
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 9 Issue 3

April 1999

GLOW WORM TUNNEL

Our March Walk

Thank you to all those who have made favourable comments about the new format of our newsletter. The editor wishes to express appreciation to her son, John whose expertise and incredible patience have made it possible to overcome many difficulties that have come her way as she tries to cope with the challenges of modern technology.

Friday, 19th March 1999

Once again John Cardy has contributed his account of the wonderful and exhilarating walk we experienced on that Friday. We are all most grateful for his interest and his literary skills. He wrote a note with his description of the walk, saying that he hoped it was not too long (or long winded) ! I am sure you will find that it is in neither of those categories.

The Pagodas and the Glow worm Tunnel

Our small convoy of mud splattered 4WD vehicles arrived at the Glow Worm Tunnel parking area. Seventeen members alighted in misty rain keen to set off on this delightful walk. Many, many thanks to Libby, Alison, Ron and Hans for providing the 4WD's, as the journey from and back to Clarence would have taken much longer and would have been far less comfortable if we had had to use conventional vehicles.

The initial part of this walk follows the old railway formation which we had been driving along for a considerable portion of the journey from Clarence. A short distance from the car park Tunnel Creek is traversed via a pedestrian bridge which collapsed many years ago. The railway alignment is again followed towards the Glow Worm Tunnel until a path is encountered which leads off towards the Pagodas.



Autumn in the Bush

TOPIC

Walking in the Bush during or immediately after rain is a special experience. The moisture intensifies many different aromas and colours, especially those of the mosses and the lichens. The additional weight of water on foliage causes some branches to develop a weeping habit while the reflection of light from water droplets and wet surfaces added a glistening effect not present in dry conditions. This section of track leads through a pretty glen which contains some tall moss covered rock walls and the occasional beautifully buttressed trees. Eventually it meets the Old Coach Road which leads up to the Pagodas.

What a unique and awe inspiring area ! On the skyline above the road are several large intricately shaped pagodas, while the view into the valley is dotted by many more of these fascinating formations. They are the result of the soft sandstone being eroded away by wind and water leaving layers of harder ironstone to form roofs, balconies, domes and ledges in all shapes and sizes. The pagodas were further enhanced on this day by the presence of water droplets spilling over the edges of the ironstone balconies and ledges and dropping into tiny crystal pools. The distant views were limited by the presence of the mist and low cloud but these added a special atmosphere to the scene. We settled down for morning tea on a rocky outcrop in this area surrounded by these magnificent vistas. On these walks we really do dine at all the best places!

Following morning tea we explored the immediate area, some choosing to climb the formations on the skyline while others continued further up the road, discovering some remnants of a steel structure over a gorge. Was it simply a bridge or did it perhaps once support lifting gear to haul timber from the valley ? There was a beautifully constructed section of a stone block wall still

retaining part of the road. What a contrast these long past positive endeavours of man were to the wanton vandalism noted by Hans near the gate where many large pieces of rock formations had been broken off and strewn around. One can only wonder in despair at the mentality involved.

Returning down the the hill a few examples of a small relatively rare yellow paper daisy like flower were noticed, **Helipterum albicans ssp. graminifolium with narrow grasslike leaves**. The track then follows the alignment of the old coach road through a sheltered gully with several varieties of Eucalypts and a fairly open under storey. As the track begins to descend towards the railway formation expansive views of the Wolgan Valley towards Newnes open up, although again the cloud and mist both limited but also added to the scene on this occasion.

At the junction of the road and the railway formation we decided it was time for lunch. A rock outcrop provided convenient seating for the group. Each was left with his/her own thoughts but a mental image did evolve of horse drawn carriages pausing at this crossing to allow the passing of a steam train labouring up the incline from Newnes.

Following the railway formation once again we proceeded towards the Glow Worm Tunnel. Increasing evidence of the past existence of a railway line was present along this section. The outer shell of a locomotive boiler adapted to a drainage culvert, a few partially exposed aged timber sleepers, the remains of a coal dump all bore witness to the hustle and bustle which once occurred in this now tranquil area. In this vicinity yellow Gums or **Eucalyptus punctata** were shedding thick slabs of their corky bark to expose the smooth pale lemon fresh bark which, when moistened by the rain, acquired a brilliant orange / yellow colour in stark contrast with the remaining coarse dark mature bark. The view into the valley provided glimpses of the twin ribbons of the Wolgan River and the gravel road leading to Newnes,snaking in tandem along the valley floor. All of this was against the backdrop of the brooding presence of **Donkey Mountain and Mount Wolgan** with their mist shrouded summits and imposing vertical cliff faces.

Gradually the railway formation began to hug the base of the cliff line. As we rounded a jutting corner of sandstone cliff the open drier forest was instantly replaced by a greener, moister world. Ferns and mosses began to appear with a smattering of rainforest trees which increased in density as we proceeded. We passed a monolithic slab of sandstone which had sheered from the cliff face and was now sitting on the railway formation propped against the cliff. Photographs taken during the railway construction reveal that this huge slab of rock was undercut to a height of approximately 5 metres above the carriage way to allow passage of the

rolling stock. Luckily it did not drop while trains were using the line!

Soon we were following a beautiful little creek through a forest of some of the most magnificent tree ferns one could wish to see. There were trunks of all shapes and sizes, some covered in various mosses and lichens, and others growing at crazy angles then lifting their heads towards the distant sunlight. This lovely creek brought us to the entrance of the **Glow Worm Tunnel**.

This tunnel is perhaps the most significant remnant of the Wolgan Valley Railway, built in the remarkably short time of 12 to 18 months during 1906/ 1907 to service the oil shale mines and processing works at Newnes. The chief construction Engineer for the line was Henry Deane whose name was given by J.H. Maiden (later to be the Government Botanist) to those majestic Titans of the Blue Gum Forest, **Eucalyptus deanei**.

The Tunnel is approximately 400 metres (20 chains) long and curves in such a way that at its centre no light is visible from either end and it is mainly in this very dark area that the glow worms have taken up residence. The glow worms are the larvae of the Fungus gnat. The glow is used to attract prey into their sticky webs. It is said that they glow more intensely the hungrier they become. If this is true they must have been absolutely famished on this day as they lit up the ceiling and the walls of the tunnel brilliantly. It is a really special experience to stand quietly in this cool, damp and dark environment, gazing in wonder once again at another of nature's treasures. Comparisons were made with looking at starlit skies or distant city lights. It was a truly unique display by these tiny creatures.

Reluctantly as always we turned towards the car park and after a welcome cup of tea set off on the return journey to Clarence. It was a long day but it provided a particularly rewarding and pleasurable experience to store away in the memory bank.

DETAILS OF THE RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION can be obtained from:- The Wolgan Valley Railway-its Construction by Henry Deane. The Australian Railway Historical Society N S W Division 1979 .

Many thanks John for that great account. May I add that it was incredible that John rarely mentioned the weather on that particular day! Yet we were all quite a sight as we had that welcome cup of tea, and not to overlook the state of the vehicles or the state of the road! John quite correctly placed the emphasis on the delights we all experienced.

In the last newsletter it was stated that the last time we visited the Glow Worm tunnel was in November ,1993. However that was an error on my part for which I apologise. Our last visit was in March,1996.

DO NOT FORGET THE MOUNT WILSON / MOUNT IRVINE BUSH CARE GROUP. It meets every 2nd Friday of the month at Sloan Reserve in Mt Wilson at 9.0a.m. Friday ,9th April, Friday 14th May, & Friday, 11th June, Friday, 9th July,1999.

Ring Liz Raines for further information on 02-47 56 2121.

OUR APRIL WALK TO THE TESSELATED PAVEMENTS--MT IRVINE FRIDAY, 16TH APRIL, 1999

This is a popular walk which we have undertaken on a number of occasions. It is an easy walk and is quite short and always enjoyable. It is rather special as this was the first walk we organised as a group back in May,1990. Nineteen came on that walk in May, 1990 so let us make sure we do better than that in April, 1999.

MEET AT THE VERY END OF THE MT IRVINE RD. BEYOND THE GATE at 10.00 a.m. or at Merry Garth at 9.45 a.m.

BRING MORNING TEA, LUNCH & AFTERNOON TEA.

FURTHER WALKS

Friday, 21st May, 1999 To the Grand Canyon, Blackheath . Probably our 4th visit.

Friday, 18th June, 1999 To Mt Tootie; The Fire trail overlooking Bowen's Creek.

Friday, 16th July, 1999 To Glenbrook and the Red Hands Cave. A new walk for our Group.

Friday, 30th July, Evans Look Out, Junction Rock, and Govett's Leap. A Classic Walk, difficult and hard.

Friday, 20th August, 1999 To Mt Airley via Cullen Bullen- Capertee and Glen Davis Rd. a long drive.

Friday, 17th September, 1999 To Gooch's Crater or Centennial Glen.

Friday, 15th October, 1999 The Southern Fire trail and back via the Waterfall Ttrack at Mt Wilson.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

A reminder in case someone may have forgotten!

Again thank you to all those who have been so prompt in paying.

Bill Smart & Helen Freeman are still under going treatment. However we expect Helen back very soon and Bill is showing substantial improvement. It is all very encouraging.

A newcomer to Mt Wilson Peter Dempsey has joined us. We welcome him and his wife, Catherine to our Group and hope they can join us on our walks very soon.

Contact Libby Raines (02-4756 2121) or Mary Reynolds (02- 4756 2006) or Alison Heap (02-4756 2116) if you are coming on 16th April Walk. Always let us know in advance it is such a help.