WILD RUNNING

Robert Rankin

The recent upsurge in interest in Brisbane of completing bushwalks in fast times has prompted me to describe some early runs in south-east Queensland. The sport has, of course, been popular amongst hill walkers and mountaineers throughout the world for a very long time. It is a lot of fun and a nice contrast to the usual bushwalking techniques using heavy boots and overnight packs full of camping equipment.

For me, it started through my interests in orienteering. The club was organising events in very boring pieces of bush and I suggested to Roger Bourne (*pictured during a Main Range run in the early 1980s*) it would be fun to use our orienteering skills in more exciting places. So we decided to attempt to run along the Main Range from Cunningham's Gap to Teviot Gap in a day. And by day I mean daylight hours. We started at first light and carried very little except a map and compass (neither of us had much knowledge of the range at all), some barley sugars, chocolate and emergency first aid. We carried no water, planning to pick it up along the way. In all, we found five water sources enroute which was enough to stop thirst being a major problem.

On reaching Lizard Point we had no idea how to get off the range and spent a lot of time tumbling down very steep rainforested slopes somewhere between Mount Bell and Mount Superbus in the gathering gloom of early evening. With no torches (to lighten our loads and give us some incentive to finish before dark!) we had to find Teviot Gap before nightfall. It was winter and neither of us wanted to spend the night out without a sleeping bag or jumper. We stumbled out onto the road at the Gap just as the first stars were appearing. The traverse took 10 hours 44 minutes from the road at Cunningham's Gap to the cattle grid on the road at Teviot Gap near the lookout to Teviot Falls. That was 25 July 1981. A month later, Roger and I ran the northern section from Cunningham's Gap to the summit of Mount Beau Brummell in just on 8 hours. Where you go after reaching the peak is up to you. We parked the car in the north-eastern foothills. Roger and I ran the southern route again the following year in July 1982 and reduced the time to 9 hours 13 minutes. On this occasion we carried one litre waterbottles which saved us the time searching for water.

Ten years went by before I again did the Main Range traverse. This time, in July 1991, I went alone as the ultimate challenge. I do not believe exploring wilderness alone is irresponsible and there should be no restrictions on this pursuit even though some may argue for it. Rather than being

irresponsible, travelling alone requires a high degree of responsibility and acknowledgment of the consequences should something go wrong.

This time I started out from Teviot Gap and ran northwards so that all the climbing would be in the cool shade of the rainforest growing on the southern slopes of the peaks. I also decided to finish at the more pleasant Spicers Gap now that the road to it had been re-opened. The clothes I wore plus my pack weighed a total of 350 grams and I chose a pair of racing shoes which weighed 380 grams. I carried a small empty wine bladder which I planned to fill upon reaching Steamer Saddle.

Leaving at 7am, the run from Teviot Gap to Spicers Gap took 6 hours 40 minutes. Shirley Peadon, who had driven the car around, was waiting at the Gap when I arrived at 1.40pm. Compared to the earlier traverses, this run was a breeze and I drank less than one litre the whole time mainly because of the cool winter weather and the fact I was a lot fitter on this occasion than the previous runs.

Below is a summary of the significant runs I have done. Note that nearly all the runs in Queensland were done close to mid-winter to avoid the warmer seasons when it is too hot to run in Queensland. I have also included some of my solo runs from further afield with the time of year the run was undertaken varying depending on the location.

25 July 1981 Cunningham's Gap to Teviot Gap 10 hours 44 minutes (Rankin and Bourne)

24 Aug 1981 Cunningham's Gap to Mt Beau Brummell 8 hours (Rankin and Bourne)

June 1982 Lost World, Worendo, Widgee, Albert R. 6 hours 30 minutes (Rankin)

14 July 1982 Cunningham's Gap to Teviot Gap 9 hours 13 minutes (Rankin and Bourne)

25 Sept 1982 Barney All Peaks (from Lower Portals) 6 hours 39 minutes (Rankin)

9 June 1983 South East Ridge Barney (from Cronan Creek) 58 minutes 58 seconds (Rankin)

4 June 1991 Logans Ridge Barney (from Logan River) 1 hour 23 minutes 58 seconds (Rankin)

6 July 1991 Teviot Gap to Spicers Gap 6 hours 40 minutes (Rankin)

August 1992 Barney Ascent/Descent via SE Ridge from Cronan Creek 1 hour 39 minutes (Rankin)

Further afield there are many challenges. Some major ones I have done solo (although none of these are likely to be records) include:

22 Jan 1985 Mt Bogong from Mountain Creek (Vic) 1 hour 15 minutes

23 Jan 1985 Geehi, Mt Kosciusko, Thredbo Traverse 3 hours 58 minutes (Snowies traverse, river to river) (NSW)

22 Feb 1993 Western Arthur Range Circuit (Tas) 11 hours 20 minutes (Junction Creek, Moraine A, Moraine K and back to Junction Creek)

18 July 1993 Mount Bowen from Little Ramsey Bay (Q) 3 hours 30 minutes

You might notice that a lot of the times feature the number 58 in them. This is because I try desperately hard towards the finish to not allow the time to drift into the next minute. A man obsessed

with time you could say! But writing this article has got me excited once again so I might see you in the bush in your running shoes sometime!