

McMillans Walking Track end-to-end walk 2019



The Moroka River heading towards Snowy Bluff



Ben Cruachan Walking Club

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ISSUE 211 – McMillans Walking Track end-to-end walk – December 2019

McTk2019

End-to-end walk of McMillans Walking Track
Sunday 01 to Saturday 14 December 2019

Participants:

Ben Cruachan Walking Club: Joe van Beek, Helmut Tracksdorf, Sue Hides, Patrick Platt, Raymond Oliver and Robyn Kercher.

Maroondah Bushwalking Club: John and Monica Chapman.

Strzelecki Bushwalking Club: Martin Norris and Wendy Cartledge.

Bayside Bushwalking Club: Bob Edwards.

BWV Independent Member: Sarah Sharp from Portland.

Guest: Geoff Cartledge.

Support:

John Kellas and Maggie Marriot – the whole walk. Oliver Raymond, Gary La Roche (Robyn's husband), Philip Davis and Julie Taylor (Martin's partner) provided support and transport to and from the walk.

Bernie Connor (Parks Victoria) – access for our supplies and gear to the wilderness area on day 6.



Walkers and Support Crew at the beginning of the walk on Sunday 1 December.

Standing (L to R): Monica, Sue, Helmut, John, Sarah, Bob, Wendy, Geoff, Patrick, Martin.

Crouching (L to R): Gary, Maggie, Robyn, Joe, John Kellas, Oliver.

Update on McMillans Walking Track

Although much has happened to McMillans Walking track since the club's end-to-end walk in Nov 2017, as a whole, it is in reasonable walkable condition. There will always be a need for maintenance and improvements.

Impacts by Fire

The fires of March 2019 affected some 25km of the track burning out Treasure Spur and along King Spur Track towards the Dargo High Plains Road, almost everything between Talbotville and Eaglevale, a patch in the Moroka Glen and a section along the D4 Track. In December 2019/January 2020, a further 27km of the eastern part of the track were impacted along the Victoria River Track and down into Mayford and virtually the full length of White Timber Spur Track. Fire impacts are not all bad and some take time to have an effect. Initially the track may be easier to follow and walk but trees begin to fall across the track and regrowth obscures it.

Maintenance priorities.

The top maintenance priorities to keep the track walkable include the 3km track along the spur from Smith Street below The Crinoline down to the Macalister River. This was burnt in a planned burn in 2015. Regrowth is now obscuring the track. The track from Brewery Creek Track down to the Wongungarra River is covered in burnt vegetation from the March 2019 fire along its 1km length. This needs clearing and the bottom end remarked. Fallen timber across the 1km upper part of Treasure Spur Track needs clearing as well as windblown timber across the upper end of the track from Champion Spur Track down to Stander Creek.

There are fallen trees, logs to clear and blackberries to spray along the 15km section from the junction of 25 Mile and 30 Mile Creeks down to Stonewall. A 2km section in the middle of the track from Tamboritha Saddle to Breakfast Creek needs clearing and marking. The track from Black River, up to CS5 Track and on to Champion Spur Track needs improvements and clearing especially at the bottom end.

Track Improvements

Parks Victoria, DELWP, contractors, BTAC and BCWC have all been active in contributing to track maintenance since November 2017. The sections of track that have had attention include: Lazarini Spur to Black River, N18 to Mt Shillinglaw, the whole 30km section from Arbuckle Junction through to Breakfast Creek, Cynthia Range to Eaglevale and the Crooked River. Additional track markers have been added at numerous locations. Some of this work has been in preparation for FedWalks2021 to be held in November 2021 as several sections off the track have been nominated for walks for that event.

Track Guide Book

Club members Helmut Tracksdorf and Joe van Beek along with Martin Norris from SBWC have been working with John and Monica Chapman on a guide book for McMillans Walking Track. This was to be launched at FedWalks2020 but, due to the FedWalks2020 postponement for a year, the guide book will be launched at the BWV AGM and Forum to be held 14 November 2020.

McTk2019

A number of people have walked the track in the last two years including a group of Sydney Bushwalkers. One individual walked the track end-to-end in six days. In December 2019, BCWC with guests walked the track end-to-end from east to west over 14 days. Read all about that walk in this special edition of the BCWC newsletter.



Treasure Spur 2 months after March 2019 fire

Day 01 Cobungra – Victoria River Track – Black Sallee

Sunday 01 December 2019

Daily Distance: 8.2 **Total Distance:** 8.2

Up: 300m **Down:** 120m

Campsite: Black Sallee picnic area

On Sunday 01 December, the majority of the team gathered at Sue's place in Sale to load the food, equipment and participants into and on top of John, Maggie and Oliver's vehicles. As we were due to depart, the Roulettes aerobatic display team from RAAF Base East Sale did a low fly over to send us on our way. We met for lunch at Omeo, where we caught up with Robyn, Gary and Helmut, and proceeded to the start of the walk with the forecast of storms and snow.

The starting point was the Junction of the Victoria River Track and the Great Alpine Road, we entered Cobungra Station and walked 8km along Victoria River Track, an undulating 4WD track, to arrive at Black Sallee camp in time for Sue to brave a swim in the cold lake and icy wind.



John and Maggie had erected a tarpaulin over the picnic table and the team soon had a camp fire lit for cooking and keeping warm. As Judy van Beek's pre-prepared Bolognese Sauce was still a hard frozen lump and not about to thaw any time soon we barbequed some sausages and had them with coleslaw in bread.



Robyn recalls that it was a trifle confusing getting to know the names of everyone but was happy to see that everyone looked fit and ready to start.

The ladies at Omeo in the tourist and shire offices had told us it was a bad idea to go due to fires in the area, but it was bitterly cold. It was so bitterly cold that some could hardly stop shivering. Robyn slept with two sleeping bags, two socks, hat, scarf and long legs and sleeves: so much for summer!

Day 02 Black Sallee – Dinner Plain Track – Mayford Track – Mayford Flats –

Monday 02 December 2019

Treasure Spur – Kings Spur

Daily Distance: 16.5km

Total Distance: 24.7km

Up: 940m

Campsite: King Spur Track overlooking the Devil's Hollow

Down: 620m

It rained during the night and we woke to an ice-covered tent and surrounds. A deer came down to drink on the far side of the lake. We wasted no time packing up and preparing for the day and the walkers were soon heading back onto Victoria River Track and, after a brief time on Dinner Plain Track, we headed down Mayford Track, a closed vehicle track but maintained as a fire break. Big gutters and mounds had been formed, with many old dead logs and up rooted trees across it. It was a steep, scrambly, and at times, slippery descent down a spur and onto the open Mayford Flats or, some say, paddocks.



A decision was made that lunch would be 200m up the 600-metre climb out of the valley, walking through open undergrowth, cleaned out by the recent bushfires (March 2019). What track markers remained were 'swallowed' up by the rapid new growth. Joe and Helmut were kept busy hammering new ones on. At the top, the terrain soon changed and became flat and quite damp. Daisies, buttercups, trigger plants, to

name a few, adorned the countryside, growing among the remnants of the recent fire. On and off snow showers continued all day, but on reaching Kings Spur Track, we were blasted by an icy shower causing a dash to camp, stopping only briefly to look over the escarpment.

This was a day in our warmest wet weather gear. That night we camped with patches of snow about at our highest altitude for the trip at a bit over 1500m. Although we had snow flurries the weather didn't live up to the forecast. The support crew, John, Maggie and Oliver, drove through snow for 53km in convoy via Dinner Plain and Mt. Hotham Village where it was foggy, the snow was very thick and the snow plough was out. They stopped at Mount Hotham, to top up with water and their last chai latte for quite a few days.

On arrival at King Spur track they selected a camping site in the snow about 2km in from the Dargo High Plain Road which over looked the Devils Hollow, the headwaters of the Dargo River, to Mount Hotham. They got a fire going and collected snow for cooking. Oliver drove down the track and provided a ride for a few of the walkers for the last couple of kilometres into camp. Most snow had melted by the time the walkers got into camp but a hot cuppa to warm them up was much appreciated.

At his evening briefing, Joe advised that the itinerary for days 4 and 5 would change and we would be camping at Bulltown and Eaglevale rather than at Talbotville and Pulpit Rock and do a catch up on day 6.

As the Bolognese sauce was still thoroughly frozen (!), it was Happy Camper Meals with a big pot of extra veggies, cooked on the gas stove that warmed and nourished us for dinner. Should McMillans Walking Track be re-named was part of the conversation with Monica and John. The lights of the lodges on Mt Hotham could be seen as dark descended, and we were all very soon in bed.

Day 03 Kings Spur – Dargo High Plains Road – Gow Plain – White Timber Spur Track

Tuesday 03 December 2019

Daily Distance: 14.5km **Total Distance:** 39.2km
Campsite: White Timber Spur Track, just south of Ritchie Road

Up: 85m
Down: 355m

Maggie's 4WD had a flat battery from the auxiliary lights used the night before. Oliver left his vehicle on King Spur Track and joins the walkers for days 3 and 4 so he can walk the Crooked River section of the walk which he had not previously done.

Bob was keen to get started so he could warm up. After a 2km walk through patchy snow and a brief stop at Lankey Plain Hut, aka Bright Shire Hut, nestled on the Lankey Plain, we turned onto the Dargo High Plain Road but after less than a kilometre, we left the DHPR and meandered through patchy snow-covered button grass following an old fence line. We then joined White Timber Spur Track North, a fairly flat walk through some noticeably young regrowth, where numerous Flame Robins could be seen and some beautiful views of distant ranges. We briefly joined Ritchie Road and camped 200 metres uphill alongside White Timber Spur Track South.

Maggie was finding the CB radios in the support vehicles a real benefit as John was able to give her great advice on road conditions, oncoming vehicles and instructions on negotiating tricky bits which she found very reassuring. She discovered that convoy travel with radios makes it safer and is a social way to travel. They

collected water from 25 Mile Creek on the way to the camp.

John and Maggie made a great fire and got the billy boiling. For afternoon tea, Maggie made some small cakes in the camp oven. The cakes disappeared as soon as they were baked. Oliver rewards her with whiskey. Robyn commented that because the walk today was shorter her legs got a chance to recover but that her shoes got wet from walking through a lot of snow. She was grateful for the campfire to dry her shoes. The campfire was huge, she was a bit worried about it going out of control. And Maggie was concerned about the placement of her tent and vehicle as the wind at the elevated camp site among the trees was quite strong and gusty.

At last the Bolognese Sauce had thawed. A delicious spaghetti bolognese was enjoyed around the campfire where talk turned to Peter Turner, a founding member of the Ben Cruachan Walking Club and Maggie's father. As people began to get to know one another a great camaraderie developed among the team.



Day 04 White Timber Spur Track – 25 Mile Creek – Crooked River – Stonewall – Bulltown

Wednesday 04 December 2019

Daily Distance: 21.9km **Total Distance:** 61.1km
Campsite: Bulltown, a former gold mining settlement

Up: 605m
Down: 1495m

Everyone was getting into a morning routine. Oliver is first up to set the fire and boil the billy. Once the call of “Billy’s boiling” comes, people start to stir. Maggie puts out the breakfast and lunch making ingredients as people check the weather, dress, pack up their camp, have breakfast, make lunch, pack their day pack, tidy up, quench the fire and help stow gear on the vehicles before setting off for the days walk.

Wendy recalls that it was an uphill climb after breakfast along a 4WD track, through some very unremarkable bush but, at the bottom of the spur, the track ended abruptly. A very narrow rocky path went off the spur and, at the bottom, we crossed 25 Mile Creek, which became 30 Mile Creek and eventually, Crooked River. We contoured along the Crooked River through open bush, on a benched miner’s track with excellent examples of dry stone walling often contouring high above the river with stunning views of the twisting river below. We had to scramble through a few fallen trees but, in the main, the track was easy walking. We passed numerous old mining relics, and the occasional mine, but at 5.30pm, after 22km, we were happy to arrive in camp.

Bob impressed us with his recovery from a trip with an amazing body roll, he did graze himself a bit. Robyn got a large bruise on her leg from not lifting it high enough over a log and striking a broken off limb on the other side. Not much blood, but ow!

We had a great campsite at Bulltown on a horseshoe bend in the river just after the first of 24 river crossings of the Crooked River between Stonewall and Talbotville. Bulltown is the site of a former gold mining settlement and there is plenty of evidence, if one pokes around in the bush, of the gold mining activities such as shafts,

tunnels, boulder heaps, sluiced out banks and water races but little of the accommodation.



Once in camp the walkers benefited from John and Maggie’s preparations; a fire with a good supply of wood and a boiling billy. Most took advantage of the river and had a good wash or even a swim. Maggie worked her magic with the food for a nourishing meal and everyone retired contented.



Day 05 Bulltown – Talbotville – Wongungarra River – Station Track – Cynthia Range – Wonnangatta River – Eaglevale

Thursday 05 December 2019

Daily Distance: 17.8km **Total Distance:** 78.9km
Campsite: Eaglevale, on the banks of the Wonnangatta River

Up: 525m
Down: 605m

Oliver leaves us and we have one less walker as Monica takes a ride with Maggie to protect her feet from the ordeal of the many river crossings. Robyn records that it was sad to say goodbye to Oliver, “He has such great botanical knowledge and has taught me several gum tree names.”

Maggie recalls that from leaving camp to the top of Bulltown Track, a very steep and rough track, Oliver and John gave her encouragement over the CB radio. John and Oliver go to pick up Oliver’s vehicle left at Kings Spur leaving Maggie and Monica to drive to Talbotville where they meet up with the walkers for morning tea. Talbotville was glorious and sunny with morning tea at tables under shady trees, Satin Bowerbirds, Sue’s lovely fruit cake and brewed coffee. There was the cemetery to visit and our first toilet since leaving Omeo. Maggie and Monica went on to have a great social time with spectacular driving and many stops to photograph the views.

Fortunately, it was a mild to warm morning for our 23-river-crossings-in-8 kilometres. We began along the Crooked River Track, a good 4WD track, and had our first river crossing soon after leaving camp. The river crossings were mostly shallow, the rocks steady and even, as we were crossing where 4-wheel drive vehicles drive across. Some of the entrances and exits were a little steep, rocky and slippery, giving conflicting challenges as to whether you chose to walk across in your boots (wet feet all the time) or sandals (dry boots but then walking in your sandals). We passed numerous mining relics and old mines; some round (Chinese), some square (European), some covered over and some fenced.

After morning tea at Talbotville there was a short walk up Brewery Creek Road before we headed down through burnt-out scrub towards Pioneer Racecourse. It was a track clearing exercise for Bob, Patrick and Joe in the lead with machetes in hand. The track had not been cleared since the March 2019 fires. As we approached the Wongungarra River Joe methodically replaced the burnt-out track markers. The day had warmed up significantly, and so it was a very welcome and refreshing crossing of the Wongungarra and onto Pioneer Racecourse Road (Pioneer was Angus McMillan’s favourite horse). It was uphill after lunch; a long hard slog up the shadeless Station Track. The burnt-out slopes made easy viewing of the mullock heaps and mines where, in times gone past, people had forged a living. We rested briefly on Cynthia Range before descending the burnt-out track into Eaglevale. This track had been cleared after the fire and was much easier walking; Joe tirelessly replaced track markers.

Robyn’s recollection of the day included: “I was Tail-End Charlie for the day which is a different type of role, as I am usually fairly quick. It gave me a chance to walk with different people, and see the landscape from a slower point of view. We had a beautiful picnic morning tea with fruitcake at Talbotville. I was so impressed by the campsite by the river, and the history of the area. I had a look at the cemetery with Joe, and was surprised by the poor condition of this historic area. It would be great to have a few more signs to show what the settlement was like. The climb in the afternoon was so steep my feet could not get a grip in the gravel at times, and I thought crawling may have been the way to go”.

We crossed the Wonnangatta River by way of a suspension foot bridge onto the open area at Eaglevale and camped there. It was a lovely woodland campsite with plenty of space and right next to the river. Everyone sat facing the river and we enjoyed wonderful camaraderie both in cooking and eating. The washing up got done, Joe gave his evening briefing about the big day tomorrow, Maggie expressed her appreciation to John for putting up her tent and all retired to their tent in anticipation of the next day.



Day05

Top Left: Crossing the Crooked River

Top Right: Toiling up the Cynthia Range

Middle: Panorama of the fire damage

Bottom Left: Patrick and Robert crossing the suspension bridge at Kingwill Bridge on the Wonnangatta River

Bottom Right: Camping beside the Wonnangatta at Eaglevale



Day 06 Eaglevale – Pulpit Rock – Moroka River – Moroka River Track

Friday 06 December 2019

Daily Distance: 23.0km

Total Distance: 101.9km

Up: 390m

Campsite: On the banks of the Moroka River at the end of the Moroka River Track

Down: 220m

Today is catch up day to put us back onto our original itinerary: 23km with much through untracked wilderness area. Sarah takes over from Oliver on the morning fire lighting duties. Our support team transitioned from the Mitchell River catchment to the Macalister River catchment and took the opportunity to get fresh supplies from Sale. Today the walkers were enlisted as supported volunteers to Parks Victoria to assist keep the Alpine National Park tidy. We were to collect rubbish and report any disturbing observations. Bernie Connor from Parks Victoria met us at the end of the day to collect the rubbish and bring us our camp supplies.

Wendy's account of the day states: Armed with black plastic bags, we headed off on Moroka Junction Track picking up rubbish along the way. We did this for 12 kilometres, passing Happy Valley, spectacular gorges and swimming holes, till we got to the end of the road just before the confluence of the Moroka and the Wonnangatta Rivers. We saw a White-bellied Sea-Eagle here, an uncommon sight as we were a long way from its usual habitat of coast and farmland. It was the first of many wildlife sightings that day which included deer, a dingo, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, Australian King Parrots, Gang-Gang Cockatoos, Robins, and the usual array of wildflowers. Before reaching the Moroka River, where the track then became a footpad, we left the bags of rubbish we had collected, some 50kg including a radiator, for Parks to come by and pick up. The rest of the day was spent in and out of the river, depending on preference and ease of passage as we made our way through the untracked Mt Darling/Snowy Bluff Wilderness Area. It was here that the deer and the dingo were spotted. There was clear evidence of a past track. One was a huge rock cairn to which we all added a rock. Others included old markers placed by John "Smithy" Smith, the original McMillans Walking Track Champion. We arrived at camp at 6.30, collected a further array of rubbish in the vicinity, enjoyed a swim, pitched camp, and had a fire going by the time the very welcome sight of our support crew arrived at 7pm. We all enjoyed a glorious cloudless night by the fire, with the spectacular views of Snowy Bluff and the Moroka River.

Maggie reports: John and I drive our 4WDs to Sale to reprovision and pick up items left at Sue's home. Her son gave us heaps of fresh veggies grown in their garden and we picked up frozen foods. Then to the supermarket. The drive back was long and, at the top of Marathon Road after a very long, steep grind in low gear, my Prado had a warning light come on - an old issue that had never been attended to. It made us late to meet up with Bernie from Parks. We transferred dinner, breakfast and lunch provisions to Bernie's ute and I was careful not to forget anything! I was very tired at this point as it had been a very long day with "heavy" driving at the end. Happy Camper meals. John camped by himself on Doolans Plain and I went with Bernie down into the Moroka River campsite. I wouldn't have wanted to drive in, that's for sure. Breathtaking spectacular landscape.



At the end of the day everyone was tired and welcomed the opportunity to snuggle up into their sleeping bags to keep warm and rest up for the following day.

Day 06

Previous page: Pulpit Rock on the Wonnangatta River

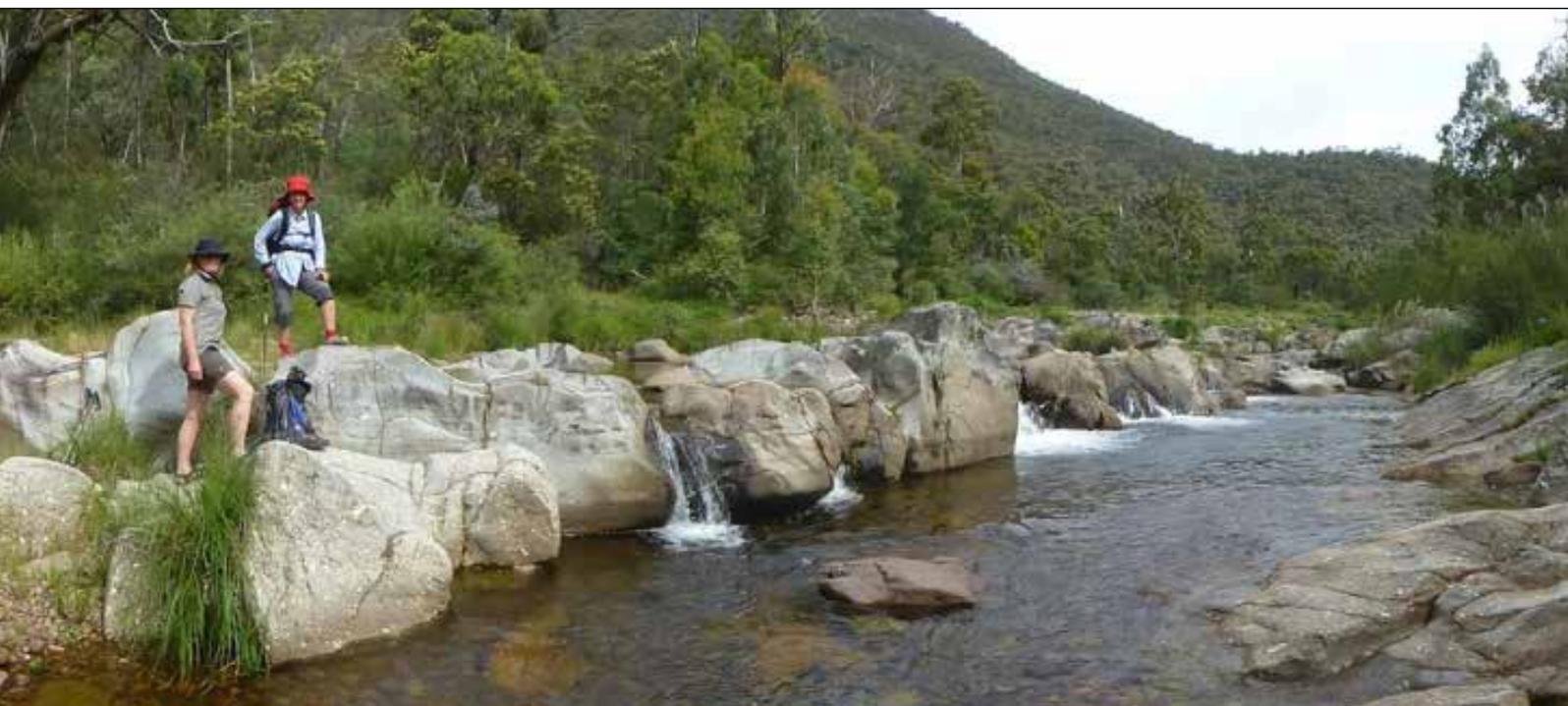
Top Right: Party on Moroka Junctⁿ

Tk with Snowy Bluff behind

Middle Left: Moroka Glen

Middle Right: Martin at camp

Bottom: Sarah and Robyn on the Moroka River



Day 07 Moroka River Track – Higgins Yards site – Playboy Creek – D4 Track – Volkswagen

Saturday 07 December 2019

Daily Distance: 13.1km Total Distance: 115.0km

Up: 1060m

Campsite: Volkswagen on D4 Track

Down: 120m

After the usual morning routine, Bernie took our gear, Maggie and the collected rubbish up the steep Moroka River Track back to John and our regular support vehicles. Having transferred the gear, Bernie, John and Maggie went to the Surveyors Creek camp where they brewed coffee and topped up with water.

The walkers left camp around the usual time of 8am, following the western side of the Moroka River picking a 'track' as best we could; at times scrambling and scrub bashing. After 3km or so we came to a clearing with remnants of a deer hunter's camp. This was the site of Higgins Yards. After crossing Playboy Creek we start to climb. It was a dry, hot ascent, through open scrub, crossing several gullies with eroded washouts. Two of these gullies contained thundereggs, easily spotted once Helmut had shown us how to see them.

**A thunderegg (or thunder egg) is a nodule-like rock, similar to a filled geode, that is formed within rhyolitic volcanic ash layers. Thundereggs are rough spheres, most about the size of a cricket ball—though they can range*

from a little more than a centimeter to over a meter across. They usually contain centres of chalcedony which may have been fractured followed by deposition of agate, jasper or opal, either uniquely or in combination.



Four snakes were spotted. We lunched on a grassy saddle below Beths Peak, named after Beth Kilpatrick, a life member of Ben Cruachan Walking Club who did a lot of work with Smithy on rediscovering and clearing McMillans Walking Track. The saddle pretty much marks the half way point along McMillans Walking Track. There was little enthusiasm to climb Beths Peak. With some reluctance we left the numerous wildflowers, (which included daisies, a leak orchid and a Dual Caledonia Orchid) and started our final climb through burnt out forest to D4 Track. Here we found an old cart, and again, Joe went about replacing burnt markers. On our way up D4 Track, a source of water was identified. As we did not know if John and Maggie had been able to source any water Robyn scrambled in and was passed every conceivable container to fill it to the brim with fresh mountain water. A little further up D4 Track, it was discovered that mobile phone reception was available for the first time in a number of days. This slowed progress to almost a standstill while people made calls and checked their messages and emails. Volkswagen campsite is on a hairpin bend among tall Mountain Ash and named because a Combi van had once been abandoned there. Level tent sites were hard to find.



Maggie was a master at manipulating the fire to get the various levels of heat she needed for her cooking. She was very much indebted to John for the excellent quality, quantity and variety of fire wood he managed to produce. Dinner was a super yummy paella.

Day 08

Moroka Road – Arbuckle Junction – Mt Arbuckle – Kellys Hut – Kelly Lane – Dingo Hill Track – Shaw Creek

Sunday 08 December 2019

Daily Distance: 19.0km **Total Distance:** 134.0km
Campsite: Where Dingo Hill Track crosses Shaw Creek

Up: 300m
Down: 500m



After a photo shoot at the junction of D4 Track and Moroka Road, we began with a stroll along Moroka Road to Arbuckle Junction. At the junction, we left the road on an obvious footpad, alive with heath, orchids, and daisies, before opening up at the top to provide excellent views from Mt Arbuckle. The track then deteriorated because of the fallen timber, but very soon became an easy descent down to cross Shaw Creek and onto the open plains and Kellys Hut. We stopped briefly at Kellys Hut, as lunch was planned for McMichaels Hut, where our feet enjoyed a dangle in Shaw Creek.

We left Kelly Lane on an old logging track, marked by an old tree sporting 3 track markers, obviously nailed on at different stages of maturity. We followed this track, through slightly overgrown parts and stepping over fallen logs till we reached Dingo Hill Track, a 4WD track, and finished the day walking down to a lovely, spacious, flat, grassy, but shadeless, camp on the banks of Shaw Creek.



We were in camp early allowing for some relaxation, bathing in the creek and clothes washing. Makeshift clothes lines soon adorned fences, trees and rocks.

As usual Maggie was grateful for the offers of help with the food preparation and cooking duties; John again secured a plentiful supply of fire wood and he always ensured there was plenty of hot water for washing dishes.



Tasks were undertaken in a wonderful collaboration and spirit of camaraderie which made it enjoyable for everyone. We had chicken drumsticks for dinner.

Day 09

Dingo Hill Track – Mt Tamboritha – Little Tamboritha – Breakfast Creek – Red Box Camp

Monday 09 December 2019

Daily Distance: 15.0km **Total Distance:** 149.0km
Campsite: Red Box Camp site on the Wellington River

Up: 420m
Down: 1360m

The weather had warmed up considerably since the start of the walk. The forecast temperature for this day was in the high thirties. We elected an early start for the anticipated (and eventual) hot day. So, after shaking the ice off the tents, we were soon on our way up Dingo Hill Track and turning onto McMillans Walking Track as it traverses on to the spur to Mt Tamboritha. We climbed continuously then, onto the summit of Mt Tamboritha where a group photo was taken at the cairn (*wide-angle below*).

The track became scrubby, adorned with wildflowers, and often giving us great views of the Crinoline (*bottom left*) and other peaks and ranges. We passed a dam before summiting Little Tamboritha and passed two more dams before regrouping on a high point where Helmut checked out the Geocache. It was pretty much all downhill from there. We stopped for lunch at a spot with spectacular expansive views, to the east, of Mt Wellington, Gable End, Mt Margaret and Ben Cruachan beyond (*Joe showing Robyn; bottom right*). Lunch was short as everyone was keen to beat the heat that now challenged us. The track was a dry, rocky, shaly, steep spur down to Breakfast Creek. At a point before Breakfast Creek it was possible to look down and see John and Maggie at the Red Box camp site and wave to them. A short walk along the sealed road lead us to Red Box camp on the Wellington River; our camp for the night, one with a toilet.

Maggie advised that it had been 43°C at the camp site, too hot for the Lace Monitor they saw to scuttle anywhere fast. No wonder everyone enjoyed their swim in the river. Robyn commented that it was lovely to get in to camp early and have a beautiful swim in the Wellington River and that she was really enjoying the company, fun, meals and campfires.



Day 10 Breakfast Creek – Smith Street – Macalister River – Barkly River – Rumpff

Tuesday 10 December 2019

Daily Distance: 18.1km (167.1km)

Up: 1130m **Down:** 930m

Campsite: Rumpff Flat alongside Mount Skene Creek



We woke from a warm night and, after the now pretty polished morning procedure, we were soon walking down the road to the Melbourne Grammar School camp. We stopped to observe the plaque that marks the opening of McMillans Walking Track back in 1988. Passing information boards concerning MMWT, we were soon climbing up towards The Crinoline and gained fabulous views of The Crinoline and yesterday's descent into Breakfast Creek. At the junction on the

ridge where you head north to The Crinoline or south to Sugarloaf, we turned right onto Smith Street, (named after Smithy) for a short while. Soon we headed west and descended a spur to the Macalister River, marking the track with pink ribbon in anticipation of future track clearing. We crossed the large river flats, and some took the opportunity for a swim while crossing the river. Lunch was on the other side, on the bank of a large property 'Glenlea.' We departed in staggered groups, up another steep, hot, dusty road, and after taking advantage of a quick rest under a tree, just after the saddle, we resumed walking downhill along the fence line to join a farm track that took us across the Clencairn Creek and out onto the Clencairn Road; a short lived downhill before an 8 kilometre grind up another hot, dusty (but fortunately not as steep) road, to the junction of Bull Road and Middle Ridge Road. We passed another property, 'Glencairn', and took in some great views looking back over the flats to The Crinoline (panorama below). From the junction it was all downhill, crossing the Barkly River, and following the grassy river flats and rock face to reach Rumpff Flat camp on Mount Skene Creek.

We arrived in camp at 4:30. It was pleasantly sunny and afforded the opportunity for some relaxation, a bath in the cold creek, a spot of washing and leisurely preparation for dinner. Robyn commented that she had enjoyed walking with Sue, Wendy and Sarah. The support crew had travelled through Licola and had hoped for an ice cream but being Tuesday the store was closed. Maggie used the nice stainless steel bench in the BBQ area in Licola to dice a leg of lamb to avoid doing it in the heat and flies at camp.



Day 11 Rumpff Flat – McMillan Spur Track – Connors Plain – Licola-Jamieson Road – Mt Shillinglaw – Lazarini Spur

Wednesday 11 December 2019

Daily Distance: 19.9km

Total Distance: 187.0km

Up: 1120m

Campsite: Junction of Licola-Jamieson Road and Lazarini Spur Track

Down: 320m

We woke to a strange, misty, cool fog rising from the ground and creek. Some were very keen to make an early start so they could take their time walking up Morris Road/McMillans Spur Track. So an early breakfast of porridge and cream for some, cereal for others, there was always a good choice.

Bob and Sue were on their way by 7:30, others followed in dribs and drabs with the last leaving at 8am. Nothing like a heart starter first thing in the morning, climbing McMillans Spur Track for 5.5 km, 1,000 metres of elevation in 4 kilometres. Shrouded in mist and bordering on cold, it made for pleasant walking. First wildlife for the day was a large native snail about halfway up. We were amazed how fast we climbed up above the campsite. Upon reaching the top, the trees took on a ghostly appearance because of the thick mist, and limited visibility. Our support crew had not arrived to provide the promised hot drinks. Joe made the decision that we keep walking, which was a great idea, as it was very cold standing around.



We walked north west on the Licola Jamieson Road for 4km to our turn off at the N18 Track. By this time our support crew had turned up and had the billy boiling for hot drinks of one's choice, hot chocolate for Robyn, coffee for Joe, tea for many. Our route took us a little way down N18 before turning onto the alignment of an old logging road going up the broad spur to Mt Shillinglaw which is now maintained as a walking track and had been recently cleared. Still cloaked in mist, the track passed through some old alpine eucalypts, Mountain Ash and low understory of ferns, sword grass and varieties of wildflowers. Lunch was had on the spectacularly beautiful (some think otherwise) Mt Shillinglaw. It felt like being there was such a privilege.

We joined the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) which took us back down to the Licola-Jamieson Road for a 5km road walk into camp, passing gullies filled with understory ferns and tree ferns. The camp site at the junction with the Lazarini Spur Track was grassy and spacious with good mobile phone reception. We had two camp fires, one for cooking and one for sitting. After dinner Maggie presented a desert-type thing she concocted on the campfire. Yummy, it went down well with some after-dinner drinks.



Day 12 Lazarini Spur Track – Crow Hut – Black River – CS5 Track –

Thursday 12 December 2019

Champion Spur Track

Daily Distance: 13.6km **Total Distance:** 200.6km
Campsite: Junction of CS5 Track and Champion Spur Track

Up: 780m
Down: 790m

Sarah records the dawn chorus to share with her dad, lights the fire and boils the billy. Today is the last day that we have the company of Robyn and Sue. Robyn's husband, Gary, is to have a knee operation within the next few days and Sue is taking the opportunity for the ride home as she does not fancy the ups and downs of the next day. After all she did them just two years ago.

The day's walk began with a stroll down Lazarini Spur Track, looking out over ferny gullies overshadowed by tall Mountain Ash. We took a brief detour and stop at Crows Hut, a large, accommodating hut complete with an outside toilet. On returning to the road, we walked another 3 kilometres before turning down a walking track recently cleared by BTAC. Robyn, Bob and Joe were able to check out how their handy work of January had stood up. The wildflowers remained abundant, and we maintained a steady descent down a narrow pad to the Black River. Serene.



Lunch was in a small clearing by a small campsite, made on a previous trip by Joe and company. Joe considers this to be the most tranquil spot on the whole of McMillans Walking Track. A few of us were glad we took advantage of a lunch time swim, as it was 'Uphill after Lunch' launching straight up Champion Spur No. 5 Track, an old 4WD track. It was a warm but pleasant constant uphill, and we enjoyed the occasional breeze and shady tree, while offering up the most spectacular views of Black River and the surrounding ranges. The occasional Flame Robin was seen, in addition to a Blue Tongue Lizard and 3 snakes. Robyn walked with Martin who, to keep Robyn going, informed her every time they had climbed a further 50 metres in elevation by monitoring his GPS. They were the first in camp. It was a dry, exposed camp at the junction with Champion Spur Track, but richly compensated with near 360 degree views.

Gary arrived about the same time as the last of the walkers arrived in camp. He came bearing gifts of champagne, beer, soft drinks and food treats like chips and snacks for everyone. The beer didn't last long. The nibbles were shared over pre-dinner drinks. There was sadness in the air when Gary, Robyn and Sue departed. Some enjoyed the sparkling wine with the evening's Spaghetti Bolognese while others stuck with the cask red wine.

Day 13

Champion Spur Track – Stander Creek – Abbot Link Track – Johnson Hill – Gooley Creek – Comet Flat

Friday 13 December 2019

Daily Distance: 17.6km **Total Distance:** 218.2km
Campsite: Comet Flat camping area on the Goulburn River

Up: 670m
Down: 1260m

A chilly start, but for some, excellent walking weather. After 2 kilometres along Champion Spur Track, we turned off and descended a long spur. Although at first a scramble, crossing over logs and then under fallen trees, the walking was easy along a well defined track with easy-to-spot markers. As the spur started to rise towards a knob, the track veered to the right and sidled above the creek and then down to cross Stander Creek close to the site of the Leichardt gold stamping battery. There was evidence of mining activity but we saw no evidence of Wyaton, an old town site, as we made our way up the steep and rutted Abbott Creek Track. Some wondered how a vehicle could ascend. There was evidence of the occasional vehicle being winched. We climbed to the top of Johnston Hill along Abbott Link Track and had a glimpse of our destination, Woods Point, down in the Goulburn Valley.



Once onto Johnson Link Track, we had lunch on a grassy slope virtually on the Main Divide. After crossing the Walhalla Road onto Bald Hill Track, we inspected the grave of William Creighton for no reason other than it was there. Here we entered onto a bush track, recrossed the Walhalla Road and continued down a long pleasant spur through scrubby bush with a cluster of mines. The vegetation changing from dry Eucalypt forest to lush ferny gully. We crossed Gooleys Creek, a small creek flowing through dense ferny undergrowth, and before long, climbed out and contoured around on a good path through rocky bits and long grass before coming out onto a good 4WD track. When we reached the Goulburn River and the small, rebuilt miner's hut, we were only 1 kilometre from camp.



The Comet Flat camping area is extensive and has the luxury of a toilet with running water. People refreshed in the river but there was little appetite for swimming as the day had remained cool. Being the last night, dinner was a mix of leftovers and perishables that should be used up. Maggie had done well with the supplies available to cater for the special dietary requirements of Patrick and Robyn and the appetite of all.

Day 14 Comet Hill – Goulburn River – Woods Point

Saturday 14 December 2019

Daily Distance: 2.1km
Campsite: Home

Total Distance: 220.3km

Up: 50m
Down: 5m



The last day was one of mixed feelings, glad to have completed our objective but sad to part company. It was a straight forward two kilometre walk into Woods Point. Joe had decided on a late start - 8.30!!! Everyone, bar one tent, was up early, and with no lunch to make, ready to go well before this time. The cars were packed. We were hoping to all arrive in Woods Point together. It was a slow 2km along the road, as if nobody wanted the walk to finish. In two weeks, a solid amity had been formed, and we were enjoying our last hour together.

On arrival at Woods Point we were informed (by the youngest Woods Point resident who was on his bike) that the local pub had been closed due to a dispute. Fortunately, Julie came equipped with 4 bottles of sparkling wine. Philip and Julie had come to help with transport home. We cut a cake that Maggie had been saving and opened the sparkling wine in the middle of the street to celebrate our achievement and say goodbye. Joe, while giving a poignant farewell speech, caught the interest of the local journalist who wanted to print up the story for the local newsletter. With farewells done, we loaded our gear into the respective cars and headed for home. Maggie and Philip with John, Monica, Bob, Patrick and Helmut on board to Sale, Julie with Martin, Wendy, Geoff and Joe to Traralgon and John with Sarah to Portland and Mt Gambier.



Reflections from a visitor ... Sarah Sharp



Well, what an honour to have done this walk, and with such an awesome group of people. John Kellas sent me the information on this walk, and after a quick read, I couldn't wait to do it. Being from Portland, Victoria, I am a long way from the High Country, but I have always had a love for it, and this was an opportunity I was not going to miss!

John picked me up on his way through from Mt Gambier, and his love for this track, the country and its people was obvious through our car chatting. The wonderful, Oliver and Caroline Raymond kindly fed me well and gave me a lovely warm shower and comfy bed to ensure I had the best possible rest before we embarked on the trek.

We all met at Sue's and, after getting the support vehicles loaded to the brim with gear, food and walkers, we set off! John, Maggie and Oliver at the wheels. As we drove up to Omeo and the start of the track, my excitement built the closer we got, and I was once again reminded of how beautiful this landscape is, although the lack of rain in the district was definitely obvious.

After a quick lunch in Omeo we had a group photo at the start of the track and headed on our way. It wasn't long before we hit our first climb. Oh boy, a bit of panic did quietly slip in, as everyone else leisurely walked up, chatting continuously, I tried to walk solo, to avoid the talking, and to not scare my new walking friends with my panting and puffing. Far out I hope I don't regret this!!! No training for the mountains when you're from down on the coastal low lands! I was going to have to work!

But there is nothing like good company, spectacular scenery and magnificent trees to take your mind off your fitness. I was in awe of the other hikers. All had

their own walking ways and all had no problems finishing each day with a smile on their face. It was a true delight to do this walk. There were a couple of days when we were climbing upwards and it was fairly hot. Being a 'ranga', I tend to feel the heat, so there were some testing moments in the old mind, but that only adds to the experience. And we were nearly always rewarded with a swim in a mountain river or stream, another experience I will cherish.

I hadn't done any hiking in the High Country before and I was certainly not disappointed. Oliver had to leave early, so he passed the morning fire lighting job to me, one of my favourite things to do. I would be woken by the morning chorus, get my phone out and record it, (to play to my dad when I got home, an old bird and bush enthusiast), then watch the bush awake as I would get the fire started and put on the billy for the morning cuppa. Bliss, my favourite part of the day. We were all so well fed and cared for by John and Maggie, I slept well and could feel myself getting mountain fit. (That was a relief!)

We climbed and climbed to amazing views; saw the detail of the Snow Gums; got snowed on; walked through swathes of wildflowers; saw the evidence of wildlife at our feet; nearly fell over backwards gazing up to the top of the Mountain Ash; were mesmerised by the tree ferns and the beauty of walking in the mist; scrambled down steep slopes, scaling rocks, clearing branches and foliage to enable markers to be seen. We rock hopped along creeks and rivers; were deafened by cicadas; stalked deer (well sort of!). And even spotted an alpine dingo. Toasty camp fires, and bush stories before bed. Up, down, up down, could life get any better!?

The wilderness areas were a real treat. Being so remote and so immersed in the bush, I think your senses really start to heighten. I reflected and pondered how the Aboriginals would have managed this area, so different to the country at home. But I also enjoyed the areas of ruins and remnant track and the walls that McMillan had built. You couldn't help to imagine what it would have been like when the Europeans first came here. We wondered how many of those early settlers/miners, filled with hope, did make their fortune, or even survive! Trying to make this wild land like the lands they had come from, it would certainly have been exciting, tough and heartbreaking. And then there was the timber, those trees....

But that's enough of all that, being part of the BCWC you will already have an appreciation for all of it. Thank you so much Joe, and the rest of the crew for organising the walk, it really was an honour to do, and I would do it again tomorrow.

The McMillans Walking Track is definitely worth the effort to maintain and walk, and I thank all for being involved with its preservation. Though I think the man, Angus McMillan, may have been a mongrel, the remnants of the work that was put into this track by him and his team, both people and livestock, command respect. And we are very lucky to be able to follow his path through this fantastic landscape, amongst a wonderful wilderness.

Reflections: the Support Crew ... *Maggie John*

I felt privileged to be on this trip with a very happy group of people who always had a smile and something nice to say. Every campsite cooking event was filled with people helping and getting the meal cooked and then the washing up done. It was so enjoyable with the wonderful collaboration and the tasks were undertaken with a joyful camaraderie. My tent was put up for me every night and in the mornings the vehicle was loaded up with everyone working collaboratively. John's excellent firewood supply made campfire cooking a success. Hot fires are the secret and a variety of wood does the trick. I was guided and reassured by John on many tricky manoeuvres. I highly recommend convoy travel with CB radios because it makes it safer and is a social way to travel.

The drives and views were spectacular. I stopped a lot to take photos. Having Monica for a passenger one day was very special and social. The trip down the Moroka River track with Bernie was nail biting but provided breathtaking spectacular landscape views.

A few things I won't forget: ice on the tent on a rainy night and collecting snow for cooking contrasted with 43 degrees watching a Lace Monitor at Red Box camp; swimming in Shaw Creek and the Wellington River; views over to the night lights on Hotham; glorious Talbotville and Spaghetti Bolognese and champagne! The whole trip, for me, was extraordinary. I spent my childhood with my father taking me with him all over this area and the place names are familiar to me. This trip has given me an opportunity to experience the

mountains that are so very meaningful to me.

Maggie Marriott, 4WD support and cook

Assuming you can find your way to Omeo, you then have a 25 km drive on the Great Alpine Road to a sign marking the start of McMillans Walking Track. Mt. Hotham Village; last chai latte for a few days. Theoretically DHPR is closed over winter to 01 Dec, but inevitably the gate has been forced open. Exits on the river crossing can be rocky and rough, use first gear, low 4wd and remember to drive to protect the underside of your vehicle. A tip; when fording streams keep to the downstream section where the water should be shallower and where the river has formed a curve of gravel and stones, rather than heading in a straight line across. Eaglevale camping area, complete with a long drop toilet. Ice creams at Licola store, provided it isn't Tuesday. Choose a suitable campsite on the flats. Firewood may need a little searching.

In all, I did about 800km from Victoria River Track to Woods Point in a 2007 Toyota Prado (3 times now) equipped with a bulbar, winch (not used) and roof rack. I carry the usual recovery gear including tyre pump, tyre deflator, snatch strap, tow chain, D shackle, 40 litres of water.

JD Kellas (all care but no responsibility)

Endnote: Thanks from Joe

Throughout the trip there were many stops to photograph the scenery, wild flowers, wildlife and historic features. Group photos were taken at strategic locations. John and Monica checked the track notes and maps against the actual terrain we traversed to make sure they were not misleading and were suitable for the guide book. We ate well thanks to Sue's preparations and Maggie's cooking. There were a few tumbles but of little consequence. The main use of first aid kits was to administer to toes and feet.

The 220km journey involved climbing close to 9000m, the height of Mt Everest from sea level, and crossing some 18 rivers and significant creeks, some multiple times e.g. 26 crossings of the Crooked River. A good deal of track clearing was achieved mostly due to Bob's efforts. Extra markers were erected and one section was taped with pink flagging tape.

I am not sure what Philip thought when he arrived, at Woods Point on Saturday 14 December to provide transport home for the walkers, to see a bunch of unwashed, smelly walkers and support crew in the middle of the road drinking bubbly and eating cake as a celebration at the end of our 220km walk.

Thanks to all the walkers and support crew for their companionship and camaraderie and for their contributions to making it a very successful and enjoyable walk/expedition. Special thanks to Sue Hides for arranging all the food requirements, Maggie Marriot for all her food preparation and cooking, John Kellas for coming all the way from Mt Gambier to provide logistics support, to Oliver, Gary, Philip and Julie for providing additional transport to and from the walk, to Bernie Connor for getting our gear into the Moroka and to John and Monica Chapman for joining us and all their sound advice.

The Guide book to McMillans Walking Track will be available in November 2020.

This newsletter was compiled by Jack Winterbottom, Helmut Tracksdorf and myself from material supplied by Wendy Cartledge, Robyn Kercher, Maggie Marriot, John Kellas and Martin Norris. Thank you for your efforts and contributions and thanks to all those who contributed photographs.

Joe van Beek

