

Outline report on the excursion from John Oxley Youth Centre to the 'Lower Portals' area of Mt Barney National Park

The party - Group 1 in Lite-Ace Mini-Bus:

Gordon Cooper)
Robert O'Hanley) Staff
Jeffrey Hanitzky)

[Redacted])
[Redacted])
[Redacted]) Students

- Group 2 in Falcon Station Sedan:

Karen Mersiades) Staff
Sarah Moynihan)

Annette Harding)
[Redacted]) Students

We left John Oxley Youth Centre at about 8:25am on Tuesday 24th May, travelling in tandem, with no stops until we reached the car park for the Lower Portals area at about 10:00am.

After walking for a short while it was obvious that there were differences in the speeds we were going to walk at and a group of four were separated. The faster walkers waited at about halfway point of the 3 1/2 kilometre track for the others to catch up.

The second half of the walk went similarly with a faster group getting ahead, I was with this group.

We arrived at the Lower Portals at about 11:15am. The backpacks containing the lunches were left at the site chosen for lunch and we - Robert O'Hanley, Myself, [Redacted], [Redacted], [Redacted] and Annette - began to explore the creek area.

After about 10 minutes 'Bob' (Robert O'Hanley) and the 5 students crossed the creek on rocks to explore further (it is only possible to go about 100 metres further along the bank). I stayed by the backpacks to wait for the slower group.

Bob and the students came into view at about 11.45am. I went to the creek bank opposite them. Annette climbed onto a rock in the creek about 4 metres from me and threw her jeans and shoes for me to catch. These were wet. Annette informed me that she had fallen in the water. She was wearing a long 'T' shirt and panties.

The slower group arrived at this time and informed us that they had taken a wrong turning.

It was decided to have lunch straight away, some of the students ate quite quickly and all except [Redacted] went back to the creek area with Bob. [Redacted] sat with Jeff and Sarah at first, and then he came to where Karen and I were sitting by the creek, some 10 metres away. He had the video camera and slowly worked his way across the creek.

From our position I saw some of the students on the near side of the creek, climbing on some large rocks. They were about 40 - 50 metres away from us and opposite the area Bob had taken them. They went from my view on the far side of the rocks and I felt they had gone back to the creek where Bob had taken them.

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Some 10 - 15 minutes later Jeff Manitzky told us that they could not be seen and I went with him up a steep hillside. The six students (all except [redacted] were near the top. Jeff had arrived a few metres ahead of me and I saw the group coming towards us slowly.

We all went back to the lunch area where we rested - some went for a swim - until we left for the return journey.

On the way back four of the boys tried to get a long way ahead so Jeff caught them up and had them slow down. I then decided that I would take the lead and try to slow the speed down.

I was partially successful but I didn't know at this stage that Annette was troubled by a blister. We stopped at a creek crossing for the party to re-group and treat Annette's foot then we stayed fairly closely together for the rest of the walk. We arrived at the car park at about 2.30pm.

As we approached the car park area, about 100 metres away, the four boys who had tried to walk very fast earlier - [redacted] and [redacted] - all said they had to go to the toilet. Someone - I can't remember who - told them to hurry so that we wouldn't be late back. The toilet is a small wooden structure some 50 metres maximum from the car park area. I saw them waiting as though to take turns, then I began checking that the backpacks were all stowed in the vehicle.

Bob called over to the boys, who were not in sight, to hurry. Then he immediately went over from the car park and informed us that they had gone.

Jeff and Bob went into the area beyond the toilet and Karen and Sarah also went to that area. I stayed with the three students who were left, [redacted] and Annette were in the station sedan and [redacted], ignoring my request to stay by the vehicle, also went over to the toilet area. One of the other staff brought him back to the car park. I think this person was Sarah but I cannot be sure.

Jeff suggested that Myself, Bob and [redacted] and Annette go to inform the police and John Oxley Youth Centre.

This we did by phone from a nearby farmhouse.

We returned to the car park and told Karen and Sarah that a policeman was on his way from Rathdowney (Jeff, we were told, had gone in search of the boys).

We left in the Station Sedan at 3.30pm and arrived back at John Oxley Youth Centre at 5.05pm to be informed that the four boys were safe and on their way home.

G. Cooper

G. Cooper (Teacher)