
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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SLACKS STAIRS AND **OUR JULY WALK**

**VALLEY OF THE WATERS,
NATIONAL PASS, SLACKS
STAIRS and WENTWORTH
PASS**

Friday 16th July 2010

Indolent, remiss, slow, sluggish, lacking in activity, loose, dull; these are just some of the twenty-five definitions contained in The Macquarie Dictionary for the term 'slack', none of which could be applied to our July walk. 'To make less tense' is one meaning which most definitely applies; the feeling of satisfaction within the group after completing this walk was palpable.

Be that as it may, the stairs we were to descend today were not named for any of the above connotations. They were so named to recognise Isaac Platt Slack, a Parramatta Real Estate Agent and Auctioneer, who was Chairman of the Wentworth Falls Group of the Blue Mountains Sights Reserve Trust. (The stairs were first constructed circa 1932 to link National and Wentworth Passes.)

A glorious winter day greeted the fifteen walkers who gathered at the Conservation Hut in Wentworth Falls for this walk. A crisp frosty morn under a cloudless sky, a slight breeze whisking around the corner of the hut raising the odd goose bump on the even odder bare knobbly knees of yours truly. The view



Winter in the Bush

WENTWORTH PASS

past Inspiration Point to the imposing presence of Mount Solitary, where vertical cliff faces were touched by the morning sun, was superb. We paused at the information board as Libby made use of the very good illustrative map to indicate the route to be followed today. We then began the descent toward the Valley of the Waters.

The track initially drops through dry open forest and we diverted onto two short side tracks. The first took us to

Queen Victoria Lookout. From here magnificent vistas into the Jamison Valley and beyond were on offer as well as a great view along the cliff face below the Overcliff Track; a section of the soon to be travelled National Pass Track was visible near the top of the talus slope. The second diversion led us to Empress Lookout which, as the name implies, gave a view of the upper section of the Empress Falls emerging from its slot canyon.

Soon we crossed the face of a small cascade, ribbons of water dropping into a shallow pool before spreading across a terraced rockface and flowing beneath the raised walkway. We dropped deeper into the valley to the accompaniment of water music generated by Empress Falls. In a shallow puddle right beside the track a tiny bird was busily turning leaves and twigs as it foraged for food, completely unperturbed by our presence. On reaching the stepping stones which take us

across the creek we paused to take in the sublime beauty of these falls. A diaphanous curtain of water drops from the slot canyon and fans out into a cascading silver veil as it flows down the rock face before dropping into the crystal clear pool at our feet; a magnificent spectacle.

On crossing the creek we passed the stylised CWA emblem of the Country Women's Association on the face of a mossy boulder. Obviously many years have passed since it was skilfully carved into the rock; one can but wonder at the story behind its creation.

The track now led us steeply down into the valley. To our right were dimly lit elevated galleries containing Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) nestled below the towering trunks of rainforest trees whose canopies were seeking the sunlight far above. On our left the Valley of the Waters Creek gurgled and bubbled along below the track, at some points light glinted off the purling water while at others the brook disappeared completely below large moss covered boulders. Soon we are at the base of the exquisite Sylvia Falls, at this time of abundant creek flows there are terraces of fine cascades on the right hand side while a separate silver ribbon of water courses down the left hand side; truly a sight to behold. The sun dramatically illuminated the white trunk and branches of a large eucalypt growing on the cliff edge high above. We cross the creek below these falls and follow the National Pass.

Grand vistas of the Jamison Valley, Mount Solitary and beyond opened up as we moved away from the enclosed environs of the Valley of the Waters. Clinging to the rocky embankment beside the track were numerous examples of *Epacris reclinata*, their red flowers brightening the scene. Also noted here were some Narrow-leaf Geebungs (*Persoonia linearis*) carrying fruit; small light-green globes with tiny needle points, remnants of styles still attached. Presently a natural rock bench beside the track provided sufficient seating for the group and we paused for morning tea.

We continued on below majestic cliff faces, weather worn into intricate patterns. We rounded a point and entered a huge curved amphitheatre carved over an aeon by the action of the waters of Den Fenella Creek; we walked behind these waters as they dropped from the plateau above. In this area there were several Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) their trunks stunted and their limbs twisted and gnarled. Contrasting with these rugged looking trees were the slender drooping branchlets of the Forest Oaks (*Allocasuarina torulosa*). In this moist environment the foliage of many other plants, weighed down by moisture, took on a pleasant weeping habit. Hanging from the vegetation on the cliffs below the track were dozens of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos appearing as large white pods among the foliage.

On arriving at the Slacks Stairs junction we continued on a little further to take in a view of the Wentworth Falls; the stairs were to deliver us to their base.

The sign at the top of Slacks Stairs states, inter alia, that the track is suitable for experienced walkers only and that the steepest stairways must be descended while facing inwards – nice to see introverts getting some recognition.

The stairs initially drop down below a huge sandstone tor that has split off the cliff face and formed a tunnel by leaning against that face. We then negotiated a series of steep caged steel stairs, while looking inwards of course, and arrived at a spot that presented a different obstacle. No stairs or ladders here, just a knotted rope hanging over a rock ledge. Being in my usual position at the rear of the group I was able to observe the various methods employed to descend said rope; it was rather entertaining. Helpers at the top were giving moral support as well as any physical aid they could from that position. Those at the bottom end (literally), experts by now as they had successfully descended the rope, guided feet onto support points and twisted and turned bodies to suitable positions while deftly dodging delicate derrieres.

The track then wound down through the thick forest and we passed a lovely stand of tree ferns. Soon the dense vegetation opened out and from the top of a steep embankment the large deep pool at the base of the falls came into view. The waters of the lower falls drop down the face of a sheer cliff into this green-tinted pond which is ringed by huge angular boulders. What an idyllic spot, one feels quite insignificant standing at the base of these towering cliffs while the beauty and grandeur of the surrounds are overwhelming.

Some in the group were surprised that Libby suggested we should stop for lunch here as the day was still young, however she was aware the track from this point on provided few areas suitable for a group lunch break. So we chose suitable spots to settle down and dine while listening to the sounds of the waterfall and soaking up the atmosphere of this very special place.

We then headed off along the Wentworth Pass; the track rises slightly as it heads back toward the cliffs. Another track was noted leading down toward the creek, it was not signposted but would have been the start of the track which follows Jamison Creek to the Hippocrene Falls and continues on past Vera Falls back up into the Valley of the Waters.

The track we followed however skirted the base of the cliffline through magnificent open forest near the top of the talus slope. The smooth white-blotched trunks of the quite numerous Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) contrasted with the furrowed fibrous bark of the occasional Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) rising from flared bases and towering skyward. Smooth-barked Apples (*Angophora costata*) were also present here, unlike the stunted and twisted examples seen earlier on the National Pass these had large straight trunks, their smooth dimpled bark coloured in shades of orange, cream, pink and grey crying out to be touched. The track dropped into small gullies and meandered through more sheltered spots where ferns and mosses thrived; a stump beside the track had become colonised by dozens of fungi, clusters

of overlapping cream discs with pinkish centres.

We crossed Den Fenella Creek whose cascading waters we had earlier walked behind on the National Pass and presently arrived at Red Rock Falls on Valley of the Waters Creek. Here three rather rickety steel bridges took us across the creek between large King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) and mossy boulders. The track then led us upstream beside the creek which cascades down through huge boulders and drops over the picturesque Britannia Falls. At Flat Rock Falls we rock-hopped across the stream where the route is indicated by a couple of blue markers and zigzagged up to rejoin the National Pass Track.

We concluded the walk by retracing our morning path back through the Valley of the Waters and returning to the Conservation Hut. It was great to see so many people both locals and overseas visitors, many with young families, using this section of the track.

While we indulged in the usual end of walk cuppa Libby outlined some details of plans for future walks. I am sure however that the minds of many of those present were still occupied by the walk we had just completed. Panoramic views, delightful grottos, stunning waterfalls, some new paths for many in the group and just a touch of challenge to provide that feeling of achievement and satisfaction. Another great day exploring the magnificent natural terrain we are so lucky to have on our doorstep.

John C

OUR AUGUST WALK

Friday 20th August 2010

The Touch of Mother Nature and the Efforts of Man on Show - Explore the Rugged Country between Bells Line of Road and Mt Irvine

The Full Length of Bowens Creek Road – Bilpin to Mt Irvine

Leave the treacherous twists and turns of electioneering behind and follow the much

gentler meanderings of this historic road as it drops down from Bilpin into the Bowens Creek gorge and then climbs up to Mt Irvine.

The group has walked various sections of this road, mainly on the Mt Irvine side of Bowens Creek, however to walk the full length will be a first for the group.

Note: As this walk will require a long and perhaps more complex than normal car shuffle from Mt Irvine to Bilpin, early notification of your attendance will be essential. We may need to ask people who normally car share to bring their own car as additional vehicles may be required for the shuffle. Libby will require time to finalise the details and then contact people to inform them of various meeting places and times.

Contact Libby Raines, as a first preference, on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) as Helen and John Cardy will not be back from holidays until Tuesday 17th August. Should you need to leave a message do so on 9871 3661 and we will pass it on to Libby on the night of the 17th but earlier contact direct with Libby would be preferred and appreciated.

The walk will commence at 10.00 am on the Bowens Creek Road just off the Bells line of Road at Bilpin (just west of the little BP petrol station and store).

Bring lunch and morning and afternoon tea and plenty of water.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th September 2010 – Six Foot Track - last section from Kiora Hill to Jenolan Caves. Allan Cupitt, who works as a part time guide at the caves, has offered to lead our group on a cave inspection following the walk; an entrance fee, probably discounted, will apply - more details later. Allan and Jeanie have kindly invited us to call in to their property at Bowenfels on the way back from the walk for a relaxing afternoon tea.

Friday 15th October 2010 – The Blue Gum Forest. A chance to see how this iconic area of

the mountains has recovered from the November 2006 fires.

Friday 19th November 2010 – Ikara Ridge at Mount Victoria

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 August 2010 at Gregson Park (Opposite Windyridge)

10th September 2010 at Sloan Reserve

8th October 2010 at Sloan Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details