

Bush Club 80th anniversary

In 1939 the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs (now Bushwalking NSW) published a ten-page booklet entitled “An Introduction to Bushwalking”. Its purpose was to promote bushwalking and bushwalking clubs, as well as to describe the activities of the Federation. The introductory article was headed “Walking for Pleasure”, and commenced with the words:

It is not the least of the vagaries of man that the more civilized he becomes, the more he seeks that which is primitive.

It continued in the same vein, pointing out that bushwalking takes one “far away from the hustle and bustle of the modern city”, so that one returns to everyday life “refreshed in body and mind and with realities in a truer perspective”.

Absolutely true! But it was perhaps an oversight on the part of the article’s writer that one of the advantages of bushwalking clubs is that they foster the experience of companionship in the bush. I guess it went without saying.

It was the year the Bush Club was formed by Marie Byles and Paddy Pallin. They wanted to provide opportunities for people (especially Jewish refugees and other newcomers) to engage with the bush in a less “out there” way. They wanted to encourage participation and companionship in walking.

That was eighty years ago. The fact that the Bush Club—and indeed some of the other walking clubs that were around in 1939—have remained active for all that time is a wonderful achievement. The social landscape has changed radically, but many people still go bushwalking, whether out in the wilderness or closer to home. The Bush Club continues to thrive, bringing people together for shared experience and companionship in the bush. To offer, in the club’s eightieth year, eighty different events led by eighty different people, is a splendid achievement.

We live in troubling times. Who knows what will be happening in the world of bushwalking in another eighty years? I hope it will still be possible for people to get away from the hustle and bustle, to find the “primitive” and be refreshed in body and mind. I hope people will still find genuine companionship in the bush. I hope there are clubs full of bushwalkers still doing it. If there are, I’m sure they’ll look back at the list of this year’s Bush Club walks with great interest.

Indeed, I now challenge the Bush Club, in 2099, to produce a repetition of these same eighty walks and cycling trips, with eighty different leaders of the day! While they’re at it, the participants might leave behind all the technical wizardry and intelligent devices that we haven’t even thought of in 2019—just as we today should resist the temptation to use our phones in the bush. Will they still connect with nature in the same way we did in 1939 and 2019?

Congratulations Bush Club, and keep it up. The world needs you.

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