

# Armidale Bushwalkers



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## Oven Camp Ridge walk

*by David Lawrence*

We'd lately read the "Bark Hut Oxley Wild Rivers National Park Historical Report " by Andrew Messner, where it says (p. 34) that "Oven Camp Ridge ....appears to be one of the earliest routes from the Macleay River to the

Mountain. We absorbed the view from the Cocks Comb cliff that the great photographer, Frank Lowe, regards as the finest in the New England. From here, great valleys and huge ridges spread into the distance, with the silvered ribbon of the Macleay way below, and Blue Nobby



*Blue Knobby and the Macleay*

New England Tableland". After walking that route last weekend, we're full of admiration for the toughness of those early settlers who pioneered it.

Ten of us from Armidale, Walcha and scattered places around the world walked in from the junction of Karori and Paradale into Tabletop

Mountain and Point Lookout faint and far on the horizon.

After a mild night's camp in the saddle, we headed down the gentle spur running due North to filter water from a convenient dam near the road. Then came a long, gradual descent – first by road and then by animal track- to beautiful



*looking up Maclay near Kerosene Creek*

Blue Mountain Creek. It was good to be down on the flat, into the soft country again. We took a semi-swim (a bit too cold and too shallow for a real one), then lazed over hot tea and a leisurely lunch while we (and the tents) dried.

The tracks made by feral horses made for easy walking, and we soon reached Macleay River junction. Now it was brilliant walking- open country, a broad riverbank, bottlebrushes still bravely blooming, and impossibly thriving figs draped over the rock faces. Occasionally we paused to take in special sights- wild horses snorting away from us, the flash of light on a Monarch Butterfly's wings, the looming beauty of the Cocks Comb way above us. Mostly we just walked in a comfortable Zen state of near-mindlessness, absorbed by the rightness of being back in the wild

By 4 o'clock we were comfortably camped at Bottom Gully, but nervously eyeing off the great sweep of spur up, up and up to the plateau above. We spent a merry night around the campfire, with Joc dispensing hot chai and Charlie handing around chocolates, while we

rehashed old trips, talked about possible walks on from here, and vigorously debated the virtues of boots vs. joggers. As the fire burnt down, the yawns began, and not long after "Bushwalker's Midnight" (8 pm) we tottered off to bed. Looking up Maclay

David reported horse tracks leading up the chosen spur, and so encouraged, we started walking at 7.45. After a fairly gentle start we broke out onto the steep open country, with glorious view along the river and across to the Cocks Comb. Some of us took every photographic opportunity as a break from the heavy labour of the steadily steepening climb. The last bit was almost a scramble, and it was 9.45 before we collapsed onto the first top.

We knew that the Tabletop Road junction was at about 1000 metres, and we'd climbed 610 metres to reach a height of 840 metres by that point. So there was less than 200 metres left to climb, right? No – wrong! We were on a dreaded "roller-coaster" ridge. For the next 4 hours, we struggled up one steep spur only to plunge down another, till we met the final

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*Group above Blue Mountain Creek*

obstacle- a stand of Fringed Wattle that had sprung up after fire. By now they were about 3 metres high and about 50 cm apart, and visibility was about 30 metres. We wove our way through them while trying to keep a compass bearing on the mercifully fairly level last section to the road. Then a welcome sit, and the knowledge that the hardest bit was behind us.

However, we still had 81/2 km of road walking ahead of us, so the rest was brief. The last of us were very glad to make it to the cars- just in daylight- by 5 pm. A long day where we'd walked only 16 .5 km, but had climbed up 1220 metres, and down 340.

Some of life's pleasures and pains come and go – Christmas and paychecks, Monday mornings and tax time. And there are some high points that, no matter how much you might desire them, can never be repeated- the fumbling joy of your first grown-up kiss, the nerves and triumph of passing your driving test. And there's another category- the Oven Camp Ridge walk category- having done it once, you never want to repeat it.

And yet, and yet- in the car back home the talk was of the beauty of the Cocks Comb views, and the joy of river walks – and maybe if we took the ridge out from Kerosene Creek, and climbed up under the Cocks Comb- let's do that later this year!

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# David Lawrence's Overseas Trip

The first week was spent walking in the Canadian Rockies, among its great grey mountains and turquoise lakes. I Walked on the Athabasca Glacier, visited Lake Louise and Banff, and spent very pleasant days walking

through rich pine woods. Saw a wild bear- actually two of them- and learnt what a bearjam was (the pile up of traffic when dozens of motorists pull over when a bear is spotted). It was so good catching up with my sister too.



*Athabasca Glacier*

Perfectly it snowed heavily on my last day there, and I left with all the world mantled in white. Then on to London, where we stayed in Covent Garden. There were 10 musicals playing with 5-6 blocks of our flat, and we spent the days walking our feet sore and the nights recovering - though we did go to a brilliant performance of "Billy Eliot" and went out to dinner a couple of times. Having spent a

few days in the beautiful island of Mull, we've moved to Fort William, with Ben Nevis, looming above us. We hope to climb it this week before moving back on to Edinburgh and Austria.



*Tower Bridge - London*

David  
Lawrence

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# David Lawrence's Overseas Trip 2nd edition

Since leaving Mull, an island that catches at the heart- we have been settled very

Fort William must have more outdoor shops per square metre than almost anywhere, and

they all have sales on. The furtive shopaholic that lurks in us all- triggered by shoe or electronic gadget or car sales according to personal loves- is out and roaring in me at the moment. I've bought a parkha, a pair of boots- sorry, 2 pairs of boots-, a trekking pole and am looking for a new



*Fog on Ben Nevis*

comfortably in Fort William, the outdoor capital of Scotland (Great Britain? The World?). We are surrounded by lochs and glens and great bare hills disappearing upwards into the mist. I have noticed that the Scots say "It's a bright day" – I suspect there's seldom call to use the term 'sunny day'. So we have seldom had our rainwear off when outside, and there's coats and umbrellas for sale everywhere.

backpack- probably have to ship it all home by freighter. Of course I had to try out all our new



*James Reid*



gear, so Jim and I decided to climb Been Nevis. As Britain's highest mountain, with an average annual temperature of 0.5 degrees Celsius, annual average rainfall of over 4000 mm (156 inches!) and a climb of 1300 metres base to summit, it was a formidable first Munro. It took us 4 hours up to summit in thick mist (did I mention that about 9 out of 10 days it's covered in cloud?). We groped around in the fog, took grey photos of people and rocks looming in the damp, and shivered in multilayers of gloves and beanies and packs quickly building up hoarfrost. Then down and down and down, to the accompaniment of protesting knees and a trip to a blessed seat in the first pub- the Ben Nevis Hotel, packed with walkers just off the summit. A grand day, but a fairly early night.

Of course, there's been other things- a great tour of Skye- I could live in the castle of Eillen

Donnan- and the bus trip from Oban, and all other views and accents and smells and the heather and the great grey beauty that is Scotland. Oh, and the shopping. Just two photos- will send more when I am moving freely again. Cheers- and I envy Hazel the clear day she had on the Ben.

David & Jenny Lawence

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# Walk from Point Lookout to Thora from Bushwalker Annual 1939

BY I. BUTLER (Sydney Bush Walkers)

It was in the spring on the Northern Highlands, and was bitterly cold, We left the service car and made out way along the road across the Serpentine and slowly on up the hill. Then a stretch of plateau country in which numberless small streams, coming seemingly

to the south, and back to Point Lookout again: most of it steep, evenly graded and densely wooded hills, the main feature being the Bellinger River, with its interlocking spurs, making its way through to the sea some 40 miles away.



The first night we camped just below the lookout. It was bitterly cold and there was a gale blowing from the south-west. Fallen trees and branches from past gales littered the ground, and we slept and shivered in fear.

## Track to Antimony Mines

Next morning, after getting our directions from Cliff, we set out down long the track to the Antimony mines. On the way along we climbed onto a tiny

from nowhere, bubbled and cascaded and tumbled along.

Cliff Mosely owns what is claimed to be the highest dairy farm in the State, right at the foot of Point Lookout, and, in addition, he ranges the New England National Park and cares for all lonely wanderers needing directions. Perhaps, if he had not been there to guide us we would have still been wandering around in the sub-tropical jungle of the Bellinger, fighting the lawyer vines, monkey-ropes and stinging trees. The next morning he came up to the top especially to direct us. He and his two dogs and Mac and I went to the edge of the precipice and looked out over the Promised Land beneath us. The Land of Canaan took in everything (almost) from Point Lookout to the Dorriggo Plateau, to Coff's Harbour, a strip of the ocean for some 80 miles

plateau known as Wright's Lookout. It might be some, hundreds of feet below Point Lookout, but it is all bare on top and one can stand and drink in the view from all points of the compass. While we were there some light and cheerful clouds were drifting across the soft blue, giving a corresponding pattern of light and shade on the densely wooded hills.

The first day was little more than a stroll, measured in terms of effort. We camped at the ruins of an old deserted hut, about the only place on the ridge we were following where any water is to be found: even here it would not have been possible to get any, if it had not been for the information which Cliff Moseley had given us—we had to wander down the hill a short distance at a particular place, and then almost dig for it.

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The next day was probably the only day of the tour in which we really extended ourselves, but it was a memorable day. First of all we followed the antimony track down to the antimony mine, just because we wanted to see what an antimony mine was like. On the way down we met one of the miners bringing out some antimony on packhorses. He yarned to us for a while and told us of the untold wealth of antimony which was waiting down in the valley to be obtained. He also gave us some directions which, if we had followed them, would probably have left us bleaching skeletons in the jungle of some lonely creek: but we had been warned. We saw the antimony mine, and then back up to the top—something like Kedumba, and certainly just as much of it. It was fairly easy following the ridge along except in one or two places where we made detours around some of the knobs on the top of it: much of the time, it was almost like walking on a razor edge. The track gradually petered out as we came towards the end of the ridge, and we began to descend. This was all right at first, but the steepness soon became uniform and monotonous at about the nearest grade to vertical at which earth will rest. This went on for hours, and we became hot and thirsty and it began to grow late in the afternoon. If anything, it got steeper, and we slipped and slid and scrambled. As the dusk began to come on we encountered lawer vine and got scratched and tied up by them. Once I touched a leaf of a stinging tree—can you imagine the worst nettle that you have ever been stung by? Well, multiply that by a hundred and you will begin to have a vague idea of the potency of a stinging tree. Their leaves are large and light green and hairy—but you will learn to recognise them very quickly. It was almost too dark to see when we began to hear the welcome sound of running water down below, and we slid the list hundred or two feet down to the bottom of a V-shaped creek.

There was nothing else for it: we made a

rough camp on a soggy, rocky bit of sand, almost in the creek. Everything was so soggy; we couldn't get a fire going. We were too tired to worry very much what happened but we did think at one stage that the weather looked threatening, and gave a fleeting thought to the fancy that the creek might rush down in the middle of the night and carry us away in the darkness. There was only a slit of sky above us, but the steep walls of the creek were studded with glow worms which scintillated like so many blue-white stars.

### **Camp at Creek Junction**

On, on, along the bed of the creek through an alley of tropical vegetation dangling long monkey-topes and covered with beautiful epiphytes. It was rather difficult going, but we look things easily. In the afternoon we emerged on to a beautiful little clearing at the junction of our creek with another one coming in from the north side. No one appeared to have been there for years, but there was an old camp and some fruit trees in bloom; it was such an ideal camp-spot that we immediately decided to stay. That night we slept comfortably and soundly.

From the clearing onwards we were on a fairly good track most of the way: the river (now quite definitely the Bellinger) opened out and the going was fairly easy. We soon emerged to the outposts of civilization—dairy cows, farmhouses and wild orange trees. We had another camp before we declared the formal end of our trip at Thora.

Measured in miles the whole of the trip was probably quite a short one. However, it was a trip which had some extremely interesting features. Point Lookout is perhaps the highest point on the New England tableland and it is well over 5,000 feet. We descended from this to only a few hundred feet above sea level; from the stinging cold of the tableland to the warmth of the coastal plain: from typical tableland woodland of eucalypts down to sub-tropical jungle of monkey ropes, epiphytes—and stinging trees.

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