

THE NOVEMBER WALK at GLENBROOK (Red Hands Cave) will be in our JANUARY NEWSLETTER. John Cardy has written it but we thought it would be nice to keep it for January 2000.

Red Hands Cave – Glenbrook

Friday 19th November 1999

Once again the weather was especially kind to us as nineteen members and friends gathered at the Visitors Centre car park at Glenbrook in the southern section of the Blue Mountains National Park. We followed the sealed road down the hill toward the causeway just short of which there were two beautiful examples of Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) both the white and pink forms in full bloom displaying their tiny delicately fringed bell like flowers while still holding some of last seasons cobalt blue berries, a delightful small tree.

Across Glenbrook Creek at the causeway with its very pretty upstream pool we moved onto the walking track which initially follows the south bank of Camp Fire Creek. Almost immediately there are Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) beside the track, some in small clumps and occasionally large drifts of them on the hillside above, the pure white petals with their subtle green tips inviting you to touch them to feel their velvety texture. Contrasting with the Flannel Flowers and in great abundance were the Trigger Plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*) with their bright pink flowers hiding the tiny “hammer” containing the stigma and stamens ready to gently tap on the head any unsuspecting insect which triggers the mechanism.

We passed some interesting sandstone overhangs off to the left displaying intricate sculptural forms due to wind and weathering actions and in the creek below us on a large rock bed the force of running water has carved an intriguing pattern of interlinked swirl pools. The creek varies from a series of rock pools to sandy bottomed sections with tiny beaches and sand bars. Water boatmen scud aimlessly across these pools and a pair of dragonflies appears performing complex aerobatics over the surface, all this to the accompaniment of the sounds of water gurgling and tinkling as it travels from pool to pool.

There are some superb examples of the Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) in this area, their bark colour ranging from light grey through pink to orange with one particularly large tree being almost blood red. Their smooth bark carried the typical pockmarked surface with one tree near our morning tea stop having deep flutes spiralling up the trunk as though some giant hand had grabbed the crown and twisted. Very tall Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifolium*) also reside along this creek and Red Hand Creek.

The track begins to climb (and therefore so do we) and very soon we emerge from the deep shade of the gully with its mossy rock walls and lush ferns into open drier woodland, the path winds around a large rock outcrop and we are at the Red Hand Cave. The rock art in this shelter is amazingly well preserved considering its proximity to a

large population centre and its easy access by car. The viewing platform and windows, protective mesh and information plates are a vast improvement on the crude chain wire screen which was the only security for the cave on the last occasion I was here, approximately twenty years ago. After some time viewing the hand stencils and prints we settled down for lunch on the rocks above the cave. Bruce Wright who had extensive experience in the study of Aboriginal artifacts and customs while attached to the West Australian Museum gave a short talk on the hand stencils. While local publications say the significance of the rock art is not known but the hand stencils are believed to act as a form of signature, Bruce stated that certainly in Western Australia the significance is known although he has no direct evidence the meaning translated to this area. In WA the use of hand stencils is a deeply spiritual act and by placing a stencil that person is stating he belongs to the land in that area. Hand stencils would never be placed by anyone other than in their own tribal lands. He said that in all parts of the world where rock art has been found hand stencils figure prominently.

The return journey to the causeway is via the ridge above the cave through dry open woodland where that unique scent of the Blue Mountains bush in summer was just beginning to become evident. Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) are more numerous here and the occasional Native Iris (*Patersonia serica*) is seen. Geebung (*Persoonia* sp) are plentiful and there are lots of Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) stems but no flowers were sighted. The track descends toward Camp Fire Creek and the canopy soon closes in to provide a shady cooler environment. Above the track on the southern side there is a large colony of Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea media*), individual specimens had been sighted earlier but here they were in abundance.

At a junction of Camp Fire Creek with a relatively major tributary there was a large rock shelf bearing many sharpening grooves and while some in the group studied these others checked their socks for leeches and when some were found Gloria decided she would check again and again and ----- . As we continued along the creek large numbers of bees could be heard as they collected their bounty high in the tree crowns.

Soon we were back at the junction of Camp Fire Creek and Red Hand Creek and the remainder of the walk was to retrace the first section of the track we had used in the morning. The steep climb in the afternoon sun from the causeway back up to the visitors centre made the customary cup of tea very welcome. So ended another glorious day, a few hours spent in beautiful surroundings where you could imagine you were hundreds of miles from civilisation until the occasional whistle of a train on the main western line brought back the reality that you were but a kilometre or so from a substantial town. What magnificent vision our forebears displayed in establishing these National Parks, let us all guard them jealously!