
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 9 Issue 9

Nov./ Dec 1999

THE SOUTHERN FIRE

Our October Walk

FRIDAY, 15TH OCTOBER
1999.

My apologies for not producing a November Newsletter but the care of grandchildren took precedence. We hope the extra contents of this newsletter will help to make up for that loss.

This has certainly been a wet Spring. Rain had preceded this walk on more days than one cares to think about.

However some eighteen walkers gathered at Merry Garth to experience the great joy of a walk in Mt Wilson. In many ways this was a very special walk for we were to cover territory loved by Bill Smart and indeed part of that wonderful property of 'Wynstay'. We were most privileged.

The walk commenced through 'Merry Garth' which was once part of 'Wynstay' and followed a track made years before by Matthie Davies who walked from 'Woodstock' to the Old Mill below to work with the timber and the Kirks who ran the Mill. The Kirk brothers had leased this mill from Colonel Richard Owen Wynne about 1920. Its remnants are still on 'Wynstay'.

The track is steep through rich rain forest being carefully nurtured by Libby and Keith Raines with many hollies being removed gradually and other intruders in the forest. There was much slipping and sliding as the mulch on the floor of the forest was soaked and that marvellous volcanic soil can be treacherous when wet. It was primeval forest filled with lush green ferns. We paused on the way down to look at a giant Coachwood still there remarkably for this area was consistently logged for softwood timber for many years. However



Spring in the Bush

TRAIL MT WILSON

this coachwood had been kept to make a coffin for Sydney Kirk, the eldest of the 7 Kirk brothers. I wonder why it was not used for that purpose? We were grateful that it was still there to admire.

So we crossed a small tributary of Waterfall Creek, known as Priest's Creek, a lovely sylvan place and popular as a picnic area with earlier visitors to Mt Wilson as far back as before the First World War. Then across Waterfall Creek, the lifeline of Mt Wilson and we moved into a totally different world, a world of elegant silver trunks of the Blue Mountains Ash standing like sentinels, preserved lovingly by Bill

against the threat of fire which can completely destroy them. It was from these trees that Bill collected seed for the National Parks and Wildlife Service to assist in the regeneration of this tree in other parts of the Blue Mountains National Park. It was also from this seed that Bill grew the plants, over 100 of them which were planted in Cathedral Reserve Mt Wilson some two or three years ago by a working bee of locals. The lower sections of the bushland were alight with the gold of that remarkable bush *Pultenea stipulatis*. Every bush was in flower providing a picture of massed colour. Here we paused for our morning tea and to contemplate This Memorial to a Man of Nature.

Then it was into some 'Bush Bashing' through that same *Pultenea* as we crossed over seeking the Southern Fire Trail led carefully and without fault by Libby who knows this country so well. Tucked amongst the *Pultenea* were other no less interesting plants such as *Tetratheca rubioides* with its dark pink flowers and dark centre. This dark centre is the reason that this species is so often referred to as Black-eyed Susan. There were some fine examples of that tongue tying plant called *Gompholobium huegleii* or the Wedge Pea with its deep golden and large pea like flowers. As we moved along the trail we were struck by the richness of

the vegetation and the sturdiness of the Eucalypts many of which belonged to the Peppermint Gum family such as *Eucalyptus piperita*. Alongside these were the remarkable Scribbly Gums with twisted branches and spotted and patched grey and tawny trunks as well as the occasional example of the *Angophora costa* or smooth barked apple.

Libby drew our attention to the entrance to the track leading to the Bowen Creek Canyon where more and more adventurers find their way in the summer months. It was marked rather conveniently by a wonderfully constructed Termite nest. It is very important that the active members of the Rural Fire Service know these tracks in case of the all too frequent emergency. At the same time we were able to admire the commanding view across these deep gorges to Mt Tomah & Mt Bell and further round to Mt Banks. As we approached the end of the trail we continued to find other plants to capture our interest such as *Hybanthus monopetalus* or the Slender Violet with its blue mauve lower petal. Often the tiny ones of the orchid family provide delight intriguing in their capacity to survive in what seems a harsh environment. The *Lomandra obliqua* with long reed like leaves was observed by Hans whose knowledge is so valuable to us all.

Lunch was quietly enjoyed on stumps and logs. Some members have a marvellous technique when it comes to finding a comfortable seat in the bush !

We had to retrace our steps for some of the distance, enjoying the warmth of the sun which had finally appeared. This gave us the opportunity to study nature more closely. Some of us became fascinated by the antics of a group of extraordinary caterpillars who only moved when its leader indicated that all was safe! Further along we stopped and turned off to the left to walk out to the end of the ridge to lookout over the North Arm of Bowen's Creek, a wonderful sight of dark canyons and rugged ridges. This was a view often gazed upon by Bill. He loved it. For us it is Bill's View.

This time we followed the Southern Fire Trail almost to its beginnings but not quite and we saw that lovely plant *Leptospermum macrocarpa* the Tea tree with those large rich creamy flowers and rusty centres. The size of the flowers make it easy to identify. We must not forget the glorious waratahs glowing in the afternoon sunlight so startlingly crimson!

We reached the site of the old Mill and the area where Bill had allowed the Blue Mts City Council to extract gravel in return for restoring the surface. Alas the Council did not fulfill its part of the bargain! This was now back on 'Wynstay' land. Dotted everywhere were slim mauve flowers of *Comespermum ericinum* also known as Pink matchheads or Heath milkwort. Its many flowers are borne on terminal racemes and the unopened buds are rounded like matchheads. It was sad to see how little is left of the Old Mill which is actually on the

heritage register. Not far away we moved through a paddock and gate to reach the edge of the 'Wynstay' Dam which is fed by a spring. Fay Hargreaves recalled coming there as a child to help her father, Jack Gunn who had potatoes planted there.

Finally we crossed Waterfall Creek or scrambled up its bank, pushing our way through the tangle of thick rainforest until we reached the track. It was fascinating to watch the volume of water plunging down the creek-a rare sight in recent years. The Lower and Upper Waterfall were performing beautifully with cascades tumbling continuously. Walking up Waterfall Rd Libby used the opportunity to attack some errant broom which is always a problem in the bush.

So we returned to 'Merry Garth' for that cup of tea on the verandah and in time to reach cover before the rains came once more. It is always a moment of friendship and peace.

OUR SECOND

OCTOBER WALK

Friday, 29th October 1999

The Second Section of the Six Foot Track from The Megalong Cemetery to the Cox's R.

This walk will be described by John Cardy who has become a very welcome and regular contributor to this newsletter. So many have said how much they enjoy his descriptions and gentle wit. It must be said John was experiencing the side effects of Flu on this day so that it was doubly good of him to undertake this additional task.

Sixteen members gathered in the Megalong Valley on one of those magical mornings of still air and clear blue skies. This walk took us from the point where the Six Foot Track meets the Megalong Valley Rd to the suspension bridge across the Cox's River and return.

We set off past the Obelisk, commemorating the early settlers of the valley who are buried in the adjacent cemetery [it was used from 1892 to approximately 1931] and headed toward the open farmland near Megalong Creek. The recent plentiful rainfall in the area had resulted in these pastures being in lush condition. While the green rolling hills with large swathes of purple/mauve Paterson's curse [*Echium plantagineum*], occasional patches of yellow dandelion flowers [*Taraxacum officinale*] and the mirrored surfaces of farm dams with the background of rugged mountains

created a slightly Celtic atmosphere in this piece of Australian landscape.

As we reached the crest of the first hill the view back towards the shaded sandstone walls of the Narrow Neck Plateau were outstanding with the sea of purple and green in the foreground. The track soon led into a lightly wooded area and granite boulders began to appear. A small creek was crossed and the terrain began to take on a more rugged character. With the increase in tree cover the bird life became more abundant and small native flowers appeared beside the track such as the Native Blue bell or *Wahlenbergia stricta* or *Wahlenbergia graniticola*, the Granite Blue bell and the yellow daisy like flowers which belong to *Helichrysum* or Everlasting family with tubular flowers, probably *Helichrysum apiculatum* or Yellow Buttons or *Helichrysum rutidolepis* or Pale Everlasting. Another possibility is the *Helipterum* or Sunray family, particularly *Helipterum albicans* again a herb with flower heads of tubular flowers.

Soon the sound of cascading water was heard in the valley off to the right and as the track swung left just past one of the several gates on the Six Foot, we caught our first glimpse of the Cox's River deep in the valley near its junction with Megalong Creek. There was a strong flow and we were treated to the pleasant sound of running water for most of the remainder of the outward journey.

At a shady and convenient place [logs to sit on] we settled down to morning tea Ray, our Bonsai expert was the first to see a visitor making a very pointed entrance. A small **Echidna** came ambling nonchalantly down the hillside, totally unperturbed by our presence. Posing for several photographs, holding its beak high in the air frequently, sniffing us humans before it trundled across the track to where Owen [Weaver] was squatting. It pushed its way under his legs and burrowed in against a tree trunk. What a wonderful privilege it is to have such close encounters with the native fauna!

The track now led past some huge granite boulders, descending into a small gully where mosses and lichens became more prolific. Small flowing beards of lichen decorate the rigid structure of blackthorns, [*Bursaria spinosa*] while flat spreading varieties cover the trunk of a gnarled tree overhanging a mossy granite tor. A small creek was encountered flowing from beneath a granite boulder into a small pool before tumbling down the mossy gully. Hanging beneath a nearby monolithic slab of granite was a colony of paper wasp nests, the outline of their structures looking like the inverted skyline of a miniature city.

The sound of running water now intensified as the track descended toward the river and wonderful vistas of the rapids opened up. Soon we were beside the water with turbulent cascades feeding into a deep pool where mini whirlpools pirouetted across the surface of the more

placid, deeper pool. Within a short distance we arrived at the Suspension bridge. This structure, the Bowtell Swing Bridge, was constructed in 1992 by the First Field Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers from Holdsworthy and named in memory of Corporal Robert Bowtell, a member of their unit killed in Vietnam in 1966. It provides an alternative crossing when the river level is high. Some members of our party crossed the bridge, adopting an intriguing variety of walking styles in an attempt to minimise the sway of the bridge (and their bodies). Only one person at a time can cross the bridge.

We chose a spot a short distance upstream to settle down for lunch and what a delightful spot to eat! Ancient casuarinas clinging tightly onto the granite islands, areas of grassy river bank strewn among the huge rock shelves and the relaxing sounds of flowing water----it would be very easy to spend some days here. Lunch was followed as was usual by a slice of Libby's delicious and much appreciated bushwalkers' cake. All this under the watchful eye of a large goanna which was sunning itself on the granite island and in the company of a couple of Skinks which sat at our feet awaiting any stray crumbs.

As we retraced the path back to the Megalong Valley Rd, we passed several groups of walkers on their way to Jenolan Caves. Nice to see so many people getting out to experience this unique environment! Near the end of the walk the cliffs of Shipley and Narrow Neck Plateau came into view, now glowing in the afternoon sun. I find this one of the most endearing aspects of the Blue Mountains; the scenery is never static, changing constantly, sometimes subtly, other times dramatically but always changing.!

Back at the cars we partook of a refreshing cup of tea before setting off on the very scenic drive out of this beautiful valley. Another wonderful day in yet another different and spectacular environment

A special thank you to John for that account. Certainly that period by the Cox's R was a time not to ever be forgotten.

John asked me to mention any trees on that walk of particular interest. As we were surrounded by trees that is a challenge. However there is one that has been in flower recently with lovely creamy wattle flowers. It is a wattle, an *Acacia penninervis*, or the Mountain Hickory although it looks like a eucalypt. Stringybarks, the Black Ash and Scribbly Gums are all part of the scene in the Megalong Valley.

The Bush Care Group continues to work quietly and efficiently. Sloan Reserve on one complete side has been cleared of noxious weeds and the group is working on the other

side. The final day for this year will be on Friday, 10th December, 1999 at 9.0 a.m. at Sloan Reserve.

Hans reminds you that he is happy to have a group walk with him each Tuesday. Do contact Hans on 02-4567 2013.

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

OUR DECEMBER WALK and CHRISTMAS BARBECUE

Friday, 10th December, 1999

The Walk will be down to Bowens Creek from Mt Irvine. Cars will be parked about 1 km down the Bowen's Creek Rd from its intersection with the Mt Irvine Rd. Some cars will be taken to Bowens Creek to transport walkers back to near that intersection. We always welcome offers of help with transport so do let Libby know if you can assist. Bowens Creek is a charming place for afternoon tea.

MEET at MERRY GARTH about 3.00 pm and bring afternoon tea.

THE CHRISTMAS BARBECUE WILL FOLLOW THAT WALK AND WILL OF COURSE BE AT MERRY GARTH about 6.00pm. Keith and Libby will be as always our gracious hosts. We owe them a deep debt of gratitude for their generous hospitality over these many years.

BRING YOUR OWN MEATS, SALADS, BREAD, COOL DRINKS and NIBBLES. Do not forget cutlery and plates.

WE WILL PROVIDE CAKES , DESSERTS, TEA & COFFEE.

Friends are very welcome and if you cannot make the walk come to the Barbecue.

ACTIVITIES in JANUARY 2000

Writing that year 2000 gives one a strange feeling. Yet is it any different from any other New Year? It will be 10 years for our Walking Group and that is no small achievement. The Group offers joy , peace and strength and a deeper understanding of the Australian Bushland to those who follow and participate in its programme. Let those principles continue unabated into this new century.

CANYONING in JANUARY 2000

Libby plans this activity for the second Friday in January. That is Friday, 14 th January, 2000 for Du Faur Creek. If any one is interested Contact Libby at

02-47562121.

There will be no Bush Care on that Friday 14th January.

OUR JANUARY WALK will be in the January, 2000

Newsletter. Yes, you are right no destination has been selected. Do not forget we are always happy for you to make suggestions for our walks.

.PLEASE CONTACT LIBBY RAINES [02-4756 2121] or MARY REYNOLDS [02-47562006] or ALISON HEAP [02-4756 2116] if you are coming on the December Walk and /or the Barbecue.