

City men follow in bush writer's footsteps

TWO former Mount Gambier men, Greg Bryan and Sean Morahan, recently completed a 220km walk from Bourke, NSW, to Hungerford in Queensland, retracing the footsteps of writer Henry Lawson. Lawson completed the trek in the summer of 1892-93.

Both Bryan and Morahan were born and raised in Mount Gambier.

Bryan's parents and sisters still reside in Mount Gambier. Bryan is currently holidaying in the city with his Canadian wife and their two children, Bronwyn, 9, and Tegwen, 6.

Bryan is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba in Canada, where he specialises in children's literature and literacy education.

Morahan lives in Sydney, where he runs his own business, providing training to salespeople in the automobile industry.

Morahan will also be holidaying in Mount Gambier during August.

The two men formed their friendship during their time attending St Paul's Primary School and the then-Tenison College in Mount Gambier during the 1970s.

Bryan's retired father, Kevin (Ted) Bryan, worked for the Mount Gambier City Council for many years. Morahan's recently-deceased father, Sean Morahan Snr, was a teacher at Tenison College.

Although Bryan and Morahan have only been together on four occasions since Morahan's family moved to Sydney in 1980, the two have remained in contact and Morahan was pleased to accept Bryan's invitation to accompany him on the recent trek.

What follows is a series of journal extracts from the pen of Greg Bryan:

Day 1 - Saturday, July 18, 2009

Sean (Moz) and I set off on our 220km tramp. We are filled to overflowing with excitement and energy.

Although I just arrived in Australia two days earlier, any sense of jetlag has been replaced by the inspiration received during our day in Sydney.

Lawson is my favourite writer and we visited his grave and then had the privilege of being shown the special collections at the Mitchell Library.

It was an amazing experience to hold some of Lawson's pens.

I wonder what literary masterpieces might have flowed from those pens.

Together with my wife and children, we viewed and held Lawson's walking sticks, his pipe, his hat, clippings from his hair, and even the death mask taken after Lawson's passing in 1922.

Moz and I aim to walk 40km each day.

The countryside is beautiful and the early kilometres fall beneath our feet with ease.

We speak often of Mount Gambier.

We reminisce about our schoolboy experiences, recalling many of the people with whom we attended school. "Do you remember when...?"

The laughs come easily and often. It is wonderful to be home again, breathing the fresh air and enjoying the clear blue Outback skies.

Although Moz has a tent, I sleep under the stars. I fall asleep gazing up at the Southern Cross, exhausted but content after a successful first day on the track.

Day 2 - Sunday, July 19

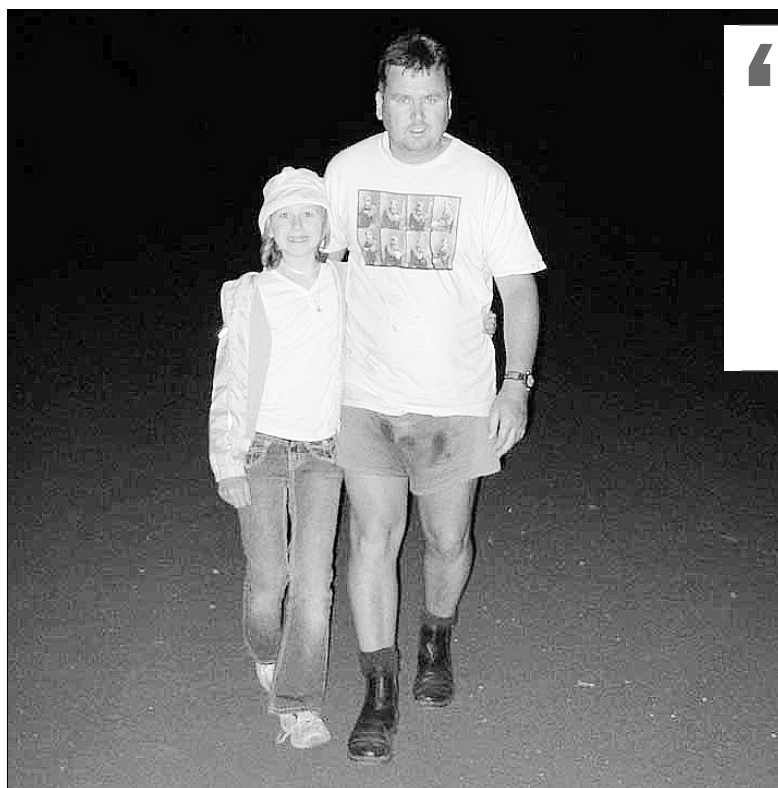
I awaken and discover a thin layer of ice over my blankets. Moz tells me the dream he had Emu feet.

The birdlife out here is spectacular. A pair of colourful Major Mitchell Cockatoos raises my spirits.

The tramp is proving to be much tougher than I expected. I was fatigued during the final stages of the first day



□Bowed but unbeaten, Greg Bryan and Sean Morahan complete the final few kilometres to the Queensland border.



□Greg Bryan making a late arrival into camp with the company of his 9-year-old daughter, Bronwyn.

and blisters begin to trouble me.

We stop at the Warrego Hotel for a late lunch.

With 68km behind us, I slump my head on the bar and worry about how many kilometres still lie before me.

As we hobble out of the bar and back onto the track, I am convinced that the publican thinks I haven't got another 150 metres in my legs, let alone 150 kilometres.

I am not afraid I will quit though. I am here to finish this tramp come hell or high water.

As I struggle through the afternoon, I remain resolute in my conviction that I will finish what I started, but I fear the pain that I will need to endure before the end.

I instruct Moz to move ahead at his own pace and not to wait for me.

When my wife and daughters catch up to me in the car, they are surprised to find me alone. My wife is shocked at my condition, but I refuse to break.

Day 3 - Monday, July 20

Eight Brolgas fly over our camp while I cook breakfast.

Their movements are easy and graceful, while mine are anything but easy and are definitely lacking grace.

Moz is a big unit. At six feet eight inches (over 200cm), he has a huge stride.

As I hobble along behind him, I compare the length of my stride to that of his footprints in the sand. I wonder how many more steps I will have to take than him.

In the afternoon, I reach my lowest point.

After stopping for lunch, I can barely get back to my feet. I stumble on, one foot in front of the other, watching Moz disappear into the distance.

The sun is beating down and I am almost at breaking point. I fight to hold myself together.

I gaze at the portraits of Henry Lawson that I carry with me. Lawson's walk has been described as "possibly the most important trek in Australian literary history." For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to retrace Lawson's footsteps.

Here I am, in the middle of nowhere, feet blistered beyond recognition, parched lips cracked and sore, legs refusing to work.

My dream has turned into a nightmare.

Day 4 - Tuesday, July 21

A wild boar crosses the track up ahead. We've seen many feral goats out here, but this is the first pig. The roos are huge.

Some pause and gaze at us curiously.

Others immediately turn and flee,

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-Greg Bryan



as if embarrassed to be in any way associated with what they perceive to be a fiasco.

Throughout the tramp, I have chosen to wear boots.

I also go without any change of clothing because I want to do it like Lawson.

I stink and the flies mass on our backs and form a cloud in our faces whenever we stop or look around. But my body is hardening.

Throughout Day 4, I feel better than at any time since the opening morning.

On the other hand, Moz is struggling. His feet have blistered and severe chaffing is causing him trouble.

Although I feel guilty, I cannot help but feel a little pleased that Moz is suffering too.

While I struggled along during the second and third day, he seemed to be doing it too easy.

Lawson suffered. "You can have no idea of the horrors of the country out here," Lawson wrote, "Men tramp and beg and live like dogs."

I think Moz is now more able to understand Lawson's experience.

A landowner in a ute stops for a chat.

"I don't know why it is so hard," he says. Later, Moz tells me he felt like grabbing the keys from the ute and tossing them in the bush.

"Now you'll find out why it is so hard!"

Day 5 - Wednesday, July 22

The temperature is almost 30 degrees as we cross the Whim Plain.

The wind whips clouds of dust into our eyes. We are determined to complete 30km before we stop for lunch.

Getting going again after lunch is just too hard. It is much easier to face 10km in the afternoon than 20.

A bull stares us down and moves our way in a menacing fashion.

Moz and I look around at our barren, featureless surrounds.

No trees to climb. Nothing to hide behind.

I decide to go down fighting and instruct Moz to arm himself. Rocks are the one thing in ample supply out here.

A white knight arrives in a dilapidated cattle truck, piercing the fast-closing gap between us and the approaching cattle.

The farmer informs us that the 20 or so cows are all that remain from a herd of more than 400 before the drought.

"It's a sore point," he tells me.

He walks with us for a while, recites some bush poetry and then wishes us good luck.

It is a long day and my nine-year-old daughter, Bronwyn, walks beside me for 12km. We reach camp well after Moz and well after dark.

Day 6 - Thursday, July 23

My feet are a mess, but nothing can stop me now.

It is wonderful knowing there are only 20km to walk today to complete the tramp and reach our destination. Lawson has been described as "the Apostle of mateship."

It has been a joy to walk the track with my old mate, Moz.

With only a few kilometres to go, my wife drives past. "I think we are going to make it," I joke.

She reveals that she had harboured some doubts. I have mixed emotions as we approach the end.

"These have been six of the best days of my life," I tell Moz.

"Six of the worst too," I add.

Bronwyn opens the gate to let us through the dingo fence and across the border into Queensland.

We hobble the final steps to Hungerford's Royal Mail Hotel and enjoy a well-earned celebratory drink. My mind is racing.

I am already planning the next endurance adventure. Next time I am going to wear walking shoes.

I'll even bring a change of socks and underwear! I'll need them.

Next time, I'm going from Bourke to Hungerford, and back.