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Beyond the Cotter

Allan J. Mortlock and Klaus Huenke

Day adventures by car from Canberra to the Brindabella Mountains and beyond.

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Extract and photograph from Childhood at Brindabella by Miles Franklin and ‘Brindabella’ from Selected Poems by Douglas Stewart are reprinted by permission of Angus & Robertson Publishers.
Introduction

To a proportion of visitors to Canberra, and indeed some locals also, the well-known Cotter Reserve with its swimming and picnic facilities is the beginning and end of outdoor recreation for the inhabitants of the National Capital. This is far from the truth, for beyond the Cotter lie the green and beautiful Brindabella Mountains which contain many delightful spots easily reached by car in a day. Here there are other and different opportunities to fish, swim, ski (in season) or simply enjoy the tranquil forest scene. In the valley of the Goodradigbee River itself is further fascination and some intriguing history, for two well-known Australian writers, Miles Franklin and Gwen Meredith, have connections with this area.

To the south-west of the Brindabella Mountain Range lie Cooleman Plain and Long Plain. Along the Long Plain Road is to be found the source of the Murrumbidgee River and, eventually, Yarrangobilly with its caves and thermal pools. Finally, to the near north of Tantangara Reservoir are some interesting mountain huts, other caves, waterfalls, and the striking beauty spot known as Blue Water Hole. This region contains rather wilder country for the more adventuresome to explore.

The purpose of this book is to document aspects of this wide area beyond the Cotter with story and illustration, and so to open it up to those who would like to look a little further afield than the familiar well-manicured picnic areas which lie close to home.
Note on maps

Readers of this book will notice that regular reference is made to numbered map sheets at the beginning of individual chapters. While the descriptions of how to reach the points of interest have been so detailed as to minimise the need for maps, nevertheless they can be of great help if doubt does arise.

The maps referred to are part of the 1:100 000 National Topographic Map Series produced by the Commonwealth Division of National Mapping in Canberra. They are presently available from the Government Bookshop in London Circuit, Civic Centre, Canberra, some commercial bookshops, and elsewhere by phoning the Division of National Mapping itself (97 4022).

A double-sided map sheet that incorporates all or part of a number of the individual numbered sheets is the 1:100 000 Natmap Sheet of the ACT (2nd Edition, 1976). This tends to be more easily available than the others mentioned and covers the whole of the ACT including some of the area over the western border with NSW. As a substantial part of the whole region covered in this book is included in this particular map sheet its purchase is recommended.

In the later sections the only map references possible are to Central Mapping Authority (CMA) of NSW 1:25 000 maps.
Warning note

Some of the roads which have to be traversed to reach the places described in this book are relatively rough. Care should therefore be taken when difficult sections come into view ahead. Always drive slowly in such cases, watch for any rocks which might hole a sump, and keep a wary eye out for oncoming traffic if the road is narrow and winding. Be sure your vehicle is in good running order lest a breakdown isolate you in difficult country with little passing traffic. Leave a message at home before setting out.

Winter conditions can make some of the roads in the high country quite impassable due to snow and slippery mud. This should always be kept in mind when setting out on the longer journeys. In high summer when bush fire danger may also be present some of the bush roads will be barred by means of locked gates. Do not attempt to enter the area in these circumstances.

It has also to be said that no responsibility whatsoever is accepted for any inconvenience, injuries due to accidents, or other untoward events which may arise out of the use of the information given in this book.
Brindabella

Once on a silver and green day, rich to remember,
When thick over sky and gully rolled winter's grey wave
And one lost magpie was straying on Brindabella
I heard the mountain talking in a tall green cave
Between the pillars of the trees and the moss below;
It made no sound but talked to itself in snow.

All the white words were falling through the timber
Down from the old grey thought to the flesh of rock
And some were of silence and patience, and spring after winter,
Tidings for leaves to catch and roots to soak,
And most were of being the earth and floating in space
Alone with its weather through all the time there is.

Then it was, struck with wonder at this soliloquy,
The magpie lifting his beak by the frozen fern
Sent out one ray of a carol, softened and silvery,
Strange through the trees as sunlight's pale return,
Then cocked his black head and listened, hunched from the cold,
Watching that white whisper fill his green world.

Douglas Stewart
The Near Brindabellas

The Bullen Range

*Map reference: Brindabella Map Sheet 8627 (Edition 1), 1:100 000, 788 847.*

A pleasantly demanding walk may be had along the ridge of the Bullen Range which borders the Murrumbidgee River to the west of Canberra not far from the Cotter Dam. From this ridge there are panoramic views of the Murrumbidgee River and the grazing properties which border its eastern shore.

From the Cotter Kiosk turn left and drive along the Paddy's River Road until the well-known developed picnic spot at Murray's Corner is reached. For the visitor, this spot is on the left a few hundred metres past a large sand quarry on the right at a sharp bend in the road. The total distance from the Cotter Kiosk is approximately 8 kilometres.

Ford the river at Murray's Corner using the concreted crossing and immediately turn right driving along the dirt road which parallels the river going upstream. There is a gate on this road just past a group of brick fire places. If this is locked your car must be parked here. If not, it is possible to drive a further kilometre or so until the edge of the pine forest on the left is reached.

At this point a rough forest road leads up to the top of the main ridge of the Bullen Range. The road is steep and runs parallel to the edge of the pine forest. You will know you are on the right track for, by looking back over your shoulder as you rise up, you will see directly behind you the collimation tower of the Tidbinbilla Deep Space Tracking Station topping Black Hill on the opposite side.
Distant view of the Murrumbidgee through the trees from the top of the Bullen Range
of the Paddy's River Road.

At the top of the ridge you will meet a fence line. Proceed along this to your right following a faint foot track. This track at first falls and then rises. You may follow it for a kilometre or so looking to your left at the glimpses of the Murrumbidgee through the trees. At a convenient point move down the slope towards the river a short distance, choosing a spot with good views, have lunch or a snack and rest a while. Quite likely some kangaroos will come bounding by, giving an indication of the seclusion of the spot.

Return to your car the way you came, taking care not to stumble on the steep slope of the original forest road which led you up beside the pine plantation. You should feel physically fitter for the extra exertions associated with this walk.

The whole round-trip, drive and walk, should take no more than an unhurried afternoon to accomplish.

Mount Blundell

Map reference: Brindabella Map Sheet 8627
(Edition 1), 1: 100 000, 682 925.

A short but steep walk with good views at the top is to the summit of Mount Blundell in the near Brindabella Mountains.

Drive out of Canberra along the Cotter Road and turn off just before reaching the Cotter Reserve along the road to Uriarra. At Uriarra turn left and proceed along Brindabella Road. Approximately 1 kilometre before this road crosses Condor Creek you will see a forest road leading off at an angle to the right. The gradient is sharply upward into the trees and there is a gate which may or may not be closed. If it is closed and locked, it is suggested that the trip be abandoned as it will then be too long on foot. This forest road is known as the Old Mine Road.
If it is possible to pass this point then proceed slowly and carefully in your car for 4 kilometres. The road is rough and rocky in places and you should be confident in your vehicle.

When the road eventually levels out there is a meeting together of four road tracks in all. The steep one on your immediate left leads to the top of Mount Blundell. Park your car here and proceed upwards on foot, pausing for breath every now and then to look at the vista which is opening up behind you. The top is flat and relatively uninteresting, but you have climbed this mountain which was there!

*The turn-off to Mount Blundell from the Brindabella Road*
After lunch at the top proceed down the way you have come, being careful not to stumble and fall on the steep slope. The round trip including a goodly rest at the top should take no more than an afternoon. If it is high summer the morning might be better.

For those who would prefer a less adventuresome drive to the starting point for this mountain climb, take instead the Blue Range Road which branches off to the right from the Brindabella Road on the outward journey from Canberra approximately 5 kilometres past the T-junction at Uriarra homestead. Two kilometres after passing under a high tension power line at the beginning this relatively smooth forest road comes to the Blue Range Hut and its associated picnic area which are described in *Rambles Around Canberra*, (ANU Press 1977). After a further rather switchback-like 3.5 kilometres it meets the Old Mine Road at the place which has already been suggested for parking your car (map reference 694 921).

**Condor Creek and the Six Fords**

*Map reference: Brindabella Map Sheet 8627 (Edition 1), 1:100 000, 694 896.*

A unique collection of pleasant picnic spots with, perhaps, an opportunity for a little fishing can be found beside Condor Creek in the region close to where this stream crosses the Brindabella Road.

To reach the area take the Uriarra Road which branches off from the Cotter Road from Canberra just before it reaches the Cotter Reserve. Follow this to Uriarra and then take the left arm of the T-junction, the Brindabella Road, for about 8 kilometres to the white-painted bridge over Condor Creek. (This is soon to be replaced by a concrete and iron bridge nearby.)
Approximately 1.6 kilometres before reaching this bridge on the left side of the Brindabella Road is Condor Hut, easily missed if you drive too fast. There is a pleasant prepared place to park here and Condor Creek itself is only a short walk away past the hut and down a gentle slope. The hut itself was used as a forestry camp in the early 1930s and in the later 1940s for immigrants. It is surrounded by Radiata pines planted in 1933.

Continuing 0.8 kilometres past the bridge over Condor Creek, take a side road which curves down to the right through a gate. There is an acute-angled fork 0.3 kilometres past this point which takes one down to another pleasantly green and flat parking and picnic area beside the creek just upstream of the bridge.

Should you not take this particular fork continue instead along a forest road for another 0.4 kilometres when you will reach yet another junction. Take the right fork here which itself curves away to the right through the trees and proceed for a further 1.9 kilometres ignoring any cross tracks until you reach the first of six fords across the creek.
If there has not been any heavy rain there is no difficulty in crossing here in your car. Park off the forest road on the other side and proceed on foot. The next ford is but a few metres away and on reaching it look upstream at the small gauging dam built there to measure the flow of the creek.

Wade across the creek here and follow the forest track to two or three more fords. There are several pleasant spots to stop here and, indeed, it is possible to slosh along the stream bed rather than follow the forest tracks if the trail-bikers happen to be annoying that day. The water is crystal clear and the surroundings green and cool even on a very hot day. A good map to the area is to be found in Rambles Around Canberra, (ANU Press 1977), p. 61. There are other fords to be found, for example, much further upstream past Blundell’s Flat. However, the present six fords are concentrated within a small area.

Although Condor Creek at present seems to be fished out, this may not continue to be the case. Should the situation change take your gear along and look for native fish and rainbow trout. Remember it is best to fish upstream in pools using, say, grasshoppers for bait. No live bait is to be employed. The official season is from October to May inclusive. The closed season, naturally, is from June to September to allow for breeding. No licence is required for fishing in the ACT.

The best time to try your luck is before nine in the morning or after four in the afternoon. Spinning gear is recommended for the experienced fisherman.

The Two Sticks Road to Mount Coree

Map reference: Brindabella Map Sheet 8627 (Edition 1), 1:100 000, 645 912.

Piccadilly Circus is a meeting together of four roads at the top of the Brindabella Range. It may be reached from
Canberra via the Cotter Road, then the Mount Mac-Donald Road to Uriarra, and finally the Brindabella Road — see the fuller description in the later chapter on the Mount Franklin Chalet. The smallest road at this junction is the Two Sticks Road which leads north along the ridge of the Brindabella Range. There is a story that this road is named after an old fellow (‘Paddy Two Sticks’) who walked these parts in times past with the help of two sticks.

Mount Coree in evening light

This road is narrow and uneven and should only be attempted by those who are good drivers and have confidence in their vehicle. It does not, however, require a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Beware of heavy rain as one section can become very boggy after this.
Aerial view of Piccadilly Circus: the road junction at bottom right
Proceed carefully along this way from Piccadilly Circus for approximately 5 kilometres. At this point there is an open space and the towering bulk of Mount Coree looms on the right or eastern side of the road. This peak is located on the border of New South Wales and the ACT and is 1421 metres high. There is a story that its name derives from the Aboriginal word ‘Cori’ for the Bogong Moth which was much sought after for food. It is possible to leave one’s car here and climb to the summit, but this is only for those who like to scramble. If this is not you, then continue for another 1.5 kilometres, when a road track leading off to the right will appear.

Follow this for another 1.5 kilometres, until it begins to climb the northern shoulder of Mount Coree. At this point park your car off the track and proceed on foot up the winding rough road track which leads to the summit. There are stories that a VW Beetle was once driven right to the top, and the writer took a sturdy HR Holden to within two hundred metres of this point. Normally, however, the final stretch should only be attempted by a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Far better to have the exercise by proceeding on foot.

Emerging on the small summit plateau one first passes a photo-electric solar energy collection panel mounted on a post which charges the batteries of a radio transmitter in the fire tower. At the other end of the plateau is the trig station itself and the fire tower. From here there is a truly magnificent 360-degree panorama of the surrounding hills and valleys, making Mount Coree one of the best viewing points in the whole Brindabella Range.

If the wind is not too strong this is a good place to lunch before returning the way you have come. It is possible to continue north and then east along the Two Sticks Road back to Uriarra Homestead. Refer to your map to avoid taking a wrong turning if you decide to take this way home.
Moonlight Hollow and the Bendora Hut

Map reference: Brindabella Map sheet 8627 (Edition 1), 1:100 000, 629 784.

On the main ridge of the Brindabella Mountains west of Canberra not far from Bulls Head are two pleasant walks of widely different lengths and both with the interest of the same delightful arboretum at the end.

Bulls Head survival shelter

After driving up to the main ridge from Canberra by turning off the Cotter Road and then following the Mount MacDonald and the Brindabella Roads to Piccadilly Circus, take the Mount Franklin Road to Bulls Head settlement. The latter may be recognised by the small collection of buildings on the right of the road approximately 4 kilometres south from Piccadilly Circus. One of these is an attractive new stone and wood shelter while the others are much older weatherboard buildings which are usually barred.

If you would like to undertake the longer walk of approximately 10 kilometres (one way) park your car here and proceed on foot down the Bendora Road which leads off the east directly opposite the buildings just described. After about half a kilometre you will come to a little used bush road on your right known as
Moonlight Hollow Road. There was a dilapidated sign to this effect lying in the bushes when the writer was last there, but this could easily have disappeared since. Take this road along through its many turns and ups and downs for perhaps 8 kilometres. The surrounding bush scene is tranquil and glimpses of distant hills are visible through the trees as you proceed.

This way eventually takes the walker back to the Mount Franklin Road to the point south of Bulls Head settlement where the shorter walk referred to earlier begins.

*The Bendora Hut*
The best strategy is to use two cars if the longer walk is attempted. One of these is parked at Bulls Head, the other at the junction of Moonlight Hollow and the Mount Franklin Road. This will avoid the need to retrace your steps to Bulls Head either back along Moonlight Hollow or the Mount Franklin Road itself.

For those who have opted for the shorter walk only, the junction of Moonlight Hollow and the Mount Franklin Road is approximately 6 kilometres south from the Bulls Head settlement. Park your car here some metres in away from the occasionally busy Mount Franklin Road. Facing east with your back to the Mount Franklin Road take the right-hand fork known as Chalet Road (but unmarked) which leads slightly upwards at this point. The left-hand fork, which goes downwards, is the southern end of Moonlight Hollow.

Proceed along this for perhaps a kilometre until a 'No Through Road' sign comes into view. Down to the right behind this is the Bendora Hut. This old building of corrugated iron and wood was originally transported from Yarralumla in 1946 and used by the workers who tended the nearby arboretum. In 1966 it was renovated by the Uriarra foresters.

Have your lunch here and inspect the graffiti on the inner walls, which seem to be preoccupied with the cold of the place in winter, or proceed the hundred metres or so further on along the track which leads past the hut to the arboretum. Here on the right day with blue sky above and green grass below among the separate stands of trees so different one from the other, it is possible to have a most delightful picnic.

The arboretum itself is still providing useful information on such matters as tree growth and adaptability. It includes plantings as early as 1940 and as late as 1958. Seed used came from places as far apart as California, Denmark, India and Corsica. The tree stands are labelled for those who would like to know more.
A day's excursion by car to the Canberra Alpine Club's Chalet, which is close to the summit of Mount Franklin on the main ridge of the Brindabella Range, is rewarding in diverse ways. First the drive itself, although mostly over dirt roads, is compensatingly rich in the variety of the passing scene. At the beginning, after travelling out of Canberra along the Cotter Road, there is the high-level crossing of the Murrumbidgee River near the confluence of this river with the Cotter River. The marked turn-off to Uriarra, the Mount MacDonald Road, which is made just before reaching the Cotter Reserve, leads one into different country with the beginnings of a pine forest on both sides of the road and backward glimpses of the aluminium telescope domes of Mount Stromlo.

At the T-junction adjacent to the green-roofed Uriarra Homestead, so nicely situated beside its large ponds or dams, take the left arm of the junction and proceed along Brindabella Road through pine and eucalypt forest until, at the top of the main ridge, you come to the four-ways known as Piccadilly Circus, unfortunately, at the time of writing, not marked. On the way some splendid vistas of distant Canberra have been passed on the left.

At this point take the marked ridge road to Mount Franklin with orange snow poles lining the way. This is narrow in parts so take care in case of on-coming traffic. Approximately 4 kilometres along this road one comes to the settlement at Bull's Head, a good place to stop for a break. Proceed further along the Mount Franklin Road for approximately 14 kilometres. The turn-off is not marked and is on the left and easily missed: refer carefully to your map.

Only a few hundred metres then separates you from the green-painted chalet building where your car may be
The Alpine Club was formed in 1934, partly due to the enthusiasm of Charles Lene Poole who was experimenting with the use of Australian (Brindabella) timber for skis. The chalet or lodge was built over the period 1936 to 1938. The construction was begun by club members but completed by Warren McDonald at a cost of approximately $1500. In the early 1950s the Alpine Club was the only active outdoor club operating in Canberra and there were separate committees catering for bushwalking and caving as well as skiing. In 1957 and the years soon after, membership grew from 80 to 200: this was during the presidency of Alan Bagnall.

In 1956 there was more than a metre of snow and in 1936 two metres. In more recent times the depth of the snow has been much less although 1977 was a good year. The chalet at Mount Franklin has 28 beds. The present joining fee is stated to be $100 and there is an annual fee of $24. Prospective new members can contact the Alpine Club secretary through their Canberra address (GPO Box 64, Canberra ACT 2600). Other lodges operated by the club are at Perisher and Jindabyne, which are reached via Cooma.
Sixteenth century Lapp hunters on skis

After parking your car near the chalet proceed on foot up the sloped track for about 1 kilometre to the summit of Mount Franklin, which is marked by a trig station. Even on a hot summer’s day the air is usually clear and crisp and the view to the distant parts of the mountain area to the west and south-west is far-reaching and splendid.

Three-quarters of the way along this track, a small distance down on the right-hand or eastern side, lies the main ski-run. It is possible to walk down this to a small hut at the bottom and make one’s way back to the chalet by a lower track.

It should be clear from what has been said that the excursion described is intended for the summer months. In the depths of winter, with significant snow cover, road access to the chalet may be severely restricted. Only those who know the area well and are familiar with the particular hazards it presents in winter should attempt a visit under these conditions.
Valley of the Goodradigbee

The valley of the Goodradigbee, so pleasant in itself and so full of interest, may be reached from Canberra after a drive up and over the Brindabella Range mostly along unsealed roads and lasting about one hour. It should be avoided during or after heavy rain and particularly in the snow season. Under these conditions it is possible to become bogged or trapped on the other side of the range because of impassable roads. Otherwise there are no real difficulties if you drive with care and are prepared to put up with a surface which is badly eroded in spots.
The general directions out of Canberra and up to Piccadilly Circus are as already given for the ‘Near Brindabellas’. From the top of the range proceed down steadily, keeping an eye out for on-coming vehicles as the road is narrow and there is no safety fence. The valley, which is cleared and sparsely dotted with homesteads has a classic pastoral appearance, and comes into view for the first time close to where a major power transmission line crosses the road down. From there it is only about 2 kilometres to the floor. At this point there is a road immediately on your left which parallels the river and leads upstream. In front, over the small bridge which spans the river are two roads. To the left is Long Plain Road, which leads upstream and eventually to Kiandra. The other, an extension of Brindabella Road is the right-hand fork and leads in due course to Tumut.

_Flea Creek_
Flea Creek


Flea Creek is a unique beauty spot on the Goodradigbee River which may be reached from Canberra by car in approximately two hours. After coming down from Piccadilly Circus and just before reaching the small bridge over the river notice the last gate in the fence line on the right. This gives access to a rough bush road which leads to Flea Creek. This gate has a sign on it about fire trails which might deter the timid. However, if one keeps in mind one's responsibilities to the surrounding bushland in case of fire, there seems no reason for not using it. The Natmap of the ACT referred to above suggests that this gate may sometimes be locked. If this is so it means a not unreasonable and, in fact, quite pleasant medium grade 5-kilometre walk. Otherwise a careful driver of a larger car or four-wheel-drive vehicle may negotiate the sometimes deeply eroded bush road to the final goal. Owners of small cars are not advised to attempt to drive the last section of the journey but to park at the gate and take the walk.

I was last there during a long dry spell and the water in the creek itself was well down. For this reason we walked on the hundred metres or so to the junction with the still strong-flowing Goodradigbee. Here the water is clear and cool and the trees shade the area beautifully. There are rocks to sit on, small cascades to watch, and many places to paddle, picnic, or camp.

A small core of long-time Canberra residents knows of the unique beauty of this area and every new visitor seems to react the same way to its still unspoilt charm. Remember, therefore, if you go there to depart 'leaving behind nothing but your footprints'.
Miles Franklin and Brindabella

Miles Franklin, famous Australian writer, was born in 1879 at Talbingo station, Talbingo NSW. Her father became the owner of Brindabella station on the Goodradigbee river near Canberra and she subsequently moved there to spend most of her first ten years growing up in the distinctive semi-isolated mountain valley atmosphere of the time.

In her well-known and thoroughly delightful account of this period, Childhood at Brindabella, she says: ‘No other spot has ever replaced the hold on my affections or imagination of my birthplace, nor are any other incidents so clearly and tenderly etched in my memory as those connected with it’.

We can assume that these sentiments carry over from her real birthplace to Brindabella station. Written over twenty-five years ago this volume is now an Australian classic and should be read by every one of us who calls this country ‘home’.

For the overseas visitor, one needs to say that Miles Franklin is, perhaps, best remembered for My Brilliant Career and All That Swagger although there were several other books of note as well. The first of the two books just mentioned was written at the age of twenty and is an unsophisticated writing showing a strong love of the Australian countryside. Because some of the characters depicted in it could possibly be linked with living friends and relatives its publication caused some embarrassment. Miles Franklin, sensitive to this, directed that it not be republished until ten years after her death. This took place in Sydney in 1954, close to her seventy-fifth birthday.

The second book, a story of the rise and fall of the squattocracy in the pioneering days, was awarded the
Prior Memorial Prize in 1936.

Not far from the main road entrance to the Koorabri property but opposite this and about 500 metres across a paddock on elevated ground near the river is a pile of overgrown stones. This is all that remains of the original home where Miles Franklin spent those first happy years.
There is great attraction in the universal but gentle sadness of the final words of Childhood at Brindabella:

'Goodbye, young thing, perhaps as much a mirage as a reality. Go back into the box of imagination and memory where you belong with those rare people who have retired to that baffling country — the past, lost for ever except in the frail inconsequential stories. Farewell happy childhood!'

The day I was there taking photographs the sky was blue, the grass underfoot a tender green, and the river sang its rippling gurgling song as it swept along between deeply cut banks. No need then for sadness but to think instead of the many joyful events that must have taken place close by when Miles Franklin was a young girl growing up surrounded by such rural beauty.

Koorabri

Map reference: Brindabella Map Sheet 8627
(Edition 1), 1:100 000, 562 739.

Koorabri is a private property owned by Mr F. Smith and his family, at the southern end of the valley of the Goodradigbee in the Brindabella Mountains. It is described here because of its beauty and historical connections and because it is sometimes possible to rent accommodation there. This can take the form of simply furnished separate lodges or, occasionally, the original old homestead. It should be particularly noted that there is little capacity for day trippers and prospective visitors who fall into this category should ensure that they are expected before undertaking the long journey from Canberra.

After having made appropriate arrangements with the owners to stay or simply visit, drive out of Canberra up to Piccadilly Circus on top of the Brindabella Range and down to the floor of the valley on the other side. Then take the road on your left which parallels the river on the
eastern or Canberra side and passes a number of pleasant picnic or camping spots along the way. Proceed steadily for approximately 6 kilometres passing through at least two gates until an old white refrigerator comes into view on your left. This is the fence line which borders the road and there is a gate adjacent to it which gives access to a private road leading eventually to Koorabri.

The Goodradigbee curls around and through Koorabri which is situated adjacent to the Bimberi Wilderness Area of the Kosciusko National Park and is a wildlife refuge. It is possible to ford the river if there has not been too much rain. However, because the crossing is deceptive, and because of the possibility of damage to the ford itself, it is recommended that you park your car on this side of the river. There is a suspension bridge which provides separate foot access, but particular care should be exercised when using this because of the simplicity of the structure.
Suspension bridge leading over the Goodradigbee into Koorabri

The Goodradigbee is renowned for trout fishing and the property has long been known as a base for the keen fly fisherman.

There are several pleasant places along the river where a quite delightful swim may be had in warm weather. In spring the daffodils come out to make a splendid show near the trees on the green flats beside the bubbling water.

There is a history here of gold mining and a long water sluice follows the stream for some distance as a reminder of those distant days. Gwen Meredith, the writer of the two very famous radio serials ‘Blue Hills’ and ‘The Lawsons’ had a long association with the previous owners, the Bluetts, and the unique Swiss-style log cabin on high ground was built for her. Many episodes of the much-loved ‘Blue Hills’ were written here and include some of the atmosphere of the surroundings and people. This serial began in February 1949 and finished on 30 September 1976, 5795 episodes later. It was a sequel to ‘The Lawsons’ which began in 1943 and ran for five years.
The Long Plain Road to Kiandra and Yarrangobilly

The Passing Scene

The turn-off to Rules Point and Kiandra is immediately on the left after you cross the Goodradigbee River. The road on the right winds up the hills and over a pine-covered plateau down to Tumut. This a good dry weather alternative route to the Western Tablelands and here and there provides magnificent glimpses of the mountainous side of Mount Coree.

The road to Rules Point meanders quite leisurely through the green paddocks of the Goodradigbee valley for some kilometres before ascending an outlier of the Fiery Range. Except for the valley bottom this is a new road built with the construction of the transmission line that feeds power from the Snowy scheme into New South Wales through substations at Cabramurra and Yass. The old route to the high plains of Cooleman and Currango was either along the valley as far as Koorabri and then up one of the ridges to Peppercorn Hill or along the top of the Brindabellas for some distance and down Harry's Spur or through Leura Gap. Still others came through the upper Cotter and over Murrays Gap.

Just below Diamond Hill is the first orange hut built for power line workers (map reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626, 486 689). The second one is on the edge of the Little Peppercorn Plain not far from the ruin of a stockmen's hut of the same name. This and Peppercorn Hut further to the east were built for grazing purposes before the area was declared a National Park in 1944.
Peppercorn Hill is the last obstacle before reaching the seemingly endless Long Plain with its large expanses of tussock grassland and sedge-lined swamps. Several tracks and fire trails converge at the northern end of the plain near where an old fence crosses the road (map reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626, 458 598). One track moves west to the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee, another goes east to Mount Jackson and a third winds down to Cooleman Plain, the Cooleman Caves and Tantangara Dam.

Driving on to Rules Point there are many places where the depression of an old stock route and bullock track is still evident. Parts of it have been stabilised by grasses and shrubs but some areas are still bare, which attests to the harsh conditions that can prevail up there. Climatic conditions are also responsible for the absence of snow gums from this and other high country plains. Cold air drains down from adjoining hills at night leaving a blanket of very cold air or a frost hollow in the valley. Seedlings find it hard to survive under these conditions.

Half-way along the plain you may notice the remains of an old telephone line that connected homesteads like Coolamine, Cooinbil, Long Plain House and the Rules Point Hotel to Kiandra and Adaminaby. It was a party line built over fifty years ago long before electricity was connected. The valley of the Goodradigbee didn’t get power until the 1950s after the big transmission line that now dwarfs the tottering old one was put in.

Cooinbil homestead (map reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626, 445 556) a kilometre or so east of the Long Plain Road is perhaps best approached on foot although in dry weather one can drive there. It had its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s and what is left now is only half of it. The living room, kitchen and washing facilities used to be above the present hut and today’s building was only used for sleeping. Someone has since made the connecting tunnel into a kitchen.

The other homestead on the plain, Long Plain House or Dr Campbell’s, is well signposted and has been
developed into a rest area with tables, barbecues, lavatories and swings for young explorers. Water is piped over from a nearby creek and if you’ve come from Canberra it’s a good place to boil the billy and barbecue a T-bone.

According to Tom Taylor, a life-long resident of the northern Snowy Mountains, it was Dr Campbell from Adelong who built the homestead. He obtained a lease of several thousand hectares from someone who went broke in 1914. The hundreds of metres of timber that went into the shingles and outside walls largely came from Jack Dunn’s old sawmill near Cumberland Mountain. Peter Quinn of Kiandra carried the timber up on a bullock dray and Master Brothers of Tumut built it.

During the building’s first winter in 1916 many of the wooden shingles split in two and a fellow called Bobby Joyce was called in to repair it. Iron was put on in later years. In this harsh climate it is surprising how well it has stood up to the elements. Some of the piers have rotted away and the chimneys are weathering but it is still possible to be relatively draught free, dry and warm in any one of the four enormous rooms. A fire with a decent back log can be lit on cooler days.

Rules Point has now almost lost all signs of human occupation and it is difficult to believe that there once was a flourishing hotel there. All that grows now are the pine trees planted long ago; the once upright walls have tumbled and lie forlorn and smashed among the weeds, thistles and tall grasses. In the 1920s and 1930s the hotel was the lively social centre for people in the area and at least once a year the locals held a sports meeting with a rodeo race, a small fair and lots of hullabaloo.

Bill Hughes, an old Kiandra identity, told me the hotel was extremely open and casual and visitors who walked into the bar would sometimes wait half an hour before they could wet their parched throats. The Larkins worked there and kept lots of paddy lambs which when they grew up continued to parade through the hotel — in fact when strange dogs came around they would rush
into the lounge, dining room and bar for protection!

The rodeo race was held along the fence on the plain below the hotel. Raffles were drawn for all manner of things and the organisers didn’t let anybody stand in the way of satisfying everybody — so the biggest and poorest family won the hamper of groceries. Bill Hains who’d lost his old man on a runaway horse won a bridle and Bill Hughes who was always short of petrol won a whole case of it — someone else had even bought his ticket.

For people like Tom and Molly Taylor the hotel also held romantic attachments, for the two met there in the early 1930s. She, like others, had gone there for a holiday to explore the nearby caves and to be in the bush. Together they later reared a family at Coolamine homestead.

**The Source of the Murrumbidgee**

*Map reference: Tantangara Map Sheet 8626 (Edition 1), 1:100 000, 450 603.*

The source of the Murrumbidgee River is to be found close to the Long Plain Road in the Kosciusko National Park. Drive from Canberra across the Brindabella Mountains via the Brindabella Road, Piccadilly Circus, down to the floor of the valley of the Goodradigbee. Cross the river here and head south along the western bank on Long Plain Road. This takes you eventually into Kosciusko National Park and Long Plain itself.

As the road enters this area there is a small hill on the right known as Peppercorn Hill. Approximately two kilometres past this point the road takes a sharp bend to the left. Here there is a junction with what is known as Peppercorn Trail on the right. This trail initially runs north-west parallel to a fence line. Park the car here and a short easy walk of 1 kilometre takes you to a simple rustic bridge spanning a small, clear, and lovely stream. This is
At the source of the Murrumbidgee

the source stream of the Murrumbidgee River. The trail may be followed on foot further to the source spring itself.
John Gale of Queanbeyan in his privately circulated *Six Days in the Mountains of Cowley*, written over fifty years ago, gives a splendid account of this area which it would be a shame not to reproduce here. His journalistic pen rises to the level of dramatic poetry as he describes the unique character of the landscape in which he finds himself.

'Here, gushing up with a vigour characteristic of all the springs in these parts, rises the water of the hoary old river whose name is so prominently associated with early Australian exploration and settlement – the Murrumbidgee, which, if not vying with its rival the Murray for precedence in point of commercial importance, claims that distinction as being longer known to Europeans and possessing a greater variety of natural and historical features. A rippling streamlet, clear as crystal and cold as ice itself, a lady or a child can skip over its narrow channel, a few inches deep, without damping the feet. But soon after, scores, hundreds of rills, from the head to the Long Plain to the north-east and the rugged country to the south and south-west, contribute their quota to the parent stream, which swells in volume with every mile of its progress, till ere it has reached its third or fourth mile a horseman finds the water to his saddle-girths, and the finest hunter or stock-horse to be found would try in vain to leap its breadth. Even here it teems with life – certainly not that of the huge codfish or princely bream, but while myriads of minnows dart in shoals through its rapid waters, its banks and swampy margins swarm with crayfish, and are the habitat of flocks of water-fowl. One is struck with wonder at the rapid flow of the river on the almost level plains. In attempting to ford one would be almost, if not certainly carried off one's legs. On the afternoon of our arrival at Long Plain (the station of Mr John McDonald) that gentleman and I rode out for an hour or two, and although we went no lower down than three or four miles below the principal source of the river, we found it widening and deepening, and increasing in its impetus to a remarkable extent.
One's wonder however ceases, after a more thorough examination of the surrounding country, which is literally a land of springs. Every hollow in the undulating plains has its water-spring; as I said of that mentioned on our upward journey, not a lazy, trickling dole, but a sparkling, boiling, over-flowing rush of water as charming and beautiful to behold, as it is cool and refreshing to drink. Considering the myriad crystal springs which feed the parent stream just after leaving its principal source; the loveliness and grandeur of the extensive plains through which it first finds its way; the rugged mountains, deep ravines, and gloomy gorges which characterise its course immediately afterwards, and continue to do so for scores of miles through what are known as the districts of the Upper Murrumbidgee; and, fed ere this by several considerable rivers, the broadening expanse of navigable water from Gundagai to its junction with the Murray, known as the Lower Murrumbidgee districts; well might a recent tourist speak, even of the lower portion, which he saw, as La belle riviere, but how much more so had he seen the sublimely picturesque scenery of the Murrumbidgee within the mountains districts. To view the Murrumbidgee at Tharwa, within fifteen miles of Queanbeyan, one would scarcely credit that its principal source would be found within forty miles, as the crow flies of that locality. And yet so it is, albeit the river traverses more than two hundred miles before it pours its volume of water over the wide and sandy river bed at Tharwa Ford. For a distance of about twenty miles the Murrumbidgee flows in a southerly direction, but from what is known as the South Arm, in the county of Wallace, it pursues an easterly course, and after travelling in that direction for about fifty miles, turns northwards in a parallel line with the waters of its source at Peppercorn Hill. In a north-westerly course the river now follows its mean direction for the remainder of its length, till absorbed by the Murray.

The Tumut, Goodradigbee, and Cotter Rivers take
their rise all in the same locality; so that Peppercorn Hill
and Long Plain may be regarded as the grand source of
the river-system of a large extent of our southern
territory."

The most comfortable return drive to Canberra is via
the Snowy Mountains Highway, Kiandra and Cooma.
Count on being away not less than about ten hours if
reasonable stops are made for lunch near the source and
an evening meal at Cooma.

**Yarrangobilly Caves**

*Map reference: Yarrangobilly Map Sheet
(CMA of NSW) 8526-1-S, 1:25 000, 343 455.*

Yarrangobilly Caves may be reached from Canberra
over the Brindabella Mountain Range and along the
Long Plain Road as already indicated. However, for
those who desire a smoother journey they may also be
reached by car from Canberra by travelling south on the
Monaro Highway to Cooma and then along the Snowy
Mountains Highway via Adaminaby and Kiandra. The
turn-off to Yarrangobilly is approximately 20 kilometres
past Kiandra on the Tumut side. A short stretch of gravel
road brings one to the caves and the Visitors Centre from
which tours can be arranged. To the turn-off this route
from Canberra is a smooth well-engineered sealed road
and the journey should take no longer than three hours.

The first caves in the group to be discovered have
come to be known as the Glory Hole and North Glory
Hole. It is believed that John Bowman, a local stockman,
came across them in 1834. Later, in 1861, the Marshall
Brothers, graziers, found the entrance to the Jersey
Cave. Jack Gibb of Yarrangobilly Station and a friend
made a deeper exploration of this cave in 1884. It was
Inside the Jersey Cave at Yarrangobilly

officially opened by the then Governor of New South Wales, Lord Jersey, in 1892 and is named after him.

The Jersey Cave can be regarded as the best of the Yarrangobilly group. It is far richer in calcite formations than the other caves and these show a wide variation in type. The guided tour only takes about an hour and you return along the same route as you entered. The day I was there the guide was a young student employed it seemed to me for the vacation only. He was enthusiastic in his description of the many features to be seen and held his small audience entranced throughout the whole of the tour.

For those with time to spare the Park authorities suggest a visit to one of the Glory Caves and either the Jersey or Jillabean Cave in order to come to know the contrast between these two groups.
Within walking distance of the Yarrangobilly Caves and well signposted lies a swimming pool in which the water is naturally heated by passage from a great depth beneath the surface of the earth. Actually the original pool was a wooden one built in 1896 over a spring associated with the former course of the Yarrangobilly River. The present pool was constructed with the help of prison labour. It is about 18 metres long and 8 metres wide, varying in depth from 1.5 to 2.5 meters and with a small wading pool for children into which the water from the larger pool fairly gushes. The water in the pool is believed to come from a depth of 750 metres. The temperature is a pleasant 27°C throughout the year.

The pool is nicely situated among a group of trees and may be reached from an adjacent car park by walking down a track some 700 metres long. There are changing delightful swim may be had there to complement a visit to the nearby caves.
On the Kiandra Goldfields

There are three possible routes from Canberra to Kiandra, two over dirt roads and one along major highways. If you want to see the Brindabellas on the way you can get there via the Goodradigbee valley, Peppercorn Hill, the Long Plain and Rules Point, or if you prefer the comfort of the highway you travel via Cooma and Adaminaby. The third route is via Tharwa, Naas, the Bobeyan Road, Shannon’s Flat and Adaminaby. It is a
better route than the Long Plain and Rules Point Road which is often covered by snow in the winter. All routes take about three hours of steady driving.

**Kiandra Township**

*Map reference: Cabramatura Map Sheet (CMA of NSW) 8526-11-S, 1:25 000, 348 288.*

They say that mining towns come and go according to the fortunes of the miners. At Kiandra they made their fortunes in a few short months a hundred years ago and ever since the town has been on the decline. What was a tight little settlement of weatherboard pubs and cottages with roaming goats and paling fences is now a few ruins, a converted Department of Main Roads depot and the odd bed of daffodils, more obvious in the late spring. Roads that once were graced with billowing skirts are barely visible and verandah-enclosed buildings that served the populace their ale are marked by monuments of empty beer bottles.

One of the last residences still surviving is Jim Pattinson’s up along Pollock Creek. A rambling structure of weathboard and iron it is now Jim’s holiday residence. Jim was born and bred in the area as were his father and grandfather before him. Skiing was a big part of a boy’s winter life and in the 1940s Jim represented Australia in downhill championships.

Along the road north of Pollocks Creek Bridge you can pull up alongside the ruin of Yan’s or Harris’s old store. Built in the 1880s it had a succession of owners who operated it as a newspaper shop, a butchers and a general store. The last ones were the Yans — descendants of some of the first Chinese on the diggings. According to Bill Hughes, a former resident of Kiandra, George Yan enjoyed being boss and glorified in refusing service.
Once when asked for sugar he replied 'got none' — 'but,' said the customer 'I saw five bags being unloaded yesterday.' ‘And that’s your bloody share of them’, said George! Tom Yan, his son, a former bullocky and mountain rouseabout, now lives in Adelong in the foothills of the mountains. The store served its last customer in the 1930s.

There were apparently no Chinese-born women in Kiandra so any Chinese who married had to woo women of European or Australian birth. Tom Yan’s grandfather teamed up with a German lady, Frau Catherine Johanna Wortz from Baden-Baden. The descendants of their seven children now live in Tumut, Adelong and other country towns.

One of the few remaining headstones in the Kiandra cemetery, a few kilometres on the Cooma side of town, marks old Mrs Yan’s death in 1913. She was bedridden for some months before her death and being a strong-willed and methodical woman had the coffin, which she felt might be called on when the town was cut off from outside, made and stood in a corner of her bedroom.
Such foresight was probably wise for she died in August, one of the coldest months.

On Chinese feast days, which were eagerly looked forward to, a procession set out from Kiandra, led by ceremonially dressed mourners carrying baskets of fish cakes, rice puddings, ginger rice brandy and lychees and peanuts, and headed for the cemetery. Slow burning joss-sticks were lit there and placed on the graves with much reciting of Chinese incantations. On the way back fireworks were let off to deter the spirits of the departed from following.

After some years the bones were occasionally dug out and returned to China. Bill Hughes recalled assisting two visitors when he was a small boy: ‘One man crouched in the bottom of the dark hole and after carefully excavating each bone tossed it to the man at the top. He wiped it carefully and added it to the assemblage on a silk cloth’. For Bill it didn’t take much to imagine dragons, gargoyles, winged serpents and slant-eyed mandarins at the bottom of the hole — ‘I was always ready to dash home’.

Below the road down towards the Eucumbene the intensive mining activity of the 1860s is reflected in the
numerous piles of stacked rock, the long eroding trenches and the parallel ditches or race lines that gathered and fed water to the workings. In soil conservation jargon they would be called contour banks. Water was an essential, but in the summer a rare, commodity and the miners guarded their supply jealously. Being in close proximity on their claims of no more than a few square metres there would often be fights over water rights. In the 1880s one ‘right’ entitled the holder to a home site, a sluicing claim and a race line.

Above the road through Kiandra, especially on the way to Cabramurra, you may notice another series of parallel race lines each one feeding water to a different claim. These carried water from the top of Bullocks Creek the 10 or so kilometres to Pollocks gully and beyond. Parts of them have now been undermined by wombats and rabbits and it is only during snowmelt that water flows in them. Without a flow it is difficult to discern in which direction they slope for the fall was only a few metres per kilometre.

Kiandra township in the 1920s
At the height of sluicing operations (see the section on New Chum Hill) when water was very scarce, the miners contemplated a race line that wound itself halfway across the Snowy Mountains and would have brought water from the Burrungubugge and Doubtful Rivers more than 40 kilometres away. Without benefit of contoured maps and aerial photographs they had worked out that it was feasible and had convinced the New South Wales government to survey the route in 1880. In several places it would have been necessary to construct elevated water viaducts or syphons to keep the water on the same level.

Unfortunately the project was never realised because of its size, the absence of rich finds of gold and a lack of funds. Had it been built it would have rivalled in extent and ingenuity some of the structures of the Snowy Mountains scheme. Even without it the total length of race lines around Kiandra built with pick and shovel is probably over 200 kilometres. Not a bad effort without mechanical shovels.

Brakes hard on — skiing at Kiandra in the 1890s
Skiers in front of Kiandra Hotel in the 1890s
Kiandra's fame also rests on skiing and some believe that the first ski club in the world was formed there in the 1870s. The snow-plowed main street that you may now drive along in heated comfort was once a busy maze of ski tracks and at a point close to the old store was crossed by the downhill ski course. And a real downhill it was — straight from the top to the bottom with lots of bumps and no flagged gates to slow down for. Skis were hand-fashioned of alpine ash with a leather toehold, and stocks were unheard of. You just let them run and held on as though your life depended on it.

In one race Bill Hughes set off on a particularly fast pair made by the local policeman. After almost losing his balance several times and adopting a gorilla-like stance to recover, he finally came to grief within 100 metres of the winning post. 'I rose clear of the snow and upon coming down both skis bogged down deeply; I hit the snow 3 metres ahead and turned 5 or 6 somersaults in the next 40 metres.' One ski was smashed across the middle and the other was found with a broken toe down in Pollocks Creek a hundred metres away.

One of the last tangible links with Kiandra skiing, apart from the old photos and skis in the Cooma Museum, is the Kiandra Chalet now converted to a Department of Main Roads depot. Part of this building used to provide a comfortable base for Sydney and Canberra visitors who came there in the 1940s and 1950s to try their hand at what seemed a very bizarre sport — 'fancy trying to steer two wily planks down a steep bumpy hillside!'

The chalet boasted hot and cold running water, innerspring mattresses and the tariff in 1950 was only £7 17s 6d a week. The hills of Kiandra are still very popular for family fun on the snow but the nearest accommodation is now at Tumut and Adaminaby. The owner of the old Alpine Hotel always boasted about Kiandra's healthy climate and used the presence of only a few gravestones as evidence! Perhaps it can invigorate you!
New Chum Hill

Map reference: Ravine Map Sheet
(CMA of NSW) 8526-11-N, 1:25 000, 347 298.

And like a mighty gallows frame,
the derrick in the New Chum claim
Hangs over where, despite the cold,
strong miners seek the hidden gold,
And stiff and blue half frozen through,
The fickle dame of fortune woo.

Barcroft Boake,
‘The demon snow-shoes’, 1891

Having pottered around the cemetery, ruins and mining relics of Kiandra you might like to visit the site of the largest sluicing claim in the mountains — New Chum Hill a kilometre or so to the north. Little of the mining machinery remains but the deep scars that resulted from the removal of thousands of tonnes of earth and rock more than eighty years ago are still very evident. The naming of the hill is fascinating in itself.

New settlers or ‘new chums’ on Australia’s shores were often given the ‘rough end of the stick’ on first arriving at a goldfield and the three Englishmen who came to Kiandra in 1860 were no exception. On asking where they could stake their claim they were told the big hill to the north was a good place to start. ‘That hill’ had been considered a poor proposition. However no sooner had the new chums started digging than their first lucky strike occurred. The story goes that they kept the news to themselves until the rich deposit petered out. When they left for home with pockets bulging all who flocked there called it New Chum Hill.

Water was essential in washing out the gold on every claim. Right in the river and creek beds it was often in excess of requirements but elsewhere it was necessary to gravitate it by raceline. One of the widest and deepest of these contour banks went from Three Mile Dam
around to Reeds Hill to a header dam above the workings on New Chum.

At the dam the water passed into a large pipe that slowly decreased in diameter to end in a nozzle of 50 to 125 millimetres diameter. The smaller one gave a very
powerful cutting stream that was used to break down the overburden and the larger one conveyed the gravels into the sluicing boxes or tail races. Wooden bars or riffles across the bottom of these helped trap the gold. Every so often the fine material in the boxes was cleared out and the gold separated from the dirt.

The source of the gold at New Chum is a very ancient river bed that was later covered by basalt lava and then partly eroded away in the formation of new valleys. It was a stream of considerable dimensions that gathered and redeposited gold as it made its way from south of Mount Tabletop to beyond Bullock's Hill in the north. Bill Hughes told me that the miners at New Chum found a straight petrified log 25 metres long and a metre in diameter in the overburden as well as fossilised ferns and leaves. When hit with a hammer the log split from one end to the other.

The naming of local landmarks is often connected with larger than life events: Bullocks Hill is one of them. The Gibsons had 600 head of cattle in the mountains in early May 1840 when a big snowfall occurred. It continued to snow for weeks and the men were only able to get themselves and their pack-horses out and had to leave the cattle to fend for themselves. They couldn’t survive on gum leaves so that when the snow melted some of the starved bodies were found dangling in the top of the trees. Henceforth the locality was known as Bullocks Hill.

When the New Chum sluicing hole became unprofitable because of the depth of overburden, the plant was shifted to the opposite side of Bullocks Head Creek to take out a big area of land below the present highway bridge. The water was flumed across the top of the creek at ‘Roaring Mag Hill’ (leading up to Three Mile Dam) and conveyed by raceline to the workings. The flume, or long wooden trough with timber supports, wasn’t absolutely watertight and icicles of enormous size and intricate shape hung from it in winter. Charles Kerry, the famous Sydney photographer, took spectacular photos of it in the 1900s.
After the sluicing phase of mining in the 1880s and 1890s the miners turned to tunnelling and blasting. Several tunnels were put into both sides of New Chum Hill to intercept the old riverbed — all with little success. They often ended the way they began — in hard rock.

Teamwork was called for in operating hydraulics and large projects often brought people together. One undertaking carried out was a dam across the Eucumbene River at the head of the short gorge below New Chum to form a fishing lake called the Mill Hole. With a depth of 7 metres and an area of several square kilometres it made an excellent trout dam. A flood took it a few years later.

The hill lay relatively undisturbed until the 1950s when the Snowy Mountains Authority needed sand and rock for the concrete arch of Tumut dam. Along with the sand they must have removed considerable amounts of gold which is now firmly encased and preserved for future archaeologists. Rumour has it that the more enterprising employees of the authority did very well out of fossicking on the side and that two Frenchmen were paid a considerable lump sum and sent back to France. Their supposedly rich find, if made public, could have resulted in another big rush on Kiandra with hundreds of employees walking off the job just like the farmers, shearers and shopkeepers a hundred years before them.

The only man-made structure at New Chum these days is the two-stamper battery erected there by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1978. It came from Schaeffers Mine just off the Kings Cross Road a few kilometres away. The new wooden wheel of the old battery was driven by a steam engine connected by long flapping belts and the ore was tipped into the iron pots below the stampers. The height of the plunge and speed of the stampers was controlled by the size and spacing of the cams and the gearing mechanism of the steam engine. When in full flight it must have presented an awesome spectacle with thundering noise, billowing dust and screeching machinery.
Many of the mining sites around Kiandra were named after their distance from the township, hence we have the Nine and Four Mile Diggings and Three Mile Dam. The dam on the Cabramurra road is a beautiful and popular spot for swimming, camping and fishing in the summer and ski-touring in the winter. Ice-skating is not advisable because of the unpredictable nature of the ice. One of my favourite camping spots is the peninsula that juts out into the lake from the south. Conveniences include barbecues and lavatories.

The dam wall was built by the Kiandra Goldmining Company in 1882-3. Labour was mostly drawn from Tumut and to start with there were sixty men, eleven tip-carts and many, many horses. There are reports of the use of Chinese labour and it is rumoured that one or two were killed in a Tong War and buried surreptitiously in the wall of the dam. Others, like Leo Hoad of Tumut believe that the Chinese were not involved.

Chinese or not the dam was certainly a significant achievement for the primitive technology of the 1880s. Its wall is over 12 metres high, about 150 metres long and 4 metres wide at the top. As well the miners built over 30 kilometres of racelines to divert the headwaters of Bullocks Creek into the dam. A fellow called Sims was employed to be in charge of the racelines and the valve of the dam. From the time the valve was opened it took two hours for the water to travel the six or so kilometres to the workings, so it had to be turned off well before the men ceased work. Sims lived in a cottage, long since disappeared, on the western side of the dam.

The Snowy scheme wasn’t the first to make use of the abundant water of the Snowy Mountains for human ends. Miners channelled, dammed and controlled the
water as early as 1860 and in the 1880s the men at Three Mile erected a 5-metre diameter water wheel to power a three stamper battery. The book *Historic Kiandra* (Cooma – Monaro Historical Society, 1959) shows a photograph of the remains as they were twenty years ago. Not much of the wheel is left today and the battery has been taken away.

**Selwyn Quarry**

*Map reference: Cabramurra Map Sheet*  
*(CMA of NSW) 8526-11-S, 1:25 000, 312 253.*

In recent years Selwyn Quarry has become synonymous with skiing, both downhilling on newly opened slopes and touring to distant huts and landmarks. It is a small concern with two T-bars, a kiosk and ski hire and parking area located on the Kings Cross Road about 3 kilometres off the sealed road to Cabramurra.

Ease of access, lower prices than Perisher or Thredbo, gentle slopes and an intimate atmosphere make it very popular for family groups from Canberra as well as local towns like Tumut and Adaminaby. The drive via Cooma and Adaminaby takes about three hours and, except under extreme conditions, the road is always open. Chains may be necessary in winter.

The granite quarry at the top of the ski run was excavated during the Snowy scheme. The name Selwyn has been taken from a hill north-east of the quarry. It is a little higher and was the site of a famous old Kiandra ski run. The 'grand slam' started at the top of the hill, descended quite steeply through a straight and narrow tree-free swathe of packed snow and a speedy kilometre later ran out on the bumpy flats below. Skiers on Kiandra butterpats would hurtle down this run at breakneck speed, the winner usually being the one who avoided falling. That wasn't easy.
The path of the cutting is still there for those who want to play old-timers. It is immediately adjacent to the transmission line that crosses Selwyn Quarry, but a kilometre to the north-east. But before venturing forth on a pair of skis it is advisable to explore the area with a map and compass in the summer. The best map is the Snowy Mountains Authority inch-to-the-mile Cabramurra sheet or, when it is printed, the Yarrangobilly 1:100 000 sheet No. 8526.
North of Tantangara Dam

The most appropriate access route to this area for ordinary sedans is via Cooma, Adaminaby and the Tantangara Road. Four-wheel-drive vehicles may enter the area from the Brindabella-Rules Point Road although this could change if the National Parks and Wildlife Service decides to close it off. The Tantangara Road is a graded dry weather road to the landing strip at the Pockets Saddle and from there becomes a well-formed track along which some care is necessary. It initially passes through giant stands of Alpine Ash, then many kilometres of stunted snowgum and after Tantangara Dam cuts across large tracts of tussock grass frost plain before running into the steep gorge of Cave Creek.

Cooleman Caves and the Blue Water Hole

*Map reference: Tantangara Map Sheet 8626 (Edition 1) 1:100 000, 525 563.*

The Blue Water Hole is just downstream of the creek crossing under a towering wall of yellow-brown rock. Here there are fireplaces where you can boil the billy and shady places next to the water where you can sip your tea or coffee. The creek bed is often dry above the road crossing but is continually fed by underground water below it. This bubbles forth from numerous holes and fissures.

The caves are located along Cave Creek, a circuitous stream whose main tributary first flows north, then west, south and east and finally north again when it reaches the Goodradigbee River. Here it is only 3 kilometres
Cave Creek below the Blue Water Hole
across country to its source but over 15 kilometres along
the creek bed. Most of this area is underlain by limestone
rock and the action of surface and underground water
has led to the formation of numerous sink holes, under­
ground caverns and tunnels. John Gale on his visit there
nearly a hundred years ago was most eloquent in his
description of what he saw.

Other formations were white and smooth as
polished marble, some sparkling with gem-like
lustre, some resembled molten wax poured over
the rocks to which it clung and remaining there
fixed in the most grotesque and fantastical
shapes; others, masses of coral formation bran­
ching off in every direction.

Gale had the benefit of a guide and an assortment of
reliable lights — two essential ingredients when exploring
unknown caves. If you want to penetrate further than the
first twenty or so metres it is advisable to join up with
experienced members of a caving club. They are listed in
the Canberra directory of clubs and societies available
from the City Information Centre.

Caves like Murrays and Cooleman are upstream of the
Blue Water Hole picnic area while the Blackfellows and
Murderers Cave are well downstream near the meeting
of Caves Creek and the Goodradigbee. But it's not
necessary to shoulder a day pack and carbide lamp or to
put on overalls and boots to get a feeling for caving as
there are hundreds of clefts and crannies in the vicinity
of the picnic area. We found several wide rock overhangs
and short tunnels in a dry gully that comes down from
the north.

Murrays Cave is named after Terrence Aubrey
Murray, the Canberra squatter who first explored the
area in the late 1830s. Since then the caves have been a
major local attraction and in 1903 two of the Southwell
boys from Coolamine homestead penetrated Murrays
Cave for a distance of over 500 metres. They had joined
other adventurous youngsters like the Sheedy brothers
and Elizabeth Oldfield, and being proud of their achievement pencilled their names on an enormous glittering stalactite about 400 metres in.

They could not know that their names were not to be seen again for sixty-five years. Their exploration had coincided with the great drought at the turn of the century when the parts of the tunnel that are now watertraps were completely dry. Modern day speleologists had been intrigued by these reports but it was not until the drought of 1968 that they found the names and saw the full extent of the cave. Studies by Joe Jennings, Canberra’s professional ‘pot-holer’, suggest that the cave may also have been dry from 1924 to 1930 and from 1936 to 1941.

Murderers Cave is said to be associated with the audacious exploits of a man called Glover, who apparently was a member of the Ben Hall gang of bushrangers. He is credited with the murder of a man and possibly a woman who were thought to be travelling hawkers and whose bodies were found in the cave in the 1870s. The body of the man had apparently been carried in on a bier formed by poking two snowgum poles through the arms and legs of his clothing. Superstitious stockmen came to believe that the cave was haunted and exclamations like ‘look out for the hairy man’ and ‘take care of the ghost’ were thrown at visitors.

Folklore has it that Glover and others who held up coaches returning to Sydney from the Kiandra and Adelong goldfields hid some of their loot in this and other caves in the area. If it has been found no one has reported it. Glover met his end on the gallows of Goulburn gaol after axing an Aborigine to death near Adaminaby.

There have been reports of other parcels of bones including a neatly stacked pile in the Blackfellows Cave, all of them over the years have spawned a different legend so that today’s folklore probably varies markedly from yesterday’s facts. For instance the body of the man in Murderers Cave is also said to have been that of a
government agent on tour buying horses for the army. Business was on a cash basis and the large sum that he carried would have made him a very attractive target for an uncomprising person like Glover.

Multiple murder or not the only links now remaining are the names of the caves. Perhaps we should celebrate Glover’s notoriety by naming a cave after him!

Coolamine Homestead

Map reference: Tantangara Map Sheet 8626
(Edition 1) 1:100 000, 508 580.

This historic and architecturally fascinating site lies 3 kilometres to the north-west of the Blue Water Hole adjacent to the fire trail. The track out of Cave Creek is very slippery and steep and it is advisable to walk to Coolamine. If coming in from the Brindabella-Rules Point Road it is advisable to leave the car at the top of the Cooleman Mountains near the dominant fence line that follows the ridge. Both ways the walk is an easy hour and a half ramble for young and old.

Coolamine Homestead in 1908
There are three main buildings at Coolamine, the first homestead with the very dilapidated walls built in about 1883, the second homestead with the high pitched roof built in the 1890s and the cheese house built like a log cabin. They are by far the oldest wooden buildings in the region and highly appropriate for the recent National Trust classification as historic buildings worthy of preservation. Some restoration work has already been carried out through the Kosciusko Huts Association and the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales is now considering further work.

Terrence Murray made Coolamine his mountain outpost in the early 1840s and for many years sheep and cattle were driven from Canberra to Coolamine to make use of the lush pastures of the mountains. The first building was very primitive with sapling walls and a bark roof. According to Murray ‘it was so cold the comforters over our heads froze and so did the sides of our blankets, while our heads lay near pools of ice’.

The building erected by the Southwells in 1883 was by contrast much more refined and built to last. Slabs were tightly fitted and cut to overlap giving a weatherboard effect; the bearers were protected from moisture by metal sheeting and all major connections were held
together with mortice and tenon joints and wooden pins. Basic equipment was a broad axe, an adze and an auger.

The best preserved building today, and the one you might brew your billy in, is the one with the high-pitched roof. On close examination you will find that the inside walls have up to fourteen layers of newspaper and that the slabs are numbered with Roman numerals. Tom Taylor believes that the homestead was originally erected at another site, numbered, taken apart and rebuilt where it is today. His sister Irene Harris of Tumut is adamant that it has always stood where it is and that the slabs were numbered as they were laid out at the logging site on Mary’s Hill. The Taylors first went there in 1908, so if it was moved it must have been in the 1890s.

William and Sarah Taylor at Coolamine about 1936
Irene was very young at the time and remembers being carried up through the snow. She also showed me a photo of an Indian Sikh who used to come up to the mountains once a year selling dresses and materials. Both she and her brother talk about rock engravings to the north of the homestead that were made by Mary, Sandy and Jack MacDonald, some of the first settlers of the area. Several recent visits have failed to find them, but you may have greater luck.

Coolamine was the lively social centre for those who braved ice and snow to make a living up there and in 1903 a stockman called Bunty Morris composed a long rambling ballad about his experiences at the ‘Annual Coolamon Ball’. Here are a few excerpts.

It was one Friday evening in August cold and chill
And a big white lot of frozen snow still lay on
Mary’s Hill
As I rose to Coolamon on my Calcutta filly
Who had borne me safe and sound from my camp at Yarrangobilly.

‘Good boy, Hurrah’, Jack said ‘I’m so glad you’ve come,
For when the dancing starts tonight, by jove we’ll make things hum’
Soon after me, one Henry and his little sister Flo Made up the next additions to our little evening show.

Now you talk of grand theatre and operas so grand
And polished arts of mankind – but is there in this land
A joy more pure and simple than the one of which I write
A real good country ball just like last Friday night.

Well we went through every circular that was ever known to man
And sets so quick and lively and didn’t we look grand
Then we had an intermission but we did not wait for long
Just time for Miss Eleanor and Bell to sing a song
And thus the dance rolled onwards till the tea bell rang again
And each boy took his partner to view the tarts once more
Yes cakes and tarts of all kinds each and all eyes could see
A dainty spread it seemed a shame to offer a pig like me
For when a man has lived for months on wallaby and possum
I think he bears a strong perfume of Eucalyptus blossom
But anyhow all jokes aside - a lovely tea for all
Was spread for each and all of us that night at Southwell's Ball.
Some Historic Mountain Huts

Circuits

Map Reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626
1:100 000, 524 346

Also known as Doosies Hut and Gulf Hut, Circuits Hut is located on the Circuits Hut fire trail about 5 kilometres from the wall of Tantangara Dam and on the edge of the Gulf Plain. The gulf itself is a deeply incised bend of the Murrumbidgee River below the dam. More of a homestead than a hut, the four-roomed structure was built by the Australian Pastoral Company in the 1920s. Furniture includes several beds and mattresses, some seats and a table and an old kerosene fridge that still works.

Each hut is surrounded by a tale or two. In this case there is a story of a man called Jimmy Gavel who had a hut on the Nungar Plain. One blizzardy day on the way home from shopping at Adaminaby he had missed his hut and wandered on to Circuits. The weather remained hostile and after eating all his food he shot his horse. This was more an act of kindness, however, for some time later the intact body was found with three bullet holes in the head. Old Gavel was found dead in the snowdrifts of the Gulf.

He had a long waist-length beard which was cut off and nailed to the mantelpiece of the old hut. When Tom Taylor visited the place later he thought someone had cut off a billygoat’s beard to make a shaving brush and not liking hairs near his tucker shoved it back in an old tobacco tin. That night the door suddenly flew open and Tom Shanley, his mate, said ‘its old Gavel coming back for his beard’. So Tom got up, said ‘Curse the door’ shut it again and went back to bed. The beard is gone now so old Gavel may have come back after all.
The turn off to this rustic farmyard setting of huts, homesteads, pine windbreaks and farm machinery is about 10 kilometres past Tantangara Dam. Before winding down the narrow track you may be lucky enough to spot the magnificent yellow dingo that lives on the ridge — I saw him next to the signpost — proud, muscular and silently aware.

There are three buildings tucked away among the giant pine trees of Currango — the main homestead intended for the manager, a small house called Daffodil Cottage and a long rambling building with five or six bedrooms intended for jackeroos, shearsers and farm hands. Back in the 1930s when grazing was in full swing and when small herds of cattle could be seen all over the vast Currango Plain there were up to thirty men employed. One year the shearsers went on strike because they had no showers, so the manager put in a bucket shower or ‘Gilligans Island’ as Molly Taylor called it. It was filled with a bucket and the water released on the naked and lathered-up shearer below. Brave was the man who had his water cold.
Currango shed detail
The property was first taken up by the squatter Whittie in the 1860s and later taken over by the Australian Estate and Mortgage Company. In 1946 it became part of the Kosciusko National Park. The Taylors have lived there since 1949 and for many years have rented out the two workers' cottages to fishermen, families and friends. It is a magnificent place but cold in the winter and Tom and Molly now spend the colder months in Adaminaby. Intending visitors must telephone first.

Across the plain to the north-west is the abandoned old Currango Homestead (map reference 503 491) with its heavy shingle roof, atticked ceilings, big bulky crumbling fireplaces, sagging verandah and thickly newspapered walls. A walk to it is beyond a day trip from Canberra but well suited to a weekend camping trip. Access is by way of the causeway across the upper Tantangara Dam or via the Mosquito Creek trail and the Blue Water Hole Saddle.

Oldfields

Map Reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626
1:100 000, 587 502

Located in the shadow of Mount Bimberi and Mount Murray, the sturdy large stockmans' hut known as Oldfields Hut built in the 1920s is about 2 kilometres off the Tantangara Road. Cars could be parked along a convenient part of the Murray Gap fire trail and the rest of the journey enjoyed on foot.

Bill Oldfield built the first hut — a log one — at the back of the present site in the 1920s and kept chooks and pigs there. He also had a stable for his horses and grew vegetables in the summer. Visitors like Tom Taylor were usually regaled with a feast of bacon, eggs and damper.

One Christmas Tom and a mate picked up some live pigs from Jack Oldfield, a nephew of Tom's to take back to Coolamine for the Christmas dinner. They put them in bags hooked to the pack saddles and stopped whenever possible to cool them off. At one stop the
complete immersion in a cold mountain stream was too much for the pigs and they blacked out. Tom said 'we've done it now, George, we've killed them', but once back on the horses they warmed up and revived. That taught them a lesson not to dip live pigs in cold water.

Huts like Oldfields and Circuits and the 60 or so others in the Kosciusko National Park are generally maintained by caretaker groups and clubs under the auspices of the Kosciusko Huts Association and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The formation of the Kosciusko Hut Association in 1971 grew out of the concern of bushwalkers, ski tourers, fishermen and others for the long-term survival of the huts. With the formulation of an official huts policy this is now largely ensured. All users of huts are asked to look after them and the things in them and should restock the wood supply. There is nothing worse than arriving at a hut wet and miserable with no dry wood in sight.

Pockets

Map Reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626
1:100 000, 564 525

Pockets Hut is a big, rambling, wooden hut in a beautiful clearing north of the Pockets saddle. Accessible to vehicles and full of rustic charm and some comfort it is in use most weekends. For many years it was used by Tom Taylor and more recently by members of research organisations like the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Australian National University who have been conducting experiments and collecting information a few kilometres away at Seventeen Flat. Most of these investigations relate to the formation of frost plains or valleys without trees.

Tom Taylor believes the hut was built by the Australian Estate and Mortgage Company in the 1920s. In the 1930s it used to have electric lights, hot and cold running water, a shower and bath, lots of comfortable
furniture and other trimmings of real homestead living. The water came by pipe from a tank over 1 kilometre away. Apparently a bloke called Clapton was the manager and he used to drive out in a Rolls Royce. Occasionally this shining chariot would emerge from the now defunct garage and be taken on a fishing spree to the Blue Water Hole.

Harris

*Map Reference: Tantangara Sheet 8626*

1:100 000, 483 556

Harris's Hut is a slab and iron hut at the edge of the Cooleman Plain below a densely wooded ridge of the Cooleman Mountains. The area is underlain by limestone and there are numerous sink holes and small caves nearby. Access is on foot only, either from the ridge near the Long Plain Road turn-off or from the Blue Waterholes trail near Seventeen Flat.

The hut was built as Blue Water Hole House in 1933 by Irene and Bill Harris. I asked Bill if the slabs were alpine ash and he said 'Oh no, very rough timber, just snowgum — you couldn't get a decent slab out of it!' A brother of Bill, Bung Harris, was a well known stockman who spent some time at Peppercorn and Coolamine in the 1950s and 1960s. Irene and Bill lived there for twelve years during which they reared several children. The daffodils they planted are now being looked after by the Canberra Speleological Society.
Appendix

Some Games to Play in the Car

Some of the journeys described in this book are relatively long. Children can become bored shut up in a moving car for the hours involved and, becoming restless, provide a source of annoyance to those around them. More importantly, they can distract the driver from his task of keeping the car on the road.

Of great help during such times are some interesting games which require the active participation of all passengers. Some of those listed below are real classics which most adults will remember, others are not so well known. Perhaps, on reading through, you will be inspired to think of more.

I spy
One member of the group sees an object coming into view and says: ‘I spy with my little eye something beginning with (naming a letter of the alphabet).’

Each other member then has one chance in rotation to say what the object might be. If no one gets it right, the first member reveals his secret. Each member of the group has a turn at making the observation as the game progresses.

Animal, vegetable or mineral
One passenger thinks of an object, not necessarily one that is visible in the car or outside. The others present have to find out by questioning what the object is. The first questions asked decide the class of the object, (is it animal, vegetable, or mineral?). The succeeding questions determine the location, size, colour and so on. The questioned passenger mostly answers simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

It is remarkable how few questions often need to be asked to discover the object, especially considering the infinity of objects available for choice. Indeed, a limit may be set to the number of questions each member
may ask. This could be six, say, for a group of five passengers, making thirty questions in all. When the set number of questions has been asked unsuccessfully by a particular passenger he drops out of the game.

Once again each passenger has a turn at thinking of a suitable object.

Add to the story
One child starts telling a made-up story. After a while he stops and another child takes over, perhaps adding characters and changing the direction of the plot. Each child has a turn, the last trying to finish it off neatly.

Action game
One child carries out one action. It could simply be scratching an ear. The next child copies this but also adds to it by, say, touching his nose. The set of actions passes round the group becoming longer as each member has his turn. The first child who forgets one of the actions drops out. The winner is the last one to remember all the actions and add one final one.

Mirrors
One child performs a series of actions with his face and hands. The other child has to mirror this. After a while they change over.

Riddles
Everybody has a store of these. Three examples you may remember are: What is big and red and eats rocks? (a big red rock-eater). What is black and white and red (read) all over? (a newspaper). Where does the hunter have to be in order that every shot of his shall be in a southerly direction? What colour are the animals he shoots? (the North Pole and white — polar bears).

What do you hear?
This game is for when you stop for rest. Everybody has to write down each separate sound that he or she hears. The breeze in the trees, a particular bird, a jet overhead and so on. The winner, of course, is the one with the longest list.
Beyond the Cotter offers residents of the ACT, as well as visitors, an illustrated account spiced with history of new places to visit and things to do beyond the familiar Cotter Reserve. Each section describes a place within a day's return drive of Canberra and pleasant walks of varying length are featured as part of the day's activities. Some interesting places in the wide area farther to the south-west as far as Yarrangobilly and Tantangara Reservoir are also documented for those with more time to spare and a taste for somewhat wilder country.

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