

Armidale Bushwalkers



Armidale Bushwalking Club newsletter No 18 May 2010

www.armidalebushwalkers.org phone 6778-3329

So You Think You've Seen The Blue Mountains !

Contributed by Bill Dempsey

Until recently my only experience of the Blue Mountains was what one takes in on a day trip to

residence at 6.30am on Monday 22nd heading for Blackheath and within five minutes we were on the

M4 Freeway with three lanes of traffic coming toward us and pretty well bumper to bumper - " just the early morning commuters avoiding the peak hour as they head into the city to work" was Max's explanation. We had a free run to Blackheath and arrived there at the scheduled time of 8.30 to meet Peter Rodger of the Armidale Bushwalking Club - even in his seventies, Peter can still walk the pads off a sheep dog and had spent the weekend day walking in the area (probably to get over the train trip from Armidale!).



Taro's "Ladders"

Katoomba - hot foot it down the main street to Echo Point, take in the vast expanse of country out from and below the lookout, maybe walk down the Giant Staircase, catch the trolley car back up, follow the escarpment back into town and have a cup of coffee at the heritage listed Paragon Cafe (don't miss the chocolates!).

After being invited by Max and John Sayer of Lane Cove and Urunga respectively to participate in a five day backpacking trip in March, I quickly realised what one saw from Echo Point represented only a fraction of what really makes up this beautiful national park.

The following is my recollection of five wonderful days backpacking in the Blue Mountains.

Max, John and myself departed Max's

Around 10.30 we were at Carlon's Farm and ready to start walking with the first objective to follow the service road down to Breakfast Creek and then up Little Cedar Gap onto the saddle at the base of Taro's Ladder. We arrived there in time for lunch



and before partaking of the same, dropped our packs and walked the half kilometre to "the ladder". The appropriately named Narrowneck is a narrow strip of country leading out from Katoomba to the escarpment and separates the Megalong and Jamieson valleys.

A long but comfortable walk out from Katoomba, however from down in the valley the final passage to the top requires one to negotiate Taro's Ladder



which is little more than a series of strategically placed metal spikes driven into a fifteen metre high rock face. Heights don't worry me too much when my backside is facing the launch pad and my eyes are focussed on the summit - different story when the same two extremities are pointed in the same direction as you make your way down!

Needless to say I only made it halfway up Taro's ladder.

The afternoon was spent in reasonably warm weather making our way down the ridge to Medlow Gap and onto the first night's camp in an area known as Wild Dog Mountains (Mt Dingo, Blue Pup Ridge, Mt Yellow Dog and Kelpie Point are just some of the names that appear on the map). Max and John would normally camp the first night at Mobbs Swamp, however their nephew had recently discovered a waterhole in an even better location and what is now pencilled in as "Geoff's Waterhole" was the venue for a well earned first night's relaxation after a great day's

walking.

Day two dawned and we broke camp at 8.00am in perfect weather with clear blue skies and hardly a breeze. It remained this way until about two when the sun was at its highest and so were we. We had just finished lunch, had reached the summit of Mt Yellow Dog and had to negotiate the three kilometre descent down to the Cox's River - it was a relatively steep descent, on an old horse trail with

many switch backs. Not the best going at the hottest part of the day and over an hour later the cool, crystal clear waters of the beautiful Cox's River were a welcome relief.

The effort and discomfort experienced during this section of the walk was more than compensated for by a two hour diversion earlier in the morning when we left our packs and climbed the one hundred and twenty metres up onto Mt Dingo and walked out to what is known as Splendour Rock. If you think you have seen the Blue Mountains "you ain't seen

nothing" until you have sat on Splendour Rock.

It really is just that - a flat, rocky vantage point that drops away quite quickly to the Cox's River 800 metres below. To the east are the shimmering waters of the upper reaches of Warragamba Dam. To the south is the Jenolan Caves area and further on the colourful sandstone rock faces of Kanangra Walls. To the west is little more than wall to wall mountains, ridges and ravines stretching as far as what could well be Oberon and beyond.

It really does take your breath away and has so





Splendour Rock

course of the day! No time to take your boots off and soft foot it across - in and out boots and all and from varying depths from ankle deep to up around your waist. The day was quite warm and the water at times was a welcome relief. The frequency of the crossings also highlighted the benefits of wearing good boots.

The camp site at the junction was another great venue however it was tinged with a hint of sadness by a plaque in an inconspicuous spot that commemorated the efforts of a Lady Cub Master who lost her life in 1987 saving the lives of others. Our campsite

inspired some people that a plaque has been placed on the rock and each Anzac Day quite a few bushwalkers make the effort to backpack in and conduct a dawn service in memory of the many bushwalkers who lost their lives fighting for their and our country.

I have often suggested that God must sometimes sit on the summit of Mt Grattai in the Nandewars taking in what he alone has created. No doubt there are times when Splendour Rock is honoured with his presence.

Camp for this night was beside the old rustic cottage at a place called Kanangaroo Clearing. Great location beside Kanangra Creek and the Cox's River only a stone's throw away. This selection of land is still privately owned and was settled in 1862 and since horses were banished from the park, the current owners transport small groups of fishing enthusiasts in by chopper from time to time as well as using it for their own recreational purposes. Plenty of history here and a really great spot to set up camp.

Day three was spent following the beautiful Cox's River upstream to the junction of Breakfast Creek.

The Cox's is one of those rivers where you can drop your watch into a metre of water and observe the trout checking out what time of day it is - crystal clear water, mostly sandy bottom, plenty of deep long holes and fish around pretty well every bend. The only drawback - we had to cross the river eighteen times during the

was also venue of a brief visit by two young students doing their Duke of Edinburgh Award - another story another time!!!

Day four was another day of blue skies and pleasant temperature. The plan was to make our way up Breakfast Creek to the preferred campsite at Frying Pan Flat however no one in the party had been upstream of the junction and it was decided to leave the packs at last night's campsite and walk the two kilometres upstream to where the Jenolan River flows into the Cox's and then up The Jenolan to the first recognised campsite.

As good a stretch of river as the previous days walking had been, this section was even better - easier going, not too many crossings, great campsites, plenty of fish and very scenic. About one kilometre upstream of the junction on the Jenolan was a great camp spot and all agreed



this river should be the subject of another trip sometime in the not too distant future., On return to camp we made our way up Breakfast Creek and made such good time we decided to bypass Frying Pan Flat and found a campsite beside a lovely pool of water only three kilometres from our final destination and at the junction with Carlon Creek.



Breakfast Creek was interesting - only just running but crystal clear, some lovely big pools and plenty of rock hopping. The walking was mostly in a fairly confined section of the creek with a few climbs up onto higher ground. Not long after setting up camp we were joined briefly by a party of five who had flown up from Melbourne that day and were doing the same walk but in reverse - they weren't looking too forward to the climb up Yellow Pup Ridge when we informed them it had taken us over an hour to come down !

An early start was made on day five in order to avoid the heat as we made our way three hundred metres up and three kilometres along the ridge to the car. We knocked it over in a bit over an hour and had a relaxing tidy up at the car park before heading into Katoomba for a couple of "cold golds" prior to heading down the mountain to Sydney.

A truly great walk and many thanks to Max and John for organising the same, leaving nothing to chance and for providing such enjoyable company for both Peter and I.

Long Point, April 2010

This is one of the few areas that you can easily get into dry rainforest within a reasonable distance of Armidale without doing some desperate clambering down steep sliding screes. With the added bonus of a beautiful Autumn day, it was no surprise that 11 people came on the walk.

It's about 50 minutes and 54 km via the Waterfall Way, Hillgrove and Long Point roads to the parking area beside a good picnic shelter and tables. We settled in to a generous morning tea, with Kathy's baking a highlight. Then down a gentle slope and into the rainforest.

There are about 190 species found in the New England Gorges Dry Rainforest, many of which are found nowhere else. In fact, it is probably the main reason that Oxley Wild Rivers NP has been declared a World heritage Area. It's one of those places where you can almost put one foot in Eucalypt forest, and another under the Wollomombi Wattle that is a common rainforest boundary species. Then we met Scaly Phebalium, a big rare shrub, covered with Stiff Jasmine, a climbing vine with big green 'grapes' as we entered the rainforest's cool shade. We took our time, inspecting a patch of Giant Stinging tree (handle only with a facemask and welding gloves), and speculating on why the ground surface had such a ploughed-up appearance. We later heard about 6 different bird calls coming from the same spot in the forest, which told us that the Superb Lyrebirds were our mysterious cultivators. David Attenborough, in his series "The Life of Birds", claimed they were the best mimics in the bird world, and much of the footage about them was actually shot at nearby Point Lookout.

We passed under a little *Sarcochilus* orchid

The Challenge of the River

Daring the Nymboida in an Iron Canoe

A trip done 72 years ago

By Jean Johnston (River Canoe Club of N.S.W. and Sydney Bush Walkers)

from The Bushwalker 1938

WE came from Sydney up through drought stricken western districts where every one stared at our dust covered canoe, borne on a trailer behind the car. Our objective was Nymboida, where we planned to commence a canoe trip down the Nymboida or South River, to its junction with the Clarence which we intended to follow to Copmanhurst.

Jock Kaske had loaned us his fifteen

foot iron canoe, the "Trail-blazer," that veteran of many trips. And it was to carry Frank English, my husband Bill, and myself, with ten days' stores. We stowed our food into four airtight kerosene tins, our garments and sleeping gear into proofed bags, and packed all into the canoe. Everything was covered with ground sheets and lashed well in.

We left Nymboida on Monday, 6th April, on what was to be the most eventful canoe trip we had undertaken. A fourteen foot weir below Nymboida necessitated a semi-portage, and then we were away. The river ran swiftly, a three foot fresh the week before ensured a good depth of water, rapids were plentiful and gave us many thrills. The current was at times so strong that it took us under low hanging trees by which we were brushed out of the canoe to float downstream till we could land and bail out.

On the second day we struck trouble by attempting to shoot a rapid that really needed to be treated with more respect. We lost a paddle, some eggs, and a lot of time. But this did not deter us from treating all the rest in exactly the same way.

On the third day out we met our first serious obstacle, that is, the first we treated seriously. Here



Blue Nobby Mtn ~ across the Macleay

clinging to a branch, in and out of some small gullies, and came out into the sunlight just before a rock platform giving a good view of Mount Harnham (beyond Uralla) some 53 km away, just above the Salisbury/ Mihi Junction about 15 km, and, much closer, Bakers Creek running across our front towards its junction with the Macleay.

Onward through the eucalypts to Chandler View Lookout, with expansive views to the north, east and south- Round Mountain, Point Lookout and Raspberry Mountain across the great bend of the Chandler, hundreds of metres below us. And on the edge of the platform, the plaque in the accompanying photo.

An easy hour's walk took us back to the picnic shelter for a leisurely lunch. Then we strolled around the Cassinia Walk via a little creek with Blue Gums and ferny-leaved Green Wattles, to the great view across the Macleay to Tabletop Mountain (16 km) and Baynes Mountain (26 km) on the horizon, with Blue Nobby Mountain with its even more splendid views 8 km to the southwest. Another 20 minutes, and we were back at the cars and saying goodbye. A beautiful place, an easy walk and home before 4 on a perfect Autumn day.



The “Trailblazer”



the river took two bends within a hundred yards, with falls on each bend. The first we negotiated by roping but the second we portaged round. This portage took time but was rendered quite easy because of the yokes which Jock had made for the canoe. These screw onto the gunwales and enable the canoe to be carried upside down on the shoulders

Thrilling Rapids

.Below these falls the river descended into a gorge, which provided some thrilling rapids next morning. We got away early, as rain threatened and we had no wish to be caught there with storm water coming down. About ten we left the gorge and floated into a long pool where the Mann River came in on our left. On the hillside above was a most picturesque little bark roofed shack, covered with vines. It had been built and was inhabited by Bert Fenny, an Inspector of Stock, who treated us with true Australian hospitality. Reluctantly we left his place late in the afternoon, getting through the

Bridal Falls below it without any difficulty. For a while the country was more open and next morning we came to the first settlement on the river— Jackadgerry.

There is a wine bar at Jackadgerry, and the boys went up to sample what they fondly hoped would be local vintage. It wasn't, but nevertheless, somewhat fortified, and rejoicing also that we'd been able to obtain some more solder, we essayed to shoot the local rapid just to show how it should be done and we were all thown out. Here we were told that there would be no more bad rapids, but we came across a wicked looking one that afternoon. Practically all the water in the river plunged into a fissure, about ten feet wide between rock walls. Bill wanted to shoot it. Frank and I didn't. Eventually the boys got the canoe through by following a small channel, dragging where necessary. We camped that night at Hanging Rock Station..

Under Sail

When we left next morning we had on board a weird arrangement of two poles and a kite shaped tent lashed together, which on the first long pool became a sail. With a strong wind behind us this gave us more speed than our three paddles. It gave us plenty of fun too; being erected in the bow with Frank in charge and Bill using his paddle at the stern as a rudder. When approaching a rapid Bill would call for the sail to be lowered. The roar of the water prevented Frank from hearing and we would just sail down the rapids, endeavouring to dodge rocks and trees, while Bill made frantic efforts to keep the boat head on into the current. Eventually we took down the sail and then came upon a rapid which nearly finished the trip. While deciding which channel to take we were caught in the main current which whirled along and landed the canoe broadside on to a couple of rocks. With the tremendous force of the water holding her there the boys had partially to unload the gear on to a rock in midstream. Scarcely able to retain a footing, they heaved with all their strength to get her once more into the current, and then to reload and float down to a place where they could land and effect repairs.

In the meantime, I perched on a rock with swift deep water between me and the shore, and waited to be rescued. The strength and force in the water frightened me. Repairs took some time to effect, but we were able to reach the Junction by four that afternoon. Apparently there had been rain on the Clarence as the river was muddy and higher than when we had come down it two years previously. We pulled the canoe well up and tied her to a tree and left her there, as we were to spend the week-end with the Cruickshanks at Dumbudgerry Creek Station, three miles up the Clarence. We arrived there at tea-time in a storm of rain.

The River Rises

This was on Saturday, and all that night and the next day and night it rained, as it can rain on the North Coast, so that we were not surprised to find

on the Monday morning when we returned to the Junction, that both rivers were up and were still rising. The Nymboida had risen about ten feet and the Clarence five. Fortunately someone had moved our canoe farther up the bank, and so we set out on what was to be the most exciting part of the trip, negotiating the gorge in a flood. About a mile below the junction all the water from both rivers cascades over a series of falls, which are anything up to fifty feet high. All the water meets and runs through a narrow rock-filled channel between high granite banks which imprison it for about a mile and a half.

We had to portage round the falls, and the difficulty was to find a place where a descent could be made down the steep rocky banks to the river. We were running just behind schedule, so to avoid a long and weary portage the boys put the canoe in the river at one of the few spots where it was possible to do so, with more than half the gorge still to negotiate, but below the last fall. It was then just on dusk. The river was ugly, the water being about twenty-five feet above normal level and rising as we watched it. A rising river is more dangerous than the same level of water when the river is dropping.

The boys lashed everything well in and pushed off, while I scrambled along the bank to view their progress at a spot where the river took a slight bend which created large waves and eddies. As was expected, they filled up at this corner, and went overboard, each clinging to an end of the canoe, and were compelled to let the current take them where it willed.

Wreck of the "Trailblazer"

Then disaster! The bow caught in a crevice, and Frank sprang on to a ledge intending to pull up and bail out, but the force of the water caught the stern and the forward bulkhead started to give. Bill let go while Frank pushed the boat out into the stream to prevent further damage. There we were, Bill and the canoe in the river, Frank on one bank and I on the other. With darkness coming on I stumbled downstream after them. Bill had a bad time, being caught in strong surges and whirlpools, travelling the best part of the gorge under water



Modern canoe ABC

and very nearly drowning. Frank made good time over the two miles of rough country that brought him opposite the Winters' homestead.

There he yelled for half an hour before they heard him and one of the lads came over to him in a flat bottomed boat which only held one. Frank had to swim the river behind the boat. Bill and I fared better. We lit a fire and got warm and dry and then set off downstream for the homestead. Our goods now consisted of camera, money, matches, shirts and shorts—and we were very hungry. We met Frank and Ralph Winters who had come looking for us on horses, and soon we were sitting down to an enormous meal in a large warm kitchen. Although the Winters, who had lived on the river for years, assured us that we would never find the canoe again.

In the morning we set off upstream to look for it. We found it too, caught in a back eddy inshore near the foot of the gorge. The ropes, with which the paddles were tied in, had caught round a submerged tree and held it there. Not much damage had been done. Nothing was lost. Our food was dry and some of our clothes, and the rest dried while Frank and Bill mended the canoe. About four we were ready to set off again. A fierce rapid below the Winters'

caused us to lose a lot of time. The flood waters ran so strongly that each narrow place in the river was just a series of big waves. Our only course was to keep close to shore on the shallow side. In doing that we were generally among trees, which, at the pace the river was running, gave us some anxious moments. Gordonbrook Falls was another nasty place, and so we halted before the next falls on Sir Earle Page's property, Heifer Station.

We reached these just on dusk and we had had enough of flooded rivers in the

dark. In the morning I went on to Grafton in the cream lorry to pick up the car and bring it back to Copmanhurst. The boys finished the trip as planned, doing the thirty odd miles from Heifer Station to Copmanhurst in three and a half hours. Bill was swept off by a low hanging tree but swam after the canoe and caught up while Frank was doing his best to keep it from broadsiding. Then, at Lilydale low-level bridge which was under water, they had an exciting moment crossing the trough between the two submerged railings at a speed, according to the watchers, of fifty miles per hour.

Hobnails

by Peter Rodger originally published in "Into The Blue" newsletter of Coast & Mountain walkers (CMW)





Armidale Bushwalkers cluster of three. There was, and is, a formula for the number of single and triple hobnails which made up the weight in ounces and pounds, but I've long forgotten. Perhaps somebody may recall.

In those days, most households possessed a bootmaker's last (these days they have antique value or serve as doorstops). And so it was home to the last and hammer to do the job of studding the soles and heels of our prized footwear. But

We've all heard of them, some walkers have actually seen them, but who can remember using them? Yes, within living memory they were at one time all the fashion when it came to bushwalkers' footwear.

Although today there is a vast array and opportunity for choice of boots of all different constructions' and materials, there was a time when the only suitable boots for bushwalking had leather soles. Now, have you ever tried walking up a slope, particularly a grassy one, with just plain leather soles? You'll find that you have a pretty slippery time of it. And so, when I acquired my first pair of ex-Army boots in the late 1940s, one of my first duties was to follow tradition and sound bushwalker procedure and highly decorate the soles of my new boots with hobnails, or 'hobs' as they were affectionately known.

The boots, of course, came from Sterns Disposals, 200 George Street North, towards Circular Quay, an establishment much frequented, by gear-hungry bushwalkers for equipment that Paddy didn't as yet make. But the 'hobnails'? Faithfully acquired from Paddy Pallin's, of course, and purchased by weight.

We did have one choice. One could buy single 'hobs' or triple 'hobs', the latter fused together as a

wait - there was a necessary prerequisite to ensure a good' job! First, soak the soles, and heels in water by standing them overnight in a shallow baking tray with sufficient water; -Reason? Easier to hammer the nails in, and when the-leather dries out it shrinks around the nail, ensuring it stays in place longer.

Now, having read thus far, you might have concluded that hobnails were the sum total of what the bushwalkers of yesteryear carried beneath their feet. No - there was one other refinement which could yet be added - TRICOUNI NAILS!

Not all walkers favored them and they were generally employed by those who saw their value in rock scrambling. They were fixed on the rand of the boot (the external rim of the sole) - and one or two on the toe of the boot) to enhance lateral movements in rock scrambling and chimneying. They resembled a small claw protruding out from the boot with serrations to aid grip. Sound pretty lethal? Yes, I always thought so. In fact, I used to liken them to those steel blades which could occasionally be seen affixed to the sides of chariots in motion picture films such as 'Ben Hur' or 'Spartacus'.

Was all this ironmongery on boots practical or even efficient? Overall, yes. It had its time, along with its pluses and minuses. Firstly, it was wonder-

fully efficient on soft rock such as sandstone, but not good at all on the harder rocks which resisted the 'bite' of the hobnails. The writer recalls a number of side benefits when endeavoring to locate some obscure (at that time) passes onto Narrow Neck, by following the hobnail scratches on the rocks. Not so pleasant is the recollection of scrambling over water-polished limestone boulders in Bungonia Gorge. In that era, many walkers carried a pair of sandshoes for rock-hopping in creeks and strapped the hobnail boots to the rucksack, adding quite a bit of extra weight to the load as you can imagine!

On reflection, there is a degree of nostalgia which flows from the remembrance of watching the sparks fly from rocks when walking along Narrow Neck on a dark night, as the metal scraped a rock or two at the right angle. And who could ever forget the clicky-clack of hobnailed boots on the footpaths in the sound-collecting corridor of Katoomba Street as walkers headed off into the night and the starting points for their weekend walks?

Not so good was the heat generated after a while by the conduction from rocks and other ground surfaces through the nails to the boot. Hence the counsel to always wear two pairs of woollen socks! Also a minus was the weight on the feet of a pair of boots, which was considerably greater than today's expectations. Care was also needed on steel surfaces such as were found on railway stations and in railway carriages. So, one exercised due caution when boarding or alighting from the 6.23pm ex Central on Friday nights.

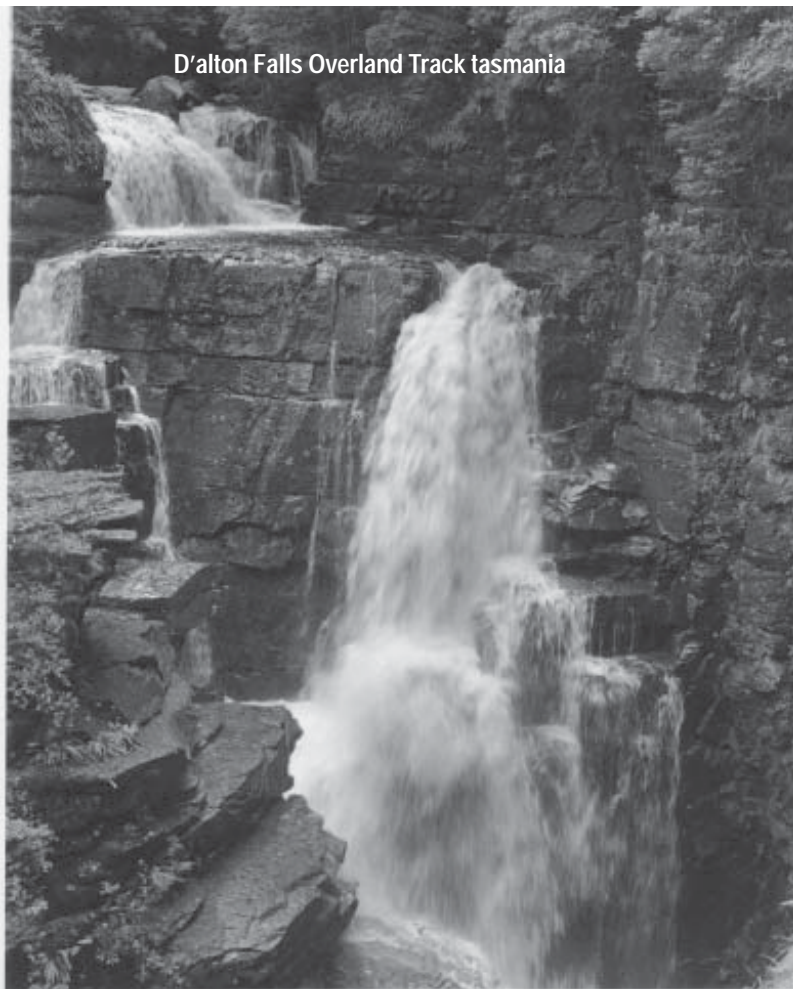
With the advent of moulded and patterned rubber soles and the general availability of other footwear materials, one might have expected a quick demise and disappearance of the hobnailed boot. But did this occur? No, not really, my recollections are of many spirited discussion at a campfire or along the track, on the merits and otherwise of rubber soles and hobnails. In fact, the transition was, at best, gradual, and many traditionalists hung on for quite a while before making a change. I seem to remember that there was at one time a Sydney club which had the title 'Hobnails Club'. I fancy, it was affiliated with the YMCA, and if the name persists, or did for a time, then it is one of the last vestiges of reference, along with early bushwalking literature, to hobnails.

Like many items of bushwalkers' equipment, they have been superseded and relegated to the realms of nostalgia, but to those of us who knew them by usage they will always evoke fond memories.



The Blue Hole

D'alton Falls Overland Track tasmania



Statements of some famous “Bushwalkers”

submitted by Peter Roger

There’s a pleasure sure in being mad. Which none but madmen know.

**Farquhan. Irish-born
English Playright**

**He who can draw a joy
From rocks or woods or weeds, or things that seem
All mute and does it ~ is wise**

B Cornwall ~ English writer

**A little fire is quickly trodden out
Which, being suffered, rivers cannot quench.**

William Shakespear ~ English dramatist & poet

**Therefore, let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk
And let the misty mountain winds be free
To blow against thee**

William Wordsworth English Poet

**The increasing prospect tires our wandering eyes
Hills peep over hills and Alps and Alps arise!**

Alexander Pope English poet & satirist

**How much better has been all this than
Lounging in too much comfort at home?**

From the diary of Robert Falcon Scott. Antatartic explorer

**Well, perhaps they weren’t bushwalkers but their utterances
certainly reflect our feelings at times ~ wouldn’t you agree**

Peter Roger.