

PB or Not PB

Liz Farquharson



Liz Farquharson, Ross Buckley, Steve Boyle, Lynne Boyle, Wendy Wilson, Ryan Farquharson

Day 1 (Tuesday 29 Dec) Off to a Good Start

Early and eager to embark on another adventure our little group gathered together at the top of Salamanca Place at 11am on Tuesday 28 December 2009. Stephen Boyle was our highly experienced walk leader, joined by the lovely Lynne Matson, Wendy Wilson, Ross Buckley (former ABW member from the US), Ryan Farquharson and Myself.

Bopping along to the Beatles in a bright orange maxi-cab driven by Dallas we made the 2hr trip down to Ida Bay. After a little confusion on the dirt roads west of Ida Bay, we found our way to the start of the Southern Ranges Traverse. Excitedly we pencilled our intentions of traversing the Southern Ranges, conquering Precipitous Bluff and making our way out along the South Coast Track in the log book.

Packs on and a happy snap and then we made our way into the green temperate rainforest. Filtered sunlight sprinkled through the canopy and it was pleasant walking indeed along a wide, flat track flanked with huge tree ferns. Approximately 20 minutes in we came across the Mystery Creek campsite. Although the afternoon was warm and packs were heavy we decided 20 minutes walking on the first day was probably a little bit slack and we would push on to the Moonlight Creek campsite. The next couple hours were spent making the 600m climb over and under logs and around fallen trees through the green (albeit drier than expected) forest up to the muddy, scrubby plains of Moonlight Flats. The pace was very

civilized with plenty of rests for those of us still getting over Christmas and back into the swing of walking. We reached Moonlight Flats around 6.30pm and it was another hour or so attempting to avoid muddy boots on the first night and negotiating a myriad tracks across the plains.

Ryan and I both managed to find mud near Bullfrog Tarns, although the others did well to keep their gaiters clean. By 7.30pm we were all getting a little weary and finding the campsite proved a little tougher than expected, due to the lack of visibility through thick scrub. We did finally manage to find the Moonlight Creek campsite (which we guessed probably came by its name from a group of campers arriving in the moonlight, desperate for a campsite!). Thankfully not too 'muddy' as described by Chapman, but in wetter weather it could be! Needless to say tents were quickly pitched, dinners cooked with little socialising and a good night's sleep was had by all.

Day 2 (Wednesday 30 Dec) A Perfect Tassie Day

The birds started singing at 4am and it got light not long after that. When we rose at 7am we were greeted by a very mild morning with clear blue skies and no wind. The track between Moonlight Creek and Pigsty Ponds had been recently upgraded and so was well marked with arrows and cairns.

The first hour of the day was through more muddy, scrubby tracks with a 200m climb up to Hill One. The eastern side of Hill One had beautiful alpine gardens filled with flowering

everlasting daisies, pandanus, wind and wombat manicured lawns. You couldn't help feeling as if the gardener must have just popped off to have a cuppa as we wandered through.

Due to the spectacular weather we stopped between Hills One and Two for a long morning tea to enjoy our first views of Precipitous Bluff, Federation Peak and Hartz Mountains. The day offered very pleasant walking with narrow scrub tracks and open ridge tops. We had lunch just past Hill Three and then made our way over to Hill Four before dropping down to Pigsty Ponds early in the afternoon.

We pitched tents out in the open near the ponds, setting up kitchen on a nice quartz outcrop, collecting water from the large tarns and bathing in the small, warm tarns. Having decided that the cheesecake was too heavy to carry until New Years Eve, Steve made it for dessert and we enjoyed a mild, still social evening with La Perouse as the backdrop. Little did we know this was the lull before the storm.

Day 3 (Thursday 31 Dec) Onwards and Upwards

We woke to dry tents flapping in a warm breeze, which was likely to get some attitude later in the day. On the unusually warm Tasmanian morning we had a 250m climb up Maxwell Ridge ahead of us. The walking was quite open with little shade, so the 'young guns' (Ryan and Liz) powered ahead, not wanting to stop too often in the warm, windy conditions and happy to wait in the shade for the group to catch up. However, before long news came that Ross was feeling queasy!

Despite this we continued on to the top of Maxwell Ridge. It was extremely windy at the top and the sun was beating down. We did have clear views on to Ooze Lake and Pinders Peak and were excited at what lay beyond and amazed at just how far you can walk if you want to. By the time we reached Ooze Lake it was clear that poor Ross was ill indeed. It was only mid-morning, but it was clear this was as far as we were going to get for Day 3.



After setting up tents in a rather open area we were advised by another camper (Rick) of a more sheltered campsite on the northern edge of the track. Ryan and Wendy set off down a muddy, scrubby track to check it out and declared it far superior (in shelter at least) and so those of us well enough up and shifted for the night. We enjoyed a relaxing afternoon: Ryan went exploring with Rick; Lynne, Steve and Wendy chilled out; Liz slept off a bout of mild heat stroke and I am sure Ross was trying to die quietly in his tent. As the evening rolled in we could see a lighting storm on the horizon. It was a wildly windy night and we all had our fingers crossed the lighting didn't head our way. Happy New Year!

Day 4 (Friday 1 Jan) PB or not PB?

The lighting storm bypassed us and we awoke to a thick fog swirling around the top of the mountains and over the lake. After coming up with various strategies as to how to continue the previous evening we were all relieved to hear that Ross was feeling somewhat better and prepared to head on. So we packed up camp and set off for what would be a big day.

From Ooze Lake we had a 350m climb up the ridgeline to just below Pinders Peak. The NW side of the ridge was exposed to strong westerly winds which made stopping uncomfortable, to everyone's relief the track crossed over to the eastern side of the ridge around 1km from the lake making the foggy walk much more enjoyable. It was a slow trudge up to Pinders and not far past the majority of the up-hill it became apparent that despite heroic efforts Ross was still not well enough to continue.

It was a critical point in the walk. We all knew we had not yet reached the most difficult sections of the walk in terms of both navigation and sheer determination (heavy scrub well documented!). There was quite a way to go to get to our planned campsite at Leaning Tea Tree Saddle and the weather appeared to be getting worse rather than better. Continuing on was not a safe option for Ross, as if his condition was to worsen we would be in an even more remote location. There was discussion of the group splitting, but in the end this too was ruled out. So it was back down the mountain. On the way down Ryan made a brief stop (30 minutes return) at the Pinders Peak junction to bag the peak, despite the lack of view!

Once exposed to the windy side of the ridge it was a wild walk down with the rain (and I am sure ice at times) pounding into our left side. Reaching Ooze Lake we headed back to our sheltered camp site, relieved to see no-one else had arrived (they probably saw the weather forecast!). We spent the

afternoon in our tents reading as the hail and rain came down. Despite a promising sunset the next few days would also prove to be wet, windy and wild.

Day 5 (Saturday 2 Jan) Round the Lake

In light of the previous two days we decided that Saturday had better be a rest day (for Ross at least). So after a lazy breakfast five of us headed off with morning tea and day packs for a walk around Ooze Lake. The walk is described in Chapman's book, but having a group comprising Stephen Boyle and Ryan Farquharson meant sticking to tracks (if they were there) was never going to be an option. We headed east back down the main track and checked out the specky views (when the cloud parted) from the hill north of King Billy Saddle. We then headed back across the main track, SE towards Knife Mountain.

Reaching the top of Knife Mountain involved a certain amount of scrub bashing, but there was plenty of laughter and a good time had by all. The views of the lakes to the south were well worth the effort and we enjoyed a bite in a sheltered position. We then made our way west across the ridge to Lake Mountain, which involved a certain amount of rock hopping and was extremely windy. (Have I mentioned the wind yet?) To complete the circuit we came back onto the main track and headed NE back down to Ooze Lake. No sooner had we finished lunch than the rain began again, so it was back to the tents and books. Dinner was cooked under the vestibules and we all crossed our fingers for finer weather in the morning.

Day 6 (Sunday 3 Jan) Cold and Wet

Ross was back on solids and the rest of us were going stir crazy so we packed up camp and headed back towards Pigsty Ponds. Although the wind was still about, the first part of the trip back started off well and as the track meandered through scrubby forest and Tea Tree-scoparia scrub it was quite well protected. However, as we made our way up Maxwell Ridge the weather really came in. It was very wet and windy (sorry; there is that word again!) along the top of the ridge and it took some effort to stay upright and move forward. I lost my pack cover (more like a parachute) and had to finally concur with my husband that perhaps they are not worth the effort in Tassie.

By the time we got down to Pigsty Ponds we were cold and wet (some of us wetter and grumpier than others!). Pigsty Ponds was a little tainted, since it was a possible source of Ross's illness so we decided camp down at Reservoir Lakes (20 mins north of Pigsty Ponds). After a little bush bashing we located the 'well defined track',

which it was, once we found it! We made our way down to a sheltered campsite among King Billy pines. Ross, Ryan and Liz bunkered down in their respective tents for the arvo; however, Wendy joined Lynne and Steve for the afternoon in their abode and the three managed to talk non-stop for about five hours. In their defence, there was also a solo walker at the camp, Tony, who joined their conversations. Dinner was again cooked in the vestibule and it was another early night.

Day 7 (Monday 4 Jan) The Split

(Day walks)

Having carried fishing rods this far Steve and Ross were keen to get down to the coast and use them, not to mention the likelihood of finding better

weather off the mountains. So Steve, Lynne, Ross and Wendy headed off towards Mystery Creek and Ryan and I decided to stay on for another day and do some of the day walks in the area. As it was my birthday the following day they all sang to me, which predictably resulted in tears. For the next couple of days I can only report on the adventures of Ryan and Liz.

After walking as far as the main track with the others Ryan and I headed towards Arndell Falls. Although still windy and overcast, there were much welcome sunny breaks. From Pigsty Ponds it was easy walking across the plains on northern side of the river. We made our way to the top of the falls and the drop was impressive. We then followed the cliff around to the northern side

where we got quite good views of the falls. The trip took about 1.5 hours return with day packs.

Once we got back to the main track we headed up Mt La Perouse. This was an excellently formed, well marked track and took about 1.5-2 hours return. The peak itself has a large flat top, which we walked around to get 360° views of our surrounds. We could see the sun shining brightly down on the south coast and had near vertical views of Swallows Nest Lakes. We made our way back down the mountain for lunch, sighted a wombat near the ponds, moved our tent to a slightly sunnier campsite closer to the lakes and enjoyed an invigorating wash followed by a relaxing afternoon.

Day 8 (Tuesday 5 Jan) Down The Mountain

There was still quite a bit of wind and mist about when we awoke, so we packed up camp and prepared ourselves for a long day of walking down to Mystery Creek. Due to the wind, the first part of the walk, which we had so enjoyed in fine weather, was quite difficult. Although the navigation was not difficult,



the track and markers were not as easy to find in the reverse direction and poor weather.

Despite having wanted to walk out to a rather impressive feature called 'The Hippo' we decided to give it a miss. We stopped for a very short break and muesli bar behind a pile of track supplies near Hill Two and then ploughed on until we reached the sheltered side of Hill One. There was quite a bit more scrub (which was very wet) than I had remembered, but other than falling and landing upside down in a scoparia bush with my feet in the air, it was an uneventful morning.

The sun was out at Moonlight Creek so we made it an early lunch stop; however, the mosquitos made sure the stop wasn't too long. After a little bit of a detour we found a well worn track heading out over the plains. This track offered a more direct route than our walk in and bypassed the majority of the tarns, so there seemed to be less mud. The day got progressively warmer as we headed further down the mountain and it was hard to believe how far we had climbed that first day. It was a mild and relaxing birthday at Mystery Creek.

Day 9 (Wednesday 6 Jan) Civilisation

We awoke to the sound of lyrebirds producing all sorts of unusual calls. Ryan was most impressed to be serenaded by two male lyrebirds while he was going about his morning business. After packing up and having breakfast we did the side trip to the Mystery Creek Cave. It was about a 15 minute walk from the campsite.

Mystery Creek flows into a huge cave opening surrounded by forest. The caves themselves are quite extensive; however, without a guide it is not recommended to go past the first cavern. The first cavern was filled with stalactites, water beads glistened on the rock surfaces and glow worms twinkled in the darkness. It was well worth the detour.

From the cave we had a 30 minute walk to the start of the track where we had been originally dropped off, then a 7km road bash into Ida Bay. To our great relief there was a rather kind soul at the end of the track who took pity on us and gave us a lift into town – Yippee! After a steak sandwich and chips at the Ida Bay Railway Café (which we would get to know well) we checked our phone messages and headed off to find our comrades.

Due to the phone reception we only got part of the directions to where the others were camping and were unsuccessful in our initial attempts to locate them. Consequently we opted to head down the old railway (which runs a tourist diesel train a few times a day) and camp at the end of the line at Elliott's Beach, which sounded very civilized with

picnic area and toilets. After I saw the train and just how noisy and slow it really was I got over my initial (nutty) fear of being steamrolled and enjoyed the walk out.

On reaching the picnic ground we got talking to a couple from Hobart Bushwalkers regarding day walks in the area. Soon after that, who should meander along the track but Lynne and Wendy. So after filling each other in on the events of the previous two days we agreed to meet again the following morning. After the last train Ryan and I set up camp in the sheltered picnic area; however, it wasn't until dark that we realized we were sharing it with a rather porky possum. Needless to say, limited sleep that night!

Day 10 (Thursday 7 Jan) Reunited

Lynne, Wendy and the boys arrived on the first train with day packs and we headed out on the marked track to Southport Lagoon. The weather was warm and sunny and the lagoon was every shade of blue you can imagine. We could see Mt La Perouse in the distance allowing us to reflect on the adventure of the past nine days. We followed the edge of the lagoon around towards Southport Bluff collecting mussels along the way, then headed back to Elliott's Beach.

After a quick swim before the train we headed back towards Ida Bay. We had a special drop-off point 1km shy of Ida Bay, where there was a track (former rail line) down to a small peninsula called Brick Point where the others were camped.

Despite the ferocious mosquitoes, jack jumper ants and rocks, it really was a special spot. Ryan cooked up curried mussels for entrée and Steve and Ross excelled, catching numerous flathead and salmon trout which were prepared with butter and lemon. The gourmet feast was washed down with some of the train driver's special stash 'odd socks' (smelly socks might have been more appropriate for us!). A very merry night had by all. (I am choosing not to mention the dismal failure on my part to convert the crème caramel into something satisfactory and can only hope the Haighs chocolate made up for it!).

Day 11 (Friday 8 Jan) The Return of the Orange People Mover

After a short walk out along the railway, we ordered coffees and hot breakfast and waited patiently for the orange people mover to arrive around midday. As promised, Dallas arrived early with amber refreshments in tow and we headed back towards Hobart with Elvis bellowing out of the speakers, thus ending another Tassie adventure.