

Diary

Fearless Leader's

75th Birthday

Great Birthday Bush Bash



Participants: Jennifer McDonald, Keith, John Jr, John Snr and Andrew Sinclair

13th to 18th July 2014

Refining the route of the George Haddock Track

Preliminary

The foreshadowed name for this 75th and 70th Birthday Sinclair celebration was to be the "The Great Waddle". It was mutually agreed at the completion of John Sinclair Senior's 70th Birthday walk through Cooloola in 2009 that the boys wouldn't wait for until the 80th birthday to do another landmark Birthday walk. (They didn't think that he would be capable of doing a long walk when he was 80). They proposed doing a shorter walk on Fraser Island when he turned 75. John Sinclair's great friend George Haddock had just died and he was proposing to honour him with a walk on Fraser Island. He suggested that the George Haddock Track should be the walk in 2014.

John Snr's sister Jennifer who had worked as a volunteer on the George Haddock Track is five years younger than him and was due to turn 70 in September 2014 and was looking for something special to mark her milestone birthday, decided to join this Sinclair clan birthday event. The event though required the inclusion of a very special support humanitarian who would help with the logistics especially driving the vehicle from point to point to rendezvous with the walkers. John Snr's partner Su, graciously acquiesced to be a participant in this big birthday celebration that the younger Sinclairs' had deprecatingly called the "Great Waddle".

The Fearless Leader had sent out an Email on 2nd July setting out the program thus:

Monday: 10 kms — Lake Garawongera to Yidney Scrub.

Tuesday: 10 kms — Yidney Scrub to Coomboo (There is some minor navigation required to reduce the currently proposed track gradient heading down to the road through Yidney Scrub)

Wednesday: 11.5 kms — Coomboo to The Northern Road (Start Bowarrady Track) (We need to do a bit of work in Block 14 checking the best way through)

Thursday: 20 kms — Bowarrady track through to Arch Cliffs

However he had foreshadowed the degree of difficulty when he alerted participants on 21 June after failing to complete the missing link between Coomboo and Lake Allom because of the thick regrowth and fallen timber:

I just thought that it might be an idea to let you have a better idea of what we may be in for. ... While some sections are easy to follow, a few short sections are heavy bush bashing with the lots of barbed wire vine (Smilax) and other vines tripping and tangling you up. That is where long pants and protection (even gaiters) are very prudent. We have an assignment to clearly mark the route along those sections that don't follow old roads and logging tracks with ribbons so others can follow and eventually build the track to tractor width. Thus we will in a couple of parts defining the route of the GHT.

I have just purchased some new brush hooks and one person in the lead will need to carry that to help clear the path for others. It is a good challenging walk and while I recently did the hardest part, some of it will be new to me.

Jennifer who had worked in the Track clearing team in June also added a note of caution:

I agree with the Fearless Leader. I wore my beaut new boots, Bunnings gaiters and long jeans to work all week on the track last week. The only time I was unprepared (ie in shorts) I was scratched and bitten and scarred. I know what to pack now! You may need some work gloves too! It will be no easy "walk in the park" but it will be great exercise and fun.

This progressive qualification happily had everyone prepared for some bush bashing although the extent of the true bush bashing and the degree of difficulty had been seriously under-estimated.

Summary of the Weeks Work

While they didn't walk the entire length of the George Haddock Track as had been proposed, they walked and pushed their way through most of it. The Sinclair Team contributed **176 hours of on-the-ground work** towards the project, marking out some sections, assessing the work to be done on other sections and defining the route in some critical sections. Other work was continued upgrading the amenity of the Barracks near Lake Allom. Sixty hours were contributed in an exhausting marathon on 14th July (Bastille Day).



There was a big load on the way up carrying the modified carryall and delver for the tractor and a bed that was found surplus to requirements in Brisbane. The first stop on the island at Gerrawea Creek allowed these compulsive photographers a chance to see who could capture the ambience best on such a beautiful and clear day.

Sunday 13th July Brisbane to Lake Allom Barracks

It was a cold and frosty morning at 5.00 am in Camp Hill when the alarm went. In no time Su had prepared a wonderful breakfast that helped clear tout her fridge. Then it was off to Graceville to collect John and Keith. WE were back at Camp Hill to pick up Su and the trailer and were on the way at 7.20 am.

It was a super smooth run over the gateway and except for some errant directions from one son who shall remain nameless we were at the Maroochydore Sinclair's residence at 8.35 am After a cup of caffeine were on the way to Rainbow Beach. Then refuelled and another cuppa and with a ferry ticket we made our way to Inskip Point where after being deflated we boarded the "Manta Ray".

Heading north along the beach at about 12.30 we paused for a bite beside Gerrawea Creek to allow Jennifer time to commune with her late husband whose spirit resides there. While Jen communed the boys went into shutter mode trying to catch the ambience of Gerrawea Creek which over the last four decades has often been a campsite for our family. Then also during this impromptu stopover we were thrilled by the antics of whale not too far off shore.

The tide seemed to be a record low as we left Eurong. We zoomed over some almost invisible Poyungan Rocks and we could have almost gone around the rapidly disintegrating "Maheno". Despite the heavily loaded trailer we had no trouble getting to Lake Allom although the boys winged about the bumps n the back.

Once at the barracks we quickly unloaded and stowed the luggage prior to heading back down to the lake when we spent a little time filming the introduction for a YouTube video to be shown at the World Parks Congress on the contributions of volunteers to National Parks



Monday, 14th July Starting the Great Bush Bash

The degree of difficulty for our first day of walking had been seriously underestimated. Even though FL had opted to be picked up at Yidney Scrub rather than walking through to Pine Hill the proposed end of the stage for the George Haddock Track, the team struggled and battled their way through dense regrowth and found that by dark (5.15pm) they still hadn't made it through to their objective.

The reason that the degree of difficulty had been so misjudged is that Fearless Leader had visited the two access points M15 and M16 on the Happy Valley to Bogimbah and Yidney Scrub to Lake Garawongera link road and inspected the amount of work that would be needed to clear these tracks. In both cases he walked and 400 metres down the tracks and assessed them as being moderately easy with light regrowth. Unfortunately access to the other ends of those former "roads" hadn't been possible. They would have then appreciated the magnitude of their task pushing their way through the extremely dense regrowth that was more than two metres high and where seeing a person five metres away through the regrowth was often impossible. It was even very difficult to determining where the former "road" had existed except that the regrowth there was often densest there and many times so dense that the walkers had to walk beside it to get through. Most times there was some evidence with close scrutiny to tell that it had been a former "road" by the micro topography where bulldozers had left minor cuttings or shoulders.



An easy section of the day's walk. Here there was visibility some distance ahead. However in parts the regrowth and fallen timber impeded progress so much that only 8 kilometres were covered in 8 hours.

The route walked is described in the Environmental Impact Statement. Essentially it ran from Lake Garawongera to Yidney Scrub mainly following pre-existing "roads" which had become incredibly

overgrown. We set off from the Barracks at 8.00 am and didn't return until 8.30 pm.

As testimony to the degree of difficulty the Fearless Leader finished the walk with the seat of his trouser ripped beyond repair and his backpack side pocket seriously lacerated. His fall from grace though began even before reaching the start of the George Haddock Track.

In the meantime, the pickup driver Su had most gainfully employed herself in Happy Valley where she spent six hours attacking the Abrus that surrounded the Rotary shelter. She had been instructed to keep a rendezvous at a predetermined point in Yidney Scrub where the optimistic walkers estimated they would arrive at 3.00 pm. They hadn't though set out from Lake Garawongera until 10.00 am an hour later than anticipated and they had estimated comfortably being able to maintain a 1.5 kph walking pace even allowing for some bush bashing.

The hard reality was that for an exhausting 8 hours they managed to advance only 8 kilometres and falling short of their intended rendezvous at 5.15 pm when darkness fell. Three of the quintet were quite exhausted so John Jr and Andrew set off with the only torch to find Su. It was four kilometres around by the road and only about 400 metres through the bush which soon became inky black and the stars shone like jewels. While the intrepid trio spent 90 minutes recovering in the darkness the rescue duo located the revival rations left by Su. They then rushed to retrieve the marooned and incapacitated survivors in the 4WD. It had been a hard exhausting day and everyone was pleased to revel in the semi darkness at home because nobody could get the generator to run. However we did have a gas light that enabled Su to prepare a lovely and most welcome chicken dinner.

Hours worked: 60 hours



The following morning the walk resumed at M16 marked out the route through Yidney Scrub

Tuesday 15th July Yidney Scrub Section

After a healthy breakfast we worked around Barracks before heading off. The chore for the day was to check out the route in and out of Yidney Scrub. We had survived with remarkably more energy and mobility anticipated for a late start to finish off the planned work proposed for the previous day into Yidney scrub.

The hours were limited by a late start to the day following the previous exhausting day and it was 10.00 am before the hard work really began. While the three "boys" worked on trying to get the generator working, the three septagenarians worked on clearing two more level tent sites to accommodate the much bigger group anticipated in October.

The "boys" used all of the collective wisdom and spent a futile hour and decided that the generator couldn't be persuaded to start and that it was a fuel problem. That meant that we were destined to have no power for the duration and we would have to get by with only a gas light and torches.

We headed down to Yidney Scrub where an assessment of the best option for the road crossing (M17) should be. It was determined that it would be beside a big Kauri Pine. Then after morning tea there we returned again to M16 where the survey the previous day had ended. The team set off following a former road for some distance and then headed off in a northerly direction slowly descending the slope until reaching the bottom of the slope about 40 or 50 metres in from the road. They then defined a route at the base of the slope roughly parallel to the road for about 300 metres to the luncheon rendezvous with Su. What was most interesting was the freedom from the understorey that characterised Yidney Scrub next to the road. This was most atypical of Yidney Scrub away from the road. The track passes some great kauri, brush box, strangler figs and satinays.

The openness of the forest in the morning helped formulate a methodology for track construction when permission is given to proceed with these sections. That is:

1. Don't use a tractor on these sections because any soil disturbance only encourages regrowth and weeds.
2. The other rule is that apart from clearing any obstacles in the line of the actual track, is that any available and convenient timber should be laid to mark out the down hill side of the track.

- The leaf litter should be raked up the those logs to hold them in place and to catch any sand moving down the slope to establish a natural bench.

The work was complete and we were all exactly on time at the rendezvous at 4.00 pm to return to the camp without electricity just prior to dark. The conclusion was that the track after leaving the Yidney Scrub should gradually rise in elevation around the head of the Palm Valley. There was insufficient time then to complete that task and to keep our rendezvous. However there is now a clearer familiarization with the topography

Back in camp everyone agreed that the easiest and most pleasant walking was where the proposed George Haddock route does not follow a "road" but there was an understanding of the reason for utilizing pre-existing roads where possible.

Hours worked: 40 hours



Carrying the brush-hook proved to be invaluable

Wednesday 16th July Lake Allom to Coomboo Missing Link

The day dawned beautifully with almost vermilion clouds in the east and a very relaxed and rested crew rose later than usual to yet another much warmer morning than anticipated. The Fearless Leader started working on another tent site near the generator shed and as he returned for breakfast he noted that it wasn't a can of petrol but a can of diesel the we had been trying to get the generator running on.

The problem of the generator was solved although it took a few more pulls on the starter rope before the fuel lines were purged and the generator was operating once more able to charge computers, (MOST URGENT) and other electronic equipment.

Andrew had some legal pleadings that had a deadline of today to be submitted and he had to stay

back to complete this work before his computer and telephone batteries failed. Su was already busy preparing for a day of painting the barracks. So at 8.30 am a quartet of the two Johns, Keith and Jennifer set off to complete the missing link between the Woralie Road and Block 14.

They were able to drive one kilometre in along the cleared route and parked the car. They then followed the ribbons a little further before deciding to deviate more to the east on the best walking course they could find marking the new route with yellow ribbons. They descended the slope and picked up ribbons placed in January 2010 but then chose to follow a different route to avoid a potential swamp. They found a good route with minimum tree fall and minimum understorey. Eventually they linked up at a road in Block 14. They had reached the deadline for return and didn't follow through to the previous lunch stop Way Point.

Back at camp at 1.00 pm they set about a relaxed afternoon. Andrew had the generator running and Su had half the verandah painting done. There were many self-appointed chores undertaken during the afternoon

Hours worked: 43 hours
20 hours survey + 23 barracks



The brush-hook was an invaluable tool clearing vines

Thursday 17th July Exploring Forest Walk

It was another glorious and still surprisingly morning as we headed off to Lake Coomboo at 8.30 am leaving Su behind with her chores of installing curtains and painting the tractor shed.

Our stop at Lake Coomboo was mainly for photography and nostalgia having camped there on safaris so many times in the past. Then we pressed on driving to Hidden Lake, knowing that the track had been opened to there a month ago. This was an opportunity for photography on a grand scale before indulging in real work and walking.

After morning tea we began further exploring the Forest Walk not wanting to repeat the assessment of the work required based on the first 400 metres. However this time the track was surprisingly clear and true to form all the way through. Jennifer amazed herself by passing within 15 cms of a large carpet snake stretched out across the track to soak up the sun and was determined not to move.

We cleared the first kilometre so that the tractor would be able to use this route to Lake Garawongera instead of the very difficult Northern Road. It was agreed that this is a much better alternative for the tractor.

After checking out the state of the track for the first kilometre, the Fearless Leader and Jennifer returned to the vehicle to reposition it to collect the boys when they came out on the southern end. Since it was possible to drive on to the track that a 2010 working bee had previously opened up, the Fearless Leader proceeded to drive up the track with caution clearing away a few road blocking obstacles before encountering the boys about a kilometre up the track walking towards them.

The boys reported that there were about a dozen obstacles in the six kilometres that they traversed that required a chainsaw. On the basis of this it was determined that the first task for the Tractor on Day 1 in October would be to drive through this route with one person and a chainsaw and an offsider to clear the track on the way to the PMG Track.

The walk was remarkably pleasant with diverse ecosystems and lots of variety in the walk from satinay -brush box forest to banksia heathlands.

Back at the barracks at 3.30 there was a rush to take up many tasks including helping Su to finish off painting one wall of the tractor shed, fixing clothes lines as Su's height and clearing more flat ground at the back of the barracks to enable more tents to be located there. There was also a rush to pack up preparatory to the pre-dawn start scheduled for the morrow.



Hours worked: 33 hours
(15 hours survey + 18 barracks)

Total hours worked for four days: 176 hours

Friday 18th July Bowarrady Walk

The boys and Jennifer had been craving to have a clear walk free of obstacles and without the need to carry a brush-hook or wear gaiters. The Fearless Leader suggested the walk along Bowarrady Creek from Arch Cliffs to the bridge. The problem was that to catch the 7.00 am low tide on the sometimes treacherous western beach required a pre-dawn start.

We left the barracks soon after 6.00 am but we couldn't proceed past a lake with mists rising above it without a photographic shoot. A similar challenge presented itself at the mouth of Woralie Creek but with photography out of the way we proceeded to Bowarrady Creek. Fortunately for the walkers the predicted wading across the creek to begin the walk wasn't required so with dry feet they stripped off their longs and donned their footwear for the 4.4 kilometre walk.

F.L. relocated the car and checked on what work may be required on the section between the Awinya Road and Lake Bowarrady. It appears to be similar to the work required on the Forest Walk and it needs clearing in October.

Back at the Barracks by 9.15 a.m. there was a busy time packing and stowing and cleaning. Happily Su had done much of the work while the rest were walking. We left the barracks at about 10.15 a.m. for a steady four and a half hour journey down the Northern Road to catch the ferry at Wangoolba Creek. Happily there were a few breaks at the Puthoo Fens and at the Bogimbah Hill Telstra Barracks for an inspection and then at Pile Valley.



Assessing the incompetence of the contracted arborists who destroyed two magnificent trees needlessly degrading this Beauty Spot that had been protected from such desecration for the past 80 years.

There was a rough ferry ride home due to the strong southerly wind with a significant chill factor. Everyone was home by 10.00 pm.