

FOR ALL YOUR TRANSPORT PROBLEMS

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HATTSWELL'S TAXI & TOURIST SERVICE

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ON APPLICATION.

KATOOMBA TO PICTON THE HARD WAY - 130 MILES

- Dot Butler

"What e'er's to do in April you
Can put off till September."

.....

Now I'm all in favour of long endurance walks occasionally - say once or twice in a lifetime; it gives the walker some idea of the stuff he's made of and boosts his confidence in his own strength, - mental even more than physical, for there's no question that when physical weariness calls to the body to give up, it's the will that keeps one going to the end. That's why we gave support to Geof on his original 85-miler - such walks are good for the morale of a Club.

Well, we started right enough on that occasion, but as the Opera tells, things went awry at Harry's Humpy. The commentator asks:

"But what of Dot, Garth, Stitt and Putt?
Don't tell me they have all gone phut!"

and the answer is

"By the bend of the river a little group sat,
And they waited, and waited, and waited
They were ready to move at the drop of a hat
For their energy hadn't abated....."

Everyone knows the sad story; these leaders of the pack continued to wait for the rest of the field who never turned up as they had taken a short cut to McMahon's via the road at the back of Harry's Humpy.

Feeling we had failed to finish merely by a stroke of mismanagement, we decided it must be done again if only to prove to ourselves that we could do it. We chose for our next try a week-end which proved to be the wettest of a wet winter - 26 points (or was it inches?) of rain in 24 hours. The Cox was running 30 ft. abanker, and its various tributary trickles were roaring torrents. Although this made New Zealanders like Colin and Garth feel they were home again, it nevertheless washed out any attempt to do the trip, and we returned, drowned rats, on Saturday night. Pete hadn't been able to make it because of exams, which was lucky for him.

Third time proves it. We set the date for the first week in September when the moon was full, and just as far from the shortest day as Geof's trip had been, only this side of it instead of the other. Still no Stitt - more exams. We left it too late to book on the Fish so we caught the Chips, and at 8.30 stepped out smartly for Devil's Hole. The night was overcast, but a full moon behind white clouds cast a diffused glow over the country, and after descending the Devil's Hole we had no further need of torches. We stopped for a brief Howdy-do with walkers camped at the Old Hotel Site, then on and down Black Jerry's where Garth, with his great memory for detail, recalled the route we had prospected some weeks ago by identifying each gate we encountered by its lock, be it a chunk of wood or a bolt, be it round at the end, be it square, be it shiny, be it rusty, or what. The same sheep as chased Jim and Kevin ba-a-a-ahed at us, the Paddock Love grass which had scented the night air on Geof's trip was now golden in death, but the briar rose bushes with their poignant nostalgic perfume were the same as always, scenting the air as we dropped down to where the Cox gleamed in the moonlight. We walked about a mile along the river bank and camped in a thicket of flowering blackthorn. Ten minutes to cut a heap of bracken, a swift dip to disperse the dust of travel, then we demolished a slab of cake, set Colin's alarm watch for 5 a.m., and were sound asleep by midnight. We awoke in the scented dawn to countless thousands of lime green flowers scattered all over the prickly bushes - there is some good in blackthorn after all. Breakfast was cornflakes and such like out of a box. Colin, remarking that he was about to slit the throat of the sacred cow, opened a tin of condensed milk with a knife. One cow per meal was the order of things - the expendable cow. Having poured the contents on his cornflakes he announced that the expendable cow was now expent and tossed its empty carcass over the blackthorn bushes, causing a herd of its relatives to dash off up the river bank in alarm with tails flying. We rounded off breakfast with a pre-cooked chop or sausage, then the sleeping bags were stuffed into packs and we were away by 6 a.m. with destination Bimlow (we hope) - 50 miles away. The day was cool and invigorating, and although the various river crossings were cold and often deep - up to the neck on several occasions - nevertheless they were very welcome as our constant steady pace kept us warmed up. Some way along the Cox Garth, who had been at the rear for a while, caught up and announced mournfully that he had lost his watch - it dropped out of his pocket when he had slung his shirt into his pack at the last river crossing. He had

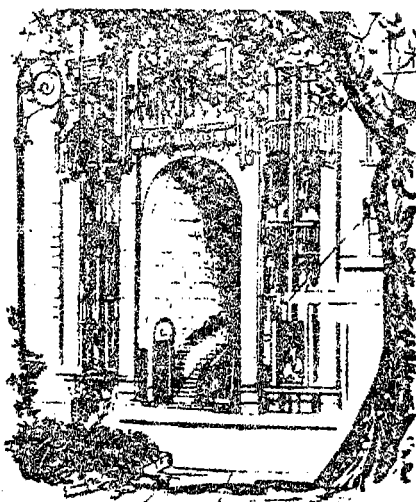
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gone back to look for it, but no luck. The light went out of the day, the sun retreated behind a cloud and we all walked on sadly. "Just shows you it would pay to insure such valuables," said Colin. Suddenly, joy! The sun shone again and all the world was bright and gay - it was insured. "You'd think that would be the first thing I'd think of," said Garth, "But I didn't."

In next to no time we were at Kanangra, and then the Kowmung Junction. It seemed very early for lunch, but we settled down to our bread and cheese, and Colin even found time to light a fire and brew a huge cauldron of tea, to which Garth added sugar and I added milk, and we were doing our best to drink it up when various youths hove in sight from various directions and converged on our billy of tea. They told us they were the Catholic Bushwalkers and they were engaged in (Shame!) a marathon handicap race. We didn't tell them that Bushwalkers deplore marathons, although we might have so quoted Club Policy. We merely felt superior that we weren't indulging in anything so low, commercialised, plebeian, vulgar and depraved as a contest - we were merely indulging in a long walk. The C.B.W's looked a bright lot of boys, all in high spirits and having a wonderful time. We donated them the extra half-gallon of our tea which we couldn't drink ourselves, they told us the best



PADDY MADE

IT HAD TO COME!

AND PADDY HAS IT !

You've all had dried eggs and dried vegetables, dried mashed potatoes and dried meat. No doubt you've also had dry bread, but there's no need to have dry bread any more because now we've got dried butter.

Yes folks, dehydrated butter. It's chief merit is not its lightness or compactness - 12 oz. mixed with water makes a pound of butter - (if you like your butter tasty mix with sour milk instead of water). The great point about concentrated butter is that it doesn't melt in hot weather.

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place to cross the Kowmung, and we sped off down Cox. Looking back we saw their vanguard streaking off up Kowmung to their finishing tape somewhere up on Kowmung heights.

Now we're at Harry's Humpy with Colin climbing up an orange tree and getting stuck in a fork, and Garth having to thump his boot out to release him. He threw down a great heap of oranges, and Garth pulled down more with a hook manufactured out of a piece of fencing wire, then off with the boots and socks and we sat in the grass under the trees with petals from the plum blossoms wafting like snowflakes across the moving scented air, the sun shining in a clear blue sky, and we ate oranges, and oranges, and oranges. Is it possible that keen intelligent adults don't know when they've had enough? I still maintain that 25 oranges at a sitting are 10 too many, but Colin blames drinking Cox water, or a stray wog from home, or anything except sour orange juice for the fact that he spent Monday at home alternating between bed and the outhouse.

Right. They shook the gravel out of their socks and rinsed out their boots - I was wearing sandshoes - then heigh-ho for Bimlow. The road went on and on, as no doubt you know, and so did we, and about 8.30 we struck Bimlow. We settled on a nice grassy spot by a blackthorn bush, Colin took his billy and went off on what proved to be a Grand Tour to the river for water, then we sat in our sleeping bags and gorged on pre-cooked chops, bread and butter, tinned fruit and cream, and despite barking dogs down by the store we slept like logs till 5 a.m.

Swayed by the weight of numbers I had brought my hob-nailed mountaineering boots on this trip - Did you ever hear of anything so silly? (Still, they had been good in Tasmania a couple of weeks earlier). I had worn them as an experiment for the ten miles down to the Cox on Friday night, then carried the darn heavy things on my back for 50 miles down the Cox, but now with the greatest of pleasure I wrapped them in a half-tent due to be jettisoned and a piece of plastic groundsheet and stowed them on a floor beam under the store at Bimlow. Will probably retrieve them somehow, some day.

With packs containing now only lunch and sleeping bag and a few minor oddments we hit the road once more. The boys were having trouble with their heavy clinkered boots. "I'll bet these blokes who carol about the joys of tramping along the highway never tried it," said Colin bitterly. "Could anything be more devastating to the feet than the interminable thump, thump, pound, pound along a hard road." And much as I would like to think in terms of the romance of the open road I'm afraid I must agree that the modern description "road-bash" is much more realistic and to the point.

Garth had decided that the 85 miles that were good enough for Geof's crowd were good enough for him too, and it was Picton for him. The blisters he had acquired on the Minni Minni Range trip were still with him; he was now down to the 6th layer of skin and doubted if there were any more under that; he would probably make the 25 miles to Picton and call it a day. Colin, however, had planned for a hundred-mile week-end, and the itinerary was to be up the Nattai,

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up Starlight's Track to Hill Top, then a few extra miles along the main road to make up the even hundred - "and we'll do those last few miles even if we do them on our hands and knees," said Colin. So I set out that morning with that simple programme and not much else in my mind: 40 miles to go. Average 3 miles per hour - 13 hours walking, plus half an hour for dinner and perhaps tea. Should finish up by 8 p.m.

"If we reach Sheehy's Creek by 10 a.m. we've got the game sewn up," said Colin. Well, we reached Sheehy's Creek at 10.30. Half an hour was nothing to worry about. I was thinking of Garth whom we would soon be leaving to make his painful lonely way into Picton alone, rather than delay the speed of the party. ("Good-bye Captain Oates." "It is a far, far better thing I do than I have ever done before.")

"Look," said Colin, "I'm going out with Garth to Picton."

"What!!!!," said I. "You've planned this 100-miler for 6 months."

"Yair," said Colin.

"You'll get in to the Royal George at 2.30, and that's a ridiculous hour to finish a trip."

"Yair," said Colin.

"You'll kick yourself for months if you don't finish now."

"Yair," said Colin.

"It's only another 15 miles. You could do that easily."

"Yair," said Colin.

"I'll lend you my sandshoes and I'll walk barefoot."

"No," said Colin, "But you go on. I'll go in to Picton with Garth."

So Colin gave me his map and a good torch, and feeling like a captain deserting his sinking ship and crew I said good-bye and sped off up the Nattai. I ran the first ten miles to still the turmoil within.....

"Oh, he rides fast to dull the pain
Who rides from home, etc. etc..."

and the green and gold clearings of the Nattai, and the tall swaying wattles in a perfection of flowering, the little deserted farm buildings and the Nattai walls flashed past in a haze. By the time I slowed down I guessed it was dinner time so finished off the food in my pack except for a small chunk of bread and a handful of popped rice.

By about 2 or 3 o'clock I was at a clearing in which was a blitz buggy containing bunks and a Silent Knight refrigerator and all mod. cons. From here Colin said it was 6 or 8 miles of trackless river work to reach the foot of Starlight's Track. Should do it by dark, so on I pushed. Instructions were to keep up the side as far as possible out of the river-bed thicket, so I bore off to the right and pressed on for several hours. Then I got into the river bed itself, which started going uphill rapidly. It was very rocky and rugged, the growth very dense, and all chance of finding a clearing on it called McArthur's Flat faded from possibility. Could I possibly have by-passed McArthur's Flat? Was I up some side creek?) I shall have to go back some time and find out. I climbed out of the river bed and headed up to the walls on the left, hoping I might be able to climb them and so get a long view of my whereabouts, but what might have been a possible climb with a party I reluctantly decided was an unjustifiable risk when alone. From the base of the cliff face though, with the sun now proposing to set in the west, I could see the river winding off to the S.E. But my direction should be due east, so I cursed heartily and decided to return to the blitz buggy site with all speed in the remaining hour of daylight. I ran all the way back, not losing too much height at first as I had hopes I might cut Starlight's Track on the way; but no, and soon after dark I was back at the blitz buggy site sitting in my sleeping bag among the bracken and eating my miserable chunk of dry bread while I studied the map by torchlight. Having resigned myself to being a day overdue, for the first time in all my walking experience, I decided to spend a couple of hours next morning going upstream right in the river bed, then if there was a clearing to be found I would undoubtedly find it, but if unsuccessful in two hours I would have to return down the Nattai and go up to Picton.

I spent the next a.m. from about 5 till 7 pushing up the river bed, but when I struck the same traitorous rocky creek-bed as yesterday I knew there was no point in going further and repeating yesterday's debacle, so with something of relief I pounded off down the Nattai to Sheehy's Creek. Heavens, how swiftly time and the scenery passes when you hurry! By about mid-day I was sitting at

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13 H U N T E R S T R E E T, S Y D N E Y.

the very spot where I had bid good-bye to Colin and Garth yesterday, eating a tin of peaches and a ditto of condensed milk ripped open with a piece of fencing wire, this providential tucker having been found in a deserted habitation on the way out. Then up Sheehy's Creek to the Waterfall, and via a road which didn't seem to be the one on the map but which brought me out to the Mowbray Park road, and so in to Picton by 3 o'clock. I sent a telegram home to say I was on my way, and enquired re departure of the next train. It wasn't due out for $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours, so I plugged off up the main Highway where the road-sign pointed Sydney-wards, hoping some kind soul would offer me a lift. However, the few cars that passed no doubt thought I was out for a light canter for the good of my health and passed on. Ha! but what's this I see crawling up the hill in low gear? - a bulk-concrete truck with a convenient girder for a perch at the rear. How easy it was to sit down. It wasn't till the vehicle reached the brow of the hill and whizzed off at 60 m.p.h. that the brain began to function. "Hell, what an asinine thing to do! How do you think you're ever going to be able to get off - it might go 50 miles in the wrong direction before it slows up on another hill. What if a traffic cop comes up on a motor bike and orders you off. Odearodear! Meanwhile the yellow dotted lines on the road whipped past underneath like bits of yellow streamer dropped into a jet plane's slipstream, and a passing woman driver with a mouth that looked like it ought to have been set out in the bush to catch dingoes eyed me with a look which said, "What a disgrace to the country!" and I studied the sky and hoped for a hill where I could drop off. Ah, at last the concrete Juggernaut changed down for a steep pull and I vacated my perch with relief. A man and his son who had thought it was all one huge joke