

MY FIRST TIME IN THE BLUEYS

By Jemimah Narkowicz

It was my very first time at the Blue Mountains. I think what I was imagining was something that slightly resembled Mt Arapiles, Victoria – striking orange sandstone towering over the evergreen, ageless pines...just more blue. With this picture embedded in my mind, I sleepily boarded the 9 o'clock plane to Sydney.

Sydney woke me up with the rush of train stations and timetables. I almost fit in with the crowd running around spilling my coffee trying to get the last free space on the train – and I probably would have fit in if it weren't for the 30kg rucksack on my back, camera slung over my shoulder and eyes set towards the mountains. While the city is nice for a while, I was glad to see the transition from industrial to country and even better, rock.

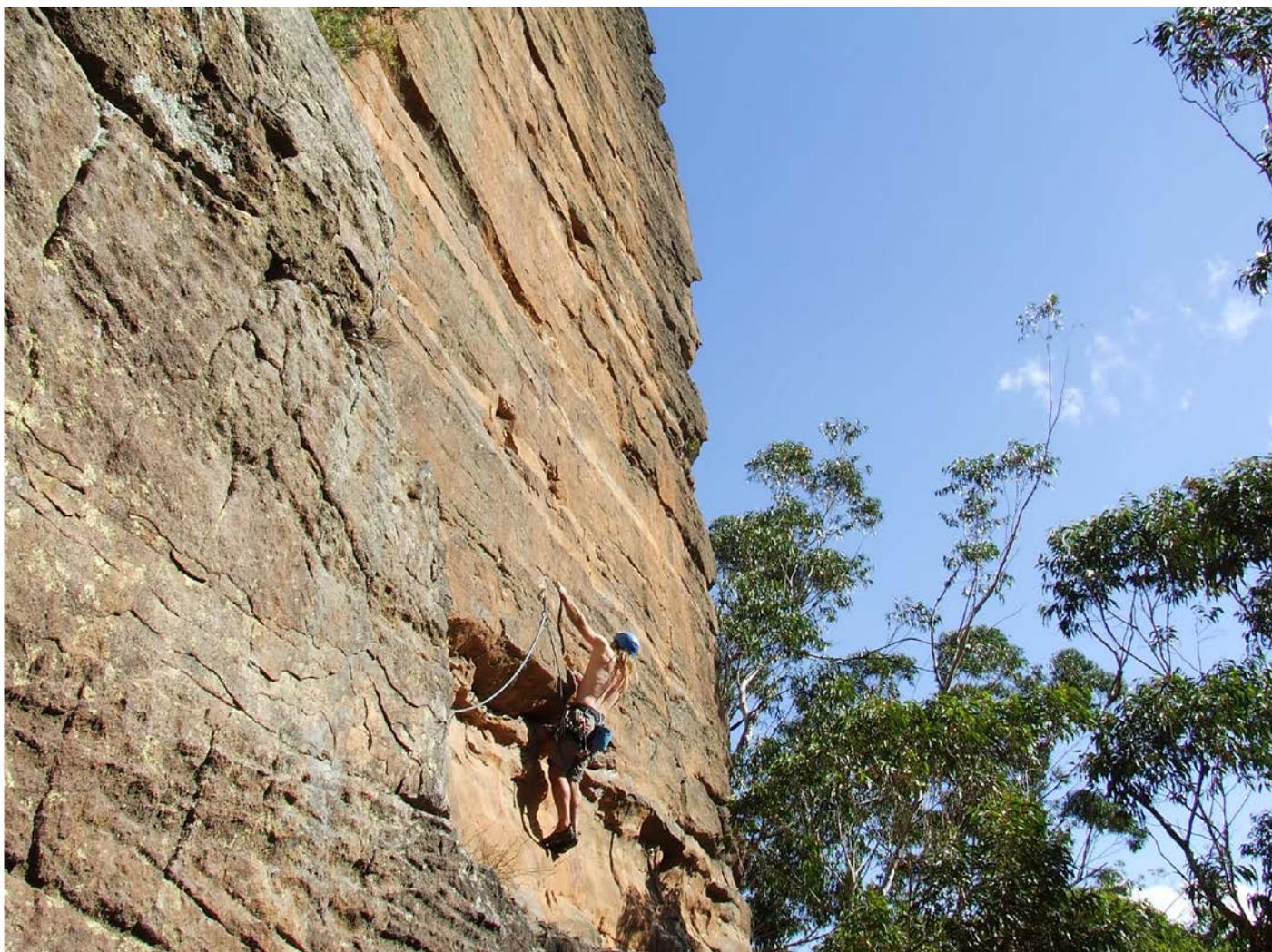
Dad, as planned was at the train station in Springwood to meet me along with Bruce and Brad Cameron. We were to be staying at their house with their beautiful family for the 2 weeks of our trip. It was so nice catching up with old and new friends and having the opportunity to be shown around the area by local legend, Bruce Cameron. Bruce has been new routing in the Bluey's since the late 70's and since then has claimed the first ascent of over 350 routes in the area. Bruce continues to pioneer new classics this very day, sharing a passion for the area and the rock with his son, Brad.



Bruce Cameron revisits a climb he was on the first ascent of in 1981, the excellent face climb of Mindblower (20) at Cosmic County.

We began the climbing holiday at Shipley Upper where I attempted Paul (Frothy) Thompsons 'Sport Climbers Challenge'. This involved not spilling my latte on the walk down to Shipley Upper. I failed the challenge tripping over a stump but decided that I wouldn't mind sticking to Trad climbing anyway. The climbing was sublime if you appreciate a grid-bolted, easy access wall with good rock and a

brilliant view. Jack High, a popular 20m 19-sport route was a great start to the day. By midday I felt as though I could fry an egg on the cliff so to escape the heat we ventured down to Porters Pass through a canyon down a weaving staircase lathered with slime from the dankness of the forest. The floor was beautifully decorated with green and twisted roots that tempted to trip anyone that was too focused on the sandstone castle rising above them. Chasing Amy, a sustained 21 with a thin crux towards the top was a pleasant end to our day.



Here's Dad leading the amazing face climb called Barbarossa (21) at Cosmic County, which I really enjoyed seconding.

Mount York was next on the agenda that we found, unsurprisingly covered in traffic. I didn't mind the extra faces though as everyone we came across told an interesting story and had a passion for climbing. I discovered a trend in many of the climbs that I was doing that day- the majority of them were steep and blank with big reaches to several horizontal breaks - very different to the gnarly cracks on the Ben that I was used to climbing in Tassie but similar in fun and challenge factor. Finding the next cliff proved an unnecessary struggle as dad thought that he knew a short cut to the crag. He didn't - resulting in an hour of bush bashing through thick, burnt scrub listening to my old man complain about how bad the approach to this cliff was - disregarding the fact that he had led us completely off track; something that I have learnt to become used to in our years of climbing together. When we finally reached the cliffs, we started up a 19 called Aunty Jack. I found the start of the route to be the crux- a strong pull over a roof to the start of a traverse. Exhibition Wall, 21, marked the end of the climbing day.

When work timetables and agendas coincided, Bruce, Brad, Dad and I took the chance to put up a new route. It surprised me just how much rock had been left untouched when it came to our choice of line. I assume that my surprise arose from the fact that if one wants to pioneer a new route in Tassie, you must scrub bash up large hills with a heavy rucksack for long hours, hoping that an unclimbed boulder might come into view, let alone a cliff. Narkocam, an attractive looking corner stretching for 3 pitches graded at 18 and 19 was the end product of a day out. Climbing an unclean, unclimbed route from the ground up was an occasional experience for myself. I have found that while repeating routes is enjoyable, it is nothing like having the new route fever.

A day was planned to venture to Pierces Pass and summit the West Face of the Mirror Ball: a 120 metre, slightly run out, four pitch route graded at 21. Brad, Dad and I each took our turn at leading a pitch of the route; placing and recollecting carrot bolts as we went. Sport climbing is well entrenched as the Bluey's most popular climbing and big cliffs such as this are not left unscarred, however, I must admit that I was glad to be clipping a bolt as I dragged myself over the crux and onto the ledge, being likened to a beached whale by my father. I can only say that I got all my technique from him.



Dad and I on the West Face of the Mirrorball (21).

Throughout the duration of the trip, I frequently found myself astonished at the diversity of each climbing area and the expanse of the mountain range. One can cruise on fun, bolted, twenty-metre routes for an hour or two, and then drive for fifteen minutes and find that they are standing in a vast canyon below a two hundred-metre face, bolt-less and begging to be attempted. For this spectacular

variety of climbing, I would return, and perhaps extend the length of the trip as two weeks left a few sights unseen and a few classics unclimbed.

My first time in the Blue Mountains was completely different to Mt Arapiles with its striking orange sandstone towering over the evergreen, ageless pines; but it was just as excellent. In two weeks we saw enough of the mountains to make us want to return quickly to its superb climbing, vast canyons and forests, unclimbed classics, beers around the fire, the best lattes ever made and of course, some truly wonderful people.



Me at the base of Eternity Crack (18) at Mt Piddington, probably my favorite climb of the trip.