

## Chapter 26

### Timid Visitors

**T**HE BOYS woke even earlier than usual. The first gladsome light of day pierced the tent's sloping walls. If the light had not woken them, their body clocks would have, though set for half an hour later.

They awakened with gratitude. They were alive! After the alarms and excursions of the night, they had been spared the nightmares they might have expected.

They said their morning prayers. And only now did Jack realize, "Ugh! Last night we forgot."

Joe added with unusual solemnity, "And just look what nearly happened cos of it."

Strangely, this did not smite their consciences until Jack put an inverted complexion on it: "If we'd said 'em, the Lord might have taken us last night, but cos we didn't, he's given us another chance."

But Jim chortled, "No jobs this morning. Home was never like this! What a holiday!"

Getting dressed, too, was simpler. They had only to put on socks, boots and a hat.

They forgot to wash, but not to eat. Meals are one of those things a real boy never forgets.

Jack knew cooking porridge was tricky. "In home-made billies," he told them, "it catches so easily, and burns on the bottom and tastes yuk."

Joe suggested cheekily, "Feed it to the chooks!"

Jack stirred it with a stick whittled to a blunt chisel. Time and again he scraped it across the bottom, and kept adding water at need.

In the other billy, Jim boiled water and three eggs. He gave them a good long run, lifted them out on a

soup spoon, and used the boiling water to half fill each mug. He refilled the billy, re-boiled it, and made tea.

Joe sprinkled powdered milk in the mugs to make hot water into hot milk. Jack poured porridge into dixies and bowl, and scooped off dribbles for himself.

"Your extra bits missed the charcoal on the billy, Jack," Jim announced cheerfully, almost regretfully.

They dosed the porridge with sugar and most of the hot milk, keeping enough milk for their first cuppa, which Jim called, "Heart-starters."

They said Grace, and tucked in.

The second course was a roll, broken open by hand, half for the egg and half for jam, then more tea. The porridge billy was left to soak to help the 'clawing out'.

Jack proposed, "We've got to be home for an early lunch, so let's do something simple this morning, something easy to get home from." He had quite forgotten about finding a way along the Giant's Causeway.

"Let's spy on the Shy Spy Triplets," proposed Jim, "and see what they're up to. And then have a real good swim in Little Bogie."

"Good," agreed Jack. "We'll leave most of our gear in the tent, and just take a morning snack with us. We'll hang leftover food up a tree in the sugar bag."

Washing up was pursued with vigour.

They dug personal latrine holes with jagged sticks.

Then taking only staffs and knapsack, they set out.

Nearing The Narrows, at the lower entrance to Paradise, Jim reminded them, "This is Jungle Warfare. Constant vigilance and..."

Joe gave the response. "And eternal suspicion."

They crept out onto Koala Creek. At once, Jack and Jim looked left at the Thunderfall pool.

Would the Shy Spies be there? No, they weren't.

Joe looked straight out across the stepping stones. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a flicker of movement upstream. He turned to it. Nothing. He told the others. "I think I saw an animal."

Jim was dismissive. "Could be a fairy..."

If the Lawsons had only been a bit earlier heading upstream, they might have seen their rivals and hid. Or if later, the Spies would have passed on downstream.

Alas! Joe was right. He had glimpsed Shadrach diving into cover. The Triplets had made an early start and were on their way to the Lawson's Big Bogie. In fact, they had almost given up on Big Trees: the outdoor life was so distracting, enchanting and attractive...

Alas for coincidence! The SST had seen the Lawsons emerging from a very solid cliff!

The Lawson Paradise was no longer a Lawson secret.

Even worse! when the Lawsons were far enough from the Thunderfall for voices to carry, Jim yelled back over his shoulder to his brothers, "Farewell till this arvo, O Paradise of Pleasure," and he waved towards the entrance of Paradise.

The Triplets saw and heard, and understood entirely.

\* \* \* \*

Jack, Jim and Joe fell silent as they drew near The Secret Water and the camp of the Shy Spy Triplets.

They crept via trackless scrub to peep out across the pool. Someone must be about? Silently they snuck on further, and hid behind the big Morton Bay, fig where Jim had done his own spying.

"No one here," they hissed to each other.

On tippy-toes they crossed the grassy area to the tent, listening hard, reflexes poised for flight. Not a sound, no snores, no breathing, no sign of anyone, apart from artifacts like tent and fireplace. And the charcoal

in the fireplace was warm and wet from dousing. The Shy Spy Triplets were real bushies.

It was a great let down after such expectancy.

"Let's raid their tent," burst out Joe, "and find out what mischief they're up to."

Jim would have liked to, but knew it breached their honour. And Jack said so. "We wouldn't like it if they poked about in our tent."

Outside all was tidy. No litter. No rubbish of civilization to clash with the Creator's beauty — not even bits of camping gear or clothes scattered about.

Despite rivalry over what they did not know, the Lawsons warmed even more towards the Shy Spies. Mum had been right. They were boys worth knowing.

The contradictions in their own thinking did not occur to them, not even to Jack. They had come to spy, and yet they declined to do so.

Jack knew there is honour in not being worldly wise. He quoted, "Better dead than a scoundrel."

Jim's lament was, "If we'd only found them in swimming! We could've had a friendly swim with 'em, like Greg and Bernie did." Again a contradiction: they could have, last Friday at The Thunderfall. "Well, there's nothing else for it but to move on."

That pleased Joe. "It'll be just warm enough for a swim at Little Bogie."

\* \* \* \*

On arrival, Jack assured them there was no risk of the girls being there. He squinted at the sun, "It's too early for them. It's no more than eight o'clock."

They lit a fire, put the billy on, and, although the water still felt cold, they swam happily, as only boys who are camping-out can do.

A cuppa with Anzac biscuits followed. The talk

moved from the Shy Spy Triplets to Ben, Ken and Steve, and back again.

They decided to press on upstream, a part they had not yet explored. They noted the cliffs above them of the Rock Rollery, and so on to Luigi's Cow Pasture.

They turned right off Koala Creek and strode fast up the steep grassy slope, through the middle of the dairy herd, bull and all. At Swampy Ridge Road they right-turned for an even faster downhill trot to *Terra Sancta*. It was good solid walking.

Mum, Nanna, the twins and the littlies were mighty pleased to welcome them, and eager to hear their doings.

Jack probed cautiously, "Are we all set for this arvo?"

Mum's kindly eyes twinkled, as did Nanna's. This was not lost on Jack and Jim. A good sign.

She replied carefully. "Partly all set, partly in doubt. What is settled is that Dad has taken the van to leave at Luigi's while he gets the train to work. He'll meet Ben, Ken, Steve, and Ben's sister, you know, Bess. The Mahoney girls'll come Friday." She paused. The boys squirmed. What was she going to say about the plan for a new camping trip that very afternoon? She went on: "You promised to set the kindling for the hot water stove, and to fill the wood boxes. Do that now while Nanna and I read your Log Books — it all depends on that. We hope you've done them?"

Jack winked at Jim. All was well. In silence they got the Log Books from the knapsack and solemnly handed Jack's to Mum, Jim's to Nanna, and Joe's to the twins. Then they spoke ever so virtuously, "We'll get onto the firewood right away."

\* \* \* \*

Jack emptied the ash-pan in the pot-bellied stove, raced out to the woodheap, back with a barrowload.

Jim had already filling the boxes for the kitchen stove and the two laundries. He did not need to check Buttercup and Bubs — so trustworthy were the twins.

They met briefly at the woodheap. Jim said to Jack. "Thank Heavens we cut so much wood."

"Yeah," replied Jack. "And it's gunna be all right. I heard 'em reading bits aloud and chuckling." He and Jim combined to set all three fires, ready for a match.

Joe was escorted by Tilly, Tommy and Billy to check the chooks. The littlies had minded them well in his absence. He piggy-backed Billy, while Tilly held Tommy by his hand.

Within ten minutes they were back.

Homemade rolls, with self-serve fillings, were on the table, and the tea was already brewed and poured.

But all Mum said was, "Wash your hands, boys." Clearly, she would not be bulldozed.

When they returned from the Old Laundry, she said, "Of course, you really should have showers. But that would mean lighting a copper. So when you take your friends camping this afternoon, have one of those awful *bush baths* you've told me about."

And that was the casual way she gave her okay.

Jack wasted no time. He aimed for the next target. "We boys thought it'd be good for us *to test the visitors* with a little walk from the station to here."

Like a relay runner, trusty Jim seized the baton. "Mum, maybe Dad could just bring Bess and their knapsacks and we could *test* the boys by walking back?"

Mum and Nanna's eyes met. Mum said, "Yes, good idea. Oh, your Log Books did pass *our* testing. You'd better leave for the station" — she glanced at the clock — "at once. It usually takes Dad 40 minutes. Meanwhile the aged and very young'll have our nap."

Colleen also seized the opportunity. "Mum, may we go with the boys and come back with Bess?"

Mum beamed her approval. She'd noticed that while they talked the twins had washed up lunch and breakfast. She smiled sweetly. "Off you all go."

\* \* \* \*

The twins pumped their brothers for juicy details. Colleen began. "Did you see the Shy Spy Triplets?"

"Yo ho nope no," supplied Joe. "We looked in at their camp and they weren't there."

Kathleen went next. "What'd you cook?"

Jim answered that to the full satisfaction of both cooking experts — who glowed with superiority.

Again it was Colleen's call. She was blunt. "Just what're going to *do* to Ben, Ken and Steve?"

Jack was briefer and blunter. "Nothing."

After that, the twins targeted Joe for details.

\* \* \* \*

The platform for trains from the east was on their side of the level crossing. The Station Master, who was also ticket collector and porter, had long and lonely days. He greeted them like long lost friends. "Yes, the train's been signalled on time, 12.45. Do you want tickets to Galway Craggs?"

"No, thanks," said Colleen, "we're meeting friends."

The train swept in majestically, as is the way of trains. Three boys got out, each with a bulging knapsack, a sleeping bag under an arm, and a green shopping bag, the sort shops sell cheap to avoid waste and plastic. The first boy also had a big suitcase. He dumped his gear on the platform while the other boys were getting out, and turned back to help down a solitary girl.

Greetings were babbled and hands shaken to the point of being wrenched off. The girls kissed one

another but knew better than to impose on the boys.

Jack explained to Ben, Ken and Steve, "We boys are going to walk from the station. Dad's train comes in a bit later and he'll take the girls and your gear."

"We'll wait in Luigi's," said Kathleen. "We've a bit of shopping for Mum."

"Dump your gear at the van," Colleen told the boys.

Once the train cleared the level crossing, they crossed to the north side. The six boys carried all the luggage to the Lawson van parked in Luigi's yard. It was not locked, so they piled everything in.

Colleen presented all four visitors to the Castonellis. With that old-world graciousness of country folk everywhere, the aged Italians smiled heartfelt welcomes.

The six boys strode off abreast — as far as potholes permitted — jabbering away. The visitors felt swept off their feet. Here they were, footing it into the unknown, first beside the railway, then off into what looked like wilder and wilder bush. However, they were quite happy and very excited.

"It's a test walk," Jack explained. "The van'll overtake us later, and if we're lucky, the girls'll have our afternoon tea ready when we arrive."

True, the visiting boys might be a bit timid and soft. Nevertheless, they were real boys. Now they laid on the questions.

With concern in his voice, Ben asked, "Do we really get thrown in the creek, first with clothes on, and then off?" Ken and Steve listened for the dread answer.

The Lawson boys roared with laughter.

It was just as Dad had said.

Joe teased them. "Of course!" Jack glared at him.

But Jim soothed them with the truth. "You've got that from our cousins. *They* pushed each other in.



*E. Tamm*

*OLD-WORLD GRACIOUSNESS OF COUNTRY FOLK*

They've told you their Dad's yarn about what the Scouts did it to *him*. The scouts did it to every one. It's been muddled up with us: we did *not* do any of it."

Jack reassured them: "We don't chuck boys in."

But Ken still looked troubled. "But *Rick* said you sprung them. You dropped them in an outdoor bathtub. It wasn't fair until they got revenge and did you, too, all sopping wet in your pyjamas, and you surrendered."

Again, the Lawsons laughed their heads off. Jack grinned. "Half true and all garbled, from Mick, Rick and Phil last Friday. And did they tell you why? We were washing their dirty mouths out with soap..."

Meanwhile, Jack was studying the visitors' clothes. They all had correct broad-brimmed felt hats. Good. All wore jeans, but when questioned, "Yes," they had shorts in their knapsacks. Shirts, socks, footwear were okay. So far, so good.

The visitors were surprised that their arrival at *Terra Sancta* would only be a stop for a snack, sorting gear, and collecting food. Then they would be off again...

Jack asked, "When d'yer get the goggles, Steve?"

Steve took off his glasses, and brandished them. "The eye doctor said there's *a stick* in my eyes."

Jack couldn't think of the right word either.

Ben helped. "Now he can catch tennis balls."

"He's not allowed to fight in specs," added Ken.

The Lawsons chuckled: Steve had not been known for fighting. Tennis balls were about his limit.

They passed Kangaroo Corner and Black Snake Crossing but unfortunately no beasties appeared. But it led to lots of interesting talk.

## Chapter 27

### Welcome to the Softies

**T**HE VISITORS STRODE it out manfully. No slacking off, no calling for rests. It augured well, and showed they were not so soft after all.

The Lawsons took over the talk. Joe teased them with half-facts merging into fantasy. Jim aimed to impress them by boasting. Jack played a modifying role and tried to turn the talk to something helpful.

Indeed, Jack became the optimist, a role usually reserved to Jim. "Just like we told you in the emails," he enthused, "we've got exciting plans for you!"

Jim and Joe took the hint. Jim said, "We're much better at going bush than we were."

Joe saw his chance. "Yeah, we're going to sleep in a tent tonight — it's fun!"

Ben, Ken and Steve looked a little uncertain. They took refuge in looking at each other.

Steve took off his specs to mop his face. It was partly nervousness, and partly the sweat.

Joe teased, "He's actually got a hanky!"

"Well, haven't you?" challenged Jim.

Joe's cheeky grin admitted his usual guilt.

Jack was re-assuring. "You won't feel as sweaty once you get into shorts. Legs need an air flow."

Their pace increased on the steep downhill of The Jumpback. But the thumpetty-thump strained the braking by the muscles in knees and ankles.

The Lawsons did not reckon it complaining when Ken said, almost as an oddment of news, "My feet are hurting a bit." Rather, they swung into action.

Jack pointed to a handy log. Ken flopped down

and Jim and Joe had his boots off in a trice. Aha! his right boot had a fold in the sock under the instep, and his left a pebble. It took all of two jiffies to fix.

They were no sooner on the move again when the van overtook them. Dad leaned out the window, and called cheerily, "Anyone for a lift?"

Jack forestalled any possible displays of weakness: "No thanks, Dad."

Jack and Jim's regard for the visitors went up further when Ken asked, "What're we gunna eat tonight?" It was the proper sort of question for a boy explorer.

And it gave Joe his chance to chime in. "Snags," he declared, "fried snags, just right for a picnic."

Ben looked doubtful. "Snags? I thought they were things swimmers dived into."

So Ken told him. "It's slang for sausages."

How the time flew! The walk did not seem long and here was a gate marked *Terra Sancta*. The visitors managed to vault it, then gaped at the grandeur of hand-hewn stone. It far eclipsed Johnny-come-lately architecture at Lahdidar, let alone Boxwatch.

The visitors were puzzled when the Lawsons led them round the left fork in the driveway, around to the side door, and almost straight into the kitchen.

Dad, Mum and Nanna were there, but not Bess and the twins — their laughter drifted in from the corridor. The littlies, who were having their nap, soon showed up, to inspect the visitors and get a second lunch.

Mrs Lawson knew them all already. She introduced them to Nanna. Then Joe led the boys off to the Old Laundry: "Wash your paws here." When they got back to the kitchen, the big girls had arrived. The table in the kitchen was laden with a splendiferous late lunch. Or it could be called an early afternoon tea

— take your pick, or hyphenate it. There were bread rolls, with cheese and tomato, also Vegemite, scones and cream and raspberry jam, little iced cakes with sultanas, and lots of tea.

Joe, Ben, Ken and Steve licked their lips in the usual full circle — the ultimate approval in advance of eating.

Jack and Jim considered themselves a cut above that sort of thing, but they ate as heartily, and were pleased to see that the new boys drank tea. Bush doctrine deemed that essential for orthodoxy.

Mrs Lawson led the talk and no one tried to start a rival conversation. She pumped Ben, Ken and Steve on their families' recent moves from Boxwatch to Lahdidar. Phil, last weekend's visitor, had complained that his family were about to move there — he openly resented such surrender to the upper crust of society. Originally, Lahdidar had been called Boxwatch Heights, where social climbers aimed to break with 'the lower classes'. With its new name it was even more so.

Then Nanna had her turn. She did a bit of a tease on Jack and Jim. "You Bush Boy Explorers really need an extra line in that Bush Catechism. On what it says about hats. Now I know something that hats are good for that's been left out."

Jack would not admit to any imperfections. Its origins were in the mind of a holy priest, and he and his brothers had proved its doctrines over the past weeks. Hats? He groped in his memory, then recited:-

"Hats are for keeping off the sun, rain, cold,  
falling sticks and stones;  
fanning fires,  
carrying water,  
and charging head down through the scrub."

Nanna smiled, almost smugly. "Hats are also for *fanning fainting females.*"

The boys cheered and the opposite sex were momentarily non-plussed. Colleen was not long lost for a word. "I bet there are fainting boys needing fanning, too."

Jack ignored this and leapt in: "Wow! How did you think of it, Nanna?"

She smiled. "I got it from Father John whose friend Father Jim wrote your bush catechism. At the start, he'd planned to put it after that line about fanning fires, but decided not to, as it might lead to trouble."

Jack thanked Nanna. However, at this stage, he wanted to get their expedition started. He told Jim, "I'll fix the food if you'll fix their gear."

Dad took off for the workshop; the twins to their schoolwork; and the mothers to see to the littlies.

With their hunger temporarily satisfied, the boys said, "Thank you" to ladies, old and young.

Jim said, "Please excuse us," and he and Joe took the visiting boys to the bedroom. Their luggage was already there, thanks to the kindly big sisters.

Jack and Jim had made neatly printed luggage labels inscribed 'Ben', 'Ken' and 'Steve'. These were tied to three drawer handles. It was a further welcome.

Jim and Joe, too, had something new to gape at. A new notice had appeared on the back of the door. It read: MANLINESS, MODESTY, MANNERS.

Jim vaguely remembered Dad telling him and Jack about some idea he'd got from Matthew Cumberland. He'd got it from a father of five called Mr George Keys, also at Coachwood Falls.

Jack, Jim and Joe also remembered that Dad had 'drawn it out' of them — "Like a dentist pulling a tooth," as Jack put it. They knew, of course, that Dad

called this 'guided discovery', and they reckoned it was an improvement on Dad's unguided 'discovery method'.

The new arrivals made no comment on Manliness, Modesty, Manners, so Jim got on with the job at hand. He began, "Better get into your shorts."

Boots came off first, then clinging jeans. No wonder they had found it hot walking.

Jim hinted, "*We* wear shorts and shirts next to the skin — it's comfier when hot and sweaty..." This was Bush Boy Explorer's style of 'no frills, no fal-de-lals'. The visitors took the hint and got rid of their underwear.

Meanwhile Jim and Joe emptied out the visitors' gear on the floor. Jim picked it over, and slid much of it into the drawer with that boy's label. The visitors tossed in their scrumpled jeans and underwear on top.

Ben apologized. "Sorry, Jim, for all the spare clothes we won't wear. But you know, mums are *girls*. Oh, and they said we *must* wear pyjamas. But we really did try to bring only what you and Jack said."

Jim grinned. "We always wear pyjamas here at *Terra Sancta*. But in the *bush*, our clothes are our PJs." He tried to look severe, and failed. "We're not taking a single thing we can live without."

He chirruped. "Cheery-cheery choop-choop." This soothing sound was much used at the Lawsons. He went on, "You've made 'em happy and you're still be doing just what they said — and what we said, too."

Joe stood by, supportive and chuckling. Jim handed him Ben's parcel of bacon, Ken's fruit cake and Steve's Anzac biscuits. "Joey, like a good chap, take these to Jack in the kitchen."

Joe reported to Jack. "Here's their food and yer should 'ave seen the contraband! So far, three watches an' two mobiles with built-in radios. Jim says they've

brought enough clothes to go to the Antarctic for a month, with stop-overs in the tropics, and one dressing gown for staying at a swank hotel! But they're *doing* everything Jim says, yo ho yep yes they are."

Jack beamed on him. "Then they're better than you, Joey, yo ho yep yes! Thank 'em for the tucker. Say we'll keep half for the second trip. An' ask Jim if their sleeping bags'll fit in their knapsacks."

He went on with his careful measuring out of food — for six boys for three meals, tea, breakfast, lunch.

Joe was soon back. "They're already lookin' like us real Bush Boy Explorers! — notebooks and all. Jim's got 'em rolling sleeping bags into swags, an' I'm getting the sash cord and plastic to waterproof 'em."

Jack carried on despite the constant interruptions. He worked from lists and carefully ticked things off. He told Joe, "Make sure of mugs, spoons, bowls, tooth brushes, Parkas. An' hankies. An' sleeves rolled up."

Finally, Jim paraded the new boys to Jack. Jack made encouraging noises... Jim's head swelled.

Jack had divided the food into shares, by weight and by bulk. Jim helped stow it. Jack gave his own knapsack a pack-horse share of the weight.

It was a great moment: "Saddle up!" ordered Jack. Joe said, "Your javelins are in the corner."

Jim translated: "He means, get your knapsacks on and javelins are your staffs. Joe and I've got nothing to carry — our gear's already at the tent — so I'll take two of your swags and Joe one."

Jack bellowed along the corridors: "We're going!"

Dad, Mum, Nanna, twins and littlies re-appeared. Farewells ranged from shaking hands, hugs, kisses or just waving, depending on who it was and with whom.

That took five minutes — including the time Mum

took to repeat her orders on a bush bath that evening.

Dad delivered the final exhortation. His gaze held the eyes of Ben, Ken and Steve. "All of you are on your honour — and Jack'll tell you what to do."

Jim winked at Jack — a new approach for Dad, eh?

Then Dad turned to his sons. "All I ask of you three is this, go on being good." His sons looked at each other — and wondering what he had found out.

At long last they were off — to the accompaniment of the Sky Boat Song sung by the twins and Nell.

Outside in the paddock, Ken was afeared of Kanga. "He's trying to bite me! It's scary looking into his mouth full of shiny sharp teeth and seeing right down his red gaping gullet — I can just see him eating me!"

Jim couldn't resist. "His tummy'd be too small..."

Unexpectedly, it was Joe who was soothing. After all, he was their animal expert. "Kanga only wants to lick you. It's like the French President kissing men on both cheeks. Dogs lick you instead of kissing."

He persuaded Ken to rub Kanga's belly. It worked. Ken was overjoyed. "He really likes me."

The twins' ponies trotted over to inspect the newcomers. Joe introduced them: "Lady, Lucy, Liz, meet Ben, Ken an' Steve." Jim gave the ponies a playful smack on the rump and they trotted off to their eternal happiness, grazing on grass.

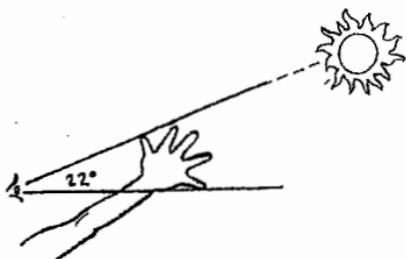
At the sliprails, Jack turned to look up and squint at the sun. He held up his right hand, fingers extended, to measure the angle. "Three and a half hand spans at 22° each, that's about 77°, at 15° an hour, that's about five hours till sunset. We've got time to show you Cubby's Cave."

Jim saw Ben, Ken and Steve's puzzlement. He winked at Joe, then spoke dryly to the visitors, "Jack's

## ESTIMATING ANGLES

and  
HOURS TILL SUNSET

See pp. 37, 465, *How Long till Sunset?* The angle formed at the eye by the biggest span of an open hand, from thumb to little finger, is about  $22^\circ$ .



With outstretched arm, count the hand spans (or fractions thereof) between the sun and that point on the horizon where it will set. The sun takes about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours to travel through the angle of a hand span ( $15^\circ$  per hour). Calculate when it will reach the horizon.

usually mad when he's normal, and he's dragged those numbers out of one of his survival books."

Jack rather liked this chiacking. Amid a chorus of hurrahs, he turned right to go down the slope alongside the post and rail fence.

He explained, "We're also coming this way to get a view over the high ground, so we can find the top end of The Giant's Causeway." He waved vaguely at the view. "It'll be somewhere over there, left of Cubby's Canyon."

Jim pointed with his staff: "Look's like the start of a ridge over there." He, too, had picked up the bushman's noble art, of finding the way by 'the lie of the land'.

Ben was incredulous: "You mean, you're taking us where you've never been before?"

"Of course," Jack replied smoothly. "You're real explorers now. This is what explorers do."

Joe had to cap this: "And you never know what we'll find or what'll happen." Yes, that scared 'em. Good!

At first, Ben, Ken and Steve proved bush-shy. For

## NAVIGATING

by "*the Lie of the Land*"

without using map or compass.

**I**DEALLY, we travel by the easiest navigable route, "Up Ridges" and "Down Creeks" (see p. 465). Of course, we might be blocked by a cliff or a waterfall.

Creeks don't fork going downhill (except for islands, billabongs or deltas). Small creeks join bigger ones and all flow downhill. But going upstream against the flow of water can be confusing at junctions.

Going uphill, small ridges join and enlarge the main ridge and there is usually no confusion. Hence the old saying, "*You can't get lost going up a ridge.*"

### GOING DOWN RIDGES

We often need to find our way down a ridge with spur ridges splitting off to confuse us (chapters 35,36):-

- **Spur ridges** branch off left &/or right and are usually lower than the main ridge, but even then we can easily slew off onto them thinking they are the main ridge.
- **Big trees or scrub**, can block the view ahead and we can't see where the ridge goes, especially if it's level.
- **Saddles** in a ridge confuse us: they slope down on the sides and rise up again (like a saddle on a horse).
- **Slewing off** the side of a ridge (especially a level ridge) can easily happen if we think we're at a saddle: we end up in a creek, or even on top of a cliff.
- **Re-entrant ridges** are spurs bent-back the opposite way to what we expect; if they branch off uphill; they confuse us, especially if higher than the main ridge.

The secret is careful observation of the slopes in front and on each side, and think before moving on, and all the time build up a mental map in the memory.

*Constant Vigilance and Eternal Suspicion*

them, it was The Great Unknown. Besides, they were rather lightweight on muscle strength and staying power. Yet their zest and cheeriness more than made up for it, and they seemed to be conquering their fears.

However, they had no time to be afraid as they sped down the slope to the dam at the corner post of the home paddock. Their staffs saved them from stumbles.

Ken blended cunning and curiosity: "Is this the dam where you'd have thrown us in, *if you'd been goin' to?*"

Joe smirked. "Yo ho nope no! We wouldn't chuck anyone into this. They'd get stuck in the mud and our fish'd eat them — that'd put us off eatin' fishes."

At the splintery post-and-rail fence, Jack told them, "For the descent to Cubby's Cave, we'll leave our gear this side of the fence."

Ben, Ken and Steve eased off their knapsacks and rubbed sore shoulders; Jim and Joe unslung the swags; and Jack his heavy knapsack. They dumped it all, including their staffs, to await their return.

Getting over slowed them. It also drew first blood from Ken and Steve. "Suck it and spit," advised Jim.

In the scrub, the visitors readily believed the Bush Catechism text, 'charging head down through the scrub'.

They were a bit on the slow side climbing down the spikes in the low cliff, but they managed it well enough.

From there, the short scramble to the cave was easy.

## Chapter 28

### Arriving in Paradise

**C**UBBY'S CAVE made a deep impression on Ben, Ken and Steve. They listened eagerly to its history and how Lawsons and their cousins found it by accident.

"Today's heat's nothing to what zonked Simon and Dominic," Jim assured them, "though this is pretty hot."

Joe was boastful, and lacking in tact. "It was 'a touch and a go' — they were nearly *deady-bones*."

"We had another sizzler after that," boasted Jim. "The Cumberlands and the Shy Spy Triplets nearly conked out." He chuckled. "You should've seen the Cumberlands wearing night shirts at our place."

All Jack had to say was, "We won't scare the women with the details. And now, we'd better move on."

They made entries in the new Log Book. Ben put, "It must have been beaut here a hundred years ago."

Ken wrote, "I'm glad I don't go to boarding school."

Steve had, "I'll like the bush, once I get used to it."

Jack led them back to the spikes and through the scratchy scrub. It left its signature on bare limbs.

Steve justified his reputation for yapping, often criticizing or arguing. "You said 'moving on', but we're 'moving back'."

Jim joined in from the end of the line. "It's like Amundsen going to the North Pole. He told the King of Norway his route was down the Atlantic Ocean to go round Cape Horn and come up the Pacific Ocean to where Asia nearly touches North America. But before they got to the equator, he told his men his new plan. 'Who wants to go to the North Pole via the South Pole?' Well, they all agreed. So you see, Steve, that's Jack

taking us back a bit so we can go forward again.”

But it all meant very little without a map.

They got over the southern fence, retrieved their gear, then climbed over the eastern fence.

From outside the fence, Jack lead off. He slanted across the steeply sloping ridge, to be sure of getting onto the watershed between Cubby's Canyon and Paradise, where the Giant's Causeway should be.

This baffled the newcomers — they had to take it on faith. However, they mostly tried to agree, whether liking it or not. Later, as they gained confidence, they got more boyish, and proved less amenable, indeed, they even showed a tendency to do as they liked...

Jack admitted to Jim, “Yes, you were right. We should've come home this way this morning, like I said originally when Joe found the Giant's Causeway.”

Slewing a bit left or right, they managed to stick to the back of the ridge on its downhill course. Soon the scrub gave way to a flat ramp of bare rock. “My Causeway,” boasted Joe, “and now *I'll* be able to lead yous down my Joseph's Dream Ladder.”

Again Steve objected, “I thought Jacob had the Dream Ladder, with angels scampering up and down.”

“This is a new dream and it's *my* dream,” Joe argued none too patiently. “*I'm* the Joseph that had it.” It is next to impossible to argue with a dream...

But Jim was not going to have his own ladder sidelined. “Jacob's Ladder's *my* ladder. It's a bit risky, and Joe's way into Paradise *is* safer.”

Jack now took over the rear guard and put Jim in front to find his scratch marks on the rock.

The wild views each side of the Causeway left the visitors agape. It was simply to be enjoyed, and quite beyond words.

On the right was the huge gash seemingly into the heart of the earth: that was Cubby's Canyon, that they had just left, though the cave was out of sight.

On the left, the mighty bush rose and fell in endless waves of ridges gorges.

It was a wild scene. One was either scared stiff or revelled in it — or indeed a bit of both.

Jim found where they should branch off. Joe took over in front, for the descent of Joseph's Dream. Jim came next, to keep Joe under control.

As each new wonder was unveiled, the visitors were unstinting in their praise. How they envied the Lawsons! Wattles were in flower everywhere, and bees collected nectar for honey. It smelled yummy.

They tried to tread with care the rough route into Paradise, but new wonders blunted their vigilance. Ben was distracted, talking over his shoulder, and came an awful bust-up. He was winded and gasping in pain.

The others gathered round, and mighty relieved to see him get his breath back, and slowly struggle to his feet. He did not complain, he did not blame anyone, and he even grinned at them. As cruder spirits might have put it, he had guts — though Mrs Lawson would have said fortitude.

Jack was too tactful to say anything. But he thought, "Well, he's known as Clumsy Ben. He's discovering bushwalking the hard way — as we did."

\* \* \* \*

On arrival at the tent, all six were lathered in sweat. Hankies were sodden from mopping faces, and Steve's goggles as well.

"First thing's a swim!" claimed Joe.

He had a lot of support. But Jack ruled otherwise: "We've gotta cool off before a cold plunge And

early arvo'd give us agonies of sunburn. And we've gotta do our Log Books before an arvo swim. Yous flop in the shade near the tent and I'll put the billy on."

His ever-loyal second-in-charge supported him.

The shade near the tent was total, being under turpentine rather than eucalypts. The new boys were content to laze, with swags as pillows. But writing Log Books was uncomfortable lying down.

While Jack and Jim sprawled to write their logs, they kept a close eye on the fire, albeit well caged in its stone prison. Log books were easy for them — they knew exactly what they wanted to say and wrote fast.

Jim checked the billy. He teased the Lahdidars. "I've wet the tea, so yous 'ad better get your mugs out."

Jack added, "And put the swags in the tent, but don't unwrap 'em or tread on 'em. Dump your Parkas on top — they'll be pillows — and put anything else in your knapsacks."

They sat in the shade and sipped hot tea with plenty of sugar and powered milk, dunking Anzac biscuits as a matter of course.

Ben enthused, "It's better than anything I could have thought of — it's Heaven on earth."

Ken and Steve grinned agreement.

Jim beamed. "That's why we call our Garden of Eden 'The Paradise of Pleasure', *Paradisum*."

On behalf of his brothers, Joe boasted, "Yesterday was the very first time we pitched our home-made tent in the bush. Last night was our very first sleep in a tent." He could not help glancing at the fallen tree, but even he knew not to mention it.

The visitors were impressed, but Steve reproving. "You mean your first camping experience was last night?" Unspoken was, 'And you're experimenting on us?'

Joe ignored him and asked Jack, "What next?"

Jack had worked it out. "Before we cool off with a swim, there are three more jobs — more firewood, dig a latrine, and peel potatoes."

Joe and Steve, the big chatterers, volunteered to get firewood — the more the better. Fortunately, they worked while they yapped, which few boys can do. And Joe enjoyed having an older boy to boss around.

Jim took Ken to help dig the latrine. They had a small garden digger made of strong plastic, shaped like a shoehorn. "Trixy's Trash 'n' Treasures, dirt cheap," explained Jim. "It's the junk shop Mum doesn't like."

Later, he gave graphic instructions on using a latrine — with all the vital details: "Scoop loose earth over all manure and toilet paper. Bring back the digging tool. Make sure you put the toilet paper back in Jack's knapsack's pocket. Wash your hands with soap and water, and without getting soap in the creek."

It was a typical of the camping lore which the Lawsons got from their books over recent days, and built on Greg's advice and the Bush Catechism.

Jack and Ben peeled potatoes. Here the planning proved slack. They had but one knife. So they took it in turns: one rubbed off dirt by hand in a billy of water, while the other peeled or scraped. Jack said, "The rubbing's often so good it hardly needs peeling."

After all that, Jim and the others expected a swim. Jack's glance passed over their faces and weighed them up. Ken was small; the visitors lacked strong muscles; and Joe, like Jack and Jim, had walked further today than ever before. They must not overdo it.

He shook his head: "This sun's still too hot for bare skin," he ruled, "We'll just have to wait till it's cooler."

Again, Jim gave loyal support. "Okay, how about

an easy stroll to Elijah's Cave: half-shade all the way?"

Jack agreed. "Okay, but we'll put the fire out." Using his Dad's persuasive approach, he gave no direct order and simply hoped they would use lots of water.

Then it was Jim's turn. "Hats on!" His blunt words were rather pointless — they had them on already. Then, "Staffs!"

"I'll bring the First Aid Kit, just in case," said Jack.

Elijah's Cave seemed a happy choice. But he could see that Ben, Ken and Steve were running out of pep. Their curiosity was fading. Even the name 'Elijah' evoked neither comment or question.

He put Joe in front, Ken next, himself third. Then came Steve and Ben, with Jim the faithful rear-guard.

As Jack expected, the smaller boys made their best speed in front, just like the books said. From his place third in line, he could see over their heads for snakes.

Occasional glimpses through the trees of the great cliffs, the Walls of Paradise, stirred their flagging interest. At the foot of the cliff, Jim pointed. "The foot of *my* ladder, Jacob's Ladder, our first rock climb." Certainly, most folk would have missed its potential.

Joe also bragged. "Yesterday, coming down, I came a gutser in the upper chimney. It was below The Devil's Burrow an' I nearly put us all over the cliff. If you'd been standing here, you'd've seen us all splattered into mincemeat!"

Hmm! A scene best not dwelt on.

They moved round the cliff a bit further. Ken was starting to liven up. "Have you had one of your fires there?" He pointed. There in Elijah's Cave was a neatly built fireplace, as good as that near the dam.

Joe interpreted. "Jack!" he screamed in righteous anger. "The Triplets've been here! Look at this!"

Couldn't've been anyone else."

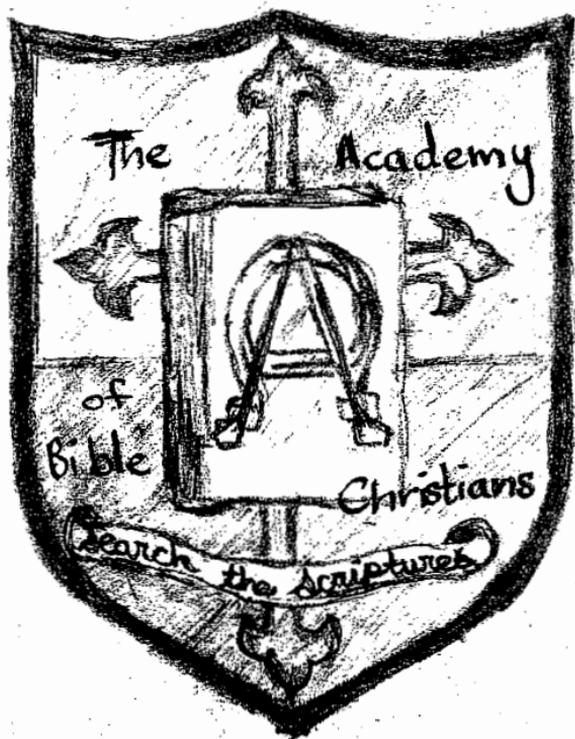
Jack came closer. After one glance, he ordered, "Only Jim go in. He's a whiz on *reading* boot prints."

Jim bowed. "Okay, but it wuz *you* that worked 'em out, only a week ago, near Cumberlands."

Nevertheless, he went in first. Yes, their own prints from yesterday had been overtrodden.

"They match the SST patterns and measurements," he vouched. He told the new boys how Jack had been like Sherlock Holmes, reasoning that there were two friends and one young brother.

After this skilled verdict, Jack gave the All Clear.



A CROSS AND A BOOK WITH ALPHA AND OMEGA

“Okay, yous can all go in and scuffle as much as you like.” For his part, he felt the ashes and charcoal: yes, it had been a fire put out properly with water.

Joe overdid his scuffling. He kicked something in the sand and snatched it up. “A badge! Guess what’s on it?” But how could they with his hand clenched?

With considerable delight he revealed the evidence. “It’s got a Cross, a book with alpha and omega, and its red, green, gold, blue like all the Spy stuff and it says, ‘Search the Scriptures’.”

“The Academy of Bible Christians,” breathed Jim — as if they didn’t know.

Joe passed the badge around, then pinned it on his shirt pocket.

Jack lamented, “So they’ve found our Paradise... Ah well, it’s not really ours. They’re so keen, they would’ve found it sooner or later.” And by way of consolation: “At least, it *is* a jolly good fireplace.”

Ben, Ken and Steve were bewildered at such alarm over the Shy Spy Triplets.

Joe burst out, “So I was right — as usual. I *did* see a Spy outside The Narrows yesterday and they must’ve seen us come out and found the way in.”

Now Jack was crestfallen. “And seen our camp.” He added, “AND the giant tree. So they’ll be back...”

Jim thought, too. “Maybe they didn’t noticed our bootprints here, or they wouldn’t’ve left a fireplace for us to know they’d been?” Jack nodded.

His glance swept over brothers and friends. The cuppa, plus a rest in the shade, and an easy stroll, had restored them. He gave his rare grin. “We’ve showed you Elijah’s Cave, so let’s do a bit more exploring.”

Jim looked pained. “Don’t you mean a swim?”

## Chapter 29

### A Second Night in Paradise

**B**RIEFLY AND benignly Jack smiled. "Okey-dokey, a swim. But the sun's still a bit hot. So let's do it by stages. After all those bust-ups, grime, scratches, dried blood and sweat, we need a..."

Jim interrupted again. "Oh no! not a bath?"

Jack grinned. "Well, we promised Mum..." Then to Ken, "How about you lead us back to... the bath?"

Steve spoke for the visitors. "You mean, we get in the dam, but with soap?"

Using Joe's famous formula, Jim gave emphasis to his reply. "Yo ho nope no! What! Lose our only bit of soap in the mud on the bottom?"

Joe muttered, "Good idea! Save us washing..."

When he was younger, Jack would have agreed. But now, he was a responsible leader. He gave them a new reason. "No polluting waterways. But you'll see!"

Jim and Joe knew this was Greg Cumberland speaking. For it was Greg who had given them more detail than *The ABC of Camping* on things like bush baths.

And *see* they did. The new boys were astonished at the hustle and bustle of the Lawsons. Surely, they must have done all this before? But not so: it was their very first bush bath, too.

On the grassy sward, cropped smooth by animals, Joe laid out dixies for Jack and Jim, enamel bowls for the rest, and mugs for all six.

Jim stretched the rope between trees still in the sun. "To hang our clothes on," he explained, "To dry the sweat, air 'em, and keep the ants and splashes off 'em."

Joe tipped out the peeled potatoes on a clean rock.

Jack relit the fire and put on all three billies. The the third one was necessary for the larger group — another of the three litre fruit juice tins from the hospital dump.

Jack and Jim made three trips for heavy stones from the wall of the dam. With boots and socks off, they lowered them into the mud at the shallow edge, as underwater stepping stones, to step in and out without mud on the feet. They were the first to use them.

Joe filled the homemade water-bucket. It was a plastic bag inside a green-fabric shopping bag.

Then came a welcome change of plan. Jack glanced at the sun. "It's gone down enough to swim at once. So we'll swim while the water's hotting up, then have the sponge bath and another swim."

Joe led the cheering. "Hurray! Hurray!"

Those still in boots and socks reefed them off.

Jim reminded them. "When you hang yer clothes up, you've gotta put yer hanky near yer bowl."

Clothes were strung up and they waded in. The Lawsons went first, then the visitors. Ken came last. He did not bother to wade, but launched off from the last stepping stone in a gliding dive. The others were only aware of him when a human torpedo whizzed past with a racing overarm, across the dam, and then a victory lap round the edges.

"Wow!" cried Jack, Jim and Joe. "Can he swim!" Then to Ben and Steve: "Can you do that?"

"Not us!" said a rueful Ben. So he and Steve basked in the reflected glory of having brought Ken with them.

Ben and Steve were only mediocre swimmers. Nevertheless, they were lots better than Jack, Jim and Joe.

Just fancy Ken! He was better even than Simon and Dominic, and far better than Mick, Rick and Phil — a happy augury for a new explorer, smallest and

## HEALTH & HYGIENE

**B**USH HYGIENE means washing and latrines:

wash hands with soap and water  
before meals and after using toilet paper;  
wash up utensils in hot soapy water  
and clean teeth after eating;  
wash face and hands on rising  
and, on long camps, have bush baths. See p. 455 §33

**A**LATRINE is a bush toilet,  
a hole, dug with boot, stick or tool,  
well away from creek and camp.

Bury manure & toilet paper, then wash hands. See p. 455 §34

**R**UBBISH DISPOSAL means that  
any plastic, tins or glass are taken home,  
food scraps buried,  
but paper may be burnt. See p. 456 §36

## BUSH BATHS

**A**BUSH BATH is sponging the body all over  
with handkerchief, hot water and soap,  
rinsing well-away from the waterways,  
and a cold plunge in the creek. See p. 456 §35; and p. 452 §14

**Bush Baths:** 'a must' in summer or on long winter camps:  
hands, face, hair, ears; back of neck, chest, tummy, back, arms,  
legs, feet; and specially where skin touches skin: behind ears,  
under arms, between toes, between legs back & front. Pour  
used water down your back; often renew hot water with fresh.

Rinse with clean warm water; rinse hanky, hang to dry; close  
pores of skin against dirt with cold water or swim in the creek.

## MODESTY

**M**ODESTY, along with purity and manners, makes manliness.

1. A modest boy speaks humbly of himself; he never boasts.

2. A kindred modesty forbids him to stare, point, snigger,  
or incite impurity, in himself or others, when undressed, and he  
only has bush baths in the company of other clean-minded boys.

seemingly weakest, to really shine at something.

The water soothed their battered bodies, though the mud and slush were a bit *ugh* if trodden on.

"This is beaut!" cried an enraptured Ben. Ken and Steve beamed their gladness in agreement. It was a simple joy swimming slowly back and forth.

They kept it up for ten minutes. Then, like Greg a week ago, Jack called, "All out!" and led the way.

The Bush Bath followed: first, boiling water in each bowl, then diluted with cold. "You go first with the soap," Jack told his lieutenant. "I've gotta keep up the hot and cold without getting soap in the billies."

"Or us in our gobs, yo ho nope no," chirped Joe.

With only one cake of soap, washing was a bit slow. Jack would not let them cut the soap in half. The new boys admired his one-handed pouring from a billy of boiling water.

They rinsed off the suds with the last of the hot water, wrung out their hankies and hung them up.

The second swim was even better. Joe told them, "Keep afloat. Don't stir up leaves. Keep the mud off yer feet, yo ho yep yes."

Never before had they felt so clean, so invigorated. Of course, the newcomers had never been so grubby before, though the Lawsons had. All six felt the cleanliness as they sliced through the water.

Nevertheless, they laughed at themselves. The whole show was slightly absurd. But absurdity is home-base for humour, and laughing at yourself is good for humility and getting on with other folk.

Jack glanced at the sun. It had now set behind the cliff tops. "There's still plenty of daylight," he told them, "but it's time to cook."

During their second swim, Jack and Jim had

managed to scramble out, mend the fire, and cut the potatoes into smaller pieces and put them on to cook.

They gathered briefly at the fire for its generous warmth and rotated at need. They dab-dried between toes with socks, with shirts for the rest, and got dressed, all the while babbling with enthusiasm for bush life.

With two sausages per boy, frying with two dixies was the usual juggle. At least, the pre-boiling at home meant the sausages did not mash up into mince.

Jack squeezed six in the bigger dixie, five in the smaller. They got easier to turn over as they shrank with the cooking. Joe used the flat stone at the fire's edge for the sausages cooked first to be kept hot.

Steve learnt the hard way: he drained the fat straight into the fire. It flared fiercely and singed his eye lashes. Maybe their being damp helped save him.

By now, Ben had sliced up onions and begun to fry them. Later, he added a mush of Gravox. Ken tore up spinach by hand and simmered it in a billy.

Steve poked the potatoes with a stick. Yes, soft enough to mash. He used two spoons. He could not refrain from a little criticism. "A fork'd be better, Jack — spoons aren't as good." Jack grinned agreement.

Meanwhile Jack 'wet the tea'. Joe got the salt.

Since each dixie and bowl had one sort of food in it, sharing equal helpings for each boy was complicated. But goodwill and willing hands managed it.

Jack remembered to lead them in Grace.

They relished what they ate and said so. Even Ben, who said, "No spinach," ate it all up meekly enough.

Each boy drank at least two mugs of tea, and billies were re-boiled several times.

The second course suffered slight delay. Jim added a mush of milk powder to half a billy of boiling water,

then stirred in a moist-mix of sugar and custard powder. When it thickened, it was dished out on top of Ken's mother's fruit cake. Slices were 'hungry-boy big helping size'. Despite being dumped on top of scraps from the main course, it was all scrumptious.

In the meantime, the campfire yarns started.

Jack began, "Nanna gave me a talk on *flash floods*."

Oh yeah? So what? They were unimpressed.

Jim growled, "There's no such beastie in captivity!"

Jack ignored Jim and went on: "The stars were 'high, bright and multitudinous'." He'd borrowed that from a little known West Australian writer. "The day dawned fine and clear. After a hearty breakfast, the three campers set out."

"Who?" demanded Steve and Joe.

"Yous'll find out if you listen," Jack rebuked them. "Well, their way led through a gorge. It was just like the one we hope to be in tomorrow — or the next day.

"About midday, the weather went to bits. 'Thunder was rumbling grumbling tumbling'," (that was from *Huckleberry Finn*). "Tom, their fearless leader, told Dick and Harry, 'Not to worry, just a bit of rain.'

"But little did he know...

"There came a distant roaring. Louder and louder... Tom, Dick and Harry could not hear each other speak! Then far too close, a deafening explosion! And a great wall of water was speeding at them! Tom's mouth moved, but the others could not hear him. He pointed left. Despite heavy knapsacks, the three scabbled up their steepest ever slope.

"Ah, but was it too late?" Infuriatingly, Jack paused. Then blandly, "Will I tell you the rest tomorrow night?"

"No!" they howled. "No! Go on!"

Fortunately for his listeners, it was still daylight.

Ken's face was drained of all colour. So was Joe's.

As though reluctantly, Jack continued. "The Great Wave was slightly shallower at the edges. Yet it clutched even at knee depth... Dazed silly with its roar, they tore themselves free, and climbed higher..."

Phew! There was still a slim hope.

"They went straight up a vertical cliff! The flood below was still rising fast... chasing them... catching them... Again, it tore at their knees. They scrambled on and upward. Then reprieve."

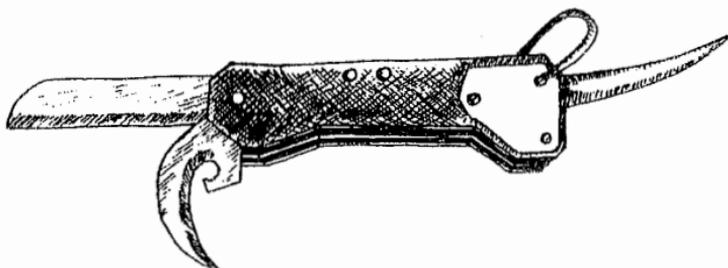
Ken and Joe didn't know that word. No matter. It was in Jack's voice. Now he rounded off his tale.

"They spent the rest of that day and all night in a big cave. Fortunately, they had matches in a watertight tin and got a fire going. It cheered as well as warmed.

## Pocket Knife

for the Bush Boy Explorers

also called scout knife, army knife and yachting knife,  
no longer popular, but very sturdy



with big blade, tin opener and spike,  
and screw driver (at blade end, but obscured in picture)

"Tom said heavy rain upstream must've fallen in one great deluge. Next day, they walked on high ground to get home. And that's the End."

Ken was sobbing. "I wanna go home..."

Jim really knew better but he teased Ken all the same. "Well, you can't," he gloated. "We're stuck here for the night. We can't get back to *Terra Sancta* before it's dark, and in the morning you won't want to."

Jack was more fatherly and understanding. "Aw, stow it, Jim! Or we'll chuck *you* in before breakfast! Be fair. We're used to living without much electric light and we're used to moving about in the dark."

Ken smiled, though weak and wan. He was somewhat reassured... and cheered up. The others laughed.

Jim repented. "Okay, listen to a cheery story. Not long ago when we were in Boxwatch, Mum took little Tilly and Tommy to a cheap shop to get birthday presents for Dad. Tilly got him blocks and Tommy a toy train. Together, they said, 'Happy birthday, Daddy, and now we'll show you how to play with them.' Dad reckoned that part was his best present of all."

Jim's story was an easy let down. They chattered.

Then Jack seized his chance. "WASHING UP!"

That vital task took time but proved soothing — except Joe blamed Jack and Jim for being cruel. "Yous are always cruel to me, yous are, yo ho yep yes! But I've decided not to tell Dad and Mum on yers!"

His brothers denied Joe's charges of cruelty, though Jim did blush for teasing Ken.

Jack changed the subject. "Will we turn in early and talk in bed?" — and thereby he made peace. The others agreed.

There was teeth cleaning and some night prayers at the fire. Jim was in charge of bedding: "I've worked

out our places across the tent: Ken, Steve, Jack, Jim, Ben and Joe. Me and Jack in the middle, to leap out and protect yers; Ken and Joe near the sides cos an enemy will attack the middle. Ken, Jack and Ben face the fire, Steve and me and Joe face away from the fire and between the feet of the rest of yers."

Jack explained, "Head to toe's the only way to fit six of us into the space. We'll put our staffs at our feet — all ready, just in case — to repel boarders or fight wild beasts..." A cheery thought to get the nervy ones off to sleep?

Jim continued, "Put yer socks in yer boots with Parkas on top to make comfy pillows. Those in sleeping bags get in first and finish wriggling."

Jack added, "Rub on Citronella against the mossies."

The visitors did as they were told. While the Lawsons were slotting in and wrapping themselves in blankets, the visitors began complaining, "It's too hot!"

"Lie on top of yer sleeping bags," counselled Jim.

Convulsions and upheavals!. Just like an earthquake. Bare feet trod on other people's faces — Joe bit someone's big toe — hence screams of rage and pain. Joe claimed, "I didn't mean to bite you — I just bite anything put in my mouth."

Mayhem and the shouting died down slowly.

The Lawsons soon found their blankets were too hot also — it was a warm night. Jack said, "I'll tie back a flap at each end." Thus began a new upheaval of equal violence to going to bed in the first place...

Joe offered to tell a cheery story. "I'll tell yers," said he, "how I taugt Jack and Jim to swim."

Jack and Jim laughed at this preposterous boast, but they didn't bother to contradict. Truth would out.

Unabashed, Joe developed his tale. "First of all, I

decided to make them rescue me, to get 'em used to the water. So I ran over a log when they screamed at me not to. I fell in, making it look like accidental, and that made 'em drag me ashore. Jim was in the water with me and Jack stayed on the log to help us along."

Jack and Jim chuckled at Joe's outrageous claims. And so did Ben, Ken and Steve! It was a cheery story and lacking any element of the near tragedy.

Joe rose to his audience. "They took me wet clothes off, cos they thought the breeze'd make me cold, so I ran into the water to start us swimming. "I sat on the sand on the bottom with me bottom, with my head out, and I learnt to float. When I splashed them a bit to get them annoyed and make them come in and duck me — they was cru-el-el... Then we played jet-propelled boy-torpedoes and that's how we started swimming."

Well, that silenced everyone! Outside frogs croaked. Mystery creatures made furtive rustling noises. Something sniffed and snuffled just outside — scary!

The Lahdidar boys begged for the flaps to be closed.

Besides, Jack had scruples about the fire. He got out the torch from his knapsack pocket and was soon back. "Fire's safe," he assured them. "Just red coals glowing dimly, like guardians. There's no moon but lots of cheery stars. And I'm tying the flaps shut."

What a day! They slept the deep sleep of exhaustion after excitement and healthy exercise.

. There was only one alarm during the night. Ken woke in the grip of a nightmare, screaming, "I'm drowning!" Jack made soothing noises, "All OK. Joe'll save you," and again they slept like a lot of logs.

## Chapter 30

### What the Shy Spies were doing

**J**ACK, JIM AND JOE really knew very little of the doings of the Shy Spy Triplets. Only later did they slot in some missing pieces and complete the jigsaw.

Last Saturday, the Triplets had pitched a tent at The Secret Water, which they called Shady Refuge. After all, naming depends on how you feel at the time. From that moment, their zeal for studying trees began to fade, in favour of the joys of camping and swimming.

Also camp chores — getting firewood, tending fires, cooking and washing up — took up a lot of time. In fact, tree-searching had been a lot more effective while living at home in Galway Crag.

Nevertheless, in the days ahead, they did rove further afield and examine lots more trees. Perhaps their real incentive was a search for better swimming holes.

Soon after Jim had overheard the Triplets' private talk, they took themselves off for home. They returned on Sunday afternoon, and set to work to fine-tune their campsite — and enjoy lots more swimming.

**T**HE TRIPLETS DID try to look for tall trees that Monday morning when Colleen and Kathleen were sewing their brothers' tent — but in-between swims.

On Monday afternoon, they were 'caught in the act' of measuring a tree when the Lawsons came along getting firewood in their reborn Land Rover.

After this, the Triplets resolved to be very careful. "We've got to keep Father's secret," declared Shadrach.

"The trouble is," said the learned Abednego, "that this tree measuring caper is not like it is in the books. The trees in books have nice pointy tops casting a clear

shadow on completely flat ground.”

“Yeah,” chipped in Meshach. Despite his junior grade in schooling, he knew same-shaped triangles had proportional sides, though he lacked the jargon.

Abednego went on, “I agree that all this bush is beaut. I like being here. But most of the ground it grows on is standing on its end, and every decent-sized tree is walled in with scrub. You can’t see the shadow at all. And where you can see the end of the shadow, it’s at a different height to the foot of the tree.”

Meshach expressed his vested interest. “Explorer and scientists aren’t safe in the bush without plenty of swimming practice, so best we do more swimming.”

Cousin Abednego agreed and Shadrach weakened. After all, they were real boys, not unfallen angels.

**O**N TUESDAY morning, they told themselves that Mr Dollerman’s directions were just too vague. And they seemed to bristle with inaccuracies.

Shadrach said, “We *could* explore further downstream.”

“Better take our lunch with us,” reckoned his cousin, “and give ourselves plenty of time for cooling off in the creek — to avoid the heat-stroke.”

“Aha, lunch!” Meshach grinned. “Sausages, please.” He was always hungry.

They packed the food for a bush lunch and zipped up the tent flaps against weather and wombats.

**M**EANWHILE, the Lawsons were on their last schoolwork for the year and very distracted.

As Max Lawson used to say, “The first lesson of a year is not given very well by the teacher and the last lesson is not well-received by the pupils.”

In the afternoon, Jack, Jim and Joe set forth on their own very first camping expedition. Their path that day never crossed the tracks of the Triplets.

**T**HE TRIPLETS passed Big Bogie and further on failed to see the faded BOYS-GIRLS notice where the old track from *The Hills of Home* met the creek track.

They arrived at Duckie pool just as Greg and Bernie and four strange boys were coming down the hill direct from the Cumberlands. One boy was jet black.

Up till now, the Triplets had turned and run when strangers appeared. But it would be rude to do this to Greg and Bernie who had been so kind to them.

Nor could they avoid giving their names. Shadrach had to say he was Dudley Dollerman, and introduce Meshach as his brother David, and Abednego as their cousin Dennis Marsden.

Greg did the honours for his cousins Pete and John Cumberland, and their friends Kev Keys and Sam Kalumbo. There was a great shaking of hands.

Then the Triplets realized that these were the Famous Six who had recently been the talk of the town, yet had dodged all honours and publicity.

"Join us in a swim?" invited the ever friendly Greg.

"Thank you," Shadrach replied courteously, "but we must press on. We're out for a day's exploring."

Much more than they imagined, Greg understood. He smiled graciously. The two groups separated.

Next, the Triplets came to the junction of Bunyip Brook. "This looks to me like the main stream," declared Shadrach, "though the map is still marked Koala Creek below the junction."

Even the Cumberlands had not realized this. Shadrach had got it right. Naming rivers was always a patchwork quilt of contradictions. Australian explorers had worked in bits, urged on by need and limited by time. At the best, they had horses, or camels, but mostly they foot-slogged. Thus they saw the country properly,

but only piecemeal and slowly. Just compare it with all the 'plus and minus' of cars, trains and planes!

"Will we turn up it?" asked Abednego.

Shadrach almost said yes, then changed his mind. "Not this time. We'll go downstream a little."

After that, almost at once, they came to Koala Pool. A grinning Meshach declared it a morning well spent, and asked hopefully, "Lunchtime?"

It was, but first, they had a wonderful swim. Next, dressed in shorts, they cooked a good picnic lunch, ate leisurely, and spent a bit of time yarning, as a rest before the next swim. They were in full agreement with the slogan, "It's a privilege to have lived."

They missed finding the short track into the scrub to Ruffian's Clearing. It was now quite overgrown.

Going home upstream, they envied the Wise Men who had returned by a different way. But Shadrach knew the limits of his cross-country navigation. He ruled, "Just take it slowly and spy out the land ahead. We mustn't burst in on them at Duckie." As it turned out, there was no one there. Not a sign of them, except a few footprints and a properly quenched fire.

Back at the Secret Water, they had another swim. Meshach grinned virtuously. "Must wash off the grime of travel..."

That night, they slept the deep sleep of tired boys.

How long they slept they did not know. Then they awoke in alarm and fright. The very ground beneath them seemed to shudder and a few seconds later there came faintly to their ears a distant THUMP.

Shadrach murmured, "An earthquake!" Meshach, "An explosion!" and Abednego, "The end of the world!"

And that was it. No more thumps, no more noises. Sleep in peace, investigate in the morning.



E. Fawcett

*THE LAWSONS EMERGING FROM THE NARROW WAY*

**O**N WEDNESDAY, the Triplets had extraordinary luck. They packed a morning tea in Meshach's knapsack. Weariness and warm weather were to be excuses for a swim at Thunderfall (their name, too).

That was how they saw the Lawsons emerging from The Narrow Way and overheard Jim's shout, "Farewell till this arvo, *Paradisum*, O Paradise of Pleasure."

Once it was safe to speak, Shadrach gave thanks as befitted the Academy of Bible Christians: "The Lord be praised! In we go! Ride on to victory!"

In went the Shy Spy Triplets. Paradise was no longer the Lawson's secret.

First they discovered the Tall Tree.

"I reckon this is it!" cried Abednego. "This is what Uncle Ernie's had us looking for." His cousins agreed.

"We've got to measure it," muttered Shadrach.

But what with? They'd left their gear in the tent.

"Let's explore first," said his brother. He found the dam and the tent. From the top of its wall they gazed on the newly fallen tree, its anchoring roots and water-roots torn from the breast of mother earth, its leaves dying from the sunlight on which formerly they had fed.

Shadrach nodded shrewdly. "The thump in the night."

Meshach pointed. "There's their fireplace."

Abednego added, "And their tent — they were lucky that tree didn't fall on them."

"We won't spy on them," declared Shadrach. "We wouldn't like it if they did it to us. The Lawsons'd think exactly the same if they found our camp."

"In that case, we better explore further up," said Meshach. Again, he led them up and onwards.

They missed finding Jim's Jacob's Ladder, the Lawsons' northern route in and out of Paradise.

But they did find the cave. "Just the place for

morning tea," declared Abednego — though it was not long since breakfast.

They built a safe fireplace. At first, it occurred to Shadrach to go back and use the Lawsons'. However, it seemed more honourable not to trespass.

Meshach got the billy and filled it from the nearby water. "Water from the rock," he chortled.

Abednego reckoned the cave would be good in wet weather. He asserted, "It reminds me of the cave where King Saul holed up for the night when he was hunting for David." They agreed to call it Saul's Cave. He was certainly echoing the thoughts of Jim Lawson from their similar Bible backgrounds.

They made their fire, brewed their tea, ate a snack, and made plans. Shadrach lamented his lack of foresight: "I should've brought the camera for that Tree."

It was his Dad's state-of-the-art mobile phone and a camera. Alas, it was in his knapsack back at their tent at their Shady Refuge. But first things first: they ate and drank and put the fire out with water.

With zestful strides they hurried and scurried out of Paradise. At their tent, Shadrach buttoned the camera into his shirt pocket.

Back again at the Tall Tree, they took an elaborate set of pictures — close-ups of each of them at its foot. "To give Father the scale," reckoned Shadrach. Then pictures at a distance. It was harder getting snaps of the complete tree. They hoped to join up separate photos, or combine them in the computer.

Shadrach steadied the camera against a nearby tree. He aimed it up at steeper and steeper angles. He used other trees to get the north, south, east and west views.

He tried from the wall of the dam but there was no way to steady the camera. "It won't matter using lots

of memory," Shadrach told them. "Father can zap what he doesn't want." As an afterthought, he took pictures of several shorter trees, to help comparisons.

The Tall Tree they named Goliath, and that finished their exploration in Paradise.

Back at the Shady Refuge, they had yet another good swim. At lunch, Meshach had muttered, "It's ages since we had a swim in The Thunderfall and we just missed out this morning." This hint was accepted.

So on Wednesday afternoon, when the Lawsons came to Paradise down Joe's *Joseph's Ladder* with Ken, Ben and Steve, they again missed seeing the Triplets.

**O**N THURSDAY morning, Shadrach said they had better go home and show Father the photos. Indeed, he now had scruples that they should have done so yesterday. They took only one knapsack.

They found their battery boosted bikes safe in the scrub at the bottom of Luigi's pasture, but the slope was too steep to ride up. They walked beside the bikes and let the electric motors do their best to help the bikes.

At Luigi's, they asked to use the phone. Shadrach knew his Dad did not want them to ride the bikes on the highway, though they had their bike helmets. Luigi knew them and charged nothing for the phone. They asked for big ice creams, with the assurance of paying as soon as their transport arrived.

During a long wait for the van, they had a second round of ice creams. Finally, Mrs Dollerman arrived and paid for the ice creams, and thanked Luigi and Mrs Castonelli. They loaded the bikes, and drove off.

She explained, "Father will be late for lunch, so have a shower, put on clean uniforms, and report to the Academy. Your supervising Master will want to see your school work..."

Then home again, but lunch was delayed till Father came. During lunch, he told them, "I would like the full details of all your doings. Start now, but be patient if my business calls me. Photos can come later."

Business did flood in. It was late afternoon before he studied the photos, every single one, and thoroughly.

He seemed very interested in tree trunks and, not just of Goliath, but even more of the lesser trees. He enlarged them to the limit. Then he rummaged in a drawer and found an old picture of a very tall tree. "Yes! It's the same, the very one I sent you to find. Thank you, congratulations. You've found it." He had a further assignment. "Please keep on looking up smooth barked trees like this, especially for scratches such as a goanna might make."

Shadrach was thinking, "What's he up to now? And what'll he do with his big tree now we've found it? Or with the goannas up the trees?" He consoled himself, "At least, we've got a new bush project."

After that, the boys waited patiently while he read their Log Books. Over the last few days, the entries had become scappier. Father was understanding — unlike their master at the Academy a few hours earlier.

Finally, he told them, "Better spend the night here — give joy to Mother, eat a big meal, get a good night's sleep. But for now, take this booklet for the GPS, the Global Positioning System. In the next day or two, try and get into Paradise when the Lawson boys aren't there. Get the exact positions of Goliath and Saul's Cave. Oh, before or after that, get the co-ordinates of their home paddock, and also its east end, so we can tell if that tree's on their property or not. You needn't come home till lunch on Saturday — just ring from Luigi's for us to come and get you."

Shadrach was not happy: "You mean, trespassing?"

Father's eyes twinkled. "You won't be trespassing. Call in at *Terra Sancta* and ask if their friends Greg and Bernie are there, to thank them for being so good to you last week. That way you'll find out where the Lawsons are. Then ask for permission to ride through their property to explore the steep hill at the east end."

Shadrach was still not happy. "Our master at the Academy doesn't like us talking to... outsiders." Too true! Their church and its academy *were* quite reserved about the pupils meeting and talking to 'strangers'.

Ernie Dollerman drew himself up. "I am an elder of the Church and hold authority. I dispense you. We must always be kind to outsiders and talk at need. You were quite right to talk and swim with Greg and Bernie a week ago — indeed, they may have saved your lives — and you were also quite right not to on Tuesday when they had their big group and there was no need."

"Yes, Sir" and "Yes, Uncle," they answered dutifully. After all, it was common sense.

Then, "Did you see anyone else to talk to?"

"No, Sir, only Mr and Mrs Castonelli."

"Well, it's time for you to eat. Give Mother good cheer. She misses you very much. Now I'll say good night because I have to eat out on business. In the morning, I'll drive you to Luigi's and you can ride your bikes from there to the Cumberlands. God bless you," and he kissed their foreheads.

During the meal, Mrs Dollerman enjoyed herself. With her female verbal skills and a mother's charm, she heard many details that had eluded Ernie.