

Mt Wilson Village Walk and Christmas Barbecue

Friday 19th December 2008

The obvious benefits of walking with this group include healthy exercise in fresh mountain air, experiencing the ever changing sights, sounds, aromas and ambience of the Australian bush and enjoying the pleasant companionship and camaraderie which exists. Possibly less apparent yet equally important are the memories that you accumulate and which spring from the subconscious to lift your spirits in times of quiet contemplation.

Following are some random images, dragged from the depths of my decaying memory, of the walks we have undertaken this year.

Who could forget the Blue Mountains Ash near Boggy Bend with their smooth greenish cream towering trunks, long dark tentacles of discarded bark hanging from their mist-shrouded canopies? The group disappearing into the mist below the lofty tree ferns along the Fields Selection track while a single shaft of sunlight speared through the forest canopy is a scene embedded in my memory bank. These images were captured on an overcast drizzly January day during our Zircon Creek walk.

The expansive views from Lunch Rock highlighted by the sun glinting off moisture seeping from the hanging swamps and the undulating heath as wind-generated waves swept across the landscape are impressions remaining from our May walk.

Having lunch while contemplating the perfect reflections of rock outcrops and surrounding woodlands in the mirror-like surface of the reservoir on Farmers Creek and the beautifully proportioned arches of the sandstone viaducts of the Zig Zag Railway. These are just two of the images which linger in the memory from our June walk.

The stunning view from Eagle Nest Lookout of the double drop of Wentworth Falls which were put into scale by the ant-like figures negotiating the stairs on the cliff face opposite was memorable. This grand view contrasted markedly with the tiny rock pools hiding in ferny little grottoes in the enclosed environment of the Valley of the Waters. Visions of 'The Creature from the Black Lagoon' pop into my warped psyche when I recall my better half Helen being hauled from the knee-deep mud of a hanging swamp beside the track. Some of the enduring impressions from our February walk.

October provided us with memories of the intriguing rock outcrop known as 'The Ramparts' which has a primeval feel to it due to spines of iron stone which run along the humps of rock imparting a hint of the fossilised backbone of some ancient being. To reach this open headland with expansive views we dropped into the line of Painui Creek where a green shroud of moss enveloped almost every surface; an overwhelmingly beautiful little glen.

Shafts of sunlight illuminating sections of sculptured sandstone walls and imparting a shimmering light to ripples on the pools in the chambers of the River Canyon remain impressed on my mind. Other images which linger of this March walk are of the vast amphitheatre beneath a rock overhang and the nearby 'wicker basket' nest sitting above the bracken and blady grass.

The delicate yellow flowers of the Pagoda Daisy rising from grassy tufts nestled against the lichen encrusted stone of the pagoda formations is a notable sight from our July walk to the Glowworm Tunnel. The gaping mouth of the tunnel portal viewed through the forest of tree ferns was impressive and the diamond dots of the glowworms though few in number were brilliant. The condition of the road in parts was also unforgettable!

The view down the Wollangambe Canyon from near the launching spot, while memorable in itself, invoked many further memories of canyoning trips in previous years. Other images which stick in the mind from this April walk are of time spent at 'The Beach' surrounded by towering cliffs and trees and of wading downstream from this spot. The 'Horizontal Treecreepers' using the huge log to cross the river also provided an enduring image.

August was extraordinary for all the wrong reasons; the walk was cancelled due to Libby's serious illness.

The prominence of Mt Banks when viewed from Station Rock was striking and the expansive panorama laid out before us at Camels Hump were highlights of our September walk at Mt Tomah. On a much smaller scale yet very impressive were the drifts of Boronia in full bloom and the enclosed rainforest where tree trunks and rocks were draped in velvety moss luminescent in the dim light. Being greeted by a group of Alpacas near the start of this walk added an interesting touch.

By far the most memorable thing about our November walk to Lockley Pylon was having Libby back with us and leading the group once more. A sight which remains with me is of the shimmering swaths of white below The Pinnacles provided by drifts of the Lesser Flannel Flower and the Mitre Weed. On a grander scale are the views of the majestic sandstone walls of Govett and Grose Gorges from the summit of Lockley Pylon and the wind blowing the waterfall on Fortress Creek back up the cliff face.

At the risk of being self-indulgent I will mention a scene which remains imprinted on my memory from a reconnaissance walk Libby and I undertook in early January this year. The overwhelming beauty of Waterfall Creek downstream from Happy Valley is certainly outstanding however the sight of the delicate Crepe Fern, a 'miniature tree fern', massed in terraces along the creek bank will remain with me forever.

I am sure each participant in these walks would have diverse images secreted away in their subconscious but this is one of the joys of walking in the bush. The same landscape delivers many and varied impressions when viewed through different eyes. The big picture of sweeping panoramas, the small detail of tiny plants, the calls of birds, the changing light, the movement and sound generated by wind, the glorious gloom of enclosed rainforest, the weather beaten expanses of open heath, exposed summits and narrow canyons, rippling streams and rocky crags provide for all of us differing precious memories of our walks in the bush.

So we come to the last walk for this year.

We were delighted that Libby felt well enough following her most recent sojourn in hospital to lead the twenty walkers who gathered at Merry Garth for this stroll around

Mt Wilson Village and beyond. We welcomed Kim Gow and Sara Sernak who were able to join us today. The weather was kind to us once more with a gentle wind tempering the quite sunny morning.

We followed Galwey Lane to Waterfall Road and proceeded past Chimney Cottage to Gregson Park. Crossing the little timber bridge which spans the upper reaches of Waterfall Creek we emerged onto Queens Avenue.

As we made our way toward Wynnes Rocks Road there was much evidence of the recent wild weather with many dislodged branches and indeed whole trees lying near the road. On reaching Nioka, the Freeman's property, Helen Cardy collected Buster the Wonder Dog who accompanied us to Wynnes Rocks Lookout.

The wind at this exposed spot was quite strong but the resulting clear air afforded great distant views. Many venues of previous walks were on show; Mount Hay, Mount Banks, Camels Hump and Mount Tomah were prominent on the skyline while Rigby Hill and sections of the Red Hill fire trail could be seen at lower elevations. Features of the Blue Mountains towns on the other side of Govetts Gorge could be clearly identified. Below this eyrie the northern arm of Bowens Creek snaked its way across the landscape below the patches of hanging swamp which stood out along the wooded slopes. As is usual there were smaller gems close at hand, a drift of fifty or more bright pink flower spikes of the Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) illuminated a rocky nook beside the track.

Soon Marion and Robert Bearup joined us having informed Libby they would probably be a little late, thus bringing the numbers to twenty-two plus one dog. We found sheltered sunny spots among the rocks to settle down for morning tea and take in the powerful panorama on offer.

While retracing our steps along Wynnes Rocks Road the expression 'the hair of the dog' took on a different connotation when the group was shown a tiny bird's nest which Helen Freeman had found on the ground in her garden, apparently dislodged by the strong winds. It was made almost entirely of Buster's hair intricately woven into a snug haven shaped somewhat like an eggcup.

Across the open expanse of Silva Plana we could see the marquee and trucks of the film crew who were spending a couple of days in Mt Wilson shooting scenes for a documentary on Charles Darwin, 2009 being the two hundredth anniversary of his birth. Charles I'm sure would have noted the creation of accelerated evolutionary forces that resulted from cameras being present. There was surreptitious primping and preening among the group and best profiles were presented in the hope of evolving into stars of the screen. Despite these efforts to elicit a natural selection no offers of a career in the movies were forthcoming, due no doubt to a little intelligent design on the part of the film crew, so we continued along the Village Walk to the Marcus Clark Reserve.

After meandering through this pleasant area of native vegetation we continued on past the War Memorial, crossed the road and dropped down into Sloan Reserve. We crossed the wonderfully proportioned stone bridge which recognises the contribution of the Valder family over many years to the Mt Wilson community. Here Libby explained that this site was once heavily overgrown with blackberry, ivy and other invasive exotics.

Efforts by dedicated members of the community over many years with weed control and bush regeneration has delivered the relatively weed free environment which now exists.

Crossing the road once more we turned back along the Village Walk and proceeded through Ferny Corner, that delightful shadowy area where the path winds under a massive vine and continues beside the dry stone wall which leads to the rear gate of Sefton Cottage. Here, thanks to the generosity of Liz and Paul Gow we enter this delightful property and wander blissfully along the meandering garden paths which lead us up the tree-clad hillside. We pass the tranquil pool and a host of maples; the tall varieties providing a lacy canopy while the dissectums dot the side of the path with feathery domes.

We linger for some time in this enchanting garden before reluctantly bidding farewell to Liz and moving onto Church Lane. We stroll down the hill shaded by the mix of native and exotic trees past yet another reminder of the recent storms, a large section of a grand old oak lying forlornly beside the road. Through the tunnel of trees on The Avenue we join the Anniversary Walk. Here there is ample evidence of the nocturnal travels of Nature's Bulldozers, the wombats, burrowing under the Wynstay fence.

Presently we are back at Merry Garth having completed a pleasant circuit of this delightful village in perfect weather conditions, a very agreeable manner in which to conclude our programme of walks for the year. Now for the Christmas barbecue!

We are always very thankful for your generous hospitality Libby, Keith and Beth in making your beautiful home and magnificent garden available for holding the barbecue, much more so this year considering the trying times you have all been through. Many, many thanks on behalf of all in the group.

While on the subject of expressing appreciation, thanks to you Helen Freeman for looking after our finances and the mail-out of the newsletters during the year. Also many thanks to you Mary Reynolds for editing the newsletter and for its delivery and pick-up from the printers in Lithgow. As one (with Libby) of the only two original members from May 1990 when the group was formed who still have an active role in the outfit we really appreciate your continuing contribution. Libby, how can we thank you enough for the organisation and leadership you provide for the group, even through the trauma you suffered this year we know you still somehow managed to think of the welfare of the group, what more can we say but "Thanks Heaps".

Thanks must also be expressed for the more immediate activities of Helen Freeman in cooking the three monumental and mouth-wateringly delicious pavlovas, aided and abetted with their decoration by Helen Cardy. (Anna would have been tutu impressed.) Many thanks also to Helen Cardy for organising the necessary supplies, the other desserts and for handling so many odds and ends associated with the barbecue, I freely admit I would not have even thought of some of the details she considered and looked after.

Finally thank you to everyone associated with the group, your friendship, good will, companionship and conviviality make this group very special.