

Yudnamutana Gorge to Mt. Hopeless

Having walked the Heysen Trail with Tony Budarick between July 1996 and November 2001 over a period of 55 days we decided to complete our journey to Mt. Hopeless in various stages. Like many other walkers we were inspired by Warren Bonython's book *Walking the Flinders Ranges* but thought we would walk a different route. Between September 2002 and June 2003 we walked between Parachilna (the start or end of the Heysen Trail) and The Armchair via Glass Gorge Rd, Moolooloo Station, Hannigan Gap, Patawarta Gap, Mt. Hack, Pinda Springs, Waukawoodna Creek, Italowie Gap, Grindell's Hut, Loch Ness Well, Oodnaminta Yards, Wywhyana Creek, Arkaroola, Coulthard's Lookout, Ridge Top Road and finally The Armchair, which we climbed. A small section between Yudnamutana Gorge and The Armchair had been walked in July 1993. In total we walked these sections in nine days.

After a lot of planning, 2005 became "THE YEAR". Tony's great-nephew, 16-year-old Alex Richards, a student at Pulteney Grammar School, accompanied us. Alex belongs to their Adventure Club and loves bush walking having walked Deep Creek and Mawson's Plateau during the previous two weeks of the school holidays. He also had a GPS on his wrist (new for us) as well as a satellite phone.

Day 1: Yudnamutana Gorge to Greenhill Hut - 17 July 2005 (16 kms):

We were taken to Yudnamutana Gorge by our contact from Mt. Freeling Station and walked along the Gleeson Creek track looking for the "hole in the hill with an amazing view". As we were carrying packs of 30 - 40lbs we left them and climbed up a steep hill to our right to find the spectacular formation with its beautiful view that Warren Bonython had likened to James Hilton's Shangri La in *Lost Horizon*. After retrieving our packs we continued down the spectacular Yudnamutana Gorge that looked fantastic after recent rains. After 2-3 kms we turned north up Balancing Rock Creek and found the waterhole was a bit difficult to negotiate. We had sufficient water for two days but hoped to find more. Coming out of the creek, walking was very pleasant up a steep track past Daly mine, Daly

Bluff and following Mc Donnell Creek. We arrived at Greenhill Hut about 4.30pm so decided to stay in the hut instead of putting up tents. An old trough by the abandoned, basic "galvo" hut with dirt floor was full of water. After our first tiring day we enjoyed a delicious stew-type meal under a clear starry sky.

Day 2: Greenhill Hut to Hamilton Creek waterhole - 18 July 2005 (23 kms):

We were on the track by 0815 after a cold night. The country was very rugged but a green tinge already after rains. After walking about 7 kms we decided to leave the track and walk down into the creek (unnamed), which fortunately ran into Hamilton Creek. Walking was much harder with lots of rocky water holes. After checking our position with the GPS we found that we were in Hamilton Creek by accident as about four creeks converge into it. Hamilton Creek is much wider but still hard going, so we took lots of short cuts across the bends and eventually found a reasonable campsite near a big water hole. We were now just off the Yudnamutana map and going blind for about 10kms until on Callabonna map. As our legs and feet were very sore we enjoyed the rest around the campfire – another perfect night.

Day 3: Hamilton Creek waterhole to Terrapinna Waterhole - 19 July 2005 (25 kms):

We were walking by 0815 along the creek which widened as it flows NE. Walking downstream we found it hard to pick the best place to walk as lots of scrubby melaleuca bush. We arrived at Brindana Gap with lots of water holes and a yellow-footed rock wallaby observation hut high up on the east side cliff – but no wallabies to be seen. We were walking in mud as we approached Terrapinna water hole. Climbing over smooth rocks at a small gap we observed the erosion caused by millions of years flooding; hard to imagine a huge river flowing through the small gap. The area was spoiled by a failed pump-type arrangement attempted some time ago. We left our packs and climbed high up on the left side to see Terrapinna water hole, the biggest water hole in the Flinders. Back to camp near a water hole in the amphitheatre area about 1km from Terrapinna waterhole.

Day 4: Terrapinna Waterhole to Mt. Hopeless - 20 July 2005 (30 kms):

THE BIG DAY! After filling everything up with water from the waterhole in the Hamilton we headed north over a rugged range. After sighting our next objective, Mt. Babbage, a small flat-top peak high on the range, we headed down into a valley. Across the Mt. Freeling to Moolawatana road, rugged climbs over lots of hills and up a creek to find some beautiful clean water just below the summit of Mt. Babbage. We topped up our water supply and had a big drink. Decided to leave unnecessary gear under rocks to lighten the load for the push to Mt. Hopeless as it was now about 10am, and 23-24 kms to go. From the top of Mt. Babbage, we had spectacular views all round with Yudnamutana's, Freeling Heights and Mawson Plateau to south and southeast and our small Mt. Hopeless almost due north. Down onto the plain and hard going at first negotiating many creeks and small gorges, stopping for lunch in small sandy creek. We had lost sight of Mt. Hopeless soon after leaving Mt. Babbage and not seen again until the last 3-4 kms.

The walking conditions varied, some flat, some hilly, with the gibber plains made softer by recent rains. Had to cross the electric dog-proof fence near the wide flat Mundawatana creek. Then past the flat-top Mt. Yerila to the east. We were getting excited as we pushed onto our destination, feeling quite tired as we negotiated a small range of hills. Some of these were very colourful and reminded us of the "Breakaways" near Coober Pedy. Lots of quartz rocks and others coloured red and black. Not until going around last hill did we see the small conical shaped Mt. Hopeless, the foreground covered with green grass and surface water in places. We finally arrived at 5.20pm very excited and emotional as we group-hugged. Took the usual photos by the rock cairn and young Alex eventually found the small container with messages inside; the first being Warren Bonython's in 1968 and the last the "Darter" group in 2001. Our long day was made very special by a beautiful sunset in the west with an almost full moon in the east and the long shadow of "our mountain" under it.

We eventually made camp in a small creek to the east and had a late and well-earned meal washed down with a cup of tea. No surprise packages in the bottom of our packs as did Warren Bonython in

1963 with two bottles of vintage claret. That came a couple of days later! After ringing our families on the satellite phone Tony called Warren Bonython to tell of our arrival and to thank him for his inspiration and his wonderful book that has given many of us enjoyment and direction. What would he have thought, remembering 37 years ago when he arrived at Mt. Hopeless, being able to make a phone call from the middle of nowhere! How things have changed.

Day 5: Return to Mt. Babbage - 21 July 2005 (26 kms):

After a long cold windy night we left our note in the small container in the cairn, said goodbye to Mt. Hopeless and headed south back to Mt. Babbage. It was another perfect warm day and with our packs now lighter we enjoyed the walk with Mt. Babbage easily seen in the distance. The only drama for the day was when Tony and Alex almost stepped on an enormous sleepy lizard. After crossing the electric fence my cap blew off the post and in trying to retrieve it with a walking stick I got a nice little shock! We approached Mt. Babbage further to the west to avoid the deep creeks and gorges, arriving at our stash about 4pm and filled up with water as we camped in a sandy creek near Mt. Freeling and Moolawatana road. Another perfect night as we enjoyed our last meal out bush under a huge full moon, chatting around the campfire reflecting on our fantastic, but at times, hard walk for a total of 120 kms over the past five days. We were very lucky with perfect weather and plenty of water.

So where to now? Cameron's Corner perhaps? We have walked Cape Jervis to Mt. Hopeless in 68 days. It has been a great journey over our beautiful SA countryside with, at times, our wives, family and in particular, Alex Richards, who should be very proud of his achievement of our walk to Mt. Hopeless. In closing I would like to thank our families, friends and many other people who have assisted us on our journey.

Malcolm Blight

Malcolm was accompanied on his journey by Tony Budarick and Alex Richards.

(Thanks are also due to Keneatha Pick who typed this article.)