

A Mt Wilson Walkabout

Friday 19th January 2007

It was with a certain sense of anticipation that seventeen walkers gathered at Merry Garth. The announcement of the January walk in the last newsletter simply stated it would be at Mt Wilson, the actual path we would follow to be dependent on the weather. The perfect weather conditions on this summer morning augured well for this walk to be a special experience.

We welcomed Judy Tribe and Denise Romaine who were joining us for the first time today. Libby organised a car shuffle in order that we could all get a ride back to Merry Garth at days end. The remainder of the group spent a pleasant time wandering around Libby and Keith's lovely garden while awaiting the return of the car shufflers.

So the group assembled beneath the ancient tree ferns in the Fairy Glen while Libby outlined her plans for this walk. We were to begin by walking to the back boundary of this property and head toward Waterfall Creek. I was to be initially in an unfamiliar position near the front of the group rather than acting as 'whip' at the rear, George Knott kindly agreed to temporarily fill that role. Those near the front of the group were armed with secateurs and poison in order to attack one of Libby's bêtes noires; the young holly plants that she knew were lurking in the rainforest.

We set off across the Children's Lawn and entered the Woodland adjacent to some giant Banksias (*Banksia integrifolia*). These trees are growing very close to each other, much closer than anyone would deliberately plant them; Mother Nature obviously has no such qualms. Continuing down the slope we pass Meredith's Corner, a place of special significance to Libby and carry on by the Huon Pine (*Dacrydium franklinii*), clearly quite happy here so far from its Tasmanian home. Soon we are at the fence that marks the boundary of this 'blesséd enclosure' and scramble over the wire that Libby in her ever-thoughtful way had earlier covered with some towelling to protect us from the barbs.

We will now be following Matthie's Track through this portion of rainforest which is part of the Wynstay estate. The track is named after Matthie Davies who, when he first came to Australia, worked as a butler at Wynstay for Colonel Wynne. He and his wife Flo later lived in Woodstock on Davies Lane and Matthie formed this track when he walked to and from the timber mill run by the Kirk brothers where he commenced working during World War II. Libby has fond childhood memories of Matthie emerging from the rainforest with his lamp and giving a cheery wave as he made his way past the tiny cottage her parents rented in these grounds at that time.

This is a beautiful pocket of rainforest. The forest contains Coachwood (*Cerapetalum apetalum*), Possumwood (*Quintinia seiberi*), Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) gigantic Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia var compar*) and equally impressive Lillypilly (*Acmenia smithii*) forming a thick canopy. The leafy cover overarches the tree ferns and many ground ferns which inhabit this shaded environment. Today the spears of sunlight

penetrating this shield of foliage bathe the surroundings in a soft light which highlights a myriad shades of green. The effect of the light and shade in this enclosed space was stunning.

The holly hunt was quite successful with many plants being cut and poisoned as we made our way down the hill. We diverted from the track to visit the 'coffin tree', a large straight-trunked Coachwood spared from logging because Syd Kirk decided he would like it to be used to construct his coffin. This of course never happened for the tree is still with us while Syd is not. Nearby is a large Lillypilly which had been deeply blazed many years ago, possibly to mark the position of the chosen tree.

We crossed Priest's Gully and soon reached Waterfall Creek, at this time a creek in name only for there was no surface flow at all. Libby stated it is the first time she has seen it in such a dry state in all the years she has been on the mountain.

The creek line clearly defines a boundary between rainforest and open woodland; there before us is a stunning stand of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*). The tall straight trunks of these trees with their smooth off-white bark glistening in the sun provided a magnificent vista. Seed collected from these trees by our departed bushwalking friend Bill Smart was used by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for regeneration of this species in various locations in the Blue Mountains National Park and plantings in the Cathedral Reserve also originated from this stock. Over the years this area has been carefully managed from a fire control perspective, these trees will not survive a wildfire.

Our walkabout now leads us into more open country as we head south, initially along access tracks and then we plunge into the trackless low scrub. Here below a few scattered Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus schlerophylla*) we push our way through the Bush-pea (*Pultenaea* sp), Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) and Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) some of which carry newly emerging soft grey flower spikes. At our feet are many examples of Grass-leaf Trigger Plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*) displaying their showy hot pink spring-loaded flowers.

Presently we arrived at The Throne, a conspicuous rock outcrop which affords dramatic views across Bowens Creek and back to the ridgeline of Mt Wilson. Atop this outcrop is indeed a 'throne' – a flat topped section of rock that forms a perfect seat. Here one can rest awhile and let the world pass by as you take in the rugged beauty of the surrounding bushland, at this time decorated with the profuse blossoming of the Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*). Here, while having morning tea, Helen Freeman noticed a large 'bumble bee' sized insect hovering nearby which appeared to be guarding its territory. Any insect that encroached within about a one-metre radius of its hovering point was instantly dispatched; a fascinating exercise to watch. Also growing on this outcrop was a small Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea* sp) which had exuded a quantity of resin that clung to the trunk in reddish/orange globules and at its base was a solidified puddle of yellow resin.

Our next stop was at the Old Mill where Matthie Davies had worked all those years ago. It now looks rather forlorn with the machinery mostly hidden below the collapsed roof. The old water tube boiler, which stands a short distance from the collapsed building, presents a fascinating sight as it is now draped in Rock Felt-fern (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*). In this area were a few examples of the Prickly Currant Bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*) laden with tiny red fruit. Those bushes that were bathed in sunlight gave the appearance of being festooned with glistening rubies.

On entering one of the paddocks near the Wynstay dam the cattle decided some food may be on offer and charged down the hill but soon turned away in disgust when no fodder was forthcoming. (Thanks should be expressed here to Wendy Smart for allowing the group to walk through parts of the Wynstay estate.) At the dam several large fish were sighted however we had no piscatorial experts among us so their breed remained a mystery. Skirting around the dam we once more entered rainforest country. We walked a short distance up the bed of Waterfall Creek before climbing the bank and emerging into a magical area of dimly lit forest.

The understorey here is dominated by Soft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) whose trunks have taken on fantastic shapes as they recover from tilts or falls on this steep slope. The ground is littered with decaying logs playing host to countless varieties of fungi. Giant serpentine vines meander across the forest floor before climbing into the canopy. The huge stump of a fallen tree sits in the gloom, its jagged features appearing as parapets and turrets of an ancient castle. This is a wonderfully atmospheric place where one could sit for hours and let the imagination run wild.

Soon we emerge onto the Waterfall Track and take the short diversion to the base of the lower falls. There is only a hint of water on the cliff face yet the mosses covering the dark basalt rock remain lush and verdant. A Yellow-throated Scrubwren has chosen this shady spot in which to suspend its pendulous nest above the creek line. Libby explained there used to be a small dam at the top of these falls from which water was piped to the mill we had just visited. A story is told that a resident of the mount used to bathe in this dam much to the chagrin of those at the mill who used it for drinking as well as for mill purposes. We moved from this pleasant grotto to the base of the upper falls where we settled down in the pervasive coolness for lunch. While we sat here Luke, Ray Nesci's grandson, kept a watchful eye out for leeches; he had no desire to part with any of *his* precious blood.

Rested and sated we made our way out of the cool gully environment and climbed the steep pinch to Waterfall Road. From here our walkabout took us across the footbridge, through Gregson Park, along Queens Avenue and into Wynnes Rocks Road. When we reached Nioka, Helen Freeman's home, she dropped out of the group to attend to other obligations while we continued on to Wynnes Rocks Lookout. The views from here are expansive; across Bowens Creek to Mounts Tomah, Bell, Charles, Hay, Banks and far beyond to Blackheath and Mt Victoria. The path of the recent fire is quite evident in fact stretching along almost the full breadth of the vista on show.

Retracing our path along Wynnes Rocks Road we deviate onto a raked track which drops down into the upper reaches of the northern arm of Bowens Creek. This track was rehabilitated during the recent fire event and is very steep, dropping approximately one hundred and thirty metres from the road to the creek; the slope at times seemed to be about one in one. It initially passes through tall open forest containing some magnificent examples of Blue Mountains Ash having an understorey scattered with Tree Ferns before plunging us once more into dense rainforest. The creek line is quite beautiful; the banks are studded with tall trees whose buttressed bases are cloaked in mosses and lichens while Water Gums (*Tristania neriifolia*) spread their convoluted roots into the creek bed. On the climb back to the bottom of the zigzag where the cars had been left earlier, a brown snake was spotted slithering across the path; young Luke was not at all impressed.

Having negotiated the vertical rise of about forty metres from the creek to the road the sight of the cars was most welcome. We were then whisked back to our starting point at Merry Garth where we had our usual end of walk cuppa in the Fairy Glen. What an agreeable way to end a most interesting walk; exquisite gardens, enclosed rainforests, expansive views, open woodlands, historic structures, tree lined avenues, shady creek lines, clear farm paddocks and deep gullies – had it all really.

A wonderful way to replenish the spirit – A Mt Wilson Walkabout.

Oops Department: In the newsletter covering our November walk to Mt Hay the gremlins got loose. Not sure whether they were of the electronic Microsoft variety or the far more twisted breed that lurk deep in the recesses of my mind. Whatever the case Meri's name appeared as Merle, apologies Meri for the slip – just as well that large rock is safely deposited on the Mt Hay cairn and not still in your hands.