
FAMOUS HISTORIC WALKS. No. 1.

The First descent of Clear Hill. Reprinted from
the Sydney Bushwalker Annual 1934.

Frank Duncan.

Note - In other countries people make first ascents. In Australia, which is a topsy-turvy country, we make first descents instead.

One of the first long week-end walks undertaken by my wife and myself after arriving in Sydney was down Nellie's Glen, through the Megalong Valley past the Woolshed, and down Black Jerry's Ridge to the Cox's River.

The chief features through the greater length of this route are the impressive bluffs, ridges and precipices of the Narrow Neck, or Clear Hill, Plateau. I well remember comparing it with the plateaux which figure so often in the tales of Rider Haggard, plateaux which usually have but one way of access, and this very difficult, and whereon are found the most weird and wonderful of ancient civilisations.

It was in this mood that we fell into conversation with a walker, who told us of the approach from Katoomba via Narrow Neck. When I suggested that it would make a most interesting route out to the Cox from Katoomba, he pooked the idea with vigour, and held forth on the ring of inaccessible cliffs at the end. He mentioned several unsuccessful attempts during the past years to find a way off the plateau. Later in June, 1928, we joined a popular Bush Walker trip to Clear Hill, at the end of this six-mile long plateau. On the way out we mentioned to some of the party our ambition to pioneer a route to the Cox via the end of Clear Hill. And as we arrived at our camping spot at Glen Raphael early, we set off for an evening exploration of the possibilities of a descent of the cliffs, feeling delightfully light and fresh without our heavy packs. A short time found us at the very end of Clear Hill, perched up in the air with cliffs on three sides of us, and a fine clear view, one of the best I have seen in New South Wales, of bush-clad ridges in every direction. Tortuous valleys at our feet wound away in the distance, but most striking of all was the feeling of airy lightness and detachment, and freedom from the petty cares of every day life.

A photo or two were taken, and then the search began. Soon our efforts were rewarded, and we climbed down the gully to the west of the southernmost point of the hill. The descent was in the form of steps or ledges extending in the direction of Mount Mouin. After repeated deviations and retracing of our steps, we came to a sheer cliff within fifty feet of the bush-clad foothills below.

These last fifty feet were the only serious difficulty of the descent, but even here it was not long before three of us, E. Austen, J. Debert and myself had climbed down a chimney-like crack and solved with a shout of pride the descent of Clear Hill.

We returned to camp very pleased with ourselves, and made plans for the morrow, when the Austens, J. Debert, Gwen Adams and ourselves made the descent with our packs, and lit a smoke signal from a clearing on the Dog Track, to let our friends, who had stayed on Clear Hill, know of our safe descent.

We spent the next night near the junction of Breakfast Creek and the Cox, and so home via Jerry's Ridge, tired, but with a satisfied feeling of achievement.

Subsequently a deviation on the latter part of the descent was explored by others, and this saved the climb down the chimney.

The charm and grandeur of the unspoilt bush still clings to Clear Hill, but now someone with more ingenuity than poetry in his nature has fixed a rope-ladder for the convenience of weaklings down the one bit of real climbing on our original route. The Philistines, I fear, will yet put an escalator up Mount Cook and a lift up Kanchenjunga!

Editor's Note: Frank's prediction, made in satire, has come true. There is now a lodge on the Grand Plateau of Cook and "climbers" are flown in by ski-plane.

TERRA NOVA - PART II.

Jim Brown.

Towards ten o'clock, the track began to rise on to the flank of Mount Baker: the map suggested that, once the initial climb was done, it should be possible to skirt around the head of a small gully, and pick up the ridge to a conical hill (Ross Castle), from which the spur ran off to Coriaday. This would avoid a futile clamber up to high ground, followed by a drop on to the connecting ridge. Obedient to this plan I left the track on the shoulder of Mt. Baker: about an hour later a much chastened walker climbed up to the high ground and came down again on to the Ross Castle ridge. That gully had a marvellous growth of fern and lawyer vine.

However I did manage to skirt Ross Castle in fairly open forest and on a passable animal pad, and bent my steps toward Coriaday, a mile or so east and almost 1000' higher. Now came the sun, and the heat again, and with it thirst. Fortunately I was carrying water - two 30 oz plastic flasks - nearly four pounds weight of water. I hated the weight - but I couldn't manage without the water; it was just one of those love-hate involvements you read about in modern novels.

It proved a long, hot, exasperating climb on to Coriaday. Like all basalt hills it had its share of rich vegetation, including lawyer vines,