



LEFT: JACK HIGH ABOVE CHARLEYS FOREST, ABOVE: THE SUMMIT IN SIGHT.

## A climb up Mt Currockbilly, 3396 feet high

Braidwood town has many social centres, varied and historic. Friendly gossip flows with agitated rhythm, drowned by boisterous noise of traffic bound for eastern Batemans Bay. Jilly Lane of hardened clay climbs to mountain tall. Monumental eucalypts whisper muted music; others shout a squall. Screeching white gangs of cockatoos show an upright crest of sulphur yellow to scare galahs and starlings many; then do dive into a nesting hollow. Frigid frost from yonder Southern Pole does drop his whitened frozen fog into our sunken valley cold. Mt Currockbilly looms high and lofty, does peep its distant rocky crest, then hides its face behind the brittle-minded eucalypts where magpies' throats do chat a-warbling, in half a dozen notes. Two climbers trudge with walking stick, crashing through the stunted brush and bracken brown. Trees of ancient wisdom smart, do throw their anchors wide, to splash and sink to gain a drip on mountain's rock-like soil, and then dig deep to hide. A robin with a breast of red (Petroica multicolour), does sit upon a swaying slender twig. Blue wrens do make a dancing run, with almost upright tails, twitching sideways, with nervous twiddles, to attract attention, and perhaps a mate. A solo kangaroo with blackened legs out-stretched sits upon its tail, with body warmed by rising sun. It licks its spit onto a sharpened claw of leg, then reaches for one lowered sar and gently rubs the healing balm, to stop the burning itch. And so begins the dreaded climb into a zigzag battle line, on boulders sharp and slippery. A sudden grasp of sapling strong with claw-like left-hand fingers. Gains a footing hold till balance mends the situation. We now assume the crawling gait of Aussie short-legged quadrupeds, to call a halt on 2nd ridge sublime. Another ridge, another hour, another view of distant summit yonder. Then we meet a bush 'portcullis'; a stand of closely-clumped young eucalypts, which bars our way.



JACK'S SON MURRAY.



Human siege-machine withdraws and pounds a weakened wall of bushes. At last, a shout from top of summit, means man has breached the rampart strong and planted foot where few have been. Distant farms and dams show tiny dots of cattle moving slowly, coloured black in distant haze, landscape seen in chrome oxide green, and Naples Yellow Light. Downward we must go. So with altered foot work and use of knees producing six-inch steps of stride. One's mind does change to thoughts of nobler value, but painful muscle cramps do strike, and leave you crippled without a prior warning. 'Don't move' I shout to warn my son of coiled-up snake of species copperhead a foot from where he stood. No sound about, until a freezing breeze with soothing touch does rustle leaves to end the lonely realm of eerie silence. Clouds now descend without a sound; and Mr Weatherking, renowned since Genesis began, does wake from slumber long and deep to strike his clouds to turn on taps and soak the parched land. Thus we leave this seething sea of blinding light and find a leafy path of level kind. The leaves do sparkle like distant stars at night; And hues and tones respond, From palette wide in hand, from faded green and brown, to brilliant colours from Mother Nature's box of oily paints. The close of day, which only two remember. T'is rare to live these timeless moments, and dream the mountain image distant, beside the homely heater.

Jack Featherstone, October 2017

I thank the Webb family of Braidwood District for wise advice on climbing mountains.

