



The climb

Derrick King whirled his jacket around his head. He brought it down on the yellow, dry grass growing between the rocks, with a whack. "It's hot," he grunted.

"It doesn't help much when you waste energy like that," protested Les Peters.

"Trying to make a breeze!" smirked Derrick.

"You've got too many clothes on—or the wrong sort!" Les said, kicking the dry dirt with his boot.

"I didn't think we were going to come up here anyway. Not my idea," said Derrick. "It's okay for you. You weren't meant to go to school today."

Les shrugged. He had on his denim jacket, jeans and a T-shirt. You only got warm when you were in the sun, unless you kept running and climbing.

Derrick began swirling his coat over his head again. He whacked it down on the ground with enough force to make a little dust cloud.

Or swinging your coat over your head, Les added silently to his list of conditions.

It had taken two hours to get from the Peters' letterbox on Back Creek Road to their present position—near the top of Ironbark Ridge. The Lawson Plains stretched out behind them. A cairn of red-brown rocks was just up ahead on the crest. From there they would be able to see across the plains in all directions. Mount Desolation was a small, blue bump on the hazy western horizon.

"What would you give for a trail bike? I'd give anything for a trail bike," Derrick puffed. "Just anything!"

"What do you mean, what would I give?"

Derrick stared at Les's back. Les could always complicate the simplest comment with a question that didn't have a real answer.

"I mean, what would you give to have a trail bike? I'm not getting one. Mum wouldn't let me," Derrick said. "Dad might, though." He waved his jacket above his head again.

"You can give *that* up anytime as far as I'm concerned!" griped Les.

Alan Horsfield