

ON THE TRACK

Memories of Greg Bridge

Steve Bennetts writes:

NPA members would be saddened to learn of the passing of Greg Bridge. Greg died peacefully at home at the end of July this year, as the result of a brain tumour which had been diagnosed about six weeks before. Greg was one of our most popular walk leaders and made a tremendous contribution to NPA.

I can still remember the first time I saw Greg on a walk. This was before either of us had started leading them, but this bushy-bearded fellow was questioning the leader with something like, "Look, we've got plenty of time, that mountain over there looks interesting, why don't we go that way?" I soon got to know Greg, and this first recollection was so typical of his wonderful enthusiasm - if there was a creek to explore, a ridge to climb, Greg would want to do it. He could of course be a bit rebellious for the leader, wanting to take off on his own explorations!

And it was probably this that gave him the incentive to lead walks. He said he wanted to contribute something back to the Association, in thanks for all the walks he had been on. Of course, it also gave him the chance of doing the walks his way.

So it was in late 1987 that Greg led his first walk. It was in his beloved Blue Mountains, from Neates Glen, through Grand Canyon, up to Evans Lookout and along to Govetts Leap. In his

description Greg had written, "Pace through the canyon will be slow for appreciation and photography, so tiger walkers not welcome." How different things became later on his walks. Looking back through the programs, Greg's walks became harder and faster as the years went on.

The Grand Canyon was one of Greg's favourite areas and it turned out that his last walk was through there in May this year. Although he was battling against his symptoms, he was so pleased to do it, aided with the help of his regular walkers.

Nothing would stop Greg from doing a bushwalk. I remember years ago I was to lead a walk down in the Royal NP. It had been torrential rain for days before and quite a few had cancelled their bookings, but I was committed to do it. So I was driving down in the early morning, got as far as Mascot and all the roads were flooded, with cars abandoned everywhere. I thought about going home, but eventually found a detour and got to Waterfall. Not surprisingly there were no other cars waiting, but half the group should have been coming in on the train.

Rain still pouring down, the train pulled in; one person was on it. It was Greg of course, in his wet weather gear, but already looking soaked to the skin just walking along the platform. I've forgotten now what we did - I know Greg would have done the

walk - but I think I might have just driven him back home again.

Greg became one of our most prolific walks leaders. He believed that showing people the beauty and diversity of our national parks was the practical way for them to appreciate the value of the conservation movement. Looking back through the programs, Greg must have led nearly 300 walks. Allowing for his band of regular followers, that is several thousand people who have benefited from Greg's walks. He also found time to lead for Sydney Bushwalkers (SBW), as well as go on hundreds of other walks.

Greg made many invaluable contributions to NPA's Field Activities Committee. Typically, as the program was being compiled, if Greg saw that one weekend was short of a walk, without hesitation he would add one more to his already long list.

Greg saw the need for increasing the expertise of our walks leaders, so was actively involved as the NPA representative on the Training Committee of the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs.

Greg was always looking for ways of gaining us new members, or giving more variety to the walks program. He wanted a walk that would be suitable for all levels of fitness, on tracks that could cope with large numbers, and with an interesting destination for a social barbecue. So he devised the Woodford to Warragamba, which uniquely had three starting points timed to allow the groups to combine together. Thanks to Greg's promotion and the involvement of Blue Mountains Branch, this walk was overwhelmingly popular; we had to stop bookings after some 130 people.



Greg's experience with SBW led him to organise our own Katoomba to Jenolan on the Six Foot Track. This was an outlet for the keener fringe of our members who enjoy walking 43 kilometres in a day! Greg himself had done this many times.

The logistics of these types of walks involve a tremendous amount of planning and coordination; Greg did this so well. They now have a permanent place on our calendar.

Easter was probably the highlight of Greg's year, and he led nine in a row for NPA. It gave him the opportunity of organising an extended walk, or especially to travel further away from Sydney. He liked the fact that the group could get to know each other, instead of just heading home at the end of the day. We remember Greg stirring the campfire conversation, his never-ending supply of jokes, and the legendary tale of The Three Bears having its yearly showing.

We think of Rennies Tunnel. This was an old mining tunnel that passes underneath Narrow-

neck. About 2 metres wide and 1.4 metres high, you had to crouch through in knee-high, putrid yellow water and mud. You would only want to do this walk once; Greg led it about seven times. Each time he would say it was the last, but I would see it in the program again. People had heard about it, asked him to do it, so he did.

Greg's enthusiasm for the bush was amazing. His friends would get his phone calls on Sunday night or Monday morning, he was just so excited about some walk he had done and had to share it with them. Quite often it would end up with something like, "I saw this great looking valley, are you doing anything next weekend?" So we'd be off there exploring it and planning another walk.

So we remember the great walks that we did. But in particular the friendship and comradeship that came with them. As we continue our walks, we will come across some place that brings back fond memories of Greg. And, as always, as the conversa-

tion turns to our previous walks, Greg's memory will always live on in them.

Steve Bennetts joined NPA in 1984 and is a member of the Field Activities Committee.

Gordon Wynn writes:

"How was your day?" asked my neighbour.

Reflecting on a typical day out with Greg, it had been an early start, Greg setting a fast pace with a couple more alongside keeping up, a barely recognisable track, slippery logs over a fast creek, a long, steep and rough ascent, temperature feeling 30 degrees in the shade, thunderstorms, heavy rain, off track, down very loose scree slopes with grazes, a few people lagging badly, wet rainforest and wet river crosses, tracks of mud then like streams, hard tiring ascent, leeches and, finally, dark with a fading torch.

"That was a good day!" says Greg. "Who is coming through the tunnel next week?" We were of course! Who would miss it.

So I answered my neighbour, "Had a great day! An easy walk in the bush with a mate named Greg Bridge."

Greg was of that rare breed who give very much to very many. He was always organising and leading, and, if he was not leading, it appeared he thought he should be! Tireless, strong, independent, no effort too much. There are many stories of Greg, probably as many as there were bushwalks, by those who were much closer to Greg than me. I will remember Greg as always in command and confident of his own ability; but overwhelmingly I am left with the indelible memory of possibly Greg's last but greatest day on a bushwalk, of his

PHOTO NO 9
CROP AS MARKED
SAME SIZE

STEVE BENNETTS

Greg Bridge on the Six Foot Track

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intense struggle to keep going against the demands of his illness, caught sadly between wanting to shrug off a guiding hand or direction but knowing he needed just that and, at the end of that day, seemingly right out of character, an unexpected hug from Greg and thanks for past friendship. He beat every challenge. Vale!

(Gordon Wynn is a long-term member, and an enthusiastic participant in NPA bushwalks.)

RARE BUSHLAND PLANTS

ARTWORK NO 11

SAME SIZE

A walk in the Wollemi

Early last December I was privileged to visit the fantastic gorge country in the Wollemi Wilderness and follow the longest sandstone gorge in NSW situated in the largest wilderness area in NSW: some of the grandest country this nation has to offer. And it's only 70 km north of Sydney.

The nine-day full-pack walk was organised by David Carmichael of the Southern Highlands Branch. Access to most of the gorge country is difficult, sheer cliffs barring progress between river and tree-clad ridges. It is mostly trackless walking. Following the river is a matter of choosing the easiest route along the bank over large boulders and through dense stands of water gums, leptospermum and callistemon, or through the shallow water where it is common to sink waist deep in quicksand!

Walking along the river bed was the only option in some locations where sheer walls of rock edged both sides of the river. The quicksand was often unavoidable. Struggling free with difficulty, we found that crawling on hands and knees worked best, the weight being more distributed. Thankfully we were not swallowed up into the depths of the earth, as is often depicted in Hollywood movies.

Progress was difficult and slow, scrambling over large boulders, the branches of the thick

vegetation tearing at our bodies. It took 8 hours to travel 10 km. Campsites were usually soft banks of white sand overlooking the river, the orange and gold sandstone cliffs pockmarked with caves always towering over us. Breakfast was invariably accompanied with lyrebird lyrics. The nights were beautiful and clear as the full moon peered over the cliffs, casting glistening silver streaks across the water.

After four days we reached the junction of the Colo and Wollemi rivers and followed the Wollemi upstream to find a way up to the Culoul Ridge, where we had cached a supply of food in a cave prior to the walk. Ascending to the top was steep and difficult, climbing up exposed rock ledges where any slip would have meant a sheer drop of 50 metres or more. As it turned out we chose the wrong spur, finding an easier and less hair-raising route for our return journey.

The views from the top of the ridge gave us a different perspective, seeing the country we had traversed and what lay ahead, with the river winding its way through massive cliffs. Over much of these sandstone ridges the soils are poor, the vegetation consisting mostly of dry woodland of ironbark, smooth-barked angophora and yellow bloodwood, with an understory of a wide variety of

shrubs. Their intricate beauty is easier to appreciate than the scratches inflicted by the prickly foliage as we pushed through. The day being quite hot, we were pleased to get back down to the river for a refreshing swim.

Further downstream the Colo River becomes a series of long, deep pools with intermittent cascades rushing through boulders. The orange-coloured cliffs reflecting in the deep, still pools have an extremely beautiful and dramatic effect. Black snakes, water dragons and skins are common along the river edge. At least quicksand was no longer a problem, the river being too deep there to walk through. It can only be crossed where there is a block-up of boulders, the water rushing through being waist deep.

Arriving at the base of Bob Turner's Track, we swam and relaxed before climbing out along the well-graded path to civilisation. As an alternative, some people choose to lilo down the river after heavy rain, which may be quicker and perhaps easier than walking: but be warned! A flooded Colo river is a terror to behold. We saw flood debris accumulated 12 metres above the water level. Rest assured, the hard going of the walk is compensated for by the magnificent scenery and refreshing river pools.

Piet van Haeff
Mid North Coast Branch