
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 19 Issue 3

March 2009

POPES GLEN AND

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

POPES GLEN and PULPIT ROCK at BLACKHEATH

Friday 20th February 2009



Autumn in the Bush

The prospect of passing through Popes Glen in order to reach Pulpit Rock gave this walk just a hint of the ecclesiastical. And so it came to pass we were gathered here on this glorious morning to partake of this heavenly walk.

Twenty-two souls assembled at Memorial Park in Blackheath where Libby organised a car shuffle in order to leave vehicles at Govetts Leap Lookout to transport weary walkers back to this spot at the end of the day. (Apologies incidentally for stripping Prince Edward Street of its title in the last newsletter; perhaps an unconscious republican power trip on my part.)

We welcomed a friend of Don Clarke, Peter Wholohan, who was joining us today, also Kerri Arnold, a friend of Grace and Chris Weaver. Indeed it was great to have both Chris and his mother Grace back with us. Chris has attended occasionally in recent years but it is quite some time since Grace has been on one

PULPIT ROCK

of our walks and it was lovely to have her back with us again.

We made our way down Wills Street to the start of the Popes Glen Track which drops down toward the line of Popes Glen Creek. We were welcomed into the bushland by a quartet of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos jabbering away quietly as they cracked open seedpods taking advantage of the abundant supply of food.

Around 1994 it was recognised urgent attention was required to remove the exotic plant

material which had heavily infested this area completely smothering the native vegetation. A volunteer Bush Regeneration Group was set up to tackle the problem. Gloria Harris, who was once a regular walker with this group, became very active in this work. Today we will reap the benefit of their tireless efforts in being able to enjoy this beautiful little glen of native flora. (The inspirational work carried out by this group was the genesis of the Mt Wilson Bushcare Group whose first work day was held in March 1999 at Sloan Reserve.)

A little further on a large group of young Blue Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) stands on the opposite side of the creek. Their smooth creamy-white bare trunks, glowing in the morning light, stand slender and tall, appearing as masts of yachts rising above a pale green sea of Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) which grows profusely

along the creek line. The track crosses and recrosses the creek as we head downstream, the tinkling and burbling of the running stream providing a pleasantly musical accompaniment. Nestled against a large moss covered boulder was what appeared as a miniature forest of conifers, possibly a group of Club Mosses (*Lycopodium sp.*).

We reach a track junction but continue on and drop down to Boyds Beach. Here the creek waters cascade over some low rock ledges tumbling into a shallow pool edged with sandy banks, a perfect spot for morning tea. Rob Bearup announced apologetically to his better half Marion that he had only brought one cup, forgetting to bring a cup for her. Marion's instant response was she only required the one cup. Rob's fallback position of using a plastic biscuit container for his tea, while resourceful, reminded many onlookers of visits to doctors carrying specimen containers.

Back on track (literally and figuratively) we pass a small clump of Button Everlasting Daisy (*Helichrysum scorpioides*) their golden flowers and surrounding bracts aglow while nearby Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) carry slender pale yellow candles of emerging flower spikes. Along the track edge here and indeed for almost the entire length of this walk the deep pink flowers of the Narrow-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium lineare*) sit atop slim stems which rise from small spherical basal tufts of green-grey leaves.

Soon we drop down to the creek once more to a second sandy beach and tranquil pool fed by a glistening cascade. We continue along this more enclosed intimate section of the gully until, a little further on, we cross the creek via a series of stepping-stones and climb the stairs cut into the rock face. This delivers us to a vantage point where the setting could not contrast more sharply with the sheltered environment we had just left. There is an astounding jolt to the senses as we are suddenly presented with the expansive grandeur of the Govett Gorge. On most approaches to cliff edges in these mountains you gain some distant hint of what lies ahead

but here this huge chasm suddenly unfolds before you; a breathtaking experience.

The sheer cliff faces in the distance below Fortress Ridge, Lockley Pylon and beyond are bathed in the blue-tinged haze characteristic of these mountains. Closer at hand distinct lines on the talus slopes indicate the boundaries between open eucalypt forest and the more lush pockets of rainforest in more sheltered locations nearer the cliffs. Bleached skeletons of giant eucalypts that perished in the 1982 fires in this area stand out above the forest canopy. The lines of Govetts Leap Brook, Greaves Creek, Katoomba Creek and Govetts Creek wind along the valley floor fed by numerous lesser streams coursing down the slopes. Though entranced by this vista Pulpit Rock beckoned with the promise of even grander views so we moved off to follow the cliff edge track.

We proceed to Cripps Lookout which affords fantastic views of Horseshoe Falls where the waters of Popes Glen Creek plunge to the rainforest of 'The Jungle' far below. The hanging swamps above the cliffs adjacent to these falls extrude over the cliff edge like ruffled velvet. The horizontal ribbons of vegetation on the vertical faces indicate the layers of water retaining clays sandwiched between the sandstone. Also on view are Bridal Veil or Govetts Leap Falls spilling the waters of Braeside Creek over the one hundred and eighty metre high cliff. The localised wind created by the action of the falls themselves sweeps around the concave cliff face pushing and bending the silver band of falling water from side to side.

We pass under many jutting rock overhangs as we continue along the track, some dry and windblown others dripping with moisture and sheltering beds of ferns. Many of these overhangs have been beautifully decorated by the hand of Mother Nature; intricate scrolls, pipes and ledges of ironstone inclusions protruding from the softer sandstone base. Others have been 'decorated' by the not so sensitive hand of man, one in particular being completely covered with deeply carved names, initials and dates; 1969 appeared to be a

particularly busy year for some reason while 1949 also got a mention. (A short aside; at what point do names and dates carved in rock faces cease being graffiti and morph into historical artefacts such as those below the old Quarantine Station at North Head or the names on the rock cuttings of Bowens Creek Road? Just a point I have sometimes pondered, perhaps I should get out more often.)

The ubiquitous Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) lined the track as we proceeded displaying their clusters of red nectar-rich tubular flowers while scattered among the ground cover were occasional Slender Violets (*Hybanthus monopetalus*), the conspicuous lower petal of their tiny flowers adding a touch of mauve to the scene. In moister areas slender stems of Button Grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocepholus*) held aloft tiny button flowers that swayed gently in the almost still air.

Having dropped back a little I watched from across a gully as the group assembled happily at Boyds Lookout. I wondered if they would be so jolly if they were aware of the scene from my perspective; the rock platform they were on jutted out into midair above the valley floor far below.

Presently we arrive at Pulpit Rock Lookout and have a brief preview of the panorama on offer before settling down in the shade on the hillside for lunch. As Libby was distributing slices of her very welcome bushwalker cake Grace Weaver asked how many of these cakes she would have baked over the years, saying she deserved a place in 'The Guinness Book of Records'. Libby had no idea of the number however a quick study of the incomplete walk list that I have with some additional rough guesstimates would put the figure somewhere in the order of two hundred and fifty. An entry in the record books would be well justified.

Following lunch we explored the various viewing platforms at the lookout. Rising from the valley floor was the pleasant 'tink-tink' call of the Bell Miners, also rising from the valley were very large numbers of beetles, possibly Soldier Beetles, dotting the air with

their yellow-orange bodies below green-grey wing covers.

The vertical cliff faces here are stunning; dark weathered rock tinged here and there with reds and oranges. The effects of the November 2006 fires were still evident by the relative sparseness of sections of the forest canopy below. Pleasingly the canopy in the area of the Blue Gum Forest appeared to be less effected. We lingered here for quite some time taking in the extensive views and puzzling over the identity of a pair of bright green trees which stood out in stark isolation among the grey-green of the eucalypt canopy far below. Adjacent to the middle level viewing platform stood some impressive Grass Trees, their relatively short and stout scapes and spikes suggested they may be the Austral Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*).

As we left this stunning vantage point to return to Govetts Leap Lookout we passed some examples of Strap-leaf Bloodroot (*Haemodorum planifolium*) so called because the section of stem immediately below ground level is blood red. A small vine was seen twining through the ground cover and to help in its identification John Meade crushed and tasted a young leaf; a rather brave move in the opinion of Rob and Marion Bearup and myself. We watched John carefully to assess his reaction. Would we have to cross him off the walker list? Would he lapse into a state of euphoria prompting us to try some ourselves? John survived and declared that the sweet taste of the young leaf and the three prominent veins in the mature leaves indicated it was a Sweet Sarsaparilla (*Smilax glycyphylla*).

It is always the case when walking the same track in the opposite direction scenes and details you did not notice on the first pass are revealed. For me one such detail was the cluster of Common Sundew (*Drosera spathulata*) appearing as red stars on a dark moist rock. Another was the hillside crowded with tall and slender but dead trunks of young Blue Mountain Ash, victims of the November 2006 fires.

High above the track there were beds of smooth pebbles trapped within the sandstone, evidence of the geological history of this area. The sands from which the surrounding sandstone cliffs are formed were laid down around two hundred and fifty million years ago. This region was once submerged beneath the sea, then formed as a vast tidal lagoon in which fine silts accumulated. Extensive braided river systems originating as far away as Mt Kosciuszko laid down deep sand deposits. The region was uplifted by the collision of continental plates and the present spectacular landscape is the result of millions of years of erosion which continues today. The pebble beds exposed here were perhaps, millions of years ago, lying in a creek not unlike the stream we had walked along this morning. Here endeth the lesson.

Soon we were at Govetts Leap Lookout and clambered aboard the waiting cars (many thanks to those involved in the earlier shuffle) and were whisked back to Memorial Park where we enjoyed a very pleasant afternoon tea in the shade of the trees, accompanied by the resident ducks. A fitting end to a day in which we experienced environments ranging from a sheltered creek line which had been reinvigorated by the dedicated hands of many volunteers to dramatic cliffs surrounding a spectacular gorge created by the powerful hand and gentle touch of Mother Nature.

John C

OUR MARCH WALK

Friday 20th March 2009

A Voyage of Discovery Following in the Footsteps of Charles Darwin

Darwins Walk, Rocket Point, Undercliff and Overcliff Tracks and The Nature Track at Wentworth Falls.

In this two hundredth anniversary year of the birth of Charles Darwin and one hundred and seventy three years after he visited Wentworth Falls it could not be more appropriate that we retrace his path to the falls and see for

ourselves why he described the view as “extremely magnificent”. This is a fairly easy walk for the most part. The Rocket Point and Nature Track circuits are rated as medium and can be optional provided you are prepared to wait for the rest of the group to return.

Meet at Wilson Park in Falls Road just off the Western Highway at Wentworth Falls, (near the Bowling Club) at 9.00am or at Merry Garth at 8.15am. A short car shuffle to the Conservation Hut will be required.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 after 7pm or Mary Reynolds on 4756 2006

(Note: Helen & John Cardy will not be available to take calls regarding this walk.)

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th April 2009 - Rienits Pass and Bushrangers Cave at Mt Victoria

Friday 15th May 2009 - Nellie's Glen and First Section of the Six Foot Track

Friday 19th June 2009 - Castle Head and Narrow Neck

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated.

13th March 2009 at Wynne Reserve

No April Bush Care (Good Friday)

8th May 2009 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details

Mary Reynolds, an original member and stalwart of the group, celebrated her 80th birthday on 26th February. Congratulations Mary and best wishes from all in the Bushwalking Group. That's the first eighty years out of way Mary, what do you have planned for the second eighty?