

# Armidale Bushw



Armidale Bushwalking Club [armidalebushwalkers.org](http://armidalebushwalkers.org)

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## Green Gully Huts Walk

by David Lawrence

In 2009, Piers Thomas, a NPWS ranger at Walcha, invited six Armidale Bushwalking Club members to backpack around some old stockman's huts in the Green Gully area and make suggestions on how they could be incorporated into a no-tent walk. We did it in late January, carrying the usual tents, sleeping mats,

whole raft of suggestions for the NPWS to ignore, and to file under – "Good idea- it'll never work".

Days went by. We got a polite "Thank you" for our report. Weeks went by. Months. Years. Then last August, Piers said they were opening the Green Gully Huts for business, and invited



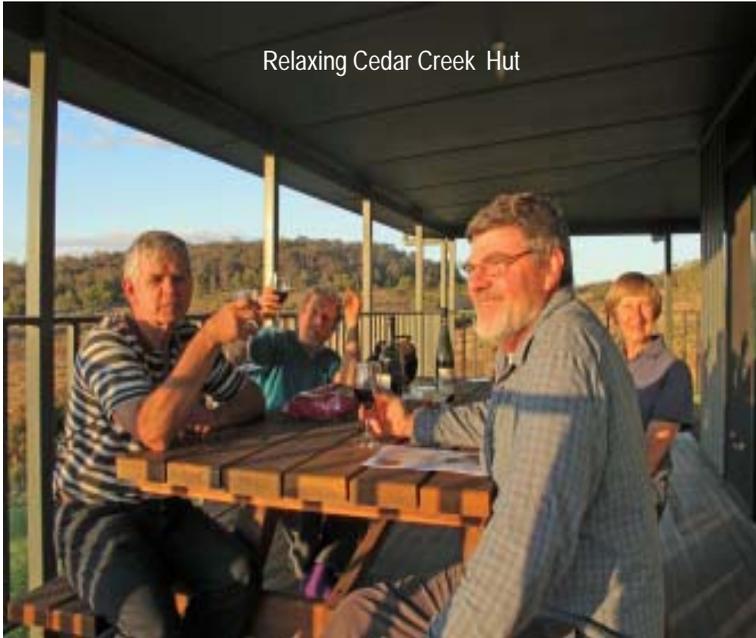
Tooth & Paradise Rocks

gas stoves, cooking utensils..... and four day's food. After the first day- hot, long, with the promise of bushfire in the air- and the first night- outside a dilapidated hut with rubbish scattered on a gravelly floor- we wondered how we could tell Piers nicely to stick his walk. However, a cool change, the view from The Rocks, and the memorable sight of rock wallabies perched on stony pinnacles up Green Gully Creek (and our naturally sweet natures) lead us to making a

us to repeat the walk and write a follow-up.

So we had a cautious look at the website. We finally found it, embedded in –<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkWalking.aspx?id=N0043#TheGreenGullyTrack>

- and the first sentence had us gagging a bit- "Your Green Gully Track **experience** takes you on a **unique** and **challenging** four day **getaway** where you journey **deep into the heart** of ...." –the market-speak 'buzzwords' in



Relaxing Cedar Creek Hut

clothing, and sleeping bags... we felt kind of naked and uneasy- *what if* the gas had run out in the hut cookers? - *or* there was a double- booking... So we sent a few queries to Piers, and Cecilia and Sonia. They replied promptly and reassuringly.

Then the infopacks arrived. We had a good look- the

**bold** rang warning bells, and we nearly gave it up there. However, the accompanying pdfs were very well written and detailed, and as this looked like being the best Spring for a generation, we decided to give it a go.

So somewhat to our amazement, we started to get our head around the idea of doing a 4-5 day bushwalk *without* carrying tents, sleeping mats, gas stoves, cooking utensils, but just food,

map was clear, detailed, folded into thin 8 X 11 cm package AND was semi-waterproof (could we possibly walk **without** a CMA topo map?). Then read the info pack avidly. It began with the flat statement "The Green Gully Track is a difficult walk", followed by facts and figures to prove it. We were much impressed! No market-speak buzzwords here- and any question that arose seem to be answered in the pack. We'd run out of excuses, so, feeling like Linus without his blanket, we packed our (amazingly light) rucksacks and set off.

Cedar Creek cottage has all the comforts of a modern house, minus the TV, and plus the silent kangaroo lawn mowers and wilderness views. So we took a bottle of red to the wide verandah and settled down to write our criticisms. . It took a bit of thought- and a couple of glasses each-

maybe a bookcase stocked by visiting walkers?



Smoky Colwells Hut

a few good photos on the walls? .....

- it seemed to take a long time to come up with 2 pretty minor suggestions.

A good meal, a very comfortable night's

unobtrusively giving light over the old- style gas rings; a genuine 1930s Willow brand pressed-metal meat safe for utensils; a benchtop made from recycled wooden planks; the old calendars

retained, with one laminated to hold its frayed ends together; a discreet loo of corrugated iron blending into the 1950s .....

We were profoundly impressed. It would have been easy to tart the place up, put in a modern fitted cupboard and a stainless- steel bench, and take down that rather naff 1970s calendar - but to



sleep, and off onto the track. The flowers were out, and the weather was perfect. All of us had our cameras clicking, and the long walk in seemed to go very easily. We climbed the knoll overlooking Kunderang Brook (They'd put in the sign we'd suggested!) and looked across to Kemp's Pinnacle. Below was the open valley where Alan Youdale's incessant work had carved out a living for his wife and 6 children, and we wondered at the stamina and courage needed for such pioneering. This is a constant theme in the new signage, how people had made lives for themselves over hundreds of years in an unforgiving but very beautiful place.

Lunch, and a steady descent to arrive early-afternoon at Birds Nest hut. Well! It was still a stockman's hut, but how had they made it so – welcoming? We decided it was the close attention to details- the sheet of Versilux

look at what was needed, and think of how the bushman of the 1930s lived, and how they might have solved the problem of protecting cutlery from mice, or making a cookbench- that takes empathy, and respect, and understanding of the continuity of human needs from then to now.

The beds were very comfortable. They could be folded up, so I took mine outside, and with the help a bit of wire that had been left hanging in a tree, the tarp I can't travel without was slung taut over the bed. After a good meal and a chat around the inside fire, we were lulled to sleep by the rustle and cries of the nightlife of the bush .

Next day, up and gone by 7.35, we headed up to Bird's Nest Trig. The spring flowering was well under way- Blue Gums over purple Native Sarsparilla, yellow Prickly Shaggy Pea and Golden Tip, and tiny Native Violets, and

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everything bursting with new growth after the best rain we've had for years. This is the type of ridge beloved by bushwalkers- a very even grade up with no downs, so you could set an



Descent to Green Gully Hut

easy pace and be a bit surprised at having climbed 300 metres when you arrived at the trig.

Even though it is over 1200 metres above sea level, the advent of GPS means that the once great view has been lost among the vegetation growing unchecked around the station. So we didn't linger long before heading down the easy 4WD track to The Rocks Trail. We sauntered along, trying to get a photo that did justice to the ferns, before clambering up a rocky side knoll for views down into Green

Gully and across to Kangaroo Flat. On then to the main Rocks Lookout, where we had an expansive view of Tooth Rocks and Paradise Rocks, then back across to the gorge of the

Yarrowyck and the pinnacle that marks its junction with the Apsley, and down for glimpses of Riverside and the end of Rowleys Creek. Lots of photos, lots of roughed-out routes for other walks....

A long descent to Brumby Pass, where a gate in the 15 metre fence between two sheer rock faces to trap stock- including wild horses- that entered the Green Gully hut paddock. The hut site is dominated by seriously strong yards- posts 50 cm across, pens that could hold a couple of hundred head, crushes, races, and loading ramps on the same scale. But we were focused on the hut's hot shower to cleanse our grimy bodies and sooth our- probably more grimy- souls. Both were better for the treatment, and soon four happy folk were sitting around the fire in the outside barbecue

pit. And not on the grass or even the new pavers- but on comfortable folding chairs EACH WITH ITS OWN DRINKS TABLE! Pity we'd drunk all the red- though the coffee from the hut's percolator went down a treat. A few minor suggestions about signage, and a small quibble about the catch on the toilet- boy, we were pretty short of things to complain about!

The notes had suggested Dunlop Volleys or similar for the walk up Green Gully Creek, and after the 4-wheeler trail ended, the frequent creek crossings showed us why. We took in the

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views up the pagoda-like pinnacles, kept a strong lookout for rock wallabies, and said hello to passing red-bellied black snakes as we entered the Canyon. One of us clambered up the left side and reported a marvellous balcony of Elkhorns framing the huge rock spire

the channel itself. It was a surreal experience following it. Definitely need light joggers. (Later, one tired walker weighed his wet boots on a luggage scale- they were ½ kilo PER BOOT heavier than when dry!)

Colwell's Hut had been expanded by



opposite. Unfortunately, the walkers far below lost patience and moved, spoiling a killer photo. We'd been warned about deep water in the Canyon, but it was hip-deep only in one 3 metre section, and an easy scramble over the rest. No trouble in dry weather, but impassable in a flood.

Many crossings later, we lunched at what we termed the Sound Shell- a great dish in a rock face with a convenient stone rostrum at its focus. One of us took a turn declaiming Hamlet, but though the audience acclaimed the acoustics, the performance itself was panned.

Another hour or so upstream we picked up our first direction sign since the canyon. It marked the start of the top 4WD track which runs UNDERWATER for long stretches along

replacing a collapsed lean-to with one made from round timber, corrugated iron, and fencing-wire- very much in the manner of the bushman of old. We were gratified to see more good bush improvising in the hut itself- especially the shutter hooks made from a worn-out horseshoe. Three of us had a good sleep under the lean-to, while the other happily snored away the night in the hut.

We blessed the good weather next morning as we breakfasted on the now-familiar barbecue platform in our posh armchairs. We felt relaxed, fit, happy, and ready for the 600 metres of climbing and 18-odd kilometres of walking ahead. The two fittest set a good pace ahead, while the others took lots of photos and lots of time. We all met up as arranged at



Rock Spire ~ Green Gully Canyon

Kunderang Trail and swapped around walking companions to talk each other through the last kilometres. Lunch was on a convenient log, there was a long pause at the patch of rainforest that meets the road 3 km from the end, and an early arrival back at Cedar Creek. Soon we were showered and propped up on the verandah, with a bottle or two and our cameras ready for the afternoon kangaroo cavalcade. A beautiful sunset had us exhausting our camera batteries and savouring this moment, with these people, in this beautiful place.

In summation. We were invited back to report on the made changes since our trial walk in January 2009. Since then, there has been- and remains- considerable opposition on environmental grounds to having such a venture in a designated Wilderness area. It could be costly

to maintain, and there are many good tracks in Eastern Australia that seem to be hardly used, and a number of homestays adjacent to them which have few customers. On the other hand, this is the first hut walk in NSW, and the Tasmanian Cradle Mountain Huts has a waiting list of customers from all over the world. Whether Green Gully can match the allure of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area has yet to be seen. It's certainly much cheaper, and has some wonderful assets- lawns mowed by kangaroos, the view from the Rocks into the Apsley headwaters, the impossible athleticism of the dumpy little rock wallabies, the sympathetic craftsmanship of the huts connecting us back to a vanished way of life, and the sheer professionalism and pride of the Walcha NPWS people have shown throughout. We have seen much to delight us, and were very pleased to have been present at the birth of the Green Gully Huts Walk.

*Photographs by Paul McCann ~ Jim Reid ~ David Lawrence ~ Kathy King*

# Gara Gorge 12 November 2011

**Kathy King**

Peter Rodger, Paul McCann, Jack Patton and I went out to the Blue Hole on this glorious spring day. Paul test-drove his new beaut bike



which electrically-assisted him on the hills. We spent the morning walking the southern rim off-track. This spring had been so wet that the country was many different shades of green – an uncommon sight. As we made our way around the rim, we peered across to the other side of the gorge and made out the cliffs below the impressive rock formation we often side-track to, off the Threfall Walk. So many wildflowers were out – *Goodenia*, *Hardenbergia*, *Dianella*, *Bulbinellies* – Paul



had a field day photographing them all. Suddenly, Peter started backwards and warned us of the brown snake directly in our path. We had been warned that the march flies were in horrendous numbers in the gorges recently. But, although armed with industrial-strength fly repellent, we were not too bothered by them.

We ended up on a large slab of granite at the edge of the gorge overlooking the aptly-named, but precariously-perched, Mushroom Rock. On the other side of the gorge was the “impressive rock formation” already mentioned. Below this, we could see the path of destruction a large boulder had made as it tumbled down the gorge side, taking trees out as it was dislodged from above. We had plenty of time so we had a leisurely morning tea perched above the gorge.

We wandered back across a gully to the northern side of Gara Gorge, past a set of small falls and ate lunch in the shade of she-oaks. Then we made our way over to the Threfall Track. Still the same variety of wildflowers this side. We sat on the seat opposite the big bend in the Gara River and viewed Mushroom Rock once more but from a different angle. A large dragonfly drifted effortlessly across the view.

Then we did the obligatory side-track to the top of “impressive rock” overlooking a large pool in the river. We made our way along the location of the old water flume of which the only remnants were the cuttings made in the ground to keep the flume at the right level.

We didn't envy Paul his bike ride back into Armidale as the weather had warmed up considerably but he said he enjoyed it, especially the hills! Apparently the new bike met his expectations.