

The Bush Fun Run Track – Mt Wilson to Mt Irvine

Friday 20th October 2006

Part of the route we will follow today is the track taken by the participants in the annual bush fun run from Mt Wilson to Bilpin. The Australian custom of giving abbreviated names to all things has resulted in this event being known by some as the “Willy to Billy”. We will be travelling at a much more leisurely pace along this course in order to appreciate the flora and to soak up the atmosphere of the mountain bushland.

There was a veritable traffic jam outside Merry Garth as the walkers assembled. Libby managed to create order out of this chaos and organised cars to be sent to the finishing point at Danes Way and their drivers to be transported back to the starting point at Farrer Road West. The remaining walkers were accommodated in a rationalised number of vehicles and transported to the start point. Amid all this apparent mayhem Libby’s car had to be left at an intermediate point, as she had to leave the walk early in order to be back at St George’s Church for Alice Kirk’s funeral service. It was all too much for me; I just jumped into Fred’s vehicle and was duly delivered to the start.

So it transpired that we all arrived outside Wollangambe, Wendy Holland’s lovely property in Farrer Road. Here we met Robyn, Robert and Barry of the “Bilpin Coffee Walkers” back for a second cup. We welcomed Victoria Arnold a friend of Jan Northam, John Meade from Mountain Lagoon and Robert Bearup from Oberon all newcomers to the group. Our Swiss visitors Marie and Heinz were with us again along with their host Anne Pigott and Anne & Don Clarke’s son Peter also joined us today. This gave us a total of twenty-four walkers.

Being outside Goonong once again, the charming property and former home of Margaret and Ern Morgan, brought back memories for many of us of Ern on the many walks he attended with the group up until 2002. We trust recollections of those adventures continue to bring pleasure and comfort to Ern.

We set off along the road that leads to Smiths Hill. This road, which was recently upgraded to provide access to the subdivisions on the hill, meanders agreeably through the majestic stands of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) and Blaxland’s Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus blaxlandii*). Various smaller trees in the understorey are cloaked in mosses and lichens and drip with the fleshy fronds of Rock Felt-ferns (*Pyrrosia rupestris*). Off to the right are the open undulating paddocks of Gowan Ross and as we pass the cattle yards of this property we begin climbing the steep pinch which leads us to the summit of Smiths Hill.

Watched by a young magpie with fluffed up feathers, which was ensconced on a fence rail we make our way past a couple of deep wombat burrows as we approach the crest of the hill. Below the gnarled spreading limbs of a stately old gum tree we take advantage of some convenient logs and settle down for morning tea. A pleasant time was had catching up with those who had not been on recent walks and with new and visiting walkers.

Continuing on we make our way back down the hillside past Lawyer Vines (*Smilax australis*) displaying at this time hanging clusters of tiny new berries and a few examples of Native Indigo (*Indigofera australis*) with their delicate lilac flower heads. Turning left at the Gowan Ross boundary the path takes us through a delightful little pocket of rainforest and past the rustic basalt dam wall built by our late walking friend Bill Smart and his brother Hugh in 1967. This dam and its associated pump house sits cosily in the gully among Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) and Cedar Wattle (*Acacia elata*). A short climb and we are on Farrer Road East near its junction with Mt Irvine Road.

A short stroll along Mt Irvine Road and we diverge onto the track which veers off to the left. Near this point is a large abandoned stationary steam engine/boiler unit, its rusting bulk an incongruous sight sitting as it does in the bush with no other visible evidence of associated machinery. The track dips down into a shallow gully roughly following the power line easement. Here the Purple Twining-pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*) with its small racemes of violet flowers does indeed twine through the undergrowth. Black-eyed Susans (*Tetradlea rubioides*) decorate the edges of the path their pink flowers contrasting with the bright yellow blooms of the Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia saligna*).

As the track descends further into the gully the bright green foliage of the Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) is prominent and the Bush-peas (*Pultenaea* sp) provide gilded flashes on the hillsides. Scattered among the undergrowth, in increasing numbers as we proceed, are the deep purple flowers of the Native Iris (*Patersonia sericea*) and the emerging flower heads of the Broad-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) embellish the scene with spiky globes of gold.

Soon we come across one of those magnificent beacons of the bush, the Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*). This botanical name loosely translated means 'a most showy plant seen from afar' which is of course very appropriate, however their brilliant red flower heads seen close up are simply exquisite. The orb of densely clustered individual blossoms sitting above a circle of gently curved bracts presents a stunning picture.

Shortly the track begins to climb and skirts around the base of a rock outcrop which carries a clump of Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) that are just coming into bloom. From this outcrop and from the area just above the eye is drawn back across the gully by the straight line of the power easement cutting through the dark green of the bushland. On the slope opposite the conspicuous soft green new spring foliage of the exotic trees at Lindfield Park and Gowan Ross contrast markedly with the surrounding native growth. The mud brick homestead of Gowan Ross sits snugly in this landscape.

Continuing up the hill, guided by Libby's deep knowledge of the area, we wend our way through the maze of tracks which cross this patch adjacent to the Touri property. Here there are examples of the Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia* sp) carrying their red centred yellow flowers among spiky foliage. The warm sunny weather has coaxed a number of Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* sp) to unfold their elegant blue petals held aloft on slender stems.

Scattered among the undergrowth are some Blue Dampiera (*Dampiera stricta*) displaying their softly crinkled blooms.

Presently we leave the fire trail and make our way to a series of rock shelves which prove to be an ideal place to pause for lunch. The view from here is across the deep gorge of the Wollangambe River to Lost Flat Mountain and to the vast wilderness beyond.

Following lunch we made our way down to Mt Irvine Road. Here Libby had to leave us and comforted in the knowledge that it would be almost impossible for me to get the group lost between here and Carisbrook on Danes Way she handed over the leadership to yours truly.

We moved onto Scrivener Pass which was once part of the road to Mt Irvine, the existing road built in the 1960's bypasses this section. The embankments and rock overhangs above the track were bare and blackened by recent fire. The resulting dark background devoid of any low vegetation highlighted the smooth silvery trunks of a group of tall eucalypts, a stunning sight.

So it came to pass that we began the climb up Danes Way. There was a fresh wind blowing and just an occasional spot of rain as we followed this ribbon of road as it weaves through the imposing tall timber. There was a flash of red in the canopy and a squawk of protest as a pair of Crimson Rosellas reacted to our intrusion into their domain. We paused at the tiny cemetery where many of the founders of this area now lie at rest on the hillside. Soon we were at the vehicles deposited outside Carisbrook in the car shuffle this morning and we made our way back to the starting point in Farrer Road West.

We indulged in the usual afternoon cuppa and associated goodies, which of course for those of us who live some distance away provides essential nourishment for the long journey home, I'll leave it to you locals to rationalise your indulgence.

Now, you know what I'm about to write; that's your bushwalking lot! But next month we have a marvellous walk for you all, make sure you don't miss it.