



THE NIPPLE KNOWN AS PIGEON HOUSE

road to the start has a few deep pools after rain. You'll know you're on the right track when you come across the first Holden holding up a tree, then it will be confirmed when you spy No. 2 in a paddock, preferring to grow a tree in retirement than to shoot a 'roo. The ultimate will be when you see the Volvo. See what I mean about recalibration? Take your two litres of water and a picnic lunch to have at the top. A biting breeze up there calls for a jacket. With Spring buds bursting, a perfect time for this one.

Dasyurus Track (Monga NP)

Named for the spotted-tailed quoll, just last week we took this 8 km gentle stroll that begins at the shaded Dasyurus Picnic Area (where there is a loo!) by the Mongarlowe River and

meets the main Corn Trail track after 4 km. Start by fording the shallow Mongarlowe. A few options here: Bare feet? Just take a towel. Shoes on and use of walking poles to steady the careful selection of stepping stones? Take walking poles. Wear creek-crossers (gumboots/Crocks?) change into your hiking boots on the other side? Collect your creek-crossers from the bush on the way back.

Pretty views of the Mongarlowe River start the walk and along its banks you can see concrete evidence (literally) of a 1930s plan, so oral history tells it, to redirect the northward flowing Mongarlowe over the eastern escarpment to water the coast. Such folly this scheme seems from today's perspective; though those were times when policy making was concerned with poverty relief above all else. It's unbearable to imagine the likely

impact of this strategy on the Monga forest habitats.

The walk follows a ridge east. Exposed to a westerly breeze banksias were flowering amongst the dry forest. Over the ridge the creeks flowed in a different direction. A watershed. These waters would collect in the Buckenbowra River that heads south-east to the coast, a more moist environment where tall Viminalis eucalypts, draped in their bark ribbons, tower over the track made narrow by lush borders of Coral fern and shaded above by Gondwanan Dicksonia tree ferns. Was it actually the case that these forests lost their koalas to a bounty a century or so ago?

A return trip, access is via River Forest Road (all weather road) about 20 kilometres along the Kings Highway east of Braidwood. Only a half day out. With a picnic table back at Dasyurus,



EVEN WIDER THAN A NEW TV

it's a great spot to lunch and boil the billy. You may need a jacket for the picnic area but a T-shirt will do for the rest.

The Corn Trail (Monga NP)

Back in Autumn a whole mob of us, led by my walking companion, descended the Corn Trail; enough people to cover the cost of bus hire to collect us at the other end. A smaller group could start at Dasyurus if you wished (see above) after leaving a car at the end of Misty Mountain Road (off the Kings Highway below the bends), a forty minute trip from the Highway. You'll be so glad you did.

The Corn Trail is rich in history. Looking back to our Indigenous heritage it was a highway for gatherings between salt water and fresh water people including Yuin and Walbunja language groups among others for many thousands of years. Post-colonisation, it was used as a horse and donkey-laden freight highway often operated by farming women, delivering produce from the coast to the highlands. Our own Jack Featherstone portrays these images evocatively in his artworks. From Dasyurus it's a 16 kilometre walk — downhill — a workout for muscles you never knew you had.

From dry forest crunching underfoot between Grass Trees, the descent is steady as the soil moistens and softens. An easy crossing of the Buckenbowra River and eventually you reach deliciously deep green shaded glens of ancient



rainforest. Twisted vines and giant Dicksonia Treeferns, Bird's Nest ferns, Cabbage Tree Palms, mossy logs and lichen — a dripping, cool, life-generating silent world begging meditation, leaves you with the sense that you've touched an ancient, solemn, sacred place. It is here, in the Misty Mountains that the escarpment clouds perennially drip to become the pristine waters we know as Mongarlowe and Buckenbowra, sustaining platypus, quoll and vibrant birdlife.

Finally after four hours or so you come to rest, again beside the shaded Buckenbowra, this time on its pebbly shore. Welcome respite after a wonderful day-long hike.

You might want to get into your stride on one of these tracks before things start to warm up. Ron Doughton's book *Bushwalking in the Budawangs* is a helpful guide for the Monga as well, as are the Corn Trail Historical Society and the Monga NP pamphlets (NPWS) available from the Visitor Information Centre at the National Theatre in Braidwood.

Possibilities for getting out on the track are endless around here. How lucky we are that we can reap the benefits of thousands of years of Indigenous stewardship of this land and, more recently, the outcome of hard-fought battles to save these forests in perpetuity.

Beware, once you start on this bushwalking journey, the bush track will come back to find you.

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