

Lockleys Pylon

Friday 17th March 2000

Twenty one members and visitors set out for the walk to Lockley's Pylon--twenty one drowned rats returned! **[So begins John Cardy's account of this excellent walk. You will all be highly entertained by John's story.]**

In between we saw some of the most spectacularly expansive views, magnificent heath lands and beautifully muted valley scenes you could ever wish to experience.

Following Libby's usual efficient vehicle rationalisation, we drove along the Mt Hay Rd on this fairly warm Autumn day, the morning mist beginning to burn off as the sun rose higher in the sky. Libby led the way in the 4WD to check the condition of the road, following recent heavy rain. Soon after passing Mt Flat Top we arrived at the starting point of the Lockley Pylon track. Before commencing the walk, we convinced Ern who had forgotten his cap, that the white paper bag he had substituted was not a particularly good look and a spare cap was found quickly, although I must say the paper bag did provide an interesting pixie like effect!

We initially walked through a low wooded area which soon gave way to more open terrain as the track rose toward the Pinnacles, three interestingly shaped rock formations where the results of Mother Nature's sculptural talents were on display in abundance. We settled down here for morning tea amid a fashionably white garden of the tiny flannel flower [*Actinotus minor*] and *Platysace linearifolia* with its dense heads of tiny flowers. This provided a stunning foreground to the view of Fortress Creek Valley with its lush emerald hanging swamps nestling against large dark rock shelves.

Suitably sustained by the combined effects of drinking in the views and the morning tea, we continued onto the highest pinnacle which provided 360 degree panorama. Our goal for the day, the flat topped symmetrically sloped Lockley's Pylon could be seen beyond the crest of Mt Stead. The ghosted profiles of Mt Hay and Mt Banks loomed eerily through the haze, while a tantalizing hint of the majestic sandstone walls of the Grose and Govett Gorges was occasionally visible through the mist. Reluctantly we descended from this vantage point to rejoin the main track, noting on the way the intricately convoluted formations in the rock faces.

Here the predominantly white floral display was infrequently punctuated by the brilliant red flowers of the Mountain Devil [*Lambertia formosa*]. There were also some magnificent examples of *Banksia serrata* with large girthed gnarled trunks stunted by the effects of wind and fire. The track, on occasions, became enclosed by the Blue Mountains Mallee Ash or *Eucalyptus stricta* as it crossed a small saddle where the soil was quite sandy and which led to the gentle climb up Mt Stead. Scribbly gums [*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*] and Geebungs [*Persoonia sp.*] began to appear along with the Hairpin Banksia [*Banksia spinulosa*] and the Heath Banksia [*Banksia ericifolia*] in this section. Descending from Mt Stead, the track suddenly emerges from the wooded area and leads onto an exposed ridge of beautiful low heath where expansive views across Walford Gully to the right open up while ahead the Pylon beckons. Here there were a few

examples of that intriguing tiny plant [*Hybanthus monopetalus*] with its large lower mauve petalled flower. **[The side petals are minute].**

The track winds to the left around a rocky knoll and the vista is even more impressive. The clearly visible line of track, leading to Lockley's Pylon adds a sense of perspective to the scene. With the exception of the cliff line near Fortress Hill which was glowing in the sunlight, the sheer walls of the gorges were shrouded in a misty curtain which parted occasionally then closed, adding an air of mystery and softness to the landscape while above distant storm clouds were building.

One of our visitors, Betty decided not to go to the summit, settling down beside the track at a vantage point on the saddle below the Pylon. On reaching the top of the Pylon and looking back to the lone figure of Betty, sitting in that vast landscape gave a scale and proportion which emphasised the magnitude of the panorama before us.

The views from Lockley's Pylon can only be described as spectacular. Fortress Creek plummeting over the cliff line on its way to join Govett's Creek far below, the route of previous walks could be seen in the lines of Govett's Creek and Govett's Leap Brook, meeting at Junction Rock, while the distinctive silhouette of Pulpit Rock and the vertical cliff face at Perry's Lookdown were visible through the haze across this vast chasm. A lone eagle was seen soaring on the thermals as we settled down, not only for lunch but also to absorb this atmosphere -- what a privilege it is to have relatively easy access to places such as this!

The return journey started pleasantly enough; a welcome cooling breeze arrived. As we approached Mt Stead, a few drops of rain increased the cooling effect, and generated that beautiful scent which accompanies rain in the bush. Some thunder was heard but it was very distant. These few drops of rain were, of course, just the edge of some far off storm, weren't they?

No, they were not! The pessimists or realists among us donned their rain gear, while we optimists pretended it was not really getting heavier. Helen and I brought our high tech, Gore-Tex rain gear, great stuff -- keeps you completely dry but breathes so that you do not become hot and sweaty while walking. *But it was back at the car wasn't it? Very Handy!*

As we left the partly sheltered Mt Stead the heavens opened. Soon the tracks turned into minor streams. When we reached the Pinnacles there was a spectacular display of mini waterfalls and cascades right across the rugged rock faces. *You all stopped to admire this, didn't you?* In this area we had a graphic demonstration of the erosion effects on walking tracks. In places the water was above top of boot height. Not only was it evident that silt and small stones were being carried along in these temporary streams but rocks the size of margarine tubs were seen tumbling down the track. Here was an object lesson in why you should not cut corners on zig zag tracks, thus creating steep track lines for the water to rapidly erode.

Eventually we arrived back at the cars! Some sought immediate refuge in these vehicles, others stood in the rain while having a cup of tea, while others just stood in the rain!

Of course shortly after beginning the drive back to Leura the rain eased to a few drops. In our car Betty [receiving a lot of mentions, Betty] kept us entertained with her tales of

becoming isolated in the heavy rain near the Pinnacles and not being sure of the track, turning back to a point she recognised, knowing that Libby and others were still behind her. However while doing this, she stumbled on the flooded track. *The thought flashed through her mind that she was going to drown on a walking track high on a ridge in the Blue Mountains!*

So ended another fabulous walk; the minor discomforts will soon be forgotten and the day will be all the more memorable because of the rain. *Our Gore-tex will always be in our packs from now on, regardless of what the weather looks like in the morning!*

A fabulous walk and a fabulous story from John Cardy.