

# Eating haute cuisine on High Plains

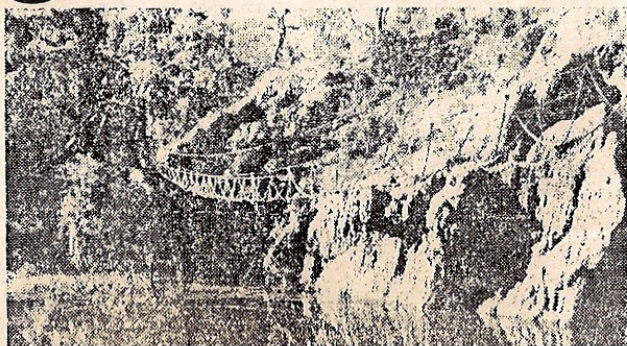
IT did not seem quite real to be sitting down to a candle-lit dinner complete with white tablecloth in the middle of the bush, nor to be eating haute cuisine that you would only expect to find in a top-class restaurant.

Our meal included a mouth-watering cold soup of curried apple, sea-run perch and prawns in a delicious sauce with polenta and a salad of endives, bananas, and pecans, and a choice of wines followed by a wonderful blackberry dessert with raisins and other goodies.

The magnificent repast in a majestic alpine setting was but one of the miracles performed by Walkabout Gourmet Adventures, the motif of which is a cockatoo with a chef's hat perched jauntily on his sulphur crest.

The proprietors, Graeme and Gabriella Clarke, several years ago planned to buy a restaurant at Port Douglas but the deal fell through at the last minute. North Queensland definitely was the loser and fanciers of a roving style of holiday the winners.

Every meal of the day our taste-buds were assailed with delightful surprises.



● The bridge across the Wellington River.

Gabriella and Graeme have their own food dehydrator and between trips work overtime preparing food for their next event.

So, they pointed out, by involving bush camping, the trip I joined to the Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park in Victoria's High Country was something of an exception for Walkabout Gourmet Adventures.

Their usual modus operandi is to take over a host farm close to a national park or other area of interest around Victoria. From these bases the guests may walk,

canoe, cycle, paint, photograph, horseride, swim and, in one case, hot-air balloon.

During the winter Walkabout Gourmet Adventures migrates to Europe, from where Gabriella originally hails, for several 12-day trips in France, Switzerland, and West Germany, which also have proven to be very popular.

Our trip involved a compulsory walk-in to a base camp at McAlister Springs, which is a sheltered saddle high up near the crest of the Great Dividing Range. A variety of delightful walks can be under-

## BUSH

by John Cannon

taken from there yet it is a mere six-kilometre walk from the road.

As Melbourne sweltered in a hot northerly we refreshed ourselves on the way up with luxurious swims in the Wellington River. Floating on our backs we looked up at the red rocks and the white gums on the beetling crags of Brunis Knob.

The next day we continued northwards in the Walkabout Gourmet Adventures bus. Climbing steeply on to the broad expanse of the Snowy Plains we passed the turnoff to the popular Lake Tarli Karng, created by a rockfall from Mt Wellington into the aptly named Valley of Destruction hundreds of years ago.

The road traversed a narrow section of ridge known as Bastards Neck, with steep drops on both sides, before reaching the meadows of everlasting which carpet Howitt Plains. The plains and

nearby Mt Howitt were named after Alfred Howitt, who headed the search party for the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition.

The next day we climbed on to the Alpine Walking Track, which extends from near Canberra to the Baw Baws, and followed it as far as Mt Howitt.

We saw hawks playing in the thermal currents between the ridge. They were carried high above our heads as if by a gentle hand and then suddenly they would career downwards in a great swooping dive. You could almost hear their squeals of joy.

In the afternoon we explored out along the Crosscut Saw, where the Great Dividing Range is at its most narrow and most serrated.

Then we headed back to McAlister Springs to enjoy our last evening together as a group and the magnificent food.

As well as the regular trips ranging from four to 10 days to national parks around Victoria and southern New South Wales, Graeme and Gabriella run day walks around Melbourne each Wednesday for people wanting to sample their inimitable style at very reasonable prices.

For further information contact Victours' Hobart office on 31 0499.



● Walkers near the Crosscut Saw.