

## Navigation Training for the Spatially Challenged, 17 May 2009

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May, a bunch of would-be navigators were given the benefit of Marj King's mammoth bush skills. We set off from the magnificent Tolmer Falls armed with compasses and topographic maps, and wound our way round (and round) a section of Litchfield NP.

The goal was to get to The Swamp car park where we'd parked one of the vehicles, so the planned route was a rough semi-circle, with frequent stops along the way, where we'd relate our location to the map, and plot our bearing for the next leg. It was a sight to behold – a bunch of intelligent people, looking skyward for inspiration, and facing in all directions as we tried to determine where we were, with Marj patiently walking from one to the other, and in some cases, getting us to about-face.

We stopped off at The Lost City, and it was from that point on that things went a little awry. Maybe we were disoriented by the ancient spirits still wandering that city. We made an unplanned circle and found ourselves back where we started, compass and maps still in hand. Gave our leader heaps – although I wonder if she was just testing us. What about that time when she left her map at one of the rest spots after insisting that we always had our maps available at all times? Was that a test too?

So after a couple of wrong turns (or tests) we were delighted to finally come across the highway. And that's where the fun really began. Was The Swamp car park to the right or the left of where we were? Or should I say to the north or south? Our maps and compasses were no help in solving this dilemma. The consensus seemed to be that the car park was down the highway to the right, so the still-energetic Craig and Ken headed off to get the car and return with it, while the rest of us waited, strewn about the edge of the highway in varying states of exhaustion.

They'd been gone for some time, when the keen-eyed Alex spotted a GPS hanging round Sofia's neck. With ample IT skills he plotted where we were and realized that Craig and Ken could walk till the cows came home, but would never reach The Swamp car park on the bearing they were on. Meanwhile, Rob had wandered a couple of hundred meters up the highway in the opposite direction, and round a corner he spied the sign pointing to the elusive car park. So the concern, then, was for Craig and Ken marching dutifully in the wrong direction. Alex set out to retrieve them, periodically blowing his pretty yellow whistle to try and catch their attention. It seems the guys never did hear the whistle, however, when I last spoke to Alex he still had ringing in his ears. Meanwhile, Glen of Ultra-Marathon fame, offered to jog to the car park where our other car was parked – our starting point - so we waved him off; 'we' being the exhausted group still strewn on the side of the highway.

In the meantime, as Alex disappeared into the sunset along the highway, blowing his pretty yellow whistle, and sporting a pretty orange ribbon bow in his shirt pocket, an unsuspecting tourist stopped for him, and took him on to the still-walking-in-the-wrong-direction Craig and Ken. Back at the group strewn on the verge, John had been holding out his hairy leg in the hope of stopping a passing motorist, but they knew better. Next thing, from the right, comes the tourist's car with Alex, Craig and Ken all waving vigorously at us as they whizzed by to find that elusive Swamp car park in the opposite bearing, obviously pleased with themselves to be now heading in the right direction.

Yes, it's true! We arrived home at about 9pm due to the fact that we resorted to modern technology a bit later than we should have. Nonetheless, all of us, including the spatially

challenged yours truly, learned heaps from the talented Marj. Personally, I learned that I'll never go into the bush alone!

Ruth Warwick