

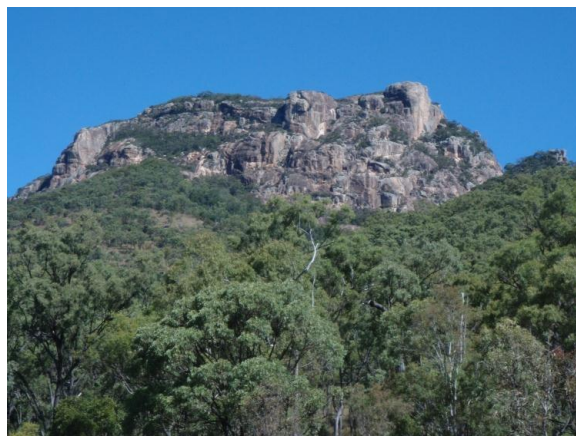
COMBINED CLUBS CAMP - Fri 4 – Mon 8 May, 2012 – BIGGENDEN

May Day weekends have always been reserved for the Combined Clubs campout rotated between (in recent times) Bundaberg, Gladstone and Capricornia clubs. And until this year, there was always something else that I was committed to going to. So when the 2012 Camp was announced as being at Biggenden – a town I had driven through many times admiring the mountains but never getting a chance to stop – it was too good to pass up.

As a first-time attendee, I had a bit of learning to do. Firstly, the number of attendees was a surprise – over 100 which makes this easily the largest bushwalking event I have ever been to. Then there was their requirement to decide what walks you wanted to do from a menu of options. And there were so many options. The Capricornia Club had more members in attendance than any other club but there were so many walk options that we weren't bumping into each other all that often.

For me as a first-time walker around Biggenden, the 'must dos' were Mt Walsh and Mt Woowoonga ... which only left one other walking slot for me which I allocated to the Monday morning bird watching session. Mt Woowoonga is part of a group of mountains just north of Biggenden dominated by the local television transmission towers. After driving through some local roads, you arrive at a small picnic area with a well constructed track to the summit. It might be well constructed but it was still quite steep and got the pulse going nicely. The terrain is mostly vine scrub to rainforest breaking to a more open brush box vegetation at the summit feeling not unlike the Berserkers. And like Berserker peaks, the views from the top were a little restricted by the timber but in the clear air, Hervey Bay was comfortably visible.

Sunday was set down for Mt Walsh – the large bluff of a mountain dominating the view to the south of Biggenden. While only the lower sections of the climb are constructed, there is more than enough traffic up the mountain to make the path very obvious. While the air was a little less clear, the views from the top were breathtaking – both of the surrounding countryside and the Wedge Tailed Eagle and Peregrine Falcon circling us around the summit. It's quite a different world up there with heath-like vegetation hanging on in the gaps in the rock with lots of flowers and orchids. One of the guides brought along details of the geo-cache on the summit and it was quickly located and the log book signed.



Mt Walsh near Biggenden

We were back down to Biggenden shortly after lunch so with an afternoon to spare, I went for a drive out to Coalstoun Lakes National Park – another location that walkers were going to but I couldn't fit in my menu. The Falcon was not the best vehicle to take in there as it was a bit lacking in clearance so I ended up doing a bit more walking than most. Coalstoun Lakes are volcanic craters from comparatively recent eruptions – only 600,000 years old. See a brochure on the mountains at - <http://qld.gsa.org.au/BBCoalst.pdf>. The main lake had quite a bit of water in it which I understand is historically very unusual but to be expected given recent weather. The outside of the volcano has been cleared for farming but the inside is heavily covered in vine scrub and is National Park.

Sunday night saw the walkers descend on the Commercial Hotel for a combined evening meal – I don't think they really knew what hit them to be honest. Once back to the camping ground at the Showgrounds, we gathered for some formal presentations including an inspiring talk by Moira Thompson about engaging local teenagers and bringing the local community into contact with Mt Walsh and all it has to offer. Forest Mountain Rescue (FMR) gave an excellent background on the role they play in bushwalker safety in southeast Queensland. And then an inordinate amount of loot was handed out with much of it heading back to the Rockhampton region.

Monday morning was a more sedate affair with a drive around some of the local birding spots just to the northeast of town. Quite country roads and lagoons nicely full had plenty of birds with some particularly cooperative Scarlet Honeyeaters feeding on mistletoe blossoms probably being the highlight. And I was made to promise that there would be a birding option at the Combined Camp 2013.

Steve