

2025

THE MOUNTAINEER

Since 1961

Published by Melbourne University Mountaineering Club Inc.



From the Editor

by **Miranda Ramsay**

Another exciting year has passed with so many amazing adventures had by our community. I'm grateful to everyone for sharing their stories, advice and experiences. Thanks to those who cheered me on to finish this magazine off (albeit a bit late oops). And of course a huge thank you to Grace Pearson for stepping up and doing an amazing job helping me edit, design and add in stories the last few months! I hope these stories continue to inspire us all to adventure a little harder, enjoy the sufferfest more, and never stop having fun in the great outdoors.

Editors and design by Miranda Ramsay and Grace Pearson.

2025 Edition

A huge thank you to our sponsors: Bogong Equipment, Paddy Pallin, Urban Climb, Climbing Anchors and Melbourne University Sport.

Cover image: Nikita Bulach by Oliver Daniels

Back cover image: Nikita Bulach and Tom Woodruff by Oliver Daniels.

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MUMC COMMITTEE 24/25



Jess Vinnicombe
President



Connor Gundberg
Vice-President



Avryl Hart
Secretary



Bernhard Andersson
Treasurer



Isaac Miles-Fine
Treasurer



Nikita Bulach
Safety Officer



Luke Spencer
Safety Officer



Jacob Fuller
Snowsports Officer



Alexis Dudderidge
Mountaineering Officer

MUMC COMMITTEE 24/25



Riley Clarke
Ropes Officer



Ella Edwards
Walking Sports Officer



Eleanor March
Walking Sports Officer



Jak Burges
Padding Officer



Charlotte Buckingham
Conservation Officer



Bernhard Andersson
Bikepacking Officer



Miranda Ramsay
Publications Officer



Julian Risos
General Member



Callum Lee-Smith
General Member

Presidential Decree

by **Jess Vinnicombe**

DEAR MUMC,
The 2024–25 committee year has been one of stability, prosperity, and a positive culture.

Despite plenty of changes in roles over the year, our club continues to thrive, with healthy trip numbers, many social events, and a real sense of community.

Snow sports have been a highlight this year, with many successful trips in the backcountry. We've also seen great momentum in paddling, with new leaders progressing. We're also part of inter-uni paddling events again.

Bikepacking has continued to flourish, with Bernhard somehow managing to be both Bikepacking Officer and Treasurer at the same time, alongside Isaac. Alicia has been outstanding in her role as Welfare Officer, running training for committee members on how to recognise and respond to misconduct, important work that strengthens our culture.

We had plenty of role changes this year: Charlotte stepping in as Conservation Officer, Alexis taking over from Daire as Mountaineering Officer after years of service, Jak filling the vacant Paddling Officer role, and of course Isaac and Bernhard becoming joint treasurer. Despite all these changes, the committee has remained steady, hardworking, and welcoming and the club has been all the stronger for it.

The new climbing framework is so close to approval from MU Sport's end, thanks to Riley and Ikey's enormous effort drafting it, and to everyone who has contributed edits and feedback.

This framework will make it easier for more people to move through the system while keeping safety front and centre.

Beyond sports, Avryl has been amazing as Secretary, keeping the club organised, updating key policies, finalising and rolling out the new clubrooms access policy after several people before her attempting it. Thanks to Avryl, the clubrooms are now a lively hub for climbing, study, and community beyond just Tuesday nights.

Deputies have also stepped up. Lucy has led rogaining teams all the way to the national champs, successfully winning a grant; Felix has been digging into club archives and is planning an event with the university archives team to acknowledge our history; Antonia has taken the library and made it functional and beautiful; and Emma Ferris has done a huge amount of work toward getting the hut heritage listed, which will hopefully secure its future.



Jess Vinnicombe, 2023–2025 President.



Jess Vinnicombe, Amelia Goetz and Miranda Ramsay at the MUMC 80th Anniversary. *Darcey Delagnes.*

Events have been a joy this year too, with an excellent Intro Trip and Pie and Slide thanks to Cal and Julian, a fresh run of merch designed by Cal, and of course last October's 80th anniversary dinner, a milestone that brought together generations of OXOs. Midnight Ascent was also a highlight, with formal wear making a comeback, no major incidents, and an awesome singalong thanks to Eleanor lugging her violin and guitar up the mountain.

Membership numbers are strong, with 704 members as of today, surpassing last year's numbers. Our socials remain a core part of the club's life, with Tuesday nights, Monday climbing, and pub catch-ups all thriving. Clubs Day was a big success in both semesters, and our social media presence, thanks to Miranda and Annika, has been a key part of bringing in new members. Miranda also continues to do an excellent job putting together The Mountaineer. You're a pro for a reason.

Looking at all of this, I can honestly say it has been an extraordinary year. Our strength lies not just in the sports we run but in the culture of belonging and adventure we foster.

On a personal note, it has been an honour to serve as President. I'm proud of what we've achieved together, but I'm even prouder of the people who've made it all possible. To every committee member, deputy, leader, and volunteer — thank you.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Connor. As Vice-President, he has worked hard — building partnerships, running Tuesday meetings, keeping me on track during committee meetings, and being a welcoming face to so many members. I have no doubt he'll make an excellent President, and I'm excited to see where he leads the club next.

Thank you, MUMC, for another year of adventure, community, and growth. I'm keen for the next chapter.

*Love,
from Jess*



Walking Sports Officer Report

by **Ella Edwards and Eleanor March**

2024/25 has been yet another great year in the world of Walking Sports. Our wonderful team of leaders has been running many great trips all over Victoria. In an exciting development, this year Trail Running became more legit. We welcomed our deputies Zabrina and Lucy who have been doing a great job working on guidelines alongside Charlotte. A massive thanks to Zabrina, Luke, Lucy, Charlotte, and Bernhard for leading some awesome trips this year.

Rogaining has continued in its popularity under the leadership of Lucy with MUMC members participating in the various rogaines run by the Victorian Rogaining Association. We have had members participate in the Victorian Championships for 2024, winning their category, and we also sent a team to the Intervarsity Champs. A huge thanks to Lucy for doing a wonderful job as deputy this year.

We want to thank all the deputies for their work this year, enforcing the cash deposit rule is especially painful and you are often last to the pub. Thanks Louis for helping tag all the sleeping bags with info it was a fun day and has made sleeping bags easier to locate for hire.

We had one collaboration with Sydney University which was a fun trip and we were taught to push on regardless, and some of their songs.

We welcome our new bushwalking leaders this year, Oliver, Charlotte, Callum, Miranda, Gabriel and very soon Ben and Will. We are excited to see where you guys go!

Midnight Ascent was a great success this year. The first group left Melbourne at around 3:30pm and actually got into the hut in time for a decent night's sleep!



Ella hiking up to Mt Bogong, Easter 2025. Miranda Ramsay.

REPORT

The Last group was not so lucky, leaving the club rooms at 7:30pm and rocking up at the hut at 7:30am.

Everyone very enthusiastically participated in the theme 'Mountain Ball', showing off the snazziest outfits in the snow. Special mentions to Jess for bringing heels up, Felix for wearing a very "unique" suit, and Charlotte and Bernhard for taking an unexpected interpretation. Charlotte looked very handsome in a suit, and Bernhard strutted his stuff in a beautiful dress. The cooking competition produced some very high quality food, making the judges' decision very difficult. Many thanks to Tom for tallying the scores for us, resulting in the win of "the Massaman". The losing team must also be commended for taking their punishment like absolute champs.

In an effort to get more trips running and more leaders trained up, we ran a "Bushwalking Leader Speed Dating." A fair spread of people showed up and shared their awesome trip ideas. Some trips have already eventuated from this so I'd call it a success. Hopefully more events like this can run in the future to encourage more leaders!



Eleanor, the gals and Bernhard dressed up at Midnight Ascent. Mohamed Nasher.



Zabrina with her feast. Petra Green.



Prepping for the feast to come in the MUMC Hut. Robert Ham.

Paddling Officer Report

by **Jak Burges**

Having taken the position towards the back half of this committee sitting from the previous Paddling Officer it's safe to describe it as a caretaker period, with minor repairs to boats, and the restocking of lost or retired gear. Though, that isn't to say there hasn't been some exciting things happening within MUMCs paddling scene.

Close work with MUOC and LUMC paddling leaders has allowed major inter-uni trips such as the Mitchell and hopefully the Friends of the Mitta this coming week to return. While numbers were small this year, other programs such as VYPA's Beginner Canoe Polo sessions and LUMC's pool training sessions are building the foundational paddling skills needed to really make these trips what they were pre-COVID.

In keeping with that goal, with the aid of external guide courses MUMC has two new paddling leaders who can slowly begin to bring paddling to a place where we are again known for our paddling scene. This number will continue to grow as those on the course finalise their hours.

So what is needed to keep this momentum going?

While small amendments have been made to the current White Water Kayaking Guidelines to enable entry level paddling. A more comprehensive overhaul of how MUMC trains its members in safe practices is needed to enable us to lead and paddle on higher grade rivers safely. What this will look like has been a long matter of discussion and hopefully one will manifest.

Lastly, MUMCs boats are really starting to be quite outdated and though repairs can and will be made to keep them working. There is a need to start phasing out some of our older creekers and river runners. The cost of this is not small and will need to be drawn out over a few years to be reasonably achieved.



Bernhard. Jak and Jacob post Paddling course. Miranda Ramsay.

Ropes Officer Report

by Riley Clarke

This year we've continued to see climbing at the club grow in popularity, and just as importantly, we've seen the general skill level of members increase, both in climbing ability and in technical rope skills. A big part of this growth has come from regular sessions like Monday Night Climbing at Urban Climb Blackburn, and the newer Thursday Night Bouldering, which rotates between gyms in the Inner North. These weekly meetups have created a strong and consistent community, giving people the chance to regularly climb together, improve, and build confidence. We've seen many new members join Learn to Lead sessions, then go on to regularly lead climb indoors, and some have just ventured outdoors over the mid-semester break.

Thanks to the work of the previous Ropes Officer and MCI, Isaac, the club has also seen a real increase in intermediate to advanced outdoor climbing trips. Members have spent many weekends at Arapiles and the Grampians for bouldering, sport, and trad climbing, and others have taken their climbing further afield to places like Moonarie, Frog Buttress, and even down to Tassie, all with the skills built through MUMC. This has been made possible by a big increase in training and assessment opportunities. Right now we have 5 Sport Independent Lead Climbers, 9 Independent Lead Climbers (trad), and 3 MUMC Climbing Instructors, with plenty more members currently on probation and working their way up. The gear store also had a very thorough inspection this year. All of our equipment was checked, and as a result we've replaced the majority of ropes and soft goods. The biggest task of the year, though, was the amendment of the Rope Safety Management Plan.

This is the document that governs all climbing activity at the club, and it hadn't seen a significant update since 2016. The revised RSMP now lays out clear progression pathways between levels, properly incorporates sport climbing into the framework, and addresses several key flaws in the old version. This should make it easier for more leaders to be signed off in the near future, helping climbing at the club grow sustainably. Right now the stoke amongst climbers at MUMC is high. As members continue to develop their skills, we're likely to see some really impressive adventures over the next year or so.



Climber: Riley Clarke. Ai Wei Chia.

Mountaineering Officer Report

by **Alexis Dudderidge**



This year excitingly saw the continued growth of many club members' alpine abilities, with the overall level of interest and engagement the highest it has been in recent years. We had another introductory mountaineering course proceed in New Zealand over the past summer with club members Tom, Ben and Finn participating and thus becoming independent mountaineers within the club framework. Activities commenced around Mt Bogong during what proved to be a good winter season, including mixed climbing attempts at the Pollux outcrops and some turn arounds in stormy weather. The Remarkables Ice & Mixed Climbing Festival saw another strong MUMC representation with Nikita, Zara, Cal and Alexis attending in Queenstown during August. Nikita and Zara completed the Snowcraft 1 clinic while Cal and Alexis undertook the Mixed and Ice climbing clinic. Cal and Alexis subsequently completed the Remarkables Grand Traverse and repeated Single Cone with Zara several days later.

Gear hire remained strong throughout the winter period, with much of the new equipment receiving its initial use and generating positive feedback from members. A considerable proportion of gear hire was for backcountry style trips, reflecting the club's continued development in this area. Potential ski mountaineering courses may further increase this usage trend. The donated G14s received new front points and are now operational, ensuring the store maintains a complete range of crampon types available for hire. Overall gear stock is at a good level following Dáire's equipment purchases and is well-suited for large groups undertaking New Zealand style mountain objectives.

Member interest in mountaineering and alpinism appears high within the club, with plans this summer for more members travelling to New Zealand for courses and individual objectives. Continued focus should be maintained on financially accessible pathways toward alpinism, particularly through ongoing Remarkables festival participation. Club attendance of this is fantastic since it allows people to get more of a taste of alpine climbing without committing \$5,000+. There remains significant opportunity for the club to encourage greater diversity in alpine climbing participation, potentially through future training grants for non-male members. This consideration is left for future committee deliberation.



Alexis on Pollux Outcrops. Luke Spencer.

Conservation Officer Report

by **Charlotte Buckingham**

Conservation continues to be a core value of MUMC. Many of our trip leaders integrate environmental awareness into their trips, encouraging participants to consider the impact of human activity on the natural spaces we visit. These conversations often include topics such as wildlife interaction, pollution, erosion, and the visible effects of climate change. In this way, conservation is embedded throughout much of the club's activity.

I took over as Conservation Officer in May, following Amelia Goetz and Isaac Miles-Fine earlier in the year. Isaac ran a conservation-focused session in the clubrooms, aiming to kickstart a second-hand gear exchange scheme: a great initiative to promote reuse and reduce waste.

This year saw several successful conservation events, including:

- Tree Planting Day at Pipemakers Park (National Tree Planting Day)
- Birdwatching in the Dandenong's, where we spotted a breeding pair of powerful owls
- A Gear Repair Night led by our Secretary, Avryl, promoting repair over replacement

The club's human-powered trips initiative continues to thrive. Bikepacking and bushwalking trips have embraced this model, offering low-impact, sustainable adventure options.

The Pipemakers Park tree planting day also led to an ongoing dialogue with a Maribyrnong Council ranger. This could develop into a long-term volunteer partnership, offering students practical experience in conservation and environmental management.

The ranger has also offered to provide letters of recommendation for student volunteers, a valuable opportunity for those seeking future work or study in related fields.

Finally, I worked with our Vice President, Connor, to draft the Paddy Pallin-MUMC Conservation Grant Policy. Funded by a \$2,000 contribution from Paddy Pallin, this grant will support trips with a conservation focus, similar in structure to the Adventure Grant. The policy is currently being finalised. It's been a strong year for conservation at MUMC, and I'm excited to see these initiatives continue to grow and develop.



Bikepacking Officer Report

by **Bernhard Andersson**

It's been an exciting year for bikepacking! The 2024/2025 committee year is the first year bikepacking has been an official sport with its own sports officer (yours truly), and we have been ramping up the scale of our trips and the hype for the sport over the year. MUMC pedalled all over Victoria, including iconic places such as the Grampians, the Otways, and the high country. Many tyres were punctured, and the occasional chain was broken (looking at you Isaac) - luckily, we were well equipped with repair gear to allow us to keep on pedalling.

We even bought a tandem bike off our generous president for a bargain price, which we somehow managed to take bikepacking (more on that in a moment). For myself, the most rewarding part of being Bikepacking Officer this year was seeing many of our members having the opportunity to try bikepacking for the first time on our beginner trips.

The Lilydale to Warburton trip was perhaps the most iconic club trip this year. We had recently acquired the tandem bike, and Connor, with a sparkle in his eye, suggested the ingenious idea that we should take it on the trip - how could I refuse? So, bright and early on the Saturday morning, we haphazardly strapped our bikepacking bags to the tandem, rode into the city, and caught the train out to Lilydale with a keen group of OXOs (I will spare you the gruesome details of manhandling the tandem down the escalators at Flinders Street station).

The trip was a resounding success. We had stunning weather throughout, saw heaps of wildlife (including a camel), and had a dip in the Yarra river in Warburton. While I did have plenty of time to get up close and personal with Connor's back, almost everyone else also had a go on the tandem, and miraculously there were no casualties - however there was one near miss when Charlotte and I managed to crash into a bridge. We'll definitely have to take the tandem out again next year.

Our other trips included a summer epic out to Bonnie Doon and Big River Road, led by Steve - Big River Road is a stunning wild 4wd track through what will become the Great Forest National Park, and is an exciting route for the intermediate-advanced bikepacker. Charles and I attempted to squeeze the Otway Rip bikepacking route into 3 days in February, which I would not recommend because there is too much stuff to see (and far too many hills to climb) to squeeze into such a short amount of time.



REPORT

Our most recent trip was the “Off the clock, on the bike” trip run by Luke, where everyone planned a route independently to arrive in Warburton together on a random Wednesday evening in the middle of Winter – heaps of fun that didn’t require taking any time off work. In total, seven bikepacking trips were run over the 2024-2025 committee year, as well as an info night and a movie night.

This could not have been possible without our small but growing bikepacking leader base. A big thank you to Connor Gundberg, Luke Spencer, and Steve Birkett for running trips this year, and congratulations to Miranda Ramsay for being ticked off as a bikepacking leader. Gabriel King and Max Corcoran are not far behind, having started the leadership process by shadowing trips.

We purchased some exciting new gear for our bikepacking store, including two sets of handlebar bags, frame bags, and saddle bags. This intermediate gear complements our range of beginner bikepacking gear which includes pannier racks, pannier bags, and dry bags.

I’m looking forward to an exciting year ahead for bikepacking – now that the weather is finally warming up, I’m putting my skis away and dusting off my bike for an epic summer of riding.

I hope everyone gets the chance to hop on their bike and go riding next committee year!

Bernhard and Connor with the official MUMC tandem bike. on the Lilydale to Warburton rail trail trip. Hallie Tai.



Snowsports Officer Report

by **Jacob Fuller**

This year has been an excellent year for snow sports with a massive uptick in both trips being run and gear being rented. We've had 6 club ski trips run across the winter in various formats proving that snow sports is very much alive in the club.

These trips included a number of touring trips to Mt Hotham and Mt Bogong along with a fantastic return to form for MUMC with multiple entries into the Kangaroo Hoppet for the first time in a number of years. We've also had gear being rented for private use by our experienced members across almost every weekend of winter. These trips saw our members and gear get used in almost every skiable locale in Victoria including Buffalo, Falls Creek, Mt Stirling, Hotham, and the bogong High plains.

This year has seen 3 of our new backcountry ski leaders from last year's cohort step up to run trips ensuring the continuation of the sport within the club. Alongside our new leaders we also published new Backcountry skiing leadership guidelines and a more budget friendly and attainable pathway to leadership. A massive thank you to our Safety officers Nikita and Luke for the input and for the push to get them published.



Overall it's been wonderful to see the increase in interest and participation in our winter activities and I see it as a wonderful reflection of the gear investments made in the previous years. I'd like to give a massive shoutout to all of the snow sports leaders this year that facilitated trips and made everything possible this winter. I look forward to seeing another amazing season next year!



Nikita, Tom, Oliver and Ella while on a Backcountry trip to Mt Hotham.



Hannah, Charlotte and Miranda on accidental but convenient chairlift on a Mt Hotham Backcountry trip.



Hannah and Eleanor at the Kangaroo Hoppet.



Category Runner Up: Rotomairewhenua / Blue Lake, New Zealand in Overseas
Landscape by Hannah Bradley

Western Arthur's Traverse

by NIKITA BULACH

TRIP REPORT Nikita Bulach

We attempted to start our Western Arthur's traverse on a beautiful sunny day. We knew there was some bad weather coming, but having had no reception for a few days we did not know if it had changed.

We were half way up our first big spur of the trip (Moraine A) when we met 2 people coming down. We asked them if they had a weather forecast and were disappointed to learn that the weather for the next few days was going to be miserable - 90+ km/hr winds and snow. Knowing that that most of the hike was up on the ridge and involved technical scrambling we immediately turned back around and walked out, preferring not to need to sit in a tent at lake Cygnus for the next while. This resulted in a 35km round day trip.

It felt somewhat wrong to be bailing in blue skies but we knew that the weather in the South West of Tasmania could change at the drop of a hat and were grateful to be able to have another opportunity later. The two people who told us the weather forecast did not, having come from interstate specifically to do this hike they said.

Ironically about a week later when we next attempted the hike, the weather was drizzly and the creeks were running high. The notoriously muddy Port Davey track had some patches of mud that went up to our thighs and tried to eat our shoes as we waded through.

Crossing Junction creek was only possible due to some hand lines that had previously been strung up. Nevertheless we knew hypothetically that the weather was meant to be good for the days we planned to spend on the ridge. Day two was equally drizzly but day 3 dawned bright and clear.

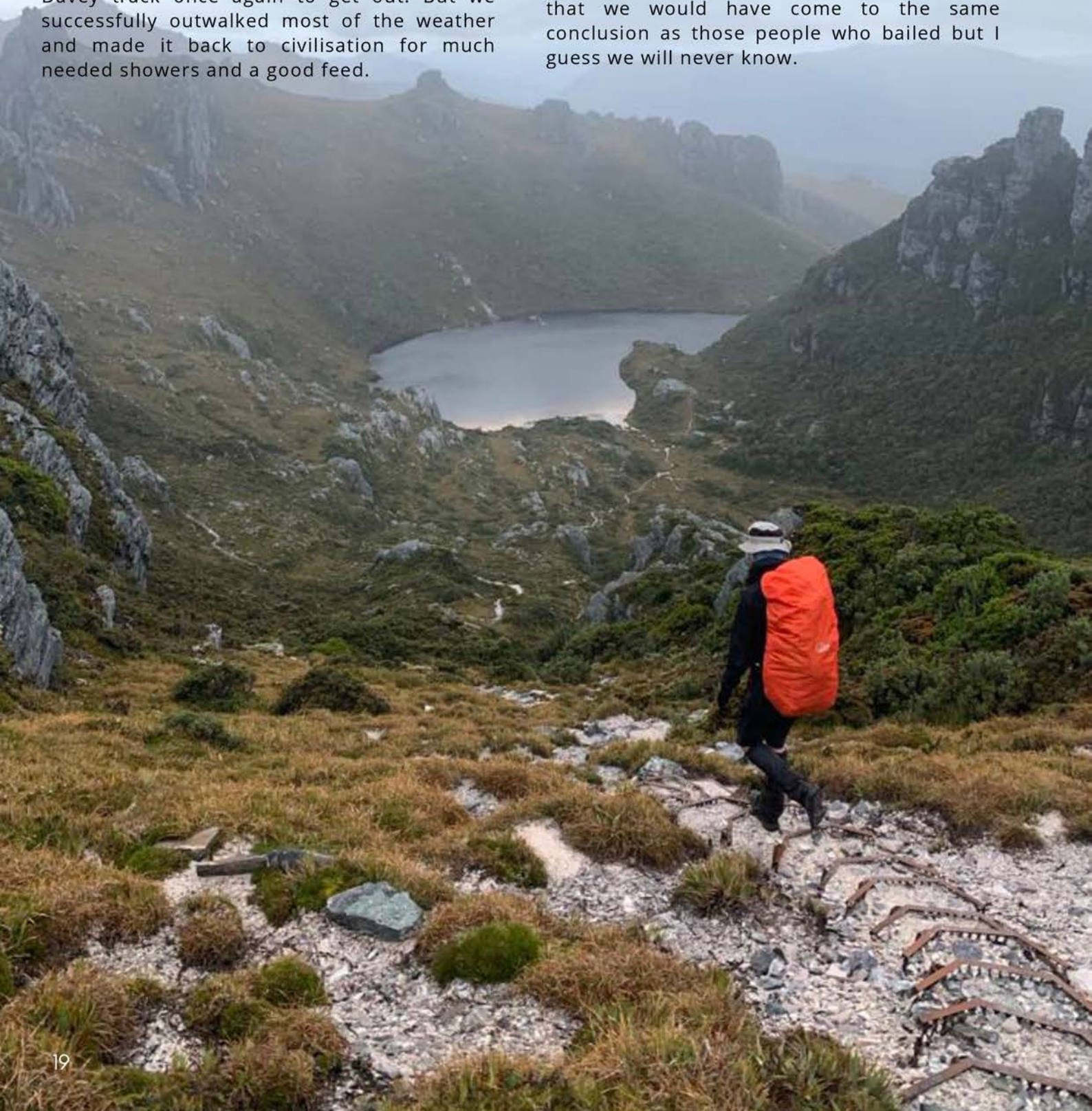
Having found the first 2 days relatively easy we were cautiously optimistic about making it to Haven Lake from Lake Oberon. It's actually only about 10 kilometres between the two sites, but due to its technical nature most people take 2 days to complete it.

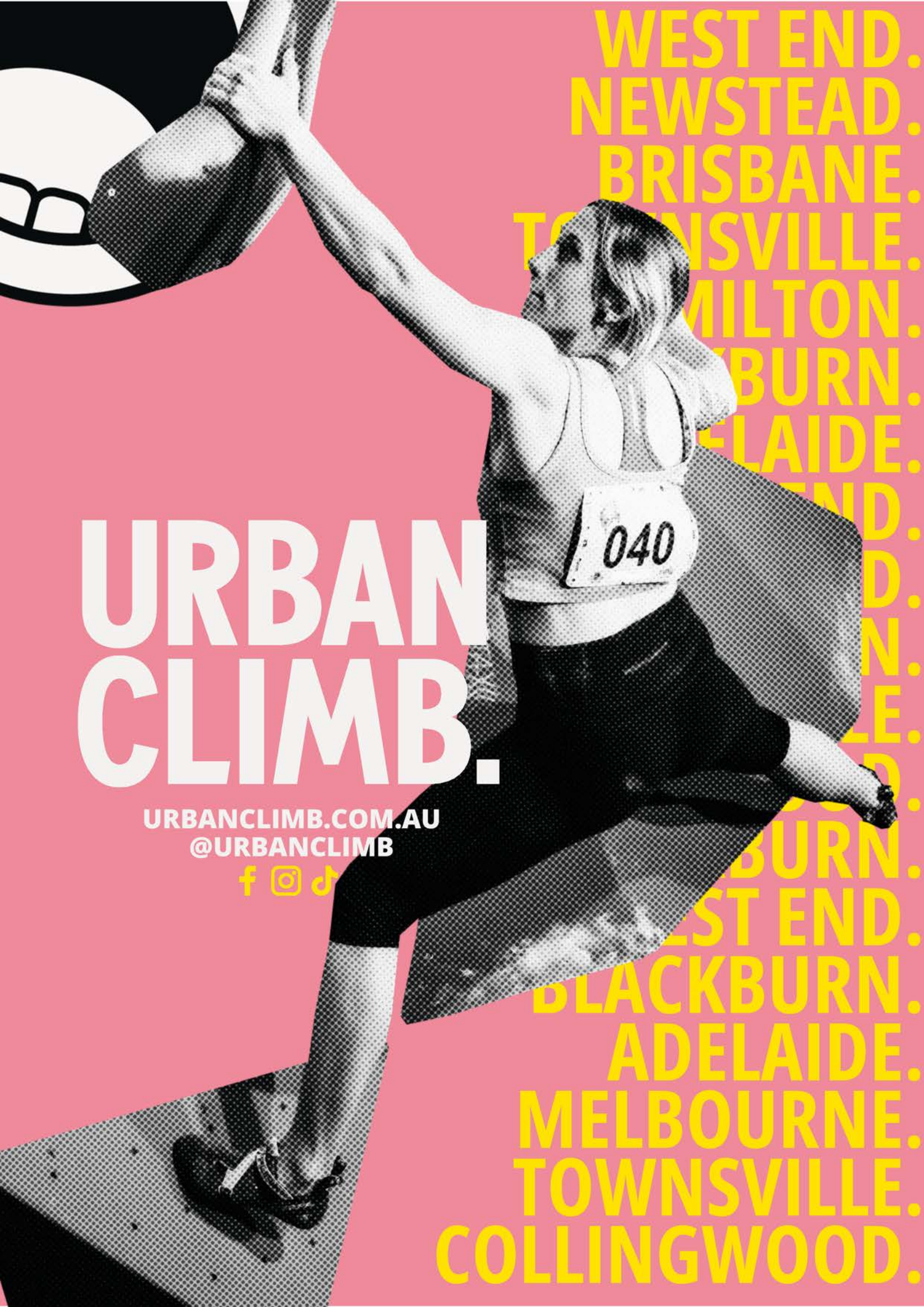
Fortunately the conditions were perfect: blue skies, not too hot, as dry as it gets (still not that dry) and as we both had rock climbing experience, the scrambling proved manageable without having to pack haul.

Still our legs and bodies were tired when we got into Haven Lake that afternoon after about a 9 hour effort. Indeed when we made it to Haven Lake, we got chatting to a party who had set out at approximately the same time as us the first time, but had been forced to be tent bound for a few days at both Lake Cygnus and Oberon. They had planned to do the full West Arthur Traverse but ended up only being able to do A-K.

We had another reason for trying to link two days on the Western Arthurs. Our weather window was shorter than we expected and the winds and rain were meant to return the following evening. Haven Lake is not much of a haven in rough weather, and we wanted to walk out before the weather turned miserable again. So another big day faced us where we linked multiple sections to hopefully beat the weather. We descended off the ridge and walked along the muddy McKay and Port Davey track once again to get out. But we successfully outwalked most of the weather and made it back to civilisation for much needed showers and a good feed.

Once again we are very grateful that we had that extended time period to be able to bail and return, otherwise our hike would have been most likely cut short. It also highlights an a skill to be able to determine when the conditions are not going to be suitable. Both of us are experienced in technical hiking and adverse conditions and are reasonably fit, but we didn't have microspikes for snow or food to be tent bound for multiple days. If we knew we didn't have another opportunity would we have pushed on? Who knows. I like to think that we would have come to the same conclusion as those people who bailed but I guess we will never know.





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N.
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D.
BURN.
WEST END.
BLACKBURN.
ADELAIDE.
MELBOURNE.
TOWNSVILLE.
COLLINGWOOD.

TRIP REPORT Luke Spencer

Darran Mountains Alpinism, New Zealand

2025 Adventure Grant

By LUKE SPENCER

TRIP REPORT Luke Spencer

Over the New Year's break, A group of Myself (Luke), James Vinnicombe, Tom Woodruff and Ai Wei Chia set off to the South Island of Aotearoa, New Zealand with help from the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club and the Adventure Grant.

We came across the idea of Sabre peak, which was regarded as "NZ's best rock-climbing peak". Tucked deep within the Darran Mountains, a 3-day adventure summiting Sabre peak embodies everything I'd associate with the adventure grant – big exposure, high commitment and intense. I managed to talk James into Sabre with adventure grant money being the carrot at the end of the stick. Sam Thompson was keen on the canyoning plans and bolstered our group experience and suddenly we had a good crew.

Amelia Goetz, Brook Allen-Brower and Jess Vinnicombe also ended up in NZ and joined for cragging and camping. Shout out to the Adventure Grant as the money was used to help sort us out with a hire car (which turned out to be rather problematic) and extra baggage which helped transport a copious amount of climbing, canyoning and camping gear. We did a bunch of sport climbing at Shotwell Slabs, Little Babylon and the Chasm, climbed Macpherson (a grade 2 winter mountaineering route) but I'll focus on the bigger objectives.

Shut down on Sabre

As with any expedition, you require good timing and a whole lot of luck. The forecast promised a stable 3-day weather window, and on paper, summiting Mt Sabre looked well within reach. We set off optimistically.

The approach seemed manageable, our climbing solid, our partnership stronger than ever...

But the weight of gear required for glacier travel, rock climbing, and four days of self-sufficiency slowed us down more than expected. Our pace lacked the urgency that time-critical alpine missions demand.

Navigation didn't help either as we had no idea where the fuck we were going. We packed crampons and ice axes but weren't expecting to have to use them on day 1. From barrier knob, there didn't look to be an easy way down and in hindsight, nothing looks easy in the Darrans and getting shut down is a right of passage. Without any proper intel beyond knowing we had to reach Gilford crack, we ended up trying a few different ways to get down. This took ages. The sun didn't set till 10:15pm so we had long days, however, it turns out the 17-hour days were not enough (this is a prelude to quite the tragedy). By the time we got down Gifford crack, our head torches out as we waddled towards the bivvy spot. There were no trails, and every 3rd step we'd sink into a knee-deep muddy hole, so lots of care was taken to avoid an ankle injury.



After not being able to find the Rock bivy either on map or on our GPS by 12:30am, we admitted our first defeat and decided to make do on the uneven damp ground and agreed to wake up at 5am.

4.5 hours later and we were up again, early enough for time to be on our side (so we thought). Having to make more use of the crampons to cross ice, jumping 1.5 metres over a bergschrund with a 20m drop and climbing steep exposed wetlands, we ended up spending far too long for comfort holding onto snow tussock and trusting it with our lives. We'd dagger our ice axes into the dirt and hold on for dear life. As it was just wet and all there was around us was untextured rock and snow tussock, we couldn't place any protection, making a very small margin for error in very highly consequential terrain. At one point James yelled out that he couldn't move.

I asked if he could go up or down and he was convinced he couldn't and yelled to throw a rope down. I tried my best to wrap the rope around a rock with a body belay but I was well aware that if he fell, there was a better than good shot he'd be taking me with him. After getting through the crux of the approach, we haven't chatted about it but I'm convinced there was some sort of epiphany about not wanting to die, James mentioning about how fucked up the approach was, and my typical nonchalant "everyone dies at some point" attitude that resulted in very slow and methodical movement from thereon out.

We got to the base of Mt Sabre at 1pm and time was definitely not on our side. We'd need to get up 9 pitches of climbing, with a bit of simul-climbing to get to the top of Sabre. I really think that if there was a way we could've gotten up Sabre, we would've done it. The added motivation of the adventure grant really spurred me on. We had brought gear to have the worst sleep of our lives and share a 1-person bivy at the top of the exposed mountain. We briefly chatted and decided that we would try to climb 3 of the hardest pitches of the climb, assess the climb and bail if time wasn't on our side.

But deep down, I had a real gut feeling that it wasn't a good idea – the type of feeling like something really bad was about to happen. In hindsight, we were way out of our depth with not enough time and we would've been benighted and there's a good chance it would've been consequential. I was the first to throw in the towel and said that I didn't think climbing was a good idea, James agreed, and we had bailed before even touching the rock

To give credit where credit is due, James is pretty much as resilient and loyal as it gets, which makes for a bloody good climbing partner. Considering how hard the approach had been, we hadn't once discussed bailing. It's taken me a while to realise that choosing an alpine climbing partner might need to be taken more seriously than choosing a lover.

I'm still on the fence.

One thing for sure is that when you are attached to a rope together in very consequential terrain, you're very much trusting your climbing partner with your life.



James in front of the approach. Luke Spencer.

There were a few integral things that contributed to our retreat – Most importantly, we'd told our friends that if we didn't make it back to them after 96 hours, for them to alert emergency services. At the base of Sabre, I realised we'd need a good day to abseil down and hike back and it meant that we didn't really have any spare time to climb. This was frustrating because alerting emergency services was kind of pointless (to me at least) - we'd either be able to alert them ourselves as we had PLBs or they'd be retrieving dead bodies. An Inreach would've been handy...

TL;DR I wrote a sad paragraph (summarised in 5 words: *I'm a failure and failing sucks*) the day after we got back and I cringed reading it back and couldn't stomach adding it in the Adventure Grant article. James filmed a vulnerable 10-minute video of us after we bailed, so he would never forget how scary this experience was and he vowed to never go mountaineering ever again. Feel free to ask him to play the video!

I think the craziest part of this all is that when I really look back on it, I actually don't really care too much about the binary outcome of climbing (ie. you send the climb or you don't – success/failure). The reason I love the outdoors (mountaineering included) is to be out in the sublime wilderness, and the Darrans well and truly epitomises that. In this regard, the trip was a resounding success and we had one helluva adventure. Getting up Mt Sabre would've been nice... but the learning experiences and opportunity for growth will help us get up far cooler things in the future!

Canyoning

*Mathers Creek Canyon (v4a4III***) and Imp Grotto (v4a3II***)*

For the canyoning, we'd planned to go down as a 3 (with myself Luke, Tom and Sam) a three-person descent of a serious, committing canyon near Haast Pass. Unfortunately, the weather window in the Haast pass had a bit of rain and to err on the side of caution, we abandoned our plans to go down a super committing canyon and opted for a similarly hard mega classic canyon, knowing it had been recently descended by a team in the past week, meaning that the anchors were in good stead.

The morning of the canyon, Sam was unwell and wasn't up for a hard day of canyoning which solidified the decision to bail on a more committing canyon. We linked up with 3 other canyoners to make for a big team of 5 which proved to be a good decision. One of the members in the group did the canyon in the previous week, and needed rescuing after being flipped upside down and got water boarded. After getting rescued, he ended up getting babysat by the group for the rest of the canyon which would've been a real shit time. Hats off to him, he was keen for redemption. Twenty-seven pitches and seven hours later — including a wild 16-metre jump — we floated out of Mathers Creek and down the Haast River, sunlit flanks of Mt Aspiring on the horizon.



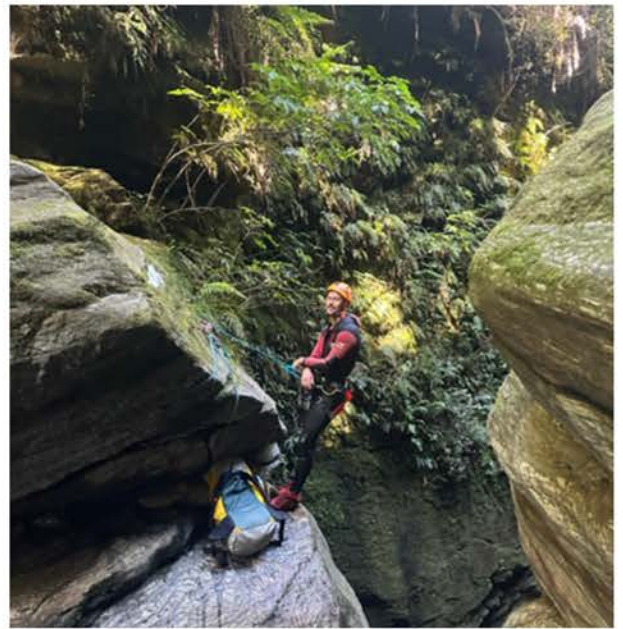
Tom Woodruff canyoning in Mather Creek v4a4III***



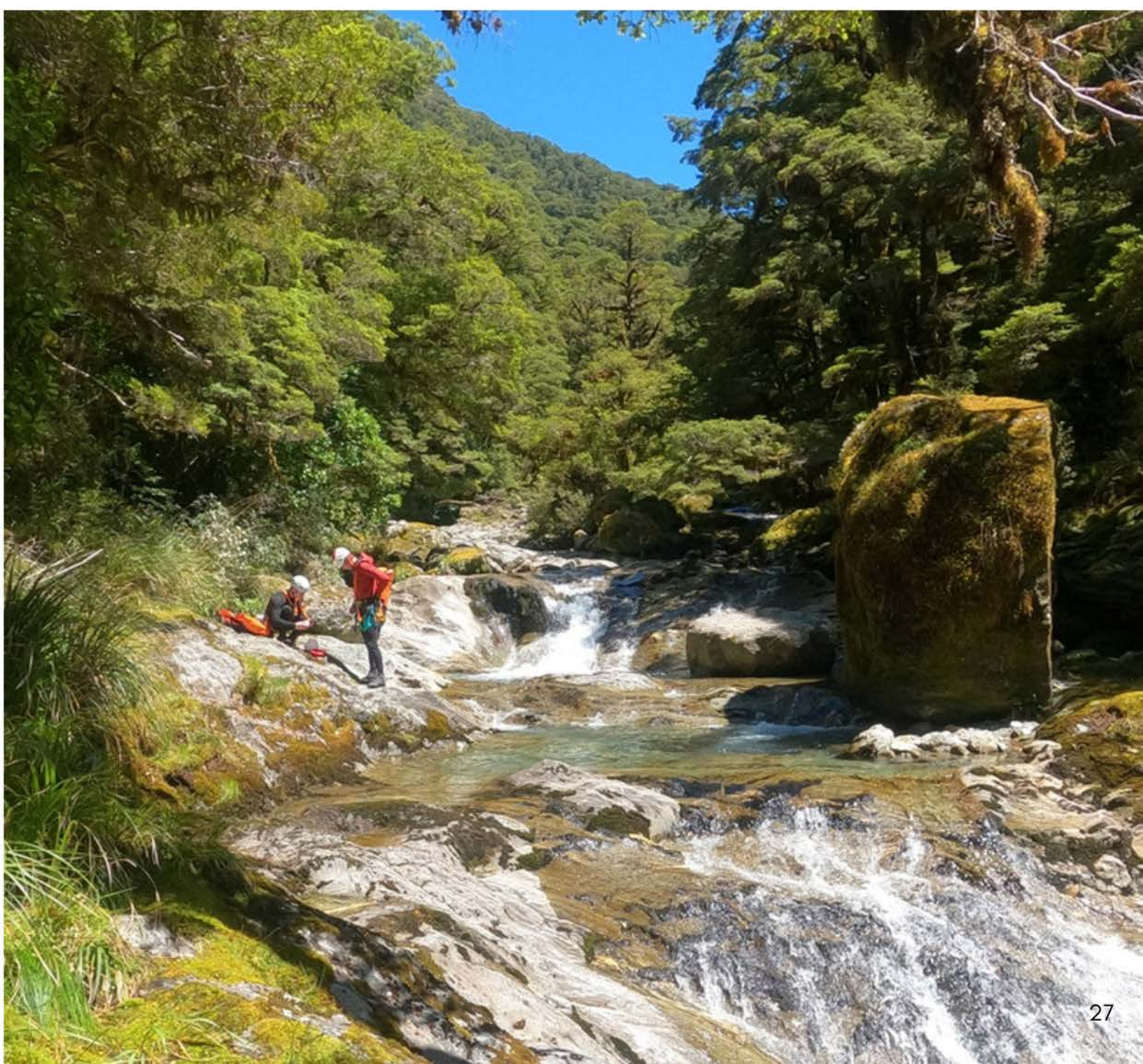
TRIP REPORT Luke Spencer

The next day, with Sam recovered and we flew down Imp Grotto (v4a3II***) in just 90 minutes. The final jump-slide — a glorious 1.5m jump, landing backside into an 8-metre slide — capped off the trip perfectly. Canyoning outside Victoria makes me realise how it's a short straw for us Melbournians (unless you're an aspiring alpinist or a masochist).

The days are long and hard, there's lots of snakes, the canyons aren't as scenic, but they do make for a real good Type 2 fun adventure.



Sam recovered and in the canyon. Luke Spencer.



VIC Rogaining Chamoionships Recap

By **LUCY ROE**

Rogaining is the sport of distance cross-country navigation in which teams of two to five members visit as many checkpoints as possible in the specified time. I like to think of it as a challenging scavenger hunt in the bush. It's a great way to improve navigation, get out into the bush and meet new friends!

On the 11th and 12th of October, the Nigel Aylott Memorial Victorian Rogaining Championship was held. We had a few teams from MUMC enter which was very exciting, in both the 6 and 15/24 hour events. My team consisted of myself, Eleanor March and Tyra Beckett. We caught the train to Bendigo, where there was a bus supplied by the VRA waiting to take us to the hash house. We set up our tents, planned our route, and off we went!

We had entered the 24 hour event with the intention of staying out less than 15 hours to enter the roving 15 hour event as well. We started off pretty strong, hitting our first marker easily. The terrain was very flat, making for quite a challenging event, with lots of scrub bashing involved. However, we started to get a bit lost after this. We were aiming for a 70 point marker, and we took a bearing from the wrong track (those pesky unmarked tracks!) which led to us wandering in the bush for a bit. Once we realised we had the wrong location, we lined up our compass to where we thought the marker now was and again tried to find it.

Alas, it alluded us and we called it quits on the marker after passing the same watercourse 3 times. We tried to get to an 80 pointer, and again just couldn't work out why our bearings weren't working!

We started to walk down a road and quickly realised there was an out of bounds area to our left that looked suspiciously like the area next to a road we didn't think we were on. At least it helped us work out where we were.

We backtracked, and once we actually got on the right track we got the 80 marker pretty easily. Turns out our bearings were right but we were on entirely the wrong tracks so we can blame that rather than our navigation for the missed 70 pointer.



The 15 /24hr teams from MUMC

We then made our way down towards the town of Dunolly, which the course setters had very kindly left in the map boundary. We got a few markers along the way, and did a detour into the town. Our hopes of a mid-rogaine potato cake were dashed when we realised the takeaway shop was closed, however we did manage to get a mid-rogaine schooner of ginger beer which was a very unusual treat. We then grabbed an icy pole at the shop next door, along with a jar of pickles (a very random purchase but ultimately a good one!) We made a pact to eat a pickle at each marker after that.

We hit a few more points pretty successfully and started to make our way back to the hash house as it was about 8pm and we had been out for 8 hours at this point. As it started to get dark, our spirits damped slightly but we stayed positive. We wanted to get 2 more markers in the dark, including the elusive 70 pointer that we had missed earlier in the day. We hit one of them pretty easily, which was very exciting.

Particularly for Tyra and I, as it was our first nightrogaine ever! However, the 70 pointer was still a pain to us. Even though we were on the right track to take our bearing from, trying to find the marker at night in "the watercourse" amongst all the trees and scrub proved almost impossible for us. After a long while of searching, we made the call to just head back to the hash house. I had horrible blisters, sore heels, felt exhausted, yet the thought of the food at the hash house helped me get back. Getting back at 10:45pm, almost 11 hours after we started, and seeing the wonderful volunteers cooking soup and cheese toasties for us was incredible. We just about collapsed into our tents and woke the next morning to continue rogaining. We had a very slow breakfast, and headed out about 9:30am again for 2 more hours rogaining.



Lucy, Eleanor and Tyra at the pub mid-rogaine.

We hit a few more markers, again cursing how flat the course was, as this made it quite difficult for navigation.

We made it back to the hash house at about 13 hours total on the course, and finished our jar of pickles at the final point. More soup and toasties were waiting for us, before we had the awards.

Our team somehow managed to win the W23 15 hour and overall womens 15 hour categories, and also the W23, 24 hour category! Making us officially the under 23 womens Vic champs.

The other MUMC teams had success, particularly in the 15 hour comp, with both teams in this event placing top 3 of the mixed category. We headed back home after packing up, jumped on the bus and train, and slept most of the way home. What a fun experience to end the rogaining season. Looking forward to more rogaining next year, and new adventures!

A Love Letter to Tasmania

By **CALLUM LEE-SMITH**

If there is one thing that my time with MUMC has taught me, it's that spontaneity is one of the most rewarding things in life that you can embrace.

It was in this spirit that I embarked on a two-week climbing trip in the Southeast of Tasmania, with my friends from the club, during my summer holidays. I was asked to join and booked my flights for this trip two weeks before we left. While I maintain that it was absolutely worth it! flights definitely left my wallet a little lighter than a planned-out trip would have...

The trip's climbing started a stone's throw from Hobart's city centre, at a crag called the Organ pipes (one of a million different crags of the same name). What made this particular Organ pipes special to me, is that it was the site of my first multipitch climb!

Winding our way up the path to the crag, there was a layer of fog enveloping the trees around us, covering the cliff face in a haze which was pierced in places by golden lights, barely managing to sift through the dense fog. Looming out of that thick fog, was a gorgeous yet daunting 80 metre cliff face, that we were about to climb.

The route we chose was named 'Moonraker', after the famous James Bond film, and let me tell you, the climb felt like a movie. The first pitch involved a cool sequence of crack climbing with a cave set into the rock halfway up the pitch. The second pitch had a narrower crack, with a little bit of traversing out onto the slab section close to the top. At this stage, we were high enough off the ground that the fog made the ground completely disappear.



The Moai, Tasmania. Callum Lee-Smith.?

There I am, hanging 60 metres off the ground, preparing to shimmy out of the safety of this little crack, nervously placing my feet on a couple of crystals on a technical piece of slab, peering straight down into the void. It felt like I was hanging hundreds of metres above the ground, both a terrifying, and exhilarating experience.

The next bit of fun came when we reached the top of the climb. It was time for me to learn how to abseil! hanging off the edge of an 80-metre cliff, staring down into oblivion.

I couldn't have chosen a cooler place to learn, attaching my ATC, tying my "third hand" prussik underneath, and then pitching myself off the side of the cliff and down into the cliff's foggy depths. It was insanely cool. It's hard to describe the feeling of your first unassisted rappel, there is a certain freedom to that moment, when you're tethered to the side of a cliff by a 9.5 mm thread of rope, watching the rock blur beneath your feet as you descend the face (That makes it sound like I was plummeting to my death, but I swear it was a controlled descent!).

TRIP REPORT Callum Lee-Smith

That night and the next nights that followed, we spent wild camping on the side of whichever road or park we found ourselves at the end of the day. The worst of these places we lovingly dubbed "Leech Forest" for the vast quantity of leeches that we found there throughout that night. The largest of which I found attached to the side of my pinkie, which practically matched my pinkie in size. I had to use some tent pegs as chopsticks, to pick it up and thundercunt it out of my tent.

Over the course of the next two weeks, I slowly fell in love with sea cliff climbing. Being a surfer, and someone who grew up by the sea, I've always felt an innate connection to the ocean and the sounds of crashing waves. To combine this passion with a newfound love for climbing, there's no wonder I fell for Tasmania's charm, with plenty of beauty both in its ocean scenery and its technical climbing!

From the Parrot Shelf Cliffs and the Moai on the Tasman Peninsula (with some of the more skilled and daredevilish of the group embarking on an absolute epic down to Cape Raoul) to the White-Water Wall and Mt Amos at Freycinet, it was a fortnight packed full of epic views and world class cliffs.

This trip has me incredibly stoked to return to Tasmania! with routes set firmly on my bucket list! From the Candlestick, which has been driving me to learn rope skills so that I can tackle this route, to the Moai, which bested us with raining conditions which trapped us at the base of its 100-metre approach cliff for hours in the rain and cold (while our friends had their day long suffer fest at Raoul).

Outside of climbing, I managed to find a cool spot for some cliff jumping at Fortescue bay. While on the smaller side of cliff jumps, this 8-metre cliff was one of the most terrifying I've ever jumped off. The water was so clear, that despite the depth being at least twice my height, I could see every single rock and boulder that littered the bottom of this drop.

Standing on the top of the cliff, trying to psych myself up to jump down into water where I could see the rocks at the bottom was pretty daunting (even after I'd dived into the water to check the safety of the depth).

But, the highlight of the trip came not from the climbing or the gorgeous scenery, or even from a little dare devilry, but from a natural phenomenon that we happened upon by pure chance whilst camping at Fortescue Bay, one which I will never forget: the bioluminescent phytoplankton.

As a biochemistry student, I could probably rattle off all the jargon about what causes Bioluminescence but you don't care about that, and in that moment, neither did I. I was totally and completely enraptured by the beauty of it.



Callum Lee-Smith.

TRIP REPORT Callum Lee-Smith

Picture this, it's pitch-black on the beach, not a whisper of light pollution in the pristine, wooded national park, except for waves which crash against the sand, lighting up the beach like glowsticks have been cracked within the surf, and from the water emanates a gorgeous, deep, neon-green glow. When waves aren't crashing, the water glistens, with thousands upon thousands of turquoise crystals embedded within its depths. As you swim through the water, you leave trails of luminescence in your wake, like you've entered the world of Avatar (the blue people one). Every time you disturb the water, a bright flash of colour ripples out from that spot like the pulse of a radar.

Myself and one of the guys decided it was the perfect opportunity to go skinny dipping, because... why not? And we were right, It was the most magical thing I have ever done in my life, every movement of your body sends cascades of lights rippling across the surface, it feels like you're swimming through the northern lights.

Skinny dipping is an incredibly freeing experience on a regular night, this was like experiencing that feeling on steroids, because it was mixed with a magical, ethereal lightshow that felt like it shouldn't exist in the natural world.

My favourite part was, as water washed onto the sand, it left the shining crystals sprinkled throughout the sand (I know they're actually phytoplankton, but if you've seen them, describing them as living, shimmering crystals just feels right), as you walk along the shoreline, lights pulse beneath your feet and when you emerge from the water, your entire body is covered by shimmering gems, as you run your hands across your arms, you leave trails of sparkling neon lights glistening on your skin.

It was genuinely the most beautiful thing that I have ever seen in my life. It put our 3:30am hike up Mt Amos to watch the sunrise over Wineglass bay, completely to shame.



Callum Lee-Smith.

(You can tell which experience I value higher, when I describe Wineglass bay in a single sentence after an essay on the bioluminescence!).

Yet sadly, all good must come to an end, after two weeks of barely scratching the surface of this gorgeous part of the world, as our group sat outside Hobart airport, day drinking three quarters of a magnum bottle of shiraz that some random bloke pawned off on us because he couldn't bring with him on his flight, I knew that it would not be long before I came be back to re-experience the beauty that is Tasmania!



DOLOMITES: ALTA VIA 1

ADVENTURE GRANT

By **DAN TRAN**

The Call of the Dolomites

There is something magnetic about the Dolomites - the jagged limestone peaks rising from green meadows, the echo of cowbells through alpine valleys, and the promise of days spent high above the clouds. For many hikers, the Alta Via 1 is the crown jewel of this range: a 120-kilometre route that threads through some of Italy's most spectacular alpine landscapes.

Interestingly, the Alta Via 1 wasn't my first choice for the MUMC Adventure Grant. I had other plans in mind, but as things often go with adventures, circumstances shifted, and somehow the Dolomites called my name. Before I knew it, I was at the trailhead, pack on my back, ready to take on the route solo. I expected long climbs, rocky trails, and afternoon storms: the usual mountain rhythm. What I didn't expect was how quickly the weather could turn, or how much this trail would teach me about humility, preparation, and knowing when to retreat.

This is a story of two attempts, one that ended in hail and retreat, and another that reached the finish. More than anything, it's a reminder that when you go outdoors, especially alone, preparation is everything, and turning back is sometimes the smartest, safest choice you can make.

The First Attempt: Caught Off-guard

Day one couldn't have started worse or so I thought. I woke up late, missed my train to the trailhead, and ended up waiting for hours at the bus station for the next one to arrive. By the time I finally set off on the Alta Via 1, it was already midday. Still, the mountains made up for it. The air was cool, clouds drifting lazily across snow-capped peaks in the distance.



The trail began with a steady climb through coniferous woodland - a thousand metres of ascent over roughly ten kilometres to the first mountain hut. By the time I got there, it was too late for lunch, and all that was left was a single slice of cheesecake. Not exactly the hot meal I'd been craving, but at that moment, it tasted perfect.

I pressed on, walking higher into the mist, watching the clouds gather. I remember thinking, just hold off a bit longer, please don't rain yet. Then something small and hard hit my arm - hail. At first, the size of cherry seeds... then bigger. Within minutes, it was a full-on storm.

There was no shelter in sight. Panic hit fast. I turned around and scrambled back down until I reached the tree line, where I quickly pitched my tent and crawled inside. The sound of hail hammering the fabric was deafening. I waited - thirty minutes, then an hour - until it finally eased. By then, it was dark.

Two hikers came down from above, drenched and shivering. They told me the hail at the hut was the size of a toe - brutal! I decided to stay where I was for the night, hoping things would clear by morning.

The next day brought relentless rain and no sign of improvement. The mountains were wrapped in cloud, the trail a stream of mud. I was cold, tired, and honestly a little scared. That's when I made the call to turn back. It felt like defeat, but deep down, I knew it was the right choice.

The Lesson: Nature Sets the Rules

Back at my base, I felt a mix of frustration and relief. I'd come all the way to the Dolomites, and I hadn't even made it past the first stage of the trail. But as the weather continued to worsen over the next few days, I knew I'd made the right call to turn back. That pause became my biggest teacher. I realised how quickly conditions in the mountains can change, and that sometimes, the best decision isn't to push through - it's to wait. The mountains don't bend to your plans; you bend to theirs.

For the second attempt, I decided to do things differently. I watched the forecasts closely and waited patiently for a proper weather window. No rushing this time, just quiet preparation and trust that the right moment would come. When it finally did, I packed my bag once more, ready to give the Alta Via 1 another go.

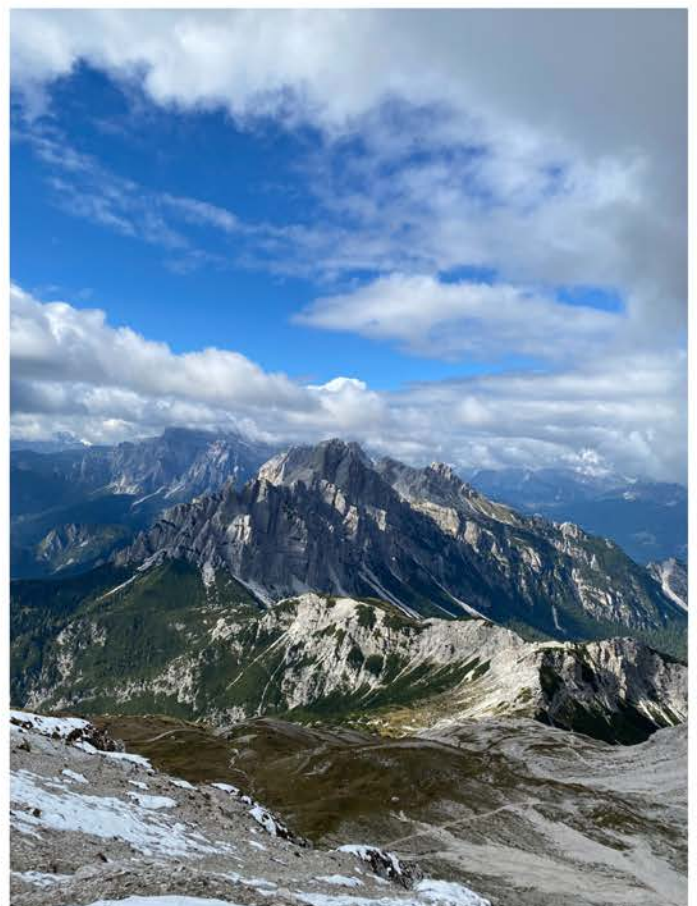
The Second Attempt: Doing it Right

When I finally decided to try again, I approached it differently - calmer, more deliberate, and a lot more patient. I knew now that the mountain sets the rhythm, not me. It was a Sunday, and as luck would have it, no buses were running to the conventional trailhead. Instead of getting frustrated, I improvised. I took a detour through another town, figuring I'd find my way to the campsite one way or another. My plan this time wasn't just to start the Alta Via 1 - it was to finish it, safely and on my own terms.

I began early from a small town called Longarone, the air crisp and still. The morning light spilled over the peaks ahead, and for the first time in days, the weather looked stable. I walked along a quiet local road toward the trailhead when an elderly couple pulled over and spoke rapidly in Italian.

My vocabulary barely stretched beyond greetings, but I caught one familiar word - Rifugio Pian de Fontana - my first destination. They motioned for me to hop in, and I gratefully accepted. Inside the car, we had a few halting conversations through Google Translate and before long, we were winding up narrow alpine roads lined with golden trees. When they dropped me off at the start of the trail, I thanked them the only way I could - "Grazie mille!" and waved goodbye.

The trail wasted no time climbing. It rose almost 800 metres through a dense coniferous forest, the smell of pine heavy in the air. I reached Rifugio Pian de Fontana around midday and was surprised to find it buzzing with people. It turned out to be the final day of the hiking season, and locals - many in their 60s and 70s - had hiked up to celebrate. They gathered on the terrace, eating, drinking, laughing, and soaking up the sunshine. It was such a simple, joyful scene. I thought to myself, what a cool way to spend your weekend - climbing a mountain just to have lunch with friends.



TRIP REPORT Dan Tran

Since the weather still looked good and daylight was on my side, I decided to push on to the next stage. The first hour after leaving the rifugio was punishing; steep, rocky, brutally hot and heavy on my back.

I must've asked myself a dozen times why I was doing this when I could've been enjoying a plate of pasta somewhere warm, but then the trail opened up, and all doubts disappeared.

Before me stretched a panorama that no photo could ever capture - towering peaks, massive rock walls, and deep green valleys glowing in the late afternoon light. Patches of melting snow clung to the slopes, glittering under the sun, while gusts of wind made me shiver and smile at the same time. It was one of those moments that reminded me why I love being out there: where pain and beauty coexist perfectly. The descent that followed was less poetic. The slope was steep and rocky, the snowmelt turning sections into slippery traps. Crosswinds buffeted me as I carefully picked my way down. At one point, I was literally on all fours, scrambling just to stay upright. When I finally reached Rifugio Sommariva al Pramperet, I felt equal parts exhausted and relieved.

The hut was closed for the season, but luck was on my side again - it had a "winter room", a small shelter left open for off-season hikers. Not every hut offers one, and considering that a bed during summer costs around €85 a night, it felt like striking gold.

The next morning greeted me with perfection: blue skies, warm sun, birds chirping through the valley.

The trail climbed gently at first, winding upward into a landscape that shifted from green meadows to pale, rocky ridges. By midday, I reached Rifugio Carestiato, where I met a young German hiker on his 20th day of walking from Munich to Venice. He looked strong and content, though his story gave me pause - just a few days earlier, he'd trudged through knee-deep snow at high altitude. I silently thanked my past self for turning back during that first attempt.

Later that day, I pushed toward Rifugio Vazzoler, following a concrete pass that seemed to climb forever. A sign promised "0.45 hours" to the hut from an intersection. I cried when it took me nearly double. When I finally reached it, the doors were locked and the windows shuttered. No winter room this time. So I pitched my tent nearby, cooked dinner under the fading light, and let the quiet of the mountains settle in. By now, the season was truly over.

I'd meet fewer than five hikers in a whole day, sometimes none. It was peaceful - meditative, even - but also isolating. There's a strange mix of calm and unease that comes with being completely alone in the wilderness. I found myself missing simple conversations, even small talk on the trail. Still, I reminded myself this was what I'd come for: solitude and self-reliance.

TRIP REPORT Dan Tran

The following morning brought thick grey clouds. The peaks were shrouded in mist, and visibility dropped to twenty metres. It wasn't raining - not yet - but the silence was heavy and the air damp. After hours of quiet walking, I stumbled upon something that lifted my spirits: a mountain lake.

The surface was mirror-still, the water icy blue. I didn't think twice, I stripped down and jumped in. It was freezing. My feet went numb instantly, my breath caught in my chest, and I let out a noise somewhere between a laugh and a gasp. But it was glorious - pure freedom and pure cold.



Descending after the swim felt easy, almost joyful, until I made a classic hiker's mistake. At a fork in the trail, I took the wrong turn. After nearly two hours of steady climbing, I realised I was completely off route. I pulled out my GPS, cursed under my breath, and backtracked. It was frustrating, but also a reminder that even when you prepare well, mistakes still happen.

"The key is catching them early - and keeping your cool when you don't"

That night, I camped near a quiet ridge, making peace with the lost time. I'd learned that on long trails, patience matters far more than speed. The next morning was bitterly cold. Fog hovered low over the valley, giving everything a ghostly calm.



As I climbed toward Passo Giau and on to Cinque Torri, the scenery transformed again. Bare rock walls, sharp ridge lines, and the distant hum of car engines below. It was strange to be back near civilisation after so many silent days. Climbers on the massive rock towers, their bright helmets specks of colour against the stone.

The biggest highlight of the entire journey came that afternoon at Lagazuoi, where I explored the famous wartime tunnel - a relic from World War I. Carved deep into the mountain, it stretched for over a kilometre through dark, twisting passages.

The Italian soldiers had once dug it by hand to undermine Austrian positions above. Today, it's a kind of underground Via Ferrata, equipped with cables and ladders. Walking through it was surreal - steep, slippery, and cold, the air thick with history.





Cinque Torri



Lagazoui Tunnel



TRIP REPORT Dan Tran

My headlamp illuminated the walls just enough to make out chisel marks from a century ago. Occasionally, a small window opened to the outside world - a flash of blue sky and distant peaks before plunging back into darkness. When I finally emerged at the summit, the gust of alpine wind hit me like a wall. I stood there, breathing hard, utterly awed by where I was.

The final day felt almost calm in comparison. The trail dipped and climbed through quiet valleys until the turquoise glow of Lago di Braies finally appeared below. It's one of the most photographed lakes in Italy — and for good reason. Standing there at the end of the trail, boots muddy, pack heavy, and heart full, I felt a mix of relief and disbelief. The journey had tested me in every way - physically, mentally, and emotionally - but it also taught me what real preparedness looks like.

It's not about having perfect gear or detailed plans; it's about being ready to adapt, to pause, to respect the mountain and your limits. I smiled, looking back toward the peaks I'd crossed. The Dolomites didn't make it easy, but they made it unforgettable.

I smiled, looking back toward the peaks I'd crossed. The Dolomites didn't make it easy, but they made it unforgettable.

Reflection: Knowing When to Turn Back

The Alta Via 1 reminded me that adventure isn't about conquering mountains - it's about learning from them. My first attempt taught me humility; the second, patience. Preparation isn't just about equipment or plans, but about mindset - knowing when to push forward and when to step back.

When you're out there alone, the mountains become your teacher. They reward respect and punish arrogance. And sometimes, turning back doesn't mean giving up - it means you're ready to return, stronger and wiser, when the time is right.

A huge thank you to the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club for supporting this journey through the Adventure Grant, and to Serena, for hosting me and showing me how locals truly live in the Dolomites. Those moments off the trail were just as memorable as the ones on it.





FEATURE

RED IN THE BLUES

by YASMINE HASSAR

The approach began with a 10-hour drive from Melbourne, though the line was quickly broken by the mandatory Maccas delays as ordered by our fearless president, accompanied by the enthusiastic chanting of *Pirates on the Boat* and the *Arapiles Musical*, and fuelled by the nation's true jug of power, the *banh mi*. Clearly, committing to a whole week in the Blues takes eagerness (or a tragic lack of better judgment).

The opening moves felt stiff: cramming tents, racks, and pans between the boot and our beloved climbers. Some call this the trip's true crux. Others may bet it on the rest of the week and how fond you were of sitting on cold ground, or whether you were lucky enough to claim a chair around the fire.

Yasmine Hassar. Connor Gundberg.

The slabby middle pitches were sketchy in their own right, approaches in Birks, thongs, and hiking shoes only somehow holding. A 7-hour multi pitch "adventure" that gracefully bled into benightment, the odd kangaroo crux nearly taking us off route, our lack of head torches, goat-skull caves with antique stoves, and, of course, a spicy meat-bone hospital detour.

The sun added pump, reddening faces far beyond what SPF could protect. While a side quest to the "Old Apocalypse" backyard provided the kind of cult-y exposure guidebooks don't warn you about.



FEATURE Yasmine Hassar

As we moved higher, the overhangs softened into the best holds: evenings of laughter, half-coherent campfire quotes, and jokes that should never see daylight again.

The luxury crimp? The first shower back at the hostel, its aroma so intoxicating it almost counted as a send in itself, kept, naturally, under impeccable hygiene standards.

Finally, we clipped the anchors on a route woven with warm embraces, triumphant sends from freshers and seasoned crushers alike, and a chorus of cheers echoing through the gorge. Pumped but not broken, we lowered off straight into the anticipation of Monday night climbing, already chalking up for the next route in the guidebook of memories.



Connor Gundberg.

Yasmine and Ben. Hallie Tai.

Yasmine climbing. Hallie Tai.







FROM OCEAN TO SNOW

A reflective journal

by **GRACE PEARSON**

In this moment, I'd never been so aware of my heartbeat, of the throb that worked its way from my forehead all the way to my toes.

It was almost surreal. I felt that throb pulsing in my gnarled heels, in the blisters that had formed as my feet rubbed awkwardly with the boots I'd hired the day before. I was wide awake, my mat and sleeping bag doing little to combat the cold emanating from the snow beneath my tent.

Now, being in Victoria's Alpine National Park made me giddy.

As a kid growing up by the sea, I'd always dreamed of camping out in the snow...

..and as I lay awake, painfully aware of my fingers and toes, I felt immensely grateful. In the mountains, I felt this weight in each activity. It was harder to move through the snow, harder to breathe (at least for a lowlander like myself), and so much harder to go to the bathroom at night. Brain whirling, I couldn't help but think about home, of the rugged green shrubbery and long stretches of white sand that meet cerulean coloured waves in the west.

Before I had relocated to Melbourne, my father and I headed out on an adventure in the far south of WA. We camped in the sand and swam every day. In the water, my body feels light, and it becomes hard to control my legs; there is a feeling of surrender to the movement of the water around me. When we hike along the coast, our movements are slow, relaxed, and we move through the land like we move through the water. While I will always miss the seas and sands of the west, I am so excited to explore this new world of snow and rock. Lying in my tent, as the throb in my head persists, my mat slowly deflating...I am content to take these new feelings, as I listen to the leaves rustle and think about not needing the bathroom at night.



Backcountry skiing at Mt Hotham

by WILLIAM MORAN

Piercing wind. Frigid cold. Cascading snow.

This was our welcome to Mount Hotham as the first car of Oxo's rolled in late on Friday evening. As the clock edged midnight we began to wonder where the second car was. Had they stopped to buy Snorkels for the impending dump of snow? Had Mick Taylor from Wolf Creek gotten to them? Or was the word of our trip 'faff' to blame?

Not long after these thoughts did the second car of Oxo's arrive, and after much campsite snow digging, everybody found themselves tucked up in bed, lulled to sleep by the patter of falling snow against the tent.

After a few groans of cold feet overnight and an early wakeup call we departed for the Loch Day Centre. Between the comforting smell of warm coffee stewing on the stovetop and the droning choir of tooth brushing the day centre started to really feel like home. Despite this welcome comfort, there was little time to faff, we had a mission to attend to. Mount Loch - blanketed with 60cm of untouched powder - was calling our names. After a comprehensive safety briefing and gear demonstration by trip leader Tom we untangled our skins and converted our skis into touring mode. Ready for the uphill grind.

After summiting Mount Loch we scoped out a few good looking lines and settled for a short open downhill run through the quaint Australian snow gums. The run then opened into a small glade where we decided to tuck into lunch.

For some this was their chance to show off their well-prepared rolls and meals, whilst others had to use their ingenuity to create something at least slightly edible from their rations. After a lunch of mixed fortunes and a precious gummy snake from Tom's 'this is to get you up hill stash' we skinned up to Machinery spur.

From Machinery spur we dropped into what would be run of the day, an open, mild pitch gully with amazingly deep and good snow quality. For many in the group this was their first time skiing in powder, but swift adaption to the conditions resulted in hollers, hoots and beaming smiles on everyone's face by the end of the run.

With Charlotte breaking trail and gummy snakes fuelling our legs, we emerged from the gully onto the windswept summit of Mount Loch, ready for another plunge into the white. Tom took on the responsibility of finding our line that we had scoped earlier in the day, and with great responsibility comes great... roasting. Tom copped it all the way across the ridge while Miranda reminded him of his poor navigation, and rightly so as our tired legs skated uphill through cumbersomely soft snow.

With the darkness stretching out behind us and tiredness growing in our minds we dropped into a prospectus tree run. Will made it down first...to the edge of a creek 30 meters from the main trail. After a long slog through 70cm of windblown snow he made it to the meeting point, the bottom of the Hotham village chair.



Zhencheng and Will hitching a free ride on the lift. Miranda Ramsay.

After about 30 minutes of encroaching darkness he started to get concerned, and so did the chairlift operators who decided we wouldn't be allowed to skin out of the resort and had to either get the chairlift which was now closed or be taken out by ski patrol on skidoos. The idea of skidoos was novel but certainly the most cumbersome for the ski patrol members who were likely kicking it back in the Genny sinking piss.

And there it was...the shining glow of Harry's bright orange rock climbing helmet, a sight for sore eyes.

With only 13 chairs left before the lift would be completely closed for the night we made it on free of charge! Go Hotham lifties!

Back at the JB plain campsite we settled into the floor of the busy hut and got our cook on. After a solid feed we set up the surgery table for Harry's badly blistered foot. Fortunately, our amazing doctor on hand Hannah could make some repairs and get his wheels moving again.

Uni students saying no to free Fireball can only mean one thing: true exhaustion, and soon we were looking at the back of our eyelids.

Departing 4WD's and footsteps in the snow woke us, well most of us, for another early morning departure. This time the car park was busy, really busy. Tom had clearly spent a lot of time in this local fruit market haggling prices on overly ripe bananas, because he managed to swindle the carparking attendant into flipping the closed sign over and making room for two more cars.

Unfortunately the weather had moved in today and the views of Mount Feathertop were replaced with thick, rolling fog. We set out on a similar route to the day before but continued our venture further across Machinery spur. From the top of our skin track we spotted an awesome looking area with steep, long gulleys, the chefs kiss of ski runs. Miranda stayed put to capture some epic shots for the MUMC social media whilst we peered over a what appeared to be a bottomless cliff.

Following a very informative snow pit test by Tom to check the avalanche danger in the immediate area we all dropped into the steepest run of the trip. Whilst the snow quality had deteriorated to the quality of a 7/11 Slurpee, we didn't let it melt our hearts, but some misfortune ahead may.

TRIP REPORT William Moran

The rule what goes down must come up is especially applicable to ski touring, and whilst Tom and Charlotte smashed the uphill, the rest of us battled through the troubles of kick turns and slippery snow. Not long into the climb Will went tumbling past Zhencheng in a complete Mount Hotham yard sale, fortunately being left with one pole to self-arrest.

Zhencheng himself was also now running on fumes, surviving the whole day on nothing more than a can of red bull and two lolly snakes. These are the times when all may feel hopeless but then a quiet resolve can take root, fostering amongst friends and seeing you through the uphill.

By gritting our teeth and pushing through every exhausting stride, we finally made it back to the Loch Day Centre in one piece, carrying a quiet, hard-earned sense of triumph. The final image of us to be remembered was eight ski bums collapsed on the free day centre couches, spent but satisfied with a weekend of skiing.



The groups set up at JB Plain. Hannah Bradley.

The crew transitioning post lunch. William Moran.



Tom teaching valuable skills. Miranda Ramsay





THE WINTER SOLSTICE 300

by ISAAC MILES-FINE

"Do you think the bananas will stay there?" I asked my mother as we both anxiously inspected the four bananas hanging from my recently installed aero bars. "It looks like you're heading off for a picnic," she replied doubtfully.

"Anyway, it's you I'm worried about, not the bananas." It was a Friday evening, and I was preparing to depart for Southern Cross Station to catch a train to Warrnambool to participate in my first bike event... The Winter Solstice 300.

The event that occurs every year on the day of the winter solstice (surprise, surprise). It leaves from Warrnambool train station at 6am and finishes when you reach the train station at Warrum Ponds. The ride entails three-hundred kilometres of gravel and sealed roads going up and down hills and passing through a few towns.

I first heard about the Winter Solstice 300 from Bernhard, who casually mentioned it to me at the MUMC clubrooms, having found out that I was getting into road cycling. I agreed to participate. That I didn't own a gravel bike, had never ridden further than 100km on road, and had only been cycling for about 3 months seemed like secondary considerations.

I would like to be able to now describe the highly disciplined training plan on which I then embarked, including strength work, practicing descents on gravel roads, intervals and training my stomach to ingest an inhumane amount of carbs. But that plan didn't exist. My training involved the occasional morning ride on the flat Beach Road and one ride with Bernhard to the Dandenongs in which we tackled four short but steep climbs.

Another flaw in the preparation was my bike, or lack thereof.



Bernhard Andersson.

One month out, my hopes of finding a carbon gravel bike on Facebook Market Place, with electronic shifting and bikepacking bags included for no more than a few hundred dollars, were slowly dying. Instead, I ended up with a nice alloy cyclocross bike which was great fun to ride around the flat parks near my house. However, the problem was that, due to my hesitance to commit to bike, I had never done a gravel ride until four weeks before WS300. My first gravel ride was in the Otways where I discovered the joy of washboard.

FEATURE Isaac Miles-Fine

My legs gave up at the 80km mark and were unwilling participants in the last 40km, expressing their resentment through the flat roads connecting Forrest to Deans Marsh - not an encouraging experiment, 4 weeks before the big event. With my longest ride still only being 120km I thought I should try a long ride, so ten days before I was set to leave for Warrnambool, I attempted a 240km gravel ride from my house. This went better, but I bailed part way through and only covered 170km. As I pedalled in my easiest gear up a tiny hill on Beach Road on the way home, I wondered how I would fare doing almost double the distance and triple the elevation.

All too soon, the evening of departure arrived. As I left my garage to head to the station, perhaps unsurprisingly, I was feeling pretty nervous. The hope I was clinging to was that I knew I could ride 100km, therefore I knew I could ride 200km, and therefore once I got to 200km I knew I could finish, because I knew I could ride 100km. Pretty poor logic, I know. But it was all that I had.

I met my three other riding companions at Southern Cross Station and boarded the train. A brief chat with Chris and Max soon revealed that I was by far the most inexperienced rider. The train ride was uneventful, but with a growing sense of fear as I realised just how long the train took to get between Warrum Ponds and Warrnambool.

Once we arrived in Warrnambool we grabbed a pizza, a large box of Weet-Bix and some milk. Our motel room was small, especially once four men and their bikes were inside. We finally got to sleep at around 11:30, ready for a 5am alarm.

When we got up, we crammed down as many Weet-Bix as we could and set off back to the station, where we found 50 other bleary-eyed and lycra-ed freaks. We set off at 6am and managed to join a fast group of riders. I sat in the draft working slightly harder than I would have liked and tried to tell myself that I wasn't burning too many matches at the start. The first 60km went by quite fast due to the tarmac, smooth gravel, small hills and the draft from far fitter riders. But then we hit the Timboon Rail trail. This is where my inexperience first showed.



Max Corcoran.

I was using fingerless road riding gloves, more suited to summer riding than dawn in the depth of winter. As frost covered the grass next to the trail and the temperature fell to minus four, I slowly lost movement in my fingers, making me unable to shift gears. Luckily after about forty-five minutes we arrived in Timboon where I rushed into a café and bought a pie and coffee to try warm me back up. However, because of this, we lost the group.

From there it was steady progress to the base of the first major climb which took us to Lavers Hill. The climb was long but not too steep and with the motivation of both a café and the joy of knowing the first third was done, we climbed at a reasonable pace. I enjoyed a Pepsi and a heavily salted potato cake and then we set off on the next third of the ride, through the hilly gravel roads of the Great Otway National Park.

These kilometres passed slowly as we moved through beautiful and quite gravelly roads, but each rolling hill took a little bit more out of our legs. By the time we got to the long descent into Lorne, the sun had long since set and the temperature was falling.

FEATURE Isaac Miles-Fine

At the top of the descent, we put on all our clothes (and in my case yellow dishwashing gloves) and headed to Lorne. However, I had discovered that once again my experience was letting me down. I was nowhere near as comfortable on the descents (my failing lighting didn't help) and often found myself alone at the back in semi-darkness trying to keep up with the others. Bernhard generously hung back with me, so I could at least see the road. Luckily for me a kangaroo bounded across the road, causing the others to consider riding at a pace more suited to my level of fear.

We arrived at Lorne and found a fish and chip shop. I tried to eat as much as I could, but having eaten hundreds of grams of lollies and other junk food already, I just couldn't stomach it. We hung around at the fish and chip shop until nine, delaying the last 90km to the finish. The main reason for my fear was the climb up Erskine Falls road.



The train station post ride. Max Corcoran.

Leaving directly out of Lorne, this 10km long climb at 5% average gradient, and with sections of up to 10%, is considered a hard climb for road cyclists, let alone people who have already cycled 215km

We climbed for an hour, passing a pair who were having "a nap in the dirt" on the side of the road. It was here that I realised the problem with my bike; while having a small cassette is great for the flat fields of Belgium, it left me without a granny gear to slowly progress up the climbs and thus I had to grind and attack all the hills.

The last 80km passed relatively quickly, a highlight being the mountain bike park in Anglesea. However, we were about to suffer our first mechanical issue. As I grinded up one of the hills, in a moment of sleep deprived desperation I attempted to shift into my small chainring, convinced that I was in my large one, given the amount of effort required to push the pedals. Smashing the shifter, I felt the resistance fall away from my pedals. My first thought was that my chain had fallen off. In fact, I had snapped it. Luckily, Max had a spare link, and we quickly put the chain back together and continued.



An interesting glove situation. Bernhard Andersson.

FEATURE Isaac Miles-Fine

With 10km to go, the excitement was building. With the last hill complete we rolled into Warrum Ponds, spreading four-wide across the road, pretending we were celebrating finishing the Tour de France on the Champs Ellysse. We arrived at the train station and took our photo under the finish sign - the station clock. The time was 4:45am, almost 23 hours after we started. With the first train arriving at 6:30 and the temperature just below freezing, we took out our emergency blankets. Then, resembling nothing so much as stiff and lifeless corpses wrapped in tinfoil scattered untidily throughout the platform - we tried to sleep until the train came.

And the bananas? They dangled from my rack for 250 km before being abandoned. Another lesson learned.



Max and Bernhard. Isaac Miles-Fine.





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PACKRAFTING THE SNOWY RIVER

By **MAX CORCORAN**

Never did I imagine strapping my bike to an inflatable raft and floating down a river, until Bernhard had the insane idea to suggest it. Perfectly normal, right? I agreed to the mission, though with some hesitation. Wouldn't this ruin our bikes? Wouldn't the raft handle horribly with a bike on the front? How do you even get the bike on there in the first place?

First, we hired packrafts, which arrived promptly in a huge box. For those unfamiliar with packrafting (where have you been?), picture an inflatable raft that handles like a kayak crossed with an inflatable beach couch. Next, Bernhard sent a hilarious photo of his bike strapped to the front of an inflated packraft in his lounge, taking up the entire space. I looked at my phone, smiling and shaking my head—what were we about to do?

The grand plan was as follows:

- Drive four and a half hours to Orbost on Friday night and camp next to the Snowy River
- Wake up bright and early on Saturday morning, ride 30km up the road on our bikes, arriving at our launching place
- Paddle down the river, camp halfway, then paddle the rest on Sunday.

We got into Orbost late and found a patch of grass conveniently between the side of the road and the Snowy River, somehow managing to set the tent up hastily despite the fatigue from the long drive. We were awoken by the birds the next morning, always a welcome sound, and began to wrap our heads around how this was going to work, staring down at the mountains of gear spread across the grass.



We eventually worked it all out, fuelled by a mix of instant coffee and hot chocolate powder that was more potent than we probably needed at that hour in the morning. Just before setting off, we had a visit from one of the residents who lived across the road, who was delighted in what we were doing and not bothered in the slightest that we had just essentially slept on his nature strip. 'Onya boys,' he waved, and with that, we were off along the Bunchan-Orbost road, heading upstream.

I tried not to laugh at our setups as we rode, but with Bernhard's packraft drooping off his rear pannier rack, it was impossible. What a sight we were: both in boardshorts, me with a big backpack and oars sticking out, both of us grinning. The ride was calm until we took Sandy Point track, a gravel road snaking down to the river. The mountain views were superb as we gingerly descended, the slope steepening as we neared the river.



The set up. Max Corcoran.

TRIP REPORT Max Corcoran

The trees cleared, and we reached Sandy Point campsite. We slumped on the grass and ate lunch before setting up our bikes on the rafts

For those wondering, here's how bikerafting works:

- First, take all your gear out of your bags and lay it on the grass in a fashion that makes it impossible to distinguish which is yours and which is your partner's.

- Once you've worked this out, pack all your gear that you won't need whilst paddling into the two dry bags that go inside the boat using a huge waterproof zip.

- Inflate the raft, using the inflator bag provided, and nearly faint from the exertion as you top off the last of the air with your mouth.

- Once you have two seemingly incompatible items, your bike and your raft, don't worry. Remove both wheels from the bike and lay the frame down on top of the raft, with the wheels positioned on top. Use the loops on the front of the raft to secure the bike and wheels.

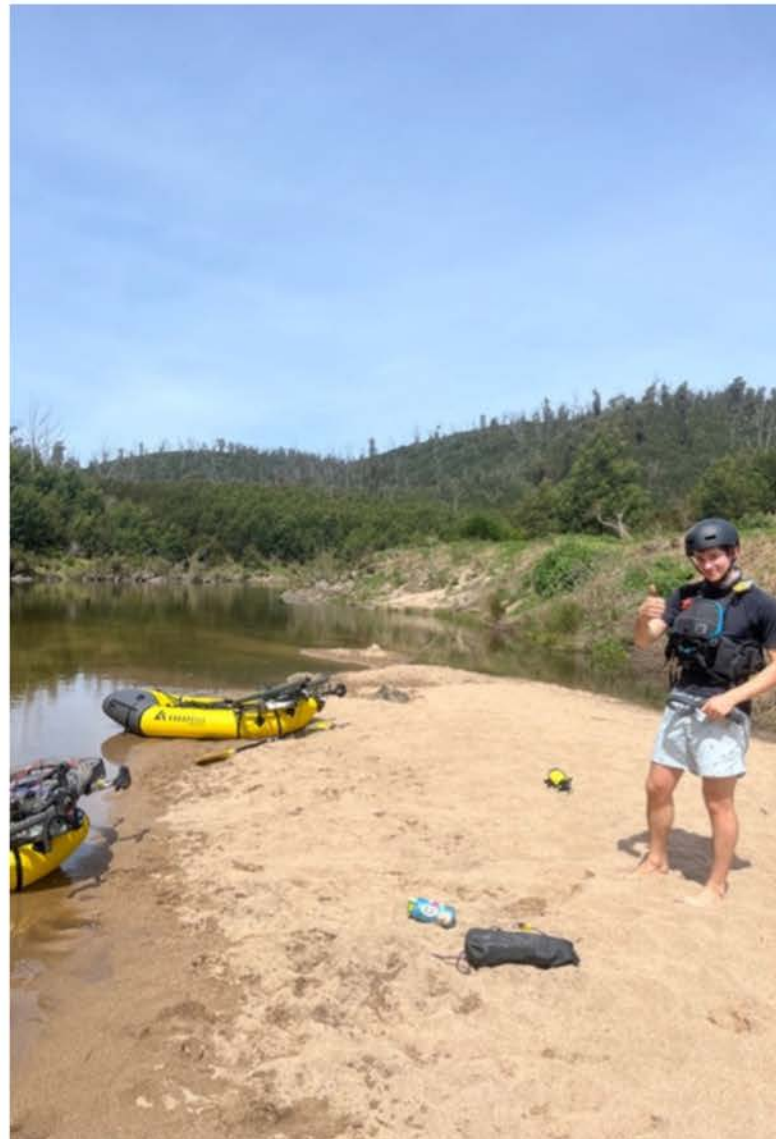
- Wobble the bike, making sure your beloved bike isn't going to take a swim later. Done!

The only other people at the campsite watched us as we carried out our procedure on the bank of the Snowy River, checking our progress as we solved the puzzle. Finally done, we high-fived and set off. Grins broke out as we paddled, hooting as we drifted down the only rapid all day, right at the campsite.

Then, incredibly, after such a process and all this thinking, planning, and fussing over gear, timings, and the route, our work was essentially done. The banks passed by as we drifted down, moving past serene beaches and towering snow gums. As someone who hadn't done much paddling at all before this trip, this was something

I hadn't quite considered; paddling down a river without rapids was chill. Unlike cycling, where you are constantly pedalling, with wind rushing in your face, paddling, in comparison, is more akin to sitting on a train, watching the world go by.

Of course, there was some paddling involved, Bernhard much more than me (sorry Bernhard), but for the most part, we had the time to sit back and bask in the sun. I remember shaking my head in disbelief at the beauty of it all, yet also smirking at how out of place the bike looked on the front of the raft, water flowing only inches away. What a thing to do.



Bernhard at Sandy Point Beach. Max Corcoran.

TRIP REPORT Max Corcoran

The rest of the trip essentially consisted of calmly paddling, stopping on beautiful beaches to eat lunch, and checking out little anomalies along the way. We chose our campsite as the sun was setting, a deserted beach in front of a thick forest, so much like the rest of the scenery, and yet all so stunningly beautiful. We enjoyed a few ciders with a campfire, watching the rest of the sun disappear behind the trees, before retiring to bed.



Bernhard and Max with their boats. Max Corcoran.

The next morning was a colder one than the previous and yet had hints of warming up into a much hotter day, so we enjoyed a morning swim before packing up and heading off again. Huge lizards flopped into the water playfully along the banks under the soaring birds of prey up above. One lizard we spotted on an island would have easily been longer than my whole arm, and didn't seem the slightest bit bothered by our visit, flicking its tongue lazily. Before we knew it, it was time to start looking for an exit point, so we flowed through the passageways of sand and reed grass in search of one, deciding on a point at which we could climb out and ride the short distance back to retrieve the car.

At this point, Bernhard decided to ride back into Orbost, whilst I was very happy to drive back in and pick him up once there. I couldn't wipe the smile off my face whilst driving back into town, thinking about what we had just done. I genuinely wasn't expecting the trip to be as relaxed as it was, with all the pre-faff around and required gear

. reflected on the versatility of packrafts, slowly realising that this simply meant I would have to buy one now. Whether it's for hiking trips, bikepacking trips, or simply for paddles, they just make so much sense; they're light, packable, and whitewater capable, meaning that the use of a car isn't even necessarily required, unlike other paddling vessels. My wallet in my pocket quaked in fear as I pondered this, fearing the incoming expensive purchase.

I cooked some noodles in an Orbost car park as Bernhard pedalled into town. Once arrived, I gave him another crisp high-five. What a trip, and undoubtedly the first of many bikerafting trips to come





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The HUNT 1000

By Bernhard Andersson

On a quiet Sunday evening in early September, I received a text from Forti.

“What’s your current plan for the hunt?”

The text conversation that ensued set our plans in stone. Despite the suffering we had experienced last year, Forti and I were once again signing up for one of Australia’s most legendary bikepacking events: The Hunt 1000. Little did we know that this year’s Hunt would be far more challenging than the year before.

What is the Hunt 1000?

Developed by Canberran Dan Hunt, the Hunt 1000 is an annual bikepacking event where participants ride unsupported from Melbourne to Canberra, travelling 1000km and gaining 20,000m of elevation. Riders are taken through the heart of the Australian Alps, often on backwater forestry roads and 4WD tracks. Restock points are few and between, and the event is notorious for its finishing rate of less than 50%. Planning is essential.

Preparing for the Hunt

Forti and I first met at the start of last year’s event (our first Hunt), when we quickly discovered our bikes were ill equipped for the ride. This year, we both made significant improvements to our rigs. I decided to take my trusty Focus Atlas again, however I swapped out my 47mm tyres for 55mm tyres in the hope that it would reduce the amount of hike-a-biking I would have to do. I also upgraded my gearset to have lower gears for climbing and acquired a Dynamo Hub to power a front light and charge a battery pack while I rode. Forti took a more comprehensive approach and abandoned his gravel bike for a Kona Unit X with chunky 2.6” tyres and a Dynamo Hub up front, a rig he affectionately called “the Trail Goat”.



Images in this article courtesy of Bernhard Andersson.

Before we knew it, the day was upon us. Forti made the weary train journey down from Coffs Harbour and, after a carb load with Molly and Oli (credit to Oli for a FANTASTIC vegetarian Bolognese sauce), and a final check over our rigs, we headed to bed early to get a good night’s sleep.

The next morning, we rode to Edinburgh Gardens, the official start point. Each rider chooses their own start date to coordinate their arrival in Canberra in time for the grand finale, so there were only a couple of other people starting. Without much ceremony, we started peddling slowly out of the gardens.

The Hunt 1000 had begun.



And then there were three

Riding out of Melbourne was ... pleasant. Accompanied by my dad for the first part, we meandered our way along the Yarra River trail to Diamond Creek. Apart from my dad crashing into a pole, our ride was largely uneventful. After a quick café stop (where we farewelled my dad), we left suburbia for the hills – and they were proper hills. It was a constant up and down as we approached the mountains, passing through Healesville and Warburton to finally arrive in Noojee, exhausted, starving, and coming to terms with just how difficult this ride was going to be. We had covered 150km and had climbed 2700m, and the rest of our days weren't going to be much easier.

We trundled over to the pub, where we met Courtney, another Hunt rider, and sat down to eat. Unbeknownst to us at the time, we had just formed our Hunt crew – the three of us would end up riding together all the way through to Canberra and supporting each other through the ordeals that were to come.

Mission to Hotham

Over the next couple of days, we rode through the peaks and valleys on the southern side of the Victorian Alps, over the notoriously steep Mt Baw Baw, through the picturesque mining town of Walhalla, and alongside Thomson Dam before descending into Licola. I quickly learnt that I couldn't afford any slow mornings – Forti and Courtney were up by 5am, and I, a sucker for sleeping in, found myself doing a daily morning catch up.

We arrived in Licola on our third day and treated ourselves to a lengthy break. Thus far, we had been passing through towns and shops at least once every day, but after Licola we faced a formidable stretch of nothingness until Mt Hotham – 180km and a whopping 6400m elevation gain away.

We set off with high spirits. It was a warm and sunny afternoon, and we had a superb dip in the Wellington River before starting the 1000+m ascent up to the Tamboritha plateau. From there, it was another gentle 20km to Guy's Hut, our campsite. We were tired, but happy. That was the point things started to take a dire turn.

1km out from Guy's Hut, my back tyre suffered a devastating puncture, large enough that it was not immediately patched by the remaining sealant in my tyre. I stayed up at Guy's Hut as the sky darkened, fixing the tyre. Thankfully, Courtney had some extra sealant and it *just* managed to patch the puncture. I went to bed slightly relieved, slightly anxious.

The next day, as usual, Forti and Courtney packed and headed off, and I finally got on my bike about half an hour later. To my dismay, my back tyre was not holding up well.

TRIP REPORT Bernhard Andersson

Every so often some air would burst out the puncture, followed by the whizzing sounds of the sealant attempting to patch it. I had to stop several times to reinflate the tyre. Things got a little depressing. Eventually though, the puncture decided to hold, and I was properly on my way.

Day 4 began with an incredibly rough descent down a 4WD track to the Wonnangatta River. I managed to catch Forti and Courtney for lunch at the river, 80km from Mt Hotham. We trundled on, up and down on winding roads as the sky became greyer and the day became gloomier. Rain and mist set in, and at 7pm, without any better spot to camp, we set up on a dismal mud patch on the side of the road and retreated to our tents. It was not a night for camaraderie.

The next day was the hardest of the entire event. *It was still raining.* We encountered roads so slippery our bikes were sliding perpendicular to our direction of travel, and 4WD tracks so steep that Forti elected to carry his bike on his back and walk up. It took us 7 hellish hours to ride a mere 40km to Mt Hotham. 7 hours. I got incredibly close to running out of food and resorted to mixing mi goreng flavour packets with some leftover packet coconut rice (it didn't taste good, if you're wondering). With huge relief we eventually summited the peak of Mt Hotham and cruised down into the village for a feast at the general hotel. From there, it was a roll down the mountain to an Airbnb in Omeo (a very justified spend, we thought), to recover and reset.

A cruise through high plains

The next 3 days were cruisy compared to the previous. From Omeo, we rode through farmland and mountains to reach the Murray River. This far up in the mountains, it was shallow enough to carry our bikes over it without too much stress.



Now in New South Wales, we climbed up to the Jagungal Wilderness, stopping in Jindabyne to restock for a final 300km stretch without towns. The Jagungal Wilderness was stunningly beautiful, a high-altitude landscape of rolling hills, grasslands, and pockets of trees. The tracks we were following were little more than walking trails, so progress was slow, but it gave us a chance to appreciate the scenery and stay in a few of the area's legendary huts. On our 8th day, we emerged from the Jagungal Wilderness and made for Long Plain Hut. The rain returned as we were arriving, so we were glad to make use of the shelter. Being only 140km away from Canberra, we were in good spirits, and decided to push all the way to the end the next day.

Don't go braking my heart

The rain did not let up the next morning. Begrudgingly, we left the shelter of the hut and started peddling. We were soon getting bogged down in the soaked dirt roads and therefore made slow progress. We left the plains and entered the forest, but the hills were relentless. Up and down.

TRIP REPORT Bernhard Andersson

And the rain. did. not. stop. Desperate to reach the main road before lunch, we pushed on. At one point, we took a wrong turn and rode 1.6km in the wrong direction, putting us all in a bad mood. At about this time, I was slowly realising my brake pads had worn out – I wasn't too worried though, I had bought spares in Jindabyne. The highest priority was to get to this main road. and a base layer left in my dry bag...

It just kept raining. 6km out from the road, we simply gave up riding on the rutted and slippery tracks and started pushing our bikes. We hit two creeks, which in dry conditions would have been no issue to cross, but due to the rain they had swollen to the point where we were making risky, waist deep crossings in fast flowing water. Soaked, tired, and frustrated, we reached the main road and plonked down for lunch. I set about replacing my brake pads, when I realised with a sense of dread that the spare brake pads I had been given were not compatible with my bike. It was 2pm, we were 76km out of Canberra, and we were yet to do a 22km descent... without brakes on my bike. The rain had stopped at least!

As we climbed to the top of the Brindabella Range before the final descent, Forti, Courtney, and I discussed my options. Hitchhiking was one, but I wasn't super comfortable with the idea of waving a car down. Courtney had suggested that her mum in Canberra could drive and pick me up. I had thought about it for a long time while we climbed that hill, and ultimately, I realised I would not be satisfied if I finished the Hunt with outside assistance on the last day. To their horror, I told my riding companions I would walk down the hill.

The sun slowly set as I walked down that 22km hill. It was boring. I listened to music and podcasts but didn't have many options as I didn't have reception. I was attempting to walk fast, but time steadily passed and by the time I reached the bottom of the hill, I was almost in darkness.



To top it off, it began to rain again.

For the last 40km into Canberra, I drew on my last reserves of energy and determination. It was dark, wet, and whenever there was a slight downhill, I put my feet on the ground to brake – needless to say, I had a very low mood. I was eternally grateful for my kLite and the few soggy lollies in my feedbag.

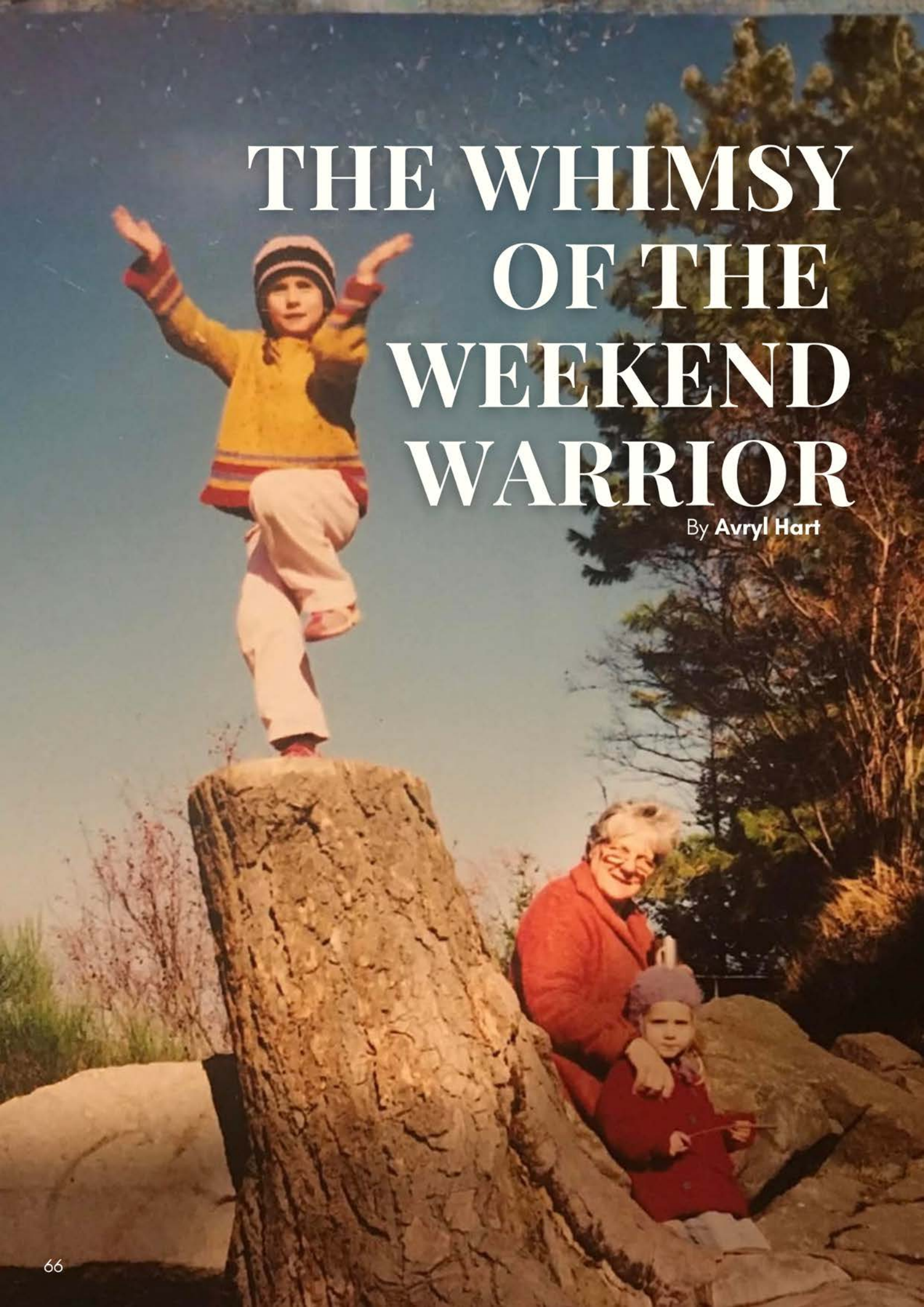
I suddenly hit the outer suburbs. Canberra! I found out from Forti that he and Courtney were already at Capital Brewing, the pub at the official end point, and would be waiting for me, so I went into turbo mode. I raced along bike paths through suburbia and along Lake Burley Griffin, using my trusty feet brakes occasionally for a sharp turn. I pulled into Capital Brewing exhausted and triumphant and was met with cheers from Forti and Courtney, who had sourced me a pizza and a whole 1.25L bottle of Fanta. Needless to say, everything was consumed.

That Hunt 1000 remains today as one of the most epic bikepacking trips that I've ever completed, and I was so glad I managed it despite all the challenges. Bikepacking in the club

The Hunt 1000 is a tough event, but MUMC runs bikepacking trips of all difficulty levels. Victoria provides many a stunning backdrop for bikepacking, with countless rail trails scattered across the state for easier trips, and networks of offroad routes through national parks for more challenging trips. If you're interested in getting into bikepacking and joining our trips, check out our club website and get in touch!





A photograph of a child in a yellow sweater and pink pants balancing on a large tree stump. The child has their arms raised. A woman in a red jacket and a younger child in a red jacket are sitting on the ground next to the stump, watching. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

THE WHIMSY OF THE WEEKEND WARRIOR

By **Avryl Hart**

FEATURE Avryl Hart

The clock ticks over, Friday afternoon becomes evening and it's time to hit the road, grabbing bags from the clubrooms, dashing home to pick up gear, meeting friends to make the best of the weekend.

It's busy and full and your chance to get out with the free time you have and enjoy nature, climbing and hiking and paddling the weekend away.

Sunday afternoon is a drive home, getting in with enough time to hang up gear to dry, put things away, grab some groceries for dinner and the week, and go to sleep.

I grew up to stories of my parents at my age, skiing and hiking and canoeing and filling their year with nature. Leaving Vancouver after work, and driving up the Sea to Sky, making it to Pemberton to sleep then a weekend full of possibilities.

As a kid it sounded wildly adventurous, a spontaneity that had left by the time I was growing up. That isn't to say that we didn't get out when I was growing up.

As young kids we lived in Nelson, a small town in BC, and our life was still full of adventure, walking along the local trails after kindy, a Saturday morning at the local Nordic Ski area exploring the forest, and long Sundays in summer Paddling along one of the local lakes, before returning home to sleep.

Once we moved to Vancouver and I had started school, it was week-long paddling trips in our summer school break, and weekend day hikes or skiing on the local mountains. The logistics of camping had become more complicated with four people and short jaunts out of the city were replaced with longer slower trips.

I was recently chatting to me parents, and mentioned that once again, I was slipping out of the city to enjoy a weekend in nature with friends. My mum mentioned that she wishes she and dad could do that too.



Annika and Avryl climbing at Mt Arapiles/Djurrite. Alexis Dudderidge.

In that moment I realised that this lifestyle of frequent and easy trips is something that takes effort and a mindset of making it happen. In the process of raising kids, they had lost that whimsy of the weekend warrior. I want them to rediscover the joy, ease and adventure of deciding on a Friday afternoon that this weekend you are going to head down the coast, find a campsite and spend the weekend doing something you love.



The name weekend warrior has a reputation in the outdoorsy community as a person who isn't as committed to the sport, someone who doesn't know what they are doing. But, for many of us with lives in the city and uni classes or work, it becomes a commitment, a dedication to getting out and doing the sports that we love at any chance that we can get.

A recipe for success and sustainability

Gear Planning: Keep your camping/climbing/kayaking gear together. If you know where it is and what you need, it takes two seconds to pack a bag.

Make the Unpacking Easy: Have a system for where you hang up wet gear. Know what can be thrown through the dishwasher and then easily repacked for the next trip.

Bits and Bobs: I have a single box full of all the small pieces, my first aid kit, dishwashing detergent, camp stove, headlamp, camp knife. When it comes time for a trip, its all in once place and easy to grab. When I get home everything that needs a clean gets put in the kitchen and everything else is thrown back in the box.

Making Eating Easy: This varies from person to person. I have a box with miscellaneous instant coffee, instant soup mix, oats, muesli bars, tinned tuna and chickpeas, and various noddles and other easy camping food. Friends have a list in their heads of easy food to grab at a shop on the way, Japanese curry or pesto pasta coming together in a flash.

By keeping meals simple and the pre-planning needed for the individual trip to a minimum, the weekend is your oyster.



Avryl with her sister, mum and dad.



Avryl and her sister in the snow in Canada



Category Runner Up: Fly Me to the Moon in Sexy Rocks by Connor Gundberg. Pie and Slide 2025





Prince of Wales Range from Frenchmans Cap, taken by John Chapman

THE FIRST PRINCE OF WALES RANGE TRAVERSE

**By Bruce Graham and
Bryan Wells**

INTRODUCTION

By **David Hogg**

The Prince of Wales Range provides one of the most challenging traverses in the Tasmanian wilderness with its jagged outcrops on the crest and dense vegetation on either side. It is also difficult to access, resulting in few parties attempting the traverse.

In summer 1953-54, two veterans of the MUMC exploratory trips to Federation Peak, Bruce Graham and Bryan Wells, embarked on the first recorded attempt to traverse the range, guided (and at times, misled) by a rather inaccurate small-scale military map. The account of their trip, that started on the Lyell Highway at the King William Range and ended at the original Lake Pedder, was prepared for a book which MUMC planned to publish for its 10th anniversary in 1954.

However, due to insufficient material being available, that book never eventuated, and the material that had been compiled found its way to the garage of the club president, Viv Pulford. In 1990, Viv passed that material on to Bill Bewsher, who was helping me update the MUMC history. Bill in turn passed the article on to me, for use as I saw fit.

Taking the MUMC history to a convenient 'endpoint' (which eventually turned out to be the 75th anniversary in 2019) was an ongoing task, extending much longer than originally planned. As the project approached its endpoint, I became aware of various reports of the first Prince of Wales Range traverse, one dating it as 1967 and another as 1963.

The authors would not have been aware of the unpublished account lying in Viv Pulford's garage at the time. I then appreciated the importance of having the original account published in full and, in consultation with current club members, decided that the most appropriate forum would be through The Mountaineer. So, after 70 years, the article written by Bruce and Bryan the publication by the club is achieving its original intention, and the historical record is corrected.

Since that historic trip, some relevant changes have taken place. Several new place names have been officially adopted – the Southern Needles is now Diamond Peak, the Southern Bluff/Mount Edward Innes is now Mount Humboldt, and the east branch of the Denison River is now Firths River.

New maps have been prepared that show the detail of the massive rock features and vegetation along the range and relocate the Denison River to the gorge between the Prince of Wales Range and the Hamilton Range, rather than joining the Gordon River further upstream. The most significant change has been the flooding of Lake Pedder, with the result that the last part of the trip along the Serpentine Valley can no longer be undertaken on foot.

In preparing the article for publication, I particularly appreciate the assistance provided by John Chapman, an MUMC life member and authority on Southwest Tasmania walks, in tracing the likely route of the trip for the map prepared to accompany the article.

Food Supplies: 26 Oz. per day oz. per day:

Granbits	1.50
Egg Powder	0.50
Dried Milk	3.50
Oxo cubes	2 per day
Rice	1.50
Pom	1.00
Dried Apricots	1.50
Nescafe/Cocoa	0.75
Sugar	2.00
Chocolate	2.00
Nuts	0.50
Butter	1.50
Honey	1.00
Cheese	0.75
Rye Bread	1.50
Flour	2.50
Bacon	1.00
Dried meat	1.00
Salami	1.50

Salt
Saccharin
Vitamin B, C.

Extract from 'The Prince of Wales Range' by Bruce Graham and Bryan Wells on food rations.

THE FIRST TRAVERSE

By **Bruce Graham and Bryan Wells**

"There will be an aircraft at Lake Pedder to meet you on the tenth of January or as soon after as weather permits."

As we walked from the office of Lloyd Jones, Chief Flying Instructor of the Aero Club of Southern Tasmania, through dimly lit hangers littered with gaudily striped sacks of food and tiny yellow Auster aircraft, Lake Pedder seemed very remote and the time at our disposal all too brief. 'As soon after as weather permits ...' Western Tasmania's annual rainfall of about one hundred and twenty inches is by no means confined to the winter months. Even in summer walking parties must equip themselves for possible blizzard conditions. The weather could swing the balance to success or failure; and in seventeen days it would be the tenth of January.

From Hobart the Lyell Highway traverses the western mountains to the mining city of Queenstown. After climbing out of the valley of the Derwent the road passes over a bleak saddle at the foot of the three northern peaks of the King William Range, forty miles from Queenstown. From this saddle we hoped to walk south to Lake Pedder, a distance of 52 miles in a straight line, though no one would care to follow a straight line in country such as this. Our route had been planned on the Queenstown four-mile military map, a sketchy publication compiled mainly from the rough notes of early explorers and surveyors. Printed across its face the following inscription suggests the nature of the country:

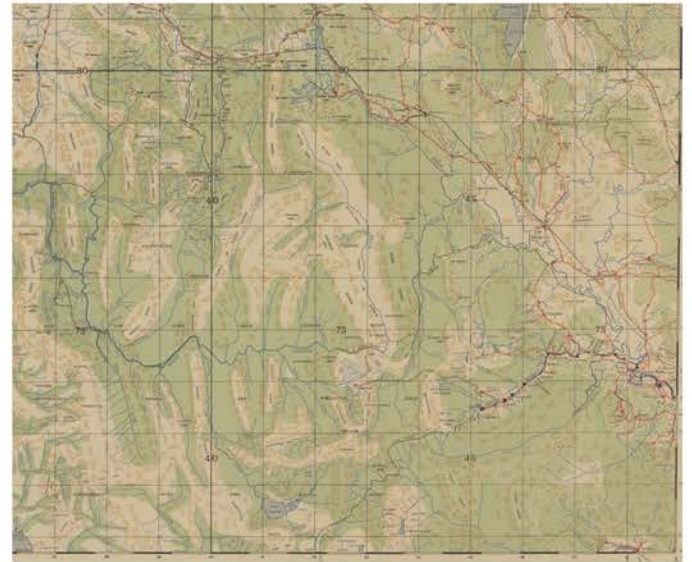
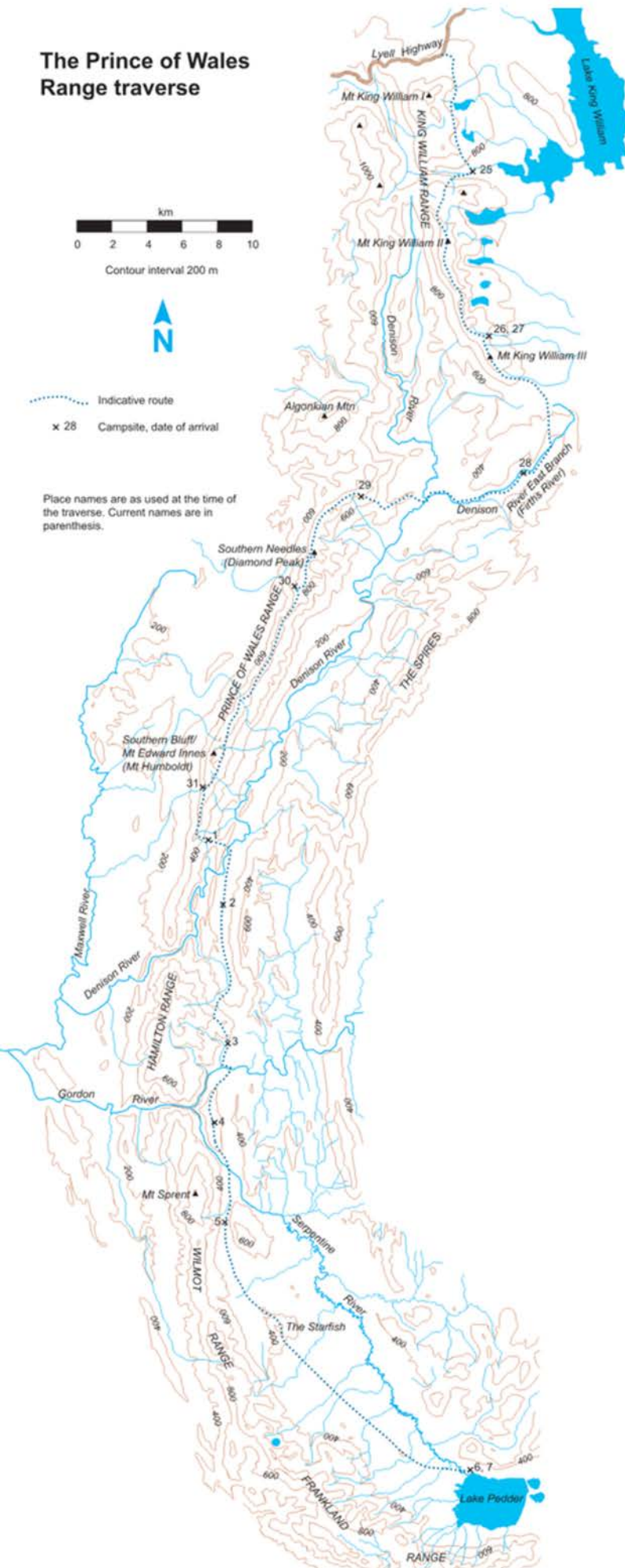
'Rugged uninhabited country valleys and low lying areas covered with impenetrable bauera and horizontal scrub interspersed with open button grass.'

Mountain chains in this area trend north and south and rise to over 4000 feet. The King William Range extends to the south for a distance of 15 miles and was to be our means of access to the little-known Prince of Wales Range. Records of visits to the Prince of Wales Range were few. In 1907 Surveyor Innes had approached the Range from the east and climbed two of its prominent peaks. In recent years, routes had been made by way of Warnes Lookout to the west and from the Spires to the east, enabling points on the Range to be reached by the Tasmanians, Chris Binks and Dave Pinkard, and by Ken Bowes of Melbourne; but the main ridge had yet to be traversed.

It was inevitable that our progress would be impeded throughout the journey by thick scrub. For this reason, we sought to minimise our loads by a choice of efficient light-weight equipment and by a ruthless rejection of all but the items we regarded as essential. We did not anticipate difficult rock, and had not the time to go in search of it, so discarded the climbing rope, whose only other conceivable use might have been to facilitate river crossings. The light petrol stove and fuel bottle carried unfailingly in the past we now regarded as superfluous. There is profound cheer in the roar of a stove and the crackle of frying bacon amid the din of rain or hail on a tent roof; but the cheer of a light pack attracted us more. We each adopted a daily ration of twenty six ounces of dehydrated food so that supplies for sixteen days added 26 pounds to our pack weights. Framed rucksack, tent and groundsheet, sleeping bag, camera, cooking utensils and a dry change of clothing brought both loads to 55 pounds.

Early in the afternoon on Christmas Day 1953, we left the Lyell Highway and followed the power line which crosses the road two miles east of the King William Saddle.

The Prince of Wales Range traverse



An extract from the 4 miles-to-inch military map, Queenstown. This map caused confusion by showing the Denison River joining the Gordon River east of the Hamilton Range instead of passing through the gorge between the Prince of Wales and the Hamilton Range. Map from National Library of Australia.

Mount Gell and the peaks of the King William Range were mantled in snow. This range is severed some miles from its northern end by a narrow valley, and by sidling to the east of Mount King William I, we hoped to enter this valley so avoiding a needless climb and descent. Leaving the powerline at the top of a low ridge we turned south across a broad shelf of button grass. Button grass grows in tussocks anything from ankle to waist high, is generally confined to valley floors and low ridge tops, and allows the easiest walking to be found in the west. Below us to the east the waters of Lake King William reflected the dull, overcast sky.

We plunged down through a forest of pandani and prickly scoparia to a small lake and skirting its western shore climbed two low ridges before dropping to a moor dotted with shallow tarns. This we crossed and after a descent through wet bush reached the floor of the valley which cuts across the King William Range. A narrow stream meanders over the valley floor. Unaccustomed as yet to our loads, we jumped hesitantly across and by dusk had established a draughty, sloping camp. A tent strung between flimsy poles, a smoking fire on which to cook a meal and cure our sodden clothes, a japara bucket of brown button grass water carried up from the stream - this was our camp, and very welcome.

A windy, clouded morning gave no promise of better weather as we moved west along the valley floor to commence the steep, toiling climb to the ridge top. This took just over an hour. The top of the range is a broad, undulating plateau studded with tarns and red dolerite blocks and here gnarled, stunted shrubs, continually harassed by the west wind find a hardy existence, while firm cushion plants underfoot make walking a delight. Occasional snowdrifts added variety as we continued our course to Mount King William II, a broad dome at the centre of the range. Sheltered beneath the summit boulders we lunched on cold flapjacks and chocolate, enlivened by a small tin of salmon which we ate with lingering joy for it was out last. Our stay was not prolonged as mist engulfed the range and light rain fell. We continued south but progress was slow.

Occasionally we found ourselves on a side spur which either ended abruptly in a swirl of mist or began a steady descent to the valley below. Realising this, we would turn about, and slowly find a way back to the main ridge.

Late in the afternoon a possible campsite was found in a gently sloping valley to the north of Mount King William III but this spot offered little shelter from the wind and no timber for tent poles so we moved on once more. We camped at last in low scrub high up on the south side of this shallow valley. Tent poles and firewood were obtained from tough, whitened snow gums while a small pool provided us with water. A cold wind drove us to our sleeping bags as soon as the meal was over.

About five o'clock next morning we were awakened when the tent, flapping in a strong wind, sagged and collapsed. As though hoping for the tent to right itself we lingered a moment before pulling on wet boots and scrambling out to inspect the damage. It was barely light. Snow was falling furiously and several inches had settled overnight. One of our tent poles had succumbed to the tent's accumulated weight of snow. A few freezing minutes, another was cut and the tent re-erected.

Here and there irregular bumps in the surface of the snow betrayed the presence of a billy or a mug and these we collected before scrambling back inside.

Any idea of moving that day was soon forgotten. In such a blizzard, the view from Mount King William III would be completely blotted out and this view was essential for our later route-finding. We spent the day in the tent. To light a fire in the open was impossible and, at meal times when powdered potato was served up mixed with iced water, we possibly regretted the omission of stove and fuel.

Next morning we breakfasted by a roaring fire in bright sunshine and were soon moving south. By this time the snow was thawing rapidly and as we climbed Mount King William III an hour later little sign remained of our day of bad weather. From this point of the range a magnificent panorama revealed the country we were to traverse in succeeding days.

The broad valley of the Denison River, a patchwork of yellow button grass and deep green rain forest stretched away to the south to find in a tangled obscurity of mountain ranges the gorges of the Gordon River. The western wall of the Denison Valley embodies the rugged length of the Prince of Wales Range, whose skyline of white rocky summits and green saddles extends either side of a characteristic centre-piece of three jagged rock peaks known as the Southern Needles. To the east of the Denison, the clear plateau around the peaks of the Spires reached as far as the Denison Range. The easy stage of our journey was over. To reach the Prince of Wales Range from the point on which we stood was likely to be more difficult. Low white, flowering shrubs merged into moderate scrub as we pushed our way down towards a broad button grassed spur to the southeast and an hour later we were dodging between the waist high tussocks. Beyond the button grass, the spur dropped steeply and in the cool gloom of a beech forest we sidled south towards the east branch of the Denison River

FEATURE Bruce Graham and Bryan Wells

Forests such as this are often free from undergrowth but inches of wet moss cover a maze of fallen logs. The banks of a small creek enabled clear walking until cutting grass and bauera in the lower reaches forced us to wade in the stream itself.

The main branch of the Denison was soon reached and after it, the button grass of the valley floor. Here we rested, draping ourselves comfortably over the button grass stumps, six and a half hours after leaving Mount King William III. For two miles we walked west over the plains and camped on the river bank just before dark. Here was dry wood which crackled into a blaze at the touch of the match. If ever a camping place reached perfection, this one surely did and we swam in the river before tea.

The almost continuous button grass of the valley made for good progress on the following morning and we had soon passed a deep rocky gorge which formed a striking landmark on our left. The Prince of Wales Range lay in full view

Near its northern end, a clear spur wound down to the Denison and we hoped that this would provide an easy route to the crest of the range, but once among the myrtle of the river's edge we lost sight of it. With some delicate steps on a partly submerged log, we crossed the Denison below the junction of the north and east branches, not far from the foot of the spur. Here the river was about fifty feet wide and we stopped on the far bank for lunch while hordes of mosquitoes lunched with us. The spur, which had looked so promising from far off, promised little but thick scrub as we drew near its foot and it was several hours before we had forced a way to a knoll four or five hundred feet above the valley floor. Once here a timbered saddle led to open slopes and with a long upward grind we reached the top of the ridge five hours after leaving the river. We perched the tent on a tiny piece of flat ground just below the crest on the eastern side. Water was siphoned from small holes between the tussocks through a length of rubber tubing. The weather was holding and we celebrated our arrival that night with an extra slice of toasted rye bread.



The Southern Bluff (Mount Humboldt) from the Campsite on the morning of 3 January.

In the following day we set off in light mist to climb the Southern Needles. Although the steep eastern side is forest clad, the main range itself is clear of scrub over most of its length. Occasionally, as an excuse for a short rest, we would find ourselves stopping to gaze back at a distant range or an isolated fire far to the west but, except for two scrubby saddles, we were not hindered and made good progress.

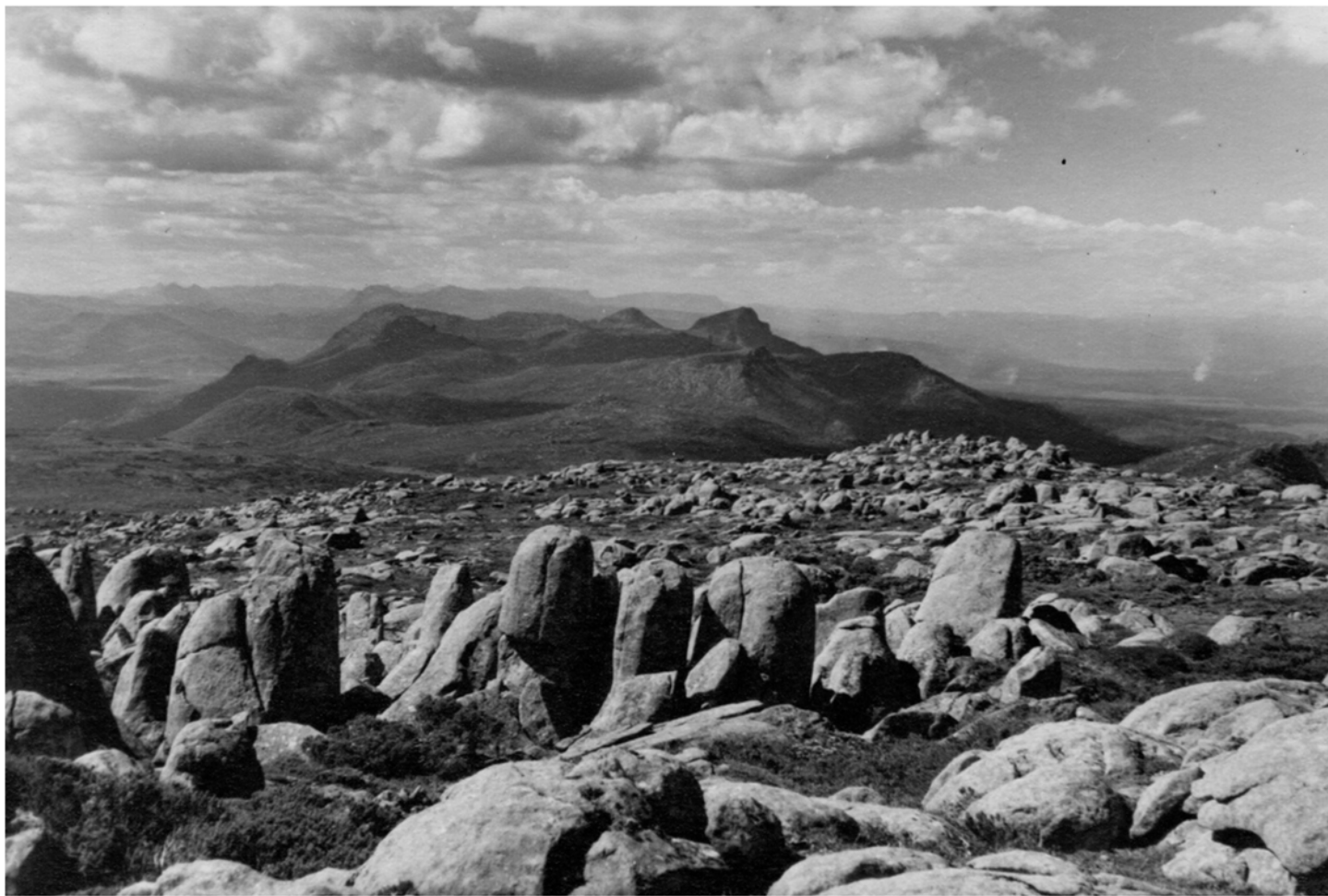
On the range we stumbled upon a snake or two but these, apart from occasional birds, were the only animals seen during the trip. We came to the three saw-tooth peaks early in the afternoon, sidled to the west of them, and returned for the climb after leaving our packs in the saddle beyond. The western peak presented no difficulty and from it we surveyed the overhanging cliff of the centre peak which dropped 150 feet to the saddle below us. An easy route to the centre peak lay along a sloping gully on the north side, from the head of which the eastern face slopes upwards at an angle of about forty degrees. From the narrow crest of this peak, most of the route we had followed was spread before us. To the west and northwest we looked out over the valleys of the Maxwell and the Jane to Frenchman's Cap; further north lay the broad dome of Algonkian Mountain detached from the Prince of Wales Range; on the east side the afternoon sun lit Wyld's Crag, the Spires, and even distant Mount Anne, while to the south the range culminated in Mount Edward Innes, highest point of the Southern Bluff.

With hopes of camping on a high plateau a mile to the south of us we left the summit cairn, placed there by Ken Bowes, and descended as massed clouds rolled in from the west. We had no sooner regained our packs than the mist came down. Reaching the plateau, we sought to camp on the east side in case the weather should deteriorate. Our wanderings in the mist brought us to a grassy shelf with bleached sticks long enough for tent poles and here we camped, but later the mist cleared to reveal not a view of the eastern mountains but the jungle of the Maxwell Valley to the west. In the mist our sense of direction had been completely reversed.

A hot, sunny morning found us moving southward along the high open ridge toward our immediate objective, the Southern Bluff massif. At midday, from a low peak, we caught sight of a far more remote goal – the blue water of Lake Pedder, with its single line of shimmering white beach, lying at the foot of the Frankland Range.

By mid-afternoon we found ourselves involved in the approaches to the Bluff, and were shocked at what we found. Chris Binks has described the Bluff as 'saw-edged' and no description could be more fitting, for here the range is cut by deep ravines which cross at right angles to its length, dividing the southern mass into a great series of separate peaks. The remaining five hours of daylight allowed barely enough time to cope with such an obstacle and the chances of camping anywhere on the saw-edged mass were remote. The whole of the Bluff would have to be crossed before dark. We set off, at times contouring below the great clefts, at times hoisting packs up their sheer sides. The highest point, Mount Edward Innes, was reached at five o'clock but we left it almost immediately. For several hours we sidled to the east of the peaks and, as the sun dropped low to leave the Denison Valley in shadow, passed high above a small lake, half hidden beneath vertical grey cliffs.

We climbed at last to an exposed saddle between two walls of rock. It was now high time to camp but the twisted stems of the shrubs gave as little promise of a tent pole over three feet long as did the rocky soil of water. A westerly wind, increasing in force, decided the issue and we moved on intent now on one end – to get off the Southern Bluff and to reach its southerly continuation, the Hamilton Range. Long after the sun had set, we scrambled off the west side of the Southern Bluff and reached the tangle of manuka and cutting grass which covers this lower ridge. A space for the tent was cut from this tangle and water was obtained from a tiny trickle in a scrub-choked gully to the east. In darkness we balanced a fire on a narrow outcrop projecting above the bushes. It was New Year's Eve.



Looking north from Mount King William II on the second day.

A hot brew of soup dispelled our weariness but neither of us voiced the suggestion of sitting up to greet the New Year.

Friday was a day of continuous drizzle and a bitter wind. We broke camp later than usual and, keeping to the ridge top, had covered about a mile of wet button grass before it merged into thicker scrub.

When tracing out a route on the map, our intention had been to follow this low ridge to the Wilmot and Frankland Ranges further south, but this cold wall of rain-soaked scrub, coupled with the poor visibility, called up an intense aversion to the Hamilton Range and a longing for the valley of the Denison. Reaching a convenient spur, we ate a hurried lunch under the shelter of the groundsheet before descending through very thick bauera. Near the lunch spot, we had passed a rusted axehead and a roughly made scrub hook, relics of a survey party of earlier days.

Bauera gave way to moss jungle as we dropped down. Here grew the tall, slender *Richea pandanifolia*, a column of dead foliage surmounted by green palm-like fronds, whose dead leaves will burn in the heaviest rain. Here we stopped for a welcome respite from the chill of wet clothes. Before reaching the Denison a low ridge would have to be crossed and, by five o'clock, we had still not reached it so camped in the rain forest. The sassafras and horizontal scrub of the forest are poor fuels but the fire lasted long enough to cook our meal of dried meat, rice, apricots and cocoa. This had been our eighth day. Nine days from now we were due at Lake Pedder. The inadequacy of a 26-ounce diet was becoming evident for fatigue was reducing our daily stages. The Gordon River had still to be crossed and we expected this to be a hazardous operation though, as it turned out, finding the Gordon proved to be more difficult than making the crossing.

Although time was so short and the weather was clearing, we did not break camp next day till after lunch. Trousers soon wear out in the constant battle with scrub and the morning was spent in patching clothing and in lavishing the contents of the first aid kit upon our feet, which had been irritated by ill-fitting boots. We crossed the ridge which separated us from the Denison a mile or so above a narrow gorge which cut across its length. A sharp descent brought us to the river which was scarcely knee deep where we waded it. The eastern bank allowed easy walking beneath huge beech trees but after a mile or more we lost the river.

Apparently, it had swung sharply west through the gorge in the low ridge. To the east we were separated from the button grass of the valley by a quarter mile belt of insidious bauera which took more than an hour to cross. We hailed the button grass with delight for a broad plain continued down the eastern side of the valley for more than five miles. We turned south and had covered a mile before we camped.

Next morning, cameras were brought into action early as the long battlements of the Southern Bluff towered high over a shred of white mist above the valley floor. We breakfasted on cheese omelettes and set off. The Prince of Wales Range now fell behind as we followed the button grass lead but the clear going appeared to be terminated a few miles ahead by a low scrubby ridge. Here we expected to find the Gordon. If we were to believe the map, the Denison was flowing almost parallel to our course though separated from us by the low ridge we had crossed the day before. Carved through the southern end of the Hamilton Range was a deep rocky gorge and this we assumed to contain the Gordon downstream from its junction with the Denison. But as we came to the end of the plain there was no sign of the Gordon and, completely baffled by its absence, we began to climb the range to the southwest.

As we struggled up the hillside under a burning sun, two facts dawned on us.

The Gordon must be still to the south and the deep gorge below the Hamilton Range contained not the Gordon but the Denison River which apparently joined the Gordon far away to the west. The pace unconsciously quickened through button grass and low manuka as we neared the crest of the ridge, hoping to find a view to the south. Then from our feet the ground fell steeply away in gullies and ridges which ran south to a heavily timbered gorge-like valley some three miles distant. This then was the Gordon River, previously hidden from us by a mountain range not indicated on the map. Ten miles away, Mount Sprent dominated the Wilmot Range while, in the haze of the afternoon, Lake Pedder, fifteen miles further on, looked very remote and even strangely unattainable.

It was four o'clock. We were behind schedule. After a brief discussion we started for the Gordon. Contouring to the southeast, we crossed a steep-sided gully and followed the crest of a clear spur. Lower down, the scrub grew higher and thicker and we camped two hours before dark near a pool of muddy water.

Next morning after the ritual of granbits and cheese omelettes – we were down to the rind of the cheese – the scrub on the spur grew ever more robust until, after an hour's toil, we climbed an isolated tree to inspect the way ahead.

Here we glimpsed the waters of the Gordon. With renewed hope, we forsook the ridge, finding much easier going in the horizontal scrub of a gully. At 11.30 we heard the roar of the Gordon and reached it soon after. Just here the water was very deep as it flowed smoothly between rock banks a chain apart, but above the rapids a short distance upstream it was wider and faster and we crossed in three feet of swirling water. We took the opportunity for a bath, long overdue, and for half an hour were busy with soap and towel.

We climbed the south bank of the Gordon to a heavily timbered ridge but soon left it to descend into a gully to the east.

Here we lunched and carried out running repairs on our clothes. For a hundred yards we followed a small stream but resolved at last to climb the steep ridge to the west. As we left the dampness of the creek and the hillside grew steeper, a wall of bauera twelve feet in height formed a dense mesh which required incredible labour to negotiate. A slow crawling pace was the best we could manage and we took turns to lead with many a short spell. But the satisfaction of being 'south of the Gordon' was very real. We made up a short song about it and the scrub seemed much easier. A short scramble over stumpy button grass led us to the top of a clear range running south from the Gordon. At a suitable camping place, we dropped our packs and climbed to a high point on the ridge. Immediately below to the west the thin silver thread of the Serpentine River, which drains Lake Pedder, snaked down a deep gorge to join the turbulent waters of the Gordon. As far as we could see down the Gordon, though the river was soon hidden behind steep rocky spurs, there was no sign of the course of the Denison. According to our map, the Denison was more than two miles to the east.

Morning clouds had followed light overnight rain as we set off next day to walk south along this ridge. The top was clear and our optimism mounted. Why, we might even have days to spare! In two and a half hours we had reached the southern end of the range opposite Mount Sprent and overlooking a wide, flat valley, over which flowed a placid Serpentine after issuing from a gorge in a low range to the southeast. The Frankland Range, which is continuous with the Wilmot, was now very near. The miles of flat button grass leading to the still distant Lake Pedder emphasised the majesty of the mountains which surround the lake on three sides. We descended to the wide valley and were surprised to find the Serpentine only shin deep, for Lake Pedder has been flooded for many months beforehand. A leisurely midday meal was eaten on the far bank in preparation for a hard afternoon. We expected scrub, having seen it from the ridge in the morning, but with luck it would be the last before we reached Pedder.

Under the slopes of Sprent, we followed the valley west of south. Bauera, by now an old friend, soon took charge and, not wishing to carry the friendship too far we moved to the southern slopes of the valley where progress was a little easier.

The creek in this valley flows into the Serpentine and, as the scrub to the south grew thicker, we returned to its banks, following them upstream through moss forest. The creek came to an end at an insignificant saddle.

Timber soon gave way to button grass and we camped below the Franklands near a tree lined stream. Now we knew what lay ahead – a long trek over twelve miles of button grass, and we determined to cover it on the following day and to camp at Lake Pedder itself.

It was going to be hot and windless. We could feel it as we moved about the camp preparing breakfast. South of us the sprawling ridges of a detached mountain known as the Starfish suggested that we might have to detour. As we crossed the intervening button grass we debated this question of climbing over the Starfish or passing it on the left, and at length decided to climb it. In the valley at its foot, we were slowed by head-high scrub but, once out of this, the way was clear.

From the crest of the Starfish, the perfectly flat foreground below us made the lake look deceptively close, appearing to be about four miles off while the actual distance was nearer nine. To our left, the Serpentine crawled over its valley in a complex pattern of meanders and beyond it rose the scrubby dolerite cap of Mount Wedge.

Behind us, the Prince of Wales Range was not no more than a ripple on the skyline. We came down from the Starfish over burnt button grass and took a direct line for Lake Pedder. After three and a half hours with no break in the monotony of the plain by which to measure our progress, and under a scorching sun, we came to the Crumbledown, a bare, isolated hill two miles from the water's edge.

FEATURE Bruce Graham and Bryan Wells

Avoiding the marshes near the lake, we came at last to an admirable campsite on a stream which flows into Pedder near its northwestern corner. We had arrived – with two days to spare – and, almost under the shadow of the Franklands, sat stoking the fire until late at night.

When we emerged from the tent, the sun was high overhead ... an hour's stroll round the shore of the lake brought us to the main beach, a strip of dazzling white sand two miles long and fifty yards wide which is used as a natural landing ground for light aircraft – a distinction which it shares with the beach at Cox's Bight on the South Coast. Although the surface was uneven it was reassuring to find that the flood waters had receded far enough to make a landing possible. From the imprint of bare toes in the sand we knew we had company.

Camped above the beach were four members of the Hobart Walking Club, who were able to supply us with some sugar and salt and who led us to the two ageing tents which constitute the 'Prospector's Camp'.

Here we trod warily, for snakes were numerous. With two days in hand there was ample opportunity for a skirmish with the Frankland Range but we settled down instead to apricots and custard.

The same afternoon the far-off purr of an aircraft heralded the arrival of Lloyd. He had come from Hobart to test the beach and now pronounced it almost fit. He would return for us the following morning and with that he was gone. In half an hour he would be back in his office. It seemed fantastic.

Precisely at ten o'clock on the Friday morning the Auster wheeled over the blue water, gradually lost height, and came bumping in over the hard sand, swerving to avoid the puddles. Soon we were loaded and ready to depart. The plane took off, banked, swooped low over the camp, where a previous party had scratched 'HAPPY NEW YEAR' in the sand, and headed out across the Huon Plains.

The Auster aircraft on the beach at Lake Pedder







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