
TWO LOGS

by

Jimmy Brook

*“it is not the knowledge of the day, that matters in the long run,
but where it comes from, and where it is going.”*

Author’s Note.

“Two Logs” is entirely a work of fiction, and all the characters depicted, are likewise. They do not characterise any known person, including the author, but are imaginary, as are their personalities.

It is a story of a group of people, and their confronting of situations, that arise, some unusual. Many readers may find an empathy with the characters and places. Whilst the bushland settings, are not related to any existing locations, all other places, are true to life, as far as possible.

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TWO LOGS

CHAPTER ONE

A sparkling sun bounced off the water, as the car rounded a bend and headed up the hill into the National Park, away from the broad river. Ahead, the dull green of the rising hills, splashed now and again with a red or yellow of exposed rock, and a floating white cloud here and there, betokened another happy escape from the daily round of existence and day to day living.

Robert caught a quick movement in the bushes at the side, but it was gone just as quickly, and deftly centred the car again on the road, before anyone seemed to notice. This early, it probably was a wallaby or something. Next to him, Andrew was still dozing, not being one ever, to Robert's memory, to rise early, and that memory went back some forty years, when they were in the Scouts together, and still remained friends, weathering the storms of teens and bushwalking and cars and girls. Today, with the other two friends, chatting in the back seat, they were somehow, still managing to go out walking, despite Andy's young family and a high pressure job at the advertising company. He would have given it away years ago, but, Lucille had her status to maintain, and who was he to argue with such a determined wife.

Robert on the other hand, had no such aspirations or constraints. Always a bit of a loose cannon, he took things as they came. He enjoyed these odd days out with Andy, but he could never make up his mind if they were to prove to himself, that he had it together and Andy was in a mould, or it was the other way around. Anyway, he was a good mate, and they seemed to feel the same things out in the bush.

They skirted the Visitors Centre, and Robert noticed even at this early hour, a couple of cars out front. Taking the ridge turnoff, the road turned to gravel, but it would only be another twenty minutes or so and they would reach the track head. Hopefully Allan would be there to meet them. He could have come with them, although a bit of a squeeze in the back, but Allan was very independent and reserved, and apart from coming out on walks when asked, didn't mix unless it was a dinner and they'd twisted his arm to turn up. However once there, he became the so called life of the party, and whilst some of his jokes were borderline, his

taste in wine was well above average.

Just before the car park, was a dip in the road, which Robert thought, a little speed, might awake the two dozing in the back. It did just that, an inappropriate word from Erlyn followed by a mumbled apology to the girl next to him. He must be getting serious about her, thought Robert. Since Erlyn had met Connie, he was slowly changing from a hoon, an academic one at least, to, well whatever it is when your keen on someone. Robert and Andy met Erlyn about ten years back, on a walk looking for orchids. Or lilies. They were all the same to Andy.

He had a girl with him then, and names were swapped and Erlyn started turning up when they asked him. However they never saw the girl again, the only reference was at a dinner one night, when a few beers had been consumed, that the girl "was not intellectual, and only after my body". More like the other way around, the others had thought.

Connie (never Constance) appeared about six months ago, and apparently worked in the same department store as Erlyn. She did show a genuine interest in the bush and was a bit radical in some of her ideas on the environment and politicians and a score of other issues, but Robert and Andy found her quite vibrant and welcomed her company on their monthly outings. Robert actually thought her quite attractive, not unlike someone he had had a relationship with, back last year. There were a couple of others before then, but always somehow they just sought of faded. He had given up then and thought when it happens, it happens. Then Pam came along. He met her on a railway station, two travellers commiserating over a late start to work, and the next day, on the same station, he came right out and asked her to go out. She said yes, to his surprise, and so it had began. He knew it was getting a bit matter of fact, but couldn't believe it, when she told him one day, it was better, they have some time apart. He rang a couple of times, but knew it was over. From there, it was more after work drinking and more walking.

Andrew however had a long experience of relationships and enjoyed the marriage he was now in. He loved Lucille and the kids, but he saw things in a different light to Robert. For one thing, his appreciation of Connie, apart from her personality, included how she would be sexually. He always told himself he would never try anything. He had too much to lose. But he could think about it.

Allan's car was not in sight, as they pulled up, and Robert made an aloud comment to no one in particular. Whilst it was shaping up to be a good day, weather wise experience had shown that it never stayed that way. Robert had noted a cold change on the way tomorrow, and everyone knew that, man and nature never adhered to the same clock.

Whilst Connie disappeared in the direction of the one toilet, whose leaf covered roof just appeared above some bushes, Erlyn was removing some items from her pack and putting them in his. "Can't have her winging about the weight, can I?", he commented, when he saw Andy looking at him. Robert thought this only confirms it, then wondered how long Allan might be.

As if this signalled some sign, a car came around the bend, screeched to a halt, and out jumped Allan. "Goodday. Sorry I was late, but slept in. Where's Connie?" Erlyn gestured vaguely in the direction of the toilet, and Allan waved his hand in acknowledgement, dragged a rather new looking day pack from the back seat, and locked his car. Connie reappeared, gave Allan a big smile, picked up her bag, and said she was ready, why wasn't everyone else?

Robert was the sort of unofficial leader, although they had never discussed it. Their walks just happened when one rang another or they were having some coffee or whatever, a place was mentioned, and it sort of went ahead. But Robert was the oldest, although just by about six months on Andy. Erlyn's birthday was the next day after Andy's, and it was always an excuse to have a party and celebrate both together. Deeper down, Robert had a fear of being forgotten or left aside, and so he was keen to keep these trips or other occasions going. Pam, the girl in his last relationship, had a penchant for having her own friends around, but never his. This was probably another reason that it finally came to an end.

Robert had suggested they walk out to a rise called Perkin's Peak. It was not a high peak, but a convenient point to make for, that would cover a reasonably level track, some 7 or 8 kilometres out. Just before the peak, the track dipped down and crossed a small brook called Two Logs Creek. There were some nice reeds here and a campsite that rarely saw use. They had been on this walk about two years ago, and it rained. Robert was hoping this time would be better as the only good views were from the peak. In summer they could sit in the creek, or dangle their legs from

the two logs that had been laid across the stream, probably by early walkers in the area. Erlyn had commented last time, that was how the creek got its name. No one forgot Allan's one word reply: "Really?". Sarcasm wasn't his usual forte, but Robert had remembered they'd been debating some topic or other in the car coming up, to do with politics, from memory, and it had got a little too personal. However since that time, it seemed to be forgotten, so Robert made a mental note not to mention it or the two logs today.

Then, not five minutes into the walk, Allan and Connie started on politics. Robert thought, if Erlyn starts, I'm going to stay right away.

"He is what this country needs, Allan. Until we got John Howard, all we had were egotistical, chauvinistic meatheads running the show, without any thought to what the people wanted."

"Rubbish" said Allan then coloured slightly and said "I didn't mean to be so blunt, but you're wrong. Labour stayed in for so long, because they were tuned to the people..."

"Well I am blunt. That's absolute garbage, and you know it. Women never ever got a mention in cabinet until the Liberals came in. Doesn't that tell you something about the Hawke Keating dictatorship?"

"Now you know, that's not true," said Allan. "Labour has always had a high regard for women in the ministry."

"Tell that to the catholic church," chipped in Andy, "they could learn something there."

"Could we drop politics for today. I just want to relax."

It wasn't the comment, Robert had thought, Erlyn would make, but he was pleased. After last time. And whether Connie was right or wrong, she certainly could hold her ground. Erlyn was going to have his hands full, landing this fish.

They'd been walking for about 30 minutes or so, people chatting about this and that, as people tend to do when they start out on

these activities, when Connie made a scream and disappeared behind a rock they had just passed, brushing past Allan who was

in the rear. Naturally everyone else stopped, and Erlyn moved back and someone said "what's up?"

"Snake. I saw it on the side" came the quiet voice, "just over there near that reedy thing". Then a higher pitched yell. "It's still there. Look."

Andy smirked, and turned around again to face her. "Sorry dear, but I will save you from that ferocious frilled neck lizard, that has menaced your honour". There were general smiles and a meek and red faced Connie, took Erlyn's hand and stepped out onto the track.

"Sorry, I could never tell the difference". They resumed their walking. A thought struck Robert a few seconds later. 'He's a bit forward, calling her dear. She seems the type to assert her feminist side.' However, if Connie had noticed, she didn't react.

Apart from some white cockatoos squawking off to the side, it was a quiet trip, until they were about 100 metres from Two Logs Creek, when, Andy stopped and turned around. Lowering his voice, he said that he could hear talking.

"And I smell smoke or cooking" piped up Erlyn.

"Must be someone at the creek" said Robert. Sure enough, as they dropped down into the gully, a couple were sitting in the old campsite area, with a fire going.

"Hi" Robert yelled as they drew up level. Everyone stopped walking. The man, youngish, looked up and waved.

"Didn't expect any one out this way today. How are you?"

"Good. Neither did we. Didn't see any car at the parking area." said Robert, noting with a quick look, only day gear.

"No. Got dropped off pretty early. As long as we are back there by 4 o'clock, we'll be right". The girl with him smiled but said nothing. "Stopping?", asked the fellow.

"No", said Robert, "we're going up to the Peak for some views. Well, see you later", and half waved, and everyone moved off, Andy turned to wave and tripped on a rock, but recovered his

balance.

"Feel free to have your lunch back there", said Robert without turning around.

"No harm in looking" said Andy.

"You know, Lucille gets a full copy of the video".

"What are you talking about?" replied Andy.

"Just joking", and every one laughed.

Shortly , they climbed around some rocks and Perkin's Peak came into view on their left, some 50 metres off the track. Allan led the last bit and soon they dropped their packs and found seating amongst the rocks and small bushes. Erlyn produced his small stove, and Allan offered some water, quickly followed by Andy, for the pot. There was general chatting, and some laughter from Connie, when Erlyn told her this was a lizard proof site!

Erlyn liked Connie. She had an infectious personality, a bit like his sister. Amy, his sister, was a couple of years older than him, and had virtually taken over the running of the house, when their mother told them, she had breast cancer. She was a very capable woman, and had still managed to get married, even in the last months of their mother's life. Erlyn had wanted a woman like this, and had almost given up, when Connie appeared one day, at the store. He always found an excuse to end up in Bedding. She was passionate on flowers, and so started their relationship, photographing rock orchids.

Robert had stood up and climbed onto the rock behind him to take in the view. It was a good view, he thought. The peaks on the skyline, blending into each other, and the valley in front. Would be nice very early in the morning, or just on dusk. Wouldn't be bad to come out and camp here one night. Might suggest it to the others later, although he doubted if Andy would come, Lucille would kill that idea off the moment he mentioned it. If none of them wanted to, he'd come himself. One day. In the distance, to the south, was a bank of low cloud, very low and white. Otherwise the sky was pretty clear. He climbed back down to see how the stove was coming on. Still going.

Allan was yawning and stretching his arms.

"Late night?" from Erlyn.

"Sort of. Out with a couple of people I know". When nothing more was offered, Robert continued the conversation.

"Anyone seen that film that's just come out, 'Titanic'? It's certainly got a big write up. Supposed to be the most expensive ever made. And it's got Kate Winslow and that kid, Leonardo Cap, whatever the name is".

"Well, that kid's earning a lot more than you or I together", said Andy.

"Why don't we get together and see it, maybe next week", said Robert, then immediately thought, 'why do I do this, organising everyone. But if I don't, no one will do anything. I'll go myself if no one wants to.'

"I'll have to give it a miss. I've already promised someone at work. They asked me, and I said yes", sprouted Allan.

"It is you who is supposed to ask the girl", said Andy.

"Who said it was a girl", piped up Connie. "I go to movies with girlfriends, so why can't blokes go with mates?"

"Thank you for organising my social life, everyone, but I'm sure I can manage", said Allan. "How's the tea coming on?"

Robert balanced a somewhat squashed tomato in one hand, whilst he attempted to cut it with a not so sharp knife, and ended up with juice and pieces on his jeans. 'Next time', he mused, 'I'll bring sandwiches like Andy, and save this messing about. Still I said that the last time.'

Erlyn seemed to have manoeuvred his head onto Connie's lap, and had his eyes shut. The realisation that this was more than just a girl, kept flashing up from his sub consciousness. The thought of wanting to be with her, and not feeling important, just because he had a girl with him, to show off, was surfacing.

He'd had 3 or 4 girl friends over the last ten years or so, but never got down to that comfortable feeling of just being with

them. It was always a conscious feeling, try to impress or please them. That type of relationship. Never in control. He'd tried sex with Gloria, the last one, but it seemed the focus of the relationship, with nothing else, and after about a year, she said it was time to move on, or something like that. He wouldn't make the same mistake again he told himself. Especially not with Connie.

He felt himself being propelled forward, as Connie stood up. The others were starting to put items away, and the unspoken command indicated it was time to return. Andy had taken a photograph of the group as they sat there, and one of the view across the valley. He was trying out his brother's camera because it had one of those date function options, and if he liked it, he would hint to Lucille, as his birthday approached, what a good idea it would be. His brother was away and had taken a video camera, lending him, his 35mm. He remembered how his brother had said to him that this was not just a camera, but a Pentax. Andy had also remembered the film, this rather hacked comment, was made in. But he wanted the camera, so he laughed appropriately. He wasn't close to his brother, but he was family, and he had money.

Andy thought, if he could just pull a couple of big clients, his future in advertising would be assured. However there were times, when he didn't care, looked forward more to just getting away from it all. He enjoyed rambling about in the bush, and pleased he and Robert had got on so well, right from all those years back, even before high school.

"Bit of a low cloud moving this way" Andy said as he packed the rest of his gear.

"Time to go" said Connie, "and I shall lead the way" with which she shouldered her pack and headed in the direction of the creek. Erlyn galvanised himself into action and quickly followed her.

"Watch out for lizards" came a loud remark from Andy as he followed. An index finger appeared in the air from her hand, and both Andy and Allan gave a loud theatrical moan.

"You go ahead" said Allan, "I need to dig a hole".

Andy turned around and shook his head. You wait until now? We'll go and wait down by the creek. Chat to those two others if they

are still there. Coming Robert?"

"No. I'll wait here until Allan's back. Just check out the cloud. Carry on and see you shortly."

Andy waved his hand behind his head, and disappeared down the hill after the other two.

Robert climbed onto the rock and looked southwards. Indeed the cloud had got very close, and appeared to be heading right to them. It didn't seem to extend very wide, and there seemed to be plenty of blue sky everywhere else. Strange. 'Oh well', he thought, and sat down to wait for Allan. "Don't know why he had to wait until leaving time to have a bog, but then again, if Connie hadn't jumped up, we'd probably be still here" he said aloud. Then he checked himself and made a mental note to try and stop talking to himself. His mother said it was not a good sign, and meant you were on your own too much. He thought that was garbage, but he did spend a lot of time not mixing, especially after the time with Pam, had ended. "She's gone and that's that" he said, then swore to himself when he'd realised he'd spoken out aloud again.

His thoughts drifted to the week gone by, and how busy it was at the Tax office, and then to that new computer screen they all had to learn. His thoughts were interrupted as Allan suddenly appeared.

"Any water, so I can wash my hands? We can refill down at the creek".

"Year. Just a minute, I'll dig it out" said Robert, and he felt around until his hand hit the soft drink bottle he used, and pulled it out, pouring some on Allan's outstretched palms.

"Thanks. Gee, that cloud you mentioned, is almost on top of us, and it's low too. We're going to be in it. Feel how cold it's suddenly getting."

Robert suddenly shivered. 'Odd', he thought.

"Come on", said Allan, moving in the direction of the creek, "better get after the others, or this might become an overnight trip."

"Better not. My mother's got some family dinner tonight, and threatened me if I didn't turn up."

Next second, a mist was swirling around them, thick and suffocating. Allan turned around to see how close Robert was, and tripped on a rock protruding from the track floor. He tried to maintain his balance, but lost it, and fell face down, on to a boulder next to the path. Sudden pain from his head, then blood trickling down over his eye. Just as he started to push himself up with his hand, the strangest feeling of being swept around and around in a whirlpool or sink, came over him, then he fainted.

Robert saw Allan trip, and started to yell, but the mist seemed to swallow up his voice, and even his vision was going streaky. "Hell, what's happening.." he started to say, then as he tried to reach Allan, who was sprawled on the ground, he could just focus on a pair of sandals. He felt giddy, and had the sensation of seeming to whirl around at great speed. His hair was standing on end and it was sore. Then he remembered no more, only falling on to a bush, and blackness.

A rushing sound first invaded Robert's mind as his eyes opened, and he tried to focus where he was. The sound faded, and realising he was laying on his side in some bushes, he sat up. His head ached a little, then he remembered Allan falling over, and quickly turned around. The cloud was fast dispersing, and all of it seemed to be heading off somewhere, leaving sunshine. He saw Allan still lying face down on the track, but moaning. Robert stood up and ran to him.

"Are you OK?. Don't move. Can you speak?"

Allan's hand touched the side of his head, then he started to push himself up on his knees. Blood was dripping from his face. Robert steadied his shoulders, swivelled him around, and the two of them sat there, neither saying a word.

"God! What happened to me?" said Allan, after a few minutes.

"You alright? Anything feel broken? Hang on, I'll get some water out of my pack. I don't have a bloody clue what happened to me or to you."

Robert stopped talking, when he realised he was jabbering away, and got the water out and passed the bottle to Allan.

Allan took a large gulp, then fumbled in his rear pocket for a hanky, and poured some water on it.

"Here. Can you clean up my face and tell me how bad the cut is. My head is pounding. Could do with an aspirin. There's some in my pack in a small jar. Can you get them out. I think I'm still seeing stars."

Robert fished around and found them, and putting two into his cup, he poured in some water, and gave it to Allan.

"Thanks."

Robert took two himself. His head was still woozy.
"OK to get up and walk? I can run down and get the others if not."

Allan stood up, quickly followed by Robert.
"Should be able to. I won't be doing that again."

"What's that?" said Robert.

"Walking whilst looking backwards. Could have killed myself."

"It's that bloody crazy mist or whatever it was. I just went giddy like and passed out. Fell into those bushes back there."

Allan blinked. "Really? Let's get out of here."

They slowly proceeded down the track, in the direction of the creek. Robert was half wishing one of the others would come back and do something. Just having someone else would make him feel better. It seemed to take forever, and none of the trees he saw, came to mind. 'It's so easy to get rattled when something goes wrong' he thought. Allan was in front, but seemed to be walking steady enough.

The creek loomed up in front, and the sound of voices reached their ears. Robert nearly collided with Allan, who had stopped quickly in his tracks, and was just standing there.

"What's up?"

"I'm very confused", said Allan, "but there are tents in the camping area, and people. Not the couple we saw."

They were only some 10 metres away, and one of the fellows, looked up from the fire, said something, and waved to them.

"Came after us, I suppose. Where's Andy and the others?" Robert said after a few seconds.

"Can't see them. If they've gone on ahead without waiting, I won't be impressed" said Allan, in a very slow drawl. "We'll ask these guys how long they've been gone."

They crossed the logs over the creek, and the newness of the timber wasn't overlooked by Robert. He wasn't even going to think about it. They just needed to go home. They stepped up to the fire, and were greeted by a "Gooday" from the young fellow squatting down, who had waved earlier.

"Hi," said Robert, "some of our party were going to wait here for us. Do you know how long ago they left?"

"Well, no one's been through here today." Turning to the others of the group, who were now gathering around the fire place, he said "Any one see anyone else pass here?"

A couple of shaking heads, and a no, came from the group. A lanky teenager, said "you hurt mister? Fall over or something?"

"Year," said Allan, "tripped on a rock. I'll be right."

"But they only came down from Perkin's Peak about 10 minutes ago, a girl and 2 blokes, about our age," said Robert.

"Sorry. Pretty sure no one's been through here, or we would of seen them. We came yesterday. Your the first we've seen."

The lanky fellow again spoke. "Where's you kit?"

"We're on a day walk from Beechtree car park, it's only about 8 kilometres. Have a car there," Robert said slowly. He was getting confused, and it wasn't his head that had the bump.

"Kill what?" said one of the other boys, short red hair and wearing army shorts.

The friendly one , replied , "Bluey, you need to go back to school. They're kilometres. It's a foreign thing they use in Europe to measure distances. It's called metric system."

Turning to Allan, he said, "You blokes foreign? Don't seem to have any accent or nothing. Like to know where you got your boots, though. They look expensive. America?"

Robert didn't answer, just looked at Allan, who looked a little dazed. Then Allan looked at Robert and pointed to the group, or more correctly, to their legs. "These guys are all wearing old army boots, you know, the hob nail ones our dad's had in the war. Either it's the latest craze, or..., let's just head after the others."

Robert spoke up, facing the big fellow, they first met." Do you mind if we have some tea or coffee? We have mugs," and took off his pack and fished around until he extracted his plastic cup. "Get yours out too, Allan. We might go down to the creek and clean up that gash. We'll be back shortly."

Grabbing Allan by the arm, after Allan had passed over his mug, he ushered him away from the quiet group, and down to the creek. Robert flopped rather heavily down on the logs, knees drawn up under his chin.

It was a full minute before he spoke, quietly and with a slight quaver in his voice. What the bloody hell has gone on that I'm missing?"

"What I'm missing is a couple of aspirin and a stiff brandy," said Allan. "Well I can at least have the aspirin," and fidgeted in his pack until he found the container.

"I meant to ask earlier, how come you have a container of those things in your pack?"

"Don't ask. Last night's vino prompted me to be prepared. Even have Alka Seltza. Still I prefer brandy."

Robert sighed." We have to get our brain in action here. Sorry about asking for a cuppa, but I just need one, and probably you

do too. Then we need to forget these odd balls, and catch up with the others."

"What if their not odd balls?" Allan whispered. "There's something surreal about everything. The cloud; you passing out; Nothing fits. We know they weren't here when we came earlier today, but they say they were. Look at their tents, and the clothes, and everything. It's ancient." Allan's voice had risen slightly. "OK, that might be religious or something, but it's like a dream."

"Is it possible to have one dream, and both be in it?" said Robert, with emphasis on each word.

"Don't ask me," countered Allan.

A short silence, broken by a yell from the camp, that tea was up. "Allan, those logs are new. Did you notice?"

"No. Probably the work of these blokes.....hell I just remembered something."

Allan stood up and crossed to the far side of the creek.

"Come here. Do you remember Andy picking up that old tent peg, back there?"

"I remember the peg. So what?"

"He said he would take it back with him. He stuck it in that crack in this rock. Said he would pick it up when leaving."

Robert drew in his breath and clenched his teeth. A habit he had when thinking. "I remember the peg, but I was up front. Probably put it in his pack. Why?"

"He did just that. Put it in his pack, 'cause the crack broke away when he jammed the peg in."

Silence. Allan was looking at the crack with a detached look. , Robert staring over his shoulder. The rock looked as if it had stood unchanged since metamorphosis, billions of years ago. So did the crack.

"This is crazy," yelled Allan. "I saw the rock break off."

There was pain in Allan's face. Anger was surfacing.

Another yell reached their ears, announcing that the tea was getting cold.

"OK", yelled Robert in the direction of the fire. Turning back to Allan, he said, "Come on. Let's go back. This has to sort itself out sometime, although I've got a funny feeling, this is all real, somehow."

"Well, I know something's up there," pointing up the hill, "because I put it there. That'll prove it."

"Forget it Allan. One, we are not digging up any....crap. Two, we wouldn't find it anyway, because it's not there. Believe me. I know."

Robert turned and walked back across the logs, and up to the billy and mugs that were sitting on the ground. He didn't look back, but knew Allan was following. As he said to himself before, a saying often quoted by his mother, 'when under pressure, sit down and have a cup of tea, and everything will come out alright.'

This time however, it seemed, it was going to be more than one cup, before this thing, whatever, was sorted.

Robert noticed that the tea leaves, that were used to make the brew, were kept in a calico bag, as was the sugar. Nothing indicated where the milk came from, but the tea was good, if not on the cool side, due to their dallying at the creek. Time to ask some questions, and hopefully get some answers.

"I'm Robert and this is Allan," he said, putting out his hand to whom he assumed was the leader.

It was grabbed in a strong grip. "My name's Tom. Tom Hancock." He started pointing to the others. "This is Frank, Billy, Dave over there with the glasses, and the bloke with the beard is Bluey. His actual name is..."

"Hey. Give a bloke a fair go." The beard had a deep voice and obviously some dislike to whatever his real name was.

"Winston." It came from Billy, the smallest member, who was wearing a khaki shirt, too large for him. At this stage he was also wearing a large cheeky grin.

"You're shark meat, mate," said Bluey, pointing a finger at him. Obviously the ginger colouring of his hair and beard, had prompted his 'nick' name.

"Think he would be proud of it. That pommy leader they have over there, is popular," piped up the freckled face kid who was pulling a billy can, wrapped up in newspaper, from a tent.

"Well Frank, if you like it, you can have it", said Bluey.

"Where your from?" drawled Tom's voice, as he refilled Robert's mug."

"Gladesville", replied Robert, without consciously thinking of his reply. "Allan, here, lives over the river in Drummoyne." Something was nagging in his mind, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

"Where do you live?", he said, addressing Tom, "I assume you're all from Sydney."

"Yes. We all live around Parramatta, except Dave. He's at Penrith, so it's handy for him to get up here, and he can sleep in. Also his old man has a car, so we usually can get a lift from the station out to the river."

"You all look about the same age," said Robert, "you in a club or something?"

"Not really. We were in the scouts, but the troop folded, and we sort of kept together." Tom threw some wood on the smoky fire, as he replied.

"You fellows do a lot of walking? I mean you're older, so you must have been around a bit. Hell. I didn't mean to be rude or anything."

"It's OK", said Robert, "yes, we do a fair bit of walking, and yes we are older, both Allan and I just turned 57 last month."

"Gee," said Billy, "my father won't tell me his age. Says it's rude for kids to ask such things. I know he's 43, 'cause it's in

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