

The Stirling Range Ridge Walk

Ellen Peak to Bluff Knoll

LOCATION : Stirling Range National Park, Western Australia

LENGTH OF ROUTE : Approximately 20 km from the northern park boundary below Ellen Peak to Bluff Knoll car park. This walk may be completed in two days by a small fit group carrying minimal loads, camping overnight at the First Arrow cave, but three days would be a more reasonable time. This route requires two vehicles at either end to perform a car shuffle, or an extra day walking back along the park's northern boundary.

A shorter circuit walk of two days is from Ellen Peak to First Arrow, camping overnight at Third Arrow cave. This is a more suitable walk if only one car is available and covers a more interesting section of the ridge. This circuit walk running from First Arrow to Ellen Peak is well documented in the Lonely Planet Guide "Bush Walking in Australia", pages 181 - 186.

ACCESS : This walk is open to the public, but parties are required to check in and check out at the Moingup Springs Ranger's Station on Chester Pass Road, or at the Northern Ranger's Station at the junction of Bluff Knoll Road and Chester Pass Road. It is recommended that parties comprise of at least 3 persons. No fees are required to undertake the walk.

To reach the start of the walk from the northern Ranger's Station, drive along Chester Pass Road about 9 km to the Chester Pass Road and Sandalwood Road junction. Turn right (E) at this junction onto Sandalwood Road. Continue E along Sandalwood Road for 15 km until Glenelg Farm is reached. You have gone too far if you come across Gnowellan Road turn-off and should drive back 3 km. Drive through the front gate and call into Glenelg Farm homestead. Then drive past the homestead to the bush camping block. Head S along the bush block's fence, keeping on the paddock side of the fence, to the Park's northern boundary.

MAPS : The best map available is the 1:50,000 scale topographical map, Ellen Peak (sheet 2529-11)

WATER : The amount of water required to negotiate the route depends upon the weather. During wet weather litres per person is sufficient, with additional water being obtained from rock drips while camping. In dry weather it is recommended that 5 to 6 litres of water be carried per person.

EQUIPMENT :

- * wet weather gear including jacket and overpants
- * long pants and long sleeved shirt
- * hat for warm weather
- * a compass is recommended for route finding when peaks are covered in cloud
- * portable stove, as collecting firewood degrades this ecosystem through depletion of nutrient cycling. Ground fires are also disallowed due to the risk of wildfire.

BEST TIME TO VISIT : Spring is the best time to visit as the spectacular wild flowers are in bloom and the weather is usually fine. Winter is also a suitable season to undertake this walk with water available on the ridge, though conditions may be very cold and low cloud may cover the entire ridge. Snow falls do occur at this time of the year and falls have been recorded as late as November. During autumn the weather is usually pleasant but water supplies are unreliable and in summer it is often very hot and walking on this ridge is rather unpleasant.

BUSH ETIQUETTE : Out of respect for this ecosystem and for other walkers, parties are expected to carry out whatever materials they carry into the Park, and as mentioned previously the use of ground fires is disallowed.

1. BOUNDARY TO ELLEN PEAK

Ellen Peak and its NE ridge can clearly be seen from the boundary fence. From the boundary fence head SE 3 km through the mallee plains for the NE ridge of Ellen Peak. A foot track becomes clear while approaching the NE ridge. Follow this track as it climbs the ridge, peaked by two small hills, and then descend into a small wooded saddle before climbing again SW to the rock face of Ellen Peak.

“ To reach the summit follow south for a few minutes then scramble up over the slabs to the bottom of a gully that leads to the top. From the top of this (where it breaks through) head a little south on the west side until it is possible to climb the last 10 m to the summit. There is a visitors book in a metal box. The way down to the saddle and the Pyungoorup is via a gully on the west side. To find the top of this head S along the top of Ellen Peak for as long as five minutes. The top of another, more difficult gully is passed before the best way down.”
(The Stirling Ridge Walk track notes, Wilderness Equipment).

To avoid the summit of Ellen Peak, continue W along the track skirting the base of the northern rock face. This is the recommended route in wet weather. The track leading around the southern face of Ellen Peak is to be avoided, as it soon disappears and to continue becomes extremely difficult due to the dense vegetation.

2. ELLEN PEAK TO PYUNGOORUP PEAK

The track around Ellen Peak emerges on its western side onto a saddle between Ellen Peak and Pyungoorup Peak. To climb to the summit of Pyungoorup Peak simply follow the westerly heading track from the saddle. Pyungoorup Peak is surrounded on its northern, western and southern faces by massive cliffs and no attempts should be made to descend these from the summit. To pass Pyungoorup Peak return towards the saddle between Ellen Peak and Pyungoorup Peak. Where the saddle sharply changes gradient leading up onto Pyungoorup's E ridge two southerly tending tracks can be found. The tracks are about 100m apart and are marked by cairns (piles of rock). Descend along the most westward of the two tracks initially S then 300m W along the base of the south face of Pyungoorup Peak to an open cave. This rather exposed cave has room for eight berths and a seasonal water drip is located 30m to its W.

3. PYUNGOORUP PEAK TO BAKERS KNOB

To reach Bakers Knob leave the Pyungoorup cave and continue W along the track skirting the base of the southerly face. Avoid the temptation of gaining height too early as false leads exist. This section of the track, which is not as smooth as the previous sections, emerges onto the saddle between Pyungoorup Peak and Bakers Knob. Follow the westerly heading track which crosses the north side of Bakers Knob. Bakers Knob is marked by cliffs on its westerly face, but compared to the massive faces of Pyungoorup Peak, it is not as large. Beyond Bakers Knob lies the rocky buttresses of the Arrows. The Arrows are three rocky peaks relatively close to each other running in an EW chain.

4. BAKERS KNOB TO THE THIRD ARROW

Following your nose and the track heading NW from Bakers Knob onto the saddle leading to the Third Arrow. From the saddle track continue westward skirting around the northern face of the Third Arrow. An obvious EW chasm is soon reached. Descend steeply westward in a gully to the lowest point in the chasm. From here the track forks. The upper track climbs up through the western end of the chasm out to the W side of the Third Arrow.

The lower track sidles around the northern cliff face of the minor peak, separated from the main peak by the chasm. After approximately 100m or so a broad gully is reached. The Third Arrow camping cave (a rock overhang) is located 10m above the base of the cliff in the gully. This cave is about 1 hours walk from the saddle between Bakers Knob and the Third Arrow. A short scramble is required to reach the cave which has berths for about eight people and is probably the best of the three caves upon the ridge.

A water supply is located on the W side of the Third Arrow. From the chasm track, which emerges on the western side of the peak, continue S along the base of the cliff for about 40m. A flat area suitable for several tents is passed. The water is obtained at the top of a chimney past the flat area. A steep scramble is required to reach the top of the chimney where a semi-permanent water drip- from the roof of a cave is collected in a plastic tank. Care must be taken with this supply as it may be contaminated or empty and parties should not depend upon it.

5. THIRD ARROW TO THE FIRST ARROW

From the Third Arrow camping cave continue westward around the cliff base for 5-10 minutes to emerge below the western rock faces of the Third Arrow. Walk 30 metres downhill to the saddle between Second Arrow and Third Arrow before a gentle ascent of the broad ridge that leads to the summit of the Second Arrow (approx 1 hr from Third Arrow). Ascend the First Arrow via the crest of the east ridge. To descend from the summit of First Arrow, scramble down the north west side via a zig zag route on rock. The First Arrow camping cave is located 30 metres below the summit and accessed via a 15 m walk E from the descent track. The cave sleeps up to 6 people, though rather uncomfortably, and has a semi-sheltered northerly aspect. No reliable water source is available nearby.

6. FIRST ARROW TO ISONGERUP PEAK

50 metres W of the First Arrow camping cave there is a large rock pinnacle with a steep gully heading in a SW direction. Cross the top of this gully then descend approx 100m north on the steep vegetated track that skirts the E edge of the pinnacle bluffs. At the base of the cliffs a rough westerly heading track is found.

The main track continues in a northerly direction and soon becomes a spur which connects with the obvious firebreak trail. The trail follows the Woolaganup Creek valley northwards to the park boundary, and is used as access for the shorter First Arrow to Ellen Peak circuit walk.

To walk to Isongerup Peak follow the previously described rough westerly heading track along and upwards following the cliff base to rejoin the ridge crest. A thickly wooded saddle is found and has a pleasant clearing suitable for several tents. Continue W from the saddle and traverse round the northern side of a small hill to avoid a 4m cliff on its western side. Walk westwards down and through a small rock gully to the saddle before Isongerup Peak. As usual follow the ridge crest for a long ascent until the northern Isongerup ridge is reached. Follow this more open ridge SW to the summit of Isongerup (approx 2 hrs from First Arrow). Water has occasionally been obtained at the base of a 3m cliff that extends to the SW just below the summit.

7. ISONGERUP PEAK TO MOONGOONGOONDERUP HILL.

Isongerup Peak is marked by a main peak and 2 lesser peaks one being to the E and the other to the SW. To walk to Moongoongoonderup Hill, follow the saddle track SSW to Isongerup's lesser SSW peak, generally keeping on the ridge top. Then descend from this peak down the steep SW track following the ridge to Moongoongoonderup Hill, some 700m away.

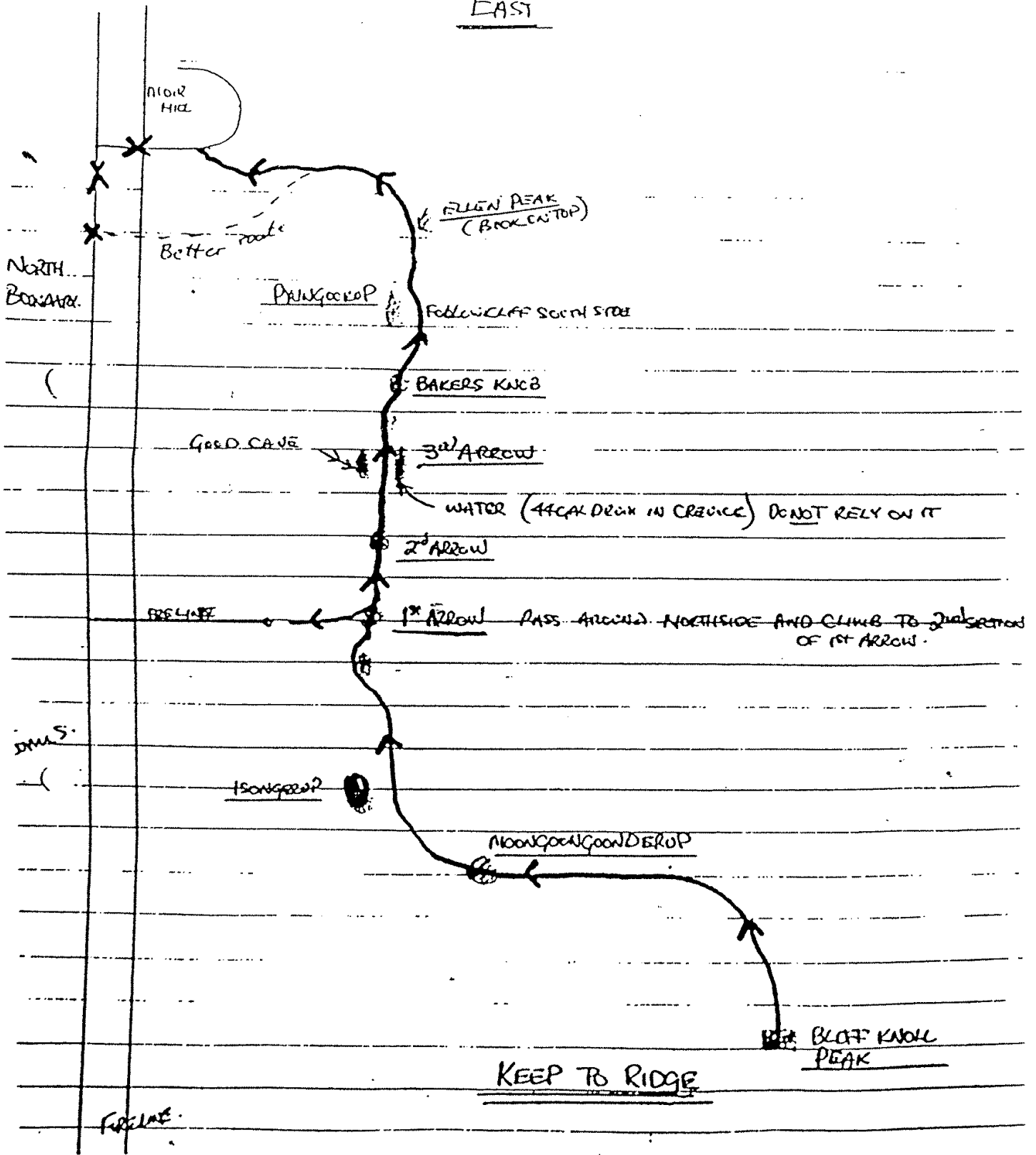
8. MOONGOONGOONDERUP HILL TO BLUFF KNOLL.

From Moongoongoonderup Hill to Bluff Knoll follow a winding ridge for 4.5 km (on the map). Initially this ridge heads NW from Moongoongoonderup Hill, but then wraps around to the SW heading for Bluff Knoll. As always the track follows the highest ground. Don't get too excited as you climb the track 400m up the side of Bluff Knoll as you will find that this is the South Bluff Knoll. From South Bluff Knoll head WSW down the short saddle and then ascend Bluff Knoll. When the Bluff's plateau has been reached walk W behind the end of a northerly gorge and approach the summit from the southern plateau. On the summit rejoice, take photo's etc, and then descend the clearly marked tourist route to the Bluff Knoll car park.

Revised July 1996, from notes compiled by M. Edgar & D. Wagland

RIDGE WALK

EAST



**WALKERS: ACCESS TO ELLEN PEAK ACROSS PRIVATE PROPERTY
FROM GLENELG CAR PARK IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED DUE TO
SAFETY CONCERNS. SEE MAP FOR ALTERNATIVE ACCESS.**

