

Lockley Pylon on the edge of Govett Gorge

Friday 21st November 2008

We set off on this walk with an extra spring in our step and a feeling of great elation; Libby was back in her rightful place leading the group.

Delighted as we were to have Libby back with us we didn't expect her return to result in a traffic jam on Mt Hay Road! Margaret Murdoch, who occasionally walks with our group, was leading a convoy of cars taking her walking group out onto the Mount Hay Range when she spotted Libby at our meeting place. She stopped her car and jumped out to give Libby a welcome back hug, temporarily bringing the morning traffic in the area to a standstill. I wonder if this interruption rated a mention on the radio traffic reports.

On arrival today some of our walkers wondered why there were so many new faces in the group. They had mistakenly gone to Margaret Murdoch's meeting place just up the road. Eventually sixteen gathered at our meeting point and following emotive and heartfelt greetings to Libby we set off on the drive to the Lockley Pylon trackhead about nine kilometres along Mt Hay Road.

The weather was kind to us once again, blue sky and windblown cloud scattered in the distance. At our feet as we stepped from the cars was a clump of Slender Violet (*Hybanthus monopetalus*), the prominent mauve/blue lower petal of the delicate flower on this small plant was a portent of the kaleidoscope of colour awaiting us as we progressed along the track.

The track initially leads us through a lightly wooded area and up a gentle incline until we are at the base of the western face of The Pinnacles. Here there are smooth bare rock shelves on the high side of the track and the heathland on the lower side drops away into a small valley where one arm of Fortress Creek rises. The Rush Lily or Vanilla Plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*) is conspicuous here carrying clusters of pink flowers with bright yellow stamens atop long slender stems. The blossom of the Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*) surrounded by tiny velvety bracts combine here with the pure white minuscule four-petalled flowers of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*) in quite large numbers resulting in swaths of white beside the track shimmering in the stiffening breeze. Occasional clumps of Rock Sprengelia (*Sprengelia monticola*) are sighted sheltering among the rocks and illuminating the crevices with their white blossom.

Having skirted around The Pinnacles the track becomes quite sandy. Here there are Broad-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) carrying starbursts of brilliant yellow flowers, the upright Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) and its prostrate relation the Mountain Geebung (*Persoonia chamaepitys*) both displaying their yellow blooms against bright green foliage and tucked in amongst the ground cover are occasional light mauve to pink flowers of the Fringe Lily (possibly *Thysanotus juncifolius*).

A *Hakea* was spotted beside the track carrying young fruit capsules which were very warty, bright green with the warts a lighter green and the surface of the fruit had an almost jelly like appearance. It had needle-like leaves as do many *Hakea*, this writer and several other observers had not seen fruit like this before, perhaps it was *Hakea constablei* which has a restricted distribution in the mountains and does have very warty fruit. Close to this find Jenny Starkey spotted a Cow Orchard or Large Tongue-orchid (*Cryptostylis subulata*), more about this later.

Continuing across the saddle the landscape was decorated with the Slender Rice-flower (*Pimelea linifolia ssp linifolia*) carrying almost spherical white flower heads, the small yellow flowers of *Goodenia bellidifolia* and Long-leaf Coneseeds (*Conospermum longifolium probably ssp mediale*) with their conspicuous terminal clusters of fascinating tiny white flowers which have a hooded upper lip and a lower lip consisting of three lobes. Scattered throughout this area and indeed along most of this track were the blue and purple flowers of what else but Blue and Purple *Damperia* (*Damperia stricta* and *D. purpurea*).

Crossing a meadow like area dotted with the fluffy pink flowers of the Pink *Kunzea* (*Kunzea capitata*) and the blue flowers with yellow filaments of the Tufted Blue Lily (*Thelionema caespitosum formerly included in Stypantra*) we diverted onto a rocky knoll where we paused for morning tea. Most of the group took up positions in the lee of this rocky crag to gain shelter from the now quite strong breeze.

I moved to the edge of this vantage point to gain a view across to Fortress Hill and beyond, on turning back there was a pleasantly poignant sight; Libby was sitting quietly contemplating the expansive view before her, a free spirit thankful and overjoyed to be back in the mountain landscape she loves so much.

The last time the group was in this general area, November 2006, we stood at the Butterbox and watched helicopters water bombing the fires in the Grose Valley. Today I had hoped to perhaps catch a glimpse of a similarly shaped but very much smaller flying machine. The rare and endangered Giant Dragonfly breeds in the hanging swamps in this area spending ten years in their larval stage up to a metre underground in the swamps. They emerge about this time of the year for their eight week flying and mating season. Unfortunately the wind had become so strong that any Giant Dragonfly which took off today would have more than likely found itself wandering the streets of Sydney in search of a mate.

We pressed on toward our destination passing a large drift of Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) and moved into the Blue Mountains Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*) and Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) which provide a tree cover on Mount Stead. After emerging once more onto heathland the track crests a slight ridge, swings slightly to the left and Lockley Pylon stands before us; the line of the track running across the ridge to the base of the pylon brings the vast landscape on show dramatically into scale.

We climb the last steep section of track onto the pylon passing numerous examples of the Strap-leaf Bloodroot (*Haemodorum planifolium*), an unusual plant whose black flowers tinged with yellow possess a rather funereal air; they are related to the Kangaroo Paw. Some in the group, in time honoured tradition, carry a rock to the summit to add to the cairn.

The wind in this exposed spot is gusting quite strongly, indeed strong enough at times to reverse the direction of flow of the waterfall on Fortress Creek. The views into and across Govett and Grose Gorges from this vantage point are stunning. Many of the venues this group has explored on previous walks could be sighted; Mt Hay, Mt Banks, Blue Gum Forest, Perrys Lookdown, Pulpit Rock, Govetts Leap, Junction Rock, Fortress Hill and more.

After taking in the views on offer we surrendered to the strong wind and moved down the slope to a more sheltered area for lunch which of course once again included a welcome serving of Libby's bushwalking cake. Far below us the Grose River continued carving ever deeper into the sandstone on the way to its meeting with the Hawkesbury while immediately below our lunch spot was a rock formation shaped very much like a sombrero, such are the vagaries of Mother Nature's handiwork.

Disinclined though we were to leave this special place we began our descent from the pylon after assuring my better half Helen that she didn't need to continue searching for her sunglasses; she was wearing them!

On the return journey, as Christine Allen was keen to see it, we searched for and eventually found the Cow Orchid that Jenny had spotted on the way out. Near this orchid was a low shrub carrying pink pea-like flowers; was it a Hovea, perhaps a Hardenbergia? A later search of Fairley and Moore showed it to be a *Mirbelia rubiifolia*, the clincher in its identification being the prominent squared pattern of veins on its small leaves which are arranged in whorls of three on its slender stems.

While I was studying this tiny pink flowered shrub others in the group were trying to convince themselves that the flower of the Cow Orchid actually resembled a cow's head. I suggest it would be prudent not to send any of them to do the milking.

So we arrived back at the cars where we had the customary cuppa before heading back to Leura, ending another wonderful day exploring the heath and headlands of this area, the stiff breeze adding to the atmosphere in this exposed landscape.

The day was made very special having you back in the fold Libby and seeing you handle the walk so well. We know you still have a couple of hurdles to clear but rest assured we all have you in our thoughts.