

Here is John Cardy's account of the June Walk and, as always, provides depth and great interest.

The Six Foot Track – Jenolan Caves

Friday 16th June 2000

Our tiny convoy of four vehicles set out from Mt Victoria under a sky masked with a veneer of gossamer cloud, but the day held the promise of remaining fine. This really is one of the most picturesque drives in the region with the spectacular scenery which opens up at the descent of Victoria Pass; the beauty of the Cox's River at Glenroy with its wonderful stands of *Casuarina cunninghamiana*; the seemingly endless folds of rolling hills in the Kanimbla Valley; the mountain escarpments in the distance and the lighter green colour and geometric shapes of the plantation pines contrasting with the natural forests all leading to that majestic, mysterious area Jenolan Caves.

After passing the tiny hamlets of Lowther and Hampton, it was with some surprise that a sizeable drift of snow was seen still sitting in a sheltered cutting beside the road. On arrival at the Binda Cabins on Kiaora Hill, Libby's patented car shuffle program was put into operation, resulting as is usual with the right number of vehicles and people at the correct ends of the walk. So we settled down for a quick morning tea in the clearing adjacent to the Binda Cabins.

The walk follows about the last 5 km of the 42 km Six Foot Track which runs from the Explorers' Tree near Katoomba to Jenolan Caves following the original horse track marked in 1884 and reopened in its present form as a walking track in 1985. This section of the track essentially follows the Binoomea Ridge, the name given to the whole locality by the Gundungurra tribe who originally inhabited the caves area. (Binoomea means "**dark places**"-- very apt). With our thirteen participants suitably refreshed and rugged up against the chilly breeze, (even yours truly opted for track pants over the usual shorts) we set off into this open forested area.

Initially the walk takes on the air of a pleasant stroll down a country lane as it follows a fire trail which had been recently graded, the trees creating a tunnel effect over the road. The fibrous-barked Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) is one of the tree varieties present here. There are occasional glimpses of the rugged valleys either side of this ridge, the Jenolan River to the west and initially Pheasant's Nest Creek to the east. At the point where the Mt George Fire Trail continues straight ahead and the Six Foot Track diverges to the right there is a magnificent view to the east down the steep sided gorge formed by the Jenolan River which has swung around the point of the ridge via the Caves complex, and disappears into the wilderness in the direction of the Wild Dog Mountains. The Jenolan River actually swings north again towards its end and joins the Cox's River approximately 2 km upstream from Breakfast Creek, the destination of our extra scheduled walk in June.

The descent towards Jenolan Caves now begins in earnest. In this more sheltered environment the growth becomes more lush and rock outcrops are covered in mosses and lichens, creating wondrous tapestries of various colours, forms and textures. Of course in nature's usual quirky way, lower down the hill there is an outcrop of rock completely devoid of any moss or lichen and having the appearance of a well laid, finely finished stone block wall. Glimpses are now seen of the Manager's residence high above Caves House -- an almost surreal effect -- a European alpine lodge transposed into the Australian bush. The limestone cliff faces are now evident, a few small cave entrances giving no hint of the abundant treasures held within. Suddenly we are walking among limestone outcrops. We must be on the roof of the Devil's Coachhouse and then we are at that famous viewing platform, looking down at the Blue Lake through Carlotta's Arch, a wonderful vista no matter how many times you have seen it before.

We then followed the circuitous path (like that one Tom?) down to the valley floor stopping on the way at the Peephole to gaze in awe into the vastness of the Devil's Coachhouse. The path to McKeown's Valley provides a very pretty walk. (McKeown was the escaped convict who hid out in this area and it was the search for him which led to the caves being discovered by Europeans around 1838). There is lush growth, although unfortunately many exotics are intruding, there are sheer limestone cliffs, a stunning example of a Kurrajong tree (*Brachychiton populneus*) in a perfect Bonsai form high on a rock outcrop, tiny bridges to cross and re-cross the rubble filled river bed and then the valley walls widen and a perfect lunch spot is found on a flat open area which was once used as a playing field. Adjacent to this area there is a fenced enclosure in which an attempt is being made to breed the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby. I have memories of visiting the caves during my teenage years and at the northern end of the Devil's Coachhouse there were literally dozens of these wallabies present. It is a sobering thought that in less than 40 years they have become endangered.

As we returned toward the caves we encountered a magnificent male lyrebird scratching in the leaf litter. Prompted by some whistling from one of our group, he paused to give a short recital then continued his foraging totally unperturbed by our presence. We then wandered slowly through those two stunning majestic features of the Jenolan Caves system, the Devil's Coachhouse and the Grand Arch, absorbing the special atmosphere they present. The area never fails to evoke a special feeling in me, the scale and grandeur of the place is just overwhelming.

Instead of afternoon tea back at the cars, we opted to stop off at the restaurant and have cappuccinos/hot chocolates instead and very pleasant it was gathered together talking of other walks in other places, some achieved and some still on the list. What a deliciously decadent way to finish a bushwalk!

For me the icing was put on the metaphorical cake of another wonderful day of walking when on the drive home, over the paddocks near Lowther, I sighted a Wedge-tailed eagle. Ah Bliss!!

Many thanks John for your story of that walk. I am sure you all felt as though you were there with the walkers from his graphic and detailed descriptions.