

Reflections on the Cradle Mountain Reserve Five-Day Walk in May 1965

Scott-Kilvert 50th Anniversary Address given by Mark Whittle

at the Special Commemorative Assembly

held at Riverside High School on Friday 15 May 2015

In February 1962, Riverside High School opened for the first intake of grades 7 and 8 students under the inspirational leadership of Headmaster, Mr K J Walker, who was very well supported by the staff and a very active Parents and Friends Association.

In the early years of the school, we didn't have the buildings and learning resources that students at this school now have. However, from the beginning, Riverside High School provided a stimulating learning environment for students to achieve in learning, sport, music, drama and other areas.

Beyond the classroom and the usual opportunities that schools offer, there were extra-curricular activities such as the Riverside High School Outdoor Society which was formed as a club for students who were interested in bushwalking, giving them the opportunity to go on day walks and overnight walks while learning valuable outdoor skills.

A five-day walk that was being greatly looked forward to was to be a walk through the northern half of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. We had several lunch-time planning meetings with Mr John Chick, a Science teacher with bushwalking and leadership experience who guided us in preparing for the walk which he was to lead in conjunction with Miss Rosemary Bayes, a Physical Education Teacher, and Mr Ewen Scott, a teacher-in-training who possessed a high level of proficiency in outdoor activities.

On Sunday 16th May 1965, 16 excited students and three teachers travelled with parents in cars up through the upper Mersey River Valley to the start of the Arm River Track which leads into the middle section of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. The walk would take us north to arrive at Waldheim on the Thursday afternoon.

It was quite a climb for a start and, as we walked on across the Pelion Plains, it was cloudy with some light rain. We arrived at the old Pelion Hut and stayed there for two nights. It was a small hut for a party of 19. In fact the other two huts we stayed in weren't very large either.

On the second day, we spent time in the Pelion area with the opportunity for a walk to Pelion Gap with the aim of going up Mt Ossa. Being misty, the decision was made for those who were interested to climb Mt Pelion East instead, being a lower peak.

On the Tuesday, we walked to Windermere Hut and encountered very muddy sections of track on the way. It snowed during that night.

Next day, the conditions were quite good as we headed on to Waterfall Valley Hut, detouring along the way to view Lake Wills and Innes Falls. However, we noticed that the weather was getting worse and as we approached the hut we experienced some snow fall and rain.

When we arose on Thursday morning, it had been snowing again during the night and it was raining quite heavily. Waiting for conditions to improve, we didn't leave Waterfall Valley Hut until about midday. We had no idea of what lay in front of us that day.

Norman Hollingsworth stayed behind with Mr Scott to replenish the wood supplies at the hut and they later caught up with the rest of us.

The weather deteriorated considerably as we climbed up to the Cirque which is between Barn Bluff and Cradle Mountain. By the time we were on top of the Cirque, we encountered freezing blizzard-like conditions with gusty wind picking up the fallen snow and driving it into our faces. We had trouble keeping upright because the very strong wind was tending to blow us off our feet. It was very tiring trying to progress forward while sinking above our knees in the soft, deep snow.

Because of the terrible conditions and the fact that it was very hard going, the teachers made the decision to take a more sheltered route rather than continuing on the exposed track via Kitchen Hut. The track from the Cirque down to Lake Rodway was slippery, but as we went to a lower altitude the weather improved.

As we walked from Lake Rodway towards the Saddle between Little Horn and Hanson's Peak, some students were becoming exhausted. We stopped at approximately 4.00 pm and had something to eat. This was the last time that we were all together and we began spreading out with Mr Scott in the lead and Mr Chick at the rear.

At about 4.30, Mr Scott, realising that we would not reach Waldheim before dark, asked three students to go on ahead to get assistance.

By this stage, some students had to be assisted as they were becoming very weak and were beginning to show early signs of hypothermia.

As Hanson's Peak was approached, the weather became much worse with strong winds blowing. By then, we had separated into three groups: the three students who had gone on ahead to get help, a larger middle group with Mr Scott and Miss Bayes, and the small group at the rear with Mr Chick.

On the way up to Hanson's Peak, David Kilvert, who was really struggling to keep going, collapsed for the first time and then had to be assisted by Miss Bayes, and then by other boys. Mr Scott who had been helping another struggling student for some time took over from the boys to assist David Kilvert. We all fell down several times during the climb up and over Hanson's Peak.

After a while, Mr Scott, realising that David Kilvert was very unwell due to exhaustion and hypothermia, said quite firmly to the boys "You go on and leave David with me".

In insisting that we leave him and go on with the others, Mr Scott shielded us from what, I now realise, he knew was the likely outcome of David's rapidly deteriorating physical condition.

As we left, Mr Scott was carrying David. They fell and began to get up again. This vision has returned to me many times.

After catching up with Miss Bayes, our group stumbled along slowly in darkness, to shelter in the old boatshed to the west of the Dove Lake car-park. We spent a very cold and wet night due to the waves that kept surging in from across the lake.

By the time the rear group was approaching Hanson's Peak, the three girls were struggling to walk. A boy, who had offered to stay behind with Mr John Chick to assist the girls found a spot to shelter just off the track on Hanson's Peak which is where they spent a freezing night.

The three students who had gone ahead go alert the Ranger, not knowing that there was a recently-constructed road from Dove Lake to Waldheim, continued on the walking-track to Waldheim until they had to stop when they reached a flooded stream flowing out of Lake Lilla, and in the darkness not knowing the depth of the water, waited for some daylight.

It seems that, after carrying David Kilvert for some distance, Ewen Scott realised that David was fading, or perhaps had passed away. No-one knows exactly what happened, but it seems that in desperation, and possibly nearly running, Ewen left David and set off to get help.

At first light on the Friday morning, the three students pushed on to Waldheim, arriving at about 6.30 am to wake up the Head Ranger, Mr Gordon Saunders, who arranged the rescue.

Tragically, David Kilvert's body was found that morning lying in snow below the track which leads down from Hanson's Peak towards the Dove Lake car-park, and later that morning Ewen Scott's lacerated body was discovered lying face-down in boronia bushes just off the track near Dove Lake.

During this assembly, many of us will relive sad memories, particularly those of us who were members of the walking party in 1965.

For parents and other family members, it was a very worrying time. Also, it must have been a very difficult time for Mr John Chick and Miss Rosemary Bayes and their families, and also for the Scott and Kilvert families. Later in this assembly, Daphne Longman and Louise Peters will speak on behalf of the two families.

The tragedy impacted heavily on our Headmaster, Mr John Walker whose family is represented here today by his daughters Phillipa and Rosalind who will speak later in this assembly. Mr Walker, at a school assembly held in what is now the courtyard, had the very difficult task of informing students and staff about the tragic deaths of David and Ewen.

It was also a very stressful time for the teachers and students who were part of the inquest held at the Latrobe Council Chambers.

For those of us who were fortunate to have survived in a physical sense we all carry, in varying degrees, after-effects which may have been alleviated to some extent if counselling had been available as it is these days to students and teachers when traumatic events impact on schools.

Even though we have gone our separate ways since the walk, we have a common bond as a result of the experience and also through the way in which we pushed ourselves to the limit of our physical capabilities, particularly on that last day.

We remember those who were outstanding in the way in which they helped others by carrying their packs, or by supporting them to keep them on their feet, including the boys who were helping David Kilvert before Mr Scott took over from them. Also, David Rowbottom who showed his deep concern for others in offering to stay behind to help look after the three girls who were absolutely exhausted, and with Mr Chick, helped them to get through the terrible night on Hanson's Peak. Mr Chick set off at about 7.30 am next morning to get help and David Rowbottom

remained with the girls until rescuers arrived. Helene Anderson who will be the next speaker by video will refer to that night and to Mr Chick's role in her reflections.

Miss Bayes, now Mrs Goodsall, who will be speaking after Helene, was amazing in encouraging those who spent the night in the boat-shed to survive by keeping their spirits up.

The three students who set off to get help - Dianne Batten, Peter Williams and Bernard Hay - had a huge responsibility placed upon them and they demonstrated great determination in very difficult conditions.

We also remember with much sadness the popular and respected trainee-teacher, Ewen Scott, who displayed utmost unselfishness and superhuman effort in carrying David Kilvert, and in attempting to obtain help, he reached the end of his physical endurance.

Our thoughts also reflect on David Kilvert, the fair-haired, adventurous and determined teenager with a lovely smile who was warmly adored by everyone who knew him.

Out of tragedy and sadness, there often emerges positive outcomes such as the building of the Scott-Kilvert Hut which will be outlined during this assembly. It is a fitting tribute that a large number of people will be walking in to the hut tomorrow.

Also, as part of the on-going ethos of Riverside High School the attributes exhibited by David and Ewen and expresses in this assembly will be also remembered in the ceremony at Dove Lake on Sunday and through the annual Scott-Kilvert Award.

On behalf of those on the walk in 1965, and I know from all of the guests here today, I wish to express appreciation to the Principal, Mr Greg Morgan, and the staff and students of Riverside High School who have put so much effort into, not only this assembly, but also into art work, musical composition, written expression and the planned memorial sculpture in the school grounds, to ensure that what is remembered and commemorated here today, and during this weekend, lives on for the next 50 years and beyond.