

THE SYDNEY BUSHWALKER

A monthly bulletin of matters of interest to The Sydney Bush Walkers, Box 4476, G.P.O. Sydney, N.S.W. 2001. Club meetings are held every Wednesday evening from 7.30 p.m. at the Wireless Institute building, 14 Atchison Street, St. Leonards. Enquiries concerning the Club should be referred to Mrs. Marcia Shappert - telephone 30.2028.

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NOVEMBER 1977.

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50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS.

by Dot Butler.

The Club has held other celebrations - a 21st, a 25th and a 40th Birthday but nothing could equal the enthusiasm of the response to the GOLDEN JUBILEE Celebrations, which, as befits great events, spread themselves over three days.

On Friday, 21st October, hundreds of walkers, without benefit of map and compass, assembled at Menzies Hotel. To those coming even only 10 minutes after the scheduled arrival time the crowd milling around in the anteroom looked as dense as a peak hour commuters' gathering at Wynyard Station. But there was this difference - nearly every face was a familiar one! What greetings and chatter and cries of delight and astonishment as old friends were recognised - some we had not seen for many years - camouflaged by beards or altered in appearance though they might be, yet to the eyes of their friends they were still the same as of old when their legs were swift and strong. Bushwalkers have drawn fewer blanks than most in the Lottery of Time; the passing of the years has not dimmed their enthusiasm and joy of life. And all the new young ones, many of them children of Bushwalkers, looked a fine and healthy crowd.

In conformity with custom waiters offered drinks but most of us couldn't take time off from talking to bother, and those who did seemed to favour orange juice. Just like in the good old days when natural high spirits were the only spirits needed.

Any now everyone is heading for the dining room. 292 walkers are at last settled at tables in small groups with their special friends, and still the talking goes on unabated "Do you remember that time down Christies Creek?" "That mighty trip down the Kowmung, Easter of '38. . . .?" "Remember the Christmas Kosciusko trip?"

At the Official Table, presided over by Helen Grey looking really lovely in jade blue, are gathered Foundation Members Win Chardon, Frank and Anice Duncan, Maurie Berry. The Club's Hon. Solicitor, Colin Broad who has given us the value of his legal experience for so many years was there with Mrs. Broad, and our newest Honorary Member, George Davison, looking very strong and distinguished with his snowy hair and 90 years of bushland experience. Mr. Davison has acted as Surveyor of our Kangaroo Valley land, and his help and knowledge of Lands Department affairs culminated in our acquiring occupancy of 22 acres of the beautiful escarpment necessary to adequately contain "Coolana". The marking of the boundaries just the previous weekend saw the completion of his 7-year job - just in time for the 50th celebrations. How this year will go down in history!

Dinner was served and it was good, but don't ask me what we ate. Things put into the stomach are gone and forgotten the next day, but things of the heart and mind are stored up forever.

Ron Knightley very efficiently manned the microphone and kept things

moving. Helen read letters and messages from old members who were unable to be present, and congratulatory telegrams from Clubs in other states. We were sorry advanced years prevented Myles Dunphy from coming, he being to all of us present the Father of Bushwalking and Conservation in N.S.W. However Helen informed us in her speech that 24 past Presidents were in attendance.

On the official table was the striking Birthday cake, complete with white icing flannel flower, the work of Grace Noble. Jean Ashdown, a member since 1928, lit the 50 candles and Dot Butler, of 1932 vintage, blew them out (just made it in one breath!)

Committee, going by past experience, had decided we did not need an orchestra, but at short notice two musicians were found and some dancing took place on the small floor. It was just a gesture to those who had run out of talk.

By 11 o'clock everyone reluctantly tore themselves away and headed for home, to be ready for the great campfire celebration to be held next day.

October 22nd. The Boy Scouts' Camp, Pennant Hills.

From 4 o'clock onwards walkers came, till around 350 were there. They gathered in the hall adjoining the kitchen and reminisced and ate and looked at old photographs and scrap books filled with walking and conservation items. Some 120 set up tents in the bush and when darkness came we saw Dunc's "Rogues' Gallery" of old photographs, the older members seeing themselves when 40 or 50 years younger, with the accompanying flood of memories.

Outside it began to spit rain but that did not stop us from lighting the campfire and urging everyone to foregather. As Paddy led off the usual singing the rain fell harder and harder. People covered under umbrellas and groundsheets and did their best to co-operate with Bob Younger and Barbara Bruce in singing, but at last we realised it was a losing battle so Helen sent us all up to the Assembly Hall where the whole crowd were eventually seated and the entertainment continued. The highlight was a Chronic Opera by the notorious Crown Street Composers - Malcolm McGregor, Jim Brown, Geoff Wagg and Don Matthews. They sang of a walk where everything, as commonly happens, went wrong. The audience laughed uproariously. The finale involved the undraping of a huge birthday cake manufactured by construction engineer George Gray. At a given signal the lid of the cake opened and up popped charming little ten-year old Susan Gray dressed in a bikini and a chaplet of flannel flowers. The audience were still applauding when up popped Dot Butler, similarly clad, bearing a placard "50 YEARS ON", the implication being that Bushwalkers now 10 years old can still expect to be walking at 60.

Another well received item was the Fashion Parade through the Decades, thought up by Grace Noble, featuring pedestrian excursionists of the 1890's and 1900's, right through to the glamorous and tough girl walkers of the present day - then beyond to the walker of the future with his solar-heater,

light-weight aluminium pack and special clothing that lets moisture out but prevents it from getting in. A real breakthrough.

A line-up of Presidents brought forth seventeen. It was a pity two of our women Presidents had just gone home. This left Helen as the only rose among all that crowd of men. Now out came Ian Debert and presented a photograph of his father, Jack Debert, who died a few years ago. Jack it was who put an advertisement in the newspaper in 1927 calling together people who were interested in forming a bush walking club - the gleam in the eye, as it were, that was followed by the conception then the birth of the S.B.W.

The Modern Pop Singing group with their guitars and bagpipes called forth many encores but my midnight good manners prompted the piper to put down his pipes so the local residents could get some sleep. Many of the audience also sought their beds, either in the dormitory, in their tents, or in their homes, many of the latter returning the next day for further re-uning.

A fitting finale to this never-to-be-forgotten weekend was a bushwalk through the adjacent parkland to visit Marie Byles in her little cottage in the bushland heights of Cheltenham. Marie has piloted her vessel steadfastly through life and now has her course set with just such clear-eyed honesty for the other shore. The younger members of the Club walked quietly through her bushland, already donated to the National Trust, and were impressed.

On which note we end this chronicle of a great occasion, hoping to be one of the number when as many, or more, will come together at the Club's 60th Birthday Party in 1987.

* * * * *

THANKS.

Ian Stevens wishes to thank all fellow members of S.B.W. for visits, cards and good wishes during his stay in hospital for his recent eye operation, which at the moment appears to have been a success.

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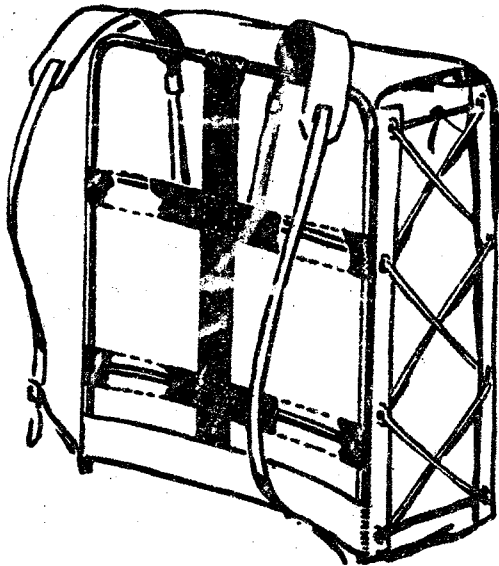
XMAS AT KOSCIUSKO.

Bob Younger is planning to spend Xmas at the Australian Ski Club Lodge at Guthega, and can take friends at \$5 per night. Day walks and luxury nights! Your own catering.

Bookings can be made with Bob up to 10th December (election day) with money in full. Phone him on 57,1158.

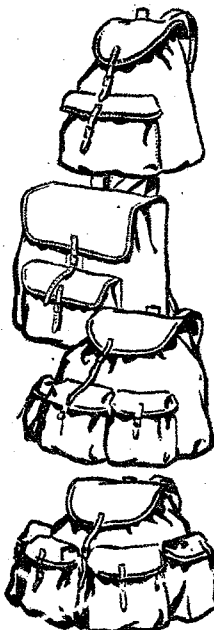
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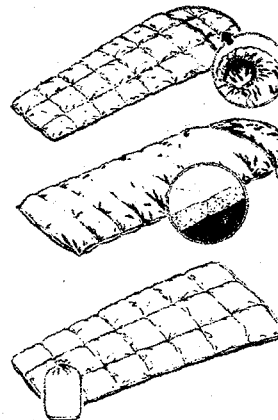
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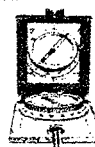
Hooded bag. Extra well filled. Very compact. Approx 3½lbs.

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Paddy Pullin

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C A M E R O N S C O R N E R C A P E R .

by Owen Marks.

Recently I have the good luck to be invited to travel in a range rover to Camerons Corner. At first I had never heard of it, until I looked up a large map and found it at the extreme north-eastern corner of Sturt National Park. Ah-haa I thought, that is where the three states meet. So I said "Right-o", and there I was leaving Sydney at 3 am on Saturday, Labour Weekend, bound for White Cliffs. A 13 hour trip including 45 mins. in Nyngan and Cobar, and half an hour in Wilcannia.

White Cliffs is where everyone's worst enemy should be sent. Temperature of 98°F at 8 pm, which means sitting outside on the pub verandah and watching millions of moths attacking the lights. A water tap with a sign "One cent a gallon - put money in chute at post office". A corner store with a bowser and an old tram next to the school for the teacher to live in is the entire town. Oh yes, a bush hospital.

A huge circular plateau dominates the town which is pockmarked like the moon. This of course is the opal diggings of last century. I was told that there is only one genuine miner left, the rest are pensioners living in holes in the ground, and in winter there is a floating population of 100 or so. At one of the underground homes is to be seen (on production of \$1.50) a remarkable fossil of a pleistocaurus all opalized, which although not all colourful like a real opal, is nevertheless quite remarkable and is being featured in all the tourist brochures of the Far West. The lady of the house showed us around her home. A series of tunnels going from room to room, all carpeted, with shafts letting in the light occasionally. It was a fun place to live and about 15° cooler than outside, and I suppose for the kids growing up in such an unusual environment, in old age they will have the supremest bestest of memories. We all camped on the top of the diggings to catch the breeze and the view is of desolation. The moon would be no different.

We left early on Sunday and headed north, hoping to hit the Wanaaring-Milparinka Highway. Kangaroos everywhere, windmills, gates, grids for two hours until we hit "The Cut Line" as the main road is called. We turned left and kept straight on. The map has the road going for 40 miles or so without a bend. Suddenly we were negotiating curves and my 5 mile to the inch map had nothing. "Keep on the road" was my advice! The road deteriorated to a track that kept passing through north-south fences at an angle. Lost. Bushed. No sun and where were we? We hadn't seen a car since leaving White Cliffs, and of course we hadn't sighted a house.

At last a signpost and we realized that we were headed south along an unmarked road. Here we saw a truck and we stopped and enquired where are we? It seemed that the main road was covered by 6ft of water three years ago and it would take three more years for it to go down. We had to make a long loop around the Balloo River overflow as Burke and Wills did all those years ago. I asked how come the water doesn't evaporate quickly in the hot summers? Of course he didn't know.

We passed the Tibbooburra turnoff and headed across a small stoney desert until Milparinka was reached. A hotel and two ruined houses with a population of 5, although a woman in the bar remarked that she lived down the road, which could mean anything up to 80 miles away. A few miles away was where Sturt and his party camped for a number of months by water, while waiting for rain. It never did and Mt. Poole is named after the first death. Sturt built a cairn on top and it's still there. Such a barren corner of the state, and all the time I kept on thinking of the early explorers then, and how terrible it is to travel there even now, with roads, towns and air-conditioned jeeps.

Tibbooburra 40 minutes away and here we are. One hotelier was asleep and wasn't serving beer or anything else. Sunday afternoon it was. The other hotel was all full and hot and smelly. The walls are painted by Clifton Pugh and out in the passageway was a doodle by another well-known, Russell Drysdale.

All the people were staggering around and we eventually found out that a wild party was held the previous day in Queensland and all the town was there. The ranger of the Sturt National Park was at home, and he could just manage a message from his befuddled brain. Yes, the road to the Camerons Corner part of the park was only $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away and there we could find a lake where we could camp. So we filled up with petrol and headed west.

The country is magnificent; horizons in every direction, flat dried-up lake beds with the road running across the middle. (Later, on the way back, my brother-in-law drove around in circles with his eyes shut.) It was getting dusky, and the 'roos and emus were hopping and skipping along the road, sand dunes were running parallel on either side, and there ahead was a windmill and a house.

From out of a station wagon staggered a man, bleary-eyed of course, and holding up his pants with one hand and shading his eyes with the other. The ranger also recovering. It seems that 100% of the rangers in this park had been rip roaring drunk. "Where is Sturt's Tree?" my sister cried. She had read that at Fort Burke where we were standing was where a marked tree was. The reply was incredible. "I went looking for it only last week but it was underneath me." Eventually it sunk in that somewhere under the lake where we intended to camp was the tree. He also couldn't tell us how long it would be under the water. "Thre or four years, maybe longer." The lake went on for miles and was full of dead trees. I broke all tradition and had a wash.

That night, a wild dry storm broke and a few drops fell. It hasn't rained for four years. Next morning we drove north four miles to the Dingo fence and headed west along it on the N.S.W. side. 17 kms of sand-hills which run north-south every couple of hundred yards. Suddenly we were there. A large gate where we parked the car, and we opened it and into South Australia for the hundred yard walk north into Queensland, where on the exact spot is a cairn, and two garbage bins.

According to the log book, anyone who is anybody goes to Camerons Corner. If you wish to go there in a conventional car you would have no trouble, except for the last sandhill run, and that can be avoided by taking a 43 km detour into Queensland. The road surfaces are excellent and such interesting scenery all the way. It must be terrible in the summer though, when, I was told, all the school kids arrive in their thousands.

Thirty minutes was spent looking at a T-junction of the 12 ft. high fence and that was enough! Two hours later we were in the General Store in Tibbooburra and hearing about the town. The biggest employer is the National Park and the second is the Social Security. (20 pension cheques). Petrol is 28 cents a litre against 16 back in Sydney. Everything is dear because it comes from Broken Hill, and look where that is! Tibbooburra is a collection of tired-looking buildings, and I wouldn't like to live there.

The return trip was effortless. We left at 10 am and by 1 pm we were only a couple of hundred kilometres away from Bourke. We had a swim in a bore here and then lunch here and there. Wanaaring next stop for petrol and a gun barrel highway all the way to Bourke. Bourke seems like Paradise regained. Relativity is a wonderful thing. I remember a few years ago when I was in Bangladesh, the locals in Dacca would have misty eyes when talking about Calcutta. (Compared with Dacca during the Troubles, even White Cliffs would seem like Nirvana.)

From Bourke to Sydney was made via Walgett - Narrabri - Armidale. Nothing to report. Thus ends my short tale. A thoroughly worthwhile trip and can be recommended to the most fastidious of travellers.

If anyone wishes to do this trip, it would be better to leave White Cliffs and head for Mootwingee and then head north to Milparinka. Nothing dull anywhere.

* * * * *

THE SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER GENERAL MEETINGS.

by Barry Wallace.

The September general meeting did happen to be the Half-Yearly General Meeting but yours truly was not there, and it is so far removed in time by now that I only intend to list the significant (?) events.

There was only one new member, Steve Tompkins, the closing balance was \$2600.61, and the only general business was the choosing of Woods Creek as site for the next annual reunion and Spiro as convenor. So there!

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The October General Meeting began at 8.28 pm with Helen Gray in the chair. Three new members, Judy Barber, Ian Debert and Jim Laing

were duly welcomed with constitution, badge and applause, but not necessarily in that order.

The minutes were read and received, in that order.

Correspondence in included a letter from Brian Harvey suggesting that honorary membership be granted to certain foundation members. (As it turns out Committee had already decided to offer hon. membership to all surviving foundation members.) There was a letter from the Paddy Pallin Foundation indicating that our application for a grant toward the cost of the anniversary issue of "The Sydney Bushwalker" had been unsuccessful. This letter also included a listing of grants awarded for the year. Federation have written asking our feelings about another outdoor recreation education workshop. If I remember rightly the last one was called a Mountain Leadership Workshop. I guess there is a dearth of mountains willing to be led. Anyway, we decided in general business that we are in favour of the general principle.

Correspondence out consisted of letters to the new members, and offers of Hon. Membership to the following:-

Anice and Frank Duncan
Ernest and Jean Austin
Harold and Winifred Chardon
Owen Chowne
Lyle Brown
Charles Kilpatrick

The treasurer's report indicated a starting balance of \$2061.61, Income of \$223.00, Expenditure of \$230.26 and a closing balance of \$2054.35.

Federation report indicates that S. & R. will be forced to change their operating structure to meet the requirements of the N.S.W. police. Part of it seemed to be to do with uniforms! So if they don't find you they will at least all look alike.

The walks report came and went.

The only general business has been discussed earlier in this article.

The announcements and the golden (?) gong put an end to it all at 9.18 pm.

CONGRATULATIONS.

The Club extends congratulations and best wishes to Christine Kirkby, our Social Secretary, and Craig Austen, a fellow bushwalker who are to be married towards the end of November.

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ANOTHER MEMBER'S S.B.W.

by Charlie Brown.

"It would seem that you have more to offer the S.B.W. than the S.B.W. has to offer you."

"Oh I see" Pensive, but ego boosted sufficiently not to go ahead with my nth application as a 'perspective'.

Well, it eventually happened, and Margaret and I did our test-walk-thing after 25 years of bushwalking and a close association with so many S.B.Ws. We took the plunge and became new members of the Club - But why?

Selfishly, we had run out of new places to go and wished to pick someone else's brains. Many of our older bushwalking chums had moved elsewhere, taken on suburban responsibilities or had been overcome by senility, obesity, bureaucracy or had just dropped off.

So that is how it happened, but not how it ends.

On reading Frank Rigby's "One member's S.B.W." in the 50th Anniversary of the Club magazine, I had a twinge of conscience (a rare thing for a public servant), and a re-think on my belonging to the S.B.W.

While some of my walking experience has been self taught, so much was gained by having an older brother (very much older, or even elderly I must add) involved in the scene, who perchance had a long list of friends with names like Butler, Stitt, Putt, Rigby, Duncan, and Hajinakitas and so many others who didn't mind "Snow's little brother" being invited along as he was a "cheerful little chap" and "rarely got in the way". Thus I learnt what it was all about. How much do I really owe the S.B.W.?

Having gone up, down, over or through Gentle's Sheerdown, Dorrie Lawry Pass, Debert's Knob, Duncan's Pass, Taro's Ladders, Maurie Berry Pass, Root's Route (sorry, it's now Ridge) and Mt. Pallin, one realises that many of the things taken for granted by us latecomers were hard fought objectives won only by a unique brand of determination and pioneering spirit that this diminishing planet may never see the likes of again. I doubt there will ever be a Mt. Brown, Brown's Pass, or Charlie's Knob (except on Lady Jane Beach).

If there are any other ego trippers out there reading this, think again. If you have more to offer the S.B.W. than the S.B.W. have to offer you - you're wrong - but offer it anyway.

* * * * *

LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT FROM JOE TURNER (HON. MEMBER)

Dear Helen,

It is more than "high time" I wrote to express my thanks and appreciation for - and of - the excellent work put into the 50th Anniversary Celebrations by yourself and the devoted and hard-worked band of S.B.W.s which culminated in the unqualified success which ALL the functions undoubtedly turned out to be. Apart from yourself, who, in my book, deserves all the encomiums (or is it encomia?) that can possibly be heaped upon you, it would be invidious to even try to mention the names (even if one knew them) of all the participants of that busy band - but one could just not fail to observe how you seemed to be in all places at the one time at, in particular the Friday night's proceedings at Menzies and the night programme at Pennant Hills. At times, Huldah and I feared you'd not be spared to see the nights' festivities to their conclusion - let alone live for the next 50 years to take part in the 100th. "doings"!!! (Oh, no!, that's not an extravagant hope - at any rate you'll see the 75th, which not even the toughest of us "oldies" can hope to do!!)

At any rate Huldah joins me in thanking you and all concerned with the organisation and "execution" of the 50th. "doings", which were equal to any Re-union which I can remember and certainly were of the high standard always achieved by the - from time to time - dedicated folk who over the years have ensured the putting into effect the late Jack Debert's invocation "LET US RE-UNE!!!".

Sincerely,

Joe Turner.

* * * * *

BUCK-PASSING!

by Helen Gray.

I've had phone calls and letters from many members since the reunion, expressing appreciation of the weekend, so I must share the glory - or blame! - with many others.

For the Dinner: Helen Rowan (who close the menu); Edna Gentle, name tags, and Jack Gentle for his assistance and for keeping and cleaning the old brass sign on the official table; Grace Noble for the huge and delicious birthday cake; John Noble for photographs; Bill Burke for providing the music; Ron Knightley, M.C.

For the Camp: Bill Burke, George Gray and David Cotton, for wood gathering and setting up lights; Ron Knightley, Malcolm McGregor, Bruce McInnes, Jim Brown, Bob Younger and Len Fall for the shuttle service from the station. Grace Noble, Tine Matthews, Shirley Dean, Jess Martin, Nancy Alderson and Clary Brown for all the fruit cakes (most made two each); Spiro Hajinakitas, Joan Rigby, Pete and Dot Stitt for preparing supper; Malcolm McGregor, Don Matthews, Geoff Wagg and Jim Brown for

the brilliant "opera"; Grace Noble and Dot Butler for their "fashion" sketch; Bob Younger, Paddy Pallin and Barbara Bruce for leading the singing, the S.B.W. Song Group, and Len Newland's bagpipes.

Thanks to all those who spent a lot of time cleaning up: Joan Rigby, Ann Morgan, Tine Matthews, Jess Martin, Kevin Dean, David Ingram, John Holly and doubtless many more. The camp warden was delighted with the way the place was left, and asked that his thanks be expressed.

The Magazine: The editors have already thanked the duplicators and typists, but left themselves out. Thanks to Owen Marks and Dot Pike especially, who literally read 50 years of magazines to choose articles from the different eras for reprinting, and did all the illustrations.

Thanks to Maurie Berry (who "discovered" the Scout Camp) and Joe Turner for so many helpful suggestions throughout the year, and to Brian Harvey for keeping a record of the 40th celebrations, which was a great help.

There must be dozens of people (like John Redfern and Christine Kirkby, who were always on hand to help through all the planning and festivities) whose names are not mentioned, but whose work, I hope, did not go unnoticed.

I must make special mention of my devil's advocate-cum-ideas'man. He would ring me at least once a day to make sure I was worrying enough, would hand out mildly approving words for ideas of mine he liked and scathing criticism for those he didn't, but whose zest and humour made the months of planning a real pleasure. He is, of course, Owen Marks.

Thanks most of all to hundreds and hundreds of happy people who made the weekend the joyous occasion it was.

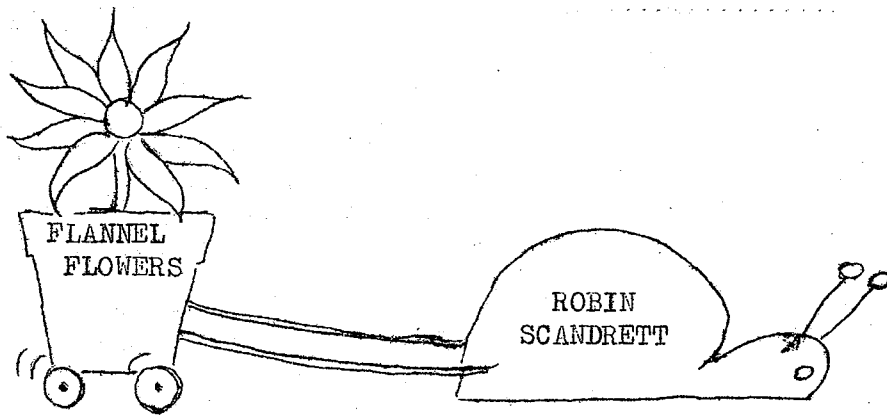
SOCIAL NOTES FOR DECEMBER.

by Christine Kirkby.

On Friday, December 9th, Jim Vatiliotis is having a barbecue at his home - 11 Woodlands Avenue, Lugarno. Ring him if you wish to come and food can then be organized - Phone 534,3865.

The Annual Christmas Party will be held on Wednesday, 21st December, at the Clubrooms. Drinks and music will be provided. Please bring a glass and a plate of savouries, cakes, pavlovas, or some other party food.

A display board for photos will be set up at the Christmas Party, and photos taken at the 50th Birthday festivities will be put up. If you, too, have taken some, bring them along!



Questions asked of me recently about our club badge and its history made me aware of an almost total lack of knowledge on this topic. Delving into a few good books found a few interesting answers.

The *Actinotis helianthi* (Flannel Flower) moved onto our coat lapels after a club competition to procure a suitable club emblem in the club's early days. Many delightful and artistic designs were submitted. The winning entry was designed by Alan P. Rigby (now deceased) who also penned the design for the magazine cover.

The plant first became known to botanists in 1770 when it was collected by Banks and Solander at Botany Bay.

The name *Actinotis* is derived from the Greek word *Actinos* - ray, and refers to the radiate appearance of the flower. *Helianthi* is derived from *Helios* - sun and *Anthos* - flower, which is intended to indicate its similarity to the sun-flower.

The flannel flower occurs in Queensland (mainly in the South-East) and New South Wales (North to South Coast and Central Tablelands, Northern and Central Slopes and just onto the plains in the vicinity of Narrabri).

To grow your own flannel flowers it is recommended to use fresh seed for satisfactory germination. Sow the seeds in a seed box in autumn; and transplant them to containers when small and allow to develop here before transplanting into the garden in spring.

These biennials which should be planted annually for best results, like well drained sunny positions. Alternatively, if cut back after flowering in spring and summer they will last several years.

Happy Gardening.

* * * * *

F O O L S.

by Gordon Lee.

Upon the Throne of Greatness sit
They who possess the feeblest wit.
But what a kindly Providence
Hides from them one mortal sense!
Not yet content that outward guise
Has made the foolish like the wise,
Their braying tongues can not conceal,
But must they hasten to reveal
Their foolishness; by attitude
That makes each threadbare platitude
Appear as wisdom newly found,
Bethought to stagger and confound.
They are the sagest of the sage
And ever utter wise adage.
Even more is this inferred
As eloquence floweth undeterred,
That wise men are to them compared,
Poor pedants overmuch fanfared,
Till, to the listening wondering ears
Of men of learning, it appears,
They had been born better. So,
Unlike the Fool, who cannot know
The limitations of the wise,
When seeing held aloft the prize
That Fortune has for them reserved,
Must doubt if it will be deserved.
While any Fool with no such fears,
Undaunted rushes past his peers
With all the perfect heedless bliss
Of Fooldom - and the prize is his.

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A VARIATION OF CALCUTTA TO KATHMANDU.

by Marion Lloyd.

"You look like a squashed chook," remarked my brother David as he tried to prevent jam dribbling out of his day pack down an unfortunate's neck. We were sitting on the stairs jammed in by bodies that were stacked up the stairs of an old vintage Leyland bus which must have been bequeathed to the colony before Independence after it had outlived its usefulness in London and coaxed along for another twenty years.

The bus was doing its best to heave itself through the heat and traffic along Chowringhee Road to Sealdah Station, Calcutta. Men were riding on the outside of the bus hanging on to any hand hold that could be grabbed whether it was the bus or a body. This way it was free, anyway they were the lucky ones as the multitude inside was packed in like sardines, collection of fares was a farce and getting out was a dream.

To beat the peak-hour traffic we left our pseudo "hotel" at 3 pm to try to reach the other side of the city to catch the Darjeeling train at 7.30 pm. At the best of times Calcutta's traffic is confusion but at peak hour it is utter chaos. The traffic grinds to a halt for a couple of hours trying to sort itself out as the air and smoke pollution rises. At Sealdah Station hundreds of homeless and poorer passengers were lying, sleeping, eating, begging, cooking, waiting.

It was the usual sort of train trip to Siliguri. Red stain-lipped betel chewing men chattered (Indian men are the world's best talkers), women were not encouraged to start. A mother breast-fed her baby whilst the kids entertained themselves. It is rare to hear a baby cry or to see a child slapped. Beggars and young dirty kids with matchbox percussion instruments periodically came to entertain whilst looking beseechingly, often to be met by an apathetic indifference from the passengers.

We arrived in Siliguri at 8 am the next morning. Here we changed to the "Darjeeling Express". We gazed at it in utter astonishment, it was a little blue "puffer" which looked like an overgrown fair-ground train as it stood dwarfed next to the big locomotives. There were three small carriages with small seats suitable only for small Indians who added to the crampedness with their bedrolls, luggage, provisions and the occasional goat or hens.

It took 10 hours for the little train to labour 100 miles or so up to Darjeeling. The track rose gradually from the burnt dusty plain to pass through lush rain forest country all the while the line criss-crossing the road as it zig-zagged its way up. The track hugged the sides of cliffs with stupendous views down the gullies. The train never changed a beat as it chugged along at a jogging pace, indeed if one wished to take exercise one just jumped out and ran along beside until the lungs had been sufficiently ventilated. School kids would leap on then alight when convenient. Without altering its 10 mph the train steamed down village

main streets and it was possible to pick up provisions and cha as it passed through.

There were frequent long stops that did not always seem logical. When I investigated one stop I found the crew and some of the passengers riding on top of the train were brewing tea, the water being from the engine's boiler. It pays to carry tea bags.

As the train climbed higher the hills which were terraced with paddy fields were becoming very steep. Late afternoon mist was beginning to descend and it was becoming very cold and damp. It was freezing and dark when we arrived in Darjeeling as it was winter. Fortunately, we found accommodation near the station as we were frozen and exhausted.

The streets of Darjeeling are very steep, winding and narrow and only a few are suitable for vehicles. The houses seemed jumbled up on top of each other and appeared to be built in a haphazard, higgledy-piggledy fashion. It is a great place to explore with day trips to the mountains and tea plantations as well as offering fabulous walking and mountaineering country. One-day visas can be obtained to go to Gangtok (Sikkim).

I was prostrated most of the time in Darjeeling with the Calcutta flu; all I can remember is the Chinese cafe that had European food that gave me relief from masala dosais, idli (rice balls), biranyis and curries. I ate porridge and milk puddings three times a day, enough eggs to make me cackle and hot chocolate until I nearly sunk.

Providing there are no hitches it is possible to leave Darjeeling in the morning and arrive in Kathmandu in the evening by a marvellous route. It took us two days because of calamities we experienced. We caught a mini-bus back to Siliguri. From there changed trains about three times and eventually arrived in Jogbani on the Indian-Nepalese border about 8 pm. It took one hour to change money on the black market, an hour taken up when border officials insisted on chatting to us over numerous cups of cha and another hour looking for a taxi or rickshaw driver that would take us to the Nepalese airport town of Biratnager about 6 miles away. We eventually found a rickshaw driver that seemed willing enough to transport us through the cold, dark, unbeckoning night to our destination.

We were fortunate to find "lodgings" about midnight. The place appeared to have bed-bugs and other creepies. I prayed feverishly that our mosi nets, creams, sprays and ground sheets would protect us. The next morning I sent up thanksgivings for being delivered unscathed as I saw a rat whizz across the room and down a drain pipe.

After many false leads we eventually found the air-line office. The fellow blithely mentioned that the plane was leaving in half an hour, so we commissioned a rickshaw driver to pedal double fast the three miles to the airport. On arriving we were informed that the plane had been delayed and would arrive in "a little while".

The plane flight was one of the most wonderful experiences of my entire trip. I can only describe it in superlatives. We flew parallel to the Himalayan Range all the way. Starboard the view of the mighty snow capped peaks, including Everest which appeared as a white blob behind her smaller sisters, was truly magnificent. Below on the port side were the steeply ascending foothills of the Mahabharat Range which were deeply grooved by paddy terraces. We were able to discern people and animals often heavily laden, plodding along the steep, ribbonlike passes or working their tiny plots. Just to reach the terraces up these steep valleys must be back breaking, let alone working them.

Approaching the dry Kathmandu Valley the plane circled several times and so we had a wonderful birds-eye view of the Tolkin-like medieval world we were about to enter. As the plane taxied in I felt a twinge of sadness that this sixty minute flight amongst the gods was over.

(More adventures following)

