

Walk from Parachilna Gorge to Mt Hopeless

Part One - Parachilna to Angepena by Gavin Campbell

There is what could be called an "unofficial extension" of the Heysen Trail, going from the northern end of the Heysen Trail at Parachilna Gorge, to Mt Hopeless.

The route is unmarked, and follows roughly the path taken by the Patron of the Friends, Warren Bonython AO, on his epic walk of the Flinders Ranges, which he and his companions completed in 1968, and is described in his book 'Walking the Flinders Ranges'. [Available from the Friends office]

In May 2000 a small group of experienced walkers from the Friends who had completed walking the Heysen Trail, and had thus walked from Crystal Brook to Parachilna Gorge, set out to set out to complete the emulation of Warren's walk, by walking on to Mt Hopeless.

Their walk was described in three articles published in Trailwalker.



Map showing the area of the walk from Parachilna Gorge to Mt Hopeless

[Part of Australian Geographic Map]

We set off for the Flinders on a morning when there was a two inch snowfall at Jamestown and rough weather over most of the state. There were nine of us and after dispersing from John's Glenelg home, seven in Les's bus and Jeff and John in John's car, we headed for Moolooloo Station north of Parachilna Gorge, to continue our Flinders Ranges odyssey.

All of us have completed the Flinders Ranges leg of the Heysen Trail, and under the inspiration of Warren Bonython's Book; "Walking the Flinders Ranges, we intended to complete walking the Flinders, not necessarily in Bonython's footsteps, but complete it nonetheless.

I for one had read the book several times over the past twenty or so years and each time had said to myself "One day I will do that".

I completed The Heysen Trail section from Crystal Brook to Hawker with friends from work and my constant walking companion Robert, and from Hawker to Parachilna with Robert alone.

Responding to a letter to the Editor in the February edition of Trailwalker, I rang Les Skinner and asked if Robert and I could join his group on the rest of the walk. Robert declined, having had enough and being unable to get a ticket of leave. My wife on

the other hand had been the one who read the letter and suggested I go. Is there a message in this somewhere?

The bus arrived at Moolooloo at about 4pm on Saturday 27th of May, and with John and Jeff having arrived earlier, there were nine of us ready for action. The plan was to stay in the shearer's quarters for two nights doing the walk from Parachilna Gorge to Moolooloo with day packs. Then with full packs into Narrina Pound staying the first night near Patawarta Gap, the second night in Narrina Hut, the third night near Mount Hack in Main Gap and the fourth night near Evans Outstation, and walking out to Angepena on the last day.

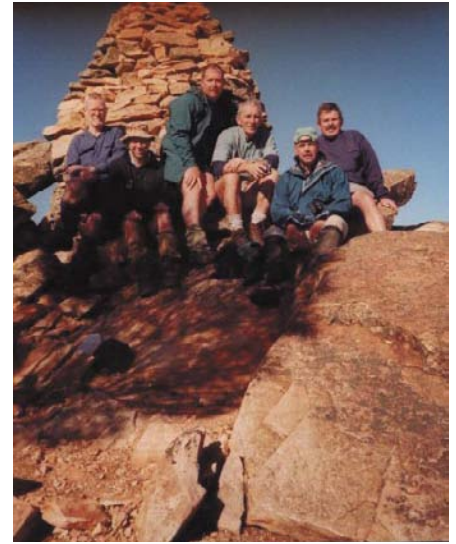
Saturday night was a cold affair and we were thankful to be sleeping with a roof over our heads. There were several books and magazines in the shearer's dining room but what attracted my attention was a framed article about one of Australia's greatest bush walkers. I copied the article and will impart its wisdom to you in a later article. On with the saga.

On Sunday morning we awoke to clouds covering the higher hills and a definite chill in the air. After bussing it to the official starting point at the end of the Heysen Trail, and taking the obligatory photographs, we set off. Firstly we walked along the road and then along the Oratunga Creek, I had photocopied the appropriate pages of Bonython's book and tried to notice any of the features he mentioned. The first feature to look for was aboriginal rock carvings near a six-foot bar in the creek. I think I found the bar but not the carvings. We were in a hurry and didn't have time to look around, maybe next time.

It was in this creek that Mark imparted his first spark of wisdom upon us. Because of our tight time schedule some of us doubted that walking in the creek was sound judgement and Mark advised us of the "wiggly factor" of walking in creeks. With the "wiggly factor" one multiplies the length by something, divide by something else, take away the first number thought of and that is the distance. He must have been right because we got back to Moolooloo at about 2pm, giving Les and John enough

time to take the bus to Angepena and come back in John's car before bed time.

Oratunga Creek is beautiful like most big creeks in the Flinders and although "wiggly" in the beginning opens out into a wide, straight and noble riverbed when the hills become less mountainous. We made rapid progress along the creek with the last seven kms of the days walk being along the road to Moolooloo Station. It was along this road that we passed over the 31st parallel. We arrived back, as I have said, at about 2pm with the bus leaving for Angepena at about 3pm. It was only after the bus had gone that on checking my gear I realised my tent had been left on the bus. This incident reminded me of Warren Bonython doing the same thing on one of his walks and I can understand not only the embarrassment he must have felt but also the annoyance with the brainpower that would have allowed such a thing to happen.



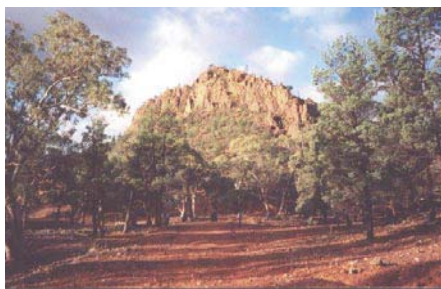
The following morning we were awakened bright and early when Les started the generator at 6:30. After breakfast as we started off from the homestead's front garden, we could just see Mt Patawarta in the distance, and could not believe we would be walking almost that far in one day. The morning started out cold and sunny, as did the walkers, setting off for our first target, Hannigan Gap. The walk was slightly undulating and through well wooded country. There were thousands of small pine trees and I blessed the eradication of rabbits. John however suggested that many might have been bonsai'd, relating a tale of how Mawson had observed a small pine at Angepena that didn't grow for 30 years. Whatever the cause, I was pleasantly surprised at the tree life, as I was to be throughout the walk. We had morning tea at Hannigan gap, Mark handing us out a musk stick each. Musk sticks were to become prizes over the next few days for feats of observation and endeavour.

As we progressed we saw little wild life except for herds of goats and a very wary wild donkey who kept a very safe distance on the treeless Home Rule Flat. Lunch was had at Home Rule Flat and it was during lunch that Mark imparted another thought. In the mood of the person who named this area, (Hannigan Gap and Home rule Flat) maybe Patawarta Gap and Mountain had been wrongly spelt and had in fact been named after that well-known Irishman Pat O'Warta. This would lend credence to Hans Heysen calling the Mountain "Old Pat". Mt Patawarta is the subject of his painting "Land of the Oratunga". After lunch we passed through Patawarta Gap and set up camp near the foot of Mt Patawarta. On John's recommendation some agreed to climb the Mountain the following morning, not me though. I hate climbing mountains. When it came time for sleeping, Les with exceptional grace offered me a berth in his tent, a gift I will always be thankful for.

The next morning again started cold and sunny, beautiful weather for mountain climbing, so off we went to attack the northeast ridge. My decision to go with the others was never regretted, for although Patawarta appears angry and gnarly from a distance, it in fact was one of the sweetest climbs I have ever done. On the summit of Mt Patawarta in all of the rock crevices there was some sort of plant, the most predominant being a flowering grevillea with its red through yellow flowers. There was a sprinkling of many other types of plants some flowering in their yellows and purples but most just green, waiting for their chance to flower in some other season. The climb was over sandstone, the summit being reached in very short time. If the climb up was beautiful, the view from the top was stunning. All ranges from the North through West to the South could be seen with absolute clarity, a haze caused by the recent cold front preventing us seeing much further than Wilpena. The easterly scene, into the sun, was also partly obscured by the sun shining through the haze. The temperature on the summit was 7 degrees. Mark again showed great wisdom at this stage in handing out little chocky eggs. With all photos taken and the summit book duly inscribed we headed down, the steepness of the rock face astounding me. Rubber soles are certainly an amazing rock climbing tool, "sticking" to some amazingly steep surfaces.

We arrived back at camp, packed our things and set off for Patawarta Bore, Mark and Les navigating. After a cross-country hike, we traversed a small hill out of a creek bed and there, right on target, was the windmill and bore, "Perfect navigation men!" After lunch we again set off, this time across a stone covered plateau at the base of some mesas along a fence line, heading for Narrina hut. Trevor making the comment that we had not seen much wildlife except for the occasional kangaroo bounding across the foothills of these mesas. The scene along these foothills was beautiful, mountains in the distance beyond a plain to our left, hills with cliffs at their summit to our right. Again Mark's navigation was spot on, for as we came over a small hill, there among the trees was the hut and shearing shed.

After the evening meal we went to bed, half our number in the hut and the others in the shearing shed.



Around midnight a mouse about the size of my thumb discovered some food and proceeded to spend the rest of the night scratching and rummaging through the packs for food. What a racket, I didn't know that one small mouse could make so much noise. To quote Elmer Fudd, he was "One pesky rodent". He must have been a gourmet mouse because he nibbled at several types of food. The wish for more wild life had been answered, "Well done Trevor!" The following morning before dawn I climbed the small hill behind the shed to watch the sun come up. This spectacle was to be one of the highlights of my trip for the views of the Pound were extensive. This was one point where the Pound could be seen in its entirety.

Don't anyone tell John, because he would have liked to be there and reminded me of my oversight for the rest of the trip. He even reverted to name calling, mainly doubting the authenticity of my parents especially my father. I promise to take him next time.

After Mark and Gunther came down from the same hill we set off towards Main Gap at the base of Mount Hack. Along the way we stopped off for water at Claypan Bore. Some of us had filled our containers with rainwater at Narrina Hut while the others filled up at the bore. It was at about this time Jeff started to lag with a sore shin and although in some considerable pain, he continued on without complaint. After an uneventful day walking in some beautiful country, we walked through Main Gap and made camp on the banks of Pinda Creek. Close by there is a rock formation that glows at dusk and on this occasion it didn't let us down. Evidently it is mentioned in Stavros Pippos' book of photographs. Before dusk we looked over an abandoned gold field with its mining machinery and fallen down shacks. I think the main track we were following joined all of the gold mines in the area, for this was to be the first of many we were to encounter along this track. Another early night was had by all. In bed by seven. I haven't done this since I was a baby. I liked Dennis's comment, "If you are good, you can go to bed early." Any parent would understand the significance of the comment.

The following morning we set off early for the Frome River, again the walk was uneventful other than being surrounded by beautiful country with stunning hills and abundant plant and bird life, the predominant little bird seemed to be a robin, with its red breast and crown. Other birds, of course included correllas always raucously protesting our presence in their most demanding way, crows giving their mournful cry of despair at having to make a living in this country (did Graham Kennedy interpret their call correctly) and the ubiquitous galahs in their beautiful pink and grey, noisily going about their business. Maybe we would appreciate these birds more if they weren't so abundant.

Along the way we called into another abandoned mining camp possibly the one Warren Bonython mentions as having a beer garden. Several of us collected little rock samples, and after showing them to our very noncommittal retired geologist Norrie, stowed them in our pockets for future examination. Near Angepena Goldfield We missed Angepena Goldfield, by electing to miss a loop in the track, so cutting off several kilometres. Again John missed out on seeing something he wanted to see, maybe next time. Around lunch time we stopped at Evans Outstation to fill up with bore water. This water was a bit sour but the boys filled up just the same, any water is better than no water. At about 3pm we arrived at the Frome River and almost immediately Mark found a perfect camping spot on its banks.

When we had all set up camp he discovered about 50 metres up stream some beautiful rock pools, the pools were healthy because of the abundant and varied aquatic life in them. Gunther on seeing this beautiful clear water got very excited, emptied out his bore water and filled up with pool water. I was expecting him to have a bellyache during the night but he must have a tough constitution. After tea we stood around watching satellites go across the sky. Such is the exciting nightlife of camping. Norrie turned on his radio but no one wanted to hear about the outside world, we had spent a week not knowing and didn't want the spell to be broken. Again we awoke to find ice on some of the tents. The degrees must have really tumbled during the night.

The final day was only a short walk out of the Frome River through Mudlapena Gap where there is a school of native fish in one of the pools created by the spring that flows through the gap. Again the day was cold and on the plain heading towards Angepena Station we had to don jumpers again. It was a feature of this walk that the temperature never got much over 100 C, although the walking kept us warm. From this plain we could see Mt Serle, and the Gammons beckoning us in the distance.

At about 11 we reached the Station and after a short talk with the Station Owner, Syd Nicholls, we boarded the bus and made a hurried trip to Copley where we got stuck into pasties, cream buns and Coca Colas to satisfy our cravings for city food. After filling up we went on to Parachilna Pub for a quick beer before heading home. I'm sure that if a brewery had sponsored us in some way it would have got a mention at this stage.

On our trip home we had plenty of time to think of our next walk, Angepena to Arkaroola, later in the year.

It should be noted at this point that although the walk for most of us was a magic experience, there was a lot of detailed planning done by John, Mark ,and Les, and my thanks goes to that trio.

I would not recommend anyone else do the walk without the same amount of preparation. Part of this preparation included getting permission from the station owners over whose land we crossed. It should also be mentioned that this is very isolated country and should not be tackled without proper consideration, for an injury could mean at least a 40km rescue.

Gavin Campbell