

The History of the Barney Hut – Arthur Rosser

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ARTHUR ROSSER.

In 1951, when the Club was only 12 months old, and Broadbent and Stephenson were still panting after galloping round the Scenic Rim, it was suggested that a number of huts be built around the Rim, in order to make it warmer at night for anyone stupid enough to follow their example. The idea was to start with one on Mount Barney, but the Forestry Dept. demanded a definite plan before giving permission, and the club, appalled at this insistence on vulgar details, very properly forgot about the whole thing.

But the idea still lurked in the minds of the club elders, and came to the surface again in 1953, when a committee was formed to investigate the matter. Alf Rosser was appointed Convenor of the Barney Hut Expedition, and bundled off to Mt. Barney to have a look around. On returning, he admitted that the idea was practicable. Enthusiastically, a club meeting decided to start shaping stones as soon as possible, then hurried out to supper. Secretary Broadbent wrote to the Forestry Dept. with a rough plan, and suggested a site for the hut at about 3,800 ft. The Forestry replied that it was all right with them but they retained the right to remove the structure at any time.

Fidgeting restlessly as he wrote the letter, Broadbent had predicted that work would begin in August '53. Less excitable walkers made a dignified start in May, 1954. Meanwhile, the hut committee had developed a final plan. The hut was to be cemented or mud plastered stone to a height of four feet, to be topped off by a log cabin. Two windows were planned, and the slope of the roof was to be 1.25 in 15.5 from west to east. Any illusions that well disciplined club members would adhere rigidly to this plan were dashed on the first trip: far from clutching it in their hot little hands and poring over it lovingly by firelight, they forgot to take it with them at all. In fact, no-one could remember what width the damn thing was supposed to be, so they thought up a new one, thus setting up a useful precedent.

The first trip was baited with promises of a happy weekend at the Lower Portals, and not until Geoff Gadby arrived with 17 sheets of aluminum on the roof of his car, did the trip's sly leader, hill climbing humanoid "Chimp" Holdaway, leap out shouting "Surprise! Surprise! This is a hut trip!". Fresher Duncan McPhee, who had hoped to live off the land nearly dropped the raffle. Later, he was persuaded to leave his gun behind, and helped cart aluminum up over Midget Peak, in a howling westerly. Though the route chosen is the second longest up the mountain, it was at that time supposed to be the most convenient one for carrying aluminum.

Saturday night saw walkers and aluminum scattered all over the mountain, but by Sunday midday it was all at the site. For the next four years it was a confounded nuisance on the following Thursday, the last of the builders left, wet, cold and miserable, leaving the roof securely weighted down on top of the 30 inch high walls.

Two weeks later the wicked Lahey laughed rang out as he came down from East Peak and saw aluminum scattered all over the Gorge again. With Gordon Hopper, Brian Egan and some Brisbane Bushwalkers, they collected it, and cut some logs for the upper walls.

Continuing with the rush of early trips, Alf Rosser spent a week up there, cutting dead gums on the side of West Peak, for use on the upper walls. (We burnt the least of these in a recent camp fire.) Bill Deardon, who was with him for a while, helped drag the logs down to the hut. He was very surprised when a log

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started rolling sideways down the mountains, his hand being caught in a rope, the other end of which was winding round the log. Bill was dragged shrieking down the slope, with every change of his hand and body being wrapped neatly round the log after the rope. Even though his hand was still some distance from the log when it stopped, Bill took an unbalanced view of the whole incident, went home, and has not been bushwalking since.

The weather on Barney frequently forced those working on the hut to put the roof on temporarily, and camp indoors. The peculiarities in the drainage of the hut were noticed, and it was on a trip at this time that Peter Gillingham, from his bed in a little stream at the northern end of the hut, announced proudly:

“I’ve got an inner spring mattress.”

Apparently, no work was done in the 1954-55 long vacation, and the first trip in the new year was in the May vacation. Ian McLoad, the new president, led a trip up from Cronan’s Creek, with aluminium and cement, and an adze donated by the Brisbane Bushwalkers. The 4 ft. high rock was, as then planned, were finished.

However, enthusiasm for building then dropped, and the president for 1956, Dave Dunstan, spoke in his annual report of the “stagnation of the Barney Hut”, while another member of that period explained –

“None of the b.....s would come and work!”

But in 1957, the new President, Johno Comino, leaped to his feet and cried that the hut must be finished. To get the ball moving, he grabbed 60 lbs of cement, charged  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way up Logan’s Ridge and hid it under a rock. It has never been seen since.

Six days later on a moonlit Friday night grinning Dave Dunstan led us up South Ridge at a brisk pace, one of the few stops on the way being when cries of “Too high up” were rejoined by enraged bellows of “Too low down!”.

As Dave argued about the new route with the club’s hot headed secretary, Tom Brown, we dropped out cement at the hut at 1.30 am and Dave produced two thin blankets, having just sold his sleeping bag in preparation for a trip to England, and settled down beneath the grass tree. On that and the following night he was bothered by the cold, and by a couple of bush rats which he claimed ran up and down his legs.

The idea of the log cabin had gradually been dropped, as most of logs cut had rotter since the previous trip, 2 years before. We collected rocks previously classed as too heavy or too distant for use, but found that lifting them up onto the walls was very difficult. Dave’s pride and joy that weekend were two window sills which he made, with the help of Mungo Scott and others, on the northern and eastern walls. Ken, after sketching out plans for a hydro-electric scheme and a wind generator, Dave ran down South Ridge and went to England.

In his report of the trip, Dunstan urged that future trips to the hut should be private ones, apparently realizing that on any trip a few individuals did most of the work. Consequently, in the next couple years, the club had little control over the progress and design of the hut, though it did not care much anyway.

Garth Lahey thought that a block and tackle would be useful for lifting boulders onto the walls, and in the May vacation, Peter Gillingham, Ron Cox and I, with a couple of guests staggered up South Ridge with a block and tackle and more cement. The following day we built a 20 ft high tripod out of rafters. The next

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weekend saw Comino charging out of the scrub again, followed by a strong building party. Comino, wild-eyed and dynamic, tore down the back wall, thus disposing of one of Dave's window sills, and, with the help of the new equipment, effortlessly placed an enormous rock square in the middle of another one, explaining that windows only let weather in, anyway.

No cementing would be done because the creek was dry and the nearest waster 200 yards down the gorge, so the back wall was built up to 6ft without cement, and was rather unstable.

On a subsequent Friday night, Gillingham and Timmins, with Pat Costello and Jennifer Hirst, toiled up Rocky Creek to reach the hut at 2 am. The rest of the weekend was spent replacing the axehandle.

A combined University and Brisbane Bushwalking trip took place in the following August. Once again we unleashed Comino, and, laughing madly, he heaved hugged boulders round on top of the balk wall, which swayed 6" either way as he did so. Meanwhile, Duncan McPhee, with Tom Brown's help, built the chimney, earnestly discussing theoretical aspects of chimney building and enthusing about architecture rising out of the surroundings. The criticism began before it was half finished, and has only recently been replaced in those hostile to the final result by a smug belief that the chimney is likely to have a violent return to its surroundings at any moment.

The progress of the hut was sufficient to warrant a discussion by the architects and engineers on the advisability of putting in a door. It was definitely established at the 1957 AGM that if a door were put in, the roof would be sucked off the first time the wind blew vertically upwards at 100 miles per hour.

By early last year, the club was, in general, much more vigorous, and some energy was left over for the hut. A day walk up South Ridge took up tools and food, and for a week in the vacation which followed. Mungo Scott and I cut timber for the rafters and beams, which Lahey contentedly belched as he potted on with his cementing. With the help of Murray Rich, we dragged the logs to the hut from the side of West Peak, and Tom Brown shaped them with the adze. Only 2 of the logs cut 3½ years before were used.

Taking advantage of the new road up to the bottom of South Ridge, we coaxed the unpredictable Peanut Truck as far as possible with a load of battens. An assorted group of walkers then took them up South Ridge, Garth Lahey pretending his was a wooden horse, and Lucy Harrison dragging hers disconsolately behind her with a piece of string.

Five sheets of aluminum were then tied to the roof of Peter Reimann's car, and brought down to Barney, it being necessary to climb in and out through the windows as the doors were tied shut. We took them up at night, and on reaching the hut at 2 am, Pete swore he was never going to carry anything more up Barney, except food. The roof was put on that weekend, which ended the successful series of trips for 1958.

1959 saw Peter Reimann (with a pack load of cement) with Lahey and Scott, wandering around the bottom of the S.E. Ridge for 4 hours, in mist and rain. Eventually, they went up South Ridge in disgust, having repeatedly run into cliffs on the other ridge.

Later this year a brand new hut committee was formed, taking advantage of the fact that the club always bleats "yes" to any questions asked by the President. At the beginning of August, after some of us walked from Rathdowney to Barney, 300 lbs of timber for the bunks, was taken up South Ridge by a very peculiar mixture of people, including 5 girls.

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Only one of the 4 bunks, was completed then, but since then the others have been built. The major remaining jobs are to replace the chimney, which catches alight when a big fire is built inside, and to put a sheet of fiberglass in the roof to let some light in.

So after 6 years, the hut is nearing completion –

“But what about him,” you are asking, nodding in the direction of the misery bowed figure of ageing builder, Mungo Scott, lines of worry etching his lean face – “Why doesn’t he rejoice”.

Never mind Mungo; he has a secret fear. It is his belief that one weekend he will climb Mt. Barney to find that some tidy little boy scout has used the hut, then burned, bashed and buried it. And he could be right – it is just the sort of thing that would happen.