

Valedictory

A Tribute to Albert Aird

from
his long-time companions and members of the Melbourne Walking Club.



We are gathered here today to pay tribute and to bid farewell to an old mate with whom we bushwalked and skied in the 1930s.

On an occasion such as this it is not unusual for folk to wear a sad countenance and to shed a few tears. Our belief, however is that this is the last thing that Albert would have desired. We knew him those long years ago as a happy person whose constant smile and joyful exuberance had a friendly influence on all with whom he came in contact. Therefore, we feel that he would have preferred this gathering to have been in keeping with his own happy personality.

Albert joined the Melbourne Walking Club in 1934 and quickly became a popular member. He is remembered in the thoughts and diaries of his contemporaries as a practical joker and the instigator of numerous humorous situations. One classic performance that has found a place in the folklore of the Club concerns an occasion when on a walking trip to the Baw Baws, Albert, by a mysterious sleight of hand acquired two bottles of beer that were being carried in a fellow walkers rucksack. He then managed, with the help of several companions to open the bottles and drink the contents. Then, after filling the bottles with water and securing the crown seals, he was able to return them to their rightful place in the owners rucksack.

The substitution was not discovered until the following day, when Albert suggested to the bottles owner, that it was about time to open them and share the contents around. The owner was completely bewildered when he discovered that he had been carrying two bottles of water and Albert, in a masterly Oscar-winning performance, vehemently made the accusation that the owner had secretly drunk the beer and made the water substitution himself. It was not until some forty years later, on the occasion of the Club's 90th anniversary that Albert confessed his 'crime' and made a replacement of two bottles of beer!

Perhaps Albert's finest performance, however, was at a Club quarterly dinner which was held at the Federal Hotel. The large attendance necessitated the guests being seated at several long trestle tables with eight or ten positioned on either side. The waitress carried the dinners in, four or five at a time and placed them before the guests. Albert was seated mid-way along one of the tables and the waitress placed the last of one batch in front of Albert before turning to get another batch from the kitchen.

Albert, seizing his opportunity, immediately ate his roast dinner in record time, placed his empty plate under his chair, wiped his knife and fork and sat with a look of innocence on his face as the waitress returned. Seeing an empty space in front of Albert, she served him a second dinner and continued down the table. Those seated nearby wore broad grins as they realised what had happened and Albert, greatly satisfied with his achievement, ate a second dinner.

Later that evening after the Chairman had dispensed with the Minutes of the previous meeting and the items listed on the business agenda, Albert rose to his feet and sought permission to move a motion. He proposed that for future Quarterly Dinners, the scheduled starting time should be put back an hour, to enable, so he said, to give members the opportunity of having a substantial dinner before attending the Club function!

There were many more of Albert's antics that have been recorded or remembered, but it must not be thought that he was involved only in humorous incidents. Albert quickly became a highly competent bushwalker and undertook many adventurous trips. Above all else, he welcomed a challenge.

Included in Club records is the report of three Club members attempting a walk from Healesville over Mt Riddell and a connecting spur to Mt Donna Buang. Leaving Healesville on a Saturday morning, they hoped to complete the crossing and meet a Walking Club party on the Sunday afternoon. They discovered that the trackless spur was badly overgrown and in places was strewn with huge fallen trees that had been uprooted in a storm. They arrived at Mt Donna Buang on Tuesday afternoon after an elapsed time of seventy-eight hours, and with a large rescue party setting out to find them!

This account became a challenge to Albert and on a Saturday afternoon in December 1935 he set off with a companion to attempt the crossing. After encountering similar problems to the original party, they reached Mt Donna Buang on Sunday afternoon after an elapsed time of twenty-six hours and then continued on to Warburton the same day. Elated with his success Albert then planned another trip across similar country from Warburton to Healesville via Mt Donna Buang and Mt Juliet. This was accomplished on a Saturday afternoon-Sunday week-end and became the first such crossing to be completed in a week-end. The fact that these two trips were through the Watts River water storage reserve which was completely closed to the public only brought an added smile to Albert's face.

He joined a social evening of Walking Club members one Friday evening and announced that he had crossed a section of the Dividing Range and there re-discovered a section of a long disused and overgrown track that once linked Marysville with Warburton - the Edgar Track. His announcement was greeted with howls of disbelief and was laughed off as a hoax. But Albert waited for the laughter to subside and then produced a photograph of a substantial log in which had been cut a gap large enough to enable a pack or riding horse to follow the track unimpeded. Albert's claim was completely verified. On another occasion Albert, unable to find a companion whose annual leave coincided with his, set off alone on a ten-day walk which took him over a section of the Dividing Range that even today is considered the most rugged portion of mountain country in the State.

Albert visited central Australia with two walking club companions at a time before the area became a tourist destination.

In 1938 Albert and a companion packed two weeks supply of food, gear and skis and made the first winter ascent of a formidable mountain, The Bluff, in the Mt Buller region. From the top, they descended into the Jamieson valley, crossed the Jamieson river, swollen by winter rains and made the first winter ascent to Mt Macdonald. The following year Albert joined a party of skiers and climbed Mt Bogong, Victoria's highest peak. They encountered eight feet of snow near the summit and in order to find the hut they were seeking, which was completely covered by snow, a photograph shows them pushing ski stocks down through the snow in an endeavour to locate the hut. This they did and then had to dig down to reach the

door of the building. Next day they skied across the summit area and located a second hut with only a small section of roof visible above the snow. On their return to Melbourne, they were informed that World War II had started.

These were only a few of the many trips successfully accomplished by Albert. In a few short years he had earned the reputation of being amongst the most capable half dozen members of the Melbourne Walking Club, a Club of which he has been a valued member for more than sixty years. Robert Croll, a veteran member of the Club once penned these lines and they seem appropriate for this occasion.!

Good-bye old friend; no more we'll tread
The tracks together day by day
You take a lonely path instead -
Peace go with you upon your way.

Albert James Aird

1913 - 1995

CRIMOND 86.86

Psalm 23 (22)

- 1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
in pastures green, he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.
- 2 My soul he doth restore again;
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
ev'n for his own name's sake.
- 3 Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear none ill:
for thou art with me; and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.
- 4 My table thou hast furnished
in presence of my foes;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows.
- 5 Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me:
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be.

Scottish Psalter 1650

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

LOVE DIVINE 87.87

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave:
thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.
- 3 Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be,
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley 1707-88

In lieu of flowers,
you may like to donate to Don-Wood Nursing Home,
in thanksgiving for Albert's life
and Don-Wood's care of him over the past four years.

You are invited to join Albert's family after the service at the home of
Ann and Warren Scott, 9 Launderers Avenue, Wonga Park.