



Rat Tales

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Web: www.ballarat.com/bushwalking.htm

E-Mail: ballaratbwc@yahoo.com (General correspondence)
rat_tales@hotmail.com (Newsletter articles)

Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club

CROSSCUT SAW: NOVEMBER 10 - 12

The rocky faces of Mt Magdala and Hell's Window emerged through the tree tops as we climbed Howitt Spur, bringing good and bad news. The good news was that the weather was going to deliver unrestricted views across the alpine region – which was in sharp contrast to the low clouds that I encountered on my first walk in this area. The bad news was that Mt Magdala is roughly the same height as Mt Howitt and the extent of the climb that remained was clearly evident.

John Merrifield led Vicki, David, Geoff, George, Ian and Craig on a three-day walk in the Victorian Alps. It was originally scheduled as a four-day walk in January this year but forecast hot weather, bushfires and a lack of reliable water supplies forced a cancellation. This resulted in the walk being even more eagerly anticipated than usual.

David kindly volunteered to transport all of us in his Landcruiser Troop Carrier, with trailer attached. We headed off for the Alps on Thursday evening and stayed overnight at the King Spur shelter on Mt Sterling. This allowed an early start to the walk after driving to the Upper Howqua River camping ground. We made the obligatory stop to view the beautiful Bindaree Falls along the way.

We all came prepared with spare shoes in which to do the river crossings but they were not needed because there was such a reduced flow. The spare shoes were stashed in the bush and we headed off in perfect conditions – cool temperature, high broken cloud and a gentle breeze. The track is well defined, so John told us to set our own pace and meet at Macalister Springs. The faster walkers took time to take in the views and practice their navigation skills. Everyone had arrived at Macalister Springs by mid-afternoon, by which time the remaining cloud had burnt off leaving us with an idyllic afternoon and evening to enjoy.

We made an early start the next morning and were setting off across the Crosscut Saw before 8:00am. Our mobile phones beeped a chorus of digital delight as Mt Buller with its communication towers came into view.

Clear skies and a cool breeze made walking the Crosscut Saw a real pleasure. Many of the main Victorian peaks, including Mt Buller, Mt Buffalo, Mt Bogong and Mt Feathertop, were clearly visible. We regrouped at the top of the well-named Mt Buggery (steep approaches on both sides) and decided to camp there rather than near Mt Speculation. The packs were left behind and we all set off to Mt Speculation to get water. The wisdom of our change of plan was soon evident as the walk to Mt Speculation was strenuous enough without packs - and the day was warming up. This mountain has spectacular views that made the walk worthwhile even without the necessity of collecting water. It was a relief to get back to Mt Buggery and relax for the remainder of the day. It was a great campsite, apart from the masses of ants, and had a beautiful viewpoint to the West from which we watched hawks hunting in the late afternoon light with the sun illuminating the flanks of the Crosscut Saw and Mt Magdala.

The forecast of deteriorating weather was an additional reason for camping at Mt Buggery as it provided a fast exit to lower altitudes in poor conditions. There were some showers overnight and steady, gentle rain in the morning. We got up at first light and descending from Mt Buggery to the Queen Spur. The rain soon stopped and the rocky scramble evened out to an easy descent to the Queen Spur Road, which has heavy regrowth along much of the upper section. It was very interesting to inspect a logger's fire-refuge bunker near the road. Steady rain set in again and brought out the leeches that jumped aboard when we stopped for a break or to pick up the shoes we stashed at the bottom of Howitt Spur. Ridding ourselves of these leeches provided a diversion during the drive back to Mansfield where we consumed hamburgers and coffee with the righteous abandon common to post-walk feasting.

Thanks to John for patiently leading a memorable walk and also thanks to David for providing the transport and doing all the driving.

Rob Hutchison