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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## THE GLOW WORM NEWNES

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### Our March Walk

FRIDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2003

Almost one hundred years ago these tunnel walls were illuminated by the light spilling from the fire boxes of massive seventy ton locomotives as they lumbered to and from the Wolgan Valley. Today the walls are delicately decorated by a myriad pin points of blue luminescence emitted by the *Arachnocampa richardsae*, the diminutive Glow Worm. This exquisite sight was the grand finale for this walk; however many spectacular displays, both man-made and natural, were encountered as we made this journey.

Fourteen walkers gathered at Clarence on this glorious morning. There was an invigorating chill in the air and the blue sky was devoid of cloud. This was one of those days when everything seemed just right with the world. Sadly of course it most certainly was not but let us escape from all that for a while. We welcomed George Knott's sister, Shirley who was visiting from the Queensland Gold Coast. Surely she would agree a day more perfect than this couldn't exist even north of the border.!

The usual efficient organization by Libby had each of us allocated a seat in the three available 4WD vehicles [many thanks to Libby, Fred and John for providing them] and we set off on the 34 km trip through the Newnes State Forest. The gravel road had been recently graded and was in quite good condition. A journey of approximately forty five minutes delivered us to the Glow Worm Tunnel car park.

We initially followed the railway formation which is built up quite high in this area. The path deviates to drop down to and across a small creek and then climbs



Autumn in the Bush

## TUNNEL, PAGODAS –

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stairs which ascend through an impressive narrow cleft in the rock face to rejoin the route of the railway. A short distance on we turn right onto the track which leads to the Old Coach Road and the Pagodas. This path wends its way through a shaded gully containing large moss and lichen covered boulders before meeting the Old Coach Road. We then make the short climb up the hill to where the magnificent vista of the Pagodas is revealed.

The view of these formations on this crystal clear day was stunning. In some cases their splendour was enhanced by the stark landscape

resulting from recent fires. The intricate wind and water worn sandstone structures with their layers of harder ironstone protruding to form ledges and canopies of intriguing shapes brought to mind images of the temple ruins of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. What better place to enjoy morning tea, surrounded by these amazing monuments to nature with a distant view in to the Wolgan Valley provided as a bonus.

We spent time here to explore, some choosing to climb pagodas, taking extreme care not to damage the fragile ledges. Atop one pagoda, growing in what could only be described as the harshest environment imaginable, was a "Pagoda Daisy" [*Leucochrysum graminifolium*—formally *Helipterum*]. This tiny plant is unique to this area, its fine grass like leaves and brilliant yellow "paper daisy" flowers presented an extreme contrast to the almost bare rock surface on which it grew. The area surrounding these pagodas had been burnt and the blackened remnants of the burnt plant material resembled giant spent matchsticks protruding from the landscape. It was pleasing to note the re growth occurring, although, only just emerging at this stage, it was plentiful. An extra benefit to us was the recent fires had resulted in the germination of a number of the tiny relatively rare Flannel Flower

[*Actinotus forsythia*]. It has pink central flowers surrounded by white velvety bracts only about 25 mm across.

The Old Coach Road is then followed as it winds northward through a pleasant gully toward Newnes. Here the smooth white bark of tall Blue Mountains Ash [*Eucalyptus oreades*] contrasts with the dark fibrous bark of the huge Stringybarks nearby. There is a spectacular wind worn cave beside this track. The freshly exposed sand stone is an orange colour so brilliant it literally glows while on the floor of the cave the product of this erosion is almost as fine as talcum powder.

As the track begins to swing left and to descend, the view in to the Wolgan Valley is presented. What a wonderful bucolic scene this was—lush green fields dotted with black cattle. The distant drone of a tractor could be heard as it ploughed long straight furrows presenting a chocolate coloured geometric pattern on the verdant background. Soon the Old Coach Road intersected the railway formation and we headed south toward the Glow Worm Tunnel.

In this relatively dry area the dominant trees were the Grey Gum [*Eucalyptus punctata*]. At this time they were shedding some of their coarse grey bark exposing fresh bark in yellow to orange blotches. Views into the valley open up here with the gravel road and the river snaking along its floor. Donkey Mountain and escarpments beyond provide majestic backdrops.

Presently we are at Tunnel Creek and the environment suddenly becomes moist and lush. The banks are encased in light green Pouched Coral Fern [*Gleichenia dicarpa*] and King Ferns [*Todea Barbara*] become abundant. At the point where we cross Tunnel Creek there is a delightful miniature waterfall and examples of the Umbrella Fern [*Sticherus flabellatus*] decorate the area. As we near the tunnel entrance Soft Tree Ferns [*Dicksonia Antarctica*] dominate. The ground is almost bare here adding to the dramatic effect of the Fern Forest.

The gaping portal of the tunnel beckons us to leave this enchanted forest and venture into a dark mysterious world. Slowly the arched frame of daylight disappears behind us as we move around the curve of the tunnel. As we approach the almost complete darkness of the centre of the tunnel the tiny sparks of blue light begin to appear. On this occasion there are very few Glow Worms on the roof area, they are mainly clustered on the lower section of the walls near the moist floor. Perhaps this reflects the long dry period we have experienced as the larvae favour damp conditions. What a privilege to stand silently and observe this sublime display.

The cycle of the Glow Worm is a relatively short one. Eggs are laid directly onto the wall and hatch in three weeks; larvae emit light immediately on hatching. They develop over a period of months before the pupal

stage of about twelve days and the adult fly known as a Fungus Gnat emerges. The adult flies have an existence of only about four days to mate and lay eggs. Lets hope they make the most of it !

Reluctantly we leave this glittering exhibition and make our way to the tunnel exit. Here many varieties of fern decorate the arch and the cliffs above are composed of an usual horizontal layered effect. This is embellished by masses of what appeared to be streaked Rock Orchids [*Dendrobium striolatum*] growing in horizontal bands across the cliff face.

Soon we are back at the car park having completed a loop of about 8 to 9 kilometres. Shirley was convinced it was more like 18 to 19 kilometres ! Here we celebrated Helen Freeman's birthday with a cake provided by Helen No.2 [Cardy] and studied some of the history of the railway in books thoughtfully brought along by Geoff. The late afternoon drive back to Clarence ended another great walk in brilliant conditions which included an incredible array of the best efforts of Mother Nature and of man.

**Thank you to John Cardy who never fails to produce the true essence and value of the walk he describes.**

#### **A GLIMPSE of the STORY OF THE WOLGAN RAILWAY**

This little tale will not do justice to the efforts of those involved but perhaps will shed some light on how it came to happen and then how it came to just as rapidly disappear to return to the environment so vividly described by John.

**With grateful thanks to “ Blue Mts. Railways” by William Bayley a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society. William was also the father of Ron Bayley who runs the Mt Victoria Flicks.**

In an earlier Newsletter we described aspects of the Hartley Vale mining story . In certain ways this is a continuation of that story. For the N S W Shale and Oil Co. was concerned that the deposits there would fail and in 1882 samples were taken of shale at Gen Alice, and in 1887 from the Capertee and the Wolgan Valleys. Mining began in 1905 in the Wolgan valley. At that stage the products, largely wax for candles, were hauled out of the valley via the Wolgan Gap by horse and bullock team to the railway at Wallerawang.

However Sir George Newnes, a British Industrialist and London Book Publisher became interested after there were good reports of the shale yielding a large percentage of oil. Newnes formed a company, the Commonwealth Oil Corporation in 1905, securing mining leases in the Wolgan Valley. This Company bought out the N S W Shale and Oil Co. and by 1907 the works and housing settlement in the Wolgan Valley were established and named Newnes after the Director

of the Company. Exploration and surveys were commenced to provide railway construction to link with the Great Western Line. Finally Henry Deane, chief engineer of the N S W Gov. Railways decided to use a route surveyed by G Marshall. This route required using curves of 5 chains radius and grades of one in 25 in the standard gauge of 4 feet 8 ½ inches to allow interchange of rolling stock with the main line and to avoid extra movement of products at the junction which would be Newnes Junction on the Great Western Line. The route of descent in to the Valley would be through Penrose Gorge down the mountain side to Constance Gorge then touching close to the Wolgan R. To negotiate these curves powerful engines were needed so the Shay Locomotives were chosen, specially designed for these curves. Two tunnels were built on the single track, both through hard sandstone, hence they were not lined. One was 363 feet long on a curve at the beginning of the descent to Penrose Gorge. At the lower end of Penrose Creek there was a loop for passing trains and below it the second tunnel 1,320 feet long also curved. [The Glow Worm]. From it the line entered Penrose Gorge and followed along a narrow ledge above which the cliffs towered a hundred feet and dropping away some hundred feet on the other side.

The railway construction was commenced in November 1906 and was completed in November 1907. This was seen as an extraordinary achievement. The line was 32 miles from the main line and descended 1,760 feet to the valley. By the time the railway was finished the works were in production. Passenger traffic began in 1907; the journey took 3 hours at an average speed of 10 miles per hour.

Reading between the lines of the highly technical accounts of the Newnes Shale Industry and the operation of the railway from 1907 until its final closure in 1932, it is a sad story of fierce competition coming later from imported oil especially with the coming of the First World War; difficult working conditions for strikes began in 1909 and continued to 1912 when all work ceased. Then in 1914 when an expert engineer arrived and a new retort brought good results things seemed brighter. But continued difficulties finally saw a shut down in 1919. In 1920 work again commenced and there was an attempt to set up a cooperative with the workers. Unfortunately by this time there was little or no trust between employer and employee and the workers refused the offer. In about 1923 passenger traffic ceased. In 1931 for a time the Australian Gov. helped and the tourist trade was encouraged with round trip tickets Sydney to Newnes Junction; rail to Newnes thence road coach to Wallerawang; train back to Sydney. However in 1932 there was final failure and the rails were taken up and sent to the Middle East in the Second World War. Meanwhile the interest in oil production moved to Glen Davis in the Capertee Valley for a time

From 'The Shale Railways of NSW' by G H Eardley & E M Stephens on P 211 is the following: 'During

march 1926 workmen employed on maintenance of the Wolgan Railway and also at the Oil Works at Newnes were paid off and the weekly train service ceased, thus severing the local mining community's contact with the outside world as far as the railway was concerned. Many families who wished to find employment elsewhere were stranded and appeals to the management met with stony-hearted refusal. The people, in some cases had to leave their furniture and belongings and follow the long winding thirty mile bush track to Lidsdale and beyond as best they may. ' Little wonder that working relationships did not function in this isolated valley.

## Our April Walk

MONDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2003

**Note that it is on Monday not Friday.**

**At Mt Wilson.**

**From Du Fours Rocks, along the Sunday Afternoon Spur; then along the track to above Du Fours Creek. Return via the Bogey Holes to Mt Wilson Road at Ryan's Cutting.**

**This walk provides an opportunity to those in our group who could join in for part of the walk but not undertake the whole walk. e.g. Some may like to walk from Du Fours Rocks along the Sunday Afternoon Spur only and join us for morning tea! Do think about it.**

**Walks in the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine District are always rather special.**

**MEET AT THE WALKERS CAR PARK IN THE AVENUE MT WILSON BEFORE YOU REACH THE FIRE STATION. AT 9.00A.M.**

**Some cars will need to be driven to Ryans Cutting on the Mt Wilson Road [4km] sign for the return journey.**

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Apologies for the lateness of the notice of the above walk.

## FURTHER WALKS

Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2003 To Nellies Glen and the first section of the Six Foot track

Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2003 To Newnes in the Wolgan Valley.

Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2003 To Mt Banks.

**BUSH CARE**

This vital work continues and is being supported by a dedicated group. Do join in. It is always pleasant and friendly from 9 . 00a.m. to noon every second Friday of the month.

**DATES to REMEMBER**

Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2003 meet in Silva Plana Mt Wilson at 9. 00 a.m.

Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2003 meet at Silva Plana Mt Wilson.

For further information contact Beth Raines on 4756 2121.

**MEMBERS NEWS**

It is pleasing to report that Alison Heap and Kathleen Howard Smith have both improved wonderfully

A gentle reminder about our unwritten rules when out in the Bush. These rules are of course for all our safety. Every member should follow the leader. It is the leader's responsibility to be in front, just as it is the carer or whip at the rear to be the last . One of the important benefits of our walking group is observing the bush, its plant and animal life as we walk to gain the maximum from the experience. Hence stopping from time to time to observe is an essential ingredient of our walks. At the same time it is of course vital to remain together as a group with the leader in front and the carer or whip at the rear.

**FOR OUR APRIL WALK**

**CONTACT** 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.

Apologies again for the late notice with this newsletter.

The two photographs opposite come from William Bayley's "BLUE MOUNTAINS RAILWAYS" page 64.