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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## PIPELINE TRACK IN

## OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

### The PIPELINE TRACK in the WOLGAN VALLEY

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2009

In 1823 Robert Hoddle had just finished his initial survey of Bells Line of Road. Surveyor-General Oxley instructed him to then seek a suitable path for a road and stock route to the Hunter River. Hoddle and four men left camp near Collits Inn on foot in late October 1823. They set off on a northerly course and reached a high point he named 'Panoramic Hill' (now known as the Bald Trig Point).

He later noted: "From this latter hill had no difficulty to obstruct us, until we came (13 miles distance) to a deep and perpendicular ravine, running east and west. The appearance of the Rock was singular and romantick, and had the appearance of a Castle and Town in ruins."

This was the first recorded sighting by white man of the Wolgan Valley.

James Walker, who around 1822 had established "Wallerowang" station, soon entered this valley and set up an out-station,



Spring in the Bush

## WOLGAN VALLEY

naming it "Wolgan". There is little doubt this was the Aboriginal name for the area.

One hundred and eighty six years later the sixteen walkers present today, comfortably ensconced in three vehicles, set out from Lithgow. We also 'had no difficulty to obstruct us', until we came (21 kilometres distance - which coincidentally equals 13 miles) to a deep ravine at Wolgan Gap. Here a roadblock was in force.

Major works are being carried out here, both to improve the road that drops steeply into the valley and to stabilise the cliff face which towers above the road.

We took advantage of this one hour forced interruption to our journey taking in the views of the valley and studying the work of the rock stabilisers and the precarious looking ropes from which they hang while working; we also partook of morning tea. Jan Northam and Meri Easton joined us today after an extended absence; welcome back.

Soon the conga-line of accumulated vehicles was allowed to proceed slowly down the road, part of which was once dubbed "The Donkey Steps" by early locals. The antics displayed by the drivers of a couple of vehicles we encountered indicated the name would still be appropriate.

A dusty drive through open grazing land and along the wooded river course delivered us to the camping area at Newnes, just inside the boundary of Wollemi National Park; an idyllic spot in which to gather before setting off on our walk. Lush grass carpeted the undulating clearing bounded by open woodland. Towering above us the sandstone cliffs glowed under the brilliant sun. One could happily laze here for hours but the Pipeline Track beckons.

As we made our way through a few scattered remnants associated with the shale mining complex a group of White-winged Choughs was seen rummaging quietly amongst the ground cover. Graeme Burrell explained that these birds live in close-knit family groups; nest construction and feeding of the young are shared equally among the group. Also they are not averse to enticing a bird from another group if their family numbers fall below the ideal.

By contrast, a little further on the eye was drawn to the treetops by the raucous cries of a large animated group of feeding Black Cockatoos.

Nearby another natural life and death drama was being played out. An earthworm, perhaps missed by the foraging Choughs, was struggling valiantly but in vain to escape the clutching red nippers of a triumvirate of black Bull Ants.

Soon we were taking evasive action ourselves as we passed through an area thickly populated by Stinging or Scrub Nettles (*Urtica incisa*). Presently we arrived at a set of steps in a low stone wall that indicated the start of the Pipeline Track.

This track follows the route of a three inch diameter pipeline which was completed in March 1941 (mainly as a defence initiative) to transport petrol from the Glen Davis shale oil refinery over the escarpment to a large storage tank at Newnes (which we passed early on this walk). From Newnes the pipeline followed the route of the Old Coach Road to holding tanks near the railway at Newnes Junction. The total head between Glen Davis and Newnes

Junction was 2,500 feet and the operating pressure of the pipeline was 1,500 pounds per square inch.

The line had a chequered history during its short life. In 1943 a hole was drilled in the pipe near what is now Bald Trig, the perpetrators having an eye on black market prices in those times of fuel shortages; 15,000 gallons of petrol was lost. It is also said that enterprising youths from Lithgow took advantage of this supply line, with the co-operation of sympathetic army personnel, to help augment their parents' petrol rations. The Glen Davis plant and thus the pipeline ceased operations in June 1952.

We may well be in need of fuel of a different type shortly; the track climbs three hundred and forty metres in about one kilometre from this point to our goal – the lookout.

To help distract us from the constant upward gradient the track is lined with an assortment of wildflowers. Very prolific are the Native Indigo (*Indigofera australis*) with their racemes of lilac/pink flowers among delicate compound leaves; twining through the undergrowth is the Purple Twining-pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*) displaying its yellow centred violet blossoms.

The uncommonly pretty Common Correa (*Correa reflexa var reflexa*) is also present here, its green-tipped yellow tubular flowers hanging below dark green rough leaves; nearby the Native Holly or Prickly Shaggy-pea (*Podolobium ilicifolium*) is in full flower, its soft red-keeled yellow blooms belie the sharpness of their needle-pointed leaves.

The track rises obliquely across the face of the hillside; seen through gaps between the trees the smooth vertical faces of the sandstone cliffs opposite appear as though sliced by some gargantuan cleaver. Hiding among the shaded ground cover beside the track were many examples of the Twining Glycine (*Glycine clandestina*) with their tiny mauve pea-like flowers scattered between their narrow trifoliate leaves. Also among the rocks here was the Trailing Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia empetrifolia*) displaying bright

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yellow blooms nestled among small glossy green leaves.

Soon the track leads us into a narrow sheltered gully populated at its lower end by a copse of Soft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and there are numerous Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) beside the path, nestled here and there in rocky nooks is the Umbrella Fern (*Sticherus flabellatus*).

The track climbs more steeply now below sheer stone walls, moss and lichen encrusted on their lower portions and carrying intricate weatherworn patterns on their higher faces. The remains of rusting trestles, silent sentinels of the past, stand among the vegetation; saddle clamps still bolted to the bedrock clear evidence of the pipeline that once ran along this route. A large eucalypt, having lost its grip on the steep bank, rests against a huge sandstone tor near the top of this gully.

As we approach the crest of the escarpment a track leads off to the right which takes us past a small section of tessellated pavement and through a grove of Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea sp*) all sporting skirts of cascading spent leaves below their star-burst heads of long narrow foliage. Then, laid out before us, is a wondrous sight; the talus slopes of the deep gorge cut by the Wolgan River, now 340 metres below, are topped by two tiers of rugged weather-eroded cliff lines. Spectacular rock turrets and pagodas sit atop these cliffs and run back into the timbered plateau beyond. We stand at the peak of one such pagoda, in awe of the magnificent vista before us; this is a very special place.

As is usual Mother Nature is not content with displaying only the sublime distant panorama, she has decorated the immediate surroundings with an abundance of wildflowers; just showing off now, isn't she?

We were treated to the sight of the yellow paper-daisy flowers of a single Pagoda Daisy (*Leucochrysum graminifolium*) tucked in beside a pagoda wall. (Ray Nesci discovered several more while exploring nearby pagodas.) This is a relatively rare plant restricted to the Newnes Plateau / Wolgan Valley area where it

grows on almost bare rock surfaces of pagoda formations. This plant was first collected by Henry Deane from the cliffs above the Wolgan River in 1909. (Deane was the Chief Construction Engineer on the Wolgan Valley Railway and had a keen interest in botany.)

The pagodas on which we perched for lunch were surrounded by a veritable garden of wildflowers. The Nodding Blue Lily (*Stypantra glauca*) with its folded back blue petals exposing woolly stamens was present as was the Tick Bush (*Kunzea ambigua*), its strongly scented white fluffy flowers attracting a host of nectar-hungry insects. Another relatively rare plant was present here. It grows only adjacent to pagoda formations on the Newnes Plateau and near Glen Davis, a member of the Mint-bush family *Prostanthera hindii*. It bears clusters of prominent deep purple flowers with 2-lobed upper and 3-lobed lower lips, characteristic of all Mint-bush flowers. This plant is considered endangered because of its localised population and small numbers.

We spent some time in this magical place; each lost in their own thoughts. We were jolted back to dark reality when a jet fighter plane screamed overhead.

Reluctantly we made our way back down toward the river; remarkable how much more conversation takes place on downhill journeys.

As we neared the camping area some Greenhood Orchids (*Pterostylis sp*) were sighted and on a nearby rock was a cluster of what were probably Streaked Rock Orchids (*Dendrobium striolatum*). Beside the track the Eye-bright herb (*Euphrasia collina ssp paludosa*) was displaying its pink flowers; beautiful little gems to add lustre at the end of yet another inspiring walk.

As we leave this happy valley it is intriguing to reflect on the words of Thomas Archer (his father managed "Wallerawang") on the early days in the Wolgan:

Wolgan, where Skranny (his horse) and I frequently went on stockdriving excursions was a wonderful valley. The end next to

Wallerawang was the lowest, and here a path had been cut in the face of the precipitous rock, and formed the only access to the valley for cattle and horses. Two brooks of the most pellucid water flowed through the valley, entering by inaccessible gorges, and, after joining their waters, left by another gorge equally inaccessible. This happy valley was occupied solely by some hundreds of young cattle and horses, and by old Ned Murray, an Irish emancipist, Rosie his wife, Jeannie his youthful granddaughter, and Neddy his donkey.

What a peaceful image he conjures of this special place.

Footnote: Details of the pipeline were gleaned from a Lithgow Historical Soc booklet 'The Oil Shale Industry'. Information on the early history of the Wolgan Valley taken from an article by H.A. MacLeod Morgan 'A Short History of the Wolgan Valley' written for the RAHS Journal July 1959. There was a deep but poignant bond between Macleod Morgan and Wilga Smart, late sister of Bushwalking Group member Florence Smart; this touching story however is for another time, another place.

## OUR OCTOBER WALK

**Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

**Restorative Rainforest, Valley Views and Wonderful Woodlands.**

**A Wander around the Contrasting Wonders of Mt Wilson**

This walk will take us around the environs of Mt Wilson; the actual course being dictated by the prevailing conditions on the day. The general plan however is to meander through the rainforest along the Waterfall Track before proceeding to explore the Du Faur's Rocks area. The intention then is to follow the Northern Fire Trail to Cathedral Reserve and return to Merry Garth via the little pocket of rainforest which brings us back to Galway Lane.

This walk totals about eight kilometres and contains a few steep but short sections. There

are however options to pull out at various points and walk back to Merry Garth through the village.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

**Meet at Merry Garth at 9.00am.**

**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.**

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## FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2009 – Fortress Ridge off the Mt Hay road near Leura

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2009 – Birrabang Ridge and Yileen Spur off the Bells Line of Road (morning walk and end of year luncheon at Merry Garth)

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## BUSH CARE

**Many thanks to those who supported the morning tea presentation on 11<sup>th</sup> September at Sloan Reserve. Nineteen attended the event where Terri Hamilton, representing the BMCC, presented a Certificate of Appreciation to the Bushcare Group "For ten years of consistent care and ecological management of our local bushland reserves". Terri also presented "The Masters Award" to Libby which "Acknowledges Libby Raines for an outstanding long term commitment to our Bushcare Program".**

**Special thanks go to Tracey Williams of BMCC for her efforts in organising chairs, banners, displays, etc for the event.**

**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.**

## Future Dates

**9<sup>th</sup> October 2009 at Sloan Reserve**

**13<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at Wynne Reserve**

**11<sup>th</sup> December 2009 at Wynne Reserve**

**Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details**