

## **Northern Budawangs Circuit – in Reverse**

Participants: Lee Cordner, Margaret Rozea, Steve Jones, Michael Lane and Jim Graham.

This anti-clockwise Northern Budawangs Circuit was a combined activity between the South Coast and Shoalhaven Bushwalking Clubs 16-18 November 2007. The profusion of spring flowers: yellow, red, blue, purple, white and several shades of pink was a highlight of the Saturday morning trudge across the heath land from Sassafras to Hidden Valley. After lunch at the Hidden Valley intersection we headed east into the Valley, and then south past caves before commencing the steep scramble up the cliffs of Sturgiss Mountain. The afternoon had become warm and humid and we were relieved by a cooling breeze on the plateau.

Pleasant walking across rock shelves and by the aboriginal bora ground soon became a distant memory as we plunged in to dense scrub on the eastern side of Sturgiss. We took turns in leading the fight through 3 metre scrub so thick at times that the only way to make headway was to fall over backwards using our packs as battering rams. We were unable to find a reasonable through route until towards the end of this scrubby section, and our passage included an airy scramble along a cliff edge. Eventually we found the cairn that marks the beginning of the ascent from the south-eastern corner of Sturgiss. However we were not out of the woods yet and some temporary navigational confusion ensued before we found the correct steep descent route in to the valley between Sturgiss and Mount Elliot – strange how different things look when coming from the opposite direction! We arrived exhausted at the excellent campsite at 5.45 pm, having taken over 4 hours to complete 3 km (as the crow flies) since lunch.

After a pleasant evening including happy hour we awoke to a clear, sunny morning. Our vows of “never this way again” were forgotten as we enjoyed the beauty of the bush and the painful memories of yesterday’s scrub bash receded. We moved quickly along foot pads around the base of Elliot then through open bush down the ridge towards Kilpatrick Creek. All was going well until a yelp from Michael indicated he had rolled his ankle. Our remote first aid training, supported by advice from our party’s GP, soon swung into action. There was some disappointment that there was no call for surgery, amputation or at least a splint. Michael was able to limp unaided to the splendid Sluice Box Falls, where we rested and cooled ourselves in the icy waters.

A few metres north of the Falls we found an occasionally cairned route through the double cliff line. This saved a lot of time and energy as the next exit point is well north up the creek. We were soon able to execute a plan that involved getting above the thick scrub then contouring above the 600 metre line through wooded country around the southern amphitheatre below the Island Mountain cliffs. We paused for lunch in a delightfully cool and shaded glen complete with a small flowing stream. We made good progress around the southern tip cliff extension of Island Mountain then strolled south through open woodland along the watershed ridge line between Kilpatrick and Camping Rock Creeks.

Our navigation skills were rewarded by the sound of water rushing and gurgling its way through the fascinating conglomerate maze of Munnuldi Falls. Black storm clouds were developing to the south so we deposited our packs in an overhang before 3 pm then enjoyed a cool off in the creek. We relished afternoon tea and happy hour from the shelter of the cave as we watched the storm lash its way up the valley bringing brief, heavy rain accompanied by thunder and lightening. 5 people in the overhang proved a snug fit, however everyone found a spot and we had a restful night.

Sunday morning was fine and clear as we admired excellent views above Munnuldi Falls and across Holland Gorge to the south and west. We negotiated the steep ascent up to Watson Pass onto Folly Point for morning tea. The hike out along the Folly Point track in warm humid conditions was made surprisingly enjoyable because of excellent recent track maintenance undertaken by the Canberra Bushwalking Club and the NP&WS – thank you! Oppressive afternoon conditions made the trudge along the fire trail from Newhaven Gap less pleasant until a sea breeze brought a quick drop in temperature. We arrived back at the cars at Sassafras around 4 pm after another splendid Budawangs experience. This anti-clockwise Northern Budawangs circuit offers many advantages and is highly recommended for experienced hikers who enjoy wonderful scenery, waterfalls, flowers, tough scrub and interesting scrambles.

- Lee Cordner