

ARAPS AND GRAMPS

by Ross Weiter

ARAPILES

Arrrrr-ah-phileeees !!! Australia's best, friendliest, easiest-to-get-to-climbs & most multicultural (foreigner infested) crag !

How do you describe this place, how do you paint a picture in a few short paragraphs ? I can try, but the only way to truly understand it is to be there, to feel the place, to experience it for yourself.

Gui DeBooks

A fair insight can be gained from guidebooks. Louise Shepherd's guidebook contains all two thousand climbs as well as a good dose of history. Its shortfalls are that descriptions are sketchy and topos or route photos non-existent.

If you are staying only for a few weeks, Gordon Poultney's "selected climbs" guide (2nd ed.), while listing only 333 best climbs, has topos and pictures of most of them. It also folds in half and can be carried along in a tiny bumbag up the climbs.

If you are staying for a long time, get both guidebooks.

CAMPSITE

The campsite offers drinkable water, toilets and a choice of 3 locations: the Pines, Yellowgums and The Northern Area. They are right next to each other and all offer shady spots to lounge around in at midday.

CLIMBING

Access time to climbs is 5-30 minutes walking. Don't worry about crowds or waiting for climbs. Although in summer nearby areas such as the Organ Pipes are crawling with climbers, if you are prepared to walk or drive out to the more remote regions such as the superb Curtain Wall, you are likely to be there by yourself.

The 150 meter high crag is broken up into many individual buttresses. Although some sport routes of higher grades exist (mid-20s plus), natural protection is the go. Leading is the name of the game. Arapiles is THE ideal area to learn leading; bomber nut placements and home-made cam slots abound on the easier and moderate routes. If you can walk and lead, you can enjoy some very very specky routes; fantastic exposure can be had on many well protected ultra-classics below grade 15 (no slabs either!). Lead, and the place is your oyster. Toprope, and you will be confined to small climbs near the bottom of the main cliffs.

Too many things have happened during our stay. Being a lazy bum, I will not go into great lengths and give a blow-by-blow account of the trip. Perhaps the "postcards" below will tell some of the story.

KACHOONG

This climb is said to have been created by the ancient god, Kodak. Most climbers will recognise the picture of a lone figure hanging at the lip of this five meter roof, with nothing

but air below and Mitre Rock behind. Now...I don't want to sound like a tourist brochure but this is The Climb to do, if for sheer atmosphere alone. Well protected climbing on a big roof through massive jugs, footwork is the key to the whole thing. Back up the roof piton with a cam and go go go ! Keep hooking your toes....

Falling off the lip results in a scary swing but the piton will ensure that you clear the wall by a meter or two. (I tested this one out, to be sure that you, the discerning climbing reader, are well informed !!) However, at grade 21, expect to get pumped.

If you can't quite handle this one, *Pilot Error* is a three move grade 20 with similar Kodak positions, while being a whole lot easier.

TIPTOE RIDGE

A fantastic grade 3 (!!!) ramble; 120 meters of exposed climbing, jugging up massive holds with wind whistling through your hair. This route has atmosphere plus when done at night with headlamps. It even has its own mini summit en route, for that special alpine feel. Do take sticky boots and allow 30 minutes for a daytime solo, longer with rope.

SOCIAL LIFE

In summer, the campsite is largely populated by escapees from the European winter and weekenders from Melbourne and Adelaide. Malcolm Mattheson's Torana, (licence HB513 - Note: 5.13 is an american climbing grade which translates to grade 13 in Australia), is occasionally seen parked nearby whenever he's not in Mount Buffalo.

If you spend a few days and make yourself known, weird and wonderful characters will come out of the Pines' woodwork (literally !). Like Guy, the Swiss speed pissguzzling machine who entertained us on New Year's Eve with his incessant banging on a 44 gallon drum, a tribal beat of a climbing nation.

Like Mark, the Shiatsu guru. The mellow sounds of his Japanese flute lingered below the Voodoo Buttress, at the camp site and in front of the Coles supermarket in Horseshit (ehm... Horsham), much to the delight of the locals.

Like Stu, the Adelaide treeclimber whose on-sight of a stout pine provided a suitable pre-amble to New Year's festivities.

THE NATI PUB

Here are some good reasons why the Natimuk pub may not serve you a counter meal:

- (i) no meals on public holidays,
- (ii) no cook - can happen any time,
- (iii) you are too early, ie. before 7 pm, or
- (iv) you are too late, ie. after 8:30 pm.

When we finally scored a meal after five attempts, this was a triumphant victory to sheer bloody persistence !!

Luckily, fish and chips can be procured through the adjoining deli and consumed inside the pub so don't despair, OK ? Warning - if your pure vegetarian heart is set on a salad roll, prepare to be disappointed as salad shortages often occur in Natimuk. When Kath found that she could not get a pub meal **and** there was no salad for rolls in the deli, she burst into tears, cursed Natimuk to climbing hell (ie. Eucla) and ran back for 9 km all the way to camp site.

Food notwithstanding, two pool tables, an up-to-date juke box and Carlton Light/Draft on tap (yum !) provided ample entertainment. While leaning drunkenly against the

establishment's walls, check out Simon Carter's specky photographs.

ze KLIMBINK.....

Whut ? You want to hear about climbing ?aw rite...herez a selection of our favourites, give them a go (there are LOTS of others):

Tiptoe Ridge (3,130m) a fantastic ramble, often done at night

The Bard (12,120m) a magnificent route winding through hostile terrain, by far the most popular climb at Araps so get up early

Muldoon (13, 50m) sweet, steep juggling with superb exposure on second pitch

Brolga (16, 115m) exciting frictioning up a massive slab

Entertainer (18, 35m) this climb has all the moves, definitely visit the Curtain Wall for this one.

Gilt Edged (18, 40m) classy technical climbing with 3 cruxes

Morfydd (19, 30m) simply the best 19, sustained, sustained and sustained, killer fingerlocks and sublime bridging

Judgement Day (19/20, 70m) a girdle traverse made in heaven, all shaded on hot days.

Quo Vadis (20, 30m) high up on the Bluffs, this one features exposure, pumpy underclings and a back jam ! Start is the crux.

Kachoong (21, 25m) the Kodak roof

Comic Relief (21,40m) another sustained Curtain Wall classic, with a manky looking bulge. The crux is before it.

Scorpion Corner (22, 20m) pull through the overlap, then keep bridging like crazy while shaking out to beat the pump. Slither to the top on you belly or, if you have the guns and gear left, continue straight up **Scorpion** (18, 20m), or do as a separate pitch. The bottomless chimney at the start of Scorpion is said to be the climbing equivalent of the shower scene from "Psycho".

Have A Good Flight (25, 20m) crimp and edge your way up this sport route, make sure that you know exactly where the route is, or you'll end up on Jetlag (28) !! A spiderman's pumpfest.

GRAMPIANS

When we finally got tired of the camaraderie, easy access and cold beer of Arapiles, Jon and I decided to get "serious" (ie. suffer a bit) and headed off to the bushy Grampians.

The newly opened Stapylton Campground has running water, clean toilets and swanky tent sites, providing an ideal base camp to explore the environs. The closest crags are **Summer Day Valley**, **Hollow Mountain** and **Mt.Stapylton**.

First, we made a brief visit to **Summer Day Valley** but after a couple of climbs dismissed it as too urbane. The stomped out bush and 20-30 meter climbs were not what we came here for.

Alan then gave us a guided tour of **Hollow Mountain** "highlights", featuring the very very spectacular **Sandinista** (22/23). If you have Bill Andrews' Northern Grampians Guidebook, note the inspirational cover photo of Peter Croft, hanging out at an overlap near the top, wild hair blowing in the wind !! We dismissed this one as too bloody hard, soft pink city wooses that we are. Maybe next time.

Over the following four days we climbed like buggery: in the **Amphitheatre**, at **Asses Ears** and at **Mt Fox**. The latter two involve a half hour walk in with light bushbashing - a standard approach to Gramps' classics, apparently. If you decide to visit, here are our impressions of some of the climbs. Note that this is but a tiny sample, there are dozens of other great areas further south (eg. Mt Rosea and the Bundaleer) and hundreds of other brilliant routes.

The Navigator (21,105m) is a good outing up the Green Wall at Stapylton, easily located in Kieran Loughlans new guidebook, (has photos). Ignore the first pitch and the contrived direct start to the second pitch, it is better to traverse in from the right. The awful bottomless crack on the last pitch can be avoided by going 8m further right and pulling through an overhang on jugs (trend left).

The **Taipan Wall** at Stapylton must be visited, if only to gawk at the beautiful orange rock which gently overhangs for 80 meters. Although the easiest whole route is graded 26 (yikes !!!), several routes have manageable first pitches. We did the first pitches of **Sirocco** (21) and **The Seventh Banana** (22/23), both fantastic climbs on their own right. On the left edge of Taipan Wall, **Tokyo Rose** (18, 50m) and **Atomic Tadpole** (20, 50m) provide a suitable warm-up. Tokyo Rose is best finished directly up the headwall some 5m left of A.T., not further left as described in the guidebook, thus avoiding some very crumbly rock.

On the top of Stapylton is the Red Wall, with a Kodak climb called **Golden Showers and...**etc etc (*hey, this is a family magazine !*, 20, 15m). here, you can stick your head through an arete (!). This make one of the quirkiest photographs I have ever seen !!

The **Asses Ears** summits are 20 minutes away from the Stapylton Campground by car and the climbs to do here are **Le Petite Mort** (19, 90m) and **Tryptych** (22, 50m). I found out why the first climb is called "little death

" when I placed 6 runners in 50 meters on the second pitch..... but - it was worth it. The second pitch is spectacular overhanging climbing on huge jugs. Beware of crumbly rock !

Mount Fox features THE climb of the Grampians. **Twentieth Century Fox** (20, 50m) is a sustained journey up the fabled "silver screen". The hand crack start is sure to wake you up - it woke me up when I forgot how to jam and fell off it....

If you get tired of death march approaches, **Black Ian's Rocks** are worth looking at (get new guidebook). There you can practice crack climbing on some teen-grade classics.

And beer ? Well, if the amber fluid runs out or the Ryvita supply looks desperately low, head back to Horsham 30 km away for a resupply. While there, visit the Baghdad Cafe and say hello to Greg, its morose owner.

If you are interested, a return airfare to Melbourne will set you back \$500, from there you can bus it and train it to Arapiles as was explained by **Pete Hickey** in the last issue. For the Grampians though, there is no way around it, you must have a car.

Enjoy !