

The Happy Valley Track

Friday 11th December 1998

A group of 26 walkers gathered at Merry Garth in preparation for our afternoon Christmas walk. The mild temperature was a pleasant contrast to the hot and humid conditions Helen and I had left behind in Sydney some 2 hours earlier. The distant rumbles of thunder and building storm clouds deterred no one and after depositing some “goodies” at Libby and Keith’s home for the ensuing barbecue we set off towards the Cathedral Picnic Ground.

We followed the track through the rainforest behind Campenalla and Linden, past what must be the grand daddy of all Banksia trees. I find this section of rainforest enchanting and could quite happily spend the afternoon here soaking up the atmosphere and “recharging the batteries” however I need the exercise and they assure me the Happy Valley area is even more beautiful. The leisurely stroll past Tolimont Cottage and Bisley to the picnic area provided us with the opportunity to catch up with members we hadn’t seen for some time and discuss the various activities we have all been involved with over the last few months, an additional pleasurable aspect of these walks.

From the Cathedral Picnic Area we took the short deviation to the giant tree where the linking of hands around the trunk resulted in it being declared an eight and a half person tree following some protest that the nine people involved weren’t really stretching enough! We then proceeded down the Mt Irvine Road in what must be described (viewed from my position at the rear of the group) as Brown’s cows fashion to the Happy Valley Picnic Area where Bruce Gailey joined the group and we settled down to a rather long and leisurely afternoon tea. (So much for the calories burnt off up to this point!)

With some walkers electing to leave packs in Bruce’s vehicle we crossed the road and proceeded along the Happy Valley track. Very quickly we were into the rainforest, rather open at first but soon the canopy became more and more dense. Not far from the road the track forks and Libby explained the right hand track leads down to a small creek where, in days gone by, picnickers at the Happy Valley Picnic Area would walk to obtain water to boil the billy for a cup of tea. The left hand track leads down to Happy Valley. Apparently this track was originally established many years ago but through lack of use it became ill defined in this area and for some years was lost. However once the alignment was rediscovered the track into the valley was quite easy to follow.

Not too distant past the fork in the track the descent into the valley begins in earnest with the track zig-zagging its way down the steep slope. We now enter some very dense rainforest, a magical area with huge rocks draped in moss, secret little fern gardens hiding under rock overhangs and wonderfully buttressed tree trunks with moss covered roots snaking their way into the forest floor in search of nourishment and a secure anchorage.

This zig-zagging section of track has recently been subjected to a wonderful restoration and upgrading job. The work was carried out by Peter Raines (and a friend – name

Mary?) over a period of ? months. Steps have been formed using treated pine and in some areas retaining walls have had to be erected to maintain the track alignment. At one corner of a zig (or was it a zag) the steps take on the appearance of a spiral staircase, a job really well done. Of course all the materials had to be carried in from the road – Oh to be young and fit again! A great job Peter and ???, I can assure you it was much appreciated by this group, especially during the climb back out.

As we descended further into the valley the usual increase in moisture in the forest became apparent with small beads of water glistening on the moss banks and ferns and other foliage releasing mini showers as they were brushed against. Soon the captivating, soothing sound of running water was apparent and as we approached the creek a very noticeable and welcome drop in temperature occurred. It was now very wet underfoot and quite slippery but everyone made it safely onto the small area of the creek bank.

What a delightful spot this is, water running over a bed of pebbles, pooling momentarily and then reforming into a narrow stream before dropping over a rock ledge into a larger pool. Then flowing out of sight around the next bend, all this framed by the magnificent, steep, forested walls of this Happy Valley.

Some of the more (fool?) hardy members of the group crossed the narrow stream, sidled along the small rock shelf and dropped down to the pool below the small waterfall. The view of the pool and waterfall from this lower level was beautiful. The abundance of green moss, the stillness of the pool reflecting the lush vegetation and the narrow, single drop waterfall combined with the smooth water-worn pebbles evoked for me the serene feeling of a formal Japanese garden while at the same time the sights, the scents and the sounds surrounding us were quintessentially those of the Australian bush. What a magical, peaceful place!!

After spending some time trying to soak up and store away for future use as much as possible of this unique atmosphere we surrendered to that rule of bushwalking in the Blue Mountains – what goes down must come up again – and reluctantly commenced the ascent to the Mt Irvine Road. One of the benefits of this track is no matter where or how often you stop to rest there is always something beautiful to observe. We all reassembled at the Happy Valley Picnic Area to ensure everyone was accounted for and then made our way (again in Brown's cows fashion) back to Merry Garth for the Christmas BBQ.

So ended another year of bushwalks – fantastic, varied venues; smooth as clockwork organisation; entertaining and informative newsletters; Libby's bushwalkers cake and most important of all Great Company – what more could one wish for?