

Kanangra Walls in the Kanangra-Boyd National Park

Friday 15th September 2006

Within the National Museum in Canberra resides a purpose built pram trimmed in canvas with wire-spoked wheels and many compartments to carry food, water, etc. This pram was made by bushwalker and conservationist Myles Dunphy to transport his son, then aged twenty months, when Myles and his wife Margaret walked from Oberon to Kanangra Walls during the early months of 1931. Myles first visited the area in 1912 and became so enamoured with this neck of the woods that he named his son Milo **Kanangra** Dunphy. Also on display with the pram are some tiny homemade leather shoes. These were not for little Milo's benefit but to protect the feet of their dog which accompanied them on this return journey of at least one hundred and twenty kilometres.

We left Mt Wilson on one of those deliciously perfect days. The crisp still air of an early spring morning glistened under a cloudless blue sky; the sun illuminated emerging blossom in many of the gardens. A quick stop at Mt Victoria to pick up Geoff Kelly, again at Hampton to collect Anne and Don Clarke and our now complete party of ten continued along Jenolan Caves Road. But wait, this wasn't in the script! Dark menacing clouds began to appear threatening to rain quite heavily on our parade. However this proved to be only a passing menace for the clouds began to disperse as we descended into the deep valley in which the Jenolan Caves nestle.

This is a magical area of the Blue Mountains; the steep twisting road conveys us to the floor of the valley where the wooded slopes are suddenly replaced by sheer limestone cliffs, the grandeur of Carlotta Arch forming a window to the sky high above the yawning entrance of the Grand Arch. Headlights on as this gaping mouth sucks in the road like a strand of spaghetti and we pass groups of tourists waiting to explore the spectacular cavities within the bowels of Jenolan. Past the majestic old Caves House and we climb out of the valley to emerge onto the Boyd Plateau.

As we turn onto the unsealed Kanangra Walls Road, which takes us the final twenty-seven kilometres to the Walls, we are pleasantly surprised to see it has been freshly graded. Further on we pass the graders and roller at work and it is only on the final nine or so kilometres that we have to do some pothole dodging. Presently we reach the end of the road which is the point where this very special walk begins.

Over the last twenty-seven kilometres we have traversed gently undulating, wooded countryside. After a walk of just a couple of hundred metres along a level path we are at a point where the edge of the plateau has been rent by deep ravines. Cut by brooks and creeks that tumble over numerous waterfalls these ravines plummet five hundred metres to the Kanangra Deep.

This vista is stunning. On the southern side of Kanangra Creek is the grandeur of the lofty walls; pockmarked with many tiny caves they rise vertically from the talus slopes. North of the creek the steep sided Thurat Spires thrust up from the valley floor. This line

of sharp pinnacles stands in stark contrast to the flat-topped landscape opposite. The wider view, dominated by Mount Cloudmaker is on this day free of any distant haze. Remnants of those earlier threatening clouds, now broken into woolly fragments that scud across the sky, greatly enhance the panorama. We stopped here ostensibly for morning tea but the main bill of fare was the spectacle before us.

We then headed down past an amazing cliff face consisting of an interesting conglomerate material and entered the little sheltered gully where the Dance Floor Cave is located. The young locals of Oberon constructed a wooden platform in this cave in 1891. People from Burratorang, Camden, Picton and the Oberon district travelled to this cave to socialise, no doubt using the stock route between the Burratorang and Oberon districts for access. The water container that sits in the cave to collect the clean pure water seeping through the roof was placed here in 1940 by a group of bushwalkers.

Having spent some time in the cave trying to develop a mental image of those gatherings held here so long ago we moved up the ramp to the Kanangra Tops Plateau. The army was called on during the Second World War to construct this ramp to ensure stock could traverse this route which was used from around 1868 up until 1942. Geoff Kelly's eagle eye noted that pieces of old railway line used in the construction of this ramp were of the double-headed type as used in the Wolgan Valley and other shale railways in the mountains. These rails have the same profile top and bottom and therefore could be reversed when the top of the rail was worn - just a little snippet illustrating there is usually a story attached to most items even those that at first appear insignificant.

The plateau is clothed in stunted wind-blown heath with many small areas of bare rock shelf. One of these bare areas carried a large pool of clear water containing several miniature rock islands and was fringed by a couple of tiny sandy beaches. On another area of rock there was a series of shallow impressions running down the slope all linked by a trickle of water sparkling in the sun. Occasionally there were large boulders carrying water filled depressions reminiscent of water bowls seen in Japanese gardens. Although this area is sun-drenched and exposed there are occasional little mounds of moss-covered soil carrying miniature forests. As is usual Mother Nature provides a variety of small cameos amidst the expansive panoramas.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is presently doing some track upgrade work on the plateau. The heath is being cut back from the tracks making walking much easier than was the case on our last visit in July 2001 when we virtually had to push our way through the growth.

The heath in this area includes the Dwarf She-oak (*Allocasuarina nana*), the Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*), the Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and the Coral Heath (*Epacris microphylla*). This mixture of plants which is constantly trimmed by the elements at work in this harsh environment, blend closely together forming an almost impenetrable hedge. At one point from my position at the rear of the group I could see only a line of heads moving along above the heath. My seriously twisted psyche once

more clicked into gear and I immediately thought of the line of ducks moving across a carnival shooting gallery.

We passed a pair of She-oaks much taller than the surrounding growth standing in defiance of the winds that would whip across this plateau. Continuing on we move into an area not yet touched by the track work and the growth presses in from both sides. Here there are Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) whose gnarled and twisted trunks are coated with copper coloured lichen. The presence of blotches of green/grey lichens on these trunks creates the impression that these shrubs are bronze sculptures carrying the patina of age.

After cresting a low ridge we drop down to a wide clearing right on the edge of the plateau, a glorious place to stop for lunch and absorb the magnificence which surrounds us. The view back up the Kanangra Gorge is dramatic; the silver ribbons of the falls glint in the darkness of the deep ravines, the pointed forms of the spires opposite form an impressive effect with the patterns of light and shade playing on their ridges and deeply furrowed flanks. The chains of ridges and valleys extend into the distance in soft folds and are punctuated with prominent features such as Crafts Wall, Mt High and Mighty, Mt Stormbreaker and Mt Cloudmaker as the eye is drawn all the way back to the Blue Mountains Range. How fortunate we are to have places such as this so easily accessible.

As we were about to leave this little piece of paradise we were treated to two eagles soaring high above and the gentle breeze whistled through the She-oaks as if to bid us farewell.

Back at the car park it was decided we would stop at Jenolan Caves to allow Marie, our visitor from Switzerland who had joined us once more, to get a close look at Carlotta Arch and that we would have our usual afternoon cuppa there. As we drove back to the caves we sighted many kangaroos emerging from their rest spots to begin their afternoon feeding.

The truly beautiful view of the Blue Lake framed by Carlotta Arch is one you never tire of no matter how often it is seen. We also walked a short distance to get a view down to Caves House and were pleasantly surprised to see the track refurbishment work being carried out. The work included installation of stainless steel handrails, new path lighting, upgrading of the path surfaces and floodlighting – very impressive.

A quick look through the peephole into the cavernous Devil's Coachhouse, a welcome cup of tea, a celebration of Marie's birthday for today, a slightly belated celebration of Anne's birthday and we headed for home. We were a little early to get the benefit of the fiery afternoon light on the distant sandstone cliffs however we were treated to a view of the Kanimbla Valley bathed in a muted glow. A charming end to yet another spectacular day.