

**John Cardy tells us the story of this walk with his usual skill and style.**

## **Mt Wilson – The Northern Fire Trail, Du Faurs Rocks and Pheasants Cave**

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2001

It was with just a little apprehension that I agreed, when asked by Mary, to write an account of this walk around Mt Wilson environs, knowing that many residents receive the newsletter. I'm afraid my knowledge of Mt Wilson and its surroundings is not as complete nor as profound as my love for the place. So be gentle with me dear readers should the occasional place name be misplaced or some other statement prove to be a "non-core" fact.

Fourteen gathered in the sublime Spring ambiance of Merry Garth in perfect weather which it must be said, at the risk of tempting fate, has become customary for our walks of late. The plan was to walk via the Cathedral of Ferns, along the Northern Fire Trail to Du Faurs Rocks, then explore the walks in that vicinity before finishing with the Sunday Afternoon Walk. An immediate delightful sight was the trunks and branches of trees opposite Merry Garth encrusted with those exquisite jewels of the rainforest, the Orange Blossom Orchids, (*Sarcochilus falcatus*) in full bloom.

A short stroll along Davies Lane and we diverged onto the track which runs through the delightful little pocket of rainforest behind Campanella Cottage and Linden. There are examples here of Possumwood (*Quintinia sieberi*) in various stages of development on the trunks of tree ferns. They have a similar habit to strangler figs in that their seeds germinate in crevices on the tree fern trunks. Initial growth is slow until the roots eventually extend into the soil. This accelerates the growth of the *Quintinia* and the host tree fern ultimately expires. Another of nature's quaint little ways! We continued past Jamine, Tolimount Cottage, Bisley and Bryn Mawn all clothed in their glorious exotic Spring robes and emerged at the Cathedral Reserve. Crossing the Mt Irvine Road we entered the Cathedral of Ferns and made our way through this enchanting area to the Giant Tree, that awe inspiring *Eucalyptus fastigata* or *Brown Barrel* which towers above the understorey of magnificent tree ferns.

Leaving this cool, enclosed environment we moved onto the Northern Fire Trail to be met by the golden glow of the *Dillwynia* or is it *Pultenaea*? There are so many species of each and one possibility, *Dillwynia brunioides* was previously *Pultenaea brunioides* so I will leave it to others to determine the species and just enjoy the expansive spectacle it provides. Beside the trail there are examples of *Epacris calvertiana* var. *calvertiana* displaying their delicate cream tubular flowers.

As we progress occasional beacons of bright red Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) light up the pervasive yellow background and the pink petals of Black-Eyed Susan (*Tetradlea ericifolia*) contrast brilliantly with the bright green foliage and black crumbly bark of the Geebung (*Persoonia levis*). All this against the background of ridges and valleys stretching into the distance under a sparkling blue sky. I have read accounts of the Australian Bush being drab and colourless. Who ever made that assessment was obviously in urgent need of the services of Gibb and Beeman.

Suitable logs and boulders were selected as seats on an embankment overlooking Crab Creek, more latterly dubbed Serendippity Canyon, to relax a while, enjoy morning tea and the extensive vista. While listening to the pleasant banter and drinking in the panorama before us one of nature's miniature delights was noticed. Peeking out from below a fallen branch was the elegant light blue form of a Plain Sun Orchid (*Thelymitra nuda*); a tiny gem set on this vast landscape, Serendipity indeed! (Incidentally how on earth could anyone name such a beautiful flower the Plain Sun Orchid.)

We continued along the fire trail through this undulating sea of gold, frequently punctuated by the lustrous red flotsam of Waratahs bobbing on the wind driven waves. The Exit Track from the Wollangambe meandered enticingly into the bush, crying out to be explored. Here the Broad-leafed Hakea (*Hakea dactyloides*) displayed its fine spidery white flowers. Soon the bare graded trail became grass covered, the surrounds take on a more lush appearance and the sculptural form of a tall group of Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyanthea australis*) provided a pleasant contrast.

Presently we arrived at Du Faur's Rocks which was our lunch stop and a more agreeable place to enjoy a midday meal on a day such as this is hard to imagine. Rosemary and George received a surprise visit from a large inquisitive skink. At least Rosemary was quite surprised! After calm returned the skink gratefully accepted a piece of apple which it battled to consume for quite some time, eventually abandoning the effort and wandering off to pursue easier fodder.

Patricia and Ern called it a day at this point; the rest of the group set out towards Chinaman's Hat, passing on the way a lovely example of Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia sp*) in full brilliant yellow bloom. On rock shelves in the area are numerous sharpening grooves, evidence that the original inhabitants certainly knew how to choose a work site! After taking in the view from atop the Hat, we descended below the cliff line and soon encountered those magnificent rock overhangs. At one point the lip of the cliff above released an occasional water droplet, each one glistening in the sun as it plummeted to the rubble patch beside the path, perhaps symbolic teardrops shed for the graffiti carried in these majestic overhangs. Heading towards the Pheasant's Cave we passed the quirky formation of the Table Top Look Out, a wonderful example of the Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) carrying a full head of brilliant pink flowers and numerous specimens of the Dog Rose (*Bauera rubiodes*) their dainty, multi petalled flowers bowing shyly on slender stems.

As we negotiated the final descent to the gully which leads from the Pheasants Cave many tree ferns were encountered. King Ferns (*Todea barbera*), Rough Tree ferns, (*Cyanthea australis*) and Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) are all represented. Crossing the tiny stream leads to a cool, mossy pocket of rainforest. At this time only a trickle of water descends from the rock ledge above, falling in front of the cave which has been occupied by lyrebirds, thus the origin of the erroneous name. A large moss covered vine lies coiled nearby like some giant serpent frozen in time.

After lingering for some time in this magical environment we reluctantly retraced our path towards Du Faur's Rocks. Near the top of the first steep pinch the group rested on a large rock ledge, taking in the view across the gully to Esme's Lookout. We took the

more direct route back to Du Fours Rocks via the steps cut into the rock face. On reaching the road we decided to return to Merry Garth, strolling through the Village via Sloan's Reserve, The Avenue, Waterfall Road and Galwey Lane. A spectacular route on which to finish a walk in any season, absolutely glorious at this time of the year. Thanks to Libby and Keith's hospitality we enjoyed afternoon tea in the gardens of Merry Garth - a wonderful finale!

We did not manage to complete the Sunday Afternoon Walk; that will have to wait until another day -- perhaps one pleasant Sunday afternoon ----- ?

**Thank you to John Cardy for that detailed and lively account of a walk very familiar to those lucky enough not only to be in Mt Wilson but to walk there as well.**