

The Long Climb

Whilst camping in the Northern Territory during my thirteenth year with my parents and twin brother, I came across a revelation, a life changing experience that will probably never again be equalled in emotional intensity for the rest of my existence. Before this brief yet hugely influential experience, for the most part I had been a depressive, frustrated child with little motivation for future aspirations or even for achieving a general quality of life. Although it brings back memories of a darker time it's left an imprint on my existence that will never be washed away.

Staring up at the dim blueness of the plastic tent canopy just above me, I pondered on simple things: confrontations of the day gone by, the boredom created by the long trip up to the camping site where my brother, parents and I would leave as soon as the sun rose, the terror of having to return to school, the one place I loathed like no other, in just three short days. These things circulated in my mind as though they would never leave me. Then, suddenly, my mind was blank. Not for the first time, I entered a state of nothingness. My eyes had adjusted to the darkness hours ago when I had come to understand the futility of the concept of getting to sleep and as such I could easily make out the shapes of the other faces in the tent. How they slept and how I envied them.

After fixing my sneakers onto my frozen feet in pointless haste, I barged out of the small shelter and into the early morning light. I found myself in a ghost world. An eerie, wide ravine, just as blue, dim and empty as the tent I had just left. I recollected my father enthusiastically explaining how tectonic movement had caused the gorge to form. It still didn't interest me. I trudged past the dying embers of our fire, up onto the footpath and onwards until I reached the walls of the great gorge that surrounded me. Standing below it I realised it was far steeper and larger than I had first thought.

With a sudden burst of exhilaration I charged onto the slope, scrambling over rock and rubble on all fours. Suddenly, I lost what little hold I had and tumbled backwards, my head crashing down onto the brittle clay beneath me. I was however undeterred. I had finally found a goal, and a bleeding head wasn't going to get in my way. After mapping out my route mid-scramble I soon found myself on a small ledge. I was scared of heights and so far I had climbed a good thirty metres. Dismissing such thoughts, I hauled myself up and over the rock face above me. I continued. Not looking back, I pushed myself until my legs burned and skin had been ripped off my fingertips. Then I had to stop, if only for a moment. Below me was a distance of almost vertical rock that, in any sensible state, I could never dream of overcoming. A large lip of dark rock towered overhead. I had no clue what lay beyond it but decided, that was where I needed to be more than any other place. With my strength dwindling I began to map out my route, my eyes searching for any sign of a clasping point in the rock.