

Armidale Bushwalkers



Armidale Bushwalking Club newsletter No 16 Winter 2009

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ABC Canoe Trip Macleay River March 2009

by Joc Coventry

Photos by David Lawrence

I maintain that a river level of between 1 to 1.5 m at Georges Junction is ideal for canoeing the Macleay. For

some cold beer by the fire and have all the boats inflated by the time Terry, Dr Phil, Roo, Sally, David and Joy arrived at 9 am Friday.



First Launch

all of February the level sat below .65 then flooded to over 8 m. By the time it came for us to go it was holding nicely at 1.1 m and the weather was looking fantastic. So why all the worry, all I needed was a little faith.

David, Kath, Peter, Russ and I, along with our two drivers and a ute load of

Inflatable canoes descended into Hall's Peak as the sun set on Thursday evening.

We were the advanced party who got to escape the rat race a night early, drink

My brother Terry is very partial to orange and poppy seed muffins which he provided. So we delayed departure for some morning tea and onto the river by 10.30 am.

Three single kayaks, one Wobbegong and four inflatables shared between eleven people, with at least that many litres of red wine, set for a three day adventure.

We all claimed some experience as paddlers (it's a bit like riding a bike isn't it), but soon found some early lessons learnt underneath the overhanging tea tree. Reading the



A steady hand

rivers flow becomes habit after a few unplanned swims. We lunched just past the Chandler / Macleay junction,



where Peter's fantastic Quickboil kettle beat my gas stove to give him tea making bragging rights.

The afternoon was spent gliding down a fantastic section of river in perfect condition-canoeing doesn't come much better than this , except for the storm brewing to the south.

We made camp high up the bank under a spreading apple box, with some grumbling about the distance to the river- the price you pay for a great camp-site??. All tents were up quickly before a short shower hit. But it cleared to allow dinner around the fire then rained again through the night.

The storm had cleared by morning allowing a leisurely breakfast and 9am departure.

Then soon into the first tricky rapid of the day. Some of us chose to portage here. Those who ran it all made it look easy, a fast flowing tunnel with a couple of drops all hemmed in by tea tree. We swept on past the Apsley junction to a short stop at West Kunderang. Back on the river again for more perfect paddling , sliding over the big flat rocks, bumping down gravel races , what a great way to travel!

Lunch was cut short by a storm which saw us paddling in the rain for an hour before clearing as we approached

Mary's View and our next camp. Terry dropped behind to fish while we made camp, and provided the perfect evening meal ,three nice bass with one added by Roo saw us eating like kings. Light rain again overnight which cleared to another great morning.

The rapids start to grow on this section of the river and some were caught out before we reached East Kunderang. The water was warm and





David & Joy grade two rapid

the group working well together so the occasional "out" was all part of the fun.

A stroll up to the homestead for those who have never been there and back to the river for the last leg of the trip. We were cruising down the rapids now, plenty of confidence and stylish moves from some- pure luck and bravado from the rest of us.

The last rapid is the only true grade three rapid on the trip and a thrilling finale to a great section of river. Peter led the way and made it look easy, some portaged and the rest were successful on this last challenge.

What a well organised river to save the best bit till last!

The plan was Georges junction by 2pm and we rolled in at 1.50 pm for an ice cold beer and fresh bread rolls. Don't you love it when a plan works ?? I should quit while I am ahead .

Thanks must go to our drivers,

ArmidaleBushwalkers a must for a trip like this. We will return the favour some-day soon guys and girls. This trip takes a little time and organization . A run like this with great conditions and a group of friends makes for a fantastic trip with many good stories !!!

Thanks guys- Joc
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Last look at the river

Circumnavigation of Armidale Part 1.

14 June 2009 by Kathy King

We started at my place near Duval High School and wended our way to UNE via graffiti-strewn highway underpasses, bogs, fields, grazing

sheep and stiles across fences to the eastern side of the university. We made a pilgrimage to the UNE memorial sundial and then down to the playing fields where we had morning tea overlooking the soccer game. Once past the colleges, we walked along the Triangle Running track to Rowlands Rd, a gravel road that joined the Old Inverell Rd. Here Alan Cunningham left us to walk

decided that her PhD thesis called and she caught a taxi home. The rest of us finished the walk along the south of Armidale, down Ross St which was alternately, a 4WD track, walking area or bitumen road and eventually



Marge's Sundial



West TSR

arrived at the cemetery. Here we crossed the railway track and headed for the off-leash dog area and playing fields before a toilet stop at Neram.

Very clever of Robyn to think of this!

We managed to walk from Neram to Robyn & Peter's house in the north of Armidale, without resorting to walking the streets – across more playing fields, creeklands, parks. It's quite amazing how much green space there is in Armidale – a legacy from the days of the campaigns by local people for the preservation of the

home as Jane Gowns, a past ABC member, was coming out to his place to inspect his greenhouses.

We then travelled directly south along an open travelling stock route to the Bundarra Rd. where we had an unavoidable 1 km walk along the bitumen road to get under the highway again. Then down Moore Park Rd to the old highway before we sidetracked again to the south to Ross St. Along the way we had lunch and it was here that Betty



More west TSR

creeklands in the 70's. We had a welcome break at Robyn & Peter's house for tea and chocolates. By then there was only Rosa, Ludwig and me to make the trek along Crest Rd to my place to finish the circuit. We had been on the track for 6 hours.

Part 2 of the circumnavigation will encompass the Armidale Walking Track to the north-east of town.

Walking for Oxfam to help kids get a better education

by Mark Higgins

It's 9 weeks to go and more importantly 1 week until the end of the financial year, and no better time to assist Oxfam and to sponsor team



160, of Mark Higgins, Nikita Wade, Nick Peterson and Peter Chan.

This team have 14 Oxfam's between them. That's 1400 K's, around the trails of Northern Sydney and so

far over those 7 Oxfam's teams that Mark has been involved in have raised over \$25,000. Mark's photo shows that it's not a very glamorous event, and this year they are going for somewhere between 20-24 hours, (after seeing the course) and this course is tough. More hills, more valleys, and the knees and ankles get a pounding. They also decided to raise their target to \$5000, so that more people will benefit from their efforts. This is a special event, a challenging event, where the body and mind are pushed to limits outside the day to day, and the reason they do it, is to raise money for **OXFAM**. Money raised will help kids get a better education, help to train people to build better homes and farms, buy ducks and sheep and live a healthier happier life.,

Where does the money go? Your donation can provide families in East Timor with vegetable seeds and trees, increasing nutrition and market opportunities. Learn more about Oxfam



Australia and their programmes on the Oxfam website www.oxfam.org.au/world?easternasia. Visit the Unisys 14 ~ Oxfam's teams site at www.oxfam.org.au/trailwalker/sydney/team/160

Total Tabletop Circuit

by David Lawrence

Peter Rodger once said that on every trip that he does he sees a couple interesting spurs or distant mountaintops that he hasn't yet walked, which must be added to his to-do list. So the number of trips he intends to do just keeps increasing. From that, it's not surprising that from a 2003 daytrip with Charlie Winter, we



have have done the definitive Tabletop Circuit 4 times.

A bit of a problem with the area is the long walk in from the Karori road along the gazetted public easement and then along the 4WD Tabletop Trail. So Joc and I had the bright idea of riding our bikes in for the first ten km. Joc talked a new club member- John Maguire – into riding with us, but had less success in convincing Peter of the sense of biking it. So, while we were unloading bikes and distributing loads, Peter started walking.

I was probably - no, let's be

honest- I was definitely- the least capable, least experienced rider, but Joc hadn't ridden for 3 months, while John actually seemed to know what he was doing as we wobbled off along the track. We quickly found that bitumen is a lovely thing, while deep muddy ruts and sticks that fly up into your spokes when you catch their ends makes for are much beautiful. I was the first to get off and push up a hill- more a gentle rise really- but the other two dismounted soon after. Confidence grew after a while- too much confidence, with a barely suppressed shriek as the bike flew down into the first deep gully crossing. "Mulga Bill's Bicycle" rose unbidden to the mind, and the memory of that 'leap of twenty feet into the Dead Man's Creek'.

We wobbled on, and stopped for a rest after 6 km having surely left our solitary walker well behind. But after having a drink and a bit of a sit, here came Peter striding along without a hair out of place. A bit of an embarrassed "You're making good time", and we hobbled back on our bikes -and sort of fled .

We huffed downhill and puffed uphill, and with plenty of effort had just managed to hide our bikes at the start of the South Tabletop Spur and begin nonchalantly organising packs as Peter arrived. He was about 15 minutes behind the first rider after 10 km- great walking (and really crummy bike riding).

The navigation to the east of Tabletop Mountain is a bit challenging.



great view back to the Cocks Comb cliffs, and allowed us to hit the river after 21/2 hours of easy ridge top walking (mixed with thigh-trembling steeper bits).

As always, we settled on a not-bad campsite that night to find an excellent one about 100 metres further on the next day. Really, what

This was our third attempt, and we made a better line than previously to get us into Cocks Comb Saddle in about 55 minutes. A welcome sit and lunch, and then up the hill to drop our packs and teeter out along the 'dragon's back' to the end of the Cocks Comb. Spread out below was a great view. To the northeast, Round Mountain in Cathedral NP 55 km, and Point Lookout nearly 60 km away were crystal-clear. To the SSE, about 45 km away Mount Werrikimbe stood above the gorge of the Apsley River. Much closer, the valley of the Macleay-today's destination- seemed forbiddingly far below us.

Steve Tremont had told Joc that you could short-cut onto the ridge horsetrack by scrambling down the side of Cocks Comb. So I had a try in what seemed to be the right direction, but soon lost my nerve and back-tracked up to our packs. From there we spread out heading more or less north and soon picked up the track. After following it for a little while, I realised I was only about 10 metres from reaching it on my exploratory scramble.

The obvious track, in places with fallen trees cut through to allow easy stockhorse passage, gave us a

we should have done was cross the river that evening in our wet boots, and let them dry in the sun that hit that lovely campsite first thing next morning. Then we would have had dry boots all day. Oh, well, another black mark against the leader.

We squelched up the Macleay in the bright sun of a perfect day. With our 9 am start and lazy pace, the boots had dried in the two hours to Blue Mountain Creek junction. We did the bit of a scramble to the left for 200 metres into Blue Mountain Creek, and carefully skirted the new growth of Giant Stinging Tree in a mini-rainforest there.

Blue Mountain Creek was just high enough to give a chuckle over rocky bits and good reflections in the long calm pools. A pleasant couple of hours, and we were lunching at Postmans Creek, by one of Max Brennan's horseyards and campsites. Great old character, Max- first rode into Blue Mountain Creek on his mother's saddle pommel when he was three, and was still leading trips in 3 years ago, when he must have been pushing 80. (You can read a bit about him in "Close to the Edge : interviews and stories of the New England gorges" , collected and edited by

David Vidler, held in Armidale library) .

The creek was now narrowing in, with less of the obliging horsetracks you soon get in the habit of following in the gorges. Still, 2 hours more pretty easy walking got us into Max's



main camp at the Hole Creek junction. There's a pole framework that can be covered by tarpaulins to make a cosy 8-person shelter, a good fireplace, and plenty of flat space for tents. The junction pool was OK for a good wash, but a not the excellent swimming hole we had enjoyed at the same time last year.

A good meal by the fire and a fairly early night, as we thought it would be a long pull out in the morning. Peter roused us early, and we left camp in light drizzle at 7.30. Ten minutes later, opposite a surprisingly broad flat beside Zinnia Creek, we began climbing the Hole/Zinnia Creek spur.

It was steep, but very even, and the navigating was pretty easy- just head up! We negotiated the "narrow ridge" that looked formidable on the map- really, it was about 20 metres across- and by 9.30 we were looking across on the level at "Cheyenne", Burg and Sue Blomfield's open coun-

try across Hole Creek. As usual, the navigating was a bit more difficult after that- not helped by the same thick growth of Fringed Wattle that adorns Oven Camp Ridge at a similar height. But we still hit Tabletop Road by 10.10 am- the usual 2 1/2 hours it takes for most climbs back to the tops.

We were glad to reach Salt Hut in time to shelter from a heavy shower, and declared it 'lunchtime' at 11 am. I suppose we were drier in than out, but the roof is full of holes, it's dark, and there's no fireplace. Three of us munched thoughtfully, contemplating a bike ride in the rain. One just ate quietly- and grinned.

A twenty minute walk on a delightfully flat road cut into the west side of Tabletop Mountain through semi rainforest brought us back to our bikes, and Peter gave a bit of a smirk as he waved us goodbye and started the long walk back to the car.

Well, it was worse than the trip in. The rain, and the deep ruts cut by someone's 4WD that morning, meant we slid into and out of the mud, had to get off and push up most of the hills, and pray that wet brakes would hold on the long descents. Still, honour was at stake, and somehow we managed to reach the car before Peter- about 7 minutes before, I judge.

If we could somehow persuade the National Parks to allow us to drive into South Tabletop Ridge(Ha!) and grade a track along the easement connecting the Karori road to Tabletop Trail (double Ha!), it would be a superb trip. It's still the best 3 day route around Tabletop yet- and one of the best walks in the New England.