

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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THROUGH THE WILDS OF TASMANIA

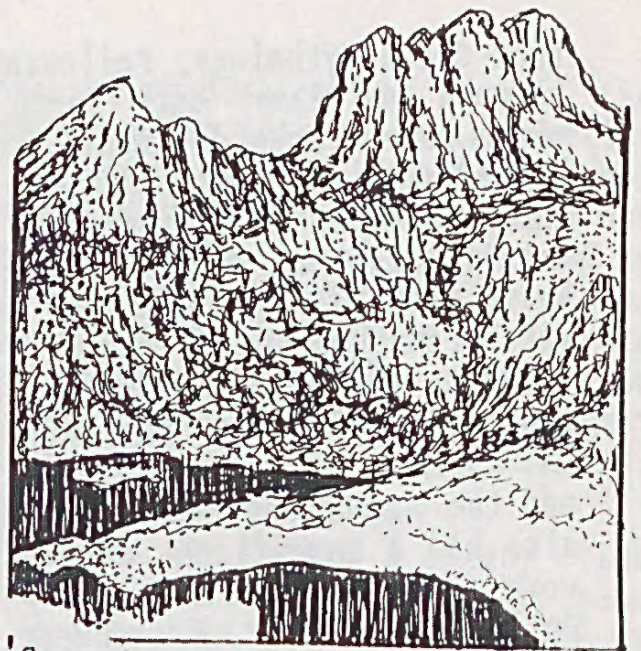
A Walk from Lake St Clair to Cradle
Mountain. 18 - 27th September 1993.

Twelve brave souls including myself and leader Trevor Youngman departed from Trevor's house at about 6.30 on the morning of Saturday, Sept 18. Our plan was to travel to Tullamarine by mini-bus, take the plane to Devenport, then another bus to Lake St Clair, where we would be ferried by fast catamaran about half-way along the lake to the first hut on our journey.

A moment of truth came at Tullamarine when the packs were checked in, revealing who had the heaviest and who had the lightest. I think they ranged between 18 and 25 kg or thereabouts. At Devenport, a visit to the Backpackers Barn to change into our walking gear, deposit our ordinary clothes to await our return, and to stock up for fuel for our stoves. Fires are no longer allowed in the National Park for obvious reasons, so we needed to carry sufficient gas, meths or shellite to see us through. So into the bus for the trip to Lake St Clair. For much of the trip there was fog, but we did get a glimpse of the Great Lake, and by the time we had arrived I had already listed several birds, including Tasmanian Native Hen, Swamp Harrier, Masked Lapwing, Little Pied Cormorant, Welcome Swallow, Black Swan, Australian Shelduck and Forest Raven.

By the time we had arrived at Echo Point Hut after an exciting but speedy trip up the lake, it was becoming fairly late, and as this hut is one of the smallest, some of us would need to camp outside. Of course although there are huts at intervals which we hoped to use, in this country it is essential to be prepared for the worst, so we carried enough tents in case we were caught by bad weather, or in case the huts were already full. Echo Point Hut is set on the edge of the lake amid dense stands of Leatherwood, Myrtle Beech and White-topped Stringybark (*E. delegatensis*). Because of the density of the upper layer there is very little undergrowth. What there was, was unfamiliar to me. During the evening we had a visitor in the form of an enormous Brush-tailed Possum who was obviously accustomed to receive handouts. At frequent intervals there came a very loud bird call somewhat resembling someone learning to play the trumpet, but the frustrating culprit kept well out of sight so I could not be sure of its identity.

Next morning saw us up early, breakfasted, sleeping bags and tents stowed ready to begin the serious business of the 130 km walk to Cradle Mountain. Our destination for that night was Narcissus Hut at the northern end of Lake St Clair on the Narcissus River. All names in this area are derived



from Greek Mythology. Following leader Youngman we set off in single file through the deep, dark Beech woods, stumbling over their surface roots which make tracks difficult to negotiate and certainly impossible to gaze around at birds while walking. A familiar call here was that of the Crescent Honeyeater which seemed to be present in numbers although I was not to actually see one until the very last day of our walk, although they were heard much of the time. The trumpet noise continued although the perpetrator remained out of sight. Nearing the end of the day's walk we emerged from the woods on to buttongrass plains where extensive board walks were provided to preserve the environment. Just prior to the hut we passed the loo which is an interesting two-storied structure, with the throne upstairs and the composting chamber downstairs, again very sound environmentally. It also had a magnificent view if the door was left open. A few more birds were added to the list here, including a Grey Thrush, Flame Robins, New Holland Honeyeater, Kookaburra, and White-browed Scrubwren. New birds were Yellow-throated Honeyeaters, and Green Rosellas, both only found in Tassie.

The following day we were off to Windy Ridge. After crossing rather nervously a swing bridge across the Narcissus River we headed across extensive buttongrass plains by means of board walks till we gained open eucalypt woodland. Mountain Berry was much in evidence here, a small bush to 1 m, most of which carried small red berries and some which were almost in flower. The day was overcast and our views of the spectacular mountains surrounding us were rather restricted; later the rain began to drift down more slowly and we realised that it had turned to sleet. Rather surprising as it did not seem cold enough. At Windy Ridge Hut which was actually nestled in among trees, we had tantalising glimpses of the Acropolis and Mt Geryon which appeared to be gathering a covering of fresh snow, but it could not be seen clearly because of the low cloud cover. Our visitors were two Pademelons who were very interested in cleaning up any left-overs. I think that it was about here that the trumpeter was at last discovered to be definitely a Black Currawong. In fact these were the most common birds seen on the whole trip which was rather a disappointment as far as the bird observations were concerned. Apart from the Currawongs which were plentiful, and some Yellow Wattle Birds and some Ravens, very few birds were seen, both in number of species and in actual numbers. True, the Crescent Honeyeaters were often to be heard calling but managed to keep out of sight most of the time apart from fleeting glimpses, often in the distance.

We awoke next morning to a world of white. Snow had been falling unheard during the night and now transformed the forest into a beautiful, magical world. All that morning we tramped through gently falling snow pausing frequently to try to capture some of the scenes on film. In this section of the forest there were many Pandani plants which look rather tropical, rather like a giant pineapple of palm, and here they were covered with snow, quite a sight. Unfortunately the snow turned to rain around the middle of the day, which washed the vegetation clear again. At this point we made a side trip after shedding our packs in order to view the magnificent Harnett Falls on the Mersey River. A large volume of water channelled through a narrow opening to fall quite a distance into a spectacular gorge the sides of which were festooned with what I believe is

called Pineapple Grass. Quite a strenuous climb down to the base of the falls, but well worth the effort. Back to our packs then to tackle section of the track which wound through the deepest, darkest, mossiest beech forest before emerging into a clearing at the historic DuCane Hut. This hut is constructed of King Billy Pine, and although is no longer maintained as one of the overnight huts, is still preserved for its historic value and as an emergency shelter. Another 45 minutes of walking brought us to Kia-Ora Hut, the newest in the park. I forgot to mention that another common tree in the early part of the walk was Sassafras. A particularly good specimen grows near the DuCane hut and was notable for being covered in blossom. Celery-topped Pine was also very evident.

Pelion Gap was our immediate objective on day 5. This meant a steady climb during the morning till we reached the ridge which separates the Northern and Southern sections of the park. This also brought us to the foot of Mt Ossa, Tasmania's highest peak, which we intended to climb, weather permitting. Unfortunately the cloud cover was such that the effort would have been wasted so we elected instead to climb some distance up Mt Pelion East, a route which took us through Snow Gums, Pandani and thickets of *Richea scoparia*, a rather prickly member of the Heath family. Up on Mt Pelion the wind was rather icy but it was fascinating to see how it had coated the rocks with snow and produced oddly-shaped icicles from dripping water. Small tarns filled with crystal-clear water meant that it was an easy matter to quench a thirst. From here we were able to see in the far distance Cradle Mountain, our ultimate destination. On the steep, muddy climb down from the ridge I was clumsy enough to slip and injure my leg, so for the remainder of the trip I was to hobble along with the aid of a stick which someone had apparently fortuitously discarded just where I had fallen. Unfortunately this was to limit my subsequent movements; that evening for instance at Pelion Hut I was told that was a great abundance of wildlife, wallabies, pademelons, wombats and platypus., but I was barely able to stagger to the door of the hut. Pelion Hut, although small and old is well situated in tall eucalypts and near the Douglas Creek.

Day 6 was unfortunately the longest and most difficult walk of the trip. As I could only make slow progress I departed early and covered as much distance as I could with the aid of my stick before being overtaken. Our route took us through Frog Flats, the lowest part of the track and which was rather wet and boggy. However, worse was to come. After climbing out of the flats through eucalypt and then beech forests, we eventually arrived at lunchtime at Pine Forest Moor. Now this is no pine forest at all; it is in fact a buttongrass plain which goes on for miles and miles, in fact it seems to disappear over the horizon. The buttongrass grows in large tussocks and in between is mostly thick, deep and very black MUD. Here my stick was a great help because I could give a prod before setting foot, otherwise one would find oneself sinking very quickly into the mire, as I did once when I trusted the seemingly firm appearance of the soil. The only thing to do was to throw myself forwards onto a tussock and laboriously extract my feet, one after the other. Some people were not so fortunate and finished up rather muddy. After a very short time we reached a section where the mud had been washed or eroded away leaving a firm bedrock of

quartzite on which one could walk safely, then the joy of seeing in the distance the beginning of a section of boardwalks which took us the remainder of the way to Lake Windermere. I cannot express the relief of seeing those walkboards. The hut at Lake Windermere is set at some distance from the lake, but the view of the lake was magnificent, especially early the next morning when a layer of early morning mist spread a veil over the surface. The weather had by now become absolutely perfect, with a hint of frost, and not a cloud to be seen.

At Lake Windermere we shared the hut with four young people travelling in the opposite direction, a lass from Scandinavia, a young man from the U.K. and a couple from Canada. We were rather concerned about the lack of equipment of the Canadian couple who had no tent, only light sleeping bags and no warm clothing, all of which are regarded as essential for tackling this particular walk. Fortunately as it happened the weather over the next few days was very kind, otherwise they could have found themselves in very serious trouble. I would have expected Canadians to have a better appreciation of those sort of conditions, but perhaps they had been led astray by the Australian tourist publicity back home extolling the joys of Sunny Australia.

Leaving Lake Windermere meant quite a steep climb out of the valley, but it was good to be able to look back frequently at the magnificent views of the lake. Once again I found my stick to be an invaluable aid in scrambling up the steepest pinches. All of the mountains in this particular area consist of dolerite intrusions which have cooled and cracked to form vertical columns, similar to the basalt columns at Barfold or the Organ Pipes, only on a more massive scale. However, the rock on which we were walking was mostly quartzite which had been formed by the baking of the sedimentary rocks underlying the dolerite. In some areas too there were extensive layers of a very coarse conglomerate rock which underlies the dolerite, most notably at Cradle Mountain itself. In the bright sunshine of the last few days, the glare from the light-coloured quartzite could be quite trying. Once again walkboards brought us to Cirque Hut which is an old hut situated near a waterfall on the rim of Waterfall Valley. At one stage we planned to stay here for the night but this hut is rather old and lacks proper toilet facilities and at the moment is being retained as an emergency shelter only. We were pleased later when we reached the Park Headquarters to find that plans are afoot to completely refurbish this hut. Today we continued on to the very small Waterfall Valley Hut where we stopped for lunch. This hut only sleeps 8 people but does have excellent toilet facilities and is situated right beside a small waterfall and has a resident wallaby as caretaker. After lunch a strenuous climb took us up out of the valley to an exposed ridge running down from Cradle Mountain itself. From here there were magnificent views back to where we had come while over to our left rose the steep imposing columns of Barnes Bluff with its capping of fresh snow. The vegetation here was very alpine in appearance with Pencil Pines growing flat on the ground, as did other shrubs, while a notable feature was the large green cushions of alpine mosses. From this high ridge with its chilly wind, a steep descent down a rather difficult track (especially for me) brought us to the Scott-Kilvert Hut situated at the foot of Cradle

Mountain on the edge of Lake Rodway. This hut was erected as a memorial after the tragic loss of two people, a student and a student teacher during a blizzard in the area some years ago. In this hut we found four young American girls, exchange students at Sydney University, who were able to tell us about Sydney's successful games bid. However we were again disturbed by their lack of suitable equipment and food for the area, especially as it appeared at nightfall that the weather was deteriorating. Trevor made plans to lend them some of our coats next morning and lead them out by the shortest and safest route. As it happened our fears were unjustified as the weather turned out to be just as perfect as the previous two days. Just to be sure however, the girls were filled up with porridge before Trevor and some of the fitter members of our party accompanied them to the car park where they were to be picked up. Later we all met at the Twisted Lakes for lunch before tackling the rather difficult (for me again) Face Track which traverses Cradle Mountain through patches of Deciduous Beech (*Nothofagus gunnii*) which at this stage was in bud about to burst. Some of the fitter members of the party went on to climb to the summit and reported magnificent views, but for me that will have to wait till another time. To regain the hut (in which we stayed two nights) we had to circumnavigate the mountain and again climb the steep track we had climbed the previous night, although on this occasion we were not wearing our packs. The hut this night was very full as it was used by people doing weekend walks.

Our final walk on that last morning took us up from Lake Rodway up to a ridge near Weindorfers Tower from where we could look down to see the carpark at the far end of Dove lake. The track ascending took us past the beautiful Flynn's Tarn and Artists Pool with its group of venerable Pencil Pines, then over Hanson's Peak with its difficult descent assisted by a chain in the manner of Ayres Rock. Finally a more or less level track brought us to the Lake Dove carpark which was almost the end of our walk. All that remained was the two kilometre walk past Lake Lilla to the Waldheim Chalet where our bus was waiting to return us to Devenport, clean clothes, hot showers and a bed with a mattress and pillow.

A word of commendation to Trevor Youngman for his excellent leadership and thanks to the other members of the party who shared some of the load when I was injured, especially Mark Lau who gallantly carried my tent the rest of the way.

Birdwise it was a bit disappointing as not many were heard or seen apart from Currawongs and Crescent Honeyeaters. My final list was

Tasmanian Native Hen	Masked Lapwing	Little Pied Cormorant
Welcome Swallow	Black Swan	Aust Shelduck
Forest Raven	Superb Blue Wren	Swamp Harrier
Black Currawong	Flame Robin	Crescent Honeyeater
Kookaburra	Grey Shrike-thrush	Green Rosella
Yellow-throated Honeyeater	New Holland Honeyeater	White-browed Scrub Wren
Brown Thornbill	Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo	Pink Robin
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Strong-billed Honeyeater	Pantailed Cuckoo

G. Broadway.

SANDON IN OCTOBER 1993

Birds seen at the bird bath were

Scarlet Robin (pair)	Brown Thornbills	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Grey Fantail (pair)	Buff-rumped Thornbills	Silvereyes
Willie Wagtail (pair)	Striated Thornbills	Magpies
Wrens		

Birds seen on the property were

Australasian Grebe (pair)	Shining Bronze Cuckoo	White-eared Honeyeaters (pr)
White-faced Heron (pair)	Australian Owlet Nightjar	Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters
Pacific Black Duck (pair)	Kookaburras	Fuscous Honeyeaters
Maned Duck	Welcome Swallows	White-plumed Honeyeaters
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Richard's Pipit	Brown-headed Honeyeaters
Little Eagle (pair)	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	White-naped Honeyeaters
Brown Falcon	Hooded Robin (pair)	Mistletoe Bird (pair)
Masked Lapwing (pair)	Yellow Robin (pair)	Spotted Pardalotes
Galahs	Jacky Winter (pair)	Striated Pardalotes
Sulphur-crested Cockatoos	Golden Whistler (pair)	European Goldfinch
Crimson Rosella (pair)	Rufous Whistler (pair)	Red-browed Firetails
Eastern Rosellas	Grey Shrike-thrush (pair)	Diamond Firetails
Red-rumped Parrot (pair)	Speckled Warbler (pair)	Olive-backed Oriole (heard)
Pallid Cuckoo (pr 13/10 very late arrival this year)	Weebills	White-winged Choughs
Black-eared Cuckoo	Yellow-rumped Thornbills	Australian Magpie-larks
Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo	White-throated Treecreeper	Grey Currawong
	Red Wattlebirds	Australian Ravens

Early November - up to 4 White-throated Treecreepers inspecting nest box (all at the same time)

November 2 - Three young Willie Wagtails in nest in a neighbouring shed.

Welcome Swallow feeding 2 young in tree by the dam.

Susanna Starr.

OBSERVATIONS

SANDON FOREST PLANT LIST ADDITION. 35 additional records for the Club's Sandon Forest plant list were made on 10/11/93. (EP, PM and WM).

HOBBY NESTING A pair of Australian Hobbies have been observed nesting in the Camp reserve, apparently using a former Magpie nest.

TRIM GREENHOODS. Orchids growing near Vaughan were thought to be Trim Greenhoods (*Pterostylis concinna*). (FD). [If this identification is correct, this is a new district record for this Club.]

DEPLETED SCARLET ROBINS. Few sightings recently. Other robins also appear to be in smaller numbers than usual.

GLENLUCE DUCK ORCHIDS. A poor season. A few leaves only. (FB)

GOLDEN WHISTLERS have been plentiful recently at McKenzies Hill. (IP)

ECHIDNA was present near the corner of Blakely Rd and Sawmill Rd. (LC)

LITTLE GRASS-BIRD was heard at Little Hampton, in a rushy creek. Despite a close look, it was not sighted. (SB)

ALPINE GREENHOOD was observed at Trentham Falls, in tussocky mature forest. Most of Trentham would have originally been like this, with very little bracken. Half a dozen were seen, and another 3 some weeks later. Also noted were Austral Indigo and Bird Orchids. (SB)

SKINK EATING CATERPILLAR was observed in Kennedy St (BM)

FRILLED LIZARD was seen in Taradale, north of the township. (BM)

COMMON BRONZEWING has been calling almost continuously for a week at Chewton (TA)

NESTING WELCOME SWALLOWS. Pair making a nest in the car port, directly over the car, to the detriment of the cleanliness of the car. They insist on returning to this spot. Swallows now stay for the whole winter. (AVG). Swallows at Faraday now have four babies. (MH)

CHOCOLATE FLOWER. This is the year of the Chocolate Flower - they are in profusion near Norwood Hill. (IP)

WEDGETAILS BREEDING at Faraday. They have made nests for years but this is the first time that they have produced fledglings. (TJ)

SPOTTED QUAIL THRUSH? A bird was seen at the edge of McKittericks Road. It appeared to be a Spotted Quail Thrush. (MH).

TERRICK TERRICK BIRD LIST

Birds seen on the Club's excursion at Terrick Terrick were

Straw-necked Ibis	Kookaburra	Rufous Whistler	Mistletoe Bird
Brown Goshawk	Rainbow bee-eater	Grey Shrikethrush	Striated Pardalote
Little Eagle	Welcome Swallow	Wh-browed Babbler	Diamond Firetail
Brown Falcon	Tree Martin	Restl's Flycatcher	Starling
Peaceful Dove	Fairy martin	Willie wagtail	White-winged Chough
Common Bronzewing	Bl-f Cuckoo-shrike	Rufous Songlark	Magpie-lark
Crested Pigeon	Hooded Robin	Superb Fairy Wren	Dusky Woodswallow
Galah	Jacky Winter	Brown Treecreeper	Magpie
Mallee Ringneck	Crested Shrike-tit	White-plumed HE	Australian Raven
Red-rumped parrot	Gilbert's Whistler		

Also noted: A goanna, in a tree. Fairy Martin and Rainbow Bee-eater nests.

HUNTER STREET BIRD LIST TO NOV 15th, 1993.

Crimson Rosellas (with several juveniles)	Rufous Whistler	Striated Pardalotes
Eastern Rosella (pr, with one juvenile)	Grey Shrike-thrush	Mistletoe Birds
Sulphur-crested Cockatoos	Blackbirds (pair)	Sparrows
Galahs	Weebills	Goldfinches
Kookaburra	Red Wattlebirds	Magpies
Welcome Swallows	Yellow-faced Honeyeaters	Australian Raven
	Eastern Spinebills (pair with one juvenile)	

S.P.

SPIDER BOOKS.

These would make an ideal Christmas. Obtain from George Broadway for \$8.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Excursions leave promptly at the times indicated.

Fri 10 Dec. MEMBERS AND VISITORS NIGHT. High School at 8.00 pm. Members are asked to provide a short segment for the evening's program, where possible. Please bring supper.

Sat 11 Dec. TRENTHAM. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm, or next to the Kyneton Botanic Gardens (Mollison St) at 2.00 pm. Leader is Kath Meehan. Depending on weather, we may take our tea - to be decided at the meeting.

THURS 20 Jan. BIRDWATCHING. With U3A., Met Continuing Education carpark at 4.00 pm. Take your tea and binoculars. Leader: M Oliver.

Thurs 28 Jan. BUSINESS MEETING. 7.30 at 38 Campbell St.

Frid 11 Feb. TASMANIA. George Broadway. Castlemaine Secondary College (the former high school) at 8.00 pm. This is the annual meeting.

Fri 11 - 14 Mar. VFNCA ANNUAL CAMPOUT Hosted by Latrobe Valley and Central Gippsland FNC. Excursions are expected to include

Mt Erica & the Mushroom Rocks. Alpine and subalpine - botany & geology.
Tyers River Valley. Life cycle of a river. Led by a geologist.
Tarra Bulga National Park. One of Gippslands best wet sclerophyll forests.
Mt Worth State Park. Western end of Strzeleki Range. Wet sclerophyll forest
Inverloch and Bunurong Coastal Reserve. Marine biology.
Morwell National Park. Exploration of this diverse park.
Sale Common. A real treat for bird watchers.
Lake Narracan and Moe environs. Gentle bird watching and botanising.
Lyrebird walk and the Big Tree at Darlimurla. Mirboo North.
Bald Hills Nature Reserve, Cape Liptrap & Walkerville.
SECV overburden rehabilitation.
Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Some excursions are full day, others half day.

A booking has been made for Eden on the Pond, which is on the Hazelwood Pondage, near Morwell. Meals provided. Cost will be \$98 per head including 3 nights accommodation. Study-bedrooms hold two people.

Buses will be hired for the longer excursions, if demand exists. Fares will be additional. Contacts: Wendy Savage 056 342 246 (AH) and Philip Rayment 051 221 050 (AH)

A copy of the program, booking details etc can be obtained from E. Perkins.

Fri 10 June WESTERN AUSTRALIA. Speaker is Winston Huggins.

Fri 8 July. FOUR SEASONS IN HAMPSHIRE

Fri 9 Sept. NORTHERN AUSTRALIA Speaker is Pat Bingham

Committee: B Maund (Pres), B Envall (VP), M Oliver (Sec), G Broadway (Treas), K Turner (Prog), R Mills (PO & asst N/L), E. Perkins (N/L ed), S Parnaby, C Morris and K Meehan.