

Robert Henderson Croll



Along The Track

Robert Henderson Croll

Along The Track



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338075925

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

FOREWORD—THE BECKONING. TRACK: A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY OF AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE

EASTWARD! (1911).

BEDS IN THE BUSH

TO THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS

(a) THE FAINTER TRACK (1915).

(b) —DUNGEY'S TRACK (1929).

BATHS IN THE BUSH

THE HOMING PACKHORSE

A CREATURE OF MOODS

THE BUNGALOW ON FEATHERTOP

PACKHORSE AND DOG

SWITZERLAND WITHIN OUR GATES

HOLIDAY HAUNTS WHERE THE SNOW LIES DEEP
BLAZES

THE LAMPS OF THE BUSH

RELICS OF THE GOLDSEEKERS

BUFFALO'S BACK DOOR

CHRISTMAS BY THE WAY

THE ENCHANTED GORGE

FOOD—AFTER A FASHION!

A TRAMPER'S MEMORIES

THE CARAVAN: WOMEN ON THE OPEN. ROAD

"FROM OBERON IN FAIRYLAND"

SOME WAYS TO WELLINGTON

THE SECRET LAKE

ABORIGINAL LEGEND OF THE ORIGIN OF LAKE TARLI KARNG.

THE WAY THE MURRAY GOES

AT HOME ON THE RUBY

FROM SWAN HILL TO MORGAN

MILDURA AND WENTWORTH

THREE CITY STROLLS

(a) THROUGH THE PARK

(b) THE LEAFY WAY

(c) ACROSS THE TOP

THREE ONE-DAY WALKS

(a) RINGWOOD—BURWOOD

(b) BOX HILL—TALLY HO—MITCHAM

(c) EVELYN TO CROYDON

SWAGGING IT: THE WAY AND THE WALKER

THE END

ILLUSTRATIONS

Table of Contents

- A BUSH TRACK
 - 2. THE BOGONG HIGH PLAINS IN WINTER
 - 3. A WOOLLYBUTT RIDGE
 - 4. THE CAVE OF THE NGRUNG A NARGUNA
 - 5. OBERON BAY
 - 6. A RED-GUM DEPÔT ON THE MURRAY HOMEWARD
 - 7. HOMEWARD
-

FOREWORD—THE BECKONING TRACK: A LITTLE ANTHOLOGY OF AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE

[Table of Contents](#)

"The way's one and the end's one,
and it's far to the ends of the Earth."

Every man to his taste! If I could fall in with a jolly young god in creative mood, just about to open a branch of the Paternal business, what a world we could make for walkers! He would seat me on Kosciusko and give me vision, and I would select the purple patches from our Australian landscape which he would bring together as a mechanic assembles the parts of a machine. It might be only a baby world which would result, but how choice a child!

Seas there would be, of course; enough ocean to give colour and movement, changing blues and greens and purples and flashes of foaming white, which contrast and combine so finely with the skyline when seen from a long curved strip of cool grey sand. Always and ever must a lady swell lift the live water into waves of jade or ultramarine. With what irresistible might they advance; how tremendous is the thunder of their ruin! From the crash and roar a fury of hissing bubbles runs to your feet, and slides back smoothly as the next comber curls over in mile-long confusion.

Mountains, too, there must be, and lesser hills by the score, each distinguished in its appropriate way, a river or two, many creeks, creeping shyly through a tangle of green or racing like children down steep places, at least one lake,

and a little snow-plain that is hidden high on a peak in Victoria.

How hard it is to choose as the moving pictures of memory show on the mental screen. One sage has said, "It is all good when you're out in it." Even the "perishes" he has done seem pleasant to the walker in retrospect. I find myself handing to the god for inclusion that long stretch of soft sand from Cape Everard to the mouth of the Snowy River, remembering only the joy of conquest and not the salt rivers, the thirst, the shrieking angry gale, the flying sand, the weight of the swag. "You never know what pleasure is until you've tasted woe!" The tiny spring that joins the sea

...where the lobster spawns
In cool Cape Conran's weed,"

most obviously had been spilt by Hebe as she served her nectar to the immortals, and the parched and weary swagmen made suitable oblation.

Of the choice things of heaven and earth the first to be taken must be the view from Sublime Point, above the Bulli Pass. Keep the top road, only interesting because of its flora, turn down the narrow forest way with no hint of the wonder to come, and as that panorama of perfection takes your sight you will want to remove your shoes, as one standing on holy ground, or to disrobe like the worshipper in Klinger's *To the Beautiful in Nature*. No detail may be omitted: the sheer rocky drop to the tropical jungle, the massed growths of palm and fig and turpentine tree and supple-jack and the rest, the dolls' houses that form the settlements, curving sands and jutting headlands, and, holding all together, the

restless blue of the sea, cunningly relieved by its snowy edging of surf.

A few national parks may be added. New South Wales shall yield the pattern of her delicious combination of wild woodland and well-ordered ways, Victoria, the greater part of her secluded sanctuary known as Wilson's Promontory. Particularly would I rape the Promontory of its Oberon Bay, where assuredly the sponsor watched fairy revels in the moonlight, of its forest of banksias at South West Corner, of that cheeriest of torrents, Roaring Meg, and, above all, of the proud, stern rock which holds aloft the lighthouse and vainly seeks to glimpse again its lost Tasmania.

I have said there must be mountains, and mountains there shall be. Kosciusko because he dominates all; Sydney's Blue Mountains because there is nothing else like them; the mighty Bogong standing savagely aloof from all others; Wellington the benign guardian of Hobart; Cobbler the Hunchback, for the outlook his strange semi-detached peak affords and the frantic waterfall which issues from his worn sides; that range of fantasy, the Grampians of Victoria, made up, it would seem, of the frames of monsters who lived in the nightmare days before the Flood and from whose decomposition has sprung a unique flora; the Buffalo because it is the Buffalo. They compel admiration, these giants, without caring whether that crawling insect, Man, regards them or not. It is the smaller hills who are friendly—

The high hills are haughty,
They stand against the blue
An count themselves a cut above
The likes of me and you.

But the little hills lean down to us
And pass the time o' day,
An tell the gossip of the tracks
And give their views away.

There is Mount Lofty, for instance, and its range of sister hills at the back of Adelaide, full of an intimate, pleasant charm, with no disturbing grandeur. Even the railway which has climbed up from the Murray level shall be included—this in gratitude for those morning peeps down terraced slopes to deep valleys and the sea beyond which the Melbourne express connives at. And Arthur's Seat must not be missed, if only for the charm of its Wonga Paddock, any more than its humbler neighbour, Mount Martha. Both have missions to fulfil: no one who has climbed their slopes will ever again malign Port Phillip Bay.

Port Phillip Bay!—yes, it is down for reproduction no less than Port Jackson, the harbour of Auckland, and those attractive waters which wash the feet of Wellington at Hobart. To one the charm of wide expanses lifted like a shield, edged with indescribable tones of pink and green, to another the glory of a mountain background, to a third the surprises of winding channels searching into a rocky coast, a never-closing feast of detail. Ecclesiastes has noted that "all the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full." I would have those river mouths, whether sweet to the very high-water mark, or losing themselves in the salt long before, or sheltered behind bars of sand which only now and then they get strength to break. Seldom is a river's final stage, that point at which it "runs somewhere safe to sea," without interest. That the walker may have to devise ways and

means to get across these mouths but adds interest to a journey. And good as they may be in exit, all rivers should improve as one tramps nearer to their source until it stands revealed in a nook of the ranges. A river or two, did I say? I could name a score whose claims may not be denied. Water is the Great Essential of the swagman: let them all go in.

But it is creeks, baby rivers, that intrigue me most. Little Dinner Creek in Croajingolong, tiniest and most grateful of running streams; numberless Stockyard and Stony and Sandy Creeks, even a Dry Creek, libellously so-called,—I would miss none. Some for their names, if for no other virtue, shall sing through the scheme as a scarlet thread shines in a green fabric. Araluen, full of soft lights and tender tones; the Dandongadale, like a peal of bells; and how many more that chime in the chambers of the mind. The wooded ranges with their towering timber and alluring pads that glance back invitingly as they vanish into the green shade, the fern and musk and beech gullies which nurse the springs of these creeks, the fish and all creatures which use the waters—nothing must be lost.

The greater lakes I would class with caves; they do not hold me. A lake, like a jewel, requires a setting. That is what makes the charm of Tarli Karngo Nigothuruk, the hidden tarn of Mount Wellington in Gippsland. Climb 5,000 feet and you stand on the edge of the basin, slip down 2,000 feet on the inside and you reach the margin of the waters. Solitude abides there; it is the home of ancient Peace. Swim in its quiet depths and you shall feel the Bunyip stir beneath you; sleep on its tiny beach and all the fairy tales of your youth

become true. Not that lake only, but that lake certainly, shall be part of my new world.

But so much has been missed. Well, that can be made good. Eternity knows no haste, and the time of a god is eternity. Rest assured that all shall be as the walker would have it. There shall be wood and water and the wherewithal to fill the body with strength and the soul with content. And night shall come and the underleaves of the gums shall light up in the glow of the camp-fire; and stars shall be hung in the tops, and a cricket shall call and a mopoke moan as you snuggle your tired limbs into your bed of leaves. What more would you have?



EASTWARD! (1911)

Table of Contents

"The Swag and the Billy again—
Here's how!"

—Kipling.

"One thing," remarked the surveyor, "you'll get plenty of crayfish at Cape Conran." He mouthed Brady's lines:

"Come south'ard where the lobster spawns
In cool Cape Conran's weed."

"You can pull them out with your hands," he declared.

None of us had heard of Conran till he pointed on the map to where its blunt projection breaks the sweep of the Ninety Mile Beach extension. It was Cape Everard we were after, the Everard that was Captain Cook's "Point Hicks" up to the time when a generation that cared nothing for tradition renamed it in honour of some local celebrity. A lighthouse stands guard there now, the last before you come to Cape Howe and turn the corner for Sydney. An ex-keeper of that light had extolled the charms of the spot, its isolation and its beauty, until we were keen to pay it a visit. He knew no better place anywhere. "Push a quarter of a mile inland and you'd swear you were the first man to get there. It's the loneliest shore light on the Victorian coast. Ships keep too far out for signals, and it's nearly a hundred miles to the nearest telegraph wire. If a wreck happened we'd have had to ride the old horse thirty miles to the Cann River and another fifty to Orbost before Melbourne could know. Yes, it was quiet all right!...If you want to see animals

in their native state, take a walk there. Dingoes? Any number!...And snakes," he added, thoughtfully, "the place is crawling with them!"

Snakes are no particular draw, but the rest was attractive. So we sought the surveyor. He knew exactly how to go and how to return, as did an astonishing number of other people, we discovered. Eventually we found ourselves setting out from Cunninghame one evening on foot, each with a sleeping bag and a load of food, and the leader armed with a map marked by the surveyor with such useful directions as "water here," "tucker here," and "turn-off to the palms." It was "a wonderful clear night of stars," but under the tall green timber the darkness lay so dense upon the land that the road became a thing of touch only and not of sight. Bungah Creek, spreading across the track, brought a halt till the abbreviated footbridge, both ends overlapped by the waters, was reached by wading and left by the same means. Then from a rise we looked suddenly on to stars beneath us—we had reached Lake Tyers and it was midnight.

Sand makes a bed that induces sound sleep even though the resident fox come and blow in your ear to find out if you are as dead as you look. He chose the botanist for his experiment and there is no evidence that the scared beast is not still running.

Orbost and its Snowy River flats, wealthy with pigs and maize, were the reward of the next day's march along the forest road—Orbost on Christmas eve, alive with people filling stockings in the name of Santa Claus. They're a kindly folk in this capital of the east. We learnt a new way to "the

palms," and gathered much that was fresh concerning our route. "Don't miss Cape Conran on your way back," was insisted on. "That is, if you care for crayfish." The Cape, it appeared, is Orbost's picnic spot, a land of all delights where even oysters grow, and crayfish are the commonplace. "One party brought home twenty dozen last Christmas," we heard. Carrying a roast leg of mutton (described in retrospect as "large as veal and tender as lamb ") and many other appropriate gifts and purchases, we made for some good trees out of the township, dug hip-holes in the tough soil, and soon slept the sleep of the tired. Presently a bird began to sing, and then another. That was how the botanist described it to the scared camp, but there was some difference of opinion. To most of the listeners the sounds suggested a musical evening in the final summer resort of the wicked. Mr. Donald Macdonald has published many notes from bush folk inquiring the origin of these very noises, and he has sheeted the offence home to *Ninox Strenua*—the Eagle Owl. The terrifying duet came from directly overhead—harsh grating groans that seemed to tear the soul in their passage, shrieks of torture, screams of deadly fear, moans as of a passing spirit. With the sun shining, some of that may be discounted, but as truth lies not in exactitude of detail so much as in correctness of impression, it will serve. One of the more widely travelled of the party made it clear that the song of *Ninox Strenua* could not possibly be mistaken for that of the nightingale.

Gippsland ends at Orbost, despite the geographies. Thereafter, eastward, it is Croajingolong, familiarly shortened to 'Jingolong (the first 'g' as in bring). The only

palms that grow "wild" in Victoria are in 'Jingolong, and they are all in one patch on Cabbage Tree Creek. They are the Illawarra or Cabbage Tree Palm so common over the border. Patriotic Victorians have been known to speculate as to how so many specimens could have reached New South Wales. Scientists (with less parochial leanings) confess themselves puzzled to account for this Victorian community, completely isolated as it is from all its relatives. That brave old botanist, Baron von Mueller, who was better entitled to the name of explorer than many of the more widely advertised claimants to the title, made two trips to Cabbage Tree Creek as far back as 1854. Blacks drove him out the first time, but he was back twelve months later. When we reached the spot, as a side excursion of six miles, no natives could have been visible even if they had still held possession, for after a wrong turning and adventures with a swamp, we arrived in the velvet gloom of a cloudy night. Nothing was distinguishable; it was as pitchy dark as the Chaos of Hans Sachs, where even the cats ran against each other. Morning showed a tropical tangle on the banks of a blackfish creek, out of which rose the graceful stems of the palms with their feathery tops. Several looked about one hundred feet high. They stand in what is now a Government reserve, and are guarded by a tribe of the most pointed mosquitoes in the State.

Bush hotels have an unenviable reputation. Half a day beyond the Cabbage Tree a little hostelry gives the lie to the general belief. Its very name is attractive "The Bell Bird," and as it nestled in a curve of the road with for background the mass of vegetation that hides the creek, it looked what

it was: the comfortable house of kindly people. Oddly, this was one of the few creeks where there was no sound of the bell-bird, that charming olive-green creature whose prosaic and sole occupation appeared to be the picking of a white scale off the gum leaves, with pauses for the utterance of the single note, "tink!" which is his contribution to the family chorus. We soon learnt that one might find water without a bell-bird, but never a bell-bird without water.

The great enveloping forests of hardwood are relieved at every creek by growths of Lilli Pilli and Kanooka, and some glorious trees of the Victorian Waratah, twenty feet high, flourish at the Bell Bird. Who shall say that the scientist is not also, at times, poet? Who ever named the Waratah *Telopea* ("seen afar off") and added *Oreades* to distinguish the Victorian variety, was no dry-as-dust. Milton's nymphs of the mountains, the *Oreads*, are fittingly associated with these lovely shrubs. Almost as beautiful as the gleaming red of the waratah blooms were here the young leaves of the gums. "Silver-top" the settlers call the prevailing rough-barked eucalypt; aptly, for its higher branches show white and clean. Whole hillsides burned with the glory of its leafage as with "woodland altar flames." 'Jingolong's one highway cuts through the green growth; little else has been done by man to destroy Nature's work. Only an occasional clearing was seen before the Bemm River crossed the track.

Not so many years ago one of the rare settlers then beyond the Bemm River met with an accident. The few neighbours started out with him for Bairnsdale—a ninety mile ride. The Bemm barred the way, dark and forbidding, and at that time deep. Such an obstacle might have turned