

## **Bernie's Boot Camp, Walls of Jerusalem-style**

**8-13 March, 2020**

Twelve enthusiastic Bush Club members converged on the Mersey Forest Road car park at the start of the walk, and met our Tasmania Hikes guides, Wes, Stefan and Keely, who were to show us around, cook for us, and keep us safe for the next 6 days. We were officially in two groups, to meet park regulations as to maximum group size.

Wes is a fifty-something, skilled, South Australian bushman, who can carry 50 kilos on his back. Not only that, but he can demonstrate amazing general and specific knowledge on botany, geology, history, and any number of other topics!

Stefan is of German heritage, another very experienced guide, and always good-humoured. To our good fortune, he is also a Hilton-trained chef, so was able to produce culinary miracles for us each day in the bush.

Keely is a young NZ-American, trained in guiding, very patient with us all, and good company.

As for the rest of us, well, quite a mixture. Nine gals and 3 boys. English, Scottish, Irish, Korean-Japanese, Kiwi, and even a few Aussies thrown in. Some of us were experienced multi-day trekkers, and others on their first wilderness trip of this type.

Anyhow, back to the start. We were loaded up with tents, cups, bowls, scroggin to add to our loads for the 5 ¼ hour climb up 600 metres past Trapper's Hut, Solomon's Jewels for lunch, past Wild Dog Creek campsite, and on to Dixon's Kingdom, some 12 km in to the park. The start of our trip coincided with a Tasmania long weekend, "8 Hour Day", so the campsites were busy. But a day or so later most were back at work, and peace returned to the park. Two days before we started there had been heavy rain in the area, and Dixon's was so wet it was hard to find suitably dry, flat terrain for our tents.

For those who don't already know, The Walls of Jerusalem is a high plateau just to the east of the Overland Track in the Tassie highlands. It comprises pristine heathland, teatree bush, pencil pine groves, myriad sparkling shallow tarns, with surrounding dolerite volcanic walls poking up above the 1,000-1,200m plateau to form rugged peaks of around 1,400m. Someone with imagination has named the various geographic features with Old Testament biblical names. The whole area is incredibly beautiful, and makes up one of the best multi-day walks in Australia, with many different entry and exit points, and many day walk options around the plateau. On climbing the various peaks we got views of the length of the Overland Track, SW to Frenchman's Cap, east along the Tiers, and half of Tasmania, with very clear visibility. It was uplifting.

We spent the first 4 nights at Dixon's Kingdom exploring Mount Jerusalem, The Temple, Solomon's Throne, and the various gates (Herod's, Ephraim, Jaffa and Damascus Gates). We also did a 15km, 6 hour return trip to Tiger Lake, so named because it was where one of the last sightings of a Tasmanian Tiger was recorded. More recently, a war veteran built an illegal hut there, now named Solitary Man's Hut, and which has been preserved, complete with his journal. This was a great day out.

We had a large tiger snake in camp while eating lunch one day, someone trod on a whip snake without being bitten, we saw several bennet's Wallabies, and had possums in camp every night. A bit

of excitement was the arrival of a Westpac helicopter as we were eating lunch one day. Another group had set off a PLB, and a patient was invalided out.

Eleven hours in a tent is a long time during the hours of darkness. So in preparation, we had the nightly parade put on by the "Duracell Girls", 6 of our number who decided to walk briskly up and down the hill in step each evening before turning in for the night, in the hope of sleeping well as a result! The nights were cold, so warming up before retiring for the night was a sensible thing to do.

On Day 5 we moved on 6 km or so to Lake Adelaide, via lunch at the old hut on Lake Ball, a very scenic spot. The campsite at Lake Adelaide is very basic, no toilets, but a beautiful campsite. Some of us had swims in the cold lake water. We had a very relaxing afternoon and evening there after yet another fine day.

As for Day 6, our last day, we had heard that rain was expected to set in around the time we expected to get back to the bus. However, Hughie had other ideas, and in the event the rain began at first light, 6.30am. We managed to set up a tarp to get breakfast going, but it was not very large, so everyone was served tea, coffee, and muesli in their tents, to keep dry! Then it was on with the rain gear, down with the tents, and hoofing it back 11 km and 3 ½ hours down the hill to the bus. The rain persisted, and it was cold and windy, so we kept moving. It was only when we got back to the bus that we found just how many leeches we had picked up along the way. They were crawling over our clothes, the bus seats, and the floor of the bus. I think we all got bites, variously in the head, the eyebrow, the mouth, the neck, the armpit, the groin, the legs, fingers and feet between us all! A bit of drama to finish with!

We were incredibly lucky to have 5 fine days with perfect visibility, and only the one day of rain as we finished. It was then back to Launceston, and a group dinner as the finale. Thanks to Bernie for getting us all going, Stan for the logistics, his wife Senna for the delicious food we were fed, Wes Stefan and Keely for carrying the food in and for guiding us, and the whole team for their good humour and sense of adventure. Bernie had not organised a boot camp after all, we had a great time, and finished fitter and very satisfied with our endeavours.

Richard Darke.