

Lambs Hill at Mt Wilson – Our Christmas Walk

Friday 8th December 2006

It is hard to believe yet another season of walks has drawn to a close. We have of course encountered all four seasons over the past year and during the pleasantly mild atmosphere of autumn when the bushland is bathed in a softer light we undertook three walks in widely varying environments.

March saw us descend the Golden Stairs into the Jamison Valley. Here we ambled through the lush rainforest tucked in against the towering sandstone cliffs and had a close encounter with a large colony of Bell Miners. We lunched at the Ruined Castle taking in the panoramic views to be had from this prominent eyrie before making our way across the face of the Giant Landslide. We concluded the day with the luxury of a ride out of the valley on the iconic Scenic Railway.

The hauntingly beautiful canyon country of the Wollangambe River below Mt Wilson enticed us in April. We explored upstream of The Beach and entered one of Mother Nature's art galleries. Here there are winding beaches, clear pools linked by shallow brooks rippling across the sand, tree ferns silhouetted against the gentle curvatures of the towering sandstone walls. The grandeur and tranquillity of this cathedral-like area is overpowering. We then entered the eerie gloom of the narrow twisting corridors of Joes Canyon with its smoothly curved walls which almost touch in places. Some gentle 'bush bashing' back up the hill to emerge at Du Fours Rocks completed this day.

A pleasant drive through the Megalong Valley delivered us to our May venue. This was a 'double header' walk. First we made our way to Bellbird Point where we were entertained by the musical tinkling of the namesakes for the area as we took in the majestic views across Breakfast Creek and of the Wild Dog Mountains beyond, a stunning vista. Following lunch we climbed the nearby Ironpot Mountain. This proved to be a very interesting experience. Many of the rock outcrops consisted of a conglomerate of large water worn stones embedded in sandstone, quite unlike any material we encounter in other areas of the mountains. There were many sharpening grooves scattered throughout the area and a series of deep circular holes had been ground into one large rock platform, clear evidence the original inhabitants had a close association with this unique mount.

It was one of those classic clear crisp mornings when we gathered for our first winter walk. We climbed up through the ever-changing vegetation to the summit of Mt Banks and then made our way to Banks Wall. The views into the Grose and Govett Gorges on a day such as this were spellbinding.

We travelled to the Capertee Valley in July. Here we experienced the natural beauty of Mt Airly and Mt Genowlan along with the remnants of human endeavour in the shale mining ventures of around one hundred years ago. The bush is slowly reclaiming its

territory by encroaching upon the remains of cottages and mining structures. A feature of distant views is the conical form of Tayan Pic.

In August the group travelled to the Colo Heights area and walked the Bob Turner Track down to the Colo River. This track drops approximately 350 metres through ever changing tree cover and delivers you to a sandy beach dotted with She-oaks beside a large pool in the river.

Spring has sprung and we made the rather long but very rewarding trip to Kanangra Walls for our September walk. Once again we were blessed with a perfectly clear day on which to drink in the views on offer in this spectacular part of the world. To stand on the edge of the escarpment and look down into the Kanangra Deep is an awe-inspiring experience. The walk along the Kanangra Tops Plateau is always special; on a day such as this it is sensational.

The bush fun run track between Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine was the venue for our October walk. This walk took us through some magnificent stands of mountain forest and exposed us to the charm of many emerging wildflowers. A few soft blue Sun Orchids shyly emerged from the undergrowth while a couple of Waratahs boldly exhibited their brilliant red orbs.

Billowing smoke from the Grose Gorge bushfires formed an ominous background for our last walk in spring. Mount Hay and the Butterbox was our November venue. This is a magical area in which to walk. The delicate beauty of the profusion of wildflowers emerging in the windswept heaths contrasts with the dramatic views of the sandstone ramparts which characterise these mountains. Sadly those fires spread rather rapidly in the days following our walk and the patch we enjoyed so much is now blackened. The fire unfortunately has devastated many of the areas in which we walk including that gem of the Grose Gorge, the Blue Gum Forest.

The first two walks of the year were of course undertaken in the summer season. January found us exploring the Western Fire Trail, Sunday Walk Spur, Du Fours Creek and the Bogey Holes at Mt Wilson. We started in cool and misty conditions however this quickly burnt off revealing a typical summer day. The rugged landscape at Du Fours Creek, the delightful little rill nearby and the shady clearings at the Bogey Holes were just a few of the attractions.

February took us to Katoomba where we completed the circuit along Prince Henry Cliff Walk, down the Giant Stairway, along the Federal Pass and Scenic Boardwalk and up the Furber Steps. This walk exposes us to both the commercial touristy areas and more remote peaceful places in the Katoomba landscape. Here however the sublime mountain scenery eclipses any man made intrusions.

It is suddenly next summer and we conclude this year of seasonal walks as we began, back at Mt Wilson. Twenty-one walkers gathered at Merry Garth on a warm afternoon for the trek to Lambs Hill and beyond.

The group set off along Galwey Lane, veered right to descend Peter's Steps and we were in that pleasant patch of rainforest behind Campenalla Cottage and Linden. Here the blotched patterns of lichen on the trunks of the Coachwoods (*Cerapopetalum apetalum*) stood out in the reduced light below the dense canopy. Also here are examples of the Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*). Possumwoods (*Quintinia sieberi*) are present here in differing stages of development on the trunks of tree ferns. Seeds of these trees germinate in crevices on the trunks of the tree ferns, the roots slowly work their way down until the soil is reached and growth then accelerates resulting in the ultimate death of the host, similar to the action of strangler figs.

Soon we emerged from this little pocket of rainforest to amble along the road beside the properties of Jamine and Tolimount, past New Bywood now beginning to nestle into its site as the new plantings develop and turn right to make our way toward Cathedral Reserve. A pleasant view was had across the manicured park-like grounds of Bisley to the rugged cliffs and bushland of the Haystack Ridge across Bowens Creek.

We crossed Mt Irvine Road and entered the mystical world of the Cathedral of Ferns. Here a light green hue pervades the enclosed dimly lit space. Tree trunks splay into sculptural buttresses in order to ensure a secure hold in the soft soil. Trunks of tree ferns form gracious curves as their crowns of fronds seek a fair share of the scarce available light. The crooked path meanders through this goblin forest of fantastically shaped trees as it climbs slowly up the hill; coiling vines hang from branches high above. It is common knowledge that within every fairytale woods there resides a monster and soon we are at the Giant Tree. This is a huge Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) which towers far above the canopy even though its apex appears to have suffered many breakages over the ages. As we have done during previous visits to this behemoth some members linked hands around its girth and declared it an eight-person tree; it seems to be a different number each time we call.

A short distance further up the hill we emerge from this shadowy world into a brighter but no less appealing area of open woodland. We pass large tree stumps covered with thick carpets of moss, furry silent sentinels to the selective logging which occurred in this area up until the 1960's. Moving past some Blackthorns (*Bursaria spinosa*) that were festooned with beard-like lichen we were atop Lambs Hill. Here a tall open canopy is formed by Blaxland's Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus blaxlandii*) and by the Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*). Below this tall canopy is a forest of Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*) that, along with the ground cover of ferns and bracken, give the whole scene a distinct primeval feeling.

We then followed the path which is the exit track from the lower middle section of the Wollangambe canyon system. As we descend we leave the basalt country and move into sandstone territory with an obvious change in vegetation. Here Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) begin to appear and both the Broad-leaved Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) and the Pine-leaved Geebung (*Persoonia pinifolia*) are prominent.

Soon after passing a group of Forest She-oaks (*Allocasuarina torulosa*) we reach a rocky outcrop overlooking the deep ravine carved by the Wollangambe. Surrounding this outcrop was a 'garden' consisting of many small Old Man or Saw Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) adding to the beauty of this spot. Here we partook of some refreshments before making a more hurried return than is usual to Merry Garth as the starting time for the Christmas barbecue was approaching.

This was an excellent walk on which to end the season for it covered a wide range of superb landscapes in a relatively short distance. Ray Nesci's grandson Luke, who had joined us today, when asked if he reckoned this was better than going to school replied: "Sure is, school should only be one day a month". Who could disagree on a day like this?

Back at Merry Garth our numbers swelled to around forty as we were joined by family and friends for the Christmas barbecue. Here in this beautiful environment we spent a most pleasant evening catching up, discussing our exploits of the past year and possible adventures to be embarked upon in the coming twelve months. Once again we express our gratitude to Libby, Keith and Beth for their hospitality in inviting us into their little piece of paradise. Sincere thanks must also be expressed to Helen Freeman for all the work she does in looking after our finances and the distribution of the newsletter and to Mary Reynolds for her efforts in putting the newsletter together and arranging for it to be printed. And to Libby our heartfelt thanks for the effort you put into the selection, planning, organization and leadership of these walks which we all love so much.

Now the mist rolls in to drape this exquisite garden in a filmy shroud, symbolically bringing the curtain down on another year of walks.