

Walk from Parachilna Gorge to Mt Hopeless

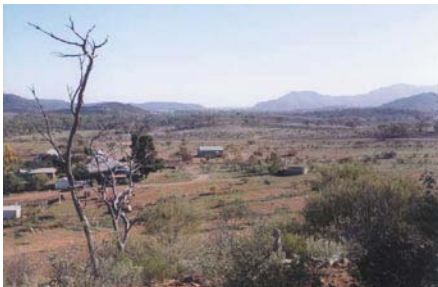
Part two - Angepena to Arkaroola by Gavin Campbell

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.



Early in September we again met at the Fleet Street Café, in Pulteney Street, to plan our next walk into the Flinders. All were present except for Geoff and Trevor, both who had work commitments and would not be able to be a part of this next walk. Angepena Station with walk in background Mark, John and Les had done quite a bit of work since the last walk and had more or less planned our route. We were to start where we had left off, at Angepena Station, walk with day packs to Owieandana where our packs and water would be left, walk up Arcoona Creek to its source, climb over Yackie Saddle into Mainwater Pound, pick up water at Yackie Waterhole, walk along Mainwater Creek to Mainwater Spring

where another water drop was to be made, walk down Mainwater Creek to Bolla Bollana Smelters and walk along the Umberatana Road to Arkaroola. I had some trepidation about it being so late in the year and the heat but was reassured, so accepted my fate. The walk was set for the first week in October 2000.

On the morning of the 30th September we again set off for the North Flinders. A cold front went through Adelaide on the previous night with another to follow on the Sunday so it looked a good start for the week. Hopefully the cold weather would last all week, thus keeping the temperatures where we were going in the low twenties.

Dennis, Les and I went in Dennis's car arriving at Angepena Homestead at about 2:30PM. Syd Nichols and his wife were at a "Back to Beltana" event so we were greeted by Don. Don had been looking after the place while the Nichols were taking some leave at Wallaroo and was due to leave the following Tuesday for his home at Whyalla. We were shown to our quarters and with Don's company we boiled a kettle and had a cup of tea and a yarn. Don is an interesting character, full of revolutionary ideas probably developed during his hard 60 odd years of life. I tried not to be dismissive of his comments but I reflected my belief that Australians are caught up in the "Beach Culture" which basically follows the principle "If things get too hard we would rather go to the beach (or bushwalking or to the footy) than fight". Our discussions went on until about 4PM when he left us and we left for Arkaroola.

By this time Gunther had arrived with Peter and Norrie and we were to go in both cars to Arkaroola, leaving Dennis's car there while we came back to Angepena in Gunther's Pajsero. We arrived back to be greeted by Mark and John who had spent the day making a water dump at Mainwater Spring. This act was to prove invaluable later in the week. After tea we had an early night in preparation for an early start the next morning.

Sunday morning started cold and clear and we were greeted by two of the farm dogs, a female Kelpie and her son, a pint sized little fellow who followed us everywhere. Les and I decided to go for a small climb up a rocky outcrop behind the homestead to see what the view was like while we waited for Peter and Mark to take the packs and water to Owieandana. Mum and pup followed, with the pup following Les to the very top. He traversed rocks that I thought too big, occasionally getting stuck and whimpering when confronted with an untraversable object. He did however find his way to the top but when it came time to go down he wanted to stay, so I had to pick him up and show him the way down. We arrived back at the shearer's quarters, having a short wait for Mark and Peter to return. We were worried about the pup following us but found him lying under a chair fast asleep, totally pooped after his climb.

With the group together, we set off at about 8:30 with daypacks. I went to say goodbye to Don but he was nowhere to be found. We set off across country for the valley between Noah's Ark and Constitution

Hill, soon meeting up with the main track to Owieandana and going between the two mountains of Serle and Rowe. There was a beautiful clear blue sky with a cool Southerly blowing, and the walk was just like a stroll in the park. Occasionally there would be an Emu or Kangaroo running or bounding away, disturbed by our presence. One thing I noticed was the lack of birds, Corellas, Galahs and Crows, which had been so abundant during our last walk.

While walking in this valley we came across a cairn inscribed with the story of how Painter had used a set distance in this plain as his base line for surveying of the whole North Flinders. At about 2 in the afternoon we arrived at the Owieanda shearing shed to pick up our packs and water. After our pleasant walk with daypacks the weight of the large packs and water was almost too much to bear. I could hardly lift mine and was thankful when after about 2Kms Mark directed us to a camp site on the banks of the Arcoona Creek he had used at other times when he had been in the same area. It was a great spot and because there had been no dew the night before I decided to dispense with my tent and sleep under the stars. Les followed suit.

At dusk some very sleepy ants ventured onto my ground sheet. I assumed that in this climate to work in the heat of the day would be unbearable so they had probably evolved into nocturnal or dusk working ants. I had no bother with them after going to bed, again at about 7:30. 4AM saw me awake and I lay there admiring my ceiling of the Milky Way galaxy. Just before dawn a bird decided to welcome the dawn with a beautiful chorus which went on for a couple of hours. It doesn't get much better than that, lying in bed watching the dawn and listening to beautiful birdsong.

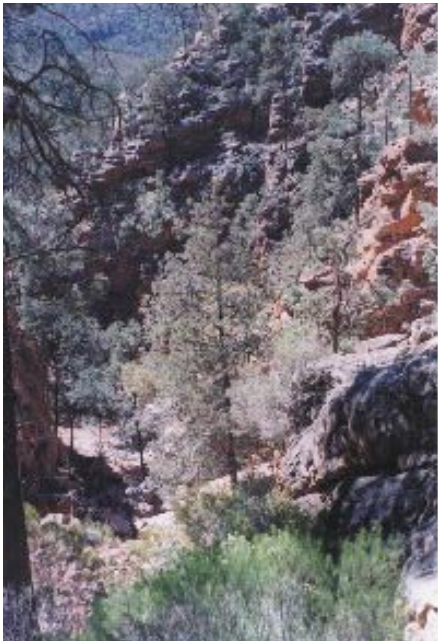
After breakfast we again set off rock hopping up the Arcoona Creek. I left behind a crushed up biscuit for the ants. It was a warm day with little to no breeze. During one of our scheduled stops someone noticed a goat perched high on the cliff edge above us. There didn't appear to be any way for him to get in or out and we marvelled on their agility. It was during this walk that I saw what I consider may have been a small meteor remnant among the rocks in the creek. I had to leave it however for it would have been too heavy to carry. We reached Sambot Waterhole at lunchtime and were disappointed to find it almost empty. If it was empty what were the other waterholes going to be like?

Along this creek I noticed a lovely aroma and discovered it was given off by a little bush with a yellow flower. Also in the creek bed were Emu bushes in flower and others with white and yellow flowers. One flower was the most beautiful deep blue. At about 2:30 we found what we considered to be the last camp site in the creek. We reasoned we would not have been able to get over Yackie Saddle that afternoon. Our decision was proved correct the following morning. So we set up camp and spent the afternoon contemplating the best route into Mainwater Pound.

Again I slept under the stars and again a little bird entertained us with birdsong at about 6AM. Peter was the only one to get up before him. He was first up each morning, much to Gunther's chagrin, for he started with his barrage of lighthearted, derogatory comments aimed at Gunther, which tended to last on and off all day (our own Morcombe and Wise show). We got going just after seven, deciding to climb up the creek as far as we could and then to climb over a ridge aiming at Yackie Waterhole. The creek climb was beautiful and as expected, offered us a staircase, not quite to heaven, although the scenery certainly was heavenly. At what was considered the best spot, we donned gaiters, climbed out of the creek and headed for "Hill 1002", a hill between Arcoona and Yackie Saddles. Although this turned out to be one of the highest points in the Gammons, it was chosen because the contour spread both up and down seemed to be the most gradual. This was a tough climb, with us oldies struggling in the heat. I was thankful that people who had considered joining us hadn't, for this climb might have caused them some anxiety. At one stage Mark, who was the group's rear guard, noticed a snake we had all stepped over. Mark was the first to notice most of the snakes seen during the walk.

We all made it and were rewarded with one of the great views of the whole area. Mainwater Pound and Yankaninna Range to the North, the Blue Range to the East, Lake Frome in the extreme distance. To the South was The Plateau and Mount Serle with Campbell Bald Hill Range to the distant Southwest. We rested here for a while, taking pictures and generally recuperating. After this rest we set off down again heading for Yackie Waterhole, the notes saying it had water 95% of the time. The gradual descent turned into a rather steep scramble into Yackie Creek which, we were pleased to discover, was a pleasant walk. At lunch time we reached the waterhole from upstream and were disappointed to discover it took up the whole of the creek and was down a cliff of about 50 feet, vertical cliffs on both sides. What a dilemma, 6 tired old blokes, although Mark and Les were still fresh and full of beans, and we didn't have many options but to climb again. There was a ledge that showed a way down but it was steep, although wide enough to offer some safety. If any one was to slip however, they would have been in trouble. It was chosen and after some harrowing slipping and sliding we all made it down without a mishap. I must have been desperate, for on several occasions I grabbed hold of spinifex, suffering its spikes in my hands rather than slipping.

Norrie and Dennis were desperately short of water and were relying on this water to replenish their supplies. To say the water was disgusting is an understatement. It was green and viscous with Mark commented afterwards that he felt a rubbery backbone when he stuck his hand in. Desperation leads to desperate measures, so John got out his water filter and although constantly clogging up with green algae we managed to get some clean water into some bottles. Unfiltered water was also put into bottles and any bugs present were killed with iodine, later to be filtered through a pair of panty hose. Iodine must be a great sterilising agent because no one got sick.



Yackie Creek from the waterhole

It was later that we read that Yackie Waterhole is the home of Arkurra, the serpent of the Dreamtime, who drank Lake Frome dry, crawled back, making Arkaroola Creek and Mainwater Creek and finally making its home in Yackie Waterhole. With so much salt in his belly you can still hear it rumbling every now and again. White fellas think the small earthquakes that are often heard in the Gammons are the cause of the rumbling. My guess is drinking that water that covers his lair would give anything a bellyache, even Arkurra, and it is about time he tidied things up a bit. The Gammons were considered out of bounds to the local Aborigines.

After leaving Yackie Waterhole we were running a little late, so we walked until 4PM, found a good campsite and settled down for the night. We were all pretty tired after such a hard day and were very relieved to be able to put our feet up. Flies were a constant nuisance but as usual they went away at dusk. It was at this point that Les asked the question, "Where do flies go at night". He answered his own question with the profound explanation that they follow the sun around the Earth in a great swarm. It seems a reasonable explanation until someone can come up with something better.

After such a tough day we all went to bed fairly early, very soon after sundown. I lay awake for some time looking at the stars through my binoculars, looking at all of the Novas, Stellar Clusters and Binary Stars I could find. My thoughts went back to an occasion when I was sailing at the bottom of York Peninsular on a particularly windless night. The stars were reflecting in the mirror sea. Kate Cottee in her book tells of such a scene and feeling like an astronaut surrounded by stars. It was a truly magnificent experience, for I think the stars down there are brighter than anywhere else. I also tried to make out figures by joining stars. I was able to do so and thought of some kid in ancient times making up figures of a crab, a bull, a scorpion and so on, not for one second thinking that at the start of the Third Millennium his star figures would be the foundation of a new religion.

I drifted off to sleep and again was awakened by the same birdsong as the previous morning. Again we were away by 7:15, following Mainwater Creek. This was to prove to be another tough day spent rock hopping in the creek bed. The temperature gradually climbed into the thirties and any shade was welcome. A light breeze, which occasionally blew in our faces, was also most welcome, but on the whole it was an uncomfortable walk. An outstanding feature of this walk was the cliffs and two particular rock falls. The first being about 500 metres at its base and the other of exceptionally huge boulders. It is certainly spectacularly beautiful country which I wouldn't have missed seeing for quids.

We arrived at Mainwater Spring at about 1PM and were very relieved to be able to sit in the shade of some large trees whose foliage looked a little like that of an Olive tree. After a short break we recovered the water and were overwhelmed by Mark and John's thoughtfulness when a carton of cold beer showed up. Well done boys. God bless 'em. The water was stowed, with the Yackie water being quickly discarded.

After a short lie down on a rock, I was awakened by Mark ready to get going with his often repeated call "TWO MINUTES!" There were several cans of beer undrunk so we collectively put them in our packs. They were to prove quite refreshing over the next few days. If left out overnight they became chilled. What a way to start the day! The afternoon's walk was to prove a painful affair, for it was along a road, which was hot, long, dusty and hilly. At one stage we could see some tracks in the dust that stopped in the middle of the road. Les subsequently rescued a frilly-necked lizard that had run into and got himself buried in the bulldust, which was about 6 inches deep. I guess he would have drowned if not for good old Les. I often feel like that lizard before his rescue.

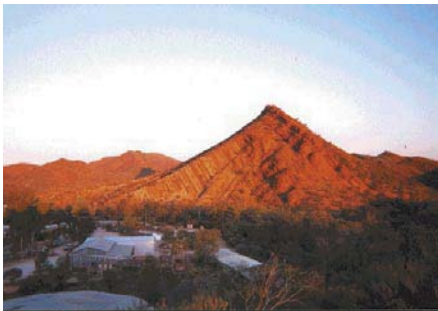
There was little shade along this road and with the temperature in the low 30s, the walk became quite tedious, I call it trudging. At 5 o'clock we turned off the main road and found a good campsite in a

creek bed near the Oodnaminta Yards. It was the first reasonable campsite we had seen all afternoon. Les, Dennis and I slept in the creek bed under the stars, not the correct thing to do but it was only a small creek and it was certainly not going to rain that night.

When all of the flies had followed the sun and left us for the night I cooked some tuna mornay and bingo they all came back. They must surely love it for they were all around it until I had finished it and sealed off the container. Again I watched the stars and a small bat that fluttered around us during the night. Sleeping under the stars is the way to go for they are a beautiful sight and the show lasts all night. There is even the occasional shooting star, some of them exploding like fireworks.

Next morning again another little bird woke me up. Not the same song as before, but beautiful non the less. When Les woke up he made a startling sight. He was head to toe in blue thermals with the leg of a worn pair on his head as a beanie. At one stage he had his hands on his hips and I half expected him to crow the dawn, our own "little blue rooster". We were again ready early when I noticed Gunther scampering up the adjacent hill. Why not go too, so I followed.

As I climbed out of the cool valley air, the temperature rose about 5 degrees in about 5 steps half way up the hill, the cold air had convected into the valley. All indications were, it was going to be a hot day. I have a theory that the views from small hills are usually the most spectacular and this one didn't disappoint. The views were magnificent in all directions and looking over a cliff we appeared to be flying as we looked down on Correllas flying here and there, kangaroos bounding away on the distant valley floor and crows crying away in the distance. We could have stayed there all morning but that was not to be.



Soon the spell had to be broken and we joined the others for the morning walk into Arkaroola. Firstly along a track, then into a creek bed that led into the Wywhyana Creek. Again Mark and Les showed great navigational skills, putting us right on target when we went across country, cutting off bends in both the track and the creek. Arkaroola Village and Griselda Hill The walk again was to prove hard going, mainly because of the heat. It must have been about 35 degrees in the shade, a measure that is of little value when there is no shade. With the glare, the heat off the rocks and the lack of shade, it must have been around the 45 degree mark or higher, which makes for tough walking. We arrived at Arkaroola around

noon and were thankful for the effort we had made the previous afternoon. Instead of walking outside in the heat we sat in the cool of the restaurant drinking the lemon squashes the bar shouted us.

While standing at the reception counter I started to read a book about William H. (not Henry) Thomas. My great grandfather William Henry Thomas had been a leaseholder of Umberatana station, the adjoining station to Arkaroola in the 1850s and 60s, with his brother James. The biography was about one of James' sons and was of special interest to me. I intended to buy it when I could get my credit card. Imagine my disappointment when the shelf book, being the only one left, was sold before I could buy it. If anyone has a copy, or knows of a copy, could they lend it to me please or at least tell me who is the publisher and author.

After a small rest, some of the others went back to Angepena in Dennis's car to bring back the other two cars and our overnight gear, my credit card and money included. After resting during the afternoon and replenishing our body fluids we went for a meal at the Arkaroola restaurant. The meal was a pleasant change from the meals of the last week.

The following day Dennis and Les drove back to Adelaide while the rest of us had a look around. It certainly is an interesting place. We tried to plan the route of our next walk, which will be to Mt Babbage or the Strzelecki Track via Mt Hopeless. The hills and mountains we saw were ominous and forbidding but no doubt we will find a way over and around them. That evening, at dusk, we went to the old Bolla Bollana Smelters and Bolla Bollana Spring where we had originally intended to spend Wednesday Night. If we had, we would have seen Yellow Footed Rock Wallabies coming in for an evening drink, along with other birds and animals but, all in all, not walking on Thursday afternoon in the heat was a bonus.

The following day we headed back to Adelaide, not however going past Umberatana Station, as I had originally wished, because we were told the road was almost impassable. Thus making two disappointments in my quest to find out a little more about my great grand father.

Gavin Campbell