

Mt Speculation Loop – Australia Day Weekend 2014

The plan was for a 3-day loop starting from King River, climbing King Spur to Mt Koonika and on to Mt Speculation. From there, we'd follow the AAWT into the Horrible Gap and up to Mt Buggary and descend Queens Spur, over the Pimple and drop off a lesser spur into the headwaters of the King River. The plan was to look for somewhere flat beside the river to camp but the contingency had us pushing on back to the cars (and a very long day).



King Spur – Jan 2014

The first morning saw us away at 8am and immediately climbing along an intermittent foot-pad that follows the ridgeline of King Spur. Lots of *Daviesia* regrowth slows progress but it's dry (thankfully – pushing up through this broad-leaved 3m tall scrub when wet is like being in a tropical downpour) and not too thick. Lunch is taken in the saddle below the seriously steep stuff that leads to the summit of Mt Koonika – a cool breeze making the exertions much more pleasant than my last trip here, 2 years ago.

There is only one point where a sidle to the left (on an obvious track) is needed – otherwise it's basically straight up the middle of the sharp rocky ridge.

As always, great views from the summit, taking in much of the Victorian Alpine NP with all the local peaks – Cobbler, Speculation, Buggary, Howitt, Despair, Razor, Viking and many more further afield. Following the ridge towards Mt Speculation, we drop down to the Catherine Saddle road (recently graded but still requiring a vehicle with good clearance) just before Camp Creek – our water source for the first night and the whole of the next day. Although flow was well below 'normal' the was plenty available from both sides of the road. It's a short on-track climb from here to the shoulder of Mt Speculation and surely the best campsite in Victoria.

Considering it was Australia Day long weekend, only 4 other people here was a surprise.

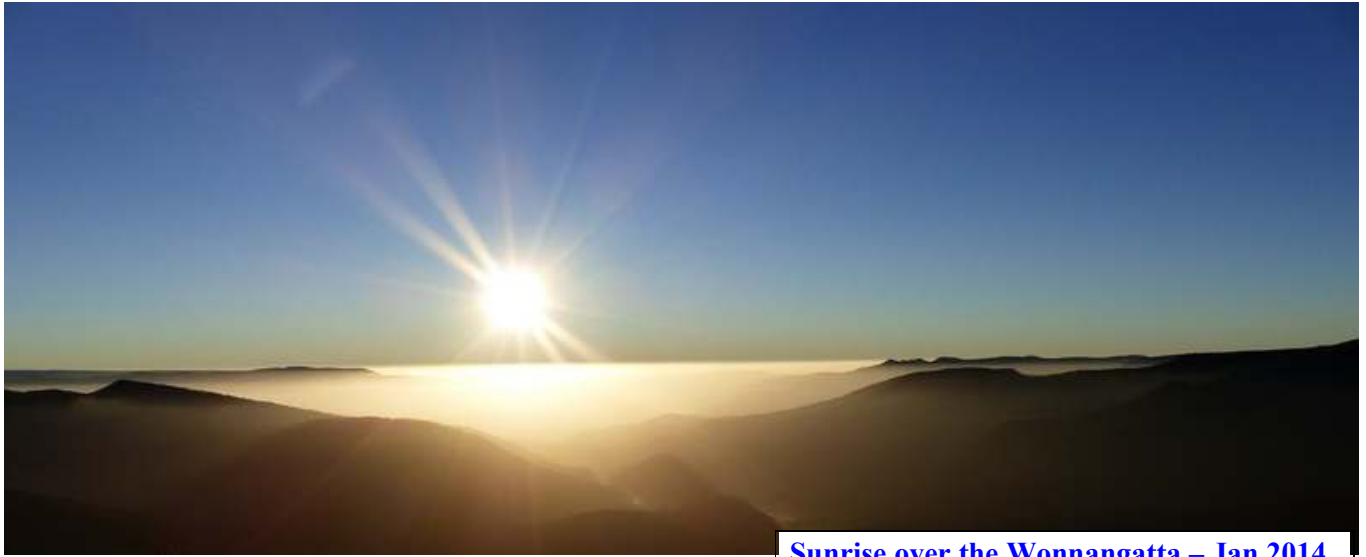
Away again at 0800, we stopped for the obligatory summit photos and began the descent from Mt Speculation into the Horrible Gap and then the climb to Mt Buggary – it's not really that horrible; 300m down and 250m up. Having made good time and after a well-earned break, we headed down Queens Spur. I climbed this spur in 1978 and I remember the many bluffs and false summits but had forgotten just how narrow it is in places.



Descending Mt Speculation – Jan 2014

There is an obvious foot-pad most of the way but navigation is not an issue until you reach the saddle 275m below the Buggary summit. The old logging road shown on maps has, in many places, almost disappeared. We just headed directly towards the Pimple, knowing there was a fair descent still and then a steep pinch to the summit. After that it was an unknown.

As we descended, the heat and the flies increased and the going slowed. After a hasty lunch at the base of the climb to the Pimple, beginning now to fall behind schedule, we set off for the summit, the final 100m being very steep indeed. At the top (heavily treed and limited views) we decided to take the main spur down to the confluence of L and R branches of the King River – the plan to drop off the right-hand side seemed a little too steep and slow-going.



Sunrise over the Wonnangatta – Jan 2014

The change in plan was justified and our pace picked up, making the River in good time. However, no suitable campsites meant the day was not over – another 3km beside (actually, mostly in) the river. Notoriously slow travel, the King River was pleasantly cool and the water very welcome, but we began to think we'd not make the cars before dark. We pushed up onto the more open slopes and for a while the going was better but thickening vegetation and blackberries slowed us again to less than a km per hour.

We made camp at 8pm – a 12 hour day – dropped packs and hit the river for a swim.

A tough day but what a variety of terrain – steep up and down, on-track, off-track, peaks and rivers, spurs and sidles, rocky bluffs and often thick vegetation – and some good navigation challenges to keep us all on our toes.



Arriving at the Summit Mt Koonika – Jan 2014