

THE SYDNEY BUSHWALKER

A Monthly Bulletin devoted to matters of interest to The Sydney Bushwalkers  
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COOKTOWN THE "DREAM TOWN"

Brian Barden & Ted. Smith.

We came to Cooktown by way of a small R.A.A.F. crash boat and, while waiting on the jetty there for transport, we happened to ask one of the lads how far the town was and whether we could "take a 'bus". For a second he looked at us in amazement and then in typical R.A.A.F. style said "Are you kiddin?"

That just about sums up the whole place - it makes one wonder how it ever exists. The town from a distance looks very much like any other country town .... the same dusty streets with the typical weatherboard buildings on either side and the inevitable assortment of cattle dogs lounging around in the shade. However, this is only from a distance. One seems to realise and feel its deadness only when one stands beside those ramshackle buildings; or in the centre of that dusty road. Most of the structures are two storied with the windows of the shops underneath boarded up, and here and there a door stands open, showing some relic of former trade. In one shop there still stand ancient barber's chairs where, most likely, gold miners came in days gone by to spruce up before going for entertainment at one of the many hotels that now stand empty along the main street. For the most part, however, these shops hold only huge empty shelves and counters, the dust of ages covering their vast expanses.

Unofficial figures state the population to be in the vicinity of three hundred. We think that must also include the herds of goats and cows that roam the town at will. At the present time there are two hotels open for business and they for only three or four days a week.

Of course, the town does come to life sometimes and then the population, or what's left of it, really goes wild. After the Japanese capitulation the town went in for an orgy of "happiness". At the height of this celebrating one of the publicans rulled two barrels into the main street and sat astride, one pouring out drinks which were "on the house". That afternoon, dogs, goats, and humans (male, female,

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half-caste and quarter-caste alike) were reposing peacefully from one end of the town to the other.

Two of the stores are run by Chinese and the cafe is run by the wife of the only "shift" worker in town.

When the Air Force lads hit town, business becomes very brisk and what could be more natural than for hubby to give a hand in the kitchen. We have never tasted more delicious hamburgers than those cooked by this versatile man. Of course kerosene lanterns make things more pleasant for proprietress and customer alike as we defy anyone to see what he is eating by the light of one of these horrors.

There is a picture show. In the one and sixpenny "bleachers" sit the black population and anything else that may happen to stray in. In the two and sixpennies are usually the R.A.A.F. lads and a few of the locals with their children. However, in the dress circle, (a raised platform about two feet from the other seats) sit the local ministers, policeman and wife, and all other persons of standing in the town. Sometimes an R.A.A.F. lad with one of the four eligible girls in town might manage to sit with the "elite" but he usually feels very uncomfortable before the night is over due to his numerous mates who speak to him lovingly from the two and sixpennies below. We don't think anybody comes for the purpose of actually seeing the show - it's just a case of seeing people and finding out what has happened in the past six or seven days..... if anything.

To the fortnightly dances which are held in the same hall sometimes come residents who ride for up to thirty miles. Little black boys and girls stand on the stairs outside and gaze with awe at the bright lights. For the most part the population seems to consist of children. There are literally hundreds of them at these dances, usually ranging in age from three or four up to about fourteen both aboriginal and whites alike. They tire of looking at their mothers and fathers dancing and turn to games. Soon there is much screaming and whooping but we have yet to see anyone bat an eyelid at the commotion. We wonder what would be the effect at one of our own suburban halls if a crowd of these "Cookies" descended upon them.

The beach is a mile from town and is quite reasonable at high tide but this one and others of its kind in Northern Queensland are greatly over-rated. We would prefer even Bondi on a Sunday with its crowds to some of these mud covered expanses with never a sign of a decent "shoot".

Cooktown can never hope to return to its former greatness. Gold and copper mining were once the magnet which attracted thousands of people to it. Now that these are gone the only contact with the outside world is by the small coastal boat "Mirinda" which calls with supplies once a week. The people that are left here dream happily on; all seem contented but for a few "strangers" (who have been there only ten or twelve years).

Their means of livelihood baffles us. Except for the government jobs ... Post Office, Police Station, etc. there seems nothing to do but drink oneself

to death and that with a choice of only two pubs. Even to a Bushwalker the country would not appeal but for a few square miles out of town near the 'drome' which is fairly clear ground and quite pretty.

For that quiet holiday which the doctor so often recommends, Cooktown would be ideal.

(The authors have painted a very gloomy picture of Cooktown but the most damning evidence is their wish, expressed in separate letter, to subscribe to "The Sydney Bushwalker". Ed.)

A report of the Annual Meeting and list of the new officers will reach you in time but here are a few to go on with:-

PRESIDENT - Jack Rose  
 VICE PRESIDENTS - Roley Cotter and Arthur Gilroy.  
 TREASURER - Maurie Berry.  
 SECRETARY - Hilma Galliot.  
 SOCIAL SECRETARY - Laurie Wood  
 MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY - Ron Knightley  
 WALKS SECRETARY - Colin Lloyd.

Col. Bob Savage has done a good piece of work in having 1000 trees planted at Balcombe Military Camp. In addition, he has established a Beergarden. The biergartin (as non-drinkers would spell it) has flagged walks and is covered with old camouflage nets over which run runner beans. (It has not yet been proved that the beans run any faster than ordinary beans nor yet that their spirals are any more eccentric). This beangartin is lit by a soft amber glow suffused by the beer bittle wall-brackets. How exciting to strike a real beangartin.

It has been said that Bushwalkers are opportunists, have initiative etc. They may have etc. but that is about all. Not one had the scientific curiosity to ask Mr. Norman Chaffer at the recent lecture where our birds could have migrated.

Joe Turner wrote us a long letter advocating living in the country in the most glowing terms. Hey, where does this Joe Turner live? In the Himalayan foothills?

OFFICIAL EXTRA

We are giving a report of the Annual Reunion in order to anticipate the questions which will be asked in Parliament.

In case you haven't studied your Walks Programme lately, it was held at Moorabinda on Heathcote Creek, same as last year.

A few people went straight from the meeting, (it wasn't hard to drag oneself from it) and, catching a late train, made a long week-end of it. Children and workers arrived at various times on Saturday as feeding and working hours respectively permitted. We noticed that the children who, last year, were carried down to the re-union, with (figuratively) napkins on the side, walked themselves down this year. This was a most depressing spectacle for those of us who, having no children of our own either with or without napkins, have no such deadly record of the passing years.

About six-ish (we're still on Saturday) everyone started to cook dinner early, secretly and privately, as they thought, each hoping he'd finish early and so secure the best position round the camp fire. As it was, however, tents and fires were so jammed together, all city-like and matey that nothing could possibly remain secret, and you found yourself stirring custard and vaguely thinking "Just fancy I don't remember bringing custard, much less putting it on to cook", then realising that your own fire was two short steps away, over which your neighbour was bending, stabbing knives into your vegetables which weren't cooked anyway.

After all this we tramped down to the camp fire or fires, as there were two, very neat and compact. The new President, Jack Rose, received the symbols of office very graciously and we hope that none of the ex-Presidents heard the enquiry from someone, "Which of the old Presidents does the Bone come from?"

We had three cheer leaders for the singing, but it was very good. There was a slight breakaway on the left side, this side showing a regrettable tendency to swing everything. We should have liked to hear more from Peter Page and Edgar Yardley, but were very grateful for the pieces we heard.

The "stage" was situated on last year's camp fire site, (sentimental reasons we assume) but it didn't make "entering" easy. No one can maintain poise walking on cinders and ashes. There were real curtains this year - Three groundsheets, exquisitely draped and hung by 12 clothes pegs unwillingly "lent" by Mrs. Frank Duncan, who couldn't keep her eyes off them all night. Early in the evening the curtains were run by impressed labour but later, one strong wire did the job very capably.

The first sketch, an ambitious attempt at "Snowwhite", was played before and behind the curtains at the whim of the players and when things were uncertain the curtains proved very facesaving. Ray Kirkby as a very rude mirror, mirror being a strategically hung tin plate, lost his mirror at a critical moment with no loss of aplomb. Later in the evening he reminded us of those-dear-dead-days-beyond-recall-thank-God, by his true to life picture of a predatory Yank on his (the Yanks) old stamping ground, Wynyard.

And all the children wanted to know what Malcom McGregor found in the tent that made him lick his lips like that.

Hot dogs and cocoa for supper! A bright idea that. We heard someone remark that they preferred biscuits but think it was just a pose.

With all the children and weaker people in bed the unorganised part of the night commenced. All the old songs were sung and those of us who just lay back and listened with great enjoyment wondered why it is that they never seem stale when sung at a reunion. We really thought that it was going to be an all-night session when most people suddenly disappeared, to bed we trust. A few drops of rain fell just as a threat, but enough to suggest retirement for most people.

We are still wondering why Arthur insisted he was, first, Captain Oates then George Somebody, and why this should make some of the girls giggle so and talk incessantly like suffragettes.

Anyway, a "beaut" re-une.

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The Social Programme for April consists entirely of "free" nights so members can spend their nights doing good work for the Club

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The Play Night advertised for May 31st has been moved forward to May 24th. This promises to be an entertaining night with many new stars. On second thoughts - delete "new".

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Breaking away from a couple of Rear-Admirals, Doris Allden recently entertained Bob Savage and "Mouldy" Harrison in the Melbourne Wrannery. Such a delectable array of foods, mostly fabulous to civilians, was served to the guests that the telling should be good propaganda for recruiting for the King's Navee.

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Two distinguished names can again be included amongst those present - Tom Moppett and Jack Debert. We hope their re-appearance means further walking days.

At the Reunion, Arthur Gilroy's tent was especially chosen for the co-tenting tests as it was thought least likely to blush.

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BUSHWALKERS' WAR MEMORIAL

By "Mumbedah.

It is my opinion that insufficient notice and careful consideration was given in the matter of determination of the nature or selection of a site of the proposed Bushwalkers War Memorial. The decision to recommend to the Federation the creation of a park on Narrow Neck Peninsula was made with undue haste, and, incidentally, by no means unanimously.

The Annual General Meeting should have been confined to the election of officers and to urgent problems where delay may embarrass the Federation or be the means of losing an opportunity. The folk present were "caught on the hop" and I think an ill-considered decision made.

A small portion of land on the approaches of Narrow Neck with its poor, stunted and scraggy vegetation is a bleak, stony, dreary soil-eroded spot to create a Memorial Park and not a fitting tribute to the memory of our fallen comrades. By the expression "park" one visualised ornamental trees, rockeries, flowering shrubs and the like - to wit, Hinkler and Kingsford Smith Parks in Katoomba - indeed worthy of those famous flyers. Our effort should be commensurately as worthy. But to envisage such a park on Narrow Neck is fantastic. There were but a few inches of sandy soil covering a rocky base and the strong westerly winds which sweep across would render the growth of any introduced vegetation almost nil. The Federation in any case has not the finance to maintain such a park and to rely on honorary work by federated club members - well, we find it difficult to get a volunteer for a simple job in the city. The perpetuation of the entire Narrow Neck Peninsula as a park would be much more desirable provided it could be left in its present state, which is very doubtful. However, there is no reason why our present efforts to have this declared could not be spurred on to have this reserved as a memorial, but Katoomba Council, no doubt, would be very loth to relinquish their control. From the point of view of majesty and beauty the Blue Gum Forest seems to be more ideal; perhaps the Trustees may have a word to say!

In view of the lengthy period involved to suitably impress the Government as to our desires, it is my idea that a lasting record should be struck in the form of a brass tablet, inset in rock or a cemented cairn on some commanding view-point off the beaten track and visited by the true bushwalker who would appreciate it. Clear Hill is becoming more and more popular and has on occasions been visited by a type who would not hesitate to pump two or three .22's into a sign.

I can think of no more fitting place than Splendour Rock on Mount Mingo as it commands all the Cox River country where the boys loved to roam so well. The Rock is centrally situated in the proposed Blue Mountains National Park and should by virtue of its position remain in the primitive state. As one gazes upon the peaceful scene, the presence of the tablet should well turn one's thoughts to a little

meditation on the fact that our boys gave their lives to help in the great struggle so that we to-day are free from domination of a foreign power.

Whatever may be the outcome of an approach to the Federation on these lines, I think this Club should, in the event of an unfavourable view being taken by the Federation Council, erect our own commemoration tablet to the memory of Gordon Smith and Gordon Mannell on Splendour Rock and I am sure any such move will receive the full approval and support of all club members.

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THROUGH THE EASIER BYWAYS

Allen A. Strom.

Let's look at this Military Map of the Barrington Tops. See that long, drawn-out ridge which separates the Williams from the Chichester? What a terrific, broken, zig-zagging, creek-eaten mass of evil it is! With the egoism of the new chum, we goaded ourselves into believing that we'd manage this ridge as we'd managed the Williams Ridge or any other decent, self-respecting, straight-forward tapering roof of a denuded landscape.

But then, the Barrington is different -- its Snow Gums are a wretched cross between the mallee type of the Australian Alps and the Scribbly Gums of our sandstone tops. Good Lord! they grow everywhere, up the peaks and down, tumbled and broken or growing in groves as spindly saplings -- and, what is more desperate, it's impossible to take a bearing or a sight anywhere! The military (upon the map) says in its wisdom, -- "complete camouflage"; if only this were a paper of disrepute, I could have my say.

Coming from the Tops we tried to pick that ridge -- in one -- and as we proceeded gently down and down, with rain forest just peeping over the edge to the right and left -- we breathed nervously -- breathed with fear -- and then it happened! We were hemmed in by brush! Racked with thirst and saturated with sweat, I looked at Doug, -- "Go on" he said, "the brush is better than a return through those Snow Gums".

Down and through -- through that pitilessly cruel vine, the Lawyer Vine; and two thousand feet below we are on the Chichester -- sometimes with water round our chest, sometimes with raging, narrow gulches and maddening waterfalls -- twisting, turning -- always with the silent, green, clammy brush -- occasionally the blood-curdling, screaming whistle of the great black and yellow cockatoo.

That night we slept the clock round as we lay on a flat patch hewn from the virgin forest -- next day we moved off with the hope that soon we would see the green swards cut by man from the army of the giant timbers; before two hours had passed, we were confronted with a narrow ravine charging down, down -- by walls of wretched hornfels -- God never made a harder rock! "What now?" my eyes asked -- and it was up and up, higher and higher, towards the crown of the ridge -- four thousand feet at the crest, the brush as thick as ever, and whistling Lyre Birds scattering at their first sight of man! For four hours we hacked and pushed, and swore, and fell -- following the ridge, following the ridge -- that confusing, ever-branching ridge between the Williams and the Chichester -- with ne'er a sight worthwhile -- not a check to flutter the flagging spirit, only torn legs, torn arms, torn thighs; the tender flesh finds irritation from the softest rustle of the grasses.

. . . . .

And so came the quiet, the calm, after exertion! The blood pounding thru'



the temples; the limbs aching with excess activity; 'tis all finished and quietly we ramble along the fertile, cultivated banks of the Chichester -- the light chlorophyll green of grass and herb ending abruptly against the still-wooded hills. An age-old church and a school, farm-houses by a swift, crystal-clear stream, the terrors of ravine now hidden in the blue smirk of the far-off Tops, dominating the background.

Slowly we mooched along, ceasing to remark on the soft beauty from sheer boredom of repetition, until we enter the precincts of the Waspet Dam. Suffice here to say, I have seen nothing more beautiful -- Kangaroo Grass reaching to the knees, extending from dam-edge to the tall, straight, clean and upright Spotted Gums. Did we suffer mountain peak and gorge whilst here, nestling in quiet and easy simplicity, was this hidden valley, this masterpiece of colour, tone, and contour? For one day we faltered and caught our breath, paid homage and thought of those who must tear the muscle-tissue from the bone before their lust for bushwalking is appeased.

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The merits of Narrow Neck as a park were under discussion. "It has practically no earth on it" chorussed several. Well, we have seen a number of necks with not quite so much dirt on them.

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Who left a bottle at the Reunion campfire? Anyone answering this question is sure to receive our thanks and a black eye some dark night.

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Readers are asking these questions.

Why was not a Government Investigator sent by plane to see the appalling living conditions in some parts of Moorabinda?

Cannot better lights be installed in the corridors at Paddy's for the convenience of queues in the long Winter mornings?

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Everyone should know that a psychological meteorologist is a man who looks into a girl's eyes to see weather.

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The scene was the monthly meeting of the Council of Federated Bush Walking Clubs - an occasion where decorum rules, where formality holds sway; where members, though they may have shared a tent, nay, even toothpaste, at the previous week-end, address one another distantly as Miss Wotherspoon or Mr. Cholmondeley as the case may be: or rather, do not address one another at all, but make oblique references via the chairman.

Sentiment and frivolity have no place on the agenda, as all who have been present at a meeting will agree.

But the month was February, the night was hot, and in the Olympian heights four floors above the council chamber dwelt a broadcasting station, which shall be nameless. Why should we give it a free plug in our popular magazine?

The Federation's tireless secretary was, as usual, one of the first to arrive.

"I think we shall have some air" she said, flinging the windows wide with the utmost abandon.

Delegates trickled in by ones and twos, mopping their brows, and the meeting opened in its wonted orderly manner. Indeed there was no untoward circumstances until the proceedings were well advanced. The trouble began quietly, one might say insidiously, while the secretary was reading the correspondence.

"Re toilet rooms on Cheltenham station - the Commissioner for Railways writes refusing our request".

"Lay your little head on my shoulder" screened a husky baritone voice sympathetically from upstairs.

Ignoring the invitation the secretary continued:

"A letter from a Mr. Golightly of Come-by-Chance, saying that he has a tent for sale, 8 x 6 - "

"Whispering while you cuddle near me" the wheedling voice went on.

The meeting stirred uneasily on its hard chairs. Really, this was not the time....

"Can't they shut their windows?" asked the Hon. Sec a little unreasonably.

"They too need the air" murmured the sotto-secretary, blotto voce.

"They appear to have it, what!" said Mr. Cholmondeley, secretary of the Lollback Loungers.

"They do indeed" said Miss Wotherspoon, guiltily checking the action of her foot which was beating time to the music.

"Proceed" said the President.

"Letter from Mr. Rufus Baggs, saying that he has reconsidered his decision to resign from the Federation."

"Whispering why you'll never leave me, whispering why you'll never grieve me -" chimed in the voice from aloft.

"Letters from six new members with [redacted] inquiries re bush walking clubs".

The orchestra finished its whispering campaign and paused before embarking on deeper seas of passion. They began the Beguine.

"The Federation Reunion will be held in October as it was last year, on the week-end nearest the full moon -"

"It brings back a night of tropical splendour" sang the voice from above - this time a throaty tenor.

"Letter to the Youth Hostel Association, re use of hostels for conferences. It was feared they might degenerate into cheap boarding houses. It was reported that people even took portable gramophone and wirelesses with them".

" - and down by the shore an orchestra's playing" warbled the songster, *sostenuto*.

"Re portions of land north of Burning Palms -"

" - and even the palms seem to be swaying -"

"the Minister for Lands writes that no satisfaction can be expected" the secretary went on valiantly. "Nor is anything to be hoped for as regards resumptions at Narrabeen".

" - and now when I hear people curse the chance they have wasted, I know but too well what they mean" carolled the tenor with a surprising return to commonsense: in fact the words might have sprung from the lips of the secretary herself.

"The Bouddi Working Bee will be held on the second week end in May -"

"To live it again is past all endeavour" the singer declared, *con spirito*.

"By Jove, he's right there" murmured several voices approvingly, thinking of the heavy loads on them by Governor Byles in last year's punitive expedition.

"Order!" said the President.

"Here are letters from the secretaries of several clubs which had been on the unfinancial list, apologising, enclosing fees and promising that the oversight will not occur again".

"and here we are, swearing to love for ever, and promising never to part" added the tenor, who was now accompanied vocally by several other lads of the village and full orchestra.

"Louder Marie!" cried Dave above the din, forgetting the oblique form of address in his agitation.

The secretary obliged by raising her voice a few semitones.

"Bush Fire Posters. Suggestions for new posters have been received - one is 'Put out Your Picnic Fire' -"

" - let the love that was once a fire remain an ember" sobbed the voice, *con fuoco e con amore*.

"and I would add, poor cold water on it till you can walk through it barefoot" continued the Secretary.

"Oh yes let them begin the Beguine -" bellowed the boys upstairs - but at this point the chairman was understood to remark that if they were just going to begin the Beguine it was time we ended, and he therefore declared the meeting closed.

BATS IN THE BELFRY ?

Well not exactly, but if we had one we'd have them in it. Instead they (the bats) content themselves with wheeling and cavorting in a super display of aerogymnastics in the garden and the street in front of the house. Their powers of flight are amazing; they beat any bird in their ability to change direction in quick time. They appear at dusk and wing their way in silence avoiding with uncanny precision obstacles such as branches and phone wires. The lack of noise is rather interesting for if we had bats ears we would hear quite a lot which raises the interesting question "If a noise is something which can be heard, is something we can't hear a noise?" Apparently the bats make plenty of noise (or should we say vibration) but is of such a frequency as cannot be detected by most human ears. I say most advisedly because I had a camping companion once who affected a very superior air because his ears were capable of hearing bat talk. Scientists think that the bat uses the reflections (or echoes) of these vibrations for avoiding obstacles in the dark in a similar way to the modern devices used by ships to detect icebergs. Nature generally gets in first with these bright ideas.

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