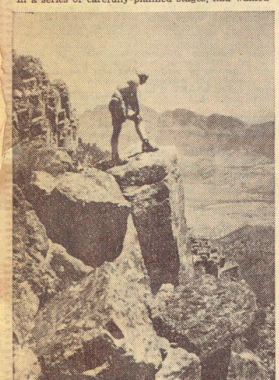
Walking The Flinders From End To End

Early this month two men stood on Mt. Hopeless north-east of the Flinders Ranges and looked over the arid landscape of salt lakes and gibber that had once daunted explorer Edward John Eyre and prompted him to give this desolate hill its melancholy name.

For one of them, conservationist and geographer Warren Bonython, this moment on Mt. Hopeless was one of satisfaction and enjoyment despite aching joints and fatigue from a long hot walk.



MR. JOHN BECHERVAISE, who went on three stages of the walk, on Pompey's Pillar, Wilpena Pound.

South-west he could see the rugged outlines of the Northern Flinders Ranges over which he had just made a remarkable journey.

For, during the past 18 months, Mr. Bonython, in a series of carefully-planned stages, had walked and climbed 632 miles — the complete length of the Flinders from Crystal Brook, which Eyre had also found in 1839, to Mt. Hopeless.

Mt. Hopeless, it seemed to Mr. Bonython, should be the appropriate place to end his walk.

And while it's only 291 miles as the crow flies between the two points, Mr. Bonython took the hard and interesting way that you'd expect of a man who likes mountains.

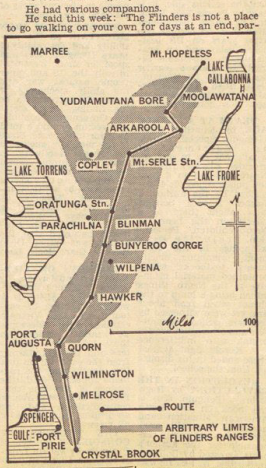
He went along the main access of the range, walking along the backbone where practicable, but mainly walking along the valleys and branching off to climb the principal peaks.

He climbed more than 60 individual summits, some of them precipitious and testing, but all of them satisfying. He climbed a total combined height of 86'000 ft. about three times that of Everest.

It took 74 walking days.

He had various companions.

He said this week: "The Flinders is not a place to go walking on your own for days at an end, particularly when the country is rough and the weather is hot."



Why He Did It

Why did Mr. Bonython make the walk?

He said this week: "Mountains mean a great deal to me. I have an inner urge to walk among them and the Flinders have their own mystery and beauty."

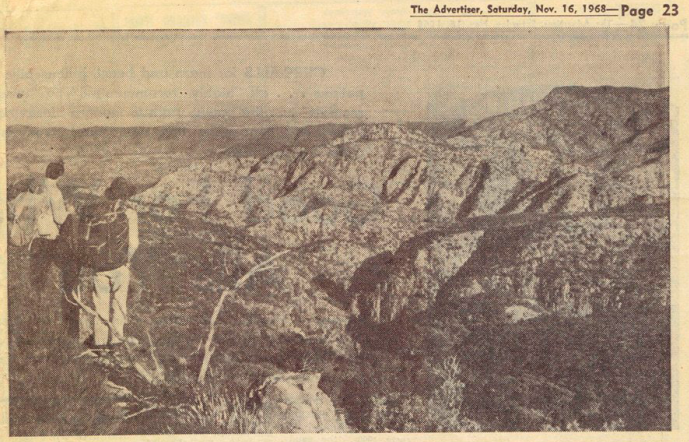
Mr. Bonython planned the journey in nine stages, each of seven to 10 days — Crystal Brook to Wilmington, Wilmington to Quorn, Quorn to Hawker, Hawker to Bunyeroo Gorge, Bunyeroo to Oratunga, Oratunga to Mt. Serle, Mt. Serle to Arkaroola, Arkaroola to Yudnamutana Bore, and then the final walk to Mt. Hopeless.

It wasn't possible, because of other commitments, to do the walk in one single expedition.

Mr. Bonython said: "I've always wanted to walk over the Flinders. This, I think, is the first time anyone has set out to walk from one end to the other, although some of the old prospectors probably walked an equivalent distance. My idea was to go beside the main chain of the range and to climb the principal summits.

"And I found it was necessary to get into training at least a month before I made each stage of the walk."

Mr. Bonython trained like an Olympic athlete. He started off with 35 lb. of lead in his pack and built it up to 70 lb. Nearly every morning he went climbing around Moriatta and Waterfall Gully, or hiking through Cleland National Park.



MR. WARREN BONYTHON (left) and Dr. Christopher Game on the summit of the Gammon Ranges overlooking Cleft Peak basin, with Lake Frome on the horizon.

By MAX FATCHEN

He started his first walk on May 15 last year, setting out from Crystal Brook.

He won't forget that section of the walk.

He said: "I found I'd inadequately trained myself, and, after the fourth day, both my Achilles tendons became inflamed. I had to walk on them for a further three days. When I arrived at Wilmington a local dog sank its teeth into the more inflamed of the tendons, ensuring I didn't go any further. It took months of medical attention and physiotherapy to cure them."

But it didn't stop him. And each successive trip became more fascinating as the mountains grew more rugged and the weather changed, sometimes in an hour, from throat-parching heat to saturating thunderstorms that brought creeks down with a roar.

Mr. Bonython and his companions experienced temperatures from 30 degrees (when the water in their plastic containers froze) to above 100.

The walks went on through all seasons — from the driving dust of last year's drought to the saturated plenty and wildflower-decked ranges of this year's good season.

The weather played some ironic tricks. Because of water difficulties on the arid Willochra Plain section of the Hawker-Bunyeroo leg, Mr. Bonython and a companion made careful preparations for the walk in January, by carrying a number of one-gallon cans on their backs up the ranges.

There they placed the water supply for when they came walking through the area later.

Unexpected Meals

When they finally made the walk, three and a half inches of rain fell.

The winter rains brought some unfamiliar sights to the top of the barren ranges.

There were unexpected meals of mushrooms.

Mr. Bonython said: "We found the mushrooms on the top of the range during the walk along the high country between Bunyeroo and Oratunga in May."

It was on a training walk before he tackled this section that Mr. Bonython slipped on a rock and broke a rib. The date, he noted ruefully, was April 1.

On the Oratunga-Mt. Serle walk in July this year it rained every minute of the first 24 hours. It was on this trip that the walkers suffered the intense cold.

And on this trip Mr. Bonython met Mr. Keith Nicholls, of Warraweena Station, who was going to service the bulldozer of an enterprising middle-aged couple who were looking for gold in the area, using the bulldozer to clear the surface of their claim.

At Mt. Serle Station he stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Jim Smith, who were among the hospitable people who helped him.

Then on August 29 he set out with John Bechervaise and Dr. Game on the rough, rugged walk through the Gammon Ranges to Arkaroola.

The Gammon Ranges have always fascinated Warren Bonython.

They are primitive and remote — a 3,000 ft. plateau of horizontal-lying quartzite rock forming many deep and narrow gorges. The scrub on top is extremely thick and difficult to penetrate.

There was the water problem—the problem of either carrying it up or climbing down from the top of the ranges to the gorges to look for it.

Helicopter Helped

Earlier Mr. Bonython had been the guest of the Army in a helicopter, watching Army exercises in the area.

He asked whether the Army could perhaps leave a few gallons of water in a dump on the Gammons. The Army obliged and a helicopter left 20 gallons, which the climbers were able to use for washing as well as for drinking.

From their high camp on the Gammons the three men went down to Cleft Peak basin and climbed the peak itself which Warren Bonython had named and was the first man to climb 20 years earlier.

Cleft Peak is a precipitous peak of shattered quartzite split down the middle by a steep valley with, on one side, one of the grandest Flinders' precipices, a sheer 1,000 ft. face of rock.

Mr. Bonython said: "On the top of the peak I looked for the tin and a note I'd left 20 years ago, but couldn't find it.

"But in a rusty meat tin open to the weather on a cairn on the north ridge we found a note from an unsuccessful climb we made 21 years ago. The writing was still legible."

There was another dizzy climb on the next walk in September from Arkaroola Station to Yudnamutana Bore. The first three days of this walk Mr. Bonython was on his own in the wild tangle of country around Mt. Painter where the Exoil exploration party is looking for uranium. He took special precautions to keep the local people posted of his movements in case of possible accident.

Later he had arranged to meet Cdr. Hitchens and Mr. Strahle at Yudnamutana and they returned to climb the Armatur, a great boss of granite with two wing-like protuberances like the arms of a chair.

"I'd climbed it 18 years before and knew the way up. But there was one spot where a slip could send you hurtling hundreds of feet," said Mr. Bonython.

As a conservationist, he was alarmed to see the number of wild goats living high in the ranges.

1,300 Wild Goats

He said: "I saw groups of about 40 goats and they pose a threat to the marsupials like the euros and rock wallabies that live in this high country. One local resident told me he had seen one flock of about 1,300 wild goats."

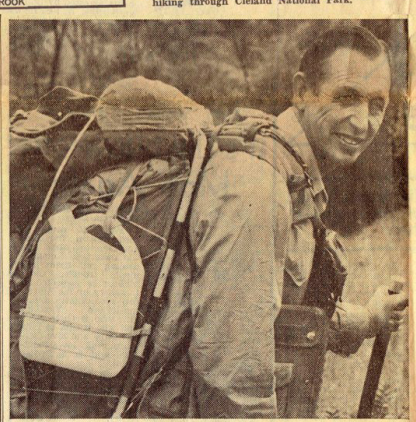
Mr. Bonython looks back on his trip with much enjoyment. Certainly he is fit enough for another.

He remembers the kindness of people along the route — Mrs. J. Whitford, of Quorn, Mr. and Mrs. Max Fargher of Oratunga Station, the Smiths of Mt. Serle, and Mr. Gerald Sheehan and Mr. Michael Sheehan, of Moolawatana.

Mr. Bonython is now writing a book about his experiences, the country and the people he met.

About the Flinders he says: "One of the most important things for the mental well-being of people in a civilised society is to be able to go back and to commune with Nature. The more pristine or primitive the Nature the better. But unless we take positive steps, it won't remain (this way. We must see that the unusual qualities of this magnificent country are not ruined by lack of thought in development. Conservation must be understood and applied by all of us."

This, from a man who has just walked through the mountains he loves, is something to ponder and to heed.



IN FULL WALKING ORDER . . . Mr. Warren Bonython and the kind of pack he carried across the Flinders.

They Want A Tonic

A request for a tonic is a common occurrence in a doctor's surgery.

Maybe the patient simply expects the doctor to sit down and write a prescription for a "really good" tonic.

The doctor sees it, however, as a challenge to find out what is behind the request: does the patient have early symptoms of some disease or is he perhaps suffering from depression?

"Why do you say you want a tonic?" I asked when George Morrison asked for one.

"Just run down, I suppose," he replied.

This was a bit of a lazy answer. I wanted more detail and stimulated him further to enlarge on how he felt.

"Oh, well," he sighed, "just that I don't feel I can get out of my own way, and can't get interested in things and my food tastes like ashes . . ."

I haven't tasted ashes and I don't suppose he has either, but this is a characteristic sort of statement made by someone suffering from depression — or a bad cold.

He hasn't a cold so I decided that he is suffering from depression.

I chatted him out with a prescription for an anti-depressive.

Burden On A Trolley

"There was this very obese woman in labor on a stretcher, nearly blocking the corridor," said Henry, our breezy obstetrician, who tells a good yarn.

"The stretcher was creaking and the wheels looked like buckling. The wardsman was sweating as he struggled up the slope. A nurse started helping him just before I came upon them."

Henry was telling the story in the surgeons' room to an amused audience.

"'Just a minute' I said and the wardsman stopped for a welcome rest.

"I had a word with the woman, and found out the baby didn't seem to be arriving on the instant.

"'Any reason you can't walk?' I asked her. 'No,' she said, 'I was going to, only they put me into this thing.'

"'Well how about it?' I asked, and she said, 'Right oh,' and jumped down and steamed off up the corridor — no trouble at all.

"When last I saw him the wardsman was pursuing her with a trolley."

Anyhow, the way he told it, we all had a good laugh.

Wrongly-Used Words

"The pain came on suddenly while I was lifting these branches," said Mr. Furber, "and I thought I might have torn a ligature or something."

"Ligament," I corrected gently. "Well, let's have a look."

There are pairs of words like this that people often get confused because they sound a bit the same and have meanings that are connected in some way.

A ligature is something tied around something, as surgeons commonly tie blood vessels with caigut.

A ligament is a strong band holding two bones together. Both have a medical flavor.

Patients often speak of a "tinge" of pain. What they mean is a "twinge" of pain.

A "tinge" (quick, pass the dictionary) is a slight coloring, and twinge is a slight but sharp pain. The confusion is caused by the slight degree implied in each.

I mention these because patients often feel embarrassed later if they find out their mistake.

Eye Like A Stone

"I hate to disturb you at this time," came Mr. Friar's apologetic voice on the phone at nine o'clock last night "but Mum's got an awful stomach upset and I don't know what to do for it."

"Mum" proved to be his wife and her upset had come on rather suddenly. I couldn't work out on the phone what the trouble might be so I set out to see her.

"Thanks, doc," said Mr. Friar, as he let me in. "I rather hoped you'd come."

I found that, as well as an upset stomach, she had a headache and the headache was mainly on one side of the head.

At this stage I thought of migraine or high blood pressure, but she was a bit old for migraine and her blood pressure proved to be all right.

Then the penny dropped and I tried feeling the tightness or pressure in the eyeballs. One eye felt hard like a stone instead of firm like a tennis ball.

She had acute glaucoma, and I rushed her off to hospital for the operation which was urgently needed to save her sight.

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SATURDAY MAGAZINE

Will Explore The Barrier Reef

TOKYO — As a man who had everything, it must have been a real problem for Japanese newspaper publisher Matsutaro Shoriki to decide what to give himself for a present in 1965.

But he solved it with typical ingenuity and acquired a $445,000 bathyscaphe which, next January, will begin a four-month scientific study of the Great Barrier Reef and the ocean floor off north-eastern Australia.

Now 83, Shoriki has never been under water in his magnificent sinking machine but he eagerly follows all details of its adventures, and the 20-odd members of the "submersible" department have a special standing around the offices of Shoriki's "Yomiuri Shimbun," Japan's third largest newspaper.

It seems so natural for the "Yomiuri" to have its own undersea exploration ship that one is almost tempted to think that no self-respecting newspaper should be without one.

In addition to the bathyscaphe the "Yomiuri" has:—

- Its own professional baseball team, the Giants, which wins the Japan championship with monotonous regularity each year and is said to be the only consistent money-maker among Japanese pro. teams. Shoriki, in fact, introduced professional baseball to Japan nearly 40 years ago.
- Its own air force of a dozen planes.

From Frank Devine

- Its own symphony orchestra, generally considered the best in Japan and frequently praised as being in world class by eminent guest conductors.
- One of the finest golf courses in the Far East, the Yomiuri Country Club, where most of the major tournaments that come to Japan are held.
- Yomiuriland — a kind of Buddhist Disneyland, not much smaller in size and scope than Disney's creation.

The "Yomiuri's" bathyscaphe is used for collecting specimens for Yomiuriland's vast aquarium, for taking underwater pictures to adorn the pages of "Yomiuri" publications and for geological and other scientific research.

Shoriki has lent his machine to the Government a couple of times to check the sea-bottom along the route of a proposed bridge linking the islands of Honshu and Shikoku and to gather wreckage from an airliner that crashed into the sea near southern Japan last year.

But one also suspects that, as a man who likes being on top, Shoriki awarded himself a bathyscaphe simply because nobody else in Japan had one.

The "Yomiuri" submersible is an eye-catching bright-red thing (the Yomiuri Giants also wear the brightest, boldest colors of any team in baseball) and looks like an improbable cross between a conventional submarine and an ironing board.

It can plunge to 1,000 ft. beneath the surface and chug around there at about two knots for six hours at a stretch.

It is nearly 50 ft. long and 8 ft. wide and it is roomy and comfortable with its usual six passengers aboard.

The "Yomiuri" bathyscaphe has seven viewing ports, made of optical glass, a powerful searchlight and electronically-controlled "magic hands" that can catch fish or pick up rocks weighing as much as 110 lb. from the seabed.

The underwater explorer, which set off for Australia this week, towed by its 100-ton mother-ship Yamato, will stop for some diving in Philippines waters and should reach Darwin as its first Australian port of call in late December.

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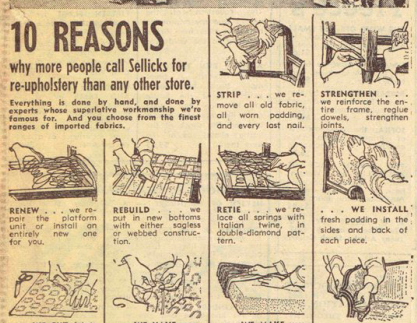

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