

## **MORELLA KORONG**

**Milo Dunphy, November 1992**

Somewhere near me there is a swarm of bees. Its high-pitched agitation dominates the two little pools and the polished rock which I have chosen for my siesta. A quick scan of three or four big grey peppermint trees and an angophora fails to locate the swarm. Individual bees are working methodically along the thickets of pink-flowered dampiera which defines the edge of the stream.

In the north, a sulphur-crested cockatoo makes a noisy way past a shadowed hill. To the east a family of yellow-tailed black-cockatoos had settled down quietly after remarking my passage. There's a whipbird in the thicket nearby and a cockatoo or two. Where the track comes down to Myuna Creek there's an old fox scat.

For firewood I have four or five beautiful straight deadfalls from a grey gum and a handful of Ti-tree fronds for kindling. For fireplace: three or four flat rocks roughly cemented to the bedrock – the remains of a little dam or bridgework which once raised the level of the upper pool a foot or two. Fire, flood and regrowth are eliminating these ephemera.

An illegal hut was built a little further up the creek perhaps forty years ago. It was pulled down by the then Park Trust but it remains a scaley clay patch littered with slabs of sandstone.

Only a few hundred yards from where I'm sitting was a major campsite of the Sydney Bushwalkers. The club leased an area here before the park was created. Another previous lease by the Mountain Trails Club further north and two scout leases, one at Heathcote and one south of Waterfall, enabled conservation groups to claim that the chief use of the whole area was for hardy outdoor recreation and nature study. Hence the Heathcote Primitive Area was gazetted. It subsequently became Heathcote State park and is now Heathcote National Park. It is probably the only New South Wales national park from which all public vehicle access is prohibited. It is an important part of the history of primitive areas (wilderness) in Australia. Around Miara Pool, for instance, many of the major national park projects of NSW were discussed by the Mountain Trails Club members, some of whom were also in the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council.

Now the Sydney Bushwalkers' campsite is lost in a dense regrowth scrub.

The Ti-tree fronds flare up and flames take hold on the sticks. I settle a billy on them and plant myself on the warm rock, scrabbling through the rucksack for food, lay it out in the shade, as far from established ant trails as possible. All my immediate needs are satisfied: food, fire and a warm rock beside a purling brook, like countless Aboriginals and bushwalkers before me.

A skink lizard cautiously patrols the edge of the rock. He stops and jerks his head up and down. In front, another skink turns back. I flick several little pieces of salami into the grasses between them and both rush forward. A sudden tussle and one skink darts

away with the largest piece of salami. The other lizard explores the grass methodically, ending up with more salami than the first. There's a lesson in that somewhere. A third skink, much smaller, prospects cautiously forward and a magpie comes to rest in a nearby tree.

At the foot of a tiny rapid, water beetles dart among the bubbles. Further on, where the surface is calmer, water striders flit across the surface, each sudden acceleration sending out a brief expanding ripple.

At intervals a dark brown and yellow butterfly patrols the channel of space between the dampiera thickets. The butterfly's course takes it over a string of little basins in the rock, each with its treasure trove of tiny polished quartz pebbles.

Cups of tea and food inside, I stretch out drowsily on groundsheet and jumper. But the new summer flies are too insistent so I wash my cup and knife in half a billy of boiling water, douse the fire, pack the rucksack, lay the remaining sticks tidily in the thicket and set off downstream to explore the hill the white cockatoo flew across. The skinks have disappeared.

Myuna Creek bends east towards its junction with Heathcote Creek and a tributary comes in from the west. There is no established track along the tributary so I have to push through the thickets, slowly angling upwards out of the creek, from tree bole, to rock, to tree bole. In a quarter of an hour there is a change of plane in the hillside – a sort of quoin – up which the growth, being more exposed, is a little more open – a zone of blackboys, needlebrush, prickly moses and banksia. Here and there are giant cutting grasses. The steep slope requires care. Some rocks are ready to slide or roll. Sloping rock faces are coated in twigs and leaves. Some trees, killed by fire, are rotten and ready to fall.

A thirty foot sandstone cliff appears above. I prospect along its foot towards a possible break but have to turn back along a ledge to find a better break, squeezing under a chockstone to find another, lesser line of rocks.

On top there are three bullant nests in rapid succession, then dense clumps of sallee. I push through to the eastern side of the little plateau, subsiding gratefully on a rock for a drink, views north up Heathcote Creek and west to highway and powerlines.

I take the downslope as carefully as coming up. There are the same possibilities of sliding or collapse but with further to fall. My long grey gum walking stick becomes very useful as a prop.

In a north-east re-entrant of the hillside there's a shady grove of bottlebrush. The grass beneath is flattened. It's a wallaby camp, sheltered from the cold westerlies and southerlies. Several hundred feet below I reach the Bulla-Waring Track which I helped my father build fifty years ago. Its purpose was to relieve the pressure of walkers on the banks of Heathcote Creek. It also increases the enjoyment of the pool user. Half a dozen parties crashing along the thick creek banks, stumbling into your camp or picnic site, destroy your sense of peaceful isolation. Instead, the track follows along the contour halfway up the hillside. From it you can pick out your preferred pool from among the best natural swimming holes in the Sydney region and descend to it,

knowing that you will have the pool to yourself – or much more so than without the convenient track.

As I follow the track towards Kingfisher Pool and Waterfall, I hear the barking of some local dog chasing wildlife. If you quietly mention to the locals that they are breaking park rules by bringing or allowing their dogs in the park, you'll get an angry response: 'But we live here!' However a few of them are angry too, at the careless littering by some visitors.

I take out a bag for rubbish collection along the way. The first 'Mintie' papers have begun to appear along the track.

The zone of timelessness, natural order and beauty quickly gives way to the chaos, noise and litter of 'civilisation'. In my hand, as a talisman, I have half a hakea nut. Perhaps its perfection will ward off the growing encroachment of this most destructive civilisation.