

Scenic Rim Traverse – Bob Stephens

On Saturday 17th of August 2019, I will be setting out with a group from the Redland Bushwalkers on a Traverse of South East Queensland's Scenic Rim.

We start at Glen Rock near Gatton and make our way around the mountains towards the Gold Coast. We are expecting to take around 18 days and be heavily supported by the club with water, food and clothes drops as well as the opportunity for the occasional trail side shower and from time to time some extra company.

Day 1 Saturday 17 August



An early start with Mats and Marika picking me up about 5:45am for the drive to Glen Rock. After some group photos and a little last minute resupply shuffling, we were off around 8:30 for a few km of relatively flat walking. As we hit the base of the climb Malcolm formally sent us on our way. Tracy, Leah, Geoff, Mats carried on with us to well up the ridge for a day walk. A warm day and very dry. The climb was up along a relatively narrow ridge with occasional razerback sections.

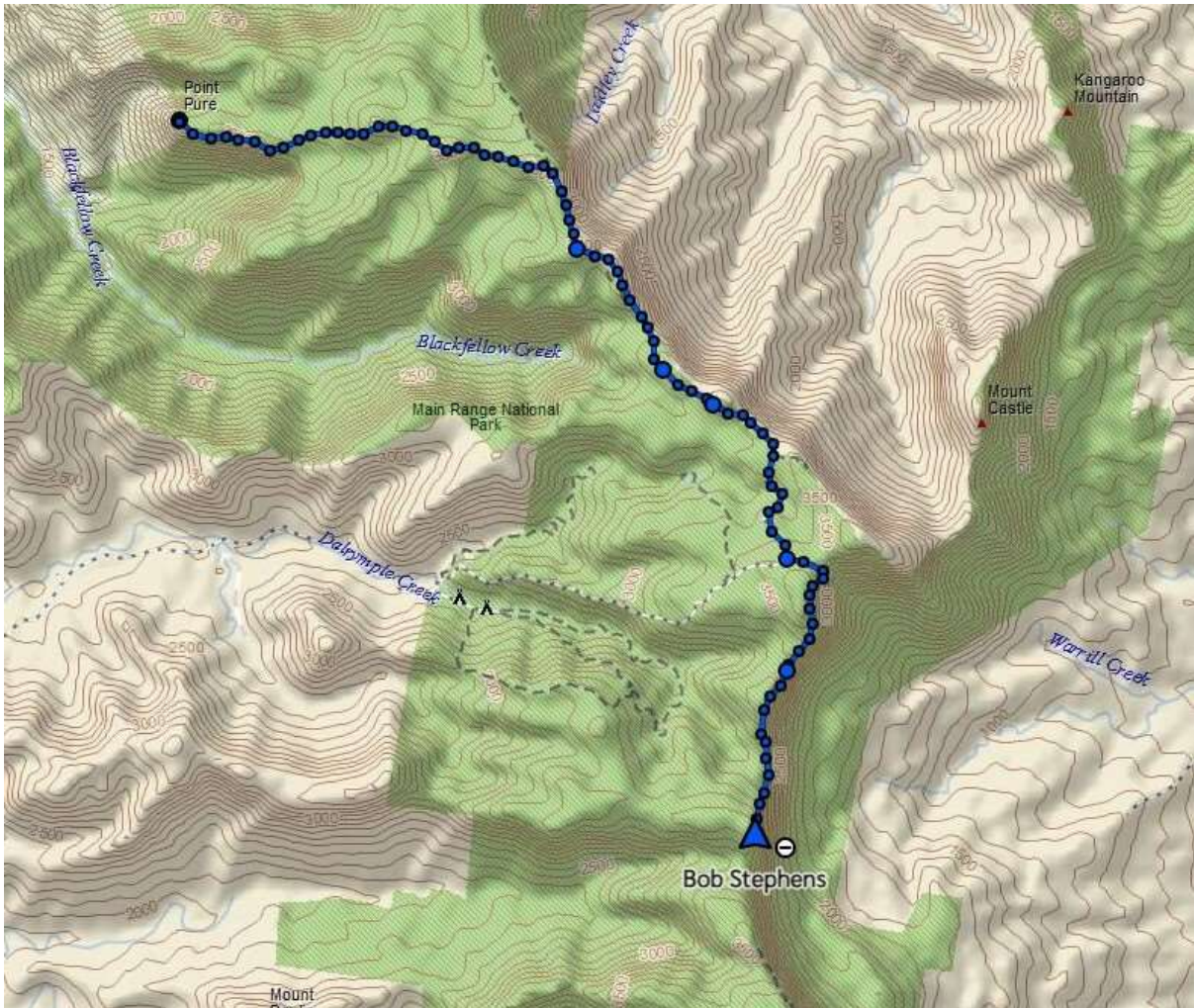
A group of 7 of us made it to the nominated campsite. A grassy area near the side of the ridge, taking around 6 1/2 hours. I had a dark chocolate disaster, thankfully most outside the pack liner but some finding its way through some holes. Getting set up to walk down to a viewing point shortly to watch the sunset.

Day 2 Sunday 19th August

A bright night with plenty of moonlight and various campsite noises made for a mixed bag of sleep.

We were all up a bit before 6am and getting on with packing our camps, eating etc. Packs were so much lighter with yesterday's water gone but that was to change later in the day.

We walked through open eucalypt forest for a while with lots of micro slips on sticks and stones hidden in the long grass. The trail made occasional guest appearances which was a theme which continued throughout the day and which I suspect will be a regular feature of much of this trek.



Dropping into rainforest we continued on our way towards the Winder Track. Ted managed to lose the blue lid off a water bottle only to discover its absence as he took an unplanned shower while ducking under a branch. I'd seen and pocketed the lid wondering why no bower bird had grabbed it not considering that it might have only been on the ground for seconds. After Teds shower, he was reunited with the missing cap.

The Winder track looked as though it had been slashed, other than a plentiful supply of stinging nettles growing in the middle it was nice and clear and we made good time along it. Michael Santry was waiting at the Mt Castle lookout carpark as we passed through on our way along the road towards the waiting water drop at Sylvester's lookout. The hard road surface was tough after the softer surface of the Winder Track and that climb up the hill goes on for a long time.

We filled numerous containers and drank all the water we could at the water drop before heading out to the lookout and a lunch stop in the forest just to the back of the lookout. Then it was off on a nominal 2.9km hike to the designated campsite at knoll T30 on the escarpment in the direction of Cunningham's Gap. 2.9 is as a very determined crow flies it, for us with all of the detours around fallen trees, clumps of vines, ups and down etc the distance was somewhat more. The campsite is by no means a clearing but does have enough open spots to set up some small tents. A number of ferns are having a very bad night to allow for that to happen.

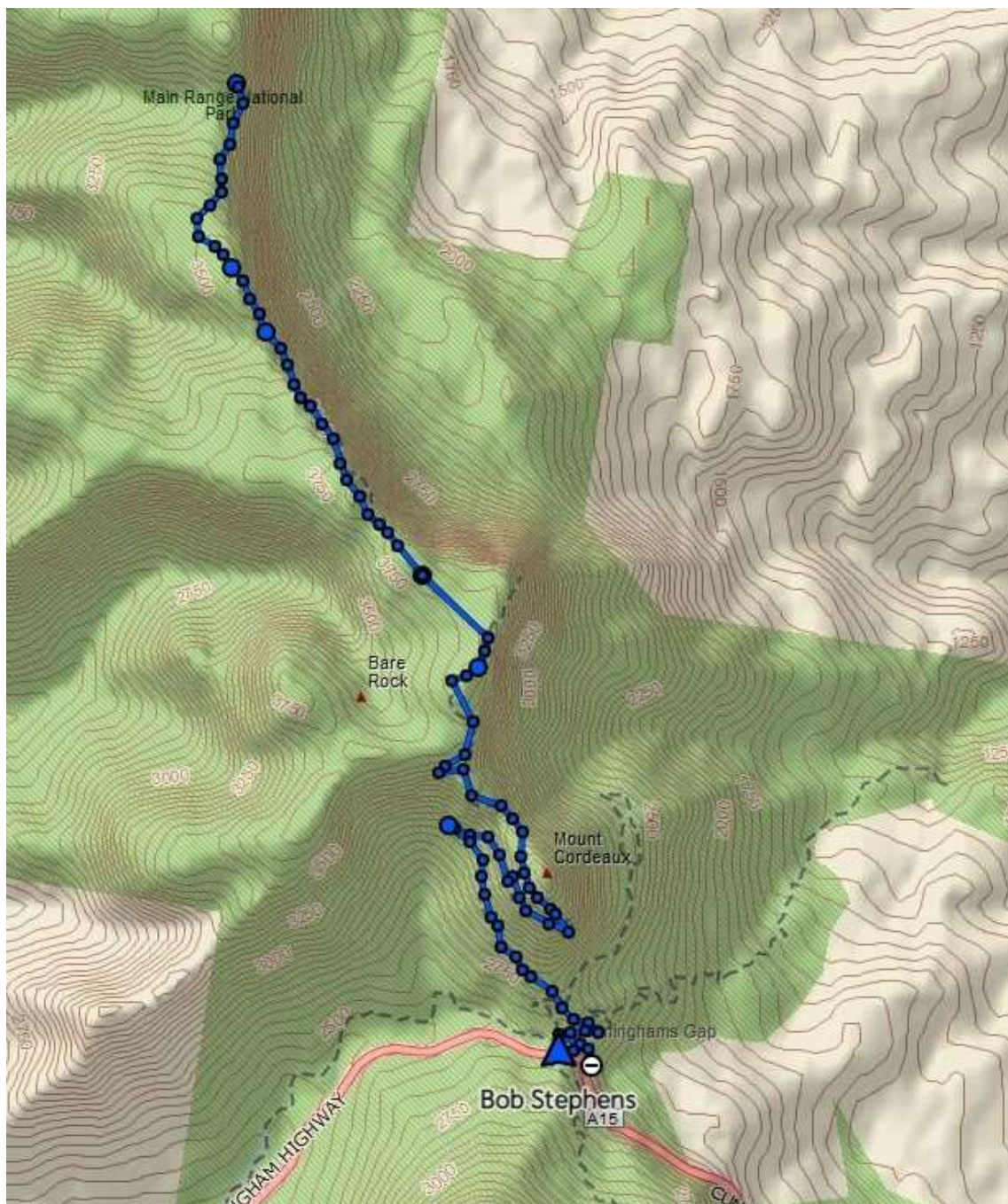
There are whip birds near my tent, temps are cool but relatively mild after a very sweaty day.

Reading track notes for the upcoming days it appears that the clutter of vines and difficulty of travel will be worse for a while tomorrow before we reach Bare Rock. The day after that gets tougher again. In one sense that's an Oh No thing, in another sense I'm enjoying the challenge and the push. Added to that the sense that being camped in a spot like this brings and I'm loving this.

Day 3 Monday 19th August

A noisy night at Knoll T30 with winds picking up and howling through the trees. We made a moderately early start expecting a busy day. The plan was to hike via Bare Rock to Cunningham's Gap where our packs could be swapped for daypacks for the hike over Mt Michell to the Governors Chair carpark then a ride back to the Spicers Gap campground.

The hike to Bare Rock was a continuation of the previous afternoons challenging battle through and around tree falls, vines and "undulating" terrain. Bare Rock was a very welcome morning tea spot with great views although the strong winds were bringing in a lot of dust.



Not long after leaving Bare Rock I had a call from Rob Santry with the news that Mt Mitchell was closed. A bit of the Scenic Rim I'd not be able to do this trip. Most of the walk from Bare Rock to Cunningham's Gap is on established track.

The road trip from Cunningham's Gap to Spicers Gap became an excuse for a detour to Aratula and burgers, coffee's, sandwiches etc.

The afternoon at Spicers Gap provided opportunity for hot showers, sorting through resupply and catchups with a group from the club who had done a day hike on Mt Mathison. We also said our good byes to Ted and Bea who had been with us for the first few days but were not doing the full hike. Graham also went off trail with some injuries.

Day 4 Tuesday 20 August



Judy, Gerry, Marika and I set out on what was the coldest morning by far so far of the hike after a very windy night. We knew the day would be challenging, we had to go over Spicers Peak then Mt Double Top then onto the Huntley Saddle to reach our campsite and the next water drop. That water drop meant we only

needed to carry water for one day which was a great help with the elevation changes in the day and some rock scrambling required.

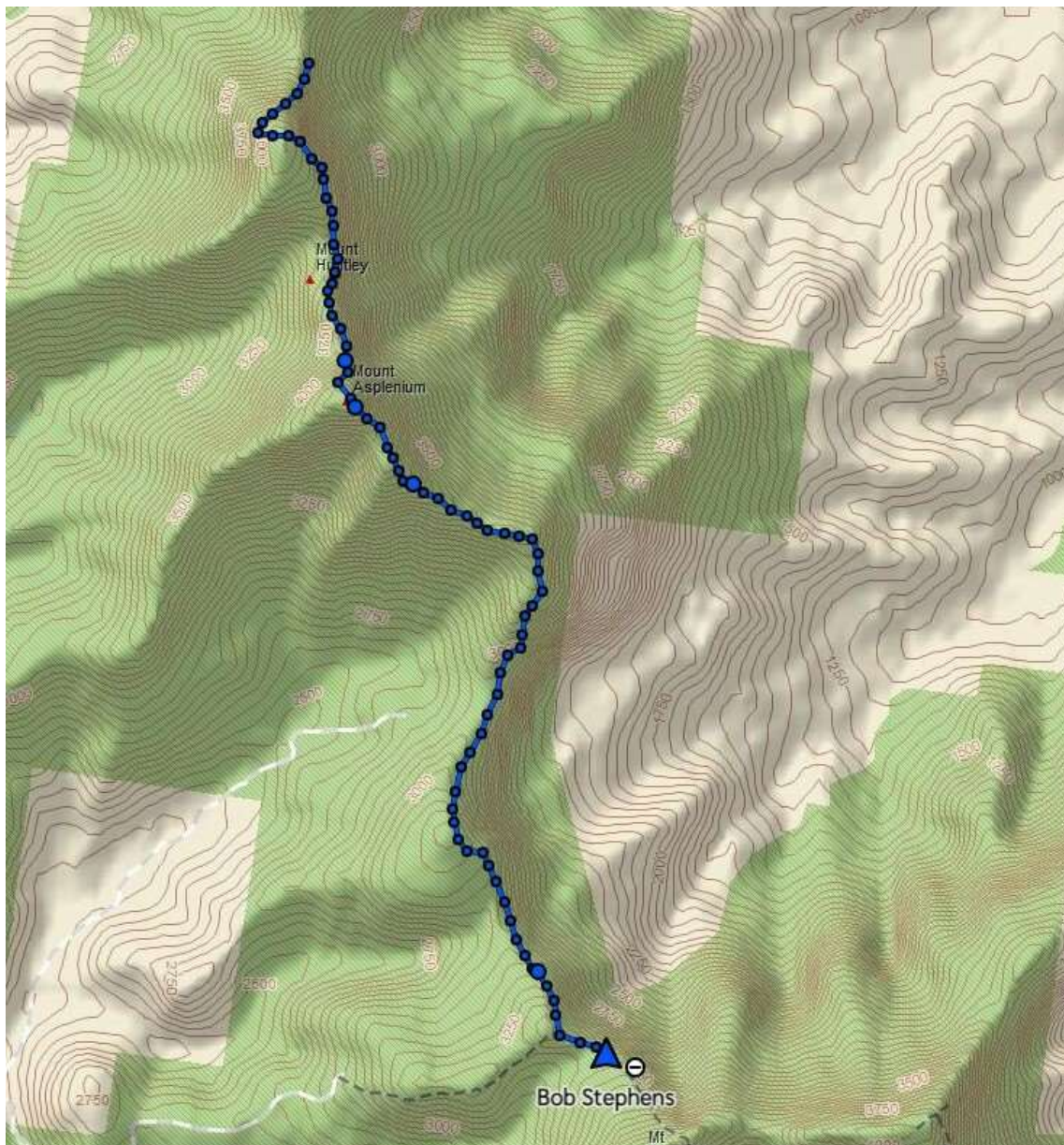
Bitterly cold fingers marked the first half hour or so of the hike. Nearing the summit of Spicers there are some scramble/climb sections which challenged some of our nerves. We carried a good length of climbing tape as a safety device which was a handy support making our way around a jutting rock before the last gully leading to the summit.

The drop down on the southern side was not technical but we were grateful for marker tape on trees at a key point to identify a break in the cliff line. We were a little navigationally challenged on Double Top not finding the expected route through one of the cliff lines and needing to traverse around a long way to get to a break which is part of a route from a place called Hell Hole Gorge.

Our lunch break was on Double Top. The descent off the southern end was steep. From there we followed the edge of the escarpment towards Mt Huntley. At times on really impressive razor backs, in a field of tall ferns, climbing over grassy knolls, battling more vines.

The campsite sits just below the start of the climb to Huntley. We found the water cache and have settled in.

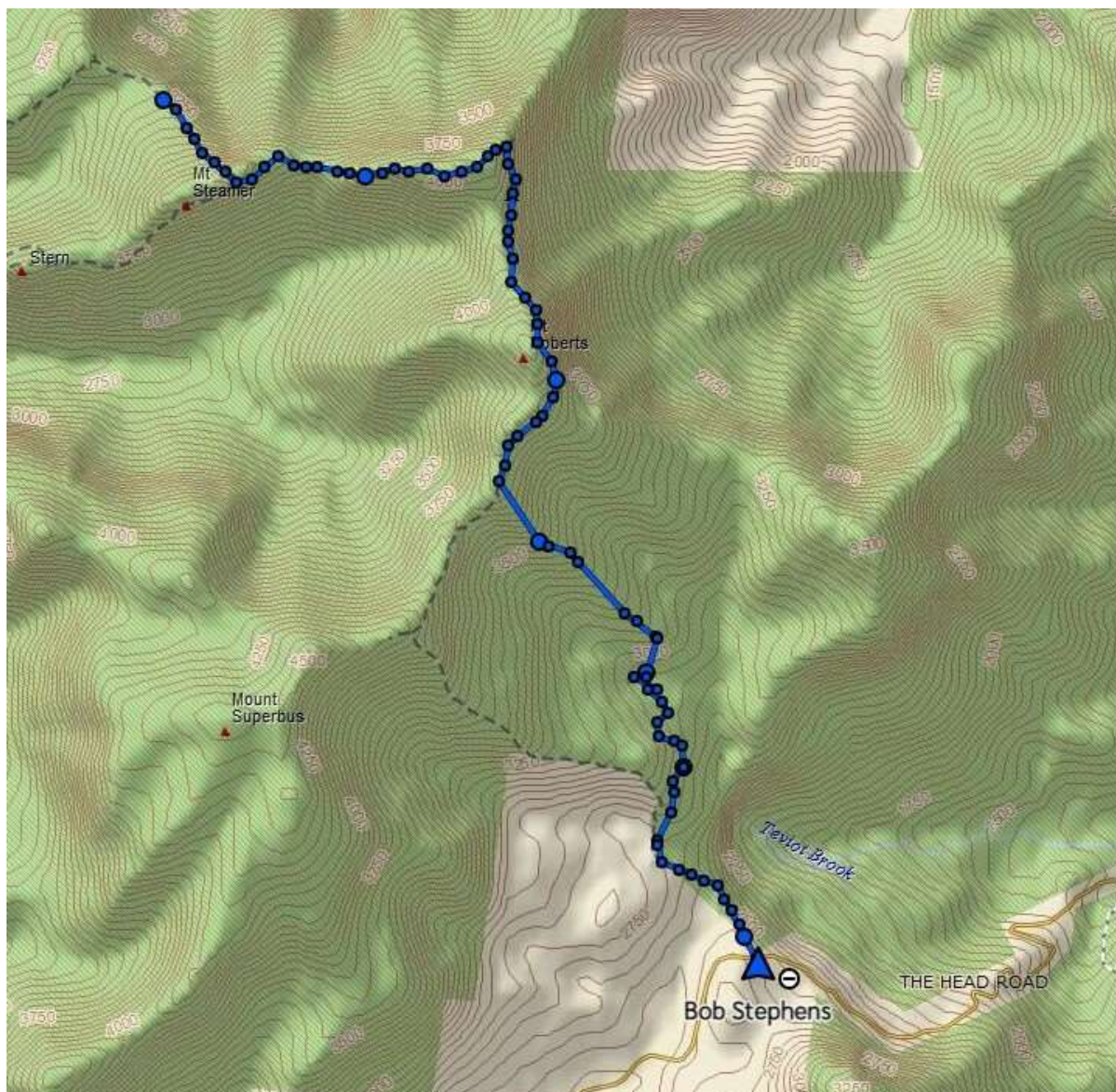
Day 5 Wednesday 21 August



A big day today. We camped in a wind tunnel in Huntley Saddle and up and out to the second bitterly cold morning and a climb of Mt Huntley with some interesting scrambles and a bit of assistance from a length of climbing tape (which came to our aid a number of times during the day).

Later Mt Double Top, Mt Asplenium, Panorama Point and Lower Panorama Point and a variety of knolls. Some stunning razor backs along the escarpment of the rim. A lovely campsite tonight with some shelter from the winds which are still in the trees.

Day 6 Thursday 22 August



A stunning morning in a lovely campsite. The views of the peaks scattered inside the scenic rim bathed in morning sunlight were really lovely. Our legs and lungs were then subjected to a rude start to the morning with the push up the ridge to Mt Steamer. A solid steep slog.

At the top of Mt Steamer, we dropped over the other side in search of a bypass for a small cliff line. First, we found a descent which would have required the tape however after heading a little west we located a break in the cliff line. All pretty steep but enough trees not to be too nasty.

From there we contoured around to the eastern point and descended to another climbable but better with tape spot to get off Mt Steamer and begin the climb up onto the peak which Lizard Point sits on. Most of the

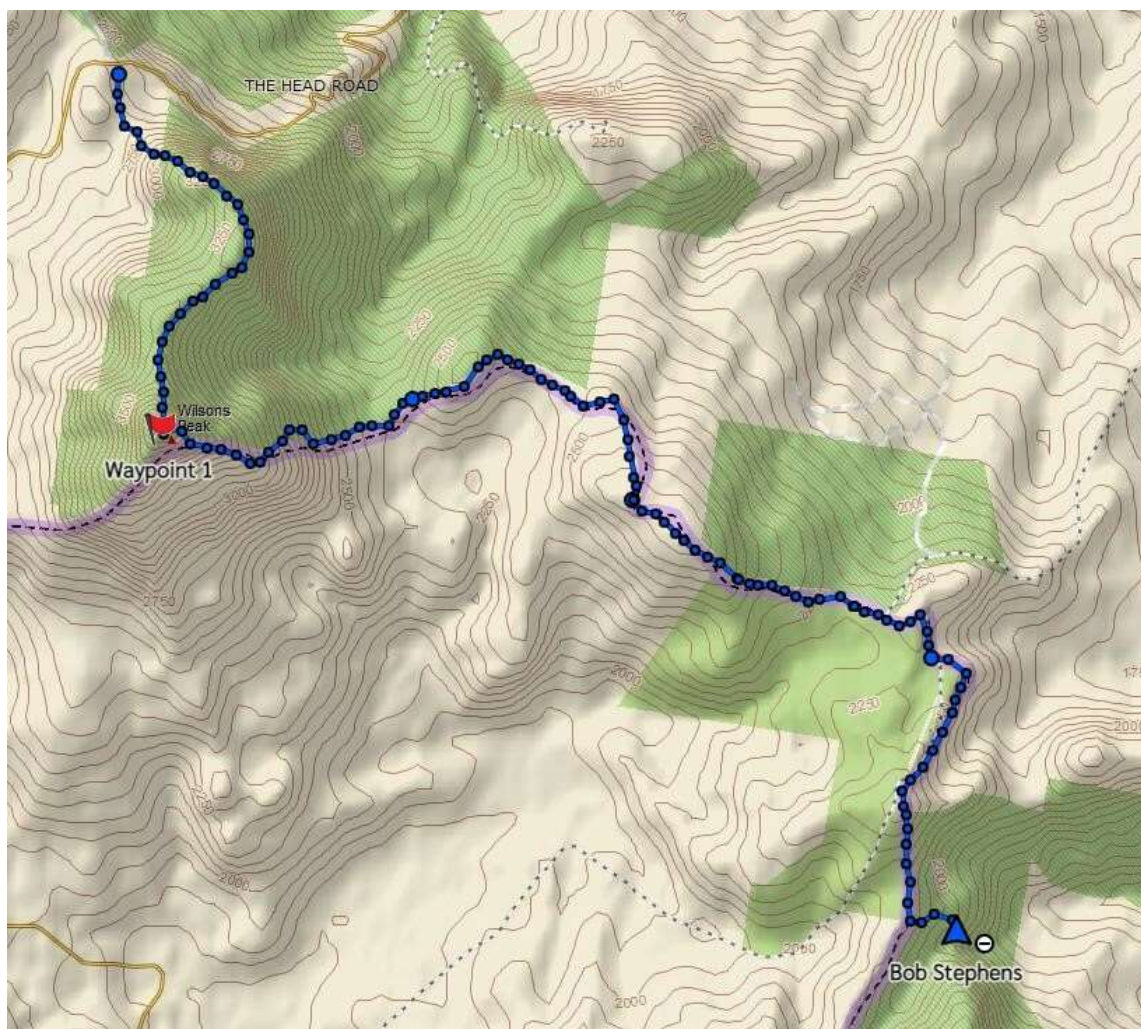
track is on the edge of a cliff line and the winds continued to be really strong and cold. Never particularly dangerous but exposed enough to keep me attentive.

The views from Lizard Point are awesome. I think I was last there in Boxing Day around 25 years ago, it was surprisingly cold on that visit.

We had an uneventful walk from Lizard Point via the associated campsite and Mt Roberts to a track not far from Mt Superbus. A brief stop at a view of the Steamers which while lovely was really wind exposed. The track bypassed the climb onto one of the knolls of Mt Superbus instead dropping down to a level to meet up with some old forestry roads and eventually out to the Head at Teviot Gap. Most of the track was an interesting group exercise in spotting tape on trees. A pleasant snack spot beside a running creek which we think feeds Teviot Falls.

A resupply, hot showers, roast dinner etc was on the menu for the evening. We are camped beside stock yards on private property just beside the grid at the Head. Reasonably sheltered from the wind, well fed and looking forward to crossing Wilsons Peak tomorrow with light packs.

Day 7 Friday 23 August



Overnight the winds died to mostly light breezes and a light shower gave me reason to get out from under my nice warm quilt to retrieve some socks drying on a fence.

We were all up at the usual time of around 5:30 to start packing. The packing was a little different to normal as most of our gear would be ferried to the water drop at the Boonah Border Gate. We hiked up to and over Wilsons Peak with day gear in our packs which was a great relief, there were some really steep sections of loose soil on both sides. The track does not go over the summit, rather to the base of the surrounding cliff

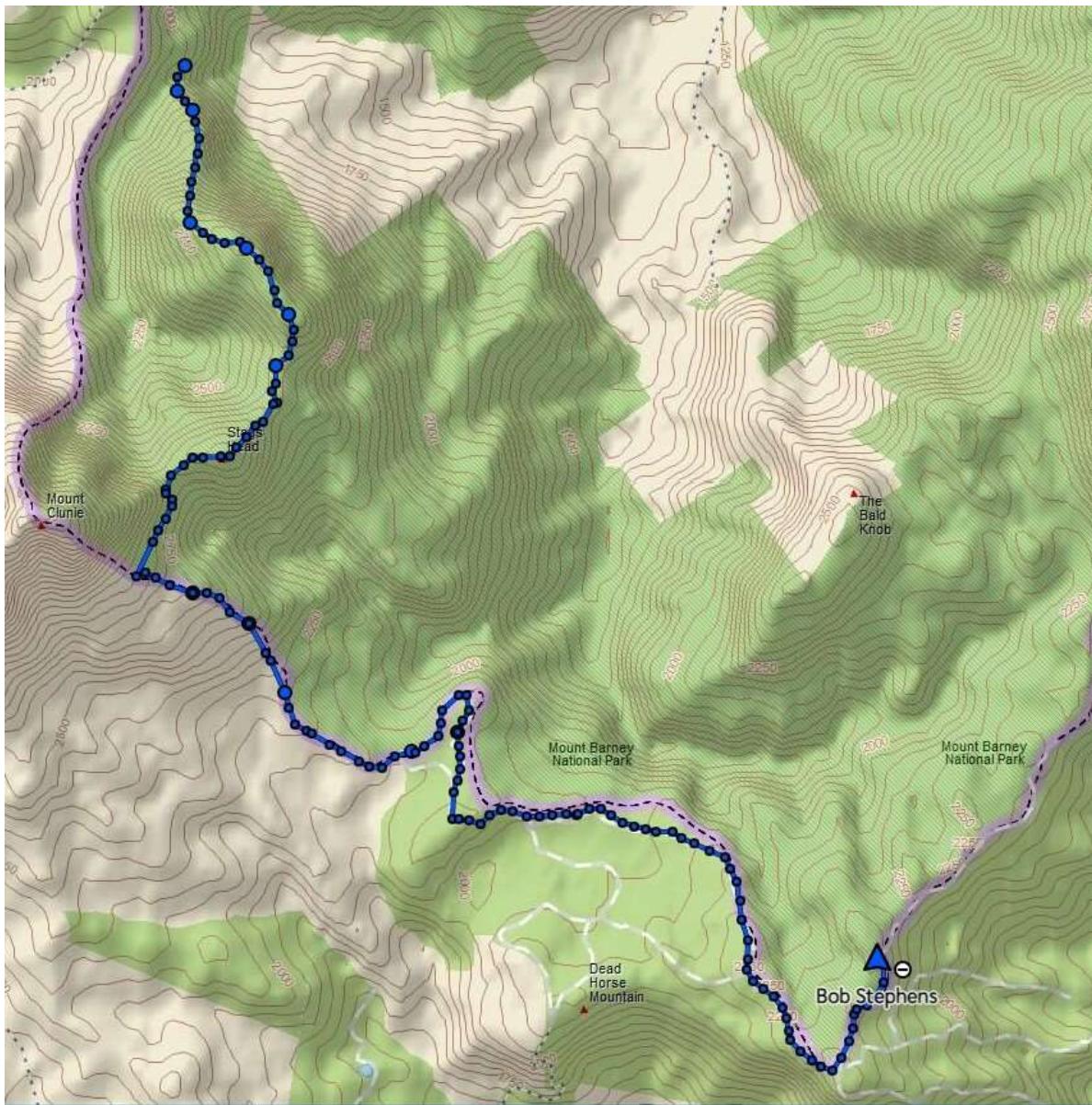
line. We circled around to the west a bit after reaching the cliff line to reach a reasonable scramble/climb up to the summit. A constant feature of much of the ascent towards the cliffs was the remnants of an old fence. Many old timber posts either lying down or standing at various angle. Pockets were loaded and packs left at the base of the scramble. The view from the summit looked back towards the north, it was really hazy which created some stunning effects but also hid much.

A few texts were sent trying to arrange additional maps and a shorter length of climbing tape as none of us were certain of the Ballow area and possible exposure there.

After getting back to our packs we circled around the cliff line back to the east around to a point where the rabbit fence was pinned to the cliff line. From there began a long and very steep descent of the mountain along the cleared area beside the fence. We dropped a long way eventually hitting a maintenance road which still had some steep sections. We followed the maintenance road out until it met some real roads and then onto the Boonah Border gate and the waiting resupply.

After the resupply we had a couple of km's walk mostly along the border fence and then a drop off the ridge to a nice grassy flat area not far from Watson's Falls which is our campsite for the night. We were in early enough to get tents dry from last night's rain and have a relaxed afternoon.

Day 8 Saturday 24 August



A cooler than usual morning but nice and calm. I'd discovered a split in my second water bladder yesterday and had left it open to try and dry it out. A morning chore was trying to fix the split with seam seal and some failed attempts with tenacious tape. As it turned out our later water resupply which had been dropped to a shed on the border was in 1.5l bottles so I didn't have to risk the damaged water bladder.

After leaving camp we dropped a short distance down to the top of Watsons Falls. A couple of stationary pools of water sat in the creek but no flow. Then began a stiff climb up the unnamed hill leading to Stags Head knoll. Slightly eventful for me as I managed to snap one of my carbon fibre hiking poles after jamming it between a couple of the plentiful rocks. A partially successful repair was made with duct tape and a stick. It lasted some km's but was not trusted. Later I was able to do a more successful running repair with a tent peg and lots of tape. A loaner hiking pole is meeting me at Collins Gap.

After Stags Head Knoll (we could not work out why it's called that) we began a traverse across a very steep and somewhat loose slope to regain the border. This avoided the climb up My Clunie which apparently is not all that thrilling. That traverse had its share of slips and tumbles and mutterings about the relative merits of climbing Clunie and we were all really pleased when the rabbit fence showed through the trees.

From there we hiked along the maintenance tracks for the fence for a number of kms. Eventually we came to the much anticipated locked gate and our water drop.

We then had to decide if we were going to camp nearby and avoid carrying the water for the night added to the supplies for the following two days or press on and gain some distance. Eventually pressing on won although it was only a km or so. The campsite was a sort of open patch covered in leaves, twigs etc. Night time exits from tents for toilet stops would be loud.

After setting up camp I got on with a better repair to my now rebroken hiking pole. Those things make a big enough difference that I didn't want to be without it unnecessarily.

Day 9 Sunday 25 August

A fairly brutal day of lantana, stinging trees, boulders, steep climbs and vast numbers of fallen trees and vines to negotiate. We started out on the remnants of the cleared space between two barbed wire fences which straddled the border for some km. We quickly hit heavy patches of lantana which persisted on and off for quite a while. At times hitting patches of juvenile stinging trees which invoked much more caution than most obstacles. One or both fences were down in many places with fallen trees or limbs on them. I wonder if they are still supposed to serve some purpose.

We left the last of that section after a long steep climb at a corner where a cliff line became the navigation feature. The first section was heavily bouldered and involved a lot of up and down, later we moved into a mixture of forest types all with regular obstacles. For a short period, we walked through what seemed to be a recently burnt section, the char smell was strong in the air and no signs of regrowth. Progress was slow, we expect tomorrow to be a long day so didn't want to fall short of our goal at Mt Nothofagus. All of us were carrying a fair bit of water as we don't expect to get more until we reach Collins Gap late Monday.

The next big part was a climb up a steep slope towards a knoll on the side of Mt Ballow. Antarctic Beech trees started to show as we neared the summit. A tree I particularly appreciate. We took a brief lunch break on the summit of that knoll then made our way up to the summit of Mt Ballow. It has a small clear area in amongst the Antarctic Beech trees and was quite lovely.

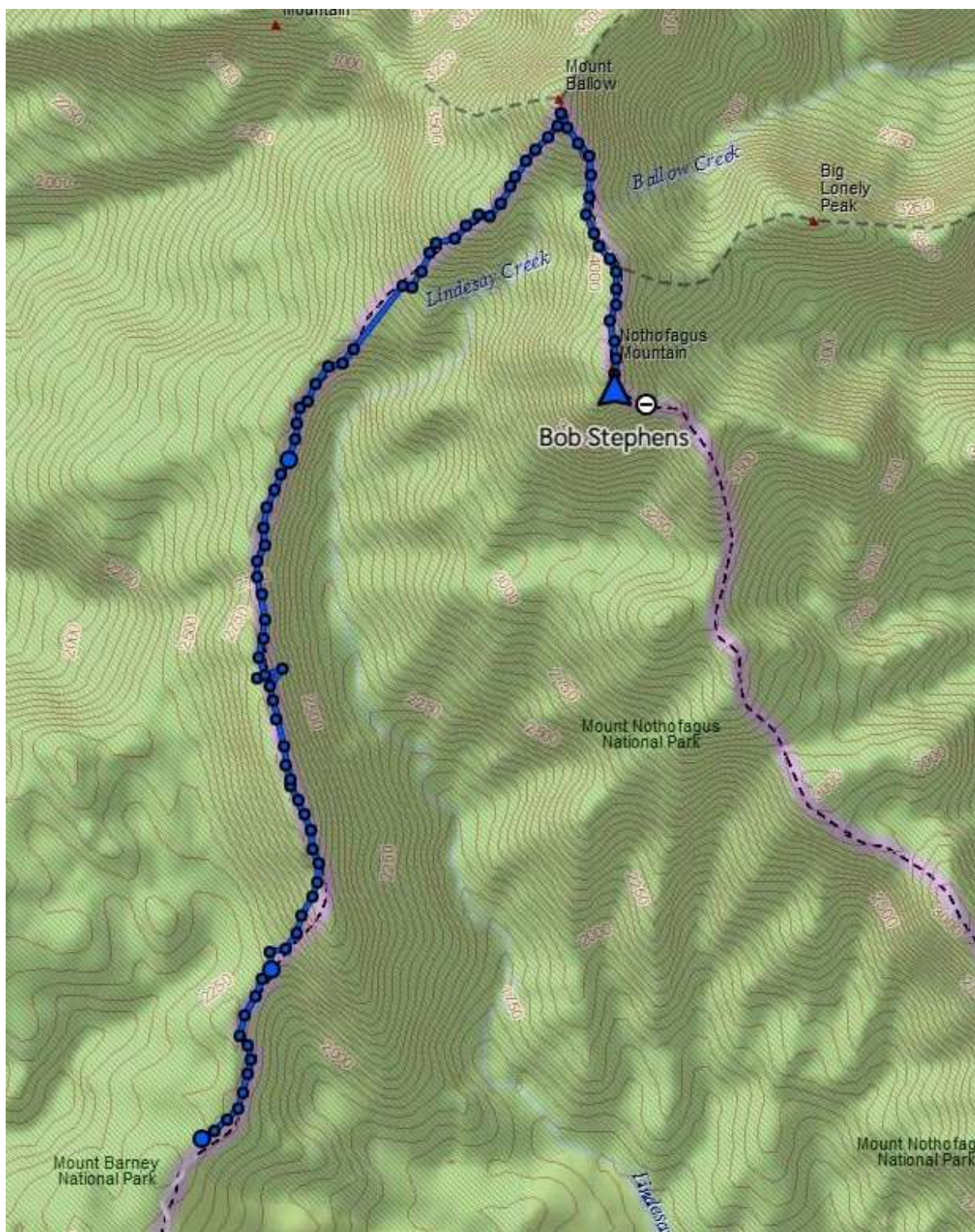
From there after some confusion on my part about directions (I was hot and exhausted having led all day, bulk helps in some conditions) we headed off towards Mt Nothofagus. I've been through this section a number of times many years ago and have no recollection of how tough that was. I later learned that a storm did major damage up here around 20 years ago which might explain some of the many fallen trees and possibly the density of vines and other obstacles.

Arriving at the summit the old campsite was nowhere to be seen, instead fallen limbs and thick vegetation (see prior mention of major storm damage). We found some spots just past the summit which we could fit

tents on, I suspect my feet will spend much of the night pressed up against the foot of the tent as I'm on a slope and the entrance to the tent is at a smallish gap between a tree and a sizable rock. On the other hand, my tent is dwarfed by the adjacent bases of a couple of Antarctic Beech trees which is pretty nice.

When I took my phone off silent, I received amongst other messages a couple related to a request from the ranger to take photos of the regrowth. That's done with a pan video thrown in to add some context.

The title of a book by Patrick McManus came to mind for today. "A fine and pleasant misery". I was never miserable; I was hot and to a degree hurting. I'm exhausted and heartily tired of obstructing vines and fallen trees but also had a really satisfying day.



Day 10 Monday 26 August

The usual somewhat sleepless night but still waking ready to put in a big day. Not sure how that works but it seems to day after day.

We knew the day would be challenging especially given the state of the bush we had experienced between Ballow and Nothofagus.



First up the relatively long drop off Nothofagus onto the ridge which is the range and forms a kind of arc around Mt Barney. Not too far after finishing the descent we hit the remnants of an old road. Mostly overgrown but also often a little clearer than the surrounding bush and mostly a more level surface.

We made slow progress throughout the day, the only part where we could hit any stride was once we hit the fence maintenance road a few km from Collins Gap. The rest was a battle with vines, tree fall, thick vegetation and occasional navigation challenges.

A few impressive tree bases, one large rock with a nice collection of crow's nest ferns and little else to be said for the day scenery wise.

It's a route I'd taken years ago a number of times, I know parts have changes both from regrowth on the road and the impacts of tree fall but I wonder how much memory blurring the details has to do with my recollections of those prior hikes.

The last two days have been pretty tough without the highlights of earlier parts of this hike. The next two will be as I understand it long days on rabbit fence maintenance roads.

Tonight, we had a resupply. We were met out on the track by Ted and Mats with Malcolm waiting with the gear. A chance to restock food supplies and some other gear switch around. Send a few things to Richmond Gap we don't expect to need in the next two days. Have a wash and a hot dinner of fish soup prepared by Mats which was delicious.

Day 11 Tuesday 27 August

A surprisingly quiet night quite close to Collins Gap. When a big truck did come through it could be heard for a long way. Somehow my phone's 5am alarm was turned on which was a little confusing when it went off. I think most of the group were awake anyway and if not, the truck which came past shortly afterwards might have fixed that. Mostly I've been using a vibrate alarm on a fitness band for my alarm (at 5:30am). A little extra time this morning was a useful thing. We all got packed and walked back down to where Mats had his car parked. Freshly boiled water, cold milk, yoghurt, blueberries, lactose free bread, coffee, mandarins and some boiled eggs awaited us. Courtesy of as I understand it Mats and Ted, mandarins and boiled eggs were in some cases added to breakfast and in others consumed on track. Despite all our feasting we managed to



start hiking by 7am. A little confusion at first as where we should be located in relation to the two parallel fences. That was resolved a little way down the track by crossing both fences to get to the NSW side of the fence. Later down the track we found at different locations a couple of large and sad looking carpet pythons. The poor things could not get through the rabbit fence and were stuck in NSW, stretched alongside the fence to get as close to QLD as possible.

A little while after that we spotted a 4WD heading towards us along the track. It was one of 3 Wayne's in the area who do rabbit fence maintenance and he was aware we might be in the area. We had a good chat and received some helpful advice on skirting around a couple of upcoming undulations (steep hills).

The diversions took us through some pretty country, in one case a really nice forest trail.

Overall, I found the day really nice. There had been a little trepidation that it might be bland exposed track and a hot boring day, the reality was mostly pretty trail through forest. Generally shaded or dappled sunlight, plenty of up and down but not relentless. A few challenging bits of steepness and some longer gentle climbs. Periodic views back to Mt Barney and some neighbours were much appreciated although difficult to capture in photographs.

The outlook from the finger lime farm was outstanding. A little while past the farm our GPS's showed we had passed Philip Road and a check of a message from Tracy reminded me that the hut where our water drop was located was about 1 km ahead.

We are camped there tonight, camps scattered around the small clearing near an old Rabbit Board hut. A grubby single bed inside suggests it has been more than storage at times.

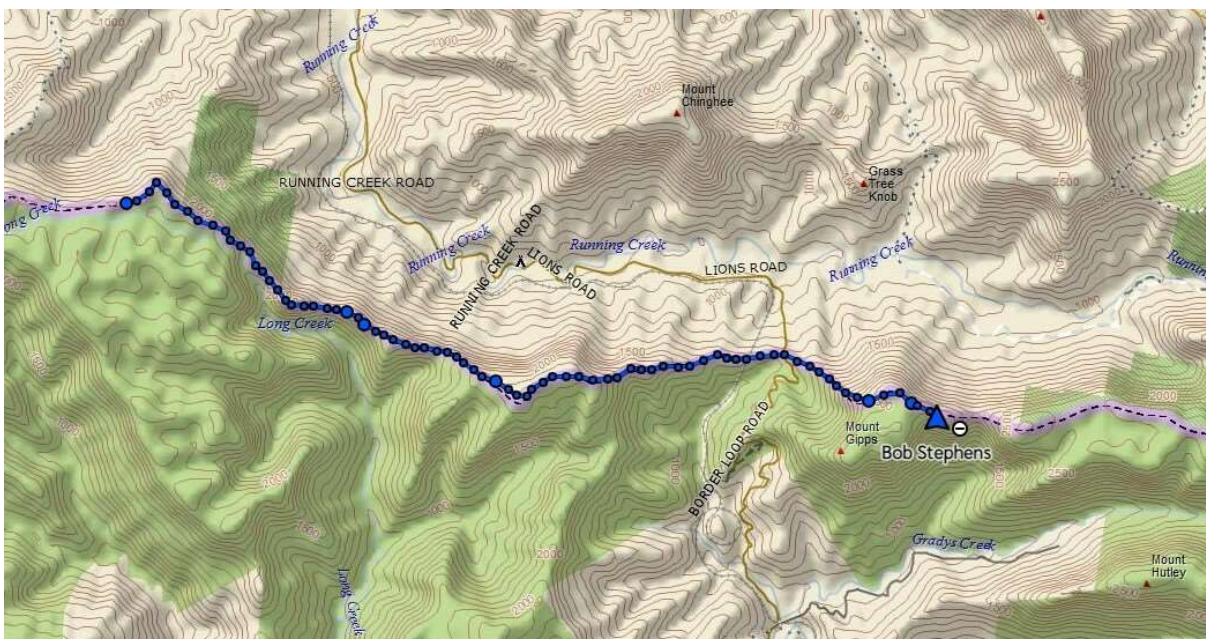
All in all, a very fine day and entirely different to the prior two days despite the presence of some tired hikers.

Day 12 Wednesday 28 August

An overnight storm meant damp tents to pack. We were on our way by 6:48am expecting a bit over 14km of undulations on track before meeting Malcolm, Mats and Leah for lunch and resupply at Richmond Gap.

Most of the track was up and down on typical fence maintenance track however one section in particular stood out. A narrow razor back which at one point overlooked a flowing waterfall. A very narrow path which thankfully we went through without it being too wet, it could have been very slippery otherwise. We later head a from Wayne Pope (one of the Rabbit fence maintenance guys) that many years ago a fence maintenance guy survived his horse jumping off the cliff after being bitten by a snake by grabbing a tree on the way down.

Lunch was a feast and added to by an offer from Wayne to run our packs up Mt Gipps in his ATV. We were very pleased with that idea. There was a little time pressure because if there was much more rain the slope becomes too dangerous for the ATV and I'm guessing it would not have been great for us with loaded packs either.



Well bloated with lunch and in my case carrying left overs for dinner in a plastic bag we said our goodbyes and tackled the ascent of Mt Gipps. It was a hard enough climb without the pack and in places a little greasy.

Plenty of grass trees coming into flower which was nice. At one point I had a pretty good view back the way we had come, I was struck by the reminder that 3 nights ago we had been camped on the other side of Barney which was now a relatively small set of bumps in the distance.

We also had a look at an old survey mark on a tree.

The campsite is a lovely grassy clearing next to a shelter called the Birdcage. Not far from that is a reasonable lookout with views of the terrain to the north. I think I could just make out some features of a range leading up to the Lost World in the distance.

I spent quite a bit of time getting cold there around sunset hoping for that magic deep sunset colour but it didn't eventuate tonight, perhaps sunrise will play nicer.

We are hoping that the rain stays away for a few days although the farmers and the land really needs it.

All accounts suggest tomorrow is going to be tough going with Wait a While and other annoying vegetation. We don't want to add invigorated leeches to the mix.

Another really great day on this most excellent of hikes.

Day 13 Thursday 29 August

An earlier than usual start for us today, not by plan but I think we all knew we were in for a punishing day. The inclines were for the most part mild with only a few exceptions but the vegetation promised to be particularly difficult.

I tried for photographs of some pre sunrise colours from the lookout clearing but it never really popped.

Most of the steeper terrain was in the first couple of KM's. After that the issue was vegetation. The old unmaintained rabbit fence which we were trying to follow when we got to it sits for quite a while on the border between rainforest and open grasstree and bracken slopes. Unfortunately, the grass trees and bracken have been joined by copious quantities of lantana and in places black berries. We wavered between the constant battles with vines, treefall etc in the rainforest and the heavy going trying to find a way through the bracken and around the lantana on the northern slopes.



Marika really shone taking the lead and setting a much faster pace than I'd been able to set in the lead earlier.

Later the fence sat entirely within the rain forest and varied in its difficulty in following it. Large sections are flat on the ground. In places the old posts, mesh and barbed wire were completely hidden, in other they formed a path of sorts. Always frequent diversions around clumps of impassable forest.

We lunched outside an old hut; it was a brief stop as progress was painfully slow.

There had been mention of an item on the gps maps marked Rabbit Fence and the likely significance of that point. Judy's theory was born out when we reached the point and it veered sharply away almost doubling back on itself. We would no longer be able to use it as a navigational aid.

From there it was a constant effort to try and regain our previous track after diverting around some obstacle.

Every now and then we would feel some drops of rain or hear it in the canopy but never enough to prompt putting on rain gear. We were all in longs and covered as much as practical.

As we reached the saddle below the low peak, we were aiming for we hit the first of the Wait A While palms/vines. Nasty things with an amazing grip.

Attempting to get to the summit involved a lot of traversing the slope looking for breaks in the dense vegetation.

Eventually with only around 20 minutes light remaining we reached a small relatively flat clearing, not yet at the summit but also uncertain what camping was like on the summit we decided to stay for the night. All are now settles into fairly closely spaced tents, dinners are cooked and eaten and it's time for sleep. Its 6:41 pm.

Day 14 Friday 30 August

After a restless night it was up and into packing early this morning. Another big day of battling clingy, scratchy and generally painful vegetation was ahead of us. Once again painfully slow progress, in real terms less than a km per hour.

I unfortunately copped an unpleasant scratch across the face from a Lawyer Vine in the morning. Just touched one eyeball which is tender but seems ok.

Not a lot to be said for the day, it was a constant effort to get free of various vines and move into the next. Skirting around thicker clumps where possible and pushing through where not. Occasional sightings of marker tape tied to trees, mostly really old.



We did sight two trees with what we think were survey marks on them J 188 and J 189 from memory.

A late lunch at Tweed Trig which is a sharp turn in the border where it meets the escarpment facing back down towards Murwillumbah. The Trig marker is a wooden post with a number of bolts in it and some orange tape attached.

A young hiker on his way from the Border Ranger to the Stinson dropped in on our lunch to say hi.

The light started to fade early and it was clear that we were not going to reach our planned campsite at Point Lookout so we were starting to lookout about for somewhere we could setup. As we neared the summit of a knoll about 650 meters from the first expected campsite on our route, we heard thunder. With falling light and the possibility of a storm looking for somewhere became quite urgent. A small relatively clear but slopped area not far from the saddle was identified as plan B and we pressed onto the summit to see what it offered. A number of clear spots which could take tents were available and we quickly got to setting up camp. I managed to rip a seam in my hiking trousers in the process.

The storm didn't really hit (yet), some showers and a bit more thunder. Most are asleep or trying to sleep so I've had my dinner, done a temporary sewing repair on the seam and on one of the frame pockets on my pack.

Tomorrow we will have some more of dealing with lawyer vines and indistinct track. It's shown more signs of traffic between Tweed Trig and here than the section from Mt Gipps to Tweed Trig but the foot pads are still hard to follow and regularly have Lawyer Vine tendrils waiting to cling at clothes, hat or any exposed skin.

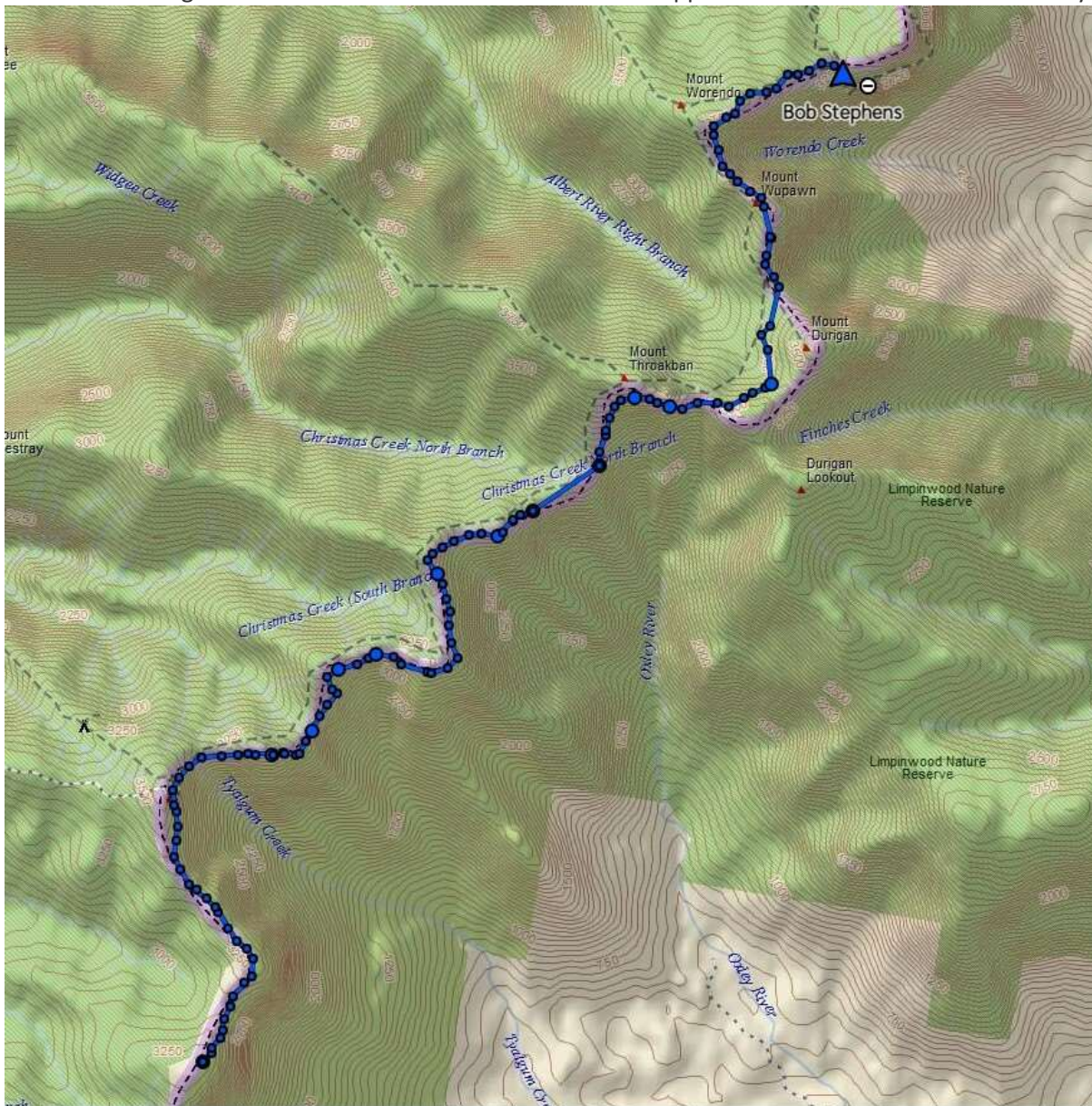
We will be trying to reach Echo Point and awaiting resupply, water top up and some friends.

At this point I don't think any of us are planning to revisit the Numgalba area. Still overall really glad I'm doing the hike though. Take the bad with the good.

Day 15 Saturday 31 August

Another early start with the likelihood of a big day ahead. I'd had a somewhat cold and uncomfortable night with my inflatable mattress developing a bad leak. I'd loaned my back up foam mattress to Judy as her inflatable has developed a slow leak. My makeshift campsite still had a few stones under it and the deflated mattress and tent floor did not provide much insulation. I'm on my foam mattress which is a great insulator but not so good on the comfort stakes.

The first 50m or so after leaving camp was a bit of a search around until we hit on some pink tape and a foot pad. The track through to Point Lookout was often visible but disappeared from time to time. As the day



went on, we got better and better at working as a team at relocating the tape and pad when it was lost. Lawyer Vine was an ongoing risk, often growing beside the track with its tendrils hanging over the track at head or pack height.

My hiking clothes are showing distinct signs of 3 days of hard hiking and are starting to feel a little like oilskins. Tomorrow I can ditch the legs and the long sleeve shirt so that will be some relief then pick up a change of clothes at Numinbah Valley.

We had started the day with serious doubts about our ability to reach Echo Point from where we had camped. We were starting at least a couple of hours from Point Lookout then some track notes suggested a very long day from there to Echo Point.

We maintained a pretty hard pace and kept breaks to a minimum and got to the Rat-a-tat turnoff by about 1:30pm. A quick lunch stop there and a check that we were all good to press on and the trip through to Echo Point seemed to go quite quickly.

Leah was waiting with food, resupplies for tomorrow, bottled water, hot water and cloths for sponge (chux) baths, wine and a variety of treats that were not part of our regular fare on trail. Sitting at Echo Point sipping wine from tiny little wine glasses, eating cheese, crackers and dip and chocolate was pretty nice.

Tonight, is Judy's last night with the group, she needs to head home tomorrow evening for work on Monday. That's a sad thing but expected. Tomorrow, we head out to the border track and eventually descend to Numinbah Valley for our second last night of the hike. Still some km's to complete but it was interesting today pondering how far away the Main Range is. In some ways that first night at Point Pure seems so recent but also so far back.

Day 16 Sunday 1 September



While we went about our morning routine of packing up Leah was out taking some amazing sunrise photos from the nearby Echo Point.

Today was a very different day from most. The majority of the distance was on Lamington NP's track system with a final steep off track descent into the Numinbah Valley.

There are occasional windows through the trees along the escarpment presenting views back towards the Tweed region and Mt Warning in particular. Some of the lookouts are lookouts in name only as tree growth has obscured most of the view.

A marvel of the walk is some of the massive Antarctic Beech tree bases. We had passed plenty of Antarctic Beeches at various stages but none with the physical presence of some we passed on the walk today.

As I understand it the trunks are not especially long lived however the base can live for thousands of years putting out new trunks as old ones fall or the base becomes big enough to support more. We pondered what role erosion might play in exposing what looks like it would have once been buried.

The track system ended at a sign for Wagawn. That last section of track was a little less maintained than the norm with some fallen trees needing to be navigated to travel on the track.

After Wagawn the was a mostly clear footpad with plenty of marker tape almost all the way to the so-called Bushranger Caves. The track is in places very steep and often covered in loose dirt and stones. Plenty of support from trees and more solid rocks was used by me and I suspect others to ensure a controlled descent.

Eventually the food pad and tape became hard to find but after a little scouting a footpad was identified leading around the base of some cliffs towards the south.

That led to what seem to be commonly called the Bushranger Caves. It is unlikely that they were ever used by bushrangers but may have been a significant spot for local aboriginal people, at least according to one woman we spoke to at the caves during a lunch break.

The features are more of a big overhang than what I'd consider a cave. Spectacular spot with the scale being really impressive. We enjoyed a brief lunch break there, taking lots of photos and chatting with a woman from the Tamborine area who claimed knowledge of the traditional history of the spot. We were given some detail of a tree to watch out for who's hollow and burnt-out base was used for cooking and a survey peg with a nearby very old survey marker carved into the rock. I think I found and photographed the tree and although we didn't find the peg Judy did find markings in the rock which may have been the survey mark.

That was at a point where the still standing but seemingly no longer rabbit fence was attached to the cliff face.

From there we descended along a narrow path right up against the rabbit fence and its often way to close top wire of barbed wire later crossing into the section between fences where the footpad changed sides and the near the end back into the NSW as Malcolm walked across the nicely mowed lawn to meet up.

We are staying at a Seventh Day Adventist facility tonight and they had had a large group in which left today so we were not able to come in until 3pm. We adjourned to a cafe down the road which was quite welcome.

At 3pm we were ready to check in. Showers and in my case the airing of tent, quilt, sleeping bag liner etc followed. Later we said our goodbyes to Judy who sadly had to return to work and would not be able to do the Springbrook section with us. She is hoping to be able to meet us at the end. There is a largish group here tonight which made for a great dinner group. We were again treated to all sorts of yummy stuff.

The hikers turned in early although I'm not quite there yet. Mats is going to drive packs (or the camping contents) up the mountain for us tomorrow and we will do the climb and a road walk section with light packs. Leah and Amanda are planning to join us for the some of the hike on Springbrook.

Day 17 Monday 2 September



The sensation of sleeping on actual beds brought mixed results for the group. I think I had the worst sleep of the three in part because my sleeping bag liner did not really keep me clear of the vinyl mattress cover. We had an upgraded breakfast with toast and coffee. Our reduced in size group was ready for a ride to the Natural Bridge by 6:15 and packs on and ready to hike by 6:30. It took a little while to find the start of the route up the side of Springbrook. There was no marker tape visible from the footpath around the bridge. Eventually we picked a likely spot and started up eventually picking up a trail of tape markers. Plenty of our usual hunting around for the next marker when there was a break in them. The route up was mostly very steep with lots of loose soil and more than a polite sprinkling of Wait-a-while. Well towards the top we had a scramble up a break in the cliff line but it was a nice easy one without much sense of exposure. Most of our heavier gear was being driven up as time was critical today, we needed to get up and over Springbrook and the Cougals.

When we reached the top, we began what we expected to be a 5km road walk towards the start of the Cream track but a couple of km in we were ushered into Malcolm's Pajero (under a degree of protest). Leah and Amanda who would hike the Cream track with us were already there waiting and we were not there to walk roads so possibly not too bad and as our timing turned out for the day pretty useful.

A nice morning team awaited us before we set out along the Cream Track which was a really pleasant walk although sadly losing a lot of elevation which would have to be regained later in the Cougals.

After saying goodbye to our temporary hiking companions, we started rock hopping up Currumbin Creek looking for the start of the next ascent. Another nasty slippery steep climb with Wait-a-while formed the start of it although it eventually morphed into a mostly eucalypt forest with some palms and Wait-a-while (noticing a pattern there). Lots of debris on the ground. We briefly lunched on a nice log on the first knoll we reached. Further up towards the West Cougal Peak we began a traverse across towards a saddle with a ridge up East Cougal Peak which it was hoped would avoid the worst of the steep ground of the route marked on our printed maps. We found plentiful tape markers for the first 30 or so meters then lost them. For a while we eyed off an apparent large mostly level shelf below us which we had not identified from the topo maps. Detouring around debris on the slope kept bringing us closer to it until we eventually descended and began what became a pretty easy traverse. Part way over we climbed over a massive fallen strangler fig as well as coming back into contact with the marker tape trail. That trail eventually led us on the ascent of East Cougal Peak. Yet another very steep loose surface scramble with the plant I don't need to mention again.

I had a very brief visit to the summit to snap a couple of photos before beginning the descent down towards the old rabbit fence. Very steep in places. We descended down to a point where we found spots to put out tents for the night in what we hope is NSW. It was late in the day and we had no certainty of a better spot further down.

Tomorrow, we meet Mats in the morning somewhere along the road to a place called Garden of Eden to swap back to light packs, take on more water and do the final push through to the Gold Coast and all being well the beach somewhere just north of the airport and the completion of our Scenic Rim traverse.

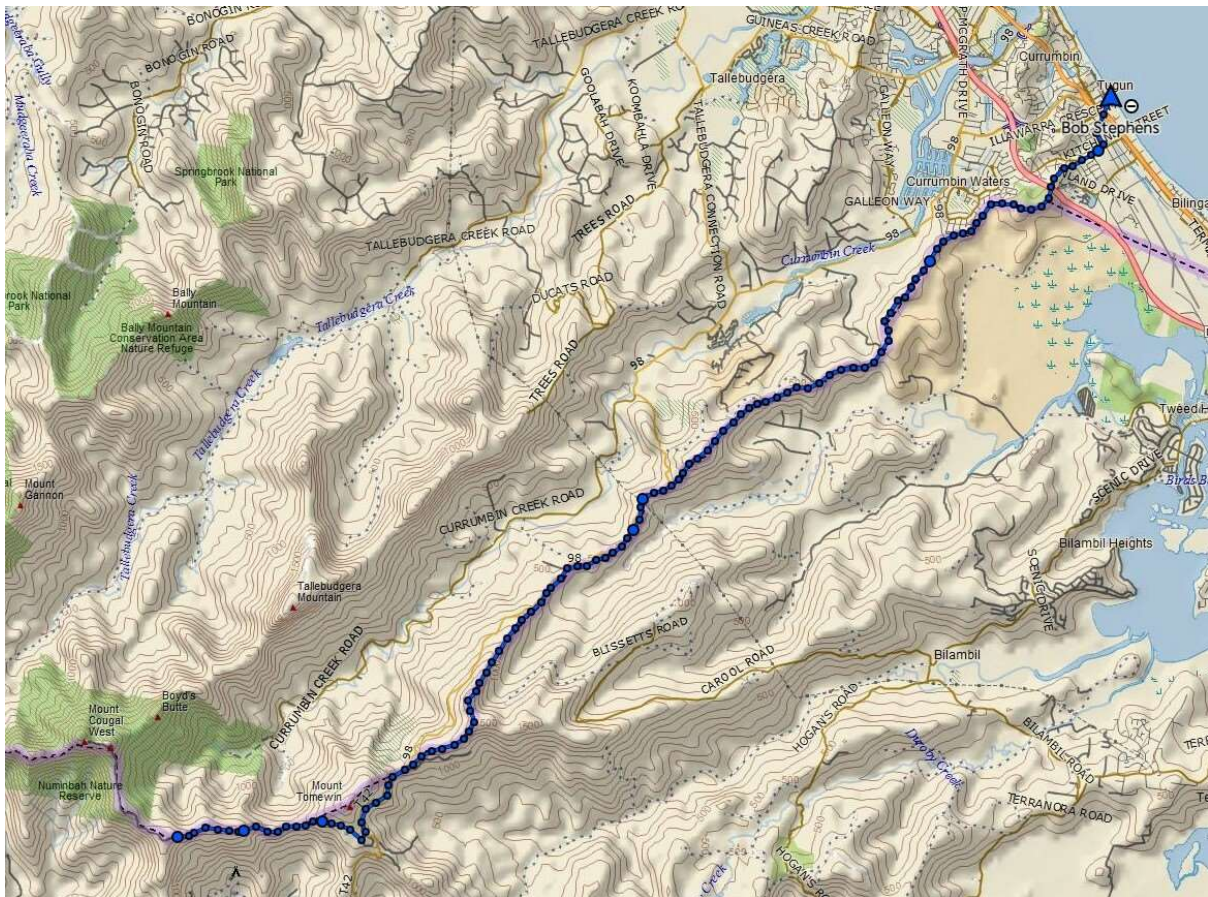
Tonight, after dinner I packed my stove for the last time this trip, for some odd reason that act more than others brought home that this adventure is drawing towards a close.

I'm looking forward to getting home, seeing Ann, getting on with the normalities of life and a number of projects on the go. The question has been asked a few times if I'm planning the next one yet and so far, the answer is no. That no is really a not yet. The memories from journeys such as this are too valuable to pass up, the joy of facing what is a pretty demanding physical and often mental challenge and handling it is invaluable.

Day 18 Tuesday 3 September

And then it was done. The day started in the usual way other than comments about it being the last time. We were packed and fed and ready to go by 6:10, a little earlier than normal but not a lot. We had been promised an easy day, all downhill or so they said whoever they were.

Shortly after starting out, we hit our first climb, not a big one. Most of the walk out to meet Mats to pick up extra water and either swap to day packs or unload camping gear was downhill. I got some nice views back along where we had come from at one point and was surprised by the sugar cane patch we walked through for a while.



After we swapped gear, we road walked through to the Tomewin Border Gate then renewed our well-practiced following of the border fence.

More up parts to the hills than any of us really had our heads around I think until we looked at the detail a little more closely.

For me the bushland highlights were occasional views back to Springbrook and the Cougals as well as a giant stone pillar encountered unexpectedly on the ridge top.

We passed some amazing properties on the way along the border strip which we turned off at the back of Tugun quite close to the motorway. I'd never really thought about that divided strip of land between fences (mostly) running so far into suburbia (millionaire's suburbia).

Eventually while standing waiting for the walk signal at traffic lights near the old Gold Coast Highway, we spotted Judy standing on the other side of the street. A great joy that she could walk the final steps with us after being part of our band for almost the entire trek. Malcolm, Leah and Ian (I think) were waiting on the foreshore near the Tugun Surf Life Saving Club with champagne and we were soon joined by Mat's who had been watching for us a little further along the foreshore. After a toast I managed to get to the beach to turn

off my GPS breadcrumb trail for the last time on that trek and get a picture of the Club Batton (or Club Boomerang as we had been calling it) on the beach which I'd been picturing in my head for a few days.

I'd picked up writing a day and a bit later, too busy and tired last night to complete the entry after making a start yesterday. I've done my laundry, been back at work for a day and sort of settling into my normal routines. Malcolm is hard at it dealing with the post hike interest from a variety of people (and missing what he called my Stalk Crumb trail).

I have a few repairs to do, I'm planning on making a new pack soon, the one I used on this trek was the first I made and it's done about 2000km of back packing with me in the last year and a half and still holding up well but I've also got some ideas for improvements. No current plans for another major hike at the moment but I can see that niggle returning in the not too distant future.

The idea of a Scenic Rim traverse was on my mind many years ago but I didn't know how to realistically put that together, it was a bucket list sleeper. It is a great joy to have done that hike in my own backyard, to have seen for the first time or revisited so many great spots. To have enjoyed the day to day routines of through walking.

Thanks again to Malcolm, Mats, Rob, Ted, Leah and all the others who provided support on the way. Thanks to Judy, Gerry and Marika for your persistence on trial and the various aspects of companionship we shared.