

THE AUSTRALIAN ALPS WALKING TRACK.

***ATTEMPT # 2
November 2017.***

Cast your mind back to November 2015 when I was airlifted out of the Track just West of Square Top - Grid Reference 0461812 5873735 . It took almost 2 weeks for me to recover my pack, did a 're-start' from Thredbo that only lasted 1 day - violent winds experienced during the night I camped at Wilkinsons Creek, a weather report that said they were not going to improve thereby forcing me to turn back - after which I returned to Tweed. Not my most successful trip.

In 2016 I walked the Bibbulman Track in Western Australia - a great walk, the first 2 weeks with Stephen Biggs, a month solo and then the last 2 weeks with Mike Gates. - a success.

So for 2017 I decided to complete (or at least do the next major section) of the AAWT - this time with a companion - some 2 weeks each with Stephen & Mike to cover the 310 plus kilometres from 'The Nobbs' (close to where I was previously evacuated from) to Mount Kosciuszko.

For this I already had notes, maps, schedules, GPS routes etc plus knowledge & experience of how physically demanding as well as mentally challenging this Track can be.

Based on this knowledge and revised 'start point' there was still plenty of planning / organising to do - most important being confirming that Geoff Anderson (my mate in Warragul) was again available to 'deliver' us to the start, carry out food drops / meets etc - YES - so on with the rest.

A revised schedule of some 23 days, Stephen "The Nobbs to Omeo Highway "; Michael "Omeo Highway to Mount Kosciuszko - each some 160km: Geoff {& Fergus + Bamse} to do an initial delivery from Melbourne Airport to a point on Nobbs Track South of its junction with Brocks Rd, then at the Omeo Highway crossing - [pick up Stephen, deliver Mike]; then on Cowombat Flat Track with a final pick-up at Thredbo.

In addition the revamp of the schedule, accommodation, flights etc ; I cooked / dehydrated food, prepared a post parcel (with Stephen) for Mt Hotham, looked at and purchased new gear with the objective of reducing weight carried [sleeping bag, pack, sleeping mat, wet weather gear, camp shoes etc] I trained with this trip in mind.

Accordingly I was some 17kg lighter than when I started in 2015 [83kg cf 100kg], my pack loaded with 7 days food + water at say 24kg still 4 - 5 kg lighter than before and a companion to assist in locating the track, find water, hike with etc - a very confident Jerry ready to go.

Day 1. Friday 3 November 2017.

To the Gold Coast Airport to catch Virgin Flight - VA728, 6.05 am departure to Melbourne - Gail dropped us off, we went to book on when I discovered first problem - I'd left my glasses on kitchen bench - phone call to Barb, who did a great job getting them to me. My excuse was that I'd had a terrible night being up with diarrhoea & vomiting from about midnight - nerves / food ?? - so I was somewhat distracted. A bit tentative with the flight [had extra toilet paper in case] but all went well arriving in Melbourne on time - 9.20am, met Geoff at baggage carousel, loaded packs & case into the car and headed off to Mansfield 200+ km, had lunch, purchased sandwiches for dinner and off to Brocks Rd then Nobbs Track. - a further 70+ km.

Geoff dropped us off at about 3.45pm at a spot where we thought we about 0.5km from the start of the Nobbs Track climb. Prior to his departure Stephen & I did a clothes change, sorted some gear that he to take with him and what he was to bring to the food drops (We brought complete supplies except for gas from Tweed)

Geoff left, we did a bit of a look around and selected our camp site for the night on the side of the track, set up tents, got "organised", discussed next days travel and actually considered that we might make Chesters Yard rather than just High Cone [an extra 10.5km] as camping tonight rather than setting out from Mansfield tomorrow then walking gave us a 2-3hr "start".

Before dinner went for a stroll to discover a designated camp site with fire pit etc about 1km away and the start of the 'climb' another 1+ km further on - bummer an extra 2km or so - still it not steep, good track so we still thinking Chesters Yard.

Dinner, chat, selected toilet tree, to bed about 6.30pm.



Day 2. Saturday 4 November 2017.

A good night, Mr Possum spent some time chatting to me but I slept well, could hear Stephen snoring [not loudly] each of the 3 times I awoke but I dropped back to sleep easily. A cool night , I slept in underpants + short sleeve T shirt - kept warm. I had made a insulation bag for my night bag from an old survival blanket - seemed to work okay but not cold enough for a real test.

Tent [Nemo] was dry inside, dew outside, but tight for room; Stephen [Zpack Shelter] some condensation on single inner wall but heaps of room.

A fine morning, up at 5.15am, breakfast and pack up - always a bit slow and messy until 'trail habits' established - tent wet from dew, breakfast some soaked overnight Breakfast Bars - nice - ready to go by 7am.

This included time spent searching for the top to Stephens new collapsable water bottle - he swore he only walked around camp area but it was nowhere to be found - I believed he must

have accidentally packed it with his sleeping bag or something - anyway Stephen a bit pissed - not a great start - this the bottles first outing.



We set out, no problem to the start of the climb but then it a real slog - steep, took 2hrs+ to arrive at the junction of the AAWT. Then onwards and still generally upwards to reach High Cone Camp site about 11.30am. The track had been relatively good to follow, faint in areas but 4 eyes looking kept us on course, regular checks with grid references on the map also.

Gone were the plans of walking to

Chesters Yard - still some 10.2km away, with substantial climbs to go. I was surprised at how tired I felt - been real slow uphill (as per normal with my breathing - COPD) but also muscle tiredness -unusual for me. So no further we thought - an early set up, lets go find water [didn't bring enough from Brocks Rd], dry the tents, enjoy the sunshine etc.



This was done - tents dried, erected, getting better even only second go, lunch, Stephen a quick look as per advice from track notes for water - no luck. - a rethink & utilising GPS on his new watch - set in coordinates for water as



marked on the note map and set off to find that point - much better line (marked with flagging to ensure we could return without problem) and some 300m away came onto soak with running water YES - this real good.

Whilst passing bottles to Stephen to fill I noticed that his new collapsible had a strange orange base - yeah there it was - the missing top was in the base of the bottle all the time - had been lost nowhere!! Water search about 1.5hrs.

A quiet afternoon, set up a small fire, early dinner, cup soup etc, trying to ensure we rehydrate fully; chit chat- to bed about 6.30pm again. Tonight promises to be much colder than last night - boxers + long sleeve T + beanie, ensure phone in bed with me. A minor problem in that sleeping mat on slight side slope - used pack + clothes bag to level up to stop me sliding off the side.

Camp @Grid Reference: 0459206 5871533; walked some 11km.

Day 3. Sunday 5 November 2017.

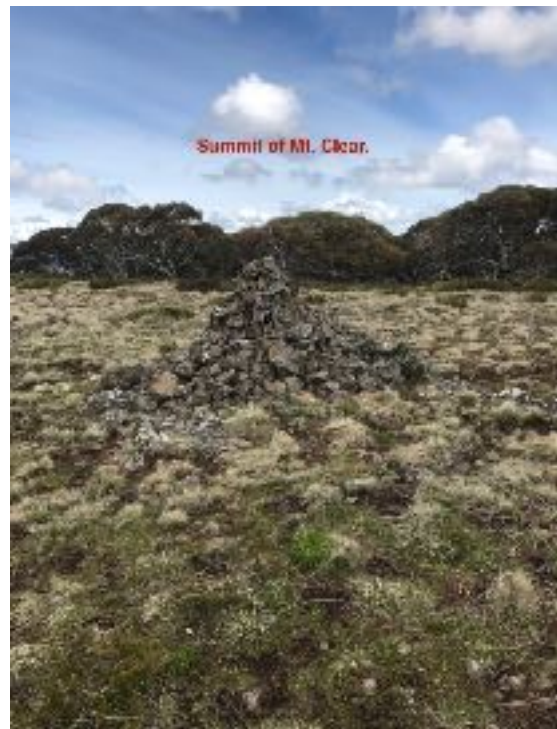
A very much colder night - down to -3°C or so - tents covered in ice, felt some cold spots during the night - feet, and where arm or body bit off sleeping mat - woke 4 - 5 times but a bit of a shuffle, pull liner sheet into place, put fleece jacket over feet and all good - am pretty happy with new gear. Stephen felt the cold a bit more - perhaps single wall shelter + more room?

Interesting in that connection hose to night bag whilst soaking clean froze just laying in the grass while we packing up.

Breakfast, cup of tea, pack up etc - quite fine - clear & cold - gloves on - ready to go 7am. We set off, track visible, steady climb - again I very slow - slept well but did not recover as I normally would - feeling a bit concerned re my performance. Opted to go via ridge over Square Top - the track has been cleared with additional markers placed compared to what I found in 2015. Past where I picked up and on to the top of Square Top - then a descent - ascent to summit of Mt. Clear - weather great - views tremendous but I struggled all the way - no recovery on flatter / downhill sections - phone service at summit - can contact Geoff - what to do?

We discussed, after King Billy no meeting place until Hotham - unaware if we have any other phone reception once we leave here - weather supposed to turn to wet conditions over next couple days, no way I was going to be airlifted out again - what to do.

Finally made the call - to Geoff looking for an early pick up - Brocks Rd @ King Billy - cancel the walk - felt really bad - what a disappointment for Stephen - then Mike - let everyone down etc etc -but decision made - so act on it - Contacted Geoff, Barb & message to Mike - I think Stephen a bit relieved with this - he was concerned with my progress - he also very kind with reactions - good to have good friends.



Enroute to Mt Clear we met a solo walker going south - he on day 30 from Tharwa - ACT - going to Walhalla.

As we leaving Mt Clear met a young couple and son out for the weekend [It Melbourne Cup on Tuesday so for Victoria a public holiday which a lot of people make into a 4 day weekend by taking the Monday off as well].

Down Mt Clear onto track - ex road , easy to follow, undulating, still finding minor ups a struggle, to Chesters Yard - stopped here, dried off tents, filled up water bottles, had a rest before heading on to King Billy #2.- This a section I drove with Geoff in 2015 during pack recovery - much less heart stopping walking than driving.!!

Arrived at King Billy early afternoon - 3 vehicles with camps already there - very friendly, hunters with sons, 1 a bow hunter, - offered us fruit, tea etc.

We set up camp, organised ourselves a fire - had plenty of water carried from Chesters Yard - but available from spring at King Billy anyway. Phone reception so finalised arrangements for pick up by Geoff - we to start walking out down Brocks Rd, he leaving Walhalla about lunch time and would meet us on track before dark (hopefully). I pretty confident that with all the 4wd holiday traffic around we would get a ride - possibly even to Mansfield.??

Hunters left Stephen in charge of roasting Lamb & veg they had going in camp oven - expected to return by 8pm or so.



We chatted, had a look around, dumped a lot of food to lighten off packs etc - spoke to Mike on phone - explained re return.

I not feeling very good about this but could only see option to cancel and go home.

Anticipated rain didn't arrive - to bed 7.30pm - not super cold.

Hunters came back & invited us to dinner - Stephen explained that we eaten , thanks very much.

During the night more vehicles arrived -6 - went on towards King Billy #1.

Camp @ Grid Reference: 0465086 5881153; walked some 13km.

Day 4. Monday 6 November 2017.

Awake early but no rush, another fine night, felt too warm all wrapped up - very happy with sleeping bag - up at 6am, breakfast & pack [tent 'dew wet' only]

Farewelled hunters who weren't leaving until tomorrow and headed off down Brocks Rd - basically downhill - travelled 7km when first vehicle going our way pulled up, sorted out his load and "John" happy to take us further on - he not sure where he going to - on his own just exploring / camping in the area. John was full of advise & information [a 'local' boy] - very entertaining - eventually said what the hell I need some more beer so I might as well go on to

Mansfield [total some 90+km] - and this he did dropping us in town at 10.30am.



A great ride - we went to park, repacked, put on long trousers [cold wind blowing] and to a pub for a drink, discuss what we might do to get home - hire car etc - too expensive - ended up deciding



to fly back and call whole trip quits.

In contact with Geoff - waited in pub - lunch there - pick up about 4pm - Geoff + Fergus + Bamse - Stephen introduced to dogs - off to Warragul - scenic drive back - arriving just after 7pm.

Hello Ro, booked flights home including me taking suitcase back, out for tea at Thai place - very nice - home to bed after a port.

Day 5. Tuesday 7 November 2017.

Awake early as per usual, quietly did repack of gear as we wearing travelling clothes boots etc to go into pack / suitcase for trip home - no problems.

Breakfast - to station to organise tickets to Southern Cross Station (I had Sky bus tickets to airport) - all done ready to go. Geoff took to the station to catch train , uneventful trip to Southern Cross, onto Sky Bus to airport, booked in baggage, read, waited then onto 3.20pm flight to Gold Coast - The 'Cup' being run as we boarded. Relatively empty flight, spare seats alongside us, quiet ride arriving to slight drizzle, collect baggage and met Gail / Barb outside for ride to respective houses.



TRIP OVER - WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT - Stephen claimed he still happy - got to check out his new watch, used it to find water, and now has some time off work to catch up on jobs on the farm.

Mike also very kind - he and Grace off to the USA in December - but even so he done all the preparation and ready to go but NO GO.

Since being back I have seen Doc. - investigating bloods, heart, respiratory - too date blood, heart Ok, but have waits for specialist for heart stress test & respiratory - but I feel ok. Certainly since return I wish we had done next day from King Billy, could have come back maybe, could have waited day at King Billy?? - seemed like lots of other options but I guess you do what seemed best at the time - not sure if I will return to this track - may have to concede defeat?? - wait and see - the usual depression that occurs at the end of a trip is / will be a beauty this time - thats life.

But beside my ongoing whinging I did enjoy what we did, it was good to be able to test some new gear in the field - already thinking of other changes - big thanks to Geoff, Ro, Fergus & Bamse.

Also Barb who continues to put up with my hiking 'obsession'.

THE END [of this attempt - maybe more to come?]

To just finish off a couple of Stephens photos - he did more videos - and of course these mainly me.



