

Reconnaissance Walk, Southern Fire Trail and Waterfall Creek at Mt Wilson

Thursday 3rd January 2008

Libby wished to check out this walk as a possible venue for the group walk. She had some reservations as she did not know the current condition of the raked track down to Waterfall Creek at the end of the Southern Fire Trail and she knew there was a logjam in Waterfall Creek which could prove troublesome.

It was a glorious sunny day as we set off from Merry Garth after informing Keith and Beth of our intended route and a possible alternative.

We dropped down through the rainforest, jumped the little brook in Priests Gully and crossed Waterfall Creek, both of which were flowing well and emerged into the magnificent stand of Blue Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) their creamy trunks glowing in the sunlight. We followed a fire trail which loops around this stand of Ash and connects with the Southern Trail. In this area there were examples of the Crinkle Bush (*Lomatia silaifolia*) their creamy-white flower spikes emerging from clumps of deeply divided leaves. Flowers of this plant closely resemble those of the Grevillea. The views onto the canopy of the rainforest-clad hillsides were splendid.

As we proceeded along the trail Grass-leaf Trigger Plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*) appeared in profusion their hot pink flowers presenting a stunning sight. At a point in the vicinity of a large termite mound which marks one of the tracks to Bowens Creek was a particularly large drift of Trigger Plants. Also not far from here we encountered a large black snake sunning itself on the trail. It stayed motionless, its head raised slightly and neck flattened while we checked out a cleared path beside the track and it was only when we skirted around past the snake that it slithered off into the bush. We stopped near here on a rocky crag to have morning tea.

At the end of the trail proper we began the descent toward Waterfall Creek on the raked track. We cleared some fallen branches and debris as we proceeded in anticipation that the group may be coming this way. As we got closer to the creek we decided that if the group did walk here we would bring a rope to assist in the rather steep descent. There was a sudden change from open woodland to enclosed forest and we sidled along a ledge and dropped down to the creek line. What a beautiful area; the creek banks clothed with moss and tree ferns stood in abundance.

Libby wanted to explore a short distance downstream to a point where a moss encrusted log bridge indicates the point where an alternative route leads up to Boggy Bend. This is a glorious cool spot with the sound of the running creek and the overwhelming greenness of the vegetation.

We then head back upstream, Libby carefully picking a path along the creek, crossing from side to side as necessary to make headway, as there is no track here. At times it was necessary to wade across and indeed occasionally along the creek. We used a log as a

makeshift step to clamber up one rock face and at times had to retrace our path when confronted with a dead end. We sank shin deep in mud and thigh deep in water as it was becoming increasingly obvious this would not be a suitable venue for a group walk.

It was however a magical experience to be in this environment; the beauty of the place was overpowering. There were terraces of the delicate Crepe Fern (*Leptopteris fraseri*) whose crowns of arching fronds sit atop short trunks on the older specimens present here. These 'miniature tree-ferns', massed as they were along the banks, looked stunning. Of the seven *Leptopteris* species this is the only one which occurs in Australia. The fronds of a couple of Soft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) in this area, rather than arching down as normal reached skyward forming a conical flask effect sitting on their thick trunks. We sighted some sizeable fish in a still pool and disturbed an orange yabby as we waded across the creek.

We carefully, one at a time, negotiated the logjam that Libby had been aware was present in the creek. The logs were covered in moss, were extremely slippery and could possibly move or break. Although they presented a slight impediment to our progress the tangle of mossy logs looked quite picturesque. Little waterfalls trickled into the creek from side gullies and huge rock overhangs jutted out above us. We rounded a bend and there before us was the delightful ribbon waterfall dropping into the pool at Happy Valley. We carefully climbed up the rock face beside the pool and sidled along the ledge which leads to the top of the falls.

It had taken us four hours since leaving Merry Garth to reach this spot. It was a fairly solid slog making our way up the creek but the experience was a very enjoyable one which will certainly linger in my memory. We had lunch at Happy Valley and what a delightful spot that is to sit quietly, the relaxing sound of the water the only thing to break the silence.

We made our way out of the valley via the normal Happy Valley track, diverted down to Cathedral Creek and followed its line to Cathedral Reserve, then made our way back to Merry Garth via the delightful track which runs through the rainforest behind Linden and Campanella Cottage.

Our journey showed the route was not suitable for a group walk but, somewhat tired and a little grotty though we were, we both agreed it was a marvellous adventure.