



The Message Stick

July 2018

Mackay Bushwalkers' Club Inc. PO Box 1313, Mackay, 4740

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Future Events

The Gooseponds.....	1 st July
Christmas Rocks.....	1 st July
60 th Birthday Party.....	7 th July
Creek to Creek.....	8 th July
Smalleys Beach to Cape Hillsborough.....	15 th July
General Meeting.....	18 th July
Mt Dalrymple.....	22 nd July
Blue Water Trail.....	22 nd July
Homevale Camp.....	28 th & 29 th July



*Photoshoot in the dry waterfall on Cut Creek
before climbing Mt Bridgman*

Club Officers

President	Clive Goodson	4954 9338	Contact Officer	Coral Morgan	49578474
Vice President	Carole Weekes	4954 6108	Walks Coordinator	Coral Morgan	49578474
Secretary	Donna Burges	0488 787953	Assis Walks Coordinator	Frances Eiteneuer	49576028
Treasurer	Ian Burgess	0428 875 991	Equipment Officer	Julie Vella	0448076983
Publicity Officer	Charles Hamlet	0478 772 418	Safety Officer	Charles Hamlet	0478 772 418
Newsletter Editor	Jenny Wooding	0447 091 532			

From the Editor

The first 2 walks for 1st July have already been mentioned in the June newsletter and on the Club Facebook page so have not been included in this newsletter.

A reminder once again that all club memberships are up for renewal!

Congratulations to all who completed the Larapinta Track – it looked like a fabulous trip.

I have attached to the end of the newsletter a trip report sent in by Mel, Charles and Bruce who also undertook the Larapinta Track and which makes for interesting reading.

Garry and I are hoping to see a lot of you at our combined 60th Party for a fun filled night.

**Items for the next newsletter should
be sent to
jennywooding@dodo.com.au
prior to 24th July**

Key to Walks Grading System

Distance

S = short – under 5km
M = medium – 5-10km
L = long – over 10km

Terrain

1-3 = Graded or open terrain, no scrub
4-7 = Bush, minor scrub, rainforest,
Rocks, creeks, rockhopping, scrambling
8-10 = Bush as above + thick scrub, major rock
Scrambling using hands, technical

Difficulty

1-3 = Easy, suitable for beginners
4-7 = Medium, reasonable fitness required
8-10 = Hard, strenuous, fit walkers only

Future Events

All trip leaders please ensure you collect the club gear bag from Julie before undertaking your walk.

Please contact the leader to nominate for all walks

Eimeo Creek To Reliance Creek and Back Sunday 8th July

Leader: Daphne Goodson 0417 706 240

Depart: 8.30 am from Mackay, or 9 am from Eimeo Creek car park.

Note the later starting time -

Journey: 30k - \$3.00

Grade: L24

Estimated walking time: 4-5 hours

Total of all uphill: negligible

Pace: average

Terrain: level beach and a few rocks, paved track at Bucasia end

Vegetation: Very little – mangroves at northern end, coastal bush at Bucasia end.

Expect: sand-flies, heat if sunny, and possibly rain, but also stunning scenery. The plan is to walk from the northern bank of Eimeo Creek, near the Bucasia Caravan Park, to Shoal Point picnic area, and then head on to the mouth of Reliance Creek, which is about 7 kilometres, and then to make the return journey.

It usually takes about 90 minutes from Bucasia to Shoal Point, and then another 45 minutes from Shoal Point to Reliance Creek, but don't forget to multiply all this by two. There are many beautiful

spots for drink stops and lunch, and it will be a relaxed day, but incorporating a fair walk as well.

This is well suited to beginners, and those wanting a shorter walk can meet us, or leave, at Shoal Point picnic area.

Please contact the leader to nominate for this walk.

Smalley's Beach to Cape Hillsborough Sunday 15th July

Leader : Ken Fihelly 0427 718282
Depart : 7am
Journey : 100 kms. \$10 (includes car shuffle)
Grade : M55

Estimated walking time: 5 hrs **Total of all uphill sections:** 300m **Pace:** average **Terrain:** very uneven **Vegetation:** rain forest, open woodland, long grass, grass-trees, mangroves **Expect:** taped rough trail, some steep slopes, great views, insects, gullies, hot conditions in open sections. This will be a through walk involving a car shuffle, and will start at Smalley's Beach and follow the old track, which is now mainly just a trail, up to the top and over to the ranger's hut at Cape Hillsborough. The journey will take us through a variety of landscape and vegetation types, and the degree of difficulty varies quite a lot as well, with some fairly level sections, and plenty of steep climbs. There are some rocky sections and some easy gully crossings, but on the whole it will not be too demanding, and the last part of the day will be the easiest. Please carry water for the whole day, and remember the insect repellent and sunblock. Sunglasses or other eye protection is recommended for the grass-trees.

Induction 6.30pm/ General Meeting 7.30pm Wednesday 18th July

Downstairs room, Mackay Family Care and Community Support Association Centre 60 Wellington Street, Mackay. Newcomers and visitors welcome.

Induction by Donna and Ian

Mt Dalrymple Day Walk Sunday 22nd July

Leader: Kevin Smith Ph 49696068 0417 326634

Depart: 5:30 am
Grade: L77
Journey: 200 km \$20

We will go via the western tail and return the same way.

Mount Dalrymple is the highest mountain in Central Queensland at over 1200m. A good level of fitness is required as it takes more than 4 hours to get to the top, with a number of ups and downs along the way. Hence the early start.

There will be some creek water along the way. We will stop at the Mt David Lookout (both of them). We hope to spend some time on the top of Mt Dalrymple and look at the Finch Hatton rock carvings and plaque as well as the great views and rock formations.

Blue Water Trail Sunday 22nd July

Leader: Coral Morgan 49578474

This is an easier option for those not wanting to tackle Mt Dalrymple. The Blue Water Trail loops around Mackay and covers a distance of approx. 17kms. People will be able to join in for all or part of the distance. More details available when phoning.

Homevale Camp 28th and 29th July

Leader: Jenny Wooding 49440236 0447091532
Depart: 10am
Journey: 240km \$24.00

Saturday: We will drive out to Mt Britton in time for lunch and to set up camp. For the afternoon we will walk up the western ridge behind the town and it will be a spectacular place for photographers to capture the changing late afternoon colours on Sydney Heads and the Marling Spikes. We will return to camp via an old road.

Sunday: I will be leading Clarke's Pinnacle which is a challenging walk. However there are plenty of alternatives in the area for anyone who would prefer an easier day.

Clarke's Pinnacle 29th July

Map Ref: Mirani 652335

Grade: M87

Estimated Walking Time: 6hrs **Total of all uphill sections:** 450m **Pace:** Average **Terrain:** Very

uneven terrain **Vegetation:** Open Forest, thick scrub **Expect:** much steep slopes, steep scrambles, loose rocks, lantana, vines, spear grass

Clarke's Pinnacle is the "dog's tooth" formation in the Diamond Cliffs area and can be seen from

many places in the Pioneer Valley. The average walker could find the day tough but rewarding, with excellent views. Water will need to be carried for the day.

Previous Activities

St Lawrence Wetlands Weekend June 8th to 10th, 2018

Once again a few representatives from the Bushwalkers' Club experienced a wonderful weekend at St Lawrence, organized by the Isaac Regional Council.



I met up with Kerry and Deb Wilson at the camp grounds and selected suitable sites for our vehicles. There were no takers in the tent area this year and the grass and trees looked a bit dry and jaded. However there was the usual amount of travellers present. Friday afternoon allowed us to relax and have a wine and cheese refreshment at the pavilion before dinner.

Saturday morning, up early for a guided walk around the wetlands and a bird watching commentary provided by Allan Briggs and a few other enthusiasts. We were not afforded the usual morning or evening display of Magpie geese coming and going this year as it was explained that the tubers they like to eat were harder to forage in the hardened mud, so these birds had relocated further North to easier pickings. Still in all, we had plenty of other species to observe, Black swans, Comb Crested Jacana, Cotton-Pygmy Geese to name a few.

Saturday morning, up early for a guided walk around the wetlands and a bird

During the course of Saturday we were joined by Edie and Dale who travelled by Bus from Mackay and we met up with Cheryl also. There were plenty of stalls to display hand crafts and showcase council sponsored services to wild animal and weed control. An interesting feature this year was the nature weaving demonstrations provided by Fijian artisans who made baskets and traditional items from palm tree fronds. Also found Snakes, Lizards and baby croc on display and handling if you dared. The display of stone artefacts and rope making also of interest I found.

We took a bus tour of the township to the Pub which is under new management and more appealing. We sampled some of their local home-made pies which were so tasty. The emphasis from the community of St Lawrence is to promote the area with favourable memories, so with the odd street displays in front of some residences and some fruit stalls and the large Croc display, there was plenty of colour and diversity to admire. The bus took us out to the cemetery to try to find the oldest headstone and listen to the rolling commentary by our local guide.



The return trip allowed us to take a look through the Court House and Lockup and an informative history of the St Lawrence Police station and court of Petty Sessions. The courthouse is the oldest wooden courthouse in

Queensland and is in good condition for its age. The local Policeman has a keen interest in the local history and provided a very interesting overview of their function.

Some festival goers were able to indulge in Chilli Mud Crabs and wine for lunch, while there were plenty of other food available and the usual bar facility. There was an excellent cooking display on for most of the day provided by Matt Golinski. He kept large groups entertained with his skills and demonstrations with various dishes. I witnessed the skinning and slicing of a large Barramundi then the simple cooking and dressing,

The evening meal was provided in the pavilion and we had a three course dinner and sweets. There was a band close by to entertain the diners and festival goers which made for an enjoyable day.

Sunday allowed us to take our time and have breakfast at the pavilion if you desired then pack up and head off to the next destination. Kerry and I took a drive out to the old Meatworks and further to the river and boat ramp where the original port used to be.

We all had a pleasant time and once again enjoyed the company and the festivities. See you there again soon.

Bryan.

Mt Bridgman Sunday 3rd June

A group of 14 of us set off for Mt Bridgeman with 8 of the party being male – it's not often the boys outnumber us girls.



This was an enjoyable day although the vegetation proved a little more difficult than when we last undertook the walk. Cyclone Debbie had knocked a few trees over along the way which added to the challenge. However the weather was crystal clear which gave us expansive views when we reached the summit. The large rock formations on

the peak before the actual Mt Bridgeman provided us with awesome views. I personally think these rocks are more spectacular than the peak of Mt Bridgman.

Thanks to everyone who came along to make it such a great day and to Ken for his help with navigation.

Jenny



Back of Finch Hatton Sunday June 16



A mild partly cloudy day greeted us, as 8 of us made our way to the watertank behind Finch Hatton. Memories of an easy open track up the ridge were soon dispelled, as we walked into a chest high wall of thick grass. The track was barely visible under it, as we pushed through it and up the hill. I was soon tiring, and the lead was swapped a couple of times to spread the effort. After about half a kilometre, the ridge became more rocky and the grass much shorter. Views started to open up as we climbed higher. The morning tea rocks were reached, and a

chance to rest. The final climb to the top of the ridge was completed, and the views over Finch Hatton to Mt

Dalrymple, and along the Pioneer valley were spectacular, as were the views to Mt Pinnacle and Teemburra Dam. After lunch, we retraced our steps, taking care on the slippery slope down, and I was keen to find the track through the grass we made, on the way up. Mostly we did, and we were soon back at the cars. I found a tick on me that night, and I hope that was the only one found.

Ken

Eungella Lookouts Sunday 24th June

Frances rounded up a group of willing walkers from town to meet up with four more of us from up the Pioneer Valley, to drive to the Broken River carpark, fifteen of our group in all. Today we took in part of the Overland Track starting at the road bridge. Fortunately some Platypus were able to be spotted, also some turtles and a flighty Azure Kingfisher.



We made our way along the graded track to cross the Broken River, regroup for a photo stop, then proceed to a corner marked on our GPS where we started the confronting task of making our way through fallen rainforest, the resultant damage from recent Cyclone Debbie. Once clear of the small creek we basically headed east and tried to follow a previous GPS tracking. The overgrowth played tricks with the satellites so plotting was spasmodic at times. Once on the edge of the Eungella Rim, it was just a matter of keeping this to our left and negotiating the dense undergrowth, lantana and wait-a-while. At times the traversing became much easier by following pig tracks, which sped up things considerably.



After a while, we came upon a clearing in the timber and found a deeply grassed area on a point which is known as Catherines Lookout. From here one could take in the grand views to the East and West of the Pioneer Valley and recognise prominent mountain tops to the North, notably Mt Dalrymple. This was a great place to find a comfortable seat and enjoy Smoko in the pleasant morning sunshine.

From here we proceeded further along the edge of the rim, within 50 metres or so at times, picking the best track to avoid prickly plants and vines and heading toward Palms Lookout. At least that was the goal. On a few occasions there were breaks in the vegetation to get a clear view of the valley below. By midday we had reached our previous destination amongst the large expanse of Cabbage tree Palms and their carpet of fallen fronds, so we decided to have a rest and take a lunch break. The destination of The Palms lookout still evades me as a timely return had to be considered for our group.

Return was basically by the same route with assistance from Ken's tracking, but again considering the wild pigs for making their trails, made life easier. We came across Penny's favourite site for the Pseudo vanilla Vines, amongst the destruction of fallen trees again. Unfortunately we didn't find Rosie's hat from a previous walk, as it appears, by some 30 metres. Now which tree was that?



I wish to thank Frances for organising the group today and hope everyone had an enjoyable time. Welcome to the newer members and I look forward to seeing you all on future bushwalks.
Bryan...

Larapinta Trail May 2018

Another travelogue about the Larapinta End to End walk is probably not needed, so we're just looking at special moments that stand out, then perhaps go on to describing the day to day adventures.

The flight over to Alice Springs was special, all the waiting, the planning, the training for the walk, the anticipation of things to come, all of these were in the past and we were really 'doing it'. Moments in time along the 'track' like the dingo howl as we were setting off, Dave the NSW greyhound setting the pace at the front, Bruce the toastmaster whose breakfast was stolen by an errant dingo, Mel and her exclamations of delight as she spied another Holly Grevillea, Charles and his 'exclamations' as we commenced yet another stony creek bed section, Peter and Jen whose nightly tipples kept us civilised – and of course there were Alice and Ryan, our excellent guides who conjured camp oven meals 'to die for', who coaxed and cajoled us through the steepest bits, who had no mercy at all waking us at ungodly hours, their only saving grace being a full coffee pot ready for the bleary eyed risers.

Getting to, and finally seeing and believing the names of places that we had read so much about in preparation for our trip, was awesome, Simpsons Gap, Ormiston, Serpentine and Hugh Gorges, Ellery Creek Big Hole, Glen Helen and of course the big one at the end, Mt Sonder (She was called a variety of names as the big moment approached, more of that later)

The enjoyment factor that's derived from any trail walk or journey that you do in company with others depends to a degree on how well the group gets on. Our group of 8 was great, we'd sit around the campfire swapping stories, we'd laugh at the poor unfortunate who earned the daily 'dunce of the day' award, we'd encourage each other when the going got tough and generally enjoyed each others company. It helped that there were 5 of us who knew each other already perhaps, but that's the luck of the draw.

What did we do:

May the 5th finally arrived, 10 months after originally booking our trip and it was an eager 5 who met in Brisbane for the midday flight to Alice Springs. Bruce, his sister Jen and her husband Peter, Mel and Charles boarded the Qantas 717 ready for a reasonably sleepy three hour flight, but in reality, it was such an interesting journey. Passing over the Channel country seeing the myriad rivers and streams that flow southward, then passing over the corner of the Simpson Desert kept us enthralled.

We had a pre-trek afternoon meeting with our guides Ryan and Alice at 'The Lone Dingo', an outfitters store catering to any and every demand imaginable, we also met the other three trekkers of our group, John and Carolin from Port Melbourne and Dave from Sydney. A bonding session at 'Montes', one of the better known pubs in Alice, was then the order of the day, with meals, not hangovers the priority.

DAY 1 – ALICE SPRINGS TO SIMPSONS GAP – About 24km

Early start, pickup at 0700 with Alice and Ryan packing everything into the trailer, us into the 'troopy' and heading for the nearby start. Freezing when we started walking, but a brisk pace soon put paid to that, just as we started, we heard a long mournful howl from the distance – we took it to be a dingo welcoming call. Such great timing though!

Crossing the train track (didn't see the Ghan) we saw a wallaby and joey nearby who represented the sum total of our kanga sightings for the trip, Alice was a font of knowledge, explaining the different forage plants, buffle grass etc, the bloodwood trees, Mulla Mulla (Useless plant)

We got to climb Euro Ridge (a tall, sharp edged escarpment which overlooked the beginning of one of the ranges we would cross over later). Exhausted we had to wander up a riverbed to Simpsons Gap. Sacred place, don't touch the water! Then a pleasant surprise, watermelon in the carpark and then by car back to the camp where Ryan had prepared dinner. We spread out our swags and had some dinner around our fake campfire before everyone looked sheepishly at the time (8pm) and crept away to their swags.

DAY 2 – SIMPSONS GAP TO JAY CREEK – About 26km

Fairly exhausted the day before, but the early start at 0545 ensured coffee was the important topic, that and the eggs on toast, and before long the day seemed to be full of promise, the previous travails mostly forgotten. Flies. Lots and lots of flies. That was the common theme for the day, almost drowning out the protests from my poor aching legs, the ascents were bad enough, but the descents soon became what I called a refined

medieval torture – loose rocky inclines, fatigue and my natural good humour (Yeah!) all played a part. But, we finally camped at the Jay Creek trailhead camp which was located over a riverbed. Alice said we may hear cows during the night as they headed down the riverbed to Fishbowl Creek. We slept under the stars again after eating dinner around our fake campfire. It was much warmer than the night before.

DAY 3 – JAY CREEK TO STANDLEY CHASM – 13.6KM

A shorter day, but the briefing didn't actually describe the hills that we were to face, luckily I think otherwise I may have called for a referee... There was a lot of creek bed walking which we grew to scowl over, but there were always new things to keep interest going, Holly Grevillea with tiny red grevillea flowers about 2 inches long. Ryan was most instructive when describing how and where to dig under particular bushes to find the elusive Witchetty Grub. Finally came to a canyon consisting of red/orange rock, stunningly beautiful. We then had an "M" shape climb (up, down, up, down) into Standley Chasm. Also saw pine trees and cycads for the first time. The campground was at the trailhead and it was a privately cordoned off area with, wait for it, HOT SHOWERS. (Oh What a Feeling)

DAY 4 – STANDLEY CHASM TO BIRTHDAY WATERHOLE – 17.9KM

Up at 5.45am to leave at 6.30am. We set off down the road from the campsite before leaving the road and heading into the countryside (a riverbed). We then started to ascend a long and steep (mountain side) climb to Reveal Saddle for a restbreak before heading upwards to Brinkley's Bluff (1208m) which is the second highest point in the NT. Sat down for lunch on top of Brinkley's Bluff and admired the vast views before heading down a very steep descent before making our way up another saddle and then making our way down to a creek bed for a 4km hike (across even and slightly undulating terrain). Really delighted to see the trailhead after this big day but then discovered we had to walk about 800m up a sandy riverbed which was exhausting. We made it to Birthday Waterhole which was the signal for the Mackay 5 to have their first swim (Mel paddled). A crow kept us amused by stealing Bruce's stuff from his swag, despite his best efforts his sunscreen lotion flew high and was never seen again.

DAY 5 – BIRTHDAY WATERHOLE TO HUGH GORGE 16KM

Leaving our campsite at Birthday Waterhole (and the 800m trek through sand) to the trailhead, we entered a creek bed where we found a bush banana on our way to Spencer Gorge. We ascended steeply to Windy Saddle and quickly found out how it got its name, the sweat on your back felt like it was turning to ice. Leaving Windy Saddle we ascended further up to Razorback Ridge which was quite narrow and exposed in sections, in fact a rocky ridge where the last thing that you'd expect would be a tree with an overhanging branch. With Alice and Mel at the rear end of the group shouts went out to out to Bruce that there was an overhanging ghost gum on the ridgeline. Charles (who was behind Bruce) obviously didn't hear and next thing BANG! He hit the branch, sat down abruptly and earned 'The Dunce of the day award'. The climb down off the ridge was scary at times with one particular section requiring you to hang on to the rock and swing around to the track on the other side. (Not for the faint of heart!) We then climbed up over the spine of the ridge before switchbacking ALL THE WAY DOWN for what seemed forever in a quite exposed position (we found one tree to rest in the shade) down to Fringe Lilly Creek for lunch. After lunch we went up Fringe Lilly Creek towards Hugh Gorge, spotting it in the distance thankfully, thankfully because we'd had just about enough of creek stones, stairs, switchbacks and scree. Dinner of Vege Korma and Naan Bread helped restore good spirits, so much so that Bruce, Mel and I stayed up chatting and solving the riddles of the twentieth century till the late hour of 9pm before retiring to our riverbed swags. Star gazing has its good points, not so though when Mars is gleefully sighted, and announced, but results only in a series of grunts.

DAY 6 – HUGH GORGE TO ROCKY GAP 15.8KM (PART 1 OF 2 OF SECTION 6)

Up at 6.45am for a 7.30am start time. A nice well worn track across the Alice Valley between the Chewing Range that we had been travelling on, and the Heavitree Range to the S/West, a few undulating hills to cross over with the first sighting of Mt Sonder a highlight. Stopped at Ghost Gum Flat (a square timber rest bench under the shade of a huge bloodwood) with a huge ghost gum nearby. After a quick rest we travelled on with nothing spectacular to note. Finally at camp around lunchtime, very windy and cold as it had been for most of the day after walking about 500m past the trailhead camp. We had sushi for lunch (made it ourselves!) and then sat around all afternoon reading, washing, re-packing our bags and relaxing. A short hiking day today

but still hard on the feet despite a good even track with little to no rocks to consider. Chilli Chicken Broccolini and couscous for tea. We slept another night in the open (this time behind some trees for shelter from the wind). Freezing cold!!

DAY 7 – ROCKY GAP TO ELLERY CREEK 15KM (PART 2 OF 2 OF SECTION 6)

Up at 6.45am. Freezing. Luckily, the wake up call from Alice heralds the coffee pot readiness, so with incentives like that, boots go on fairly quickly, and with no need to change from thermals etc just yet, stagger across to where the toastmaster Bruce is already ensconced in his morning Toast duty. After the mandatory egg on toast we headed off again over the Alice Valley, It was windy as hell, still freezing and it made walking tiresome fairly quickly. Stopped at the bottom of the saddle before heading over and onto the backside of the Heavytree Range. It was quite steep going over the saddle so a break at the top overlooking the Alice Valley was gratefully received. We could then see it was totally different terrain with lots of what looked like volcanic rocks which were purple and a whole array of new plants such as the native plum, native fuschia and red mulga which were the eucalypts with red stems and main trunk underground. This allows the red mulga to regenerate following bushfires.

After countless ascents and descents, Ellery Creek Big Hole finally hove into view where most of the group took a rapid plunge, interesting to sit on the bank and watch and listen as each of us discovered just how cold the water actually was. Lunch then, courtesy of Alice, who had carried 'the makings' all morning. Soon after a tour bus arrived, the tour group departed for the Gorge whilst the driver, bless his cotton socks, supplied coffee and tea and biscuits to us all (Must have looked a woebegone lot indeed). Very kind though and gratefully received. Ryan then arrived to pick us up and take us to camp where we put up our tents for the first time! The campsite was 1km from a trailhead (Serpentine Gorge) but we couldn't access the trailhead along the management track because Alice and Ryan didn't have a key to the padlock. This spot was to be our campsite for the next three nights, being 'troopied' back from wherever we had reached the following day. Camping amongst the spinifex ensured that everyone had a good idea of where to step for nocturnal wanders. Taco's for dinner, It was so cold that Ryan put hot coals under the seats of our chairs and we got instant warm buns!

DAY 8 – ELLERY CREEK TO SERPENTINE GORGE 15KM (SECTION 7) Mothers Day

A shorter day was promised with the added incentive of a HOT shower at a nearby World Ex camp at the end of the day. Different sort of trail today, still the undulating hills, but the purple volcanic rocks of yesterday now became purple and yellow. After a quick smoko stop in a creekbed, we ascended to Trig Point where there was yet another type of rock, giant circular dolomite holes in them – cause unknown. We ended our hike at Serpentine Gorge which is a sacred place where the indigenous believed a serpent swam so they only came here when they were absolutely desperate to get water and they used to sing songs to tame the serpent when gathering water. The lookout at the Gorge was recommended so we all headed off, I couldn't believe how steep the path was with stone stairs just that bit too high to allow for normal step ups .. Ugh! However the view once there was worthwhile. The shower after that at 'Charlies Camp) was great, a bit of washing (Socks n Jocks) and then back to camp for a 430 beer.

DAY 9 – SERPENTINE GORGE TO SERPENTINE CHALET 15KM (SECTION 8)

Another smallish day as far as kilometres go, but the wind chill made the temperature plummet even if it was 730 when we left camp. Climbing the ridgeline to Counts Point warmed everyone up although we could have done without the 4km of the dreaded shale rocks that tried to continually trip us up. Nearing the top, we dropped our packs, got to the summit and were delighted/perturbed to sight Mt Sonder looming ever closer. Having climbed a lot of metres, it was now time to descend the same distance, the stairs in particular hurting our knees but once on the flat managed to rustle up a smile when the lunchtime creekbed came into sight. Boots and socks off to rest the feet was a relief! after that, it was a 4km walk to the trailhead where John, Mel and Charles opted for coffee instead of doing the optional side trip to the Serpentine chalet dam. Once back in camp, it was prepare as best as we could for the big day coming up, the 31km would be OK on the flat, but the track took in quite a few decent ascents and descents.

DAY 10 – SERPENTINE CHALET DAM TO ORMISTON GORGE (31KM) SECTION 9

Left in the dark at 545am with our head torches on and started hiking. A couple of km's down the trail it was light enough to turn our head torches off before setting into the Inarlanga Pass which was a beautiful gorge used by camel travellers. Once we'd cut through the pass (still in the shade with no sun in the valley) we entered into Hidden Valley. After a few km's of undulating hills we crossed into what we named "Very Windy Saddle" (it was un-named) and Ryan pointed out a lizard, a dragon who was so cold he hadn't moved and we found out that Mac had caught him in his hat earlier before releasing him. We then went over the saddle to see more of the valley and another much higher saddle. More undulating hills in the valley. We stopped to see Mt Sonder at one point and John shot passed Ryan, Charles and Mel. We kept walking and then suddenly found John on the ground with a cut below his eye. First aid at hand. We then turned into Waterfall Gorge where we saw (or rather heard) the Spinifex Pigeons which sounded like B52 bombers flying around. We stopped in the gorge for a quick rest before leaving the riverbed and began ascending the Mt Giles Lookout which was intimidating because it was quite sheer and unbelievably windy with high wind gusts. Once at the top, we travelled 4kms along the ridgeline stopping for lunch before descending down off Mt Giles Lookout. It was very tough on the knees and our feet hurt from all of the rocks which we were sick to death of seeing or rather feeling! A quick break at the bottom of the lookout before pressing on for our final 8kms of hiking. We saw a black rock which looked like melted lava during our final rest stop with about 3kms to go. AT LAST, we made it to the car after passing over Ormiston Creek where we were once again treated to some watermelon from Alice who was waiting on the other side of the creekbed. A quiet group back into the troopie for a 25 minute drive back to camp where an appetising chicken satay with rice was dinner followed by and a very early night (Unsurprisingly)

DAY 11 – ORMISTON GORGE TO FINKE RIVER (9KMS) SECTION 10

We were treated to a 730am wake up and departure at 9am after our big day yesterday. We had to pack up our tents at the Serpentine Chalet Dam campsite and load up the troopie where Alice drove us back to the creekbed at Ormiston Gorge to complete the final leg of Section 9 (it was not long). As we got out of the troopie Mel spied a Dingo over the other side of the creekbed but upon telling everyone it took off quickly. We went to Ormiston Gorge to check out the Gorge and we had free time until 1045am and so we checked out the Gorge and then went to the café for a warm muffin and coffee. We made ourselves a lunch roll before setting off for a 9km walk. A quick 5km walk over small undulating hills to Hilltop Lookout when we stopped for lunch and a brief rest before setting off for the final 4kms. We arrived at Finke River camp at the trailhead before setting off up the sandy river bed for 1.2kms to our campsite beside a waterhole. A really really windy afternoon.

DAY 12 – FINKE RIVER TO ROCKY BAR GAP (18KM) SECTION 11

We set off from our Finke River campsite by car to the lookout at Glen Helen (not technically leaving from the trailhead which was down river from our campsite) but rather from another point so we could see the Hole in the Wall. We left home at 730am and after a short walk we came across the hole in the wall. We continued on nice walking tracks and stopped for a restbreak in a creekbed when Carolyn lost her watch (or at least she thought she did) and Alice went back to look for it. Following morning tea at the creekbed waterhole, we began our ascent up to the Hilltop Lookout (1088m) passing a couple of dozen hikers who were walking for Indigenous Women's Health. The ascent was quite challenging but not as scary as Mt Giles Lookout. We had lunch up on top (Charles and I hiding on a campsite hiding from 30kn winds). We then descended in freezing conditions but then had to stop half way down to take some layers off. We saw the blue malley – eucalyptus and saw heaps of Holly Grevillea on the way down. We hiked for another couple of kms until we reached Rocky Bar Gap. It was quite evident there was a gap between two large distinct ridges and it was beautiful to walk between them. We hiked another 1.5kms up to the locked gate to meet up with Ryan before driving back to our Finke river campsite. We had awesome beef burgers on damper rolls for dinner.

DAY 13 – ROCKY BAR GAP TO REDBANK GORGE SECTION 12

Back into the 'troopie' 745am for our 11.6km walk plus another 1.5kms from the locked gate on the Parks Management Track back to the trailhead at Rocky Bar Gap. Ryan, Charles and Mel waited for Mac to use the "facilities" before heading off on a relatively smooth track taking a rest break in a riverbed on the way. Pressing on, we then stopped in the Davenport river to admire the Batman Bush, (fragrant leafed bush) where Mel promptly grabbed a handful to put in her pillow. We reached the trailhead at the end of Section 12 at Redbank

Gorge where Alice had prepared a lunch of Vietnamese Chicken Salad' To walk that off Mel, Bruce and Charles had a quick recce to the Lookout to see what was in store for tomorrows climb. Alice and Ryan assured us that seeing that we had made it this far, tomorrow would be no problem at all. We left Redbank Gorge and stopped in at Glen Helen Resort for an hour and half to enjoy the beautiful waterhole where we skipped a few stones, went for a wee walk and had a good cup of coffee. Ryan then came to pick us up to take us back to the Finke River campsite.

DAY 14 – REDBANK GORGE TO MT SONDER 16KM RETURN (SECTION 13)

As mentioned earlier, there is a legend associated with Mt Sonder: The Western Arrernte Aborigines called the mountain "Rwetyepme". Legend has it that a woman and a man from different social levels fell in love, the woman became pregnant and was banished from her tribe to lie on her back watching the sun crossing the sky. As you approach Mt Sonder, by road or by trail, its not hard to see why it's called "The pregnant Lady"

Up at 230am for a 245am departure and a 30 minute drive to the trailhead. Bruce discovered that a Dingo had stolen his sandwich and Jenny discovered that the Dingo had also stolen her sandwich during the night. We'd heard the Dingo's at 11.20pm and again about 20mins later. They sounded close. We got to the trailhead feeling very apprehensive about what lay ahead on the dark, cold and windy trail. Most of us had thermals, hiking shirt, polar fleece and wind proof jacket (Mel also had her snow coat on) We started climbing up stairs for a short while before entering a switchback climb. It was still completely dark and soon the 9 of us had split up and were walking in different groups. All we could see were head torches up ahead, sometimes no head torches at all were visible. We continued climbing in the dark with wind gusts blowing at 50kn (according to Mac our fisherman). The winds were so high at times it knocked you off your feet. Just when we thought we'd reached the ridgeline for our gradual climb then another climb ensued and this went on for what felt like forever. We just needed to keep going. About 150m from the top the sky started to lighten and it outlined how far it seemed we needed to go. We finally summited and a bright red glow appeared on the horizon. Perfect timing! WE HAD MADE IT! Alice had carried a celebratory thermos so we could all enjoy a hot cup of coffee at the top of Mt Sonder. Mell turned on her GPS and went looking for the geocache and finding it relatively easily. We stood freezing on the top of Mt Sonder admiring just how far we'd come and what an adventure it had been with hugs all round (the others departing) leaving Charles, Alice, Bruce and Mel to admire the lightening surrounding countryside. The cold won though so we packed up and headed down the mountain. The wind did not let up at all until we made it nearly to the bottom of the mountain. We passed the junction and made the last slog across the riverbed and up the drive to the trailhead at Redbank Gorge meeting the others in the carpark. A quick Group photo before returning to camp where Ryan treated us to a croissant with salmon, crème cheese, spinach, fried tomato, avocado which we ate quickly to avoid the inundation of flies! Darn those flies! We then got changed, packed up our gear and our tents and returned to Alice Springs (about 130kms away by road).

Mel, Bruce and Charles