

## Chapter 5

### Reporting their Triumph

**B**EYOND the stepping stones the path sloped up amidst turpentine and she-oaks and a tangled undergrowth of bushes, vines and blade grass.

Ahead was a five metre cliff. Here their path entered a narrow canyon whose floor tilted steeply upwards, walls of rock to right and left.

Since Jim proved fit enough to walk, Joe felt free to assert himself. "The smallest should be in front setting the pace, yo ho yep yes I should."

Big Brother replied, "*You* would be if you were bleeding and got wet all over. But you aren't and you haven't, so you're not..." After all, Joe's showing off last Wednesday had nearly drowned the lot of them.

To avoid stumbles, they had to look down at their feet, and did not spare a glance for the sides of the canyon. Nor did they wonder where exactly the girl-noises came from — silly giggles, loud shouts, shrill squeals, nor where you branched off to get there. So they missed seeing the narrower cleft in the right wall — whose floor was the height of their waists.

They popped out the top of the rocky canyon, glad to be on a track and under bigger trees once more.

Here came glimpses of a big pool ahead of them.

"Big Bogie all right," declared Jack. Jim sped them down the gentler slope. Once they were closer, they could see its larger branch in the side creek.

Only this identified it for sure with Jim and Joe.

They re-crossed Koala Creek on a second set of stepping stones, then a third set in the side creek.

Cheeky Joe warned Jim, "Don't you fall in again."

Jim grinned. "Watch it! Or I'll chuck *you* in."

Joe ignored him and demanded a swim. "It's two whole days since our last swim, Jack."

Jim tended to agree with Joe. "Yeah, Jack. And I can dry my clothes properly at a fire."

Jack, however, was developing a sense of a leader's duties. He asserted his authority. "We simply haven't time. Waiting a day or so longer won't hurt anyone."

Cheerful Jim made the best of it. "Besides, there's nary a sign of Greg and Bernie so we haven't got the excuse of talking to 'em."

Even Jack cast a regretful glance at the cave where they had boiled the billy on several occasions.

Jim plodded steadily upward on Koala Spur, led them over its high point, and down a gentle slope to the Swampy Ridge track at the foot of the Tumbledown.

Here they paused to collect more passion fruit. And lo! amid the passion fruit vines Joe found a handkerchief. "It's got D.D. sewn in a corner."

"Initials of a Shy Spy Triplet," reckoned Jim.

With a dry little smile, Jack replied, "Well, it'd hardly be Doctor of Divinity. But what's D stand for?"

They hurried on homeward, still with secret hopes of seeing Greg and Bernie. But back in the kitchen, Mum shook her head. "They've been and gone."

Then the inevitable, "What's up with your head, Jim? And why are you wet through?"

Jim mumbled, "I'm all right; I bumped it; I'll... I'll show you when I'm cleaned up." He slithered off like a goanna, not to clean up but for dry clothes for jobs.

Mum and Nanna shook their heads. "Boys!"

So Jack wrote for Jim on the board, 'Back at 1635'.

There was no time to hear about the Cumberland's visit. They were running a bit late for family jobs.

**B**EFORE the evening *convivium*, Jim's forehead was duly inspected by Dad, Mum and Nanna.

Mum shook her head again. "It's a fair sized lump. I do wish you boys were more careful."

Dad came to the rescue. "That lump's nature's way of rushing extra support where it's needed."

The stay-at-homes went on to tell Jack, Jim and Joe of the royal welcome they had given Greg and Bernie.

"We took 'em up Pisgah," chortled Colleen "They were mighty impressed, and so were we, for they seemed to know the names of everything."

"We thought you'd want us to give 'em a copy of your map," added Kathleen, "So we did."

Jack chuckled. "We left one at *The Hills of Home*."

Then he read Greg's note addressed to them:-

**Dear Jack, Jim and Joe,**

Sorry to miss you. We dare you to ambush us tomorrow at your Big Bogie — what we call Fugitives' Pool.

We're glad you're real Bush Boys and altar servers.

*Greg and Bernie Cumberland.*

"They think just like us," marvelled Jack.

Joe seized on something else. "From now on, we'll call ourselves Bush Boys."

Jim's face lit up. "The Bush Boys of Guntawang."

Jack went further. "Please! The Bush Boy Explorers of Guntawang."

The family agreed that 'Bush Boys' had a nice ring to it, and Guntawang was such a musical name. They rolled it round their mouths like a lolly: 'The Bush Boy Explorers of Guntawang'.

Jack had last say. "And as the short form, we're still the "Boy-explorers."

"One more thing," Colleen went on, "That stray hanky you've just dumped in the laundry... It had bike

tyre marks on it — only faint, like some one had dropped it and it got run over.”

Even Jack had not noticed that. Trust the girls!

Jim drew the conclusion. “Whoever dropped it at The Tumbledown must’ve ridden the bikes we saw.”

Jack thought a moment. “And the footprints on the ridge were between the two places. They showed several journeys, maybe yesterday and today. So likely they came on bikes both times — but where from?”

Jim, ignoring the question, crowed triumphantly like a rooster. “That means they might be back tomorrow.”

Dad smiled. “Better not let sleuthing get in the way of exploring and chopping wood and school work.”

Jack and Jim grinned. Each was thinking, “At least, he’s taking our detective stuff more seriously.”

\* \* \* \*

After Family Prayers, Mum took the littlies off to early bed. After Washing-up, Dad read from the old Cubby Cave Log: “This time it’s from an advertisement to persuade parents to send their sons to the Guntawang Academy. The original leaflet was in full colour and pasted into the original Log Book. Apparently their headmaster had remodelled his school on a brand new and much larger boarding school in England called *Abbotsholme*. It had an unusual approach to schooling, and was away ahead of its time. In fact, it may never have been equalled, let alone surpassed.”

That was calculated to stir up interest, from young Joe to old Nanna. Could anything good come out of England? Could anything be good about a school?

Dad continued, “The leaflet starts off saying:-

The Guntawang Academy will develop *a triad*  
of hand, heart and brain.

He made the first interruption himself. “We might

improve on 'brain' and say 'mind'."

Joe was hazy about the difference but did not bother to say so.

But Jim demanded, "What's a triad?"

"A threesome," replied Colleen.

Dad made it simpler. "It means three wheels like a trike." Then he read on:-

Tuition is by skilled teachers for 3½ hours every morning Monday to Saturday. The school subjects develop the brain. However, the emphasis is on thinking things out, not just memorizing facts for examinations.

Again, Dad interrupted himself. "They must've worked them hard. Mental work is more tiring than manual labour, and they had a lot of that, too." He continued:-

The Guntawang Academy forms the characters of its students for clean minds in healthy bodies. On Sunday mornings the boys attend the Church of England service in the village of Guntawang.

Dad grinned. "He doesn't mention that the boarders had to walk to church and back — which is what I do every school day." Again he read aloud:-

The headmaster, The Reverend Mr Edward Windsor, often leads the service and Mrs Windsor conducts the choir drawn from selected boys and plays the organ.

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are for outdoor work, such as the vegetable gardens, the flower gardens, the farm animals, collecting fire wood by horse-dray, mending and building fences, and painting the woodwork of the buildings. This outdoor work helps them teach themselves to use mind and hand together, and to solve a myriad of practical problems.

Wednesday and Saturday afternoons are for

games, walks or swimming. Every boy without exception must learn to swim.

Dad grinned again. "Like most of the small boarding schools, they could not boast of having a proper swimming baths." He nodded at his sons. "Your pool was the one they used, of course. Now it's not in the Log Book, but Old Fred told me: beginners were told to jump in. If they hesitated, they were pushed or thrown in. Either way, by animal instinct, they quickly learnt to dog paddle to miss drowning, and somehow struggle ashore. It was a tougher age, and must have been hard on the more sensitive boys. Of course, a couple of good swimmers were always ready as life-savers." He resumed:-

Friday afternoon the boys walk to Guntawang to visit the old people and help them recall happy memories of their youth.

Jack chuckled. "They were something like us, only we cheer up our visitors here on the spot, instead of going into town, and we spend longer than one afternoon doing it."

Colleen felt she must say something. "It's hardly a burden for you because you enjoy yourselves as well. And it's not as hard as cheering up the aged who have all sorts of aches and pains."

Joe, however, quickly recognized any ill-treatment of earlier generations of boys. He murmured, "Doesn't the leaflet tell the parents anywhere that the boys've gotta have fun being naughty? You can't have fun without being naughty, yo ho nope no you can't!"

Dad smiled patiently at Joe. "The parents would know all that and a Headmaster has to pretend otherwise. Never mind, Joe, there's not much more."

Evenings are for social activities, with talks,

debates, acting plays often written by the boys, recitals, singing and music, writing home and reading for enjoyment.

Nanna gave a wry grin. "I'm glad to hear they were not those dull 'improving books', like that awful *Eric, or Little by Little*. There was no joy in it at all, at all. You'd *have* to be wicked to get over it."

Dad grinned. "Their evening music was probably higher grade than ours, with piano or fiddles.

Kathleen laughed. "With such full-on days all the week, they must have been so worn out at night that they'd have fallen asleep as soon as they got into bed."

Joe knew the technique. Here it was again, history repeating itself, of the gross ill-treatment of earlier generations of boys. "Fancy wearin' 'em out to stop 'em enjoyin' a bit of mucking up — a nasty grown-up trick even in the olden days!"

No one bothered to gainsay Joe. They knew it wasn't worth it.

Dad concluded his reading:-

Finally, there are night prayers with Bible readings.

to which he added, "And for us, too."

\* \* \* \*

Before bed, the Bush-Boy-Explorers scribbled away in their Log Books.

Joe drew stick figures of Mrs Cumberland opening the door to him, plus the three lots of bootprints — it took all of 60 seconds effort.

Jim simply pasted Greg's letter into his book — he claimed he was too tired to do more.

Jack wrote up their navigation from *Terra Sancta* to *The Hills of Home* and back. He did it with great economy of words — a sketch map labelled with

numbers, which were explained in a legend alongside. He went one better than Joe with the boot prints, by adding a simplified version of two matching treads and two different sizes.

When Jim had finished, he denounced Joe's 60-second effort as cheating — despite his own skimpy effort: "It's what you'd expect from Joe."

That led to a mild, friendly scuffle — which ended in saying their bedside prayers.

As soon as they pulled up the bed-covers, they were fast asleep — just like boys in the olden days..



*THREE LOTS OF BOOT PRINTS*

## Chapter 6

### Ambush, Tricks and Spying

**G**REG GRINNED at Bernie — it was lunchtime at *The Hills of Home* — and told him, “Those Lawsons like springing surprises. Let’s give ’em a really big one! We’ll push off early, and easily beat ’em to Fugitives’ Pool. That ridge we came home on yesterday — we can fairly race along it.”

Bernie put on his cultivated voice. “*I think you mean Big Bogie.*” Then, in broad Aussie strine, “Yeah, trot all the way.” Plus a mild rebuke: “You reckoned if we came home their way, we’d be sure to run into them — and we didn’t, cos Mum told them our way, the way we *went* to their *Terra Sancta.*”

Greg chuckled at the criticism, then ignored it. “And when we get to the bottom of that steep bit they call the Tumbledown, we’ll turn off sharp left onto the ridge we came up yesterday. And just before we get to their Big Bogie, we’ll hide and wait. When they come past, we’ll sneak up behind them... If we can catch ’em at the water’s edge, we’ll shove ’em in — SPLASH! SPLASH! SPLASH! And that’ll prove it...”

Bernie chortled. “And if they’re not near enough, we can pick ’em up one at a time and chuck ’em in.” He gloated, “Jack first, he’s the biggest — before the others know what day it is, we’ll get ’im.”

If Greg’s plan was fluky, Bernie’s was even more so.

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE LAWSONS, too, had been making plans — indeed, very similar. Before break-of-day, before they got out of bed, they were plotting...

Jim told Jack and Joe, “This arvo, we’ve gotta get

into an ambush first, before they can ambush us.”

“Yeah, extra early,” agreed Jack. “And after all that work we did on Monday, I reckon we can skip this arvo on the woodheap. It can wait till tomorrow — it may turn out cooler.”

“Yo ho yep yes!” enthused Joe. “An’ just yous never forget! It’s only a week ago it was *me* who got us started swimming — so we’ve gotta have a swim on my anniversary.” No one proposed any amendment.

\* \* \* \*

At lunchtime, Jim refined the tactics. “As well as confusing ’em by arriving early, let’s come by a way they won’t expect. They’ll be expecting us to come straight down by Koala Spur and at about one o’clock.”

“Yeah,” reckoned Jack. “We’ll make ’em dance to our tune — like those bits of confetti Dad made this morning, dancing ’em from rubbin’ electricity off a ruler and reckoning it’s another of those invisible forces that remind him of God.”

\* \* \* \*

Yet again, the long suffering twin sisters were gracious about the washing up. After lunch, the boys were able to flee the kitchen *extra* early. Their sisters were certainly in the gold medal class...

Jack had the knapsack with the usual supplies. They all had staffs — and hats, of course.

They trotted all the way to The Tumbledown, for they were quite used to trotting in heavy leather boots. Then at a fast walk, they went on just a bit further, before slewing off to the right, down the headwaters of the first small creek.

Jim grinned. “This is where those mystery Shy Spy Triplets slipped on their magic rings and went invisible yesterday.”

Jack grinned back. "This little gully should be the top end of the side creek feeding into Big Bogie."

So far, so good. The gully was deepening, in fact, steepening into an impressive gorge.

Sometimes, they jumped from rock to rock, imitating the hurrying waters of what was still a fairly small creek. Other times, they *thrusted* (Joe's word for it) through the scrub alongside.

Jim was second in line. He could spare more attention to looking about him. So it was he who spotted The Boy.

A boy, clambering higher up on the left of the dizzy slope, and making heavy going of it, was working his way towards them on a parallel reverse course.

Scrub partly camouflaged him, as it did also the Lawsons. In fact, they were now only about a hundred metres apart.

Fortunately, Jack, Jim and Joe had kept silence.

They could tell when the boy spotted them. At once he gave a peculiar version of 'coo-ee': "Coo-coo-coo", followed by a long drawn-out "Eee-eee-eee", then back to briefer sounds, "Coo-coo-coo".

For once, Jack's mind worked fast. "It's a private code for SOS! d'd'dit, dah dah dah, d'd'dit. He's calling for us to help him."

The Lawsons slanted upwards to the rescue.

"It must be one of the Cumberlands," reckoned Joe.

"Perhaps luring us into an ambush," muttered Jim, with his usual cheery suspicion.

However, the stranger realized he had mistaken them for friends. He did not wait to lure them, but turned and ran for it, away from them. Falling over, scrambling up, leaping recklessly, more and more hidden by the scrub, he was soon lost to sight.

Jack soon worked it out. "He's not a Cumberland — his clothes are too tidy and they'd not have a silly straw hat. He's a Shy Spy Triplet!"

"Ah," cried Jim. "That explains it. He thought we were the rest of his pals."

Joe contradicted Jim. "Yo ho nope no. He'd only expect to see two of them and we are three of us!"

Jim grinned. "Good work, Joey, take a holy card and go to the top of the class — most improved pupil. Don't you get it? He's like you, the youngest. He can't count past two."

Joe ignored this cheery sarcasm. It was too stupid to bother protesting about, even for him.

Jim relented. "Perhaps he couldn't see us clearly."

"He's got separated from his pals," reckoned Jack. They've probably spread out to cover more bush for whatever they're looking for. And he's got scared, cos he's the youngest, and all on his own."

\* \* \* \*

After that, things got complicated. Only a helicopter or an angel could have grasped the whole picture. Afterwards, the Lawsons and the Cumberlands, and, much later, the Triplets themselves, worked it out.

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE SHY SPY TRIPLETS had split up, exactly as Jack had guessed. The youngest, who fled from the Lawsons, soon found his big brother. Again, Jack was proved right in his clever deduction about a young brother in the clue of Tuesday's boot prints.

A bit further along, this Shy Spy Triplet came upon his friends. By this time, all three were on a steep slope with lots of little cliffs and bits of level scrubby stuff a few metres width between cliffs. It was the gorge above The Mermaids' Pool. It was slow work

finding a way down to the level just above the mermaids' Slippery Slide. Seemingly no one was about. They crossed the rushing water and inspected the Secret Room, impressed at how it was all walled in by big boulders, taller than a man.

They admired its fireplace. Beside it, they found a large squat coffee jar with a wide screw lid. Inside was the brand new secret of the Cumberland girls, their own Log Book. Indeed, they had only installed it yesterday. There were earlier entries, suitably back-dated, with details of what they had done previously.

The Shy Spy Triplets realized they had accidentally intruded, and considered themselves honour bound not to read further. So they cleared out.

They hurtled down the stairs alongside the Slippery Slide, up the beach, and soon found the zig-zag track through more boulders. It led to a cleft through the solid rock, a cleft with a kink left and then right.

At that crucial moment, they heard a medley of voices. They seemed somewhere just ahead, yet coming from both directions. They climbed onto the flat top above the rock walls, and lay on their tummies. Here they peeped down into a much wider cleft, the one known to the Cumberland boys and girls as the Grand Canyon, through which ran the main track.

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**J**ACK, JIM AND JOE soon gave up chasing the solitary Spy. It was pointless, and just too hard across that slope. So back they went to the creek. Soon they got a glimpse of their real goal, Big Bogie.

They crept closer, with silent tread, without a word. Did an ambush await them?

They arrived. It seemed they were first there.

Jack used a hushed whisper. "Quick! Get along

that canyon track, what we came home on yesterday.”

Again they missed the side canyon. At the lower stepping stones over Koala Creek they halted, irresolute.

Jack pointed left and hissed, “The Cumberlands can’t’ve come yet. Into those bushes. After they go past us, we’ll sneak after them to the Big Bogie.”

\* \* \* \*

**F**OR THEIR PART, Greg and Bernie achieved the first part of their plan. They had trotted the whole way from Cumberland’s Lane along Swampy Ridge to the foot of The Tumbledown. Here, they had turned left up the initial rise of Koala Spur, over its highest point, and down, down, down along the bits of old timber track on the long sloping ridge to The Big Bogie.

Close to the pool, they found a suitable hide-away on the left of the path. Here they lay in waiting, speaking in whispers, hissing like snakes.

Bernie spotted the Lawsons first. He nudged Greg, pointed, and barely breathed the words, “Think they’re clever, don’t they? Coming down that side creek...”

They watched the cautious approach of Jack, Jim and Joe, but the gurgling water was like white-out on the whisperings of both Lawsons and Cumberlands.

“After ’em!” muttered Greg, and leapt to his feet. “Up to the Grand Canyon.” They broke cover, crept past the pool, crossed both creeks, and turned left.

“Forward!” whispered Greg. “Remember, they’re looking for us — they won’t go far. We’ll ambush ’em coming back towards their Big Bogie. Or dodge aside. Either way, we’ll close in behind. We’ll get ’em!”

“We’re Big Bad Boogie Men,” gloated Bernie in immense satisfaction. “We’ll shove ’em in from this side. I was worried we were going to miss the fun.”

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE LAWSONS, however, were already at the lower crossing in their ambushade.

Jim and Joe soon tired of inactivity and Jack had trouble getting them to keep still and keep quiet.

Joe made his protest in a very loud whisper. "Time we had a swim," and added some grown-up talk. "Mustn't waste a whole afternoon."

Jim agreed in a slightly lower whisper. "Oh, blow this! Let's go back to the pool. When they come, we can ambush 'em from the water. We'll have a fire and put the billy on. It'll count as us ambushing 'em, and winning."

Jack tended to agree. Before he could whisper back, Joe screamed — no-one could be expected to scream in a whisper — "I'm bit! Look! Two bull ants at once. Ouch-ch-ch! Ouch-ch-ch! Ouch-ch-ch!"

Jim flicked off the ants with a stick and said "Ssssh!" Jack applied the antidote and Joe *ssshed*.

Greg and Bernie grinned. They now knew exactly where the Lawsons were. They crept forward, peeping round any slight curves in the canyon, before scurrying along the next section.

Nevertheless, at the branch cleft on the left to The Mermaids' Pool, they met Jack, Jim and Joe head on.

At once the Cumberlands yelled, "BOO! GOT YOU!"

Jack, Jim and Joe ignored it and fired a ripple broadside. First, Jack: "Rubbish! It's us's got you!"

Jim: "*We ambushed yours!*"

Joe: "WE'VE WON!"

\* \* \* \*

**M**EANWHILE THE SHY SPY Triplets were lying flat, looking down on this fascinating meeting. After another quick peep, they pulled their heads in.

The Lawsons and Cumberlands gave each other

heart-felt welcomes with a great shaking of hands. Each had heard so much of the others. Besides, there were those stirring challenges left at each other's homes.

Afterwards, their well-read fathers compared this meeting to Stanley with Livingstone in darkest Africa.

The Shy Spy Triplets were too well brought up to enjoy eavesdropping. It was dishonourable.

However, they had to listen to every word. How could they help it? Trapped by circumstances, they dare not move, lest even the smallest noise betray them, for that would only embarrass everyone even more.

First the preliminaries — "How did you get here?" and "What was *your* plan?" and the explanations.

Then Jack asked Greg and Bernie, "Have you seen three boys lurking around here just now? Did you see bikes in the bush up near your place?"

The three under discussion listened intently.

The Cumberlands looked puzzled. Greg answered, "What boys? what bikes?"

Bernie asked, "Whaffor?"

Jack said, "They belong to the Shy Spy Triplets."

Jim complained, "Wherever we go in, we see 'em, and they run away. *They're* up to no good!"

Joe added, "They're *spying* on us!"

The hidden boys were aghast. They had never thought of themselves as spies. How could anyone?

The Lawsons plied the Cumberlands with more facts and more guesses — while the subjects of discussion overheard everything.

Jack explained, "They signal in Morse Code to each other. They use short and long sounds so you don't know its Morse — it just sounds like warbling."

"Hmmp!" thought the Spies. "They've cracked our code!"



*LOOKED DOWN ON THIS FASCINATING MEETING*

Jim's choicest tidbit was almost funny. "Well, we Lawsons are smarter. *They* don't know that we know that they come in on bikes by Cumberland's Lane."

Which made sure that the Shy Spy Triplets would never come that way again. Their leader resolved to come in from the west. And it made him more resolute than ever to avoid both Lawsons and Cumberlands — or anyone else that was a hindrance to their mysterious secret searchings. Yet such meetings were almost inevitable in this bush setting...

Joe went on, "We've seen 'em every day, and every time they're all tidy. He grinned. "Not like us."

Jack explained. "Their pants and shirts always look newly washed and pressed. They must have two sets and their mothers keep 'em smartly turned out" — his washerwomen sisters would have said 'half a dozen'.

Jim pretended to pout. "They wear swank straw hats! *No one* could be expected to keep 'em clean."

Greg suggested, "Maybe they're at a very strict school?"

Jack summed up. "We're certain they're searching for something. Some sinister secret. They're spying on us or maybe on our family *and we don't like it.*"

Greg's information was meagre in the extreme. "We did find barefoot prints at Fugitives' Pool, I mean, Big Bogie, yesterday."

Jack thought a moment. "Yesterday — you went past there before we did, and we hadn't time for a swim. Oh, bare feet could have been us last Sunday."

Jim prompted — lest they'd forgotten. "Look here. We're supposed to meet at Big Bogie... so LET'S GO AND SWIM!"

## Chapter 7

# Horseplay

**T**HE FIVE boys all jabbered at once as they scurried along the path to The Big Bogie, or Fugitives' Pool as the Cumberlands called it. They had so much to say and so much in common.

Thrifty bush habits prompted them, while still among the trees, to gather firewood both great and small. They dragged it in bundles, big ends first, small ends trailing, with an elbow crooked round to save wasting time using string.

A few sticks scraped off along the path. A few more dropped in the water crossing the stepping stones. Yet their bundles made a good heap on the cave floor.

The Cumberlands broke sticks to length, while keeping a critical eye on the Lawsons' bushcraft.

The Lawsons soon rebuilt last Sunday's fireplace; Jim set the fire; Jack hung the two billies; Joe lit it.

Greg and Bernie strung up a bush clothesline, their special cave-edition. It stretched tight between sticks jammed into cracks in the roof near the back wall.

Jack told them proudly, "We had a clothesline using trees the day our cousins pushed each other in."

Bernie looked superior. "*We* have one every time. We always air our clothes when we're swimming, not just for sopping wet." He grinned cheekily and struck a pose. "We're refined, we is!"

Greg did not correct his grammar. It was obviously a take-off of someone. Instead, he turned to Jack and asked shrewdly, "Do you make coat-hangers?"

Jack admitted, "I never thought of that. We just ran a rope through sleeves or legs. But coat-hangers'd

be better. What's the best way?"

Greg and Bernie were happy to demonstrate — straight sticks dangling from string tied on the rope.

Bernie explained, "Clove hitch on the stick. Long stopper on the clothesline. And sticks without jags."

Greg said, "Coat hangers are only for wet or sweaty things. Usually, drape 'em over's enough."

Joe was thinking, "After all that waffle, surely we'll swim?" But no, Jim's boots and socks had got wet again. Bernie put them on sticks stuck on rocks on the floor. Greg explained, "Boots need this only if they're wet." Socks were threaded on each end of a coat hanger.

Jack nodded: "We knew not to dry boots at the fire."

Meanwhile, the others got their boots and socks off.

That evening, Jim drew pictures in his Journal of all this Bush Lore from the Cumberlands.

They emptied their pockets and turned them inside-out to look like rabbits' ears. They were just unbuttoning their shirts, when...

The Devil must have assigned a very mischievous demon to Bernie. And Bernie knew he shouldn't... But the others were standing so temptingly at the edge.

He crept up behind. No one guessed — big brothers are not always fast enough with "No!"

Bernie gave Joe the usual gentle shove between the shoulder blades. Not a mighty shove or a kick in the bottom, nothing violent — just enough to topple him, so he had plenty of time to see what was coming.

Joe began yelping, "Yo ho nope no!" — and swallowed water trying to repeat it. Even splutters were lost in that SPLASH!

He came up, spitting out water, and a twig or two.

At least he was in time to see Jack dealing with Bernie in the same high-handed fashion. SPLASH!



THE USUAL GENTLE SHOVE

So Greg just had to push Jack in: SPLASH!

Jim, as last of the Lawsons, gave Greg his come-uppance: a fourth big SPLASH!

Jim knew not to wait. His shirt and shorts alone were dry. He tossed them on the line and jumped.

The victims struggled out chuckling good-naturedly and wrung out wet shorts and shirts.

Greg told Bernie, "Hold my stuff and I'll get the rope nearer the fire." Fortunately, he still had two long sticks to make a diagonal lashing from his endless supply of string. He clove-hitched the clothesline on to it, and belayed the end to a heavy boulder. They made more coat hangers for their dripping shorts and shirts.

Meanwhile Jim was swimming back from the far side and scoffing at them. "Silly boys! Going swimming with your clothes on! I really thought you'd got more sense."

Once in the water, they ducked Jim four times, once for each of them, and then each other. Only then did they swim merrily up and down the full length of pool. The Lawsons showed off the breast-stroke which their cousins had taught them, and got in more practice.

In the pool, they continued to yarn. The Lawsons told how their cousins lacked hats, and got heat exhaustion one day and heat stroke the next. To make its full seriousness quite clear, Joe explained, "They very nearly kicked the bucket."

Jack was ready to admit their own absurdities. He told the Cumberlands, "We only got our own hats a week ago, and just in time."

He asked these bushy experts about sleeping in caves and tents. They gushed a torrent of detail.

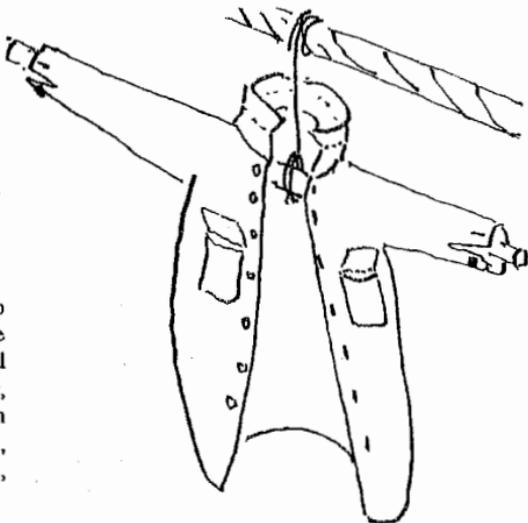
"Hah!" chortled Jack. "That's the Bush Catechism."

Greg was surprised. "How did you know that?"

## DRYING CLOTHES

- Let air flow through.
- Separate layers so wet cloth is not touching wet cloth.
- If drying clothes over a fire on a tripod (see sheer legs, *Bush Boys* ch. 22\*) beware lest they catch fire or fall in.

**SHIRT:** hanging up on 'coathanger' made of a straight stick tied to clothesline by string, and unbuttoned down front and at cuffs, collar turned up, pockets held open.



### BOOTS:

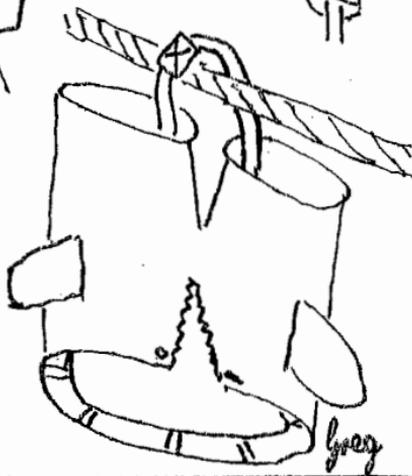
upside down on two sticks stuck slanting in the sand so the heel is lower than the toe to run the water out. (Do NOT dry leather at a fire — it curls up, goes rigid and 'dies'.)



**SOCKS:** stuffed with dead grass or bracken and threaded onto a blunt stick stuck upright in the sand



**SHORTS:** upside down, inside out, with pockets flapping and fly unzipped, and with the belt threaded through one leg and around the crutch and out the other leg and buckled over the clothesline.



Greg

Jim grinned slyly. "Father John gave Dad a copy for us, and Jack learnt it by heart when he was pretending to do school work." Such *dobbing*<sup>1</sup> on a brother to your friends is reckoned quite okay.

Jack moved on to another item. "What exactly are *dixies*?" he asked.

Greg explained, "They're rectangular metal bowls with handles — really useful. You can cook in 'em like saucepans or frying pans, and eat out of 'em."

Bernie explained further. "They come in pairs, and the small one just fits in the big one. The proper army name for a pair is, 'tins, mess, rectangular, one'."

Greg guessed Jack wanted a pair. "Don't buy steel ones — they're too heavy. Get aluminium with high sides, and handles that fold down over the top. Don't get low-sided ones with handles that swing along the sides and swing 'emselves into the flames."

Bernie concluded, "Brothers usually share a pair."

"I'm not a pair," wailed Joe. "What about me?"

His brothers laughed. "We'll get you a tin plate or an enamel bowl," Jack assured him.

Jim consoled Joe. "You won't have to get yours greasy when we're sizzling your sausages for you."

Jack had more questions. "We'd like more details on washing and latrines than's in the Bush Catechism."

"You don't need it," Greg asserted. "Just read every single word very carefully. You've gotta think *why* it says all those fiddly little things."

Bernie reminded him, "It was dreamt up by a friend of Father John. This Father James was so used to packing small knapsacks tight with all the vital gear that he packed the Bush Catechism tight with ideas."

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1 Dobbing: Telling tales to get someone into trouble with teacher or parent.

"That's it," added Greg, "every word counts, but then you have to try it out. That's what we had to do."

Bernie chimed in again. "Another thing: bushy swimming — Dad told us, 'No diving' and 'no swimming out of your depth'. When our Dad orders us" — he glanced at Greg — "we do it."

Greg grinned, "That's why he trusts us when he's not there." He continued, "Dad taught Frank and me to swim at Duckie when Frank was a bit younger than Bernie is now. I was next oldest. Later, Frank and I taught Bernie."

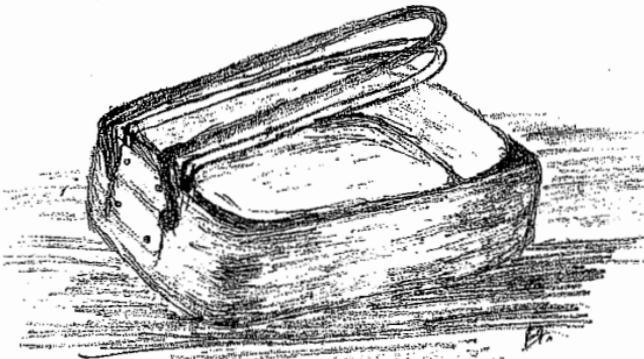
Jack was puzzled. "Who's Frank? Have you another brother besides Bernie and Tim?"

Bernie grinned. "Frank's in Heaven. That's for sure, cos he died saving Kate's life. He dived in front of a semi-trailer to shove her clear — she was only about three."

Greg added, "It slammed on its brakes so hard it snaked all over the place, fish-tailing."

Bernie could not conceal his grief. "We saw it... it was just after we'd started swimming together..."

So they discussed the Shy Spy Triplets instead.



Jack had further ideas. "They're always looking up at the tops of trees. Maybe it's birds? And how come they're so good in the bush? How do they know Morse Code? Is it from a youth group or a school?"

"The vital thing," Jim reminded him, "is to find out what they do it for. What are they up to?"

Bernie's suggestions were extreme, indeed, kindred to Joe's. "Maybe they're prospecting for gold or diamonds or something? Maybe there've got an old map with a buried treasure marked 'X' and the map's a bit vague? Maybe they're spying out the big trees for a timber mill? Even if it's a National Park, they can bribe or blackmail the government or twist *his* arm. Our Dad says so, and he knows — he was a major in the army." He paused for breath and Greg butted in.

Greg suggested they gather accurate details. "The Mahoneys live in Galway Crag. If the spies are from there — well, those three Mahoneys know everyone in Galway Crag and nearly everything about 'em. Besides, they've got seven sisters, an' girls always know about other people and love to tell everyone."

Joe boasted, "The Mahoneys are teaching us how to be altar servers at the late Mass."

Jack glanced around at the shadows — he had an instinctive feel for time, plus a strong sense of duty.

Jim and Joe had more personal and primitive time signals, like hunger pains in the tummy.

"Listen, Greg and Bernie," said Jack. "We've gotta be home by quarter past four to keep faith with Mum and Dad and Nanna so they won't worry that something's gone wrong with us and to do our jobs."

Jim added, "We've got lots of jobs before tea."

Greg guessed the Lawsons had no watch. He scrambled out and went to a knapsack pocket. "It's

only quarter past three.”

“You mean fifteen fifteen,” chuckled Jim. “We use 24-clock time.”

Bernie also chuckled. “Greg was sure you wouldn’t know it.”

“It takes us 40 minutes from here to home,” sighed Jack. “We’d better have afternoon tea at once.”

He led the move ashore to join Greg.

**THEY CAME OUT.** Four of them hauled on wet shorts. And Jim’s dry shorts soon dampened up quite a deal, for his body dripping wet.

Jim made the tea. The others scurried around, milked and sugared the mugs and got the biscuits out.

Greg recited his home-made drills for drying without towels. “This is our own stuff, not in the Bush Catechism, but Bernie an’ I’ve worked it out from common sense. For between the toes, use the tops of your socks, and keep the toes and soles dry.”

They did this at once and got their boots on.

Jack suspected that Greg had lots more. “That’s feet. What about the rest of us?”

Bernie grinned at Greg and chuckled. “You’ve got ’im started, Jack. He’ll rave on forever.” Joe groaned.

Greg chuckled and spoke fast. “Where skin presses on skin, dry with shirt-tails and legs of shorts. If both are wet, use sunshine or the fire, and you can dry wet clothes by walking in them, but you must keep the wind off with a raincoat and not get cold.”

By this time they were sipping hot sweet tea and chewing Anzac biscuits. As they did so, they were rotating themselves at the fire, and holding out their wet shirts to give them the hot air treatment.

Greg looked quizzically at his brother. “What on earth did you have to push Joe in for? and get all our

clothes wet?"

Jack had been too polite to ask this very question.

Greg continued the rebuke. "It's rather inconvenient when we've got so much to yarn about."

Bernie had the grace to blush. "I pretended to myself that Joe's clothes needed a rinse in the pool."

Indeed! Saying it made it sound even sillier.

"Giving-in to temptation," muttered Greg.

Jack now felt free to explain their situation. "We've got spare shirts and shorts but they're for emergencies. When our things get wet and we can't dry 'em without Mum finding out, she gets us to boil 'em in the copper after we've filled our shower buckets. Then after our showers we get straight into pyjamas before tea."

Jim supplied further details. "We have to rinse and wring and hang 'em at once, to dry before morning. Mum says, 'That'll be an incentive not to get things dirty, and wet, and make more work for the twins.'"

"They run our laundry," explained Jack. "And they are going to make us some more shorts and shirts from a roll of khaki cloth we got from the St Vincent de Paul. And now, we'd better get going." As he spoke, he got his shirt on, and his brothers did likewise.

They were ready.

Bernie smiled, dimples and all. "We're staying for another swim."

Greg nodded to Jack and Bernie, then looked shrewd. "After swimming we'll go home the long way through Ducky, just to see if there's any tracks left by Shy Spy Triplets."

Thus ended the long overdue first-of-many happy get-togethers of the Lawsons and the Cumberlands.

## Chapter 8

### Two Sorts of Log

**N**OT FAR from the passion fruit vines, Jack, Jim and Joe came on their little sister Tilly riding confidently on Lucy, the third pony. Around her mouth were passion fruit seeds and juice dribble. Her riding implemented the enthusiastic suggestion of cousin Patricia last Sunday. Apparently Luigi Castonelli had lent the girls a third saddle as well as the ponies.

The boys were sure that Colleen and Kathleen would not be far away. Sure enough, they were gorging themselves and their ponies Lady and Liz on passion fruit.

With mock severity, Joe corrected them. "If you girls spoil your appetite for tea, I'll tell." His brothers and sisters knew quite well he would not.

"Want a lift, do you?" Colleen teased him back. "We'll consider it — you look tired and grubby."

This was such a regular jibe that the boys did not bother negating it. Besides, it was often true. Jim replied with a challenge. "We'll beat your ponies on foot," and the boys broke into a trot, up the steep trail on The Tumbledown and all — at least proving that they were *not* worn out. The kindly girls let them win.

\* \* \* \*

At *Terra Sancta* Jim scribbled on the white board, 'Back from Big Bogie 1610'. A copy of their home-made map was held on by a magnet, so such names could make sense to the stay-at-homes.

Dad had got in only five minutes before. Over a cuppa, he asked them, "Could you boys forego exploring tomorrow afternoon, and cut up more of that wood

you got on Monday? I know you've already cut enough for the visitors and the weekend. But there's an urgent call from Luigi Castonelli. He's asked for more stove wood at the café for his wife to cook her apple pies for the tourists."

Jack and Jim and Joe remembered those apple pies. It was a vivid and altogether pleasant memory. How could they forget that previous time they took her a load of wood. How scrumptious the home-made pies and cream! They licked their lips merely at the memory.

Besides, that particular Friday was memorable for another reason — Jack had stalled the Land Rover on the level crossing, with trains bearing down on them from both directions. Mum and Dad still did not know that horrible detail, though Jack had been severely rebuked for driving the Land Rover on public roads, no matter how unfrequented.

The boys and their parents conjured up a mental picture of the five businesses all-in-one at Guntawang. As well as a motor garage, the Castonellis had the general store — everything from a needle to an anchor — a post office and a bank, as well as a roadside café.

Indeed, this tea room was the only sign of modernity in the entire set-up. And ironically, the café's greatest attraction, its most popular feature for a modern tourist, was their immense satisfaction eating old-fashioned apple pies made in an old-fashioned wood-burning stove. The stove was just within view of the tourists, and the very smell of apple pies and a wood fire was mouth-watering. What is more, the pies were served with the lashings of old-fashioned fresh cream from Luigi's dairy herd.

And overarching all other features in their fivefold kingdom were the beaming smiles of Luigi and Caterina



*MORE STOVE WOOD*

Castonelli. They radiated that rural goodwill of family and farming people all over the world, in Italy and everywhere else, people living close to the Living Earth.

As usual, Dad made suggestions rather than issue orders. "Perhaps you boys might do family jobs first, leave showers and Log Books till after tea, and get dressed again? And spend every moment before we eat packing chaff bags with stove logs? Perhaps put 'em in the van, even finish off after tea?"

The boys grinned. "Yes, Dad," said Jack and Jim.

Joe affirmed it more stridently, putting on his deepest voice. "Yo ho yep yes, Dad; and aye aye, sir."

Jim, ever alert, asked mischievously, "Did you make a pun about logs as books and logs as firewood deliberately?"

Dad smiled amiably, and so did Mum and Nanna.

The boys stood to go. Rather more earnestly, Dad added, "My teaching colleagues tell me the forecast for tomorrow is for a regular stinker. I'd rather you were not in the bush in very high temperatures."

Then he switched to his teaching mode. "What were those two things to avoid?"

Jim was sure of himself. "Heat exhaustion and hyperthermia, that's heat stroke, not hypothermia."

Dad beamed. "Good! You've been learning Father John's *Australian Bush Catechism of Camping*."

Jack couldn't resist rebuking Dad. "Yeah, Dad. And that was nearly two weeks ago — and *you* didn't pass it on to us till last Sunday."

Dad smiled his *mea culpa* and smote his chest. He had the last say. "Tomorrow, then, you might stay home and work in the shade, cutting up more logs, not only for our visitors' weekend, but also for later on?"

His sons also grinned amicably. "Yes, Dad."

**M**EANWHILE the Shy Spy Triplets set out to get back to their bicycles by the way they had come, via the track back to Twin Peaks.

Here they would skirt around the Cumberland home paddock, lest they be seen by some of the family.

They were sure Greg and Bernie would not use the track until they were returning to *The Hills of Home* in an hour or so, after their swim.

They had meant to spend the afternoon on a thorough-going exploration around The Mermaids' Pool and The Big Bogie Pool. Yet wherever they went, their chance encounters with the Coachwood Falls and Guntawang boys had meant a change in their plans.

They were not whingers. They made the best of things without complaint. On the way back to their bikes, they kept their eyes peeled for any really big trees, still hoping to find one they might have missed on the outward journey. And they discussed how they might, in future, dodge these shrewdies whose curiosity they had aroused and who already knew far too much.

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE MEAL that evening or, as Dad insisted on calling it, the *convivium*, was even happier than usual, with lively reports and eager listening.

When his turn came, Jack was greatly heartened that the family's lively interest matched his own.

Jim described the rope for hanging the wet things, and he acted it by prancing round the kitchen.

Having seized their full attention, Jim glanced at Dad, and remarked so casually as to be emphatic, "Talking to Greg and Bernie, we *discovered* lots of things..."

The implication of *discovering* by listening to wiser people was not lost on Dad. He knew it was a rebuke for his rather overdoing the 'discovery method'.

Private discoveries are not enough. Dad was being prompted to remember his other dictum, 'learn to listen, and listen to learn'.

Colleen and Kathleen left it to Tilly to report on the pony riders. She was bursting with pride at her first bush exploit, and on horse-back, too. First she smiled gratefully at the twins, then she began.

"Yous," she declared boastfully to her big brothers, "have never ridden a horse and I have and I've done it in the real wild bush and" — she had now turned to her sisters — "even got out of sight of yous." At that, she seemed to run dry of boasts.

Kathleen prompted her. "Did we have anything to eat?"

Tilly smiled with deep satisfaction.. "Us and our horses ate buckets of passion fruit and we galloped past the boys and beat 'em home."

Joe would have been willing to counter-attack both these invidious comparisons. However, Jack and Jim poked and nudged him to let it pass.

Mum had good news from her brother. "Your Uncle Wal rang up on our marvellous mobile" — she pointed heavenward to the roof aerial and beamed on Dad — "and said that Simon and Dominic have been wonderfully improved since their visit last weekend. They're not grumpy at all, and they help with the family jobs instead of fighting big sister Patricia and each other and everyone else. While I was on the phone, I thanked Wal again for the extra shower, and told him that, thanks to Patricia's idea, the twins were taking Tilly on her very first pony-ride at this very moment. Wal also said the Cox littlies at Lahdidar want the whole family to come next time and..."

Despite Dad's rules on conviviums, Jim could not

restrain himself. He burst out from the depths of his anxiety. "Not Aunty Irene, I hope?"

"Jim!" Nanna reproved him with a look that said half a dozen things at once. Jim blushed. Jack nudged him. Mum frowned. Dad shook his finger.

Then Mum took up from where she was interrupted. "Aunty Irene has told Wal it would be impractical for them all to visit us at once..." Jim heaved a long and windy sigh of relief. This was let pass, for the simple reason that Mum and Dad felt exactly the same, but could not say so.

Mum went on, "Uncle Wal has rejected his sons' proposal to move from Lahdidar to Guntawang. It's not practical for his plumbing business. Nevertheless, Aunty Irene thinks she might give homeschooling a try in the New Year, at least for the boys."

It was Joe's turn. He added to the reports of his brothers. But it was so long and involved that Jack hissed, "We've got buckets of things to do before bed. Hurry up!"

Such provocation was likely to make Joe even more long-winded. This time, fortunately, he realized the sense of it. "I'll tell you more at breakfast."

Colleen sighed hopefully. "Maybe he'll forget?"

They closed the family convivium with prayers and washing up while the littlies were put to bed. Before the usual bedtime stories, the boys needed to write up their Log Books. For this, they moved to the schoolroom and its big table:-

### **Jack's book:**

- Shy Spy Triplet's use Morse Code: short sound 'coo' is a dot and longer sound 'eee' drawn out is a dash.
- Most people would never guess it's coded information.
- SOS = coo-coo-coo eee-eee-eee coo-coo-coo.

**Jim's Journal:**

- Map with legend. [See p. 73]
- Pictures of drying wet shirts, shorts, socks and boots.

As for Joe, he got out of doing his by one of his old tricks — tricks practised even by adults with urgent toilet calls or diplomatic illnesses. This time, he simply yawned like a fog horn, folded his arms on the table, put his head down, gave a few pretend snores that would fool no one, let alone his brothers, and then sank suddenly into real sleep — with no snores.

His brothers had a standard routine for Joe. They put him on the floor — reasonably gently for big brothers — and carried him to their room. Again they put him on the floor, got his boots and socks off, pulled back the bedcovers, dumped him in his bunk — fortunately it was a lower bunk — and hauled up sheet and blanket.

Jack told Jim, "It's still daylight and we're dressed and've just got time: let's dash down and put our new Lawson Log Book in Cubby's Cave."

Jim reminded him. "Joe won't like being left out."

Jack's solution to that was quite simple. "We needn't tell him. He doesn't need to know. And he may never find out so it won't worry him."

Jim wore the knapsack. It had a school exercise book already inscribed for its noble purpose, a couple of pencils, all inside of an old giant-size powdered milk tin. The book would take on the same gracious curvature as the tin.

However, the attempt to sneak out along the cross-corridor (at right angles to the main hallway) and hence past the old laundry was spotted from the open kitchen door.

"Ready for the family reading?" called Dad. "And

where's Joe?"

Oops! Jack had forgotten all about the family reading from the old Cubby Cave Log Book.

"Joe's already asleep," replied Jack, "so we put him to bed."

Dad was used to such things. "In that case, we'd better postpone reading the Cubby Cave Log Book till tomorrow night."

Jack seized the opportunity to legitimize their dash to the cave. "In that case, Dad, may Jim and I run down to the cave and put our new Log Book in it."

"Yo ho yep yes," chanted Dad, in imitation of, and in honour of Joe. Then shrewdly, "Is that what you've got in the knapsack?"

"Signposts for a mind-reader!" thought Jim. "Can't put anything over him..." and aloud he echoed Dad, "Yo ho yep yes, yes Dad." Dad grinned obligingly.

Jack and Jim scuttled off. Jack was slightly dubious: "He didn't exactly say we could go right *now*."

"Actually he did, even if he wrapped it up in Joe-waffle," Jim assured him, "and that's usually as much as he ever does."

\* \* \* \*

The sun was not quite set. Just in case, he had a box of matches in an old lozenge tin and a torch in the main pocket of the knapsack.

Sure footed, the two older boys trotted down the cow path to the dam, skirted round it, down to the splintery post-and-rail fence, and raced through the small belt of prickly scrub to the low cliff with the spikes.

They swung down them and stepped carefully in the shadowy light on the rougher ground underfoot.

They romped up the stone step at the Cave, got out the Log Book and grinned. Their title page read:-

Cubby Cave Log Book, revived after 100 years,  
by the Lawson family of *Terra Sancta*.

On page 2, Jack made the very first entry:

Set up on Wednesday, 1900 hours EDST  
on 29<sup>th</sup> November in the Year of the Lord.

Then the signatures:

*Jack Lawson, Jim Lawson, Joe Lawson (per proxy)*

It was darker in the cave and already twilight in the canyon outside, so they hurried to get home.

“Big day, tomorrow,” declared Jim, and he chanted:

Early to bed, early to rise.

Jack obligingly finished it:

Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

They climbed out of the canyon. The sun had long since gone and the scrub filtered the last of the twilight. They hurried home for the luxury of reading in bed.

They zipped into pyjamas, and sped through ‘pyjama prayers’. They adjusted their positions in bed to get the best from the low power bulb to read their books. Its electricity was from the big battery on the front verandah through the mysteries of an inverter. The system could not sustain brighter lights for long.

“All things wise and wonderful,” murmured Jim as he opened *Bevis, the Story of a Boy*, and was happily lost in a world even older than the Guntawang Academy for the Sons of Gentlemen.

For his part, Jack was reading *Settlers and Convicts* on the early timber-getters, hoping to find a clue to the strange activities of the Shy Spy Triplets. His final words were, “I do hope we get to Zodiac on Saturday.”

## Chapter 9

### Burnt to a Frazzle!

**T**HIS Thursday Greg and Bernie made a second attempt to 'spring a surprise' on Jack, Jim and Joe.

Greg reckoned, "We haven't given 'em a big enough fright. We can't count hunting each other yesterday when *they knew* we were looking for 'em."

It was in a searing heat that they left *The Hills of Home* after an extra early lunch. Alas! it was still getting hotter...

Last Sunday, Jack, Jim and Joe's cousins had nearly perished in that same gorge of upper Koala Creek. Today's heat made venturing there even more lethal.

Greg and Bernie strode down the ancient track rediscovered by their sister Kate, and ignored the branch track to her Mermaids' Pool.

It was the best route for the Cumberlands to get to places upstream — to The Big Bogie, The Thunderfall, and on again, past The Secret Water, and finally to Little Bogie, with its two-storied cave where they had fooled the Tricky Trio firebugs just two weeks before.<sup>1</sup>

When Jack told them of the ladder at Little Bogie, their sun-flushed faces hid the blushes of their shame. Just fancy! They had passed that ladder without seeing it! But now it would be their best course to *Terra Sancta* for the Surprise Attack.

Too late Greg realized what an ugly day it was — madness for *anything* outdoors, let alone bush walking.

He kept telling himself, as he had so often told others, that creek walking was always safe. In hot weather they would have water for swimming and water

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<sup>1</sup> See *Bush Boys and Bush on the Move*, chapters 22-23.

for drinking — all the way. What else mattered?

He forgot a third essential, shade to rest in.

This sun blazed cruelly from above. It bounced back from the ground and the sides of the gorge. It was 'doing them' like a dinner in an overheated oven.

It was dawning dimly on Greg that they had nearly 'had it'. He began to feel light-headed. His mind could not grasp that their bodies were about to revolt. It was far, far worse than that awful sun on the climb up the Coachwood Razor Back a fortnight ago.

They struggled on, more and more slowly.

Last time they came past, they had not known there was a Secret Water, for scrub hid it. This time, thanks to Jack's map, they knew a refuge was at hand.

Greg gasped. "We'll rest up under that big fig tree they told us about, and swim in the shade," and they swung off into the scrub between track and creek.

Bernie hissed, "Listen! voices!" Then, in a hoarse whisper, "The Lawsons! Let's creep up and duck 'em." The mere prospect tended to revive him.

They came a grassy verge under scattered coachwoods which cast dappled shadows on the lawn. A huge fig tree gave full shade to the Secret Water itself.

They saw the backs of three heads on the far side. It must be the Lawsons. Below their necks, all was hidden in water dirty-black from rotting leaves — the curse of tree-shaded pools. And besides, no one in bright sunlight could possibly see into thick shade.

The bushy silences were rent by the glad cries from the pool. They must have just arrived and plunged at once into the soothing luxury of cool and shaded water. A grand splashing fight was in full swing, with so much noise and so much water in the air that the Cumberlands went unobserved.



*"LET'S CREEP UP AND DUCK 'EM"*

Greg and Bernie gaped. Their eyes 'saw without seeing'. Their brains were addled. Their minds could not grasp it — it did not add up... three genteel boater hats atop three jumbled heaps of clothes, tossed higgledy-piggledy on a stone seat alongside a fireplace. Would the Lawsons wear such sissy hats in the bush?

Nevertheless, Greg winked at Bernie, hissing, "Don't stare or they'll *feel* our eyes boring into their backs."

He dumped his knapsack alongside one already there. They reefed off boots and clothes and tossed them in new jumbled piles on a second stone seat. As usual in the sun, they kept their hats on — about as sensible for a swim in the shade as boater hats for bushwalking...

In dirty water, they dared not swim like submarines. So with silent breast-stroke they skimmed the surface, to get in position on the blind side of their victims.

They were within a metre of ducking them when the other boys spun round. Three faces burnt fiery red were writ large with surprise, fright and annoyance.

They were *not* the Lawsons, but complete strangers.

Who were they? Greg and Bernie really had no idea... could they be the Shy Spy Triplets?

Though Greg was a deal more embarrassed than Bernie, the strangers were even more embarrassed. But at least, they knew who the Cumberlands were. Along with the Lawsons, these were people they most wished not to see, and nor be seen by, let alone talk to.

Greg smiled contritely. "Oh, I'm sorry. We mistook you for friends. We thought you were the Lawsons..." He paused, felt foolish, and continued lamely, "It was them we meant to duck..."

The strangers were still put out. Nevertheless, they gave little smiles. It encouraged Greg to go on, "I'm Greg Cumberland and this is my brother Bernie."

One of the unknowns spoke up — not without courtesy, but *very* cautiously. “It’s my fault, too. You see... we’ve never been here before and we’re escaping from the heat.” But no names, and not a word of greeting or welcome.

Greg glanced at Bernie, smiled again and asked politely, “Please give us five minutes in your pool — to survive the fiery furnace.” Mischief made him add, “With a bit of that angelic cool wet breeze.” Bible texts of the youths in the furnace prompted him to play the wag. He’d test them as Dad might. “Perhaps we might call you Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?”

Shadrach gave a little start. Aha! he knew those Bible names. But any blush he had was hidden in his sunburn. He ignored Greg’s gentle prompting.

He too was addled by the sun and spoke distractedly. “I’m sorry our clothes are so untidy...” Oops! But so were Greg and Bernie’s. Lest they think him rude, he hurried on, “We usually fold them.”

Then more coherently. “The sun got us. We were desperate for shade. I spotted the crown of a Morton Bay Fig. We broke through the scrub and found a pool in the shade, and a fireplace and seats. We’ve often been in the bush but we’ve never swum in a bush pool. Until now, all our swimming’s been civilized, in the pool at the Acad...” He quickly amended ‘the Academy’ to “school”.

Meshach, clearly a young brother, seemed happy to be uncivilized. “It feels beaut!” he chortled. “I like it,” and he circled around with a slow breaststroke. Even in the shade, his neck and lower arms and legs glowed fiery red against his unburnt body.

Greg grinned. “Please excuse us. We really must swim a bit and cool-off.” He and Bernie launched

themselves along the surface. Shadrach gave a little smile, and he and Abednego swam, too. With lazy strokes all five happily circled each other in the shade.

After five minutes of cooling off, they let their feet sink into the leafy muck. Abednego burst out, "Please don't tell our teachers or my aunt you saw us swimming in the creek — they'd murder us if they found out."

Greg reassured him. "We swim in this creek further down nearly all the time." Then to Shadrach, "What school was it you mentioned?"

Shadrach was instantly on guard. Only yesterday he had overheard Greg asserting it must be 'a strict school'. Now he spoke fast, "Oh, at Galway Craggs," followed by a fast counter question: "Do you go to school in Galway Craggs, too?"

Bernie declared proudly, "*We* are homeschooled."

The evasive Shadrach changed the subject again. "Water — we've only got a half-litre bottle between the three of us... Is this creek safe to drink?"

Greg smiled. "Better not. Look here, Bernie and I need to boil the billy. Would you join us in a cuppa?"

"No, but thank you very much." Once more it was clear that Shadrach wished them gone.

Greg studied the three faces. Now he spoke firmly. "You're dangerously dehydrated. You could die from sunstroke." Then he spoke with the voice of command. "You stay here and cool off. I'll get a billy on."

Bernie grinned to himself. As usual, Greg's personality was carrying all before it.

Greg scrambled out, and hauled on shorts and boots over wet skin. His hat was already on.

Shadrach shrugged — there was not much else he could do. So the four boys in the water swam cheerfully up and down in the shade. It did feel good.

Greg dried his hands on his shirt. He cleared the litter round the fireplace and used it as kindling — nice dry twigs. He told himself, "This stone fire-place is safe even in a total fire ban. It's a life or death emergency. And it's shaded." He filled his billy at the top end of the pool, hung it in the flames, slid off boots and shorts, and rejoined them in the water.

He kept an eye on the billy. When steam showed, he was out again. This time he dressed completely.

Shadrach knew nothing of drying without a towel. He watched Greg use shirt tails for his lower body, pull on shorts and shirt, leaving shirt tails hanging out, and dried between his toes with the top of his socks.

Greg tossed in a handful of tea leaves, and called, "How many mugs've you got?" Shadrach shamefully shook his head. "Not to worry," Greg assured him cheerfully. "I'll share with Bernie and you three can share from mine. Milk an' sugar?"

Meshach answered, "Yes, please, all of us."

Greg stirred a dry mix of powdered milk and sugar in each mug. "Come an' get it!" he called chirpily.

They hurried out. Bernie guessed Greg meant to move off straight after, and also dressed completely.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego clad themselves modestly in shorts. Clearly, they intended to stay on and swim some more.

Greg poured tea left-handed while his right stirred in the milk and sugar with a stick. Shadrach produced six ham sandwiches, so there was one and a bit each.

Greg and Bernie did not usually say grace at afternoon tea. But Greg had a hunch these strangers might be shocked at any 'Roman Catholic stuff'. With a deal of his Dad's fun blended with piety, he winked at Bernie and they made the Sign of the Cross, then the Protestant

Grace, "For what we are about to receive..."

The strangers responded with Bernie, "May the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen." Again he and Bernie made the Sign of the Cross.

They sipped hot tea in turns. While waiting, they nibbled sandwiches. Along with the swim, it helped restore them. Once more, Greg tried to yarn, as bushies do when they meet bushies. "We're on our way from *The Hills of Home* to the Lawsons at *Terra Sancta*, and we're exploring as we go."

This time, Shadrach made a minimal response, but gave nothing away. He took his cue from 'exploring'. "We're sort of exploring, too, you know, animals and birds and plants and all that." So all-embracing!

They watched each other warily. Greg found it fun.

When the mugs were empty, Greg dealt out more milk and sugar, and refilled them — the 3-litre billy held over five medium size mugs.

"Should I boil it again?" he asked Shadrach.

Shadrach shook his head, though he did look grateful. "No, but thank you. You've kept us alive — a little longer." Meshach and Abednego added their thanks, while Bernie rinsed the billy.

Greg's shrewd guess was that the strangers had come down the ladder at Little Bogie. Why didn't they stop there? Ah, its pool was unshaded. Or maybe the heat had not bitten them enough?

Again he tried to draw them out. "There's a quite easy way to the top." He pointed. "That scree slope against the cliff's like a sort of spur ridge. It runs north-west and has a bit of an old path on it. It joins the main track above the ladder, and it's much quicker."

Greg had gleaned this from listening to Jack and from Jack's map. He remembered Cubby's Canyon,

but guessed it was meant to be kept a secret.

Shadrach said, "Thank you. But we'll wait till it's cooler." For the first time, he smiled properly. "We'll enjoy a good long swim. It's beaut in this weather."

Greg rinsed the mugs. Before he swung on the knapsack, he took out a plastic bottle. At the edge of the scrub, he waved it at them, put it down in the shade and called, "We'll say good-bye, and God bless you!" as a further surprise for these unknown boys. He laid it on. "Here's two litres — from a Good Samaritan." Before the strangers could respond yea or nay or 'thank you', the Cumberlands had vanished.

Lest he be overheard, Greg hissed to Bernie, "This sun's murder. Gotta get shade. We've no more water. Let's short-circuit things — straight up the Lawsons' Cubby's Canyon. It's supposed to start right here."

They got clear of the scrub. Greg looked skyward. He pointed to the riven cliff that formed the canyon.

They plunged through a thicket of bloodwood and turpentine which hid the entrance, and were embraced by the delicious coolness of the canyon.

Ever upward, they plugged wearily on, more and more exhausted with even that little extra effort.

Then up a ladder akin to that at Little Bogie, only sloping and shorter, and so they came to Cubby's Cave.

It was a measure of their utter weariness that they did not boil the billy again, but simply swigged water by the mugful from a twenty litre barrel with a tap.

Only then did they discover a big tin, labelled Powdered Milk. Inside was an exercise book. Its cover said, CUBBY CAVE LOG BOOK.

"Wowie, Bernie!" cried Greg, as he opened it. "The Lawsons only put this here last night. Ours will be the second entry." His entry was a model of brevity

— just names and date and nothing more, not even admiration, or of escaping the searing heat.

They stretched out on the hard rock. It was deliciously cold. To run the blood back into their heads, they propped up their legs on logs.

Bernie spoke drowsily. “The Lawsons must’ve got water from the trickle in the cliff.”

Greg’s thinking was also wandered sleepily. “Those boys *must* be the Shy Spy Triplets.”

Though half-asleep, Bernie chuckled. “Shadrach was cunning as well as shy. Keeping their names secret. And where they came from. And where they were going. Or why they were there at all. His pals weren’t as careful — he’d’ve rather they kept quiet.”

“Yeah,” rejoined Greg. “He talked a bit sissy, but he’s not. They’re real bushies — but we could teach ’em a bit.” He paused, then went on. “When we had that cuppa, I worked out they came from upstream — they were all red raw on the backs of the knees, but our knees are more burnt in front.”

“That’s right,” agreed Bernie, “and their faces were not as burnt as yours”. He knew his would be as bad.

“Another thing,” resumed Greg, “I was too brain-cooked to notice till we were getting dressed: school badges on those silly hats — it’s a school uniform — and a good school where they learn the Bible. It must be a Protestant school that really believes in its religion. And it’s at Galway Crag — those boys wouldn’t lie.”

Soon they were lost to the world in the long dreamless sleep of total exhaustion. They were long past being in a hurry to get home or anywhere else.