

This walk was the final one for the year 2000 and it is most appropriate that John Cardy should describe it for us as he and his wife, Helen have become constant and loyal supporters of this group.

Rigby Hill

Friday 15th December 2000

The earlier threatening clouds had cleared and we were blessed with a beautiful, early summer afternoon as twenty one gathered at the Pierce's Pass carpark for the short walk to Rigby Hill. [Named by the way after Mrs Rigby's son].

This walk is only a little more than half a kilometre in each direction. However it is a classic example of good things coming in small packages. The first gems to delight the eye are the flannel flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) growing in small clumps beside the path, their velvety white bracts tipped in soft green are irresistible to touch. Scattered among these flannel flowers are the bright pink flowers of the trigger plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*) which holds its stigma and stamens on a tiny "hammer" which is triggered by visiting insects who are bashed on the head or back thus releasing and/or collecting pollen; the wonders of nature are endless.

Attention is then drawn to the coppery coloured new growth on some of the Banksias as the path leads along a small ridge with views across to several hanging swamps, their open light green expanses contrasting with the darker olive green of the surrounding trees. These natural "sponges" retain and regulate the flow of water to the rainforest areas and eventually to the Grose Valley streams far below.

A slight dip into a small gully is negotiated and we then climb onto Rigby Hill proper. Glimpses of the spectacular walls of the Grose Valley give a tantalising preview of the panorama about to be revealed. The sight of a pair of walkers on the path to Walls' Lookout which runs along an adjacent ridge adds scale to this expansive scene. As we reach the southern edge of the hill, the full majesty of the Grose is laid out before us; on this occasion shrouded in a faint haze resulting in a softening effect on the sandstone cliffs. This was unlike our previous (1997) visit when it was very clear and the walls had a golden glow. One of the many charms of these mountains is the capacity of the same scenes to be presented in so many guises.

We all chose vantage points to settle down and soak up the magnificent vistas before us; Blackheath Walls directly opposite; to the right Bald Head and Baltzer Lookout with an edge-on view of the spectacular Hanging Rock and Banks Wall off to the left. Immediately below the ledge we occupied were some samples of the Cliff Mallee (*Eucalyptus cunninghami*) a tiny member of the eucalypt family restricted to the cliff lines of the Blue Mountains and which rarely exceed one metre in height.

No matter how often you walk in these mountains there is always some thing new to be observed. For instance I have never before seen anyone throw himself off a 350 metre high cliff !! Today was the day, when not one but three people leapt off Walls Lookout with the third not content with simply jumping into space but performing a double

backward somersault before letting go of the small drag parachute which opens the main parachute. "Base Jumping" I believe it is called. I could think of other names! Personally whenever I leave terra firma, I want to be supported by something which has at least four engines and is under the control of an experienced pilot;

Having taken in our fill (if that is really possible) of the wonderful views from this little knoll, we retraced our steps to the carpark, passing along the way some Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) displaying their fresh crop of beautiful red tubular flowers and a Native Currant Bush (*Leptomeria acida*) carrying its small edible fruit which, in 1804, was by necessity eaten by botanist George Caley during his epic journey to Mount Banks.

Back at the carpark we met up with the base jumpers. Interesting to note they all wore knee pads for protection when they landed on the talus slope but the only one to wear a helmet did so because it carried a camera to record the event. While not wishing to disparage a sense of adventure in the young, the priority displayed in protecting your knees from a few scratches rather than your head against possible skull fractures perhaps says something about people who jump off cliffs.

At Merry Garth our numbers more than doubled for the Christmas BBQ, this year held on the beautiful recently completed patio with its islands of stone floating in the paving. Once again we are indebted to Libby and Keith for their generous hospitality. It was wonderful to be able to catch up with those members and friends who for various reasons had not been on recent walks.

So another year of glorious walks and treasured companionship drew to a close as the mountain mist rolled in creating a mystic, almost surreal effect over this magical garden.