
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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**PRINCE HENRY CLIFF
STAIRWAY, FEDERAL**

Our February Walk

FRIDAY 21ST FEBRUARY
2003

RAIN GLORIOUS RAIN!

Ten walkers gathered in this now strangely unfamiliar but extremely welcome wet atmosphere to explore the Katoomba cliffline and the valley below.

We set off from the Katoomba Falls Picnic Area, following the Prince Henry Cliff Walk, the first section of which has been paved and so allows wheelchair access to the Cliff View Lookout. At this lookout signs have been erected which carry inscriptions in Braille, another thoughtful innovation. Full marks to the authorities concerned. On this day however we were all put on a similar footing to any unsighted person who visited, for nothing was visible beyond the guard rails.

Past this look out the route reverts to an unpaved track and we were able to emulate Alan Marshall, that marvellous Australian writer with his auto biographical novel, "I Can Jump Puddles" for we, too, could jump puddles and many of them ! { Just a little note from M. Alan Marshall spoke at our home many years ago and what a courageous and inspiring person he was at that time and a wonderful story teller. Some may not know that he was crippled with Polio as a boy. }

In this area the Coral Heath [*Epacris microphylla*] displayed its clusters of tiny brilliant white flowers and it transpired these were one of the varieties of wild flowers we encountered throughout the entire walk. Soon we were at another blanked out look out where some fine examples of young Blue Mountain Ash [*Eucalyptus oreades*] had their smooth white trunks



Autumn in the Bush

WALK, GIANT PASS, FURBER STEPS

almost camouflaged against the background of heavy mist and cloud. At Lady Darley's Look out the lower track was closed for refurbishment so we climbed the stairs which led up to the roadway. Along this short spur track the glorious rain-induced gloom was punctuated by the brilliant red of a single flower of the Mountain Devil [*Lambertia Formosa*].

A funny thing happened on the way to Echo Point. It was the first time in the many visits I have made over the years that there was not another person in the area. Now it is an extreme understatement to say this was not a day for panoramic views

but I found the lack of people rather eerie. It must be said that the development work being carried out here is being done, I feel, in a sensitive manner, considering the popularity of the site. The "dry stone" walls, paving and stainless steel guard rails create as unobtrusive effect as would be possible consistent with the huge visitor numbers involved. I was pleasantly surprised to see the stone arch forming the commencement of the walk to the Three Sisters had been retained along with the "imitation rock" shelter shed into which we retreated for morning tea. [One can only hope that having made the decision to retain this shelter more attention is given to maintenance and cleaning of the interior]. Having completed morning tea and upon resumption of our walk towards the Three Sisters, I felt much more at ease; for now hordes of visitors had arrived on the scene—this was much more normal !

As we made our way toward the beginning of the Giant Stairway, it was an absolute pleasure to observe the water running down rock faces, reinvigorating the tiny ferns and mosses. The shrubs beside the track were bowing gracefully under the unfamiliar weight of dampness and you could almost hear sighs of relief emanating from the parched bush as the plants thirstily absorbed the moisture. As a gap momentarily appeared

in the mist, I am sure I saw the closest of the Three Sisters smile!

Making our way carefully down the Giant Stairway in these slippery conditions, we were occasionally walking behind tiny transient waterfalls which leapt from the overhangs above. On other occasions we had no option but to walk through these falls as they cascaded onto the stair way. The walls here are decorated with Rock Sprengelia [*Sprengelia monticola*] and the *Dracophyllum secundum*, neither of which is in flower at this time but which both have glossy leaves which are stem-sheathing, the latter having miniature pineapple like leaves. Long sections beside the stairs are densely covered with the brilliant light green fronds of the Pouched Coral Fern [*Gleichenia dicarpa*]. As we descend deeper into the valley the mist begins to break and ghostly glimpses of the eastern escarpment of Mt Solitary appear and a changing vista of the forest canopy far below is presented.

Suddenly we emerge onto the Federal Pass at the base of the Giant Stairway and proceed toward Katoomba Falls. It really is a pleasure to be in a valley environment once more with copious moisture present after such a long dry spell. The normally shining leaves of the Black Wattle [*Callicoma serratifolia*] have even more lustre from the coating of rain water. The mosses and lichens clinging to fallen tree trunks and rock faces are far more vibrant and the scents which waft from the bush are greatly enhanced during and immediately after good rainfall. Deep green fronds of the Rasp Fern [*Doodia aspersa*] embellish the dark forest floor with the occasional soft pink tip of young fronds adding to the display. A battered and gnarled smooth-barked Apple [*Angophora costata*] stands beside the track; its anything but smooth bark a brilliant deep apricot made richer by being soaked with the rain. The rain now had almost ceased, most of the drops descending on us being those released from the forest canopy. It was very pleasant walking now, the silence only broken by the musical chorus of distant bellbirds and the not so distant melodious tones of Helen, my better half, solving the world's problems with another member of the group!

A large rock overhang high above the track provided an ideal lunch spot. Looking out into the forest from this dry refuge as the rain once more increased in volume, it was hard to imagine a more pleasant place to rest awhile.

The sound of rushing water in the valley below became a thunderous roar as we rounded a bend and approached the base of Katoomba Falls. This was a stunning sight. Above us the huge shards of water appeared to be simply falling out of the mist and crashing onto the rocks upstream from the tiny bridge. Downstream the foaming torrent of white water careered between huge moss covered boulders. These waters from the source of the Kedumba River will rush through the Jamison and Kedumba Valleys collecting strength from a myriad of

tiny tributaries to eventually be tamed and imprisoned in the Warragamba Dam. Standing adjacent to all this uncommon activity is a tree which itself is uncommon in the mountains, a Black Sassafras [*Atherosperma moschatum*]. As we ascend the track toward the lower station of the Scenic Railway we pass that magnificent specimen of Turpentine [*Syncarpia glomulifera*] displaying a patch of lighter coloured bark adjacent to the viewing platform. This caused by the hands of innumerable passers-by unable to resist the urge to touch such an ancient giant of the forest.

Crossing the bridge above the Scenic Railway, we set off to explore the circular boardwalk which winds past the bottom station of the Scenicender cable car. The loop section of the board walk was not completed when we last visited this area. Again this construction has been very well done considering it must cater for such large numbers of visitors. The presence of this boardwalk gives the opportunity to many people who would not normally venture into such areas to experience and hopefully gain an appreciation of rainforest environments.

As we descend further into the valley we pass magnificent examples of Coachwood [*Cerapetalum apetalum*], Sassafras [*Doryphora sassafras*] and a couple of stunning specimens of Blue Gums [*Eucalyptus deanei*]. There are also sections of the forest floor which have been cut and leveled and remnants of abandoned apparatus which serve as reminders of the coal and shale mining periods in the area. Nature however, in her relentless fashion is slowly reclaiming her territory. At the lowest point of the boardwalk there is a "Rainforest Room" which is set up like a small chapel. The "Reverend Rosemary" mounted the pulpit and was keen to conduct an impromptu service however her water-logged flock was not very cooperative!

The boardwalk then winds its way back up the hill past many examples of rainforest species such as the Bulwarra [*Eupomatia laurina*] which carries a guava tasting fruit in winter, the Pepper Bush [*Tasmannia insipida*] and the Blueberry Ash [*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*]. At a sharp turn in the walk a huge Lilly Pilly [*Acmena smithii*] stands, leaning precariously down hill and nearby there is a veritable "magpies' nest" of Five-leaf Water Vine [*Cissus hypoglauca*] twisted and twined into a grotesque tangle before the vines eventually climb to the sunlight above the forest canopy. As if to soften the appearance of this bizarre sculpture Mother Nature has totally encrusted the vines with Rock-felt Fern [*Pyrrosia rupestris*].

We wended our way back past the Scenicender, the Scenic Railway and many plastic coated tourists to begin the ascent of the Furber Steps. Two short side tracks along the ascent led to vantage points which gave spectacular close up views of Katoomba Falls in "full flight". The sense of the power of the Falls at close range was awesome and adequately compensated for the lack of an overall view due to the heavy mist and

cloud. Witches Leap Falls was also spell-binding in its raw beauty; a seething column of white crashing through the brilliant green of the rainforest.

Soon we were back at the Reserve from which we had started, having crossed the innocuous little creek which just a few metres downhill leaps over the cliff edge and transforms itself into the breath taking Katoomba Falls we had just experienced.

Thus ended a wet, waterlogged thoroughly worthwhile and absolutely wonderful walk.

John Cardy produced this highly descriptive and graphic picture of what must have been a very memorable walk.

Our March Walk

FRIDAY, 21ST MARCH 2003

TO THE GLOW WORM TUNNEL

Fortunately the road to Newnes is now open.

This will be the Group's 4th visit to this fascinating area. We were last there in 1999 on a rather damp day. If it is very wet the road may not be negotiable.

It is very important to contact us early for this walk for the following reasons 1. transport is dependant partly on the availability of **FOUR WHEEL DRIVE** vehicles. We would be grateful for help with this aspect. 2. It is a long trip of some 34 Km. and hence a long day. Libby and I particularly request early notification if you are coming i.e some days before 21st March.

Bring a torch for the tunnel.

The area is quite special with its pagodas, its views of the Wolgan valley, the story of the railway which traversed the area and the glowworms in the tunnel !

MEET AT CLARENCE near the ZIG ZAG RAILWAY at 9.00A.M. or at MERRY GARTH at 8.30 A.M.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

FURTHER WALKS

As yet we have not been able to plan ahead for our walks but do not forget that our April Walk will be on the Monday 14th April 2003 as the third Friday is Good Friday 18th April 2003.

BUSH CARE

Fortunately the Bush Care dates remain the same. The attendance in February was excellent and we were able to consolidate the work done at Sloan Reserve by removing weeds around plantings done last year for Hans and in the Federation Centenary area.

It is a year since Hans passed away but for those of us who knew him well he is always with us on every walk we undertake.

DATES to REMEMBER

Friday 14th March 2003 meet outside Jalscene, Galwey Lane Mt Wilson at 9.00a.m.

Friday, 11th April 2003 meet in Silva Plana Mt Wilson at 9.00a.m.

Friday, 9th May 2003 meet in Silva Plana Mt Wilson at 9.00a.m.

For further information contact Beth Raines on 4756 2121

MEMBERS NEWS

Recently Alison Heap who looks after our finances has been in hospital for surgery and is now home. We hope her recovery will be very rapid so that she can return to caring for those priceless cattle which keep on winning all those prizes.

Kathleen Howard Smith, a member for some years and a loyal supporter was in hospital but is now improving. We send our warmest good wishes for her complete recovery.

One of our founding members, who left Mt Irvine some years ago to live in Patonga, Fae Boulton passed away suddenly last Saturday, 1st March 2003. We remember Fae and her husband, Cedric with much affection. Fae was a fine craft person and had a wonderfully vibrant personality. Cedric who was a great auditor of the Bushfire Brigade books and the Progress Association Books will find life very empty. We extend to him and his family our deepest sympathy at this time.

FOR OUR MARCH WALK

CONTACT at least 2 or 3 days before the walk: Libby Raines 4756 2121 or Mary Reynolds 4756 2006 We acknowledge the help from C&W Printing Mort St. Lithgow with the printing of this newsletter