

THE TIGERS.

By Alex Colley.

It was in March 1937, when I was a new member of some four months standing, that Max Gentle came up to me in the clubroom and asked would I like to come on a walk with Gordon Smith and himself at Anzac weekend. I had never been on a walk with either of them, and, knowing their reputation for toughness, couldn't understand why they would risk spoiling a good walk by inviting such a weakling. But as Max described the route and mentioned that fascinating name on the map - Mount Cloudmaker - and the ridges he had followed years ago, the urge which is the undoing of bushwalkers came upon me. Often I had studied the ridges on the Blue Mountains Map while playing with the idea of a three day trip to Cloudmaker - from Katoomba and back. This was my chance and the challenge of those distant ranges could not be resisted. Though still protesting my inadequacy for such a trip in such company, I was already at the point of no return.

The news of the trip soon got around the clubroom. So far as etiquette would allow inquiries were made, interest shown and hints dropped. Jack Debert and Dot English (Butler) were soon included in the party. As the news continued to spread it grew to nine in all.

Came the historic Friday night in April 1937 when eight Sydney Bush Walkers sat up awaiting the departure of the 6.15 p.m. for Wentworth Falls, while rain poured on platform roofs. But where was the ninth, Max, our guide and inspiration? He appeared just before the train left, packless, but complete with leather overcoat and umbrella. Couldn't imagine that we would be going in such weather, but just thought he ought to take a look at the train to make sure. This was the first and last time that anyone ever doubted that the whole party would turn up. Tiger trips went on schedule, rain or no.

We arrived at Wentworth Falls about nine o'clock and walked to the foot of Kedumba that night. At 4 a.m. Max, who had caught a late train, caught up with us, and before 5 a.m. we were on our way again. Breakfast at Reedy Creek, then on, over the Policeman range, to camp in light rain at the foot of the ridge leading up to Tiwilla Buttress. Next morning ever upward through the mist, past the hundred man cave Max had located in his previous trip, over the rock wall where he had dropped his pack and been "perilously short of food" while walking along and down and under to retrieve it; and so to Cloudmaker. Lunch at Dex Creek, then down the ridge now known as Strongleg to Kanangra clearing. Another early start, and we made Carlon's by about 11.30 a.m. The dinner we had ordered was not ready so early and it was nearly 3 p.m. when we got away. This would have been plenty of time if we hadn't planned to climb Carlon's Head, which then had neither chains nor pitons. Max, ever cautious in bushcraft, preferred to walk up Nellie's Glen. All went well till we reached the 20 odd feet of almost vertical rockface. Dot, our champion rock-climber, didn't quite make it at her first attempt, so we made a pyramid, from the top of which Bill McCosker took off. Using finger and toe-tip grips he was able to span the last smooth stretch and get his hands on to the top of the ledge. Slowly he inched up. As he pulled himself over the top cheers burst from those who could bear to look (there was a 200 feet drop

beneath him at this point). Dot followed, then a rope was thrown up and the pedestrian members of the party, i.e. the other six, were hauled up. It all took time, with the result that, when we reached the top of the last rocks, there was less than three hours left to catch the last train. We set off at a good pace - Dot had to run a good bit of the way to keep up with the longer-legged ones - and made Katoomba just on time, by our watches, but 10 minutes too late by station time. This was a cruel blow - a night in the railway waiting room and train instead of our beds; after a 75 mile trip, 9,000 feet of climbing, and Carlon's Head. Though the Tigers did plenty more walks, including some as difficult, this was the only time they missed the last train.

After the trip - Editor please note - every member of the trip wrote up his, or her, impressions. The result was a most readable article (see Magazine No.34 - July 1937). One of the party just wrote the following :

Max Gen T le
Gordon Sm I th
Hilma G alliot
Alex Coll E y
Jack Debe R t
Bill McCo S ker

David Ste A d
Dot Eng L ish
Len Scot L and.

This was the origin of the term "Tigers". Most of the nine continued to walk together and many others became "Tigers" by adoption. Amongst those who became regulars were Bill Hall, Reg Alder, Roley Cotter, Tim Coffey, Jess Martin, Edna Stretton, Bert Whillier and Mary Stoddart (Eastoe). Many others, in fact nearly all the active walkers in the Club, came on "Tiger" trips at one time or another. The truth was that there was only a handful of genuine "tigers" and a number of followers who became known as "rabbits". This term originated during a distance event from Katoomba to Picton in two days. As David Stead and I started our weary feet on the last 15 mile stretch after lunch on the Sunday, some ten minutes ahead of the others (and of David's famous schedule), David called back to them "The rabbits check out".

The secret of the "Tiger's" success as a walking group was not their toughness but the organisation and teamwork that went into every trip. I believe any reasonably fit group of walkers could do the same, or similar trips, if they organised as well. Gordon Smith did most of the planning. He used to make exhaustive enquiries about the country, the tracks, times, transport, etc. so that we would set off with as much knowledge of the route as could be obtained. On the track it was the ringing voice of Jack Debert that got the party under way before the sun was up. It was Gordon's quiet good humour and encouragement that kept them going at an even pace during the day. Most of the trips were not covered at a fast pace, but we always started early and kept going steadily. The party seldom camped in the dark except on the first night. In the finding of routes Max was often our guide, but when there

was doubt nearly everybody gathered round the map and argued. The results were good. False theories were usually exploded. Even if the arguers couldn't see the light, Gordon usually could. After a few minutes of listening quietly he would say "I think we'll try this way". And we would. Except on well-known routes the party kept together. When the going was tough the strong walkers were at the back, ready to help if necessary. Gordon and Jack usually carried at least 50 lbs. and sometimes 70 or more so as to enable the girls to travel light and do trips otherwise beyond them. Others helped where they could. When we came to rock faces Dot would get up, lower a rope, and enable the rest to climb or be pulled up.

Most of the best trips were in the Blue Mountains. I will not describe them in detail because they have all been adequately described in the magazine (Them was the days, Mr. Editor). Some which come to mind were the trip to Guouogang and back - written up in the magazine as "Debert's Last Walk" - the first attempt to ascend Arethusa Canyon, the first trip all the way down the Kowmung, Murruin Gorge, Paralyser, and the first ascent of Middle Christy's Creek with its wonderful trio of waterfalls, the last of which - "Margaret Falls" - though seen from the Boyd Range by Myles Dunphy, had not been seen from any other point.

An interesting feature revealed by the harder walks was the variety of skills which go to make up the good bushwalker. Gordon, the national long distance champion, could have left everybody behind on an open track if he felt so inclined, though it was only occasionally when the going was plain and he wanted to do some training that he did so. In rough country I doubt whether anybody was better than Max, while on hills Jack Debert and Bert Whillier were probably the strongest. In the rock climbing and rock hopping department nobody could touch Dot in her bare feet, and on some trips we might never have got through if Dot had not got up first with the rope.

Not everybody approved of the "Tigers" - some thought we just put our heads down and raced, but a reading of those magazine articles will dispel any doubt that we were lovers of the bush and knew it better than most walkers. I know nothing to equal a hard walk, with its difficulties, dangers, hardships and thrills, to bind a group, or a club, together. Soon the Tigers monopolised the walks programme (Walks Secretary, please note), and I doubt whether official walks have ever been better attended. Twenty or thirty on a day or weekend was common.

Now the "Tigers" are dispersed; one, their leader, a victim of the Japs in Borneo. But some still walk and many take an active interest in the Club. For two at least the call of the bush will never grow dim, nor the Club lose its appeal.

IN A NAME. At its first meeting, the Club was provisionally styled "The Waratah Walking Club" in tribute to the parent Mountain Trails Club, whose badge depicted a waratah. The present name came into being at the Third Meeting of December 8th, 1927, when a suggestion put forward by Maurice Berry was adopted by ballot, and the new club became "The Sydney Bush Walkers". At that moment, too, the word "Bush walker" was born.