
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 19 Issue 11

November 2009

**WATERFALL TRACK,
NORTHERN FIRE**

OUR OCTOBER WALK

**The WATERFALL TRACK,
PHEASANTS CAVE and the
NORTHERN FIRE TRAIL at
Mt WILSON**

Friday 16th October 2009

“Strange winged insects dashed their gauzy wings against the glass windows of the car, demanding admittance; a flock of gaily-plumaged parrots flew screaming overhead, and a silver pheasant, startled by the rush of the car, flew past and sought refuge in the dark lonely scrub that clothed the Mountain side. It seemed like dreamland – and that instead of being on one of the highest peaks of the Blue Mountains, one had been suddenly transported to the far off islands of the South Seas.”

This passage from the Blue Mountains Echo of 1913 describes a visit to Mount Wilson at that time.

While I doubt we will be seeing any grass-skirted lasses swaying below coconut palms today we will certainly experience a ‘dreamland’ of native bushland and exotic gardens. ‘Gaily-plumaged parrots’ will also be encountered and we will visit an enchanting cave deep in a gully - perhaps the point of



Spring in the Bush

**PHEASANTS CAVE,
TRAIL, MT WILSON**

refuge for that ‘silver pheasant, startled by the rush of the car’.

Seventeen walkers gathered outside Merry Garth on yet another glorious day. We welcomed Alice Simpson and Robbie Feyder who were joining us today for the first of what we hope will be many walks with the group; Alice and Robbie have recently purchased ‘Pinnaroo’ in Wynnes Rocks Road.

As we headed off along Galwey Lane it was sad to note that the old windmill in the Wynstay paddock was now recumbent on the grass; finally having surrendered to the very forces of wind from which it had extracted so much energy over many years. We paused while Libby pointed out the grand Wynstay stables, the nearby brick-domed well and its adjacent turntable platform around which a horse once plodded to drive a pump and other machinery. (Richard Wynne erected the first permanent cottage on Mt Wilson in 1875; the tiny two-roomed timber building still stands near the stables today.)

We continued on to Waterfall Reserve and made our way to the start of the Waterfall Track, which was established around 1920.

This track leads us down the hillside into a veritable wonderland. Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) tower up from the

gully, their foliage providing a dense canopy. Any daylight that manages to find a way through this mantle of leaves is scattered as sunshine confetti throughout the forest. Possumwoods (*Quintinea sieberi*) and Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) thrive in this sheltered environment. Gnarled and hollowed tree trunks, some with spreading buttresses, are draped with mosses. A forest giant reclines on the hillside, its days of thrusting skyward in search of the sun long gone. Shafts of sunlight that have speared through larger windows in the canopy spotlight features on the dark forest floor. This is an enchanting place; if sylvan sprites do not inhabit this area they surely must be regular visitors.

Soon we arrive at the lower falls on Waterfall Creek. Tucked away in a little grotto is a dark wall of basalt over which a silver ribbon of water drops into a pool at its base, before continuing down a gully between moss-encrusted boulders. Tree Ferns abound here; the trunks of some encased by tiny filigree ferns and delicate crusty lichens. We rest here awhile to absorb the magical aura of this sheltered spot and to indulge in morning tea.

Libby pointed out the remains of an old pipeline running down the gully. She explained this ran from a small dam that once stood above the falls. It supplied boiler feedwater for the timber mill located further down the mountainside. Libby related the anecdotal story that a member of the Gregson family (local property owners) found the small dam a very pleasant place in which to bathe. The Kirk brothers, who ran the mill, were not quite so pleased with this activity as in addition to using the piped water in the boiler they used it for drinking and tea making. Puts a whole new connotation on the expression "full bodied tea".

We paused at the base of the upper falls before tackling the climb out of this delightful little gully. At one point, while still in the shaded environ of the forest, the track crosses an incredible maze of intertwined surface roots. Soon we emerge into more open woodland

and arrive back at the picnic area of the reserve.

We now head down into Gregson Park crossing the upper reaches of Waterfall Creek via the Jefferson Bridge built in 1993 to replace a 1931 bridge commissioned by CW Jefferson and built by the Kirk Brothers and Sam Hall from Bell. That 1931 bridge provided a more viable link across the creek as it replaced a simple plank crossing.

Having just experienced some of the natural wonders of this mountain we continue along Wyndham Avenue which takes us past some of the beautiful gardens and built features of the village. On our left, over the dry stone wall of 'Windyridge', a bronzed gentleman sits reading; frozen in time among a mixture of exotic and native plants, lulled by the rhythmic sound of a man-made waterfall. The tranquillity of this scene evokes a strong urge to swap places with this figure, though perhaps not on such a permanent basis. A little further on the imposing gates of 'Hawthorn' open onto a drive that leads your eye up the hill to glimpses of the home nestled comfortably in the garden. Indeed, native vegetation and natural attractions combine easily with exotic plants and man-made features in producing the charm of this special place.

Next we divert into the Marcus Clark Reserve. A woodchip path now meanders through this small pocket of native bushland and plant identification signs have been installed. This land was purchased from Eccleston du Faur in 1912 by Henry Marcus Clark. His sons donated the land to the Parents and Citizens Association of the local school in 1950. The land is now in the care of the local Progress Association which has established the area as a flora and fauna reserve in memory of the Marcus Clark family.

We proceed down Du Faur's Rocks Road and head along the track which takes us to the Chinamans Hat formation. Along this route, evident on the rock platforms, are numerous examples of axe grinding grooves and small man-made depressions for holding water; a

sign that the original inhabitants appreciated this superb outlook. We drop down below the escarpment and follow the track beneath the majestic rock overhang and climb to Tabletop Rock where we pause to take in the magnificent view.

Continuing on we pass some fine examples of Dragon's Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) just coming into bloom, their bell-shaped white flowers hanging in elegant panicles on the rock faces. Beside the path a few examples of the Slender Violet (*Hybanthus monopetalus*) are displaying their tiny mauve flowers with a conspicuous large lower petal. Soon we are looking down into the deep gully where the Pheasants Cave is situated. What a grand sight; the hillside opposite carries a host of Soft Tree Ferns, their wheels of deep green fronds standing in stark contrast to the towering white trunks of the Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) that surround them.

We descend to the creek line of this tiny stream which rises behind the old Mt Wilson School building before leaping off the cliff edge to plummet into the exquisite patch of rainforest in which we are now standing. Tree Ferns abound in this shaded mossy environment and taller trees are draped with looping vines, ground ferns and small shrubs form vertical gardens on either side of the falls; a delightful spot for a pheasant to seek refuge from 'the rush of the car'. (Early settlers referred to the lyrebirds that frequent this area in fairly large numbers as pheasants.)

Returning to the large sun-drenched rock platform which overlooks this gully and affords expansive views over the Wollangambe it is decided that lunch would be in order. We are roused from our sun-induced lizard-like torpor when Libby begins distributing her most welcome Bushwalker Cake.

Reluctantly we decide it is time to move on and we make our way via the short-cut stairs back to Du Faur's Rocks Road. At this point Libby has to leave and make her way back to Merry Garth as a large group of visitors to the

garden is scheduled to arrive by coach; Anne Clarke decides to accompany her.

I was rather surprised that more didn't elect to go with Libby as yours truly was now going to lead the group – they know not what they do!

We now leave the road to follow the Northern Fire Trail with Fred Roberts taking over my usual position as whip for the group. (Thanks Fred and to Wayne Pascoe who kindly filled that position earlier in the day.)

We now moved into open woodland as the track dipped and climbed. The red globes of Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) now become more numerous and stand out dramatically against the prolific yellow blossom of the Bush-pea and Parrot-pea (*Pultenaea sp* and *Dillwynia sp*) – blood red upon gold; spectacular!

We pass the track which winds down to the Wollangambe and some time later the 'Exit Track' which rises from the end of the first canyoning section of that river.

Walking on a fire trail such as this is quite social, allowing people to move in groups and catch up on news and future plans; the pleasant sound of friendly banter mixes with the rhythms of the bush. We pause occasionally to take in the distant views and to admire details closer at hand such as the cluster of Sundews (*Drosera spatulata*) decorating an embankment with their reddish rosettes. We are reminded of the reality of the natural world when we come across a dead Tawny Frogmouth lying beside the track.

During most of these pauses we could hear distant mellifluous yet incessant tones which moved closer and closer. Then Helen, my better half, would arrive on the scene saying the steepness of the hills was taking her breath away; perhaps cause and effect could stand some closer examination!

Soon we arrived at Mt Irvine Road (I guess even I would have trouble getting it wrong on the Northern Fire Trail).

As Alice and Robbie had not yet ventured into the Cathedral of Ferns we decided to make our way to the Giant Tree, the ancient Brown

Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) which was recently struck by lightning. It has still not fully surrendered to that attack, one large branch still displaying some living foliage; we can but hope. We then wended our way down through this enchanting remnant of forest and crossed into Cathedral Reserve.

All that remained was the short climb to Hillcrest Lane and a pleasant walk through the rainforest behind New Bywood and Campanella Cottage to bring us back to Davies Lane. Here we realised most of the group was neither in sight nor in earshot, so we waited - and waited - until eventually they arrived, led by Helen; she had - you guessed it - found someone else to talk to!

The person credited with being the first European to set foot on this mountain in 1833 was the surveyor and explorer William Govett. A mere one hundred and seventy six years ago he described it as 'A high mass range of the richest soil and covered with the most impenetrable scrub'. We have seen today that while there have been massive changes on the mountain since that simple yet apt description was offered, there is much that remains as it would have been during the many thousands of years when Aboriginal feet trod mountain paths. A wonderful blend of nature and man.

We had afternoon tea overlooking the Rock Garden in Merry Garth. This open sunny spot at this time was displaying masses of whites and pinks. Only a stone's throw away, in the more subdued light at the edge of the rainforest area, racemes of white flowers on dozens of tiny Orange-blossom Orchids (*Sarcochilus falcatus*) appeared as clusters of stars among the trees; a sublime place in which to end a very pleasant day.

John C

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

Friday 20th November 2009

Heavenly Heath, Wonderful Wildflowers,
Vast Valley Views, Rugged Ridges.

Fortress Lookout and Fortress Ridge off
the Mt Hay Road north of Leura

The group last visited this venue in November 2003. This is a relatively easy walk, about nine kilometres return, which follows ridgelines with very few ups and downs, just some gentle undulations. We will first visit Fortress Rock Lookout with views to the west across Govett Gorge to Evans and Govetts Leap lookouts; we will then continue along Fortress Ridge to Fortress Hill (very defensive this area) which offers 360 degree views.

Meet at Leura on Mt Hay Road in the 'dip' just past Churchill St at 9.15am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

There is no direct access to Mt Hay Road from the Western Highway at Leura Primary School when travelling from Sydney; it is necessary to approach via the roundabout above the new tunnel, turn right and travel back down the hill to Mt Hay Rd via Britain St or Victory Lane and Churchill St. It is suggested those travelling from the Katoomba side also approach via this roundabout. Four-wheel drive vehicles would be most welcome. There will be a vehicle rationalisation for the drive to the start point.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0418 646 487 if you need to leave a message.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 18th December 2009 – Birrabang Ridge and Yileen Spur off the Bells Line of Road.

This is a morning walk followed by the end of year luncheon at Merry Garth - Details later.

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.

13th November 2009 at Wynne Reserve

11th December 2009 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details