



Rat Tales

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Ballarat Bushwalking and Outdoor Club

MT BOGONG —“THE LIVING MOUNTAIN”

FRI 9 TO SUN 11 NOVEMBER

This walk will forever be etched into my memory. It was fun, picturesque, challenging, soul searching, timeless, peaceful and heart wrenching. It left me with an even greater respect for our land and Mother Nature.

Vicki, Tom, Ian Craig, leader John Merrifield and I gathered together at Mountain Creek Picnic/Camp ground Thursday night in preparation for the steep climb to the summit of Mt. Bogong.

On Friday morning John took our packs to the start of the walking track that led to the bottom of Staircase Spur. He parked the car and we adjusted our packs in readiness for this relentless climb. Our small group soon split into 'gazelles' and 'others'. The plan was to regroup at Bivouac Hut approximately halfway to the summit. It was hot hard work. After resting here, we continued walking above the tree line. It became quite exposed. Snow from previous falls was still around and the spectacular views urged me on. Snow poles marked the path across the ridge towards the memorial cairn for three people who had lost their lives in a blizzard years before. An optional short trip to the summit gave 360 views. The usual fluffy white clouds were gathering and by early afternoon were looking more threatening.

The 'gazelles' had by now crossed Hell Gap and had set up camp. I had no time to wonder about the name Hell Gap as I was introduced to Sago (a type of snow and hail). This spurred me on. I travelled faster. Fortunately it was now downhill and I was able to set up camp before the rain fell. The rain stopped and we explored our campsite and discovered another memorial to a mountain man. The 'luxury' at Cleve Cole hut was welcome. A kitchen sink, *running* water, a fire if needed, beds, ensuite, and drop toilet were all provided for our comfort. Tasty food such as couscous and noodles was followed by gourmet puddings of chocolate and pecan served with custard.

We were greeted by a beautiful sunny morning for which we were thankful. We packed our worldly goods to keep them dry, and walked pack free down to How-

man Falls. Here we sat and enjoyed the serenity. The gazelles turned into mountain goats and worked their way across the water to the other side of the falls. They took photos before rejoining us. A quick stop to revisit the memorial and check the views and we were trudging off along the Rocking Stone Saddle. Tom had set us a challenge of finding this rocking stone after producing an article from the Journal of Melbourne Bushwalkers in 1951. What a surprise to find this small round rock snuggled inside a rather larger rock. It could not be removed from its resting place. It seems that this is how the saddle derived its name of Rocking Stone Saddle. The article states that it was formerly known as Emu Egg Stone.

Heading towards the summit again we were met by a young man *running* along the track, equipped with only joggers and hydration pack. He had no time to stop and talk as he was in training for a mountain race to be held in January 2008. A group of school children greeted us at the peak where we lunched. A quick lesson in map reading was provided by Vicki before we headed off towards West Peak; thankfully without our packs. Clouds were building again and of course the daily deluge began. It developed into a wild thunderstorm lasting *too* long. I can only say that being under cover while nature's raw emotion surrounded us was a humbling experience. I know that John loves this country and revels in its wildness but...

Here at Michell Hut, seven more adventurous hikers were biding their time waiting for this electric display to abate. Canvas shelters were erected once the storm had passed. Supplies lugged up by hikers which included two bottles of wine, a cask of red, coke, fresh milk, bread, along with a frypan and gas stove made our meals appear meagre. Everyone enjoyed the company and warmth and finally retired to our tents to listen to the rain.

Sunday morning dawned. Our group was eager to begin the descent to Mountain Creek. We said good bye to the 'luxury hikers'. The morning promised a beautiful day and it didn't deny us a quick descent. 'Gazelles'

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had become 'greyhounds' and quickly departed for their homes. I enjoyed a leisurely lunch by the creek with John and Tom. Phil, Tom's dad, who had used this opportunity to visit an old uncle, arrived. We left John, who was about to take a dip in the water and headed back to civilisation.

Sincere and heartfelt thanks go to John M. our leader for providing the opportunity to complete this adventure unharmed. His determination to proceed with the week-

end, even though he was unwell has been acknowledged by us all. Thanks Ian, Craig, Vicki and Tom for your company and for sharing your knowledge on bushwalking with me.

This trip has provided a glimpse of the strength of a man and the power of a mountain

Karena Esnouf