and Swallow Cave. This is considered to be one of the more diverse walks in the area.

2. Blanket Leaf - Cora Lynn Falls - Allen Dam - Phantom Falls – Allenvale Picnic area - Kookaburra.

The track gradually descends through the forest from the Blanket Leaf car park reaching the Cora Lynn Falls after a few kilometres. After this point, the track becomes rougher and crosses the Cora Lynn Creek numerous times (rock hopping). This walk is more technical than the other walk due to the number of creek crossings, but is well worth the effort.

3. Blanket Leaf-> Erskine Falls → Lorne

Starting from the tranquil Blanket Leaf picnic area, the track passes the spectacular Erskine Falls, and then follows the river to Lorne through the forest.

Grading: *Medium* **Enquiries:** [David](#) 0407 667 624

Beaufort (accommodated): 18-19th August

Midway between Ballarat and Ararat, Mt Langi Ghiran and Mt Buango state parks offer some of the best day walks in Victoria. Between them they feature lush eucalypt forests, ferny glades, caves, waterfalls, and granite peaks with panoramic views as far away as the Grampians.

The unquestionable highlight of Mt Langi Ghiran state park is the rock scramble to its eponymous summit, but the grand tour will also take in some aboriginal rock-art, Hidden Lagoon and Mt Gossin, the park's other major peak. The walk has some steep and off-track sections, hence it isn't suitable for beginners.

Mt Buangor state park contains the popular Beeripmo Walk, however the route this weekend will take in some tracks and features that aren't part of the Beeripmo, including Ferntree Falls and The Cave.



Mt Langi Ghiran (and the Grampians) from Mt Buangor.

Accommodation will be four-share deluxe cabins in the attractive town of Beaufort 160km from Melbourne, cost \$70pp + booking fee.

Grading: *Medium-hard* **Enquiries:** [Stephen](#) 9387 6481

Albury (accommodated): 28-30th September

Spend Grand Final long weekend exploring border country in the Murray Valley region between Albury and Corryong.

The area's best walk is Pine Mountain (1062m), a vast granite monolith 1½ times the size of Uluru. Its summit has superb views of the Murray Valley and high snow-capped peaks of Kosciuszko National Park. A good level of fitness is needed, as with a view ups and downs along the way, the total climb is about 800m. There are also good viewpoints on the way up where anyone struggling or not fast enough to complete the full walk in reasonable time can wait and rejoin the group on the way down.

West of Pine Mountain in Mt Lawson NP, Flaggy Creek gorge is arguably the region's second best walk. The 14km return walk starts close to the upper reach of Hume Weir and follows a steadily rising track to Flaggy Creek Gorge. There is a good lookout over the Murray Valley en-route, but the highlight is the rock pools and cascades of the gorge that are normally at their best in early spring.

The walks will be done in conjunction with the Border Bushwalking Club, who've joined us once or twice before.

Grading: *Medium-hard* **Enquiries:** [Erryn](#) 0438 018 509

Cape to Cape (Western Australia): Sep 8-16th



The Cape to Cape Track is 135km long, running from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin in the far south west of Western Australia. It features spectacular coastal and forest scenery, a fascinating geology of cliffs, caves, headlands and rock formations and an ever-changing display of vegetation and wildflowers.

We are doing a pack carry in mid September when the wild flowers are starting to bloom and the whales are on their way back to Antarctica.

The grading of this trip is medium as we will need to carry four days' food at most with a food drop. At the halfway point, we will stay in a caravan park to have a hot shower and soft bed. To finish the track in seven days, there are some days when we will need to cover over 20km, the longest being 26km.

Participants will need to organise their own return flights to Perth. The estimated land-transport and accommodation cost (organised by the leader) is \$340. This includes pickup and dropoff at Perth airport and a night's accommodation before, after and mid-way through the trip.

Grading: *Medium* **Enquiries:** [Jan](#) 0413 803 668

Nudist Camp circuit: Sat 4th August

- Is winter a suitable time for this?
- Am I likely to see many YHA Bushwalking members?
- Can I be turned away for being inadequately equipped?
- Is it OK to take lots of photos and post them on Meetup?

The answer to all the above questions is 'Yes' – exactly the same as it would be for any other walk on the program. After all, there is nothing unusual about this bushwalk.

Cobaw state forest is just north of Lancefield, which in turn is 75km north of Melbourne. The granite-ridged Cobaw Ranges are amidst the forest, resulting in undulations that are enough to make the area interesting but not steep enough to make walking difficult. In late winter wattle and wildflowers start to appear, the forest also has a noisy population of white cockatoos.

The 12km walk follows 4WD tracks, one of which is called Nudist Camp track. The reason is unclear – there isn't any such accommodation in the vicinity, maybe a local surveyor had a sense of humour. As long as you go on this bushwalk for the right reason, you shouldn't be disappointed.

Grading: *Medium* **Enquiries:** [Erryn](#) 0438 018 509

Recent Walk Snapshots

Canberra Centenary Trail (Easter 2018)



Over the Easter long weekend, a group of 14 led by Erryn stayed at Canberra YHA and walked sections of Centenary Trail, a 145km circuit in and around the national capital. As Canberra is surrounded by hills, there were plenty of lookouts and fine weather to enjoy the view; highlights included Black Mountain, Red Rock Gorge (above) and Mt Arawang (right).

The bushwalk also took in some urban highlights of the trail, including Parliament House. Luckily no feral politicians were spotted; that would have been even scarier than the actual wildlife encounter the group had.

Enjoying a break at Kambah Pool on the Murrumbidgee river south-west of the city, John and Erryn went for a swim while the rest of the group relaxed on the beach. Suddenly everyone began screaming and yelling to get out of the water – they'd spotted a snake swimming slowly towards John. Being the closest to the beach, he got out so the snake turned its attention towards Erryn in the deeper water and began moving towards her. It may have just been inquisitive rather than on the attack, but Erryn didn't wait around to find out and managed to get to shore, after which the snake headed off in the opposite direction.

(story & photos – John Morris)



Grand Strzelecki Track (Dec '17 / Jan '18)



photo: Marion Kloos

Craig Beer recently led the club's first end-to-end walk of the Grand Strzelecki track over two weekends. The second weekend, despite being in the middle of summer, was one of the wettest of any recent season, providing plenty of mud...and leeches. Despite the less than ideal conditions, the walk has got people talking, so if you missed out, don't worry it is likely to reappear on the program in the near future.

South Coast Track (March 2018)

Heavy overnight rain made this creek too dangerous to cross.

Too bad that the closest camp ground was on the other side.



So, makeshift campsites on the button grass were the best available accommodation, while waiting overnight for the water to subside.

Next morning the creek was down to the safer level of knee-high. Everyone made it across without incident, grateful for the rope.



Heysen Tales

Starting at Parachilna Gorge, the northern end of South Australia's Heysen Trail, last August's walk followed the trail south through the Flinders Ranges to Hawker. Spanning ten days, including a couple of side trips, such was the variety walk that from a group of nine, nearly everyone nominated a different section of the walk as their highlight.

The Hayward Range forms an impressive backdrop, particularly at sunrise, from Aroona campground. A challenging side-trip to the imposing summit of Mt Hayward was **Marina's** favourite day.



"Bummer" said Stephen. "I left my track notes for Mount Hayward in the car" (a day's walk away). This meant we would have to find our own way up this rocky peak. We left at 8:30 am., heading west across the valley floor through open forest of Northern cypress pine. While discussing which way to climb the peak, I suggested that we ascend a gully north of Mt Hayward and then traverse south along the ridgeline to the summit. This is the route that we ended up taking and involved first climbing some steep hills covered by grass and low shrubs. This allowed us to see the proposed route more clearly and make an informed decision of which gully to ascend. We then made a steep ascent up the gully,

Lisa liked the part between Aroona and Trezona for its diverse scenery and incredible geological history.



We walked through beautiful cypress-pine and desert oak forests and along/across numerous dry creek beds lined with magnificent, ancient river red gums. At times the ground underfoot was almost black to chocolate coloured siltstone – it brought to mind images of a moonscape or a giant Flake bar (but crusty).

This day included numerous geological highlights including the global reference point for the Ediacaran Period which occurred 620-542 million years ago! Called the Golden Spike and located just outside of the Trezona camp site, this is the oldest geological reference point in the world predating

led by Bruce, who found an excellent footpad up through some small cliffs. When we reached the ridgeline, it was very windy and we could see an extremely rugged peak reminiscent of the Western Arthurs in Tasmania.

The ridgeline involved pushing through low scrub and walking along the edge of a rocky cliff with great views of the Aroona Valley and other ranges. I was glad that I had chosen to wear trousers, as everyone else was wearing shorts and got scratched by the scrub. At 12:30pm, we reached the summit cairn of Mt Hayward and found a fire ring, indicating that someone had camped there. After lunch on the summit, we continued south along the ridge for about an hour until we reached a footpad descending east from a small saddle. As the descent was extremely steep, Stephen scouted it while we had a rest. Stephen reported back that the footpad was doable, so we descended carefully, being careful not to dislodge rocks onto those below.

After descending through a steep, narrow valley we emerged once more into the pine forests of the Aroona Valley floor, picking up the pace to walk to the road, and then north back to the campsite. Arriving back by 4pm, we marvelled at the view of our ascent and descent routes and thanked Stephen for an adventurous, challenging and interesting day. Eventually reunited with the track notes, we found that we had ascended Mt Hayward by the 'official' route but not so the path downhill – the recommendation was simply to return the same way, not nearly as interesting!. It was fun to work together to find our own way up and down this imposing rocky peak and I really enjoyed this awesome side trip.

the better known Cambrian period and represents the Ediacara fossils which are the oldest evidence of animal life on earth. We ambled past numerous other geosites containing stromatolites and evidence of prior glaciation.

Reaching camp also proved eventful – despite having booked campsites, we found a large school group from Ororoo had set up camp across several sites including the ones we had booked. Our "head teacher" failed to negotiate a settlement with theirs, we ended up on a vacant site hoping that no other parties arrived demanding we move our tents. Bruce & Gill camped in a dust bowl; Cath camped a bit further away overlooking the grassy plains and a large mob of kangaroos.



Bruce's highlight – an aboriginal 'supermarket' → p9

Heysen Tales (cont'd)

The section after Trezona was an easy 11km, reaching Yanyanna Hut shortly after lunch, leaving a full afternoon to explore. While most of the group went to a nearby lookout, **Bruce** discovered an unexpected highlight. A wander along creek beds for a couple of kilometres both north and south of the campsite took in three springs.

The lushest, most beautiful was Bunyeroo spring. Winter 2017 was dry, but the miniature waterfall Gillian and I found was a permanent water supply. The place would have been of great importance to aboriginal people, the equivalent of a supermarket for the variety of foodstuffs they would have obtained from its vicinity. Climbing a ridge on the way back from Wilka Wilka spring, a perching eagle shared the view with us. This was its bit of territory; the raptor was also there the following morning, farewelling us as we headed to Wilpena Pound.



Gillian's memorable walk was from Wilpena Pound to Black Gap. The flat section inside Wilpena Pound wasn't very exciting – all the eucalypt trees had brown leaves and looked as though they were dying. Fortunately we found out later that it was just the effects of a frost – the leaves die, but the trees are fine and would have brought forth new growth in spring.

The view from Bridle Gap at the edge of the pound made up for the so-so earlier part. Swirling clouds robbed Black Gap and the Elder Range of colour but gave them a dramatic and foreboding appearance.

Basia was also impressed by the Elder Range, but on the day after Black Gap, when the sun returned.



Not long after mid - morning we crossed another wide and shallow dry creek bed strewn with majestic river red gums so typical of Hans Heysen's compositions. Beyond the creek we continued walking along a derelict- looking fence line and ripening paddy melons, trampling the sparse grasses beneath our feet as we headed westwards towards the distant view of the magnificent Elder Range.

The duller colours of dry paddocks soon gave way to a richer and redder gravelly earth, glaucous saltbushes and the lively greens of the native callitris cypresses, while the multi-coloured horizontal striations of Elder Range formed a feature backdrop. It was pleasant walking at the base, but easy to lose the track too as the red gravel could be easily washed away. A solo hiker from the opposite direction told us he'd spent two hours getting back on track after he missed a marker. Without losing anyone, we made it to a lovely campsite complete with fire pit, tank water and toilet. Whilst for some of us it was a very tempting thought to light a campfire on this cold, clear, night, we gave in to protestations against potential ember attacks on a nearby tent.



The Elder Range was also **Stephen's** favourite part of the walk. The second day of this section started before breakfast with a walk up Red Range for the sunrise. The panorama took in Mt Aleck, high point of the Elder Range and northward to the now distant peaks of Wilpena Pound. Much of the day's walk followed the wide, dry bed of Slaty Creek. A flock of sheep in the creek bed was an indication that this part of the trail was outside the National Park, passing through private property, Arkaba Station.



After a lunchtime baseball game with paddy melons, we finally reached the southern end of the Elder Range as it tapered away at Mayo Gorge. Here was a mini-oasis, rare pools of surface water attracting the most bird and animal life we'd seen so far. The restored Mayo Hut provided a scenic campsite for the final night of the walk.

Review - Kangaroo Island Wilderness Walk

Across the New Year, I went on the lovely Kangaroo Island Wilderness Walk, situated in the Flinders Chase National Park. This walk has been only open for a year or so, and is very well organized, easily accessible, beautifully appointed and well signposted.

At only 61 kms long, the experienced bushwalker would find it pretty easy going. It takes in the rugged coastline of the south side of the island, through eucalypt woodlands, mallee scrub, a few rivers and lagoons, and wild windswept beaches.

The walk is structured to take five days and four nights, the first and last day really being half days at less than four hours each.

One of the new style of tracks management, you book in advance, at a cost of \$161 (as of 2018), plus \$25 for a pickup at the end from Kelly Hill Caves back to the start point and are mailed a very smart map and booklet. There is a limit of 12 walkers/day (commercial tour operators have a separate, much larger allocation, but expect to pay at least \$2000 if you go with one of them). When arriving at the information centre to sign in, you are also given a safety talk and a reminder that if you don't come out they go looking for you.

Expect possibly high temperatures in summer and exposure along the clifftops.

The walk starts at the Flinders Chase information centre and heads down towards Snake Lagoon. No snakes were seen by us, but we did see many of the Kangaroo Island monitors – a smaller version of some of the intimidatingly large ones seen on the mainland.

Night one is Cup Gum campground, one of the prettiest new campsites I have been to, signposted with a stylish steel and wooden gatepost, similar in style to the new Three Capes Walk in Tasmania.

Complete with stainless steel benchtops, rose-scented toilets with toilet paper, solar powered lighting that came on automatically at dusk, and tank water tapped straight to the kitchen sink, we felt quite spoilt!



The tent sites are either wooden platforms with peg tags or sandy pads, and are well spaced.

Day two takes you down to Cape du Couedic where you can walk along the beach for a bit before heading up to the

clifftops. That night is Hakea Campground, from where you can walk down to the well known Admiral's Arch and admire (and smell!) the seal colony before dinner, or upon leaving the next morning.

Day three goes to Banksia Campground through some mallee scrub before coming out at the spectacular Remarkable Rocks which is well populated by car visitors.



Day four goes to Grassdale, crossing the South West river by a boat attached by ropes to either side. You then find yourself at the beautiful Hanson Bay, where there is safe swimming on one side of the headland, wilder waves on the other. A short walk further on takes you to Tea Tree campsite near a pretty lagoon. In cooler months the modern fire pit is unlocked to allow use at night, but not during the fire season.

The last morning goes past both the Wilderness and Grassdale lagoons through banksia woodlands and sugar gums and up a bit of hill to the Kelly Hill Caves. You can take a guided tour there of the limestone caves, complete with stalactites and stammites, whilst waiting for your pickup.



A highly recommended walk, Kangaroo Island itself is worth a few days' visit if you have the time. There are several wineries, a gin distillery, an oyster shop and more wonderful beaches. The ferry across is pricey and gets booked up in high season. There is also an airstrip now so one can fly direct from Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide.

Elizabeth Jarman

Food that lasts the Distance

Here are a few ideas for food on multi-day hikes that needs to be lightweight and non-perishable



When it comes to commercially prepared dehydrated meals, Back-Country is the ubiquitous brand. A problem most people have with them (irrespective of whether they like the taste) is that the single-serve packs are too small but the double-serves too large.

Two alternative brands taste much better and come in more 'goldilocks'-sized portions. Although harder to obtain, they are worth the effort if planning a major hike.

[Strive](#), unless you live in Hobart, can only be ordered online. Favourites from members who used these recently include Vegetable Laksa, Massaman Curry and Mushroom, thyme & garlic pasta.



Unfortunately [Absolute Wilderness](#) is only available (even online) in New Zealand. It rates highly for taste, so is worth stocking up on if you travel across The Ditch or have a friend who can post them to you (there aren't any quarantine issues with NZ commercially packaged food). Recommendations are Tom Kha Gai, Wilderness Stew or Mushroom Risotto for dinner, and Bacon & Eggs if you need a hearty breakfast ahead of a big day.

A vegan-friendly recipe for those with a food-dryer. Hummus dries and rehydrates well, providing a tasty dip for lunch no matter how many days the walk is.

The quantity below makes about seven serves.



- 1 cup chick peas (dry)
- 1/3 cup tahini
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed with
- 1 tsp salt

- Soak the chickpeas overnight in water with a pinch of bicarb of soda.
- Rub the chickpeas in water to loosen their skins, skim off the skins.
- Cook the chickpeas in fresh water for ~1 hour until tender, strain.
- Blitz the chickpeas in a food processor with the other ingredients until smooth, season to taste.

If the hummus is to be consumed fresh, more liquid is needed at this stage to thin it down, but as it is going to be dehydrated, skip this step.

Space tablespoon-sized flattened blobs of the mixture on dehydrating trays. Dry until they have a brittle biscuit-like consistency, then pulverise the pieces in a food processor.

Allow about 50g /serve. Start soaking at least 2-3 hours beforehand; it will thicken as it absorbs water, so check occasionally and add more liquid if required.

Asian groceries have a fantastic variety of dried or long-life food. A serve of noodles can be considerably enlivened by adding dried vegetables to the cooking water (as well as mushrooms, seek out and try seaweed, spinach, watercress).

Preserved eggs don't need refrigeration and make a handy ingredient for lunch or dinner.



Asian style jerky is not as tough as the Aussie or Kiwi versions. [Jerkyhouse](#) (Melb CBD, 206 Bourke St arcade) is particularly recommended. The array of dried fruit (try the tamarind, plums or cumquat) makes good scroggin material and will appeal even to those not interested in their range of chicken, pork or beef jerky. Best of all, nearly everything is sold as pick and mix by weight.

The only tip is that exploring exotic ingredients is fun, but don't do it at the same time as your outdoor exploration; try them out at home first so you know what you'll like and how to best use it.



And finally, a long-standing favourite that has sustained bushwalkers for generations. Laughing Cow is to cheese what Caitlyn Jenner is to womanhood, but is obtainable anywhere and will remain edible on any length hike.

Day Walks with a Difference: #1 An evening hike on Stromboli

Stromboli is one of the seven Aeolian islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea off the northern coast of Sicily. The 12 square kilometre island has a population of just a few hundred people who inhabit two villages. That's boosted by an estimated 20,000-25,000 visitors who come to climb its famous volcano each year.

Stromboli is famous for the phenomenon of constant minor eruptions of magma and gas known to volcanologists as Strombolian Activity. And if you know your Jules Verne, Stromboli featured in the ending of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* when Professor Lidenbrock and his party were shot out of it after entering the earth through an unpronounceable volcano in Iceland.

To see the eruptions for yourself (and usually a pretty cool sunset), you can join a trek to a summit above the volcano's three craters. The walk is an afternoon-evening trip beginning at around 4pm and returning by about 10pm. It is a steep walk on a dusty trail that climbs 924m over six kilometres.

Hikers attempting the summit must be accompanied by a guide. I joined Mario from Magmatrek guides for my hike to the summit in April 2017 while I was travelling on a Sicilian Volcanos tour with Exodus. Our group was joined by a family with seven-year-old twins who set a fast pace at the front. I kept waiting for them to hit the wall but they didn't.

The track climbed steadily as soon as we left the village. I'm not a fast walker and I admit I wasn't at the peak of my fitness when I did this walk so I found the fast pace on the way up a bit quick. We weren't getting many rest stops on the way either. When we did stop at a 'chicken' point about 400 metres up, where there is an option to turn back on another path, two members of our group were sent back for failing to keep up. That left me bringing up the rear. So I asked Mario if he wouldn't mind terribly slowing down the pace just a tad. After all the summit would surely still be there if we took a few minutes longer to reach the top. He agreed but I barely noticed any difference.

At around 500 metres in altitude, or roughly halfway up, the landscape changed when we reached the end of vegetation. From here, the depth of ash and exposure to the wind makes it nearly impossible for any but the smallest plants to survive. The volcano's slope was now a barren, rocky place; windswept and dusty. The trail was narrow and close to the edge in some places and wouldn't be nice for anyone who had a fear of heights. Lucky for me I don't.



"How is the walking pace? OK now?" Mario asked me at our next rest stop.

"OK. Just." I said.

"Madam, any slower and I will be stopped," was his reply.

So I decided to not to make any further comment about the walking pace for the rest of the trip and concentrate on keeping up with the group. And I couldn't let those little twins put me to shame.

The final few hundred metres of the track were the toughest when we started to walk on thick ash. It was a bit like walking uphill on soft sand. You slide backwards a little with each step; walking poles sink straight into the ash and aren't much help any more. A head wind didn't help either.

We soon made it to a point just below the summit where we put on our helmets and had a rest. Only 80 people are allowed on the summit at once so we had to wait our turn. We eventually moved up to the summit where we were about 300 metres above Stromboli's three craters. We could hear them rumbling like thunder. We were given strict summit rules to follow: leave helmets on, stand in single file facing the craters, no standing behind another person and no bags or poles on the ground behind us.

Within moments there was a loud rumble and a spray of red sparks shot into the air from the left crater. Instinctively, I rocked back on my feet and almost stumbled backwards away from the explosion. The rules made sense then. If there had been something on the ground behind me, or another person standing there, I might have tripped or knocked the other person over. A narrow ridge high above three volcano craters is not somewhere you want to take a fall or get knocked over.



We got to stay about an hour at the summit and the volcano put on a spectacular show for us. The central crater kept bubbling away like a giant witch's cauldron while the other two craters regularly threw magma and stones high into the air. It got more spectacular as it got darker, when the fiery red and orange colours were bright against the night sky.

With the wind picking up and temperature dropping, it was time to head back down. We didn't go down the same way we came up. Instead we 'skated' down the ash on the rear slope. You step on the heel of one foot, let it slide until it stops and change feet. We were not allowed to stop on the descent in case we caused a pile up in the dark. It took around three hours to climb up to the summit but we skated halfway back down in under half an hour. We then continued down a path and walked back into the village.

When we returned to the office to give back the helmets and end the trip, Mario gave me a bow and kissed my hand. I'm glad we finished as friends.

Louise Reynolds (photos courtesy Steve Walker)

Day Walks with a Difference: #2 Timbaan to Mamasa valley (Sulawesi)

Just one day remained of my 60km solo trek in South Sulawesi. According to the guidebook I could expect to pass through remote traditional villages, coffee plantations and some big mountain scenery. But it also warned that the route could be rendered impassable by heavy rain, thunderstorms and landslides. I'd slept well inside a traditional Timbaan house, but overnight, through a massive thunderstorm, it had rained cats and dogs. Before I could cross this trek off my bucket list, I faced 20km of mud and landslides.

How and why did I get here? The town of Rantepao is connected to Mamasa Valley by over 100km of mountainous winding roads. The mesmerising scenery and fascinating culture of these regions, notably the elaborate and spectacular Torajan funeral ceremony, attracts travellers from all over the world.

In April 2017, after flying into Makassar from Kuala Lumpur, the overnight bus journey to Rantepao was 12 hours of very bumpy road. Thanks to my lucky star, I arrived in one piece. Once there I began researching how to trek to Mamasa Valley. The owner of my hotel was friendly and helpful, however he did not entertain the idea of a three days solo walk for a foreigner. There is no official map, no signs on the trek, and the locals don't understand either English or Chinese. "It is dangerous" he said.

I consulted an "official" of an unofficial tourist office. He was more than willing to be my guide for a fee: 1,000,000 Rp (AUD 100) per day. And it could have taken up to 4 days. After rechecking all information available from the internet and guide books, and with the "YES, I CAN" attitude, I decided for the first time in my life to trek alone through the "unknown" for 60km.

With an old and simple hand drawn map downloaded from a blog, an offline GPS (indicating rough direction) on my smart phone and the offline Google translation into Indonesian, I am on my way. There is no turning back!!



The trek started from Bittuang, about 40 km from Rantepao. The first two days were hard but no big drama and the weather was reasonably good. The heat (>30°C) and high humidity demanded drinking many litres of water. I collected water along the route from some water points setup by locals, directing water streams on the hill. Thanks to my garlic, I did not suffer any ill side effects!

Waking at 5am on the final day, Mama Be Be, the owner of the house (somehow women's names all start with "Mama") had already prepared my breakfast (pancake, noodles, banana and sugary coffee). By 6am I was on the road.

The first 10km was the gradually elevating Puncak Tadokalua (1775m), one of the highest points on the trek. Due to last night's heavy rain, there were a few small scale landslides and some sections of the track were covered by mud and closed. A Caterpillar was required to clear the mud and rocks. On one occasion, I miscalculated the depth of the mud, stepped in it and couldn't move my feet out of it.

During the earlier part of the walk the only hitch had been getting lost by wrongly walking into a rice field. I had to get a local to escort me back on the right track. Big thanks to Google Translation back then – but it wasn't going to get me out of the mud now. Back in Rantepao, I'd visited a number of cave burial sites: seeing more human skeletons more than the Killing Fields in Cambodia. Luckily my skeleton wasn't going to be left in this field; there was a small piece of rock within arms-length, I managed to pull myself out by gripping on the it. (Learning new experience: Walking in mud need to wear nothing but bare foot !!) This is first time in my life walking in bare foot in the mud: it is enjoyable.

After almost four hours labouring on the winding and muddy road, I reached the peak. It was bare and rocky, but the surrounding view was captivating; rugged limestone peaks above forested valley, complementing with spectacular terraced rice fields. Over a cup of good coffee in a Warung (roadside store), the owner told me it was another 10kms to Mamasa Valley; this section of the trek was supposed to be better than the previous one, but due to the rain, the road condition had been changed. She advised me there was a truck away taking people to Mamasa and suggested I get on it. I walked through the village, and saw the truck. Many people were already standing in it, waiting for departure: (no seat and no seat belt !!). I chose walking instead.



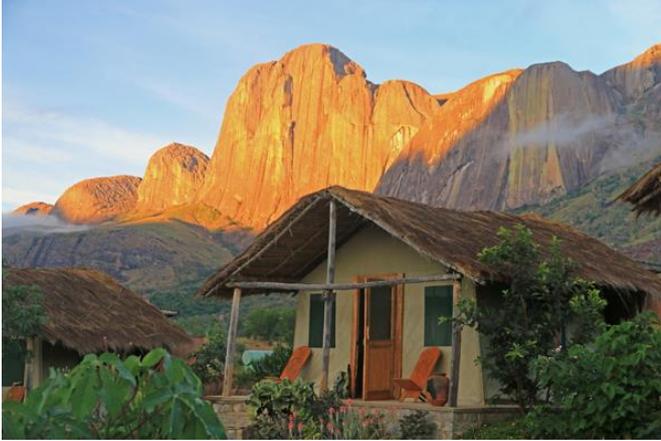
After walking bare foot over many more kilometres of muddy sections of the road, I arrived in Kole safe and sound, but exhausted beyond exhaustion. Kole is only 3km from Mamasa Valley, and well known for its hot spring. There was only one hostel in Kole: Mamasa Cottage. I was planning to stay there and relax in the hot spring, but adding insult to injury, the cottage had been damaged last night, leaking everywhere. I had to walk another 3km to the town.

The three day solo walk was an unknown and challenging. I lost five kilos and gained many aches and blisters, however it was rewarding and worth it: Experiencing having no internet, no electricity, and no fridge, only the beauty of hinterland of green mountains, spectacular terraced rice fields and the traditional architecture. Furthermore, there is no traffic noise, only the voice of children, the sound of running water, the lowing of buffalo, and the bleating of goats. It is a nirvana!

Je ne regrette rien – **Robert Yuen**

Day Walks with a Difference: #3 Mt Chameleon (Madagascar)

The impressive sight of dawn's first rays striking the face of Tsaranoro Massif was reason to get up early anyway, so there was no trouble being ready for a 7.30am departure hiking to the neighbouring 1500m summit of Mt Chameleon, a day that promised much and delivered even more than expected.



Welcome to Andringitra National Park, in Madagascar's southern central highlands, a region containing some of the country's highest peaks. Andringitra's spectacular open landscapes are an exception to the forest-canopy wildlife spotting of most Madagascan national parks, making it a prime location for trekking. Getting there isn't easy – an almost two hour journey from the main highway along a rough dirt road, but it was worthwhile and definitely something to look for if planning an itinerary in Madagascar.

The early start was to avoid climbing 600m during the heat of the day and finish before the fine weather had a chance to change. In late April, the wet season hadn't been entirely shaken off; the previous day's drive in was amidst a torrential downpour. Four of us were accompanied by a local guide, Cedric. A guide is mandatory in all national parks; the cost is low by western standards and their knowledge and sharp eyes are invaluable. Two kilometres of road ended at a village, at which began a well-marked walking track. By then, Mt Chameleon loomed much closer and it was obvious why it was so named – not something fanciful to appeal to tourists, a vast stone chameleon really did appear to be basking on its summit.

Passing by a large rock, Cedric pointed at a small opening - "that's where they put cattle thieves". Peering into the cave revealed skulls and bones scattered in the dirt. Zebu (hump-backed cattle) mean wealth and status in Madagascar. A man wishing to marry must present a gift of zebu to his bride's family. Stealing one from a nearby village is a rite of passage, but in some areas cattle rustling has got out of hand. Petty thieving has become organised crime, with rough justice meted out.



One person slowed once the climbing began; Cedric stayed with her and let the rest of us go ahead. At first we'd stop and wait for the last two to catch up but as they fell further behind, we decided to make a break for the summit. Rising steadily along an open grassed slope, the track steepened for



a final few hundred metres before reaching the crest of a ridge. A short walk along the rocky ridgetop led to the summit, but grand though the view was from the chameleon's spine, a better one was promised from its nose. A small chasm separated the head from the body; getting across it required scrambling down a sloping rock face to a point where the gap was narrow enough to step across. This wasn't the sort of manoeuvre that would be sanctioned on a guided walk, but Cedric was still a long way back, so with no-one to forbid us from doing so, we made the jump.

About half an hour later Cedric arrived, joining us for lunch and an enlightening conversation. What began with our questions about the view we were gazing upon morphed into Cedric's views about the social and political problems that had beset his country. Although Madagascar's economy seems to be on the upswing at the moment, a combination of corruption and incompetence over the past couple of decades caused much of the populace to descend further into poverty.



The walk descended the other side of the ridge, providing views of the 'chameleon' from other angles. Eventually the track joined a road next to a lush garden and hotel. The original plan had us finishing here, supposedly too exhausted to carry on for another two kilometres and instead propping up the bar until transport arrived. Except Cedric had very much overestimated how long we'd take and the truck wasn't due for another two hours – even with the "slow" person at the back, we'd set a record for foreign tourists! Still with plenty of energy, we decided to walk on and have a drink back at Tsara camp instead. Sharing the road with a colourful procession of local people dressed in their best clothes to celebrate Easter, the decision to walk was vindicated by more chameleon views - real ones. Cedric spotted them on roadside trees, almost as motionless as the overlooking stone one. Even when they were pointed out, I had to stare hard to discern them. Over the following days I got better at it, spotting some on my own as I became more attuned to this eye-opening country.

Stephen Smith

Pacific Crest Trail - In search of the outside

I watched 'Wild' sometime back in early 2016; I had just decided to quit my research degree after spending the whole of 2015 trying to salvage it from its inevitable demise. I was wallowing in self-pity when I saw the movie. Epiphany might be too strong a word for it, but the realisation that others have had far worse than I was having shook me out of the funk I was in. I knew I had to get out of the 'inside', both in the physical and abstract realm, to journey someplace that was the 'outside'. Well, what better place to go find that 'outside' than what I just saw on screen- the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), a continuous footpath from the Mexican border to Canada.

Poring through a PCT guidebook and the PCT association website, after much head-scratching I decided on a roughly 460 km section covering the Sierra Nevada ranges. The plan was to resupply and have a rest day every 7-8 days at nearby towns or hiker resorts.

San Francisco to Lake Isabella -

A tale of lost boots, hitchhiking and a lingering cold

My planned starting trailhead at Walker Pass was 50 km east of the remote town of Lake Isabella in southern California. After spending a week in San Francisco organising resupplies, I headed for Lake Isabella. First I had to take the Amtrak train to the small city of Bakersfield. There my trouble began by forgetting to take my bag from the overhead of the train seats. The bag had my hiking boots in it. Despite my best efforts to locate it ten minutes later, it was gone.

Fortunately I had two hours before my connecting bus. So after a quick dash to the shopping mall, I boarded the bus with a new pair of boots. I reached Lake Isabella, only to find that my motel was actually 13 km east of the town. There was no Uber or taxi there and walking was next to impossible as there were no shoulders on the road. Hence hitchhiking was my only option! Standing on the side of the road trying to get the attention of passing cars, some 'not-so-friendly' looks from the predominantly white male drivers in their 4WDs came my way. Add to that the hot sun and a roadside rattlesnake that I could hear but not see, the whole experience was unsettling. After what seemed an eternity (actually only 45 min) standing by the side of the road, a couple kindly stopped to give a ride to the motel. I was a bit ill at ease at first, but it was ok in the end. They knew about the PCT and the guy had done some trail angel¹ work before, which was good to hear, as it gave me an indication of the community that had built up around the trail over the years.

1. Not an official term. Refers to residents around the trail who voluntarily provide help to hikers.



Waiting to hitchhike, Lake Isabella to the right

The old-fashioned motel I booked was owned by a retired couple. The husband graciously offered to give me a ride to Walker Pass, saving me from having to catch the only bus service at 5am. Despite a warning from him about the ongoing heat wave and my persistent cold that refused to go away, I kept telling myself 'she'll be right, mate'. If I only knew what lay ahead, I may have thought differently.

Walker Pass to Kennedy Meadows – A hard lesson in over and under estimation

Walker Pass to Kennedy Meadows is 86 km, which should have been at most a six day hike. Although my pack was a hefty 20 kg, as I was carrying an ice axe and crampons for anticipated snow in the high Sierras, I somehow managed to talk myself into thinking it was possible to hike through.

It was cloudy when I got to Walker Pass in the Owens Peak Wilderness zone. As I stood there in the desert heat looking towards the trail, I thought to myself I just have to get above 2500m to escape the extreme heat. I started off determined to walk at least 10km to a higher ridge to camp and did get there, but only after about five hours. In hindsight that should have been the first sign that I was already struggling, but at the time I thought nothing of it.

The next day, although an early start was planned, I did not leave until nine as I had overslept after a restless night. The trail truly opened up for a spectacular view of the Owens Valley to the east and mountains to the west. I was already feeling lethargic by midday. More worryingly my phlegm production started up in earnest along with what felt like a slight fever. I pushed on in the hope that conditions, both physical and weather, might improve. However, as soon as I got to the foot of another moderate climb, all my willpower and capacity to walk had evaporated. The feeling of disappointment was overwhelming to say the very least. Setting up camp on a little flat close to the trail, the home truth of my miscalculations started to set in, along with the realisation that I might be in more trouble than I thought. The heat was unrelenting and on a second look at the map, I realised most of this trail section is in fact way under 2500m (meaning it would be hot all the way). Continuing in my condition with a monster of a pack would be suicidal, however turning back had its own challenges. Firstly, I had to hike back up 600m over a steep mountain pass. Secondly I was coughing out more mucus than the water I was drinking in (or so it felt like). And finally I had to walk back twice the distance in a day than I managed to over the last two days. But, self-preservation was indeed a strong motivator.

On the third day, I started off at 7am with that one objective in mind - self-rescue. Although I was sorely tempted to press the SOS button on my PLB, I was more determined to not explain to my family why they received a call from S.&R in the middle of the night (or why it is that almost all my trips involve a visit to the hospital). There was in fact another chopper rescue happening on top of the pass (later, I heard it was someone on the nearby Owens Peak due to heat stress). I got over the mountain pass in a relatively ok state, but then my trouble began. As soon as I crossed the pass I was completely exposed to the sun with no cloud or shade in sight. I could barely walk for ten to fifteen minutes before having to take my pack off and drink copiously. The next five hours of walking was a battle of mind over matter. Every part

of my body ached mercilessly. At one stage, I heard voices in the distance talking to me, which later I could only put down to hallucination brought on by heat stress. By around 3:30pm I caught sight of the road. After yet another half-hour in the sun, I was finally picked up by a passing car. Again, they were people who knew about the PCT and more importantly knew the difference between a trail hiker and a hobo. The gentleman happened to be a forest firefighter for the local county and had seen his fair share of search and rescue on the trail. They were surprised to see me, as it was fairly late in the season to be hiking through that area. Probably why I only saw four hikers over the last three days on the trail.

That night I began having serious misgivings about my whole venture. The naysayer in me told me to quit then and there, but the optimist was urging me on. I went to sleep undecided.

The next day I got back to San Francisco to recover properly and went to the ER at the local hospital for a quick check-up. It all checked out ok and I was relieved to know that there was no impending pneumonia. The only recommendation was to take cold and flu tabs. A pack of cold and flu tablet costs only five bucks. A visit to ER costs 200 times that!

San Francisco to Bishop - three days by public transport

Whilst in San Francisco, news broke about a missing solo hiker. That person went missing roughly where I should have been had I continued the hike. I still had half a mind to throw in the towel and instead go on a long road trip. After much rationalising of the pros and cons of continuing, I made up my mind to resume but from a different route. Plan B was to hike back on to the John Muir Trail (JMT)/PCT from the South Lake trailhead near Bishop, a town on the desert plain east of the Sierra. This time I shed the extra snow gear.

The advantage of starting from South Lake was that I would stay clear of the dangerous creek crossings and icy passes around Mt Whitney. On the flipside, although Bishop is just under 500 km from San Francisco by road, it was a three day circuitous trek by train and bus. On the way I had to stopover at Mammoth Lakes, a popular ski-town. I arrived there late on a festival weekend with no motel/hotel vacancy. In desperation I headed to the campground just outside the town perimeter. This was my first camping in bear country - pitching a tent in complete darkness was an experience I was not going to forget anytime soon. Luckily no bear came to investigate the tasty tourist morsel on offer. Next morning though I was confronted by that other hostile species- human. Without realising, I had camped on a spot that looked empty in the night, but come daybreak, there was a car parked just metres away. The car owner was furious that I was on a spot that she had paid \$20 for! I tried to placate her by offering to pay half, but she wasn't going to have a bar and wanted me gone asap. I duly packed in record time to escape before she decided to call park rangers.

South Lake, Bishop to Tuolumne Meadows - The views just kept coming

Arriving at Bishop, I was fortunate to find a B&B host who kindly agreed to give me a lift to the trailhead. South Lake was about 30 km away, and generally much cooler due to its higher elevation. This time I got off to an early start just before 7am, while the temperature was still low. However, as soon as the sun's rays hit the ground, the skeeters (mosquitoes) swarmed with a ferocity that I had never experienced before. The bug spray came in quite handy, but not before I got bitten by tens of thousands.

After a quick ascent, I was clear of the tree line and skeeters. Now in the High Sierras, famously described by John Muir as 'the Range of Lights', one word came to mind when I saw what lay before me - breathtaking. All the drama and heartache of the past weeks were finally behind me. The walk of a lifetime could now begin.



Hurd Peak, John Muir Wilderness

I had the first of four major passes I was to cross in front of me. At 3650m, Bishop Pass was the highest point I have ever hiked up to, so it was a special moment to commit to memory and camera. Once over the pass, the trail descended into Le Conte canyon to join up with the JMT/PCT trail. In fading light I came across a small but fast flowing creek crossing. To save time by not getting wet feet, I decided to cross over what looked like three easy rock hops. The first two were ok, until at the third I slipped badly with one leg in the water and the other barely finding a hold on the side of a boulder. Now I was truly caught between a rock and a fast flowing water place! Letting go wasn't an option as my next stop would be over the waterfall just metres downstream. After a bit of thinking, I slowly inched my way upstream whilst keeping my full weight to the side of the boulder. At the front end of the boulder, I managed to carefully put both feet in an eddy with knee deep water, but with the boulder in front to stop me from getting swept downstream. From there I could reach for the edge of the creek and after a hard push... up... managed to get onto dry ground. Wet feet is indeed better than a broken leg or worse! Later I heard another person was airlifted out of that same waterfall the day before.

I reached the campground at the bottom of Le Conte canyon just before sunset, only to hear from other hikers that there was an active bear alert for the area. With that in mind, I quickly set up camp without bothering to cook dinner. This would have repercussions the next day at Muir Pass.

My plan was to go over Muir Pass and camp at Wanda Lake three km north of it. The pass at 3,650 m was the same height as Bishop Pass, however the elevation gain was much greater, almost 1,000 m. I set off at 9am, after a small breakfast, which in hindsight did little to replenish my calorie reserve. The trail through Le Conte canyon was made difficult by fallen trees and boulders, although it did clear once it started climbing. I started feeling the physical strain before midday. The trail was quite steep for much of the day and by about 3pm I was spent. I decided to abandon plans for camping at Wanda Lake and instead sleep in Muir Hut on top of the pass. On a side note, I wasn't aware of the hut as it was not on the map I was carrying but luckily another hiker told me to go there instead after noting my progress.



The approach to Muir Pass (photo above) was buried under snow for at least four km. Despite an opportunity to camp below the snow line, I decided to carry on. To complicate matters I was walking on snow in the late afternoon sun, when it turned soft and the reflective heat was at its peak. The next four hours felt like a *déjà vu* of my experience at Walker Pass. With every step I took, I was rueing my earlier decision not to camp below the snow. If I had a fuel indicator for my strength, it would have read 'EMPTY'. At one stage I thought aloud 'So this is how you meet your end!' Turning back was not an option as I didn't want to risk double-backing over a dubious snow bridge. It truly felt like an eternity, until I finally saw the hut. I would have to admit, despite being non-religious, a little part of me wanted to believe in a higher power when the hut came into view.

The hut, a circular stone building with a small window, was empty when I arrived. Inside I was greeted by a very confused mouse, seemingly undecided on whether to run away or approach me. As I sat on the floor recuperating, to my horror I realised that I hadn't aired out the hut by opening the door and window before entering. The reason for this was to reduce the chance of a Hantavirus infection². Anyway I decided to take my chances as it was too late to do anything about it by then. The thought of impending doom was ameliorated by the magnificence of the views from the pass. There was not a single person or tent to be seen on either side of the pass for miles. The phrase 'in splendid isolation' would be an apt way to describe my stay at the hut. To think of how everyday concerns of modern life pales into insignificance in the face of such vastness of nature, it is hard not to feel a little quasi-spiritual in moments like these.

Thankfully next day was all downhill to Evolution Meadow campsite about 19 km from Muir Pass. Compared to the past two days, this day's trek was a breeze and without any more incidents involving life-injury-death situation. At dinner I discovered that my feet already had pre-blisters forming and to further my misery, the spork (a spoon and fork combination) was in two pieces. It was both comical and infuriating at the same time trying to eat out of a dehydrated dinner pack when the end of the spork kept falling in despite the duct tape. Later, though, a quick wash in the cool clear water of Evolution creek helped to lighten the mood a bit.

Day four would also have been without incidents if I had known how to read a map properly. For reason unbeknownst, I misunderstood a sign at a fork on the trail and

2. A rare but often deadly zoonotic disease carried by rodent droppings and urine. Can be easily avoided by dearing out huts of droppings and dust.

took the wrong turn into a canyon. After three hours of climbing over broken trail complete with treacherous mini-waterfalls, I realised I was on another trail altogether! Inner composure is a great thing to have at moments like these, as in frustration I almost wanted to throw the GPS into the raging river beside me. Thankfully the rest of the day passed without any other incidents.

Camping that night, I was amazed at the depth of human stupidity when I saw food bags hung from some shrubs just a foot above ground. I wasn't sure if the idea was to keep food out of reach from rodents or rodent sized bears! Either way both could have easily got there if they had wanted to.

Next morning I was pleasantly surprised to discover a small store selling utensils and padded insoles, both of which I was in desperate need of. As an added bonus another hiker handed me a fresh plum, which worked like magic in lifting my morale. The day had another long climb in store - going up to Shelden Pass and then another long descent to Bear Creek. Along the way I came upon one of the most scenic campsites at Sally Keyes Lake, got swarmed by skeeters again just after crossing Shelden Pass and met a family of seven, of whom the youngest was 11 years old. David and Juli with their five children from California - I shall refer to them as the W family for simplicity - were on a mission to complete 340km of the JMT trail. They graciously invited me to tag along with them to Tuolumne Meadows, where the JMT and PCT split. I, of course, took up on their offer eagerly as that meant both company and campfires to enjoy after dark. After agreeing to meet up the next afternoon, I leapfrogged ahead of them to camp at Bear Creek. Like its namesake, Bear Creek was one scary creek to cross. Fortunately, there was a log crossing approx. 100 m downstream from the trail crossing. The skeeters here took on the characteristics of an attacking bear and were relentless. I couldn't have worked quickly enough to spray on the repellent to keep them at bay.

The next day I met up with Juli and her two daughters at the dock whilst waiting for a boat to take us across to Vermilion Valley Resort (VVR). I was overjoyed to learn that the first beer was free at VVR. Almost all the people there were connected to the trail in one way or another. It was an enriching experience to get to hear stories about the lives of people of varied backgrounds from different parts of the world. Getting to hear the background of various trail names was interesting to say none the least. Given my propensity to get lost, I took 'lost boy' for my trail name³.

Later I was invited to dinner with the W family, which I was only too glad to take up on. Their resupplies were being dropped there by another of their daughters, so food surplus was the order of the day. Guess it pays to have friends on the trail. Around that time I also decided to finish the trek at Echo Lake in Northern California.

After the first of four zero days, I headed to the trail with the W family. Over the next six days to Tuolumne Meadows, we went over two major passes. The sheer granite peaks, the series of blue lakes connected by crystal clear creeks and the wide open green meadows gave this section of the PCT an ethereal quality unlike any I have seen before.

At each campsite, I was quite amazed to see how the W family went into action to set up camp. Like a seasoned army platoon, each knew exactly what was expected of them and

3. Commonly thru-hikers (completing the whole PCT) give themselves a name that could easily be remembered by others. Useful in emergencies to track down hikers in mobile black spots.

got to task without any of the usual bickering often observed in other families. On the second last day of this part of my journey we went over Donohue Pass into Yosemite National Park. The descent to Tuolumne Meadows was particularly brutal under threatening weather - 630 m descent within roughly 5km, complete with one sketchy creek crossing.

Reaching Tuolumne Meadows the following day was a bitter-sweet moment. On the one hand I was to get some much needed respite from tent sleeping at the motel in Mammoth Lakes; on the other I had to say goodbye to the W family, with whom I had a great time sharing the trail with.



Approaching thunderstorm. Ansel Adams Wilderness

Tuolumne Meadows to Sonora Pass - Bears (real and imagined)

This section of the trail was much quieter than the more popular JMT. I was no longer travelling in the protective envelope of the group bubble - and that was when I had the 'close-ish encounter of the bear kind'! As I was diligently clearing a tent site under a tree, I looked up to see fresh claw marks on the bark. Instead of moving to a different site, I plonked my tent just metres away. My justification: "well at least I am not under the scratching post", and not "hey, bears have legs too!" After a very tense dinner away from the tent, during which I kept looking behind every minute or so, I went to sleep relying on the sheer mathematical probability (and hope) of not becoming bear chow that night.

The six days were extremely clear. The section north of Tuolumne Meadows was relatively flatter than the previous JMT part, so I started making more progress than I anticipated. Instead of 18 km, I was now averaging 25 km or more a day. However, it also meant blisters were forming on a regular basis, though they never got any worse. Then disaster happened. Not with my feet, but with my tent. While camping at beautiful Smerdberg Lake, the poles broke. So there I was, miles from civilisation and at least two weeks away from any town to replace the stupid poles!

I was late leaving, as I tried to tape the poles in an effort to prevent further damage to the tent fabric. When I got to the next campground deep in a canyon, the light had already faded. I put up the tent with trepidation thinking it would collapse at any time. To my surprise, though, it held up somehow and did so for the next eight nights! As I was eating by torchlight, three deer casually walked up and one passed within feet of me. To my astonishment it circled back for a closer look at my dinner. I duly scared it away. Sharing dinner with the local wildlife was not on my agenda.

That night at Dorothy Lake, as I lay there in my tent in the pitch black of darkness, the sound of footsteps followed by heavy sniffing approached to just where my head was! The five steps of grief struck at once but not in the usual order.

First, denial - thinking whatever was happening was not happening. It was a bad dream. (Reality was I froze in panic)

Then depression - sad at the thought that any moment something would come crashing through on me.

Followed by acceptance - just had to accept the inevitable, that it was a BEAR and it smelt blood.

And bargaining - I shouted out loud in the faint hope it might pause and think twice.

Finally anger - the sound of my own voice spurred a fight back. I picked up the whistle and blew as hard as I could muster. Then I took the multi-tool knife and backed out from the tent into the open, whistling loud.

So there I was standing outside, whistling away into the empty space in front. Whatever it was had already left. The morning after, I checked around to look for signs of footprints or scratching, but to no avail.

The next two days to Sonora Pass was relatively incident free. Crossing the Yosemite National Park boundary, I felt an immense relief to be away from the official bear habitat. Never mind that bears would not care much for officialdom. The trail transitioned from granite to volcanic rocks, which was a sight to behold. I bumped into a couple from Oregon, who informed me that my supposed bear encounter was probably caused by a deer, but I was still jittery during the following nights and kept an ear out for any noise.



Boundary between Yosemite Nat Park & Hoover Wilderness

At Sonora Pass, I hitched a ride to Kennedy Meadows North, a hiker-friendly resort for the last of my rest days. The couple I met earlier were also there - and they'd seen a bear the very day I met them on the trail! I was probably ten minutes behind them when they crossed paths with it. At the resort I scrutinised the packs of the other hikers. I was a bit envious at how they managed to keep their pack weights down, while I had to carry Monster II (so named after a few people on the trail commented on its enormity). Then it dawned on me that my pack was fundamentally different from theirs. Mine was heavy material mountaineering pack, while almost everyone else had the smaller ultralight hiking packs. Surreptitiously I felt a little better about myself for managing to carry Monster II all this way, although my shoulders, back and legs were definitely not in the mood to give me a pat on the back.

Sonora Pass to Echo Lake - The end is nigh

After a relaxing stay at the resort (during which I managed to debate a Trump voter about the virtue of universal health-care!), I started my final leg. The five days that it took me to get to Echo Lake were days with constant smoke from wildfires far in the lower valleys of the Sierra. Though some oncoming hikers complained about struggling through the smoke, I had to thank my Bangladeshi lungs (read- mindset, as I am sure my lungs were damaged in equal measure) for not getting too bothered about the haze. For reference, Dhaka (capital of Bangladesh) can have an AQI (Air Quality Index) of 160 on any day. The AQI never went beyond 150 in that region despite the fires.

Although technically I was on the Sierra Nevada ranges, the landscape changed dramatically from mountainous to a series of plateaus. It was hotter too, but there was plenty of shade. The trail traversed through some private grazing property complete with cowpats. The soil erosion around creek beds and the trail was significantly greater than in the protected wilderness. One could imagine the difficulty this would create for anyone attempting these sections during rain-snow. Mostly I got along fine due to favourable weather conditions.

After a day’s hiking through grazing pastures, I was back in the wilderness area. Some of the rocky outcrops along this last section could have been inspired writers and sets of many a sci-fi-horror show. In the fading light of sunset a scene from ‘The Hills Have Eyes’ came to mind, which only spooked me further; a horrific moment where a person gets dragged into a hole on the side of a hill by a huge arm.

The final campsite of the whole trip also housed a group of supremely brave mice. Without batting an eyelid, they would

try to get to the food within inches of my hand. I, in turn, deployed the diversion strategy by throwing some trail mixes the other way, which seemed to buy me some time to quickly prepare my dinner. Though I did worry about them chewing through the tent in the night, none thankfully did.



And then the sun rose to usher in the day to finish what, at the time, felt like an epic journey. I couldn’t have walked fast enough to the finish line at Echo Lake. I reached the car park just after 11am, mentally spent, my shoulders and feet crying out for a break from Monster II. I was here – after 30 days, 500 km. The *here* that was the ‘outside’ I imagined a year and half ago. Feeling enormously relieved, I strolled into the local store to buy an orange soda. Sitting on a bench in the gleaming sun sipping the cold soda with the magnificent blue water of Echo Lake in front, this, was a moment to savour forever. Knowing how much I struggled with self-doubt at the start, thinking back on the experience of a lifetime it was hard not to feel a sense of triumph over that naysayer in me.

Tanveer Ahmed



Photo Competition Winners

Landscape category winner

Bruce Meincke, “Routeburn Flats”

A nicely balanced composition, the complementary colours in the background give sharp focus to the mountain tops. Although there is a slight loss of detail in the foreground, exposure is well controlled throughout the picture. There is an inviting warmth that draws you in and makes you want to stay and explore.

Runners Up

- 2. Andrew Stevenson, “Outdoor Shower”
- 3. Andrew Chalk, “Lorne”

Wildlife category winner: Jan Huang, “Daisy”

Everything about this photo is pleasing. The colours are bright and vibrant and full of life. The shallow depth of field makes the flower and insect jump out of the background and the composition is well thought out. The sharpness and detail achieved are commendable.

- Runners Up:**
- 2. John Morris, “Fluoro Fungi”
 - 3. Jan Huang, “Lizard”

People category winner: Jan Huang, “Oops” (cover, page1)

- Runners Up:**
- 2. Andrew Stevenson, “Happy John”
 - 3. Tobias Ziegler, “Sunrise”



(The “Sunday Walk” category wasn’t judged due to insufficient entries).

YHA Bushwalking History part 7 - (2000-2017)

Celebrating the Millenium

It was the last day of the millennium, but not yet the half-way point of an epic trek along Tasmania's South Coast Track and Southern Range. That day's walk had been one of the highlights, wading along the shallow edge of New River Lagoon in atypical SW Tassie sunshine, reaching camp by early afternoon. Another walker had been expected to arrive first, having carried an inflatable rubber dinghy for the express purpose of paddling up the lagoon, but thanks to an inconvenient puncture out on the water he was the one who turned up late and stressed. No-one was particularly tired on New Year's Eve, but with an early start and big climb up Precipitous Bluff (PB) next day, no-one was keen to stay up later either. As is often the case on such extended walks, the compromise was to hold out until 10pm and see in New Zealand's new year. Amidst packs burdened with up to 12-days of food, Simon Walliss surprised the group by producing a half-bottle of Moët Chandon. And so YHA Bushwalking toasted the onset of the 21st century.



It should be pointed out that this was the official (aka pedant's) date, 1st January 2001. The Y2K transition a year earlier was such a momentous occasion that those who were out walking at the time, can't quite remember what they did, although the consensus seems to be that the ongoing AAWT trek had made it to Ropers Hut – see the separate inset on page 23 for the dramatic conclusion to that six year series of walks.

The exceptionally fine weather continued into the New Year, making the long ascent up PB well worth the effort. Camped near the summit, the first day of the third millennium ended with a truly spectacular sunset over New River lagoon, the south coast and a seascape extending as far as Maatsuyker Island. In such perfect conditions came a feeling that all would be right with the world, that the troubles of the last century could be consigned to history and golden times lay ahead. Which goes to show that appearances can be deceptive.

Despite one or two long hard days to come, that trip ended well. Simon's champagne had been surprising, but what he brought out of his pack at the end of 12 days was astonishing – a cucumber. Astonishing because it was still in fresh edible condition, doubly astonishing because it hadn't been eaten, triply astonishing because way more energy had been expended carrying it than would ever have been gained from its consumption!

Bushwalking online

Over its six decades of the 20th century, YHA Bushwalking evolved in response to the general changes in society, and since 2000 this transformation has continued at an even greater rate. No prizes for guessing the biggest influence has been the ubiquity of the internet. As covered in the previous chapter, a fledgling website was launched in 1997, but had it crashed for a few weeks at the turn of the century there wouldn't have been much of an impact - unlike now. A club email address and rudimentary mailing list was set up in early 2000, migrating to a Yahoo group in 2003. In 2006 leaders' email addresses began being published as part of the program and in 2011 the facility was introduced to contact leaders via the website Walks page. Booking on trips, which had mostly been done by phone, was soon done almost entirely by email. This made some aspects of trip organisation much easier, but the reduced personal contact between the leader and participants beforehand was missed, particularly in determining whether newcomers were experienced enough for what they wanted to attempt. Even more personal had been conversations at Clubnight, which was still the primary means of booking on walks in the early 2000s, particularly where advance payment was needed. The Club didn't introduce an electronic banking facility until 2007; before then the only alternative to Clubnight was mailing a cheque to YHA Bushwalking's PO Box. With less necessity to visit Clubnight to sign up for a trip, attendances dropped sharply and reinvention was needed. Guest speakers were scheduled – this kept up interest, although it was difficult to organise something every week. Evenings without a presentation ended up very quiet, so Clubnights changed from weekly to fortnightly in 2007, then monthly the following year, a format that has been maintained since. They have long ceased as a venue to book on walks, but have an ongoing role as a social event and opportunity for newcomers to talk to someone about YHA Bushwalking.



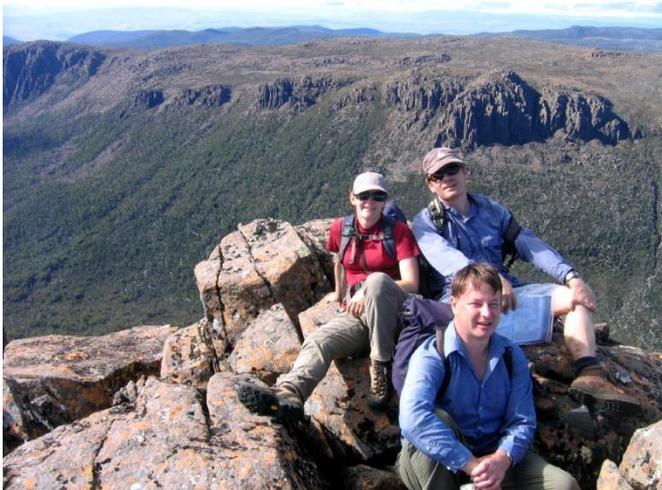
Late-spring snow-walk: Howitt-Cross Cut Saw Nov 2003

The collapse of HIH in 2001 triggered a crisis in public liability insurance, as premiums either skyrocketed or were denied for anything those in suits deemed overly risky such as venturing above the snowline. This curtailed many outdoor activity clubs at the time, but YHA Bushwalking, under the umbrella of YHA's organisation-wide insurance policy was unaffected, enabling winter snow-camps to continue. A memorable example of the difficulties faced during this period was a Razor-Viking circuit planned for Melbourne Cup Weekend 2003. A late season snowfall began on the

drive to Howitt car-park, forcing other clubs in the area to turn around and head back downhill towards Licola. YHA Bushwalkers were able to push on; although conditions weren't suitable for the originally planned walk, shorter walks and the rare sight of a snow-covered Cross-Cut Saw (common in winter, but inaccessible) were possible.

A Taste for Adventure

In 2003 Simon Walliss became YHA Bushwalking's last Chairman and in 2005 the first President. With a fondness for challenging walks, his other life as a travel agent lent itself to walks that were also challenging to organise. The most notable included Dusky Track (New Zealand), Flinders Island and the Eastern and Western Arthurs. No nine-to-five leader, some of Simon's walks involved a few hours of unpaid overtime as he guided a group to a finish well after sunset. By far the most dramatic moment on one of Simon's adventures was a heart-stoppingly narrow escape on Federation Peak in 2005. The side-trip up to the summit requires traversing a narrow ledge with a sheer 600m drop. Simon fearlessly went first, anchoring himself past the end of the ledge with a rope for the rest. One of the group, Dion, nervous and petrified by the drop decided to get the ledge over and done with as quickly as possible. Rushing along, he slipped, lost his footing and began to fall to his doom. With one metre gone, 599 to go, a mega dose of adrenalin kicked in and he managed to grab the dangling rope and haul himself back to safety.



Past-presidents Simon Walliss (rear) and David Sisson (together with Jane Bateson), Mt Field 2007.

A Taste for Comfort

In contrast to Simon's keenness for challenging walks, the legacy of his successor, David Sisson, as President was to latch onto the growing popularity of "glamping". YHA Bushwalking's origins were in the organisation of hostel-based walks, but the formation of a Bushwalking activity shifted the focus to day walks and camping. Accommodated, mostly hostel-based, weekends still appeared on the program but by the early 2000s were mainly easier graded walks appealing to the club's older demographic. Those wanting harder walks away from Melbourne had the options of an overnight pack-carry or base-camp. The use of a 40+ seater bus for long-weekends was made viable by offering various grade base-camp and overnight walks. Glamping (a contraction of glamour-camping) appealed to those who enjoyed walking hard by day but insisted on their creature-comforts at night, chief of which was a hot-shower. Easter

2004 at Falls Creek marked when the glamping trend took hold within the club. Until then, surprisingly little use had been made of off-season ski-lodges. Baw Baw hostel (now closed) saw occasional use for summer walks, but the arguably better Bogong High Plains area had been ignored for accommodated trips. The walk was successful, booking out around 40 beds, with a good number of the predominantly younger demographic taking up the hard day walk options. Lodge-based trips at Falls Creek, Mt Hotham, Thredbo and even a bogong-moth infested one at Baw Baw followed, becoming regular long-weekend fixtures from then on. The Easter 2006 Thredbo trip sounded the death knell for the use of a bus on long-weekends. The necessity to drive to the full distance to the accommodation instead of being able to camp at an intermediate staging post such as Corryong meant a very long drive and extremely late night. The new style accommodated trips mainly impacted base-camps. Those who liked pack-carrying weren't lured away by the prospect of comfort, but many who had hitherto begrudgingly base-camped jumped at the opportunity not to sleep in a tent. David Sisson pioneered the style of alpine accommodated weekends, but the mantle was also taken up by others, most notably David Sale. Thus areas like Wilsons Prom and the Grampians also featured regularly for more challenging accommodated walks.

Sleepless in Walhalla

In the early 2000s, the Club had a base camp at Walhalla, in the camping ground at the northern end of town. We arrived late on a Friday night, to find wet, cold and muddy conditions; not ideal for setting up tents. Some of us huddled together under a small stone shelter with no sides, and a few considered trying to sleep there.

A member of the group suggested looking in town for accommodation, so four of us drove down and discovered the recently rebuilt Star Hotel. Although it was closed at that time of the night, we found a door bell, rang it and were welcomed in by the owner. He offered a large room for \$50 per head, so we agreed and settled in for a warm, dry and comfortable night. Unfortunately, the room was too hot and I hardly slept!

From memory, breakfast was included, so we then packed up and rejoined the campers at about 9.00 am, as if nothing unusual had happened. It was a tough start to the weekend!

On a previous base camp to the same spot in 1989 (before the Star Hotel was reopened), the conditions were similar. It was a case of putting up the tents in the mud and rain. One girl had a borrowed tent and didn't know how to put it up, so another walker kindly did the job for her. Alas, he erected the tent inside-out, it leaked and she wasn't happy...

On one evening in the camp ground, there was a buck's party – not involving YHA, of course! The buck ran around buck-naked, being tracked by a spot light and trying to escape his "friends". He ran into a toilet block, but was captured, tied up and led back to their camp. The party revved up, and some, probably merry members, started to cut down tall trees in the camping ground to feed their fire.

Our "inside-out tent man" became quite angry and confronted them. As a result, they left a half cut down tree waiting to fall on someone. Walhalla turned out to be not such a quiet, sleepy place, after all...

Stuart Hanham

Andrew Stevenson took over as President in 2009, performing the role for six years, the longest of anyone so far. Fortunately he was very popular, combining much-needed people-skills with a passion and knowledge of the outdoors. Andrew's association with the Club is over roughly the same period as that covered by this chapter, beginning in the early 2000s when he moved to the city after being based on the Mornington Peninsula. Looking for a new club to join, YHA Bushwalking impressed with its program, organisation and particularly the Clubnight presentations. At first thinking that getting involved would be too much work, he soon realised there was a committee to share the load and joined as Social Secretary. His time in that role was characterised by imaginative events, the quest for variety and trying something new also became part of his legacy as President – the Snow Train, You Yangs night walks, Beechworth Priory and fusion of Mexican or French culinary themes with a weekend walk being some of his most popular ideas.



Andrew Stevenson, with partner Louise, prepares to cook pancakes for his group. Great Ocean Walk, January 2014.

Andrew's particular passion was Clubnights, organising regular presenters from both within and outside the club, still attracting attendances of 40-50 at times despite the challenges of finding a location with both good facilities and accessibility. Like many who took on the role of Chairman/President, Andrew didn't have a particular agenda other than to keep the Club running smoothly and maintain what attracted them to it in the first place.

Sunday walks also had a change in meeting point, just the third in their history. In June 2006, forced out by the development of Spencer St into Southern Cross station, they moved to the Law Court entrance of Flagstaff Station.

In the 2010s, attendances began to decline, particularly on the popular Sunday walks which had reliably averaged around 25 for generations. The problem was that while there was still a core of regular walkers, the supply of new ones had dwindled. Numbers on some Sundays, with no obviously untoward factors such as weather, didn't reach double figures. YHA had long-ceased to be a promotional channel for what was left of its activities, but the website, despite being enhanced to make it easier to contact leaders, wasn't attracting enough new members to make up for those who

Caring for Cope Hut

In 2004 YHA Bushwalking was appointed caretaker of Cope Hut as part of an initiative by Parks Victoria and the Victorian High Country Huts Association to assign responsibility for hut maintenance to users such as bushwalking or 4WD clubs. Cope Hut was chosen because it was often visited on bushwalks and its location 500m from the Bogong High Plains Rd made access fairly easy without allowing vehicles to be driven to its doorstep. Working bees were organised over the next few years, as although the hut was in reasonable condition, there were a lot of things that needed fixing. Roof leaks and damaged windows were repaired, grotty mattresses were removed, the chimney securely stayed, and tatty black plastic lining the ceiling was replaced by reflective material that improved the ambient light no end. John Belfio, with professional metal working skills, led the work. With increased tourism as a result of sealing the High Plains Rd and development of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing walk, Cope Hut became much more frequently visited. As a result Parks Victoria took over responsibility for hut maintenance, performing monthly inspections during the summer season. The legacy of YHA Bushwalking's effort is still very much in evidence; as well as the aforementioned ceiling lining, John's handiwork includes the custom-made ash shovel (brazed with the hut's name), the large metal cabinet next to the log-book holder and the anachronistic sink in the back room!



John Belfio at work on Cope Hut, October 2006.

drifted away. Bushwalking wasn't less popular – other people were encountered on walks, but they didn't always fall into the usual categories of another club or group of friends. The age of social media had made it easy to hook up with others for impromptu walks without the formality of a club. Organisers of some of these groups had only basic knowledge and experience – the most alarming was a party ascending Mt Feathertop in winter without any ice-climbing gear or awareness of its dangerous cornice – but they were attracting the next generation of bushwalkers.

The committee realised something had to be done, but took a while to decide on what. Ultimately it was a case of if you can't beat 'em, join 'em; future President Lutz Lademann had the confidence and internet savvy to lead the setting up of YHA Bushwalking on Meetup. The effect was immediate, with Sunday walk attendances recovering and then surging into the unmanageable 50+ region, requiring adjustments to throttle back the numbers. The hope had been that Meetup would tap into a supply of new walkers who, upon realising

The Alpine Walking Track 1996-2002 (part 2)

1999/2000 - Benambra to Falls Creek (as recollected by people who aren't Mark)

The weather was miserable throughout, being cold and wet everyday didn't exactly buoy the spirit of the group, so by common agreement this was the least favourite section of the walk. Joining Mark was his new girlfriend Sharon; keen to impress her with what an experienced, capable bushwalker he was, Mark got off to a good start by forgetting his tent poles. She must have scored him highly for resourcefulness as three children and almost twenty years later they are still together. Also along for the ride was an Age journalist; ill-prepared, she didn't enjoy the experience, but never wrote about it either, even though she is one of the few from that era still writing for that newspaper.

2000/01 Falls Creek to Mt Howitt (now told by Mark)

Weather was good for the whole time but warm which of course means that nothing super dramatic happened. Good company, great mountains to climb, beautiful snow gums to camp around. The Barry mountains presented a shortage of water, while the heat and the difficult terrain of Mt Speculation and the Viking tested us. Tiredness and fitness levels showed up towards the end when the faster group descended from Mt Howitt to the upper Howqua camp ground and left some water for the slower group, we camped just below Howitt for the night and descended that last day.

2001-02 Howitt to Baw Baw

The final stage and what a stage, one that lives with me regularly. It started with snow which was nice but cold. A few members of the group were under done in fitness and sleep. Considering this was a long trip, things looked dodgy from the outset and the first day was slow. By the second day up Mt MacDonald we were half a day behind. The timetable for pickup at Mt Baw Baw looked decidedly out of whack. Three members of the party and I realised that the whole trip was in danger of collapsing. The decision I had to make is still one that saddens me to this day - I had to ask three walking friends to leave the group and hitch hike out. That night I suffered stomach cramps, something that had never happened before in all my years of walking. The rest of

the trip, until the penultimate day was made up of heat and what seemed like a 100m climb every morning out of camp. On the second last day it started to rain. The track was through heavily forested areas with log crossings. At one log about a metre and a half thick with no bark, David gripped a broken branch stub and proceeded to pull himself up. No bark meant a slippery surface and his boots slipped. I asked David whether he was ok at which point his eyes rolled back into his head and he fainted into my arms, a dead weight, pack and all, of maybe 110kg. I managed to guide him to the ground, got up on a stump and blew the emergency whistle three times to alert the forward part of group there was trouble. We looked after David, setting up a tent and waited about half an hour or so to see if he was okay; unfortunately he felt faint again. This meant Bruce and I had to devise a plan. We split the group in two, with some of the fitter members staying behind and Bruce taking the rest of the party out to Baw Baw to get help for David. During that night a member of Bruce's party left by himself and walked out on an old road to get help; the rescuers he reached next morning said he was nearly hypothermic. It could have ended badly and wasn't an action that is recommended in any bushwalking books. The next morning, thinking it would be a while before help arrived we were having breakfast when we heard chainsaws as the police, SES and ambos arrived. David ended up at Warragul Hospital with an all clear, we guessed at some sort of dislocation that had popped back in. A very memorable trip.

Thanks to all the walkers over the five year journey, in particular Bruce Meincke for being co-leader for much of the trips. So many memories: Kim and John burying a bad meal, Dzung and the Tardis pack, Kerryn soldiering on through a lot of pain, John's split head, Johnnies Top and the pulverised feet from road bashing, the huge amount of flies on the trail to Kiandra, brumby hunters near Buenba hut, the beautiful snow gums near the Pilot. Sadly brumbies shot on Limestone Creek countered that with a beautiful morning chorus at the head of the creek. Duelling lightning storms viewed from the Main Range, a lazy half day and pancakes amongst snow gums and snow grass just up from the Whites River Hut.

Mark Beyer

this was better organised than myriad other groups, would become regular walkers. By and large this is what happened, with some who joined taking the next step and becoming leaders. Meetup came with a few headaches as well, mainly from its casual culture that enables an element of its users to book onto events across several groups and then decide at the last minute which, if any, they want to go on, but experience will doubtless manage its advantages and disadvantages.

This is the last chapter for now, as YHA Bushwalking's past has caught up to the present. On the weekend after you read this, someone will have their first trip with the club, possibly their first taste of bushwalking. They will mingle with a mix of other relative newcomers and seasoned walkers who have been involved with us for years or even decades. Transported outside the urban area, the day hiking in a natural landscape will leave them invigorated, their mind temporarily freed from the preoccupations of weekday life. For those spending the entire weekend away and camping overnight, the effect of being in the bush from dusk to dawn will be even more powerful. Experiences will be shared, new



Enjoying a rest break, Walhalla bus trip. March 2018, but otherwise a timeless scene. (photo: John Morris)

friendships forged and unless the weather is particularly unkind, the worst part will be the return to Melbourne. This scenario is one which has played out repeatedly over the almost 80 years since the first organised walk in Easter 1940. Much has unquestionably changed in that period, some for better, some for worse, but the quintessential YHA Bushwalking experience remains the same.