
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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CANYONING ON THE January 2001

FRIDAY, 5TH JANUARY
2001

John Cardy who is becoming our most constant contributor provides us with a stimulating and inspirational account of this highly specialised activity which takes us into a truly different world.

On returning to the carpark after spending a full day floating, paddling and wading through the canyon all the weariness from the long walk out is swamped under an amazing sense of satisfaction of having experienced this wonderful journey. However back to the beginning.

Seventeen thrill-seekers wended their way down to the Wollangambe, past Halfway Rocks, dropped down into the coolness of the lovely enclosed little gully which delivered us to the sandy beach, the starting point for the moist section of this expedition.

Now the ritual wetsuit samba began-- with much jiggling, jumping, pushing and prodding eventually resulting in our being cocooned in our rubber suits which in some cases had mysteriously shrunk over the past twelve months. Perched high on a rock and apparently enthralled by all this activity was a large Water Monitor. [The 'monitor' part of the lizard's name comes from the belief they monitored and warned of the presence of crocodiles. It must be true as none of the lizards we saw gave us any warnings and we didn't encounter any crocodiles!!]

From the roof of a large rock overhang grew an "upside down plant", a strappy-leaved plant hanging vertically downward from the ceiling with no apparent source of water nourishment. Hans knew its name [which I have forgotten] and stated it was endangered; not surprising if it chooses to grow in these situations!



Summer in the Bush

WOLLANGAMBE

The convenient little chute from which we launched ourselves last time we undertook this trip was now blocked by a tree trunk deposited by a flood at some time during the intervening four years. However with Beth's assistance we pushed off from an adjacent rock ledge. The variations in li-lo riding styles was amazing; some set astride them like rodeo riders; others chose the face down surfboard paddling mode while some reclined on their backs, propped against their backpacks. This is the mode adopted by Hans. However he always appears to float much higher out of the water than everyone else and it is due, I have been told, to his bladder-- an inflated wine bladder that

is --which he places in the bottom of his backpack!
Ingenious!

After initial adjustments to sitting and paddling styles everyone was safely underway and we could absorb the beauty of this place. The deep green pools, majestic stone walls, miniature beaches, rock falls to negotiate, mini rapids to give a free ride for short distances, rock overhangs dripping wet, their roofs only inches above your head and inviting sand banks on which to rest a while. It was a joy to listen to the exuberance expressed by the younger members and first timers in the group; then to find yourself momentarily alone in a stretch of river, listening to the sounds of silence and appreciating simple things like watching spent leaves randomly spiralling down from the trees high above and observing the aerobic manoeuvres of a pair of brilliant blue dragonflies or watch the intricate play of reflected light on the canyon walls resulting from the sun's rays bouncing off the ripples caused by our progress.

Suddenly it was time for lunch. What happened to morning tea ?! Some chose to seek out a shady spot on the sand, others soaked up some sun while dangling feet in the cool stream. Water monitors soon appeared not at all shy about soliciting a free lunch. Libby's

Bushwalkers' cake proved to be amphibious and made its usual welcome and much appreciated appearance. With appetites suitably satiated we continued through this wonderland. Flowers of trigger plants added brilliant flashes of colour to otherwise bare rock walls. Shrubs and small trees clung tenaciously to rockfaces, some climbing vertically toward the sky forming natural espaliers against the walls, others reaching out across the river, dipping gently to kiss the water's surface then arching upward again to seek the energy of the sun.

Evidence of the awesome power of the river could be seen in large logs bridging the canyon, wedged under rock ledges by massive floods. The intricate horizontal concave patterns indicated the changing levels of the river as it cut down through the rock over aeons. In places the patterns were enhanced by the vertical grooves left by the remains of long dormant swirl pools. Undercutting had caused some rock to collapse leaving large overhangs; in one case the huge fallen blocks were neatly arranged in a row as if placed by some juvenile giant playing with building blocks.

As you imagine the beauty of what you have experienced could not be surpassed, you reach a little side shoot called Crayfish Canyon. This is a very deep, narrow canyon. Enter this half lit world of glorious gloom, draped in soft green velvet and the air is so cold your breath vaporises. A tiny rill gurgles in the darkness occasionally glinting in shafts of light spearing down from narrow apertures above. If you could stand in this beautiful environment and not be deeply moved your heart would be as hard as the unyielding rock walls surrounding you.

The faint sound of distant thunder brings back a touch of reality and we continue on to Exit Rock, reaching the end of our river journey just as light begins to fall.

The walk out is initially quite steep with a climb up a small cliff aided by some conveniently placed tree roots. The storm clouds blocking out the sun were very welcome as we made our way back up the slope. Just as the spirits were beginning to flag we turned to observe, laid out before us, an undulating sea of the white flowers of the Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*) stretching back down into the valley from whence we had come and across the ridges beyond. The subdued light from the leaden sky added to the awesome beauty of this scene which was so uplifting we virtually sprinted back to the carpark!

A note about RIGBY HILL which featured in our December Walk. It was named after a fine Bushwalker, Alan Rigby described by Myles Dunphy: "a commercial artist by calling but that was incidental: he was an artist by instinct, an admirer of beauty. He possessed an analytical mind not tied up in conventions, but tempered by poetic sensibilities. He was an excellent observer and an enthusiastic explorer of aloof rugged places

unimproved by man.....He was an expert photographer.....Above all he was communicative, spoke easily and had the gift of description." 1923

Later, he, along with Myles Dunphy and others was responsible for the purchase of the Blue Gum Forest c. 1931 so that it could be permanently protected. In 1966 Alan Rigby gave his life for the conservation movement when he collapsed during a photographic bushwalk in support of the campaign to save the Colong Caves from mining. *From Back from the Brink by Andy Macqueen*

Our January Walk

Friday, 19th January 2001

Bowens Creek Road---Bilpin

There had been rain the night before and a very unpromising weather forecast with the morning damp and misty as nine optimists gathered at Merry Garth. Libby has an uncanny insight about the outcome and she is rarely wrong. Keith and Ellis quietly thought we had lost all sense of proportion!

We set off in 2 vehicles along the familiar road to Mt Irvine which never loses its timelessness and beauty created by all the elements of the soft and mystical rainforest that guards both sides of the road and then opens out into the sandstone vegetation which is rich with diversity and every shade and tone of green as we pass over the Long Saddle onto the road that dips down to Bowens Creek. Alison passed us a kilometre or two out from Mt Wilson. We hope she will follow us. Newcomers must at best find the signs at the intersection of Mt Irvine Rd. and Bowens Creek Rd. very confusing! Fortunately we have no such problem as we know exactly what we are doing!

Not far down and we have a vast picture on the right of Bowens Creek below us in the midst of truly rugged country. John Cardy uses the word awesome and this is the scene before us. Across the deep gorge one catches a glimpse of the road like a thread appearing, then disappearing among the trees on the precipitous slope.

Libby shows us letters carved on the rocks by the workmen who built this remarkable track in the early 1930's. That was an achievement and a complete story in itself. It deserves to be told.

It is 5 kilometres to the Bowens Creek bridge and in that distance the road turns and twists almost back on itself as it negotiates the sheer depth of this descent. The closer we approach the bridge the vegetation becomes richer and more luxuriant, returning almost to the rainforest we passed through earlier.

There at the bridge we were joined by Bruce Gailey who with Sue are the custodians of this lovely area and Hans who came via Bilpin and Alison arrived. Now we were 12 in number.

Our real walk began at the Bowens Creek Bridge. The bridge itself is wonderfully sturdy since it had been repaired. Below it the waters of the Creek fed by recent rain chatted gratefully along looking deceptively clear and unpolluted and the sun peeped through what had been a very overcast sky ! We set off at a pleasantly leisurely pace to enjoy the pungent freshness of the damp bush and the richness of the growth. There were small and large Turpentines at every turn surrounded by *Pulteneas*, their lush green foliage enhanced by the moisture and *Epacris pulchella* with its tiny white flowers clustered over its spiked stems and the occasional grey spider flower of the *Grevillea buxifolia*. Along the edge of the road gracefully nodding to us were the lovely Flannel Flowers *Actinotus helianthi*. Almost inevitably as we climbed the road that twisted and turned, as it did across the gorge on the Mt Irvine side, a shower of rain dropped from the dark clouds that had suddenly gathered only to vanish a few minutes later after we had all rushed to cover ourselves with our rain gear. Steadily the narrow road took us upwards opening to display the wonders of the rugged landscape below us and to the north and south. Remarkable rock faces of marvellous colours in sandstone and iron hung over the road decorated with tiny dainty plants creating micro hanging gardens while near the road itself the bright gold of the *Goodenia decurrens* caught the eye with the unobtrusive delicate *Platysace* displaying its tiny white flowers.

Occasional evidence of the original construction of the road could be studied where a drain had been placed. We reached a sharp corner as the road turned left while on the right were some convenient rocks to sit and enjoy some morning tea and be able to gaze down to the creek far below to see how it had fought its way through rock and canyon and for us to enjoy the warmth of the day and the companionship around us.

Soon it was off again ever upward steadily the road narrowing at times especially as it crept along the edge of the steep sides of the gorge. We met no less than four Adventure waggons, loaded with their tourist passengers some wandering, gazing with concern but amazement at the depths below them with only an inadequate fence as protection. The road, particularly here had many pools of water, evidence of the need for better drainage and also the damage to which these armoured like vehicles probably contributed.

Further on we caught a marvellous vista of Mt Tootie with its isolated trees standing like sentinels on its open grassy slopes. It seemed to be beckoning to the Bowen Creek enticing it to make its way towards its junction with the Wollangambe. Nearer at hand were some fine glowing trunks of the Angophoras not seen at higher altitudes but often appearing amidst the sand stone country. There were more of those amazing overhangs of rock standing feet above our heads with fine narrow shelves of shale, one on top of another created so delicately and forming micro-climatic areas of massed greenery tumbling over moist rocks, with sedges and the Dog rose or *Baueri rubioides* shyly displaying its soft pink flowers. Tiny ferns in crevices spilling out to form miniature rock gardens and miniature waterfalls. Near the road the larger ferns were massed together, while many *Leptospermum* or tea tree were covered in their lovely creamy white flowers of 5 petals

We reached yet another group of rocks. Below us on the left these contained a cave where the original European settlers at Mt Irvine had camped on their way to found that special community. Naturally it had to be closely examined. On the other side of the road were some nicely flattened rocks just right for sitting and enjoying lunch, shaded by a graceful *Eucalyptus sclerophylla* with a soft light grey trunk. Close by the ground was covered with *Actinotus minor* a smaller flowered Flannel flower responding brightly to the warmth of the sun. A breeze brushed us as we enjoyed gentle talk and looked out onto the rich creamy blossom of Eucalypts in flower, the *Eucalyptus piperita* or Sydney peppermint.

Finally we leisurely began our return to the Bowens Creek bridge, observing plants which we had missed earlier in the day such as *Persoonia acerosa* with its deep yellow flowers crowded along its upper branches. As we descended exciting discoveries were made of plants such as the *Scaevola ramosissima*, a lovely pale blue flower known as the Fan Flower and we all again delighted in the sight of the green hanging gardens tumbling over the dramatic glistening rock faces above our heads next to the road and the views before us of the rugged gorges.

The twelve walkers were soon scattered along the road, some led by Libby, pulling those obnoxious weeds [fleebung] from the edges of the road while others had a discussion with Ern about Sycamores ! The Australian Sycamore was referred to as the Silver Sycamore. Its botanical name is *Cryptocarya glaucescens*. Its other common names are Brown Beech or Native Laurel and it is found along our coast from Milton to Queensland in what was sometimes referred to as the Brush, a word often used to describe rainforest. The Sycamores in Mt Wilson are exotics. Wonderful trees in their own habitat in America but a problem in Mt Wilson where they seed and spread into the bushland.

Back at the bridge we enjoyed the after feeling of relaxation and joy which come from such a pleasurable

time along with that traditional cup of tea and special wishes to Arthur on the occasion of his birthday. Thank you to those who always provide the thermos of hot water, the tea, coffee, milk and sugar and the tasty eats.

Our February Walk

Friday, 16th February 2001

Walking along the cliffs from Katoomba Falls Picnic Area to Leura Falls. While this track is not in good condition as there are rough patches and up and down sections, it should be within everyone's capacity. It is roughly two hours each way, covering about 6-7 kilometres. It is possible to stop and not go the full distance. There are some truly marvellous views of the Jamison Valley and beyond.

MEET AT THE KATOOMBA FALLS PICNIC AREA off CLIFF DRIVE at 10.00 A.M. Coming from Katoomba follow Katoomba St then turn off to Katoomba Falls. Coming from Blackheath take the Cliff Drive turn off from the Great Western Highway.

MEET AT MERRY GARTH AT 9. 00 A.M.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

FURTHER WALKS

We want to stress that everyone is very welcome to suggest particular walks they would like us to undertake. Do contact us and offer your ideas we would welcome them.

Friday, 16th March 2001 Along the cliffs between Govetts Leap and Evans Look Out and could include Braeside Walk.

Friday, 30th March 2001--an extra walk. We are still debating the destination for this one.

Friday, 27th April, [**not the third Friday as there is a Fine Craft & Art Exhibition in the Turkish Bath from 14th April to 22nd April, 2001.**] Mt Irvine, Danes Way and the Fire Trail.

Friday, 18th May, 2001 Ikara Ridge. A fascinating new walk. Guess where it is ?

Friday, June 15th, 2001 Back to Deep Pass off the Newnes Rd.

Friday, 29th June 2001 An extra walk. ?

Remember if you have any ideas for walks do talk to us about it.

BUSH CARE

The first Bush Care Day for 2001 will be Friday, 9th February 2001 at MT IRVINE. On each 2nd Friday of the month, commencing at 9.00a.m. to midday. i.e. Friday, 9th March, **not Friday, 13th April as that is Good Friday**; Friday, 11th May, 2001; Friday, 8th June 2001; Friday, 13th July 2001.

Come along and enjoy the pleasant company while eradicating those intruders in the bush, the weeds.

Contact Elizabeth Raines for further Information.

Tel: (02) 4756 2121

FOR OUR FEBRUARY WALK 2001 PLEASE CONTACT **Libby Raines** (02) 4756 2121 or **Mary Reynolds** (02) 4756 2006 or **Alison Heap** (02) 4756 2116.

It is always a great help if you make contact before the day of the walk.