

## **BSAR is 70 years old**

We don't know the names or the clubs of the 11 volunteer bushwalkers who left the Russell Street Police Headquarters in 2 trucks early on Friday 6 May 1949 for Port Welshpool. There they boarded a fishing ketch and were landed on the east coast of Wilsons Promontory to join the large search for a missing bushwalker.

This was the first occasion volunteer bushwalkers organised through the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (now Bushwalking Victoria) assisted in a bush search.

Senior Police were very impressed with the skill and independence of these bushwalkers and encouraged the Federation to establish a formal search and rescue group. Six Clubs made this a reality soon after this search; MBC, MAWTC, MUMC, VMTC, WCV, YHA. Five of these Clubs still provide members to BSAR.

The newspapers of the time tell the story:

The Age, Wednesday 4 May 1949

## No Word from Elderly Hiker

FOSTER, Tuesday.—Tonight nothing had been heard of Mr. A. B. Howie, 64 years, of Westley-street, Hawthorn, who left the Tidal Camp River 15 days ago on a hiking tour of Wilson's Promontory.

Mr. Howie said that he would be back by Friday last.

Tonight it was decided to send out a search party.

A fellow hiker who left Mr. Howie about a week ago said Mr. Howie intended to hike through rough country from Fealer's Cove to Refuge Cove.

When he left Mr. Howie had food for a fortnight.

If no word is received of him tomorrow morning a search party will leave.

The Age, Thursday 5 May 1949

## Search Party Delayed

Police, rangers and experienced bushmen will start their search this morning for Mr. A. B. Howie, 64-year-old clerk, of Westley-street, Hawthorn, who is now six days overdue from a hiking tour on Wilson's Promontory.

Because of bad weather the searchers, who were to have travelled by boat to Sealers' Cove, have had to make the overland trip from Tidal River. This has delayed them by 24 hours.

Mr. Howie left the National Park ranger's residence on April 19, accompanied by a friend, Mr. Colechin, for a hiking tour of some of the State's roughest country.

Before leaving he said he would be back last Friday, and had arranged for a car to return him to Foster on that day.

Mr. Colechin returned more than a week ago, but since then nothing has been heard of Mr. Howie.

Mr. A. J. Wilson, ranger at Tidal River, said yesterday that he believes Mr. Howie is either lost or has had an accident.

"Mr. Howie carried concentrated food, but had no gun or fishing rod with him, and the bush in the back country here is like a brick wall," he added.

## The Herald, Friday 6 May 1949

“Victorian Walking Club” means Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs. The press had trouble getting that right for decades.

The Herald, Friday,  
May 6, 1949—

### More Join Search For Hiker

Two truck loads of experienced hikers from a Melbourne walking club left for Wilson's Promontory early today to extend the search for Mr A. B. Howie, 63, of Westley St., Hawthorn, missing for a week.

Late tonight, or early tomorrow, this party will be followed by Mr Morton Colechin and two companions who left the city by train today. Mr Colechin, a city optician, was Mr Howie's hiking companion, and saw him last on April 19 when Mr Howie stopped on the Sealer's Cove track to change his wet clothes.

Because Mr Howie had a supply of food and expected to be away for several days no anxiety was felt until Friday, when he was expected to return over the Sealer's Cove track to Tidal River.

The two parties which left Melbourne today are expected to join a police party at Sealer's Cove tonight, and will move over a wide front through wild country toward Refuge Cove, about three miles south-east.

Although he has been exposed to driving rain and bitter cold during the past week, the searchers have not lost hope that Mr Howie will be found alive.

Yesterday the fishing ketch Janet Isles—equipped with a wireless receiver for messages from the Wilson's Promontory lighthouse—searched the coast in rough seas as far as Refuge Cove. It returned to Welshpool late last night. She will load more stores and return early tomorrow when the sea has moderated.

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### Search For Mr Howie

(Continued from Page 1)

No request has been made yet to the RAAF for a plane to assist in the search.

Only clue to the missing man's movements is that apparently he removed a quantity of tea, potatoes, soup, sugar and condensed milk from a shelter hut at Sealer's Cove several days ago. If his supply of concentrated food had been exhausted the food from the hut would have sustained him for several days if he had missed the Tidal River track or decided to return past Refuge Cove.

During the last week the country east of Tidal River to Sealer's Cove has been searched thoroughly by police and bushmen led by Senior Constable Fleischer, of Foster, the Darby River ranger (Mr J. S. Sparkes) and Mr Don Lester, an experienced bushman.

—THE SUN—Thurs

### MISSING ELI MAY BE

BUSHMEN think that Mr. A. B. Howie, 63, who is missing on Wilson's Promontory, may be lying in rough country, unable to make his plight known to searchers.

Rough seas with a heavy swell yesterday prevented searchers putting out in a fishing smack to search along the coastline.



## New Hope for Missing Hiker

The discovery of ashes from a recent camp fire and a cardboard food container similar to those carried by the missing man has given fresh hope in the search for Mr. A. B. Howie, 63 years, of Westley-street, Hawthorn, now eight days overdue from a hiking trip at Wilson's Promontory.

Although he has been out in torrential rain and bitter cold for several days, experienced bushmen are now convinced that Mr. Howie is still alive.

Ten members of the Victorian Walking Club yesterday left for Wilson's Promontory to assist in the search.

This morning Mr. Morton Colechin, with two companions, will join them.

Mr. Colechin, a city optician, was with Mr. Howie on Wilson's Promontory until April 19, when he returned to Melbourne.

## Air Search

Attempts will be made to use an aircraft in the search today.

Yesterday Mr. Harry Brosch, of Port Albert, tried to join the search in his two-seater Tiger Moth, but was unable to take off because of the weather.

Mr. Brosch will go to Yarram today and try to borrow a plane from Yarram Aero club.

However, the area is rugged and dense scrub country and police consider ground parties have the best chance of locating Mr. Howie.

## Air search for hiker today

A RAAF Dakota will leave Sale at dawn today to make a search of impenetrable scrub country on Wilson's Promontory for the missing hiker, Mr A. B. Howie, 63, of Westley st, Hawthorn.

He was last seen by a hiking companion at Sealer's Saddle, a small plateau between Mt Wilson and Mt Ramsay, on April 19, and is now 11 days overdue at his destination at Refuge Cove.

Senior-constable H. Flescher, of Foster, who has led a search party in the last 10 days, returned to Foster last night, but reported that no trace of Howie had been found.

Eleven members of the Melbourne Hiking Club, who joined the search at the weekend, returned to Melbourne last night. Another five men, some of whom are close friends of the missing man, set out for Mt Wilson this morning.

The men think Howie, who is a keen amateur photographer, may have climbed to the summit of one of the mountains to take pictures.

Unless Howie is found by the weekend, additional searchers will climb both mountains in a final effort to find him.

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# Air search for hiker in vain

An RAAF Avro-Anson flew at treetop level over mountains, valleys, and beaches, on every part of rugged Wilson's Promontory yesterday in a vain, two-hour search for the lost hiker, Mr A. B. Howie, 63, of Westley st, Hawthorn.

Two experienced bushmen in the plane trained binoculars on the precipitous granite slopes of Mt Wilson and Mt Ramsey.

Mists cleared to make conditions ideal for the air search yesterday, and it was felt that little could be gained by another flight.

Meanwhile, the land search, now in its 11th day, will continue.

Mr Howie has now been missing for 13 days. Though warmly clad when last seen, he has no emergency food supply.

## FAMILY THANKS SEARCHERS FOR MISSING HIKER

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARGUS  
Mrs A. B. Howie and family wish to thank sincerely all who have given generously their time and their energy in the search for my brother, Alfred, who is missing on Wilson's Promontory.

Mrs Howie and family, together with Mr Howie's brothers and myself, want especially to thank Constable Flesher, Mr Watson, Mr Lester, Mr Sparkes, the members of the Melbourne Walking Club, the air pilots, the fishermen, and all who have taken part in the search.

We have received many letters and telegrams of sympathy, and we would be grateful if you would pass on, through the columns of THE ARGUS, our heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

MARY E. HOWIE.  
23 Lisson grove, Hawthorn.

## POLICE MYSTIFIED ABOUT HIKER

Police and bushmen, who have searched the south of Wilson's Promontory for two weeks in an attempt to find Mr A. B. Howie, 63-year-old clerk of Westley Street, Hawthorn, are now puzzled by his mysterious disappearance.

Senior Constable G. P. Fletcher, of Foster Police, said today that the last search would begin late tomorrow or at dawn on Monday. Included in the party would be about six bushmen from the Lands Department, who had been working at Yanakie for several weeks.

### NO TRACKS

The party would try to scale Mt. Wilson (2240ft.) in one day to search the summit. This was obscured by clouds when an Avro Anson from Sale made a low-level search on Thursday.

Senior Constable Fletcher said that in the past two weeks several parties had explored every track, gully and precipice where Mr Howie could have been injured or lost if he had wandered from the Sealer's Cove track.

Visiting alpine climbers from New Zealand had even climbed the craggy faces of overgrown cliffs without finding a scratch or imprint of Mr Howie's studded boots.

Letter from the President and Secretary of the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs.

## Letters

### SEARCH AND RESCUE

The protracted search for a missing middle-aged man now taking place on Wilson's Promontory, suggests to the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs that the following points be made public:—

Do not undertake "lone" trips unless on well used tracks or roads in reasonably settled country.

Do not undertake trips in remote, difficult or unknown country unless you have the necessary experience, maps and notes, and equipment.

Do not undertake trips without being reasonable confident that you are physically fit for them.

The leading members of the various clubs have considerable experience in bushcraft, and when it is known that some "hiker" is lost or missing in the bush they are always willing — even anxious — to help.

For some time this federation has had under consideration a search and rescue section planned along the lines of efficient, officially recognised bodies operating in N.S.W. and New Zealand. That such an organisation is possible and could be valuable was demonstrated on Saturday-Monday, May 7-9, when a party of 12 members from several clubs was organised during the Friday in Melbourne, and on Saturday morning was "on the job" at Wilson's Promontory, assisting the local police in the search.—J. S. ULPH (President), E. G. STEWART (Secretary).

# MISSING HIKER MYSTERY

## Police HQ To Join Hunt?

Detectives from Russell Street may help soon in an extended search for Mr A. B. Howie, 63, of Westley Street, Hawthorn, who has been missing in rugged country at Wilson's Promontory for more than a fortnight.

They are expecting a report from Senior Constable O. P. Fleischer, of Foster police, who will trace Mr Howie's probable movements since he was seen last on a track to Sealer's Cove.

When the report has been analysed, the detectives may make further inquiries in the city or go to the Promontory to search for clues.

### NO CLUES LEFT

The most baffling feature to police and bushmen at present is that Mr Howie disappeared without leaving one clue to his movements.

Several days ago it was thought an empty food packet found in the bush had been thrown away by Mr Howie, but it has been proved since that it was discarded by two youths who had been assisting in the search.

Meanwhile, a protracted search is being made on 11 bushmen and Lands Department workmen led by Mr Jack Lester, an experienced bushman from Shallow Creek.

### SCALE MOUNT

They expect to scale Mt. Wilson (2550 ft.) today and during the next three or four days will follow the gullies to the south, between Waterloo and Oberon Bays.

Twenty-six Geelong College students, led by their headmaster, Dr Bunting, and Mr John Becherer, will also keep a look out while they hike from Refuge Cove toward Waterloo Bay and Sealer's Bay. The boys are on a holiday hike and will not join the search parties.

## Still Searching For Hiker

It is 10 days since Mr A. B. Howie, 63, of Westley Street, Hawthorn, disappeared while walking through rugged country at Wilson's Promontory, but the search still goes on.

Two search parties are out — one of 10 men and the other 30. They have divided Wilson's Promontory into areas and step by step they are searching the whole district.

Senior Constable O. P. Fleischer of Foster police said today that the present plan would take eight or nine days. The 40 men searching were well equipped, and were among the most experienced bushmen in Australia.

## Promontory Search For Hiker Abandoned

After one of the longest searches on record in Victoria, Foster police have temporarily disbanded parties that have been looking for Mr A. B. Howie, 53, of Westley Street, Hawthorn, who disappeared mysteriously during a trek at Wilson's Promontory more than seven weeks ago.

Mr Howie disappeared mysteriously during a trek on Wilson's Promontory seven weeks ago.

Inquiries are now being made in the city by Senior Detective W. W. W. Mooney, of the Russell Street Homicide Squad.

In the past week, Senior Detective Mooney has studied maps and interviewed more than 50 relatives and friends of Mr Howie. Not one has provided a single clue to the missing man's movements after he was last seen on April 10.

He was then on a track between the "Bura Road" and the Saddle, and intended walking to Sealer's Cove.

One man who has taken a leading part in all the searches said today the most mystifying feature was that Howie — a

very methodical man — had not left one clue.

He discounted the theory that Howie did not intend to return to Melbourne because his clothes had been left in a hut at Tidal River and £6 and a return ticket to the city had been found in the lining of the coat.

The searchers had examined the remains of many fires in the district, but were satisfied that none had been left by Howie.

He was a coffee drinker and always neatly emptied the wet grounds on a fire before he left his camp site. No coffee grounds had been found.



# 'Human radar' hunt for hiker

**C**ARRYING samples of hair and blood taken from a cap worn by the missing man, a prospector will set out from Foster today to search Wilson's Promontory for Mr Alfred Howie, aged 63, of Hawthorn.

Mr Howie has been missing since early in May, and several intensive searches have failed to reveal any trace of him.

The prospector is Mr George Edwards, who is confident that he can trace Mr Howie. Mr Edwards will use what he describes as "human radar" in his search.

He is a diviner, and has successfully used his ability to locate water and minerals in various parts of Australia.

His practice is to employ materials of a similar nature to those for which he is searching, and he said yesterday that the hair and blood samples from Mr Howie's cap would be used to "tune in" as he approached the Promontory.

Mr Edwards, who will be accompanied by two men who knew Mr Howie, claimed in Foster yesterday that by means of his unique "human radar" qualities he had already "picked up" Mr Howie.

Argus, Fri, Aug 12/49--3

# New search for lost hiker

A new search will begin today for Mr Alfred Howie, 63, of Westley st, Hawthorn, who disappeared three months ago on a hike across Wilson's Promontory.

His son, Colin, left Melbourne last night for Leongatha, where he will be joined this morning by experienced bushmen, who will search a thickly wooded area known as The Gorge, between three and four miles from Sealers' Cove.

They will renew the search from a spot they reached a fortnight ago when they were turned back by bad weather.

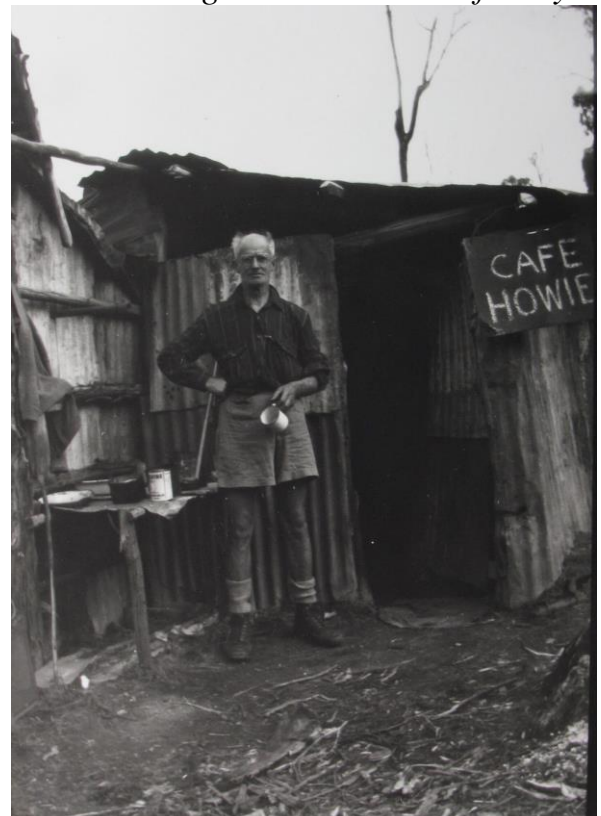
Led by Mr George Edwards, a professional water diviner, of Leongatha, they had then reached the edge of rough country overgrown with thick scrub.

Because of his ability to locate objects with the aid of divining apparatus designed by himself, Mr Edwards has become known as the "radar" man. He is confident the body will be found.



## Alfred Howie in 1943

*Acknowledgment: the Howie family*



No trace of Alfred Howie was ever found. What happened to him?

His family recall one possibly discussed at the time. Given that his destination was Refugee Cove, he may have fallen off the slippery log crossing Sealers Creek at Sealers Cove, either at high tide or when the Creek was in flood and been washed out to sea.

In August 1949 the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs established its Search and Rescue Section.

Members were called out, in response to a request for assistance from Victoria Police, by a Club based telephone tree. In the early years, members assembled at the Russell Street Police Headquarters, in a hall in the basement.

The Police Search and Rescue Squad was formed in 1957.

*See “**The Scroggin Eaters**, A history of bushwalking in Victoria”; pp 183 to 190 for a detailed account of the search.*

*Thank you to the family of Alfred Howie for sharing their recollections and records.*

*Newspaper articles collated from TROVE by Duncan Brookes, May 2019*