
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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CENTENNIAL GLEN BLUE GUM FOREST &

Here is a late edition of the newsletter for August 2004 with absorbing accounts of two walks held in July by John Cardy. The September newsletter will follow with the August Walk.

CENTENNIAL GLEN AND PORTERS PASS at BLACKHEATH

Friday 16th July 2004

Stunted wind blown heath to lush moist rainforest, expansive valley views and tiny fern filled grottos, exposed headlands to enclosed glens, bone dry dusty pathways and tracks through boggy peat beds, warmed by the sun in sheltered places while chilled by the wind on the open plateau - this was a walk full of contrasts. Throw in a rescue and it added up to quite a memorable day.

Eleven gathered at the end of Centennial Glen Road on this glorious morning, stepped off the kerbed and guttered road, down a recently refurbished stairway and into the bushland. The path immediately leads into a shrubby tunnel made up of Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*), Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) and the Needle-bush or Silky Hakea (*Hakea sericea*) through which tantalizing glimpses of the valley could be seen. Passage



Winter in the Bush

BLACKHEATH-THE THE GROSE GORGE

through this tunnel transported us from an urban environment into one of the wondrous landscapes of the Blue Mountains.

We stood in chest high heath which provided a perfect foreground for the extensive views into Kanimbla Valley. The morning sun lit up the sandstone cliffs, their vertical walls accentuated by the talus slopes which lead down to the valley floor. The valley is a

mosaic of tree covered and cleared areas, the latter dotted with farm buildings and the minuscule form of cattle and horses.

A short traverse of this heathland and we begin to descend, turn right at the first junction in the path and skirt around the cliff line below a rock face richly decorated with the intricate forms of ironstone protrusions. We then negotiate some steep stairs down to Centennial Glen. Here we take a short diversion which leads into a canyon like area of the creek where crystal clear pools are fed from an unseen waterfall. (At least unseen by this writer).

Back on the main track we follow the creek which passes under a huge sandstone tor and then drops to a lower level in a rather unique way. Not the usual vertical drop off a ledge or tumble over a rocky cascade, here the water

slides silently down a sensually curved sluice carved in the smooth sandstone. The colour of the various bands of orange and gold exposed in the stone by constant erosion are greatly enhanced by the presence of moisture. Below this point we cross the creek and proceed along Colliers Causeway which follows the contours below the cliff line. Magnificent views of the sheer sandstone cliffs are to be had here. Above us now are towering ramparts and then rock overhangs form long colonnades. Among all this grandeur, as is usual, there are tiny gems such as a few examples of the *Epacris reclinata* lighting up dim corners with their red tubular flowers.

Libby suggested we may pause for morning tea at a sun drenched rock outcrop and before you could say "Scottish Shortbread" Helen Freeman had the thermos out and the tea bag brewing! As we sat here taking in the valley views and luxuriating in the gentle sounds and scents of the bush the muffled tone of a Truckus bigii was a reminder of just how close we actually were to the highway. What a blessing that it is possible to be surrounded by all this beauty and be virtually only a stones throw from the back doors of the good burghers of Blackheath. As Geoff Kelly said when he sees views of the Blue Mountains in travel brochures he is constantly grateful and quite chuffed that he lives in the middle of them!

The track soon begins to change from dry to moist and then became boggy as we reached an area where drops of water fell from an overhang high above. The vegetation was much more lush here with many ferns and banks of moss. A quite beautiful floral display was provided by the brilliant gold of the Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalis*), the pure white of the *Leptospermums* and the soft cream tubular flowers of *Epacris calvertiana* var *calvertiana*. Also in this area was a large pillow of moss carrying an intriguing pock-marked pattern caused by the constant drips from far above.

Soon we reach Porters Pass Gully where we are treated to the sight of a delightful miniature waterfall cascading over a terraced rockface. Here a trough has been hewn into the stone which blended into the natural landscape quite well as its rectangular shape had been softened by moss and fern growth. The scene at the bottom of Porters Pass is one of those magical fairytale dioramas - an ancient gnarled tree sits atop a huge boulder its flattened roots undulating over the surface then digging into the hillside for support. A stairway of large stone blocks meanders informally through the thick leaf litter and disappears between two large moss encrusted rock faces as it winds its way up into this fern filled gully. As we reached a more open rock platform perhaps halfway up this gully the fairytale theme took on a completely different atmosphere for we heard the plaintive cry of a damsel in distress - "Can you help me, I'm stuck on this ledge and can't get off!"

There, across a small side gully was a lady sitting on a rock ledge which led to nowhere. We determined she hadn't fallen to that point and had her indicate from which direction she had come to get to that position. We found an indistinct side track which she had mistakenly taken and several of our group followed this path to help her out while others stayed in sight of her to relay instructions if necessary. As they neared the lady it was obvious that having taken the wrong turn and encountering a dead end she had built herself a psychological barrier which prevented her return. Diana Landsberg crossed the small gully and assisted her in overcoming this barrier and making the return journey. The lady, Kim, who had been walking alone decided she had experienced enough bushwalking for one day and walked with us back up the remainder of Porters Pass. We laid some branches across the side track Kim had taken to discourage others from taking the same wrong turn. A simple rescue which ended well, it did however illustrate the folly of inexperienced walkers venturing into the bush alone.

Lunch was then taken at some pagoda type rock formations overlooking the Kanimbla Valley. One of these formations carried a sign declaring it to be Lamberts Lookout and a newer plaque denoting a natural rock seat as Logans Rest. Logan certainly knew how to pick a spectacular rest spot! Having partaken of lunch we lingered here for some time stretched out on the rock absorbing the warmth of the sun like a group of lizards.

Eventually we pushed on up the hill toward Burton Street. Here three varieties of Geebung were sighted; Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*), Narrow-leaf Geebung (*P. linearis*) and the Prostrate or Mountain Geebung (*P. chamaepitys*). Also present were examples of the Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) carrying large numbers of their compact light green to brilliant yellow flower spikes.

A short stroll along Burton St and Kanimbla Rd brought us back to the open heathland where the track descends gently to Fort Rock. Panoramic vistas of Kanimbla Valley and the ridges beyond are on offer here.

Once more we descend into the valley, passing behind a small waterfall which is part of Centennial Glen Creek. The cliff faces here are marked with many small white blotches which are the residue of rosin used by rock climbers who frequently enjoy their sport in this area. Our observation of the positions they must get into indicated by the rosin marks and rock anchors led us to assume they must be crazy! We continue past the stairs to Centennial Glen and our entry point to the valley of this morning. Soon we are at an enchanting green grotto in which a bath like pool has been built. Despite the beauty of the setting no one felt inclined to take a tub on this chilly afternoon.

As the track gently climbed to a higher and drier area we noted some climbing equipment and then encountered a group of climbers preparing to ascend. Foghorn Leghorn (aka Helen Cardy) could not restrain herself of course saying: "We saw where you people

climb and we all thought you must be crazy. Now we meet you at a cliff like this - you are crazy!" She always was diplomatic! The climbers all nodded in agreement by the way.

Presently we were back on the plateau among the heath. The afternoon sun was now highlighting the hillside before us. The olive green undergrowth was dotted with domes of bronze, gold, red and brown as the heath gently rippled under the wind. The scene was backgrounded by the wonderfully contorted silver/grey trunks and limbs of the Scribbly Gums also moving to the rhythm of the breeze. What a marvellous way to finish the walk, strolling through this scene with only the sounds of the wind, the birds and the chink of the ironstone scree underfoot!

A Footnote:- Today was my last official day of employment, having taken a rostered day off to finish my career of just over 45 years in the electricity generation and transmission industry. I could not think of a more pleasant way to begin my retirement than walking in these glorious mountains with this group of treasured friends.

We wish John a wonderful and rewarding retirement with Helen. We know that their contribution to our bushwalks has been and will be beyond measurement. M.

The Blue Gum Forest and The Grose Gorge

Friday 30th July 2004

We set out on this walk as the early sun illuminated the sandstone walls. The journey was completed under the light of a silvery moon! Along the way we were treated to many stunning displays of the mountain bushland under various nuances of light and shade.

A longer than normal car shuffle was required for this walk which began at Perrys Lookdown on the Blackheath Walls and finished at Pierces Pass Picnic Area off the Bells Line of Road. Once again Libby called on her knowledge of pure mathematics and higher algebra in determining a plan which deposited the fifteen walkers at the correct starting point while leaving the required number of vehicles at appropriate ends of the walk to transport everyone home. Special thanks must be made on this occasion to all those who kindly agreed to provide vehicles for the long road journey between starting and finishing points, namely Libby, Fred Roberts and Joe Landsberg.

This walk took on a family atmosphere with the welcome participation of Diana and Joe Landsberg's daughter Cathy, Libby's daughter Beth and Ray Nesci's son Clinton. We paused at Perrys Lookdown and the nearby Monument Lookout which carries a memorial to four teenage boys who perished near here in a bushfire in 1957. From these vantage points we surveyed the terrain we were to cover today. The majestic Banks Walls, Lockleys Pylon and Du Faur Head towered above the lines of the Grose River and Govetts Creek snaking along the valley floor almost 600 metres below. The confluence of these two water courses marked our main target for today - The Blue Gum Forest.

Having viewed our intended course no one complained of cold feet or indeed a chill in any other appendage so we began our journey into the valley. A lone Gang Gang seemed to be following us high in the tree tops, its raucous comical call perhaps a comment on what we were about to experience.

The initial descent is through open dry country where we were entertained by the tinkling song of Bellbirds, a chorus which was to be with us for most of the day. From the ceiling of a rock overhang an *Epacris reclinata* was getting a different slant on things by growing vertically downwards, decorating the sandstone with its delicate red flowers. Soon

the track drops into a moist gully filled with Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and other more lush growth. As we descend through this cleft in the cliff face the distant views are framed by sheer towering rock walls. An example of the bushland fight for survival was encountered here. A Cedar Wattle (*Acacia elata*) had fallen across the track but had refused to die. All of its branches which had been pointing downward from its now horizontal trunk had turned through 180 degrees and were again seeking the light above. Certainly made it easier to duck under the obstacle.

At the point where the track emerges from this gully we paused for morning tea. The rocky knoll here provided good seating in the warm morning sun. Spectacular views of the cliff face and a stunning rock steeple were enjoyed during this short break.

The descent of some steep steps brings us to the base of the cliff line. The construction of these steps in 1946 was paid for from funds collected in memory of Neville Keith Bruce. A small plaque dedicated to his memory is attached to the cliff face above the steps. Neville Bruce, who died in 1944 from meningitis, was a member of the Rover Ramblers Bushwalking Club started by Paddy Pallin.

From the base of the cliff line the track follows Dockers Buttress to the valley floor. In this area there are examples of Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*) shedding patches of their matt grey bark and exposing a smooth yellow/orange new skin. As we move lower into the valley there are many examples of young Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) displaying pink to orange bark on dimpled trunks. Twining through the understorey beside the track are many Lawyer Vines (*Smilax australis*) and an occasional sighting was made of a vine carrying bright yellow berries, possibly the Wombat Berry (*Eustrephus latifolius*).

A distinct advantage in entering this area via Perrys Lookdown is that you are suddenly presented with the splendour of the Blue Gum Forest. As we descended the last small ridge the group stood transfixed as the majestic Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus deanei*) were revealed in all their glory. At this time most of the towering straight trunks had shed the best part of their mature blue/grey bark and were clothed in fresh white to cream/lemon hues with occasional blotches of orange near their bases. Closer inspection of those trees retaining mature bark revealed patches of the most subtle shades of olive green. (The *Eucalyptus deanei* was named for Henry Deane, the Chief Engineer for the design and construction of the Wolgan Valley Railway to the shale oil works at Newnes. He had a keen interest in natural history, especially the study of the Eucalyptus genus).

Standing in the cathedral like atmosphere of this special place made the descent of 1570 steps from the carpark eminently worthwhile. (No I didn't count them! That information came from Andy Macqueen's brilliant book "Back from the Brink - Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness").

We wandered through the forest to Acacia Flat, soaking up the mood of the surroundings. These Blue Gums certainly brought out the tree huggers in the group. It was almost impossible to resist the urge to reach out and touch the remarkably cool bark of these imposing giants. Some chose to stand close to the trunks of these colossi and gaze skywards to the rather sparse crowns far above.

Following a short rest at Acacia Flat discussing the pros and cons of composting versus pit toilets and other delicate subjects we headed back toward the middle of the Blue Gum Forest. This area brings to mind the expression "Like a child in a lolly shop". Everywhere you look there are instances of extreme beauty. Huge trees standing in splendid isolation, the scale of their girths and heights overwhelming. Then there are vistas through innumerable straight and tall trunks

their vertical presence emphasising the horizontal plane of the river flat. The well worn track meandering through the grasslands of the forest floor gives a sense of proportion to the scene.

Before we commenced this walk Beth Raines stated she thought she had been to the Blue Gum Forest in her childhood. Libby thought it was unlikely. Now she was in the forest Beth felt she had not been before however still had a feeling of deja vu - spooky! It must have been one of those out of body experiences Beth!

Following lunch taken at the cut log through which the track passes we headed north. High on a Blue Gum trunk an orchid was sighted, then we were treated to a visit by "our logo", a Swamp Wallaby surveyed our progress totally unperturbed by our presence. Soon a mix of the native and exotic was seen in the forms of a Lilly Pilly carrying bright purple berries adjacent to a fruit laden orange tree. The track passed close to a few examples of the Sandpaper Fig (*Ficus coronata*) with their coarse raspy leaves.

As we meandered along the banks of the Grose River the grandeur of the forest was replaced by intimate little cameo scenes such as tiny white waterfalls dropping into mirror surfaced pools. Large rock islands dotting the stream carried miniature gardens of mosses and ferns. A waterless channel lined with moss encrusted rocks which was running parallel to the main stream formed a verdant tunnel beneath a dense roof of Grey Myrtles (*Backhousia myrtifolia*). In more open areas the path was at times decorated with the fallen yellow tipped red blossom of the Common Corea (*Correa reflexa*).

Approaching the point where we would cross the river there were some lovely examples of the Forest Oak (*Allocasuarina torulosa*) displaying its deeply grooved corky bark. There were also several large clumps of Rock Orchids (*Dendrobium speciosum*) the more

accessible clumps showing signs of having provided a snack for the local wallabies.

Soon we crossed the river by clambering over the huge boulders in the stream and rested awhile before the long haul out of the valley. As we made our way up Hungerfords Track the afternoon sun provided a kaleidoscope of colours on the cliff faces opposite. Features such as Bald Head, Baltzers Lookout, Burromoko Head, Hanging Rock and Burra Korain Head took on ever changing hues as the sun slowly set.

On entering the more enclosed area of Pierces Pass the dimming light provided yet another ambience. We were surprised by the amount of water flowing in Pierces Creek considering the current dry spell.

As we neared the top of Pierces Pass we were greeted by a wondrous sight. The full silver moon rose above a craggy rock face and bathed the surrounding bush in a very special light. The fronds of tree ferns took on a beautiful almost phosphorescent glow this writer had certainly not seen before.

The sight of wattle blossom under moonlight was also very memorable. The pale cream flowers of Prickly Moses (*Acacia ulicifolia*) and some nearby deeper yellow blossom, possibly Sunshine Wattle (hard to tell in the moonshine) took on the appearance of tiny dim light globes.

What a glorious finish to a stunning walk!

A special note to all our members.

As we have some surplus funds, [See the financial statement by our treasurer, Helen Freeman], it has been proposed that we help the Bush Generation Group attached to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine by purchasing some small saws for use by the women

members of that group. The Bush Generation Group really emerged from the Bushwalking Group so that it seems sensible to assist the Bush Generation Group in this way as it has no funds of its own. We hope you will support this proposal. Mary R.

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