

25/5/88

To Peter Coyne, Manager, John Oxley Youth Centre

This letter details events concerning the outing to the Lower Portals at Mt Barney on Tuesday May 24, 1988.

I departed the John Oxley Youth Centre at approximately 8.30am in the company of Gordon Cooper, and Jeff Manitzky (Staff Members).

We travelled in the mini-bus with four youths. [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] and arrived at the Lower Portals parking area at approximately 10.00am. We set off to walk into the area and I proceeded with the group of faster walkers and arrived at the Lower Portals at approximately 11.30am.

Upon arrival we selected a lunch area, left our backpacks and began to explore the river environment. A group of youths including [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] and Annette headed upstream on the far side of the river towards the Lower Portals main pool (80 metres upstream) and I followed along with them. At the pool, [redacted] and [redacted] waded near the edge as the water was very cold. After approximately 15 minutes we began to head back to the lunch area. As the boys began heading downstream Annette removed her jeans and began to wade. She accidentally slipped and fell into the pool. Annette continued down the side of the river adjacent to the lunch area where she threw her jeans from a large rock to Gordon Cooper. The other boys and I continued along the far bank of the river to the lunch area. Annette climbed from a large rock, directly to the lunch area.

The slower walkers arrived at the lunch area at approximately 12.00 and began to explore. I had lunch at this time with [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted]. Over the next 15-20 minutes others also had lunch.

A group consisting of [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] Annette and [redacted] moved across the river and began to drift upstream. I was moving back and forth across the stream and returned to the lunch area to get the video camera. [redacted] came with me and we began to video the area (approximately 10 minutes).

Jeff Manitzky indicated that he thought the group had headed up the bank near the larger pool and that he was going to check. I crossed the stream from the lunch area and moved to the upper pool where I began to whistle loudly as we had used this signal throughout the morning to keep the youths together.

I returned to the lunch area at approximately 12.45pm and was informed by Karen and Sarah that Gordon had gone to assist Jeff in locating the group. They returned at approximately 12.50pm.

We set off on the return journey at approximately 1.10pm and arrived back at the car park at approximately 2.30pm.

As we approached the car park on a downward track four of the boys indicated they were going to the toilet block and raced towards it. I proceeded to the mini-bus which was parked 50 metres from the toilet facilities and began to pack the bus. The rest of the group congregated near the vehicles. We began suspicious that the boys were still at the toilets and I proceeded to investigate only to discover that four boys had absconded. They were [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted].

It was decided that Gordon Cooper and myself would take the car with the remaining three youths and drive to the nearest Police Station to report the abscondings. The other three staff remained at the car park. Instead of driving to Rathdowney or Boonah we stopped at the first farmhouse and I phoned the Rathdowney Police and the John Oxley Youth Centre. The time was approximately 3.15pm.

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Date: 06.05.2013

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I returned in the vehicle to relate to the other staff at the car park that the Police Officer from Rathdowney was on his way to the parking area. Gordon Cooper, myself and three youths then proceeded to return to the Centre. We passed and flagged the Rathdowney Police Officer on our way out of the Mt Barney reserve (approximately 3.30pm). He spoke briefly to us and as I had phoned him he asked for my full name. We arrived back at the Centre at 5.05.

*R O'Hanley*

R. J. O'Hanley (Teacher.)

