



THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM TO LAKE ST CLAIR VIA “THE NEVER NEVER”

Noel Hayward

During the seven years I lived in Tasmania the Walls of Jerusalem were known to me as being a lovely area, but as they were almost on the opposite side of Tasmania (there was no Cradle Link Road in those days) did not warrant the travel required to go walking there. After all, there were more than enough beautiful walks to do and majestic rivers to kayak on the West Coast without spending a day driving to get to the Walls.

However some years later whilst working at the Leinster Nickel Mine 367 km north of Kalgoorlie I had a copy of a Peter Dombrovskis Wilderness Calendar above my desk. For March there was a stunning photograph of Lake Salome and Herods Gate with a colourful patch of scoparia in the foreground.

Looking out my office window all I saw was the grey dust covered Nickel Concentrator. Driving to and from work each day the drab mulga and gibber landscape on the edge of the Great Victoria Desert dominated the landscape. No mountains, no lush green forests of pencil pines or plains of cushion plants. It was clearly time to go and see the Walls for myself.

As luck had it I was due to present a paper at the Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy's Fourth Mill Operators Conference in Burnie in March 1991. So the conference came, the paper was presented and the Conference Dinner enjoyed (at least I think it was although I have no recollection of it). The Conference over I went off and borrowed a pack and tent from an old mate and headed to the Walls to see for myself if it was as beautiful as in Mr Dombrovskis' photograph, with warnings from my mate *"don't camp near the Pool of Bethesda (or maybe it was the Pool of Siloam) – its fouled with crap and dunny paper, find a spot amongst the Pencil Pines beneath the West Wall on the opposite side of the valley"*

So without having done any serious bushwalking for about 5 years we headed up the steep climb to Trappers Hut (with much huffing and puffing). From there it was up through Herods Gate and Lake Salome until we found a nice untouched campsite in a small patch of pencil pines beneath the West Wall. As far as I can recall we were the only walkers in the Walls that weekend.

Using our campsite as a base, next day (based on my poorly labelled slides) we seemed to have climbed Solomons Throne and the Temple, visited Dixon's Kingdom and returned to camp via the Pools of Bethesda and Siloam before walking out the next day and flying back to Perth that evening.

So was it as beautiful as Mr Dombrovskis photo? In March 1991 probably not, but it was clearly an area of immense beauty. So when Russell first mentioned a walk through the Walls to the "Never Never" and onto Lake St Clair I signed up immediately.

This is why at 5:45am on the last Thursday in January, still half asleep, I fronted up at Mildura airport with my pack and a plane ticket to Launceston. Already there were Russell, Roger, Dick and Karl. Peter was not to be seen and just as it appeared he was going to miss the plane he strolled up to the check in, pack on his back, as cool as a cucumber.

We were on our way, glad to be leaving the 40°C plus weather behind.....would it be as delightful as I remembered?

Despite the forecast of a very hot day there was very low cloud coming into Melbourne and across Bass Strait. As we flew into Lonnie it was surprisingly dry but was still overcast and looked invitingly cool.

Collected our packs and found our bus and driver Paul, an archetypal Taswegian bushwalker type. With our packs loaded we headed for Deloraine for lunch (venison pies for some), before continuing onto the Walls of Jerusalem car park arriving at 1:30pm.

We were immediately taken aback by the number of cars in the car park, there was not even room for the bus so Paul had to park it on a side road. Would we even be able to find a campsite in these days of tent platforms and NO camping areas? This was definitely very different than last time when our hire car was the only one in the car park!

As we changed into our walking gear and made our final preparations the cloud lifted and the sun came out. By the time we started walking at 2:20pm it had become quite warm by Tasmanian standards.

Reaching the small shelter with the Walkers Log Book some of our concern regarding campsites was eased as we saw that the majority of the walkers were heading off track to lesser known and smaller lakes such as Lake Tyer.



Ready to go

As in 1991 it was a hot, sweaty slog up the hill to Trappers Hut – bugger! I would not have minded if this had changed. It was slow going but after Trappers Hut the grade eased as we wound our way through Solomon's Jewels to Wild Dog Creek Campsite, just outside Herods Gate.

Solomon's Jewells are a series of exquisite tarns (*tarns are a small lakes or pools in a cirque [valley] created by a glacier*) surrounded by stands of ancient pencil pines, eucalypts, scoparia, mountain rockets and cushion plants along with sphagnum moss rafts on the boggy outlet streams.

At Wild Dog Creek we found plenty of space, of the eight public and three private tent platforms three were being used by Rangers, one had a young French couple and the other a middle aged couple just getting into bushwalking. Both parties were using Wild Dog as a base for day walks. The private sites were unoccupied. This was all new in recent years as a consequence of walker numbers doubling in the past decade.

Whilst Noel, Peter, Dick and Russell used the two lower platforms beside the couples, Roger and Karl joined the Rangers on the mezzanine level. Whilst we were in the open overlooking a mossy creek they were further back in the scrub. I am not sure location had

much effect on the number of march flies or mossies', although we probably had the better view down Wild Dog Creek with Clumner Bluff in the background.



*The sun goes down on our first day at an idyllic campsite at Wild Dog Creek as Russell asks us:
"I wonder what the poor people are doing?"*

Roger and Karl joined us for the evening meal in a lovely setting sun. We found a small pool in the creek where we could have a refreshing wash, being mindful of the odd leach. As the sun got lower in the sky it started to cool down and even though it was still light; due to the early morning, long day and hordes of march flies and mossies' we were in our tents by 8:45pm.

Friday dawned a lovely morning with a light dew and mist rising along Wild Dog Creek. Arose at 6:00 am after a poor night's sleep, due to my self-inflating mattress regularly self-deflating and possums spending most of the night trying to get into my pack and/or tent.

While we were having breakfast the French girl came over and asked if we had anything they could use to repair their tent. During the night a possum had torn their tent trying to get to the food they had stowed in it. We gave them some "horse tape" which seemed to do the trick on the 80mm three cornered tear. Later I overheard the bloke from the next tent platform talking to the Rangers about it, a Ranger was explaining that once you have been out a day or so your body odour will mask the smell of the food and the possums will not be a problem – was he for real?

Packed up and on the track by at 8:20 am, walking quickly up through Herods Gate and along the side of Lake Salome to the area where Mr Drombosvkis had taken many beautiful photographs. The changes of twenty years brought about by ever increasing visitor numbers were very evident. Whereas in 1991 a narrow muddy, rocky track followed along the edge of Lake Salome now we were on boardwalk a couple of hundred metres from the Lakes edge – probably a good change.

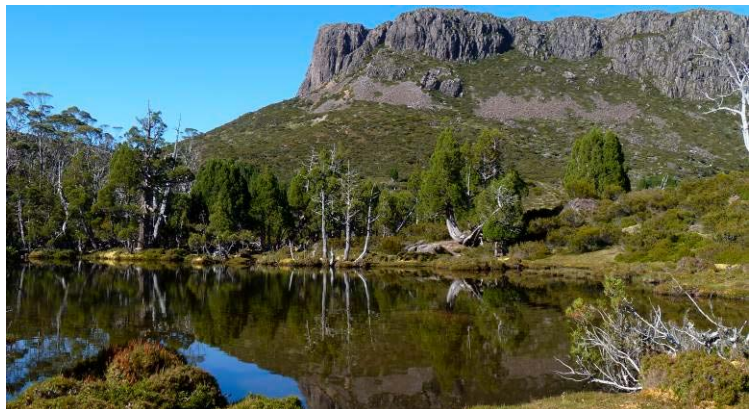
But the splendour had not dimmed, the West wall still towered above us and the cirque was scattered with beautiful lakes and tarns, numerous stands of pencil pines, scoparia, cushion plants, sphagnum moss and other small flowers



Lake Salome. It was a photograph of this area in a Peter Dombrovskis Wilderness Calendar which first drew my attention to the exquisite beauty of the Walls.

There were many more stands of pencil pines than I recalled and I had no idea where I had camped previously. We stopped at the Pool of Bethesda for our morning break – a really lovely tarn surrounded by Pencil Pines. Despite this being shown on maps as a no camping area there was a tent there. I saw no indication of a track to the Pool of Siloam so was unable to revisit it.

From the Pool of Bethesda we had a short climb to the saddle known as Damascus Gate with good views back down the valley. Whilst Roger and Karl decided to climb Solomons Throne, the rest of us descended through a spectacular pencil pine forest to Dixons Kingdom. I do not believe it would be possible to ever forget the beauty of this area.



The enchanting Pool of Bethesda, Solomons Throne behind, the ridge to the left known as Damascus Gate.

On arriving at Dixons Kingdom the hut did not look right, being much smaller than I remembered.

On getting home I checked my slides and found that the drying room was gone, which had halved the size of the hut – yea! My memory still works! A bit of investigation revealed the following.

Dixons Kingdom Hut was built by Reg Dixon in the early 1950s using pencil pine logs cut and dragged with draft horses from the nearby forest creating a log cabin low and long in appearance, with a shingle roof and a stone and timber chimney. It was used by Reg Dixon and the cattlemen who every year drove large numbers of cattle into the Walls for summer grazing prior to the area being made a National Park.

In 1987, the Walls of Jerusalem was the location for the filming of 'The Tale of Ruby Rose' and the hut was substantially 'repaired' by filmmaker Roger Scholes and a "skin shed" style addition added. (Skin sheds were developed for drying possum skins in the harsh Tasmania winters)

The hut was not used for the film and in 1998 the extension was removed and the hut reinstated to its original condition and the roof replaced.



Dixons Kingdom Hut – Now and Then.

The name Dixons Kingdom was inspired by the book Campbells Kingdom by Hammond Innes

I am sure you can deduce when my previous visit had occurred – I think I liked the film version better!

Leaving our packs at the Hut we headed off to climb Mt Jerusalem, a 1,459m peak which dominates the head of the cirque we had walked up.

As we were leaving the hut we noticed a couple of young blokes packing up ready to go, one who had a canoe paddle on his pack. A query by Russell ascertained they were doing fieldwork in the area and using a pack raft to paddle out to the islands in the lakes to survey them. They were now walking to Lake McKenzie 20km to the north. As they strode off ahead of us up the boardwalk toward Mt Jerusalem with their heavy packs, we lamented our lost youth.

Commencing the climb up Mt Jerusalem we soon caught up with a couple of young women. Speaking to them later on the summit I learnt that it was their tent at the Pool of Bethesda. They had driven and walked into Lake Ada from the east (Highland Lakes Rd) a couple of days before and were now exploring the “Walls” area from a base camp as they felt unable to carry enough food to do a longer walk.

As we ascended views too beautiful for words were revealed to us. To the west Herods Gate and the mountains of the Overland Track, - Cradle, Barn Bluff, Pelion West, Ossa, The Acropolis, Geryon, Olympus and the Sentinels; to the east was the area of the Central Plateau known as the Lakes Country and hundreds of its 4,000 or so lakes.



View from Mt Jerusalem. Featuring The Temple, King Davids Peak, Lake Salome, Barn Bluff and Cradle Mtn.

On the top we stopped to talk to a couple who were camped at Lake Tyres at the northern foot of Mt Jerusalem. While she sketched the numerous vista's he took in the views and helped me identify the various mountains.

After almost an hour on top we descended past the numerous crystal clear tarns, with their reflections of rocks and pencil pines, which adorned the track to Dixons Kingdom where we had a delightful lunch in the shade of the towering pencil pines. According to the *Walls of Jerusalem National Park Management Plan 2013*, the ancient pencil pine forests of the Walls of Jerusalem with their grassy understorey are not found as extensively anywhere else in the world. Pencil pines can live for up to 1,200 years, explaining why they are so enormous.

After lunch the temperature started to rise as we headed cross country to Lake Ball and then along a rough undulating track along the northern bank. For the next 48 hours I would be walking in new territory. We stopped at Lake Ball Hut for a break and although there was a nice waterfront campsite there decided to go on to Lake Adelaide. The next day was one of the longest of the trip and with high temperatures (for Tassie) forecast this would make it a bit shorter. Found a lovely campsite by Lake Adelaide. Washed our sweaty clothes and bodies with a long refreshing swim in the mild and crystal clear waters of Lake Adelaide.

We had encountered an interesting demography of walkers in this area with most walkers being couples. We were the largest group, clearly the oldest and apart from a couple of solo male walkers and the workers, the only all-male group.

Day 3- Saturday: into the unknown.

Up at 6:00am again! A lovely mild morning with heavy dew on the tent fly and a gentle mist rising from the Lake.



Breakfast by Lake Adelaide.- We enjoyed a refreshing swim in its crystal clear water the previous evening

Breakfasted, packed and on the track by 7:50 am - a perfect morning for walking. The track was shaded by a low ridge as we followed it along the eastern side of Lake Adelaide. Although it was up the hill somewhat away from the lake, we still got numerous good views of the Lake.

The Lake was not what I expected with steep sides. A look at the Parks Notes

however explains; *Lake Adelaide was formed by Glacial deepening by a powerful ice-stream with its sides restrained by a low lateral moraine*, thus explaining its difference from Lake Salome. After about an hour we stopped for a short break and then just after we got going again came to a pretty campsite at the south of the Lake. A quick stop here to fill our water bottles lasted almost an hour – a very pleasant spot indeed.

Leaving Lake Adelaide it was easy walking through an open valley to Lake Meston where we again came on yet another attractive campsite with a sandy beach and lovely views of the lake. Once again we lingered. Just before midday we decided we should really get going and walked to Meston Hut for lunch. This section of the track was through tea tree scrub higher above the lake with limited views of the Lake. Being on the western side and exposed to the sun it was also quite warm.

Lunched at Meston Lake Hut, an interesting hut in a small patch of myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) and Deciduous Beech (*Nothofagus gunnii*) a short distance back from the lake.

After lunch it became quite hard work. At some point we lost the track and ended up bush bashing our way for the last kilometre through to Junction Lake using the GPS, coming out on a small rise overlooking the lake.

After three attempts Roger and Dick located Junction Hut a couple of hundred metres away. We decided to camp on the small rise. Once we had our camp set up it was time for a swim. Access to the lake however proved difficult. Once we got to the water's edge we found deep mud and sediment to be negotiated before we could have a swim. Once in however the water was beautiful and we were in no rush to get out.

As Russell, Peter and myself were splashing about like three albino whales watching the trout rise, a lone walker hiked past going towards the hut giving as an jaunty wave as he went.

Roger and Dick had gone around to the hut for a swim and met him there. He proved to be a young French backpacker called Ben who had spent the day unsuccessfully trying to find his way through the "Never Never"

The March flies continue to be very bad.

Day 4: THE NEVER NEVER

So why is a relatively short unmarked track along the upper Mersey River connecting Junction Lake to Hartnett Falls on the Overland Track known as the Never Never?

I believe most of us would relate the term 'The Never Never' to Jeannie Gunn's book '*We of the Never Never*', or if a bit more literary we may think of Barcroft Boake's poem "*Where the Dead Men Lie*" :-

*Out on the wastes of the Never Never –
That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance forever –
That's where the dead men lie!*

But why the headwaters of the Mersey River are known as the Never Never is unclear. Our bus driver suggested it is because once you have walked it you will *never never* walk it again. I am not sure I agree with this, but maybe in Tasmania terms it is the Never Never, out beyond the Overland Track and the Walls of Jerusalem where foreign backpackers get lost.

Up early again, a quickish breakfast and packed up by 8.00 am when Ben joined us and we were on our way **into the Never Never!!!!**.

We followed a pad around the edge of the Lake to the Mersey River, finding Clarke Falls without much difficulty at all. On the way we came across a National Parks Box with intentions book. It appeared a few small groups had passed through in the last week or so.



Karl at McCoy Falls

After Clarke Falls the track became harder to follow and on a few occasions we ended up following wallaby pads into tea tree thickets. Other than that the going was reasonably easy passing from open grass land to rainforest. We eventually came to McCoy Falls, walking straight past the "recommended" log crossing of the Mersey in the process (due to the very low level of the river it was not critical).

McCoy Falls were beautiful wide falls about 10m high nestled into thick rainforest. Roger, Karl and I scrambled down the steep bank to get some photographs.

Shortly after leaving the falls we came across a large log with a rope across the river. Peter, Dick, Russell and I decided to cross here whilst Roger with Karl and Ben continued along the northern bank. The track was now much easier to follow and we shortly entered a delightful shady, cool rainforest through which the crystal clear Mersey babbled over its rocky bottom. Fish could be seen swimming in the shallows.

We decided to lunch in the rainforest so with the GPS telling us we were about a km from Hartnet Falls (which we knew was not in rainforest) we stopped on a rock beach in the cool of the rainforest for a very pleasant long lunch.

Leaving the lunch stop we soon came to more tea tree scrub and the temperature started to soar. Reached Hartnett Falls shortly after – Roger and Co were already there lounging on the rocks at the top of the falls on the other side of the river. Suddenly the bush became crowded with numerous Overland Track (O/T) walkers cooling off at the Falls. Peter, Dick, Russell and I walked to the bottom of the Falls, very nice and we did not really want to leave. Encountered a Cradle Huts group as we were leaving. With the amount of walkers about we decided we needed to get going about 3:00 pm to make sure we could get a campsite at the Bert Nichols Hut (Windy Ridge).

With the exception of Peter we were now all back on tracks previously covered, although it was my first time walking south. As we started the walk from Hartnett Falls to the Overland Track proper we realised how hot it was, and also how steep the track was when you were not doing it as a side trip with no pack.

Had a lengthy breather at the junction to recover and then we began the long slog up and over Du Cane Gap. It was steeper, longer and more closed in than I remembered.

We reached Bert Nichols about 5:30pm, it was already busy and most of the tent platforms were occupied. We occupied the two furthest from the Hut plus one nearer one. By morning even the helipad had a tent on it.

Some of us had struggled a bit today and that evening at least Russell, Dick & I had decided we would probably give the Cuvier Valley a miss due to the weather conditions.

A very warm night, chatted to a few walkers, mainly international backpackers, all very subdued and weary due to the heat. I dug a small well in creek bed behind the tent platforms where we got enough water for a wash before another early night, this time as much due to weariness as the mossies'.

Day 5: To Echo Point.

A mild overcast morning. Up at the normal time with the expectation that today would be an easier days walking, on a well-made track without any significant climbs.

As Karl was not quite ready Russell checked with him and Roger if they minded if the rest of us went ahead. With an affirmative received we headed off, pausing briefly as we passed the Hut to look at the interpretative sign explaining all about glaciers and cirques and stuff.

It was a slow easy walk to allow the others to catch up. We met up with a Track Ranger just before the Pine Valley turn off and had a good 15 minute chat. Informed him about our French friend in the Never Never and he explained that February is the time of the year when the backpackers finish fruit picking in the north and head south, many choosing to walk the O/T. He said there are always a few who do not want to pay the \$200 fee so based on what they found on the internet decide to go via the Never Never.....(I don't think he was impressed)

The Ranger gave us directions to a nice campsite on the shore of Lake St Clair just before Echo Point – because we looked like real bushwalkers and he could trust us.

Stopped at a nice creek a couple of hundred of metres on for smoko and to wait for the others. When we had finished smoko and the others had still not caught us (after 2½ hrs) Peter and I

decided to go on slowly while Dick and Russell waited a bit longer. Russell indicated if they did not arrive soon he may go back and look for them.

In lovely conditions on a good track Peter and I made steady progress and around 11:30am walked into Narcissus hut – and there WAS ROGER??? A quick discussion revealed they had been there for 40 minutes and had lunch AND that Dick and Russell had gone back looking for them. As Peter and I sat down for lunch they headed back to find the others. As to what happened when they met up – all I know is “that what happens on the track stays on the track”. It turned out that they had walked past behind us as we were discussing the sign and thought we had seen them.

So Peter and I spent an interesting 3 hours at Narcissus Hut swatting march flies and exploring the immediate surrounds. We went down to the jetty to see the Cradle Huts group depart and had a pleasant chinwag to the tour leader. He had some interesting snippets of info. They had recorded the temperature as 36°C coming over Du Cane Gap the previous day. We subsequently learned there had been walkers vomiting and suffering heatstroke at Bert Nichols Hut the previous night.

He also had an interesting update on the O/T track and how it had changed in his three seasons as a guide, saying that most of it was now boardwalk, including the entire section from Windermere down through Frog Flats to Pelion Hut. He had also seen the National Parks work schedule and believed it would not be long before it was all boardwalk (a gaiter free zone as he described it).

Eventually at 2.45 pm Dick came charging into Narcissus like an Olympic contender, the rest not far behind. All back together and a few hours lost, the decision on which way to go was irrelevant as we now needed to take the quicker route down the shores of Lake St Clair, and headed off towards Echo Point, the fresher Noel and Peter going ahead to see if they could locate the camping spot described by the friendly Ranger.

In the meantime a cool change had arrived and the march flies disappeared as a result.

Peter and Noel reached the hut about 5:00 pm and retraced their steps for 10 minutes to locate the campsite, meeting the others at about the right spot. We found some nice secluded tent sites with lake views amongst the flowering leatherwood trees.

Although it was now cool and the wind was whipping up a chop on the Lake, Noel, Dick and Russell braved the waters for a swim. As Lake St. Clair is the deepest fresh water lake in Australia at 167 m deep, the water was understandably not quite as warm as Lakes Adelaide and Junction.

With lunch at Cynthia Bay now on the plan for tomorrow most of us dined on whatever food we had left. Tonight the mosquitoes and march flies were replaced by light showers and a cold wind so once again it was an early night. A lovely cool night for sleeping, with the soothing sound of small waves lapping on the stony beach.



Day 6: The Last Leg.

A lovely cool clear morning. Glorious views as the sun rose and bathed Mt Ida, the Acropolis and the shores of Lake St Clair in the pink morning light.

Despite having six hours for a three hour walk it quickly became evident that some people were hanging out for a Cappuccino, Coopers Pale Ale, hamburger or other delicacy of their choice. So breakfast was quickly consumed, packs packed and we hit the track running. A quick pit stop at Echo Point Hut as the Ranger had stressed he did not want a "turd under every rock" at his "exclusive" camping spot.

A brisk walk through the lovely rainforest along the shores of Lake St Clair followed, arriving at Cynthia Bay by midday where we indulged in the above mentioned drinks and nourishments.

Paul the bus driver arrived on time and by 3:00 pm we were on the bus heading for Lonnie via Bronte Park, Poatina and the trout fishing mecca of the Central Plateau Lakes country.

Arriving at our backpackers lodge in Lonnie around 6:00 pm we cleaned up and headed out to find a drink and a feed. (There were some thoughts that six in one room was a bit much and Dick and Russell decided they would see if they could get their own room. The look on the attractive young lass' face was priceless when the two elderly gents asked if they could get a double room - we knew they meant twin. *Fortunately there were no doubles available.*)

Ended up at Irish Murphy's Pub where we were treated to a free lesson on beer types with some free samples and a fine meal. Note: The SBW Beer aficionados are predicting Boags Red Ale will be the next big thing!

Day 7: Homeward Bound.

A more leisurely start to the day today. Once everyone was ready we wandered down to the main street and had a pleasant breakfast. After breakfast, some already planning for the next walk, went and checked out the gear shops, others yearned over the woodwork at the Tasmanian Design Centre. I went and stocked up on Christmas Bush and Manuka Honey then had a scrumptious *Tinnies* Curried Scallop Pie (CSP) for lunch and a long chat to the Café owner who had worked everywhere from the Dog Fence north of Penola to Darwin. He had bought the Café when he realised it was probably cheaper than paying for a CSP every lunchtime.

It would be easy to say we then had an uneventful flight back to Mildura, but the truth is that we experienced quite an interesting event. As we were flying into Melbourne we seemed to be going a long way to the north, to the point that I commented to Russell that if we went much further they would be able to drop us off in Mildura. Ultimately however we turned and started our approach to land and were coming in smoothly when just as we were about to touchdown the pilots suddenly put on full power and pulled up into what was as steep a climb as I have experienced in a commercial passenger jet and banked sharply to our right. After what seemed an age the pilot came on the PA and announced there was a Qantas flight taking longer than anticipated on the runway and the tower had asked them to go around again.....

As we were disembarking I cheekily asked the pilots how close we had been to running into the back of the other plane to which he responded "We wouldn't do that, there would be too much paperwork to fill in" - touché.

Epilogue.

During the walk we discussed that it really was too hot, with too many march flies and mosquitoes to be walking in Tasmania at this time of the year. However, if we had left it two or three weeks we would have encountered heavy rains and below zero nights. One of the joys of Tasmania is its unpredictable weather.