
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NARROW NECK AND

OUR JUNE WALK

NARROW NECK and CASTLE HEAD

Friday 19th June 2009

Several days of inclement weather leading up to this walk did not bode well for our chances of enjoying the expansive views from Narrow Neck and Castle Head. As we drove across the Darling Causeway however, views across Hartley Vale were on offer as the cloud began breaking up and the fog lifted.

Nonetheless to quote the US writer and poet Carl Sandburg “The fog comes in on little cat feet” for on our arrival at the locked gate on Narrow Neck we could see no further than a hundred metres.

Undaunted, the twenty walkers set off along Glenraphael Drive to the accompaniment, emanating from the fog, of the guttural calls of unseen Wattlebirds. Closer at hand smaller birds twittered and chirped as they flitted from bush to bush, darting among the dripping leaves and twigs in search of sustenance.

Because of the enveloping fog it was decided we would first walk out along the road past the Corral Swamp area to Narrow Neck in the



Winter in the Bush

CASTLE HEAD

hope that the fog may burn off before we returned to Castle Head.

The prevailing conditions make for very pleasant walking. Off to the right we see the lower portions of hanging swamps; open patches of light green fringed by darker shrubs and the white skeletal forms of the trunks and lower branches of Hard-leaved Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*).

The water seeping from the embankments beside the road forms tiny rivulets which glint

in the subdued light as they course down the hill. As we crest a slight rise we pass a prominent rock formation on our left and the mist swirls down the slope through the open woodland. We ignore both tracks which lead off to Castle Head and swing right before climbing a steep pinch in the road. Now on more level higher ground the fog encloses the landscape; here trees and shrubs loom as dark shadows in the white haze.

The road dips slightly before climbing a gentle slope and disappearing into the mist. A grove of slender Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) stands beside the track, their white trunks blending into the foggy background. Tangled drifts of light green Pouched Coral-fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) line the roadside while here and there dark stalks of the Rush-leaf Bloodroot (*Haemodorum corymbosum*) carry clusters of spent flower heads.

We begin a steep descent through a cutting. On our left the cliff face carries intricate patterns of protruding veins of ironstone; ledges, pipes and scrolls all embellished with lustrous rust-red lichen. As we drop lower we are pleasantly surprised to see that the fog has lifted over Megalong Valley.

This westerly view is stunning. Framed by the cliffs below Fools Paradise on the left and those below Corral Swamp on the right is a pleasantly bucolic scene. Farmlands dot the valley floor, gravel roads snake along beside creeks and around hillsides, wisps of smoke rise from farmhouse chimneys, all this against a backdrop of wooded hills and the ridgeline which carries the road through Hampton to Jenolan Caves.

We are now looking along the course of Mitchells Creek, the small stream we crossed on our last walk just before reaching our destination at Megalong Cemetery.

Continuing a short distance up the hill we move onto a rock platform beside the road. The easterly 'view' from this narrow neck of land proves to be in stark contrast to that on offer just across the road. There is a solid bank of fog (can you have a 'solid' bank of fog?) obliterating everything more than perhaps thirty metres from the edge of the platform. We pause for morning tea at the cusp of these wildly dissimilar weather patterns; it is no surprise that facing west is the preferred seating arrangement.

As we head back along the road the fog again thickens, a couple of walkers a hundred metres or so ahead of the main group fade into the swirling mist. The ample mounded forms of Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) and Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) loom, in this shrouded atmosphere, as large boulders scattered across the landscape.

On arrival at the track junction we decide to continue on to Castle Head though our hopes of seeing the grand views are not high; nor are they lifted when we take the short diversion to see the magnificent old gnarled Banksia that clings to a nearby cliff top. The sight of the old tree alone is worth the diversion, however

the view into the wall of fog from the cliff edge is not encouraging.

As is usual Mother Nature provides alternative attractions when the big picture is obscured. Near the start of this track, where moist conditions prevail, there are clusters of the Common Sundew (*Drosera spathulata*), their rosettes of reddish leaves carrying glistening dewdrops to tempt unsuspecting insects. Higher up the hill the track weaves through crowded heath. Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) abound, tiny demonic faces peer out from among the foliage while the occasional flower provides a splash of red. Even more prolific are the Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) their egg-shaped cones nestled among the light green foliage.

Heath Banksias grow here in large domes giving the appearance of having been carefully pruned to shape. At this time, the height of their flowering season, numerous nectar-rich flower spikes sit within the hemisphere of foliage awaiting the attention of the many honeyeaters that frequent the heath. Contrasting with the clipped appearance of the Banksias are the Broad-leaf Geebungs (*Persoonia levis*) whose open informal growth habit exposes the dark flaky bark of their trunks and major branches. The blossom of several Tea-trees (*Leptospermum sp*) provides patches of white among the greenery and a lone Fuchsia Heath (*Epacris longiflora*) delivers an unseasonal touch of red.

Soon we descend through a tunnel of vegetation and emerge at the cliff edge overlooking the Jamison Valley. What a sight to behold!

Right on cue the fog has lifted from the valley floor and has largely dissipated. Cotton wool clusters cling to the distant cliffs of Kedumba Walls below Kings Tableland. The Three Sisters hide coyly behind a veil of gauze. Slivers of mist stream up from Pitts Amphitheatre and sweep across Narrow Neck to tumble into Megalong Valley. The drifting clouds create a moving mosaic of light and shade on the valley floor. We stand enthralled; the vista before us is spectacular.

Eventually cameras are lowered and we reluctantly turn away from this magnificent scene to continue towards Castle Head. Beside the track now are remarkable aged examples of the Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*), the bases of their broad spreading trunks are encrusted with moss and a smattering of orange lichen decorates their rumpled bark. Also in this area are a few fine specimens of Forest Oak (*Allocasuarina torulosa*) displaying their deeply furrowed corky bark. We pass close to the cliff line once more, giving us a beautifully framed view into the valley.

The track begins to rise slightly and we are now in very dense heath. Geebung, Hakea, Grevillia and Tea-tree are just some of the plants which thrive here; a few scattered Mallee Eucalypts are the only things to stand above the general line of wind pruned foliage. Adding a touch of softness to the vegetation which presses in from both sides are the Dwarf She-oaks (*Allocasuarina nana*). All that is visible as I look back is a row of heads bobbing above the sea of heath as the group forges through the shrubbery.

Soon we arrive at the trig point and drop a little further down the slope to settle on a rocky outcrop for lunch.

This is a spectacular spot at which to dine. From this eyrie we are looking down onto the jagged sunlit ramparts of the Ruined Castle sitting atop its conical mount; the majestic sandstone walls of Mount Solitary form an impressive background. Feathery cushions of fog hang in the far reaches of Kedumba Valley while streams of mist lift off the western parapets of Mount Solitary revealing distant views of the backwaters of Warragamba Dam. The deep gorge of Cedar Creek dissects the floor of Cedar Valley forming a dividing line of deep green between Mount Solitary and Narrow Neck Plateau.

While we partake of a leisurely lunch and absorb the sublime beauty of the scene before us, we are serenaded by two lyrebirds. The lyrical song of one bird rose from the Jamison Valley side the Ruined Castle while the other

was holding concert in the Cedar Valley on the opposite side; stereophonic lyrebirds – what more could you ask?

While enjoying this performance we indulge ourselves with the customary Bushwalker Cake. Libby, ever thoughtful, had baked a cake for us as usual and handed it on when she greeted those who met at Merry Garth this morning. Libby had considered attending today to perhaps walk part of the way, however she decided it would be far wiser not to venture out in this weather and at this stage of her treatment. (Her course of ray treatment finished incidentally on the Friday following this walk and she is looking really well.)

At the conclusion of the presentation by the Liling Lyrebirds we retrace our path back through the heath. We pause at the viewing spot we spent time at this morning and make our way along a spur of track which delivers us back to the roadway about half a kilometre closer to the cars from where we initially left the road.

As we commence the final climb toward the car park we divert onto a short track which takes us out to the cliff line once more. Here we are treated to views back along the cliff faces to the Ruined Castle and Mount Solitary. In the opposite direction we are looking down on the area where tunnels were cut under Narrow Neck and Malaita Point when trestles, ropeways and tramways were constructed to transport kerosene shale and coal to what is now the Scenic Railway. The bush of course has reclaimed its territory over the ensuing years, erasing most signs of these constructions. It is quite thought provoking however to stand here and ponder the tenacity and ingenuity of those who built that complex around one hundred and thirty years ago.

Also on show here are some amazing rock formations. One area consists of several series of concentric circular projections of ironstone intersecting each other. These extend over perhaps three metres. Other remnants appear as though they may once have been part of huge spheres of rock. Further on, patterns

appear as ripples radiating from a pebble dropped in a pool, frozen in time.

Tiny pools of water stretch along the cliff edge here. In and adjacent to most of these are many grinding or sharpening grooves; one cannot think of a better place to sit and fashion stone axes. (I was surprised to read in a National Parks and Wildlife Service publication that experiments suggest approximately six hours of rubbing are required to produce each groove; I would have assumed a much longer time would be required.)

As we are about to leave this intriguing place one more surprising aspect is discovered. Two of the small rock pools are found to have a couple of pinkish mauve objects, a little larger than a fifty-cent piece, floating on their surfaces. Closer inspection reveals they are rafts made up of dozens of tiny spiders no more than the size of a pinhead. What is assumed to be an adult spider, itself only three to four millimetres across, appears to be shepherding these rafts. The wonders of nature never cease. This discovery certainly stirs some interest in the group; I have not seen such intense scrutiny of anything on a walk for a very long time.

So we arrive back at the car park to end another superb day in the bush, a day which started with many doubts yet produced so many gems along the way. Such is the nature of walking in these mountains. No matter how often one treads a particular path there are always nuances; little surprises waiting to delight and astound, one only needs to look and listen - allow the bush to talk to you.

The varied conditions we enjoyed today put me in mind of the quote attributed to English author and social reformer John Ruskin: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather".

John C

OUR JULY WALK

Friday 17th July 2009

Exhilarating Escarpments, Wonderful Waterfalls, Pleasant Pools and Outstanding Overhangs.

Leura Cascades to Gordon Falls, Pool of Siloam and Lyrebird Dell

The group last visited this venue in September 2004. This is a relatively easy circuit. It follows the Prince Henry Cliff Walk from Leura Cascades to Gordon Falls Reserve, drops down to the Pool of Siloam, then on to Lyrebird Dell where rock overhangs have a history of Aboriginal occupation dating back more than 12,000 years. We then return to Leura Cascades. The full circuit is a little over six kilometres.

Meet at Leura Falls Car Park (upper car park off Cliff Drive) at 9.30 am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 21st August 2009 – Deep Pass on the Newnes Plateau

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 both by the other workers and by the native vegetation.

10th July 2009 at Sloan Reserve

14th August 2009 at Gregson Park

11th September 2009 at Gregson Park

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details