
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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BLUE GUM FOREST

OUR OCTOBER WALK

**BLUE GUM FOREST or the
PULPIT ROCK TRACK and
RIGBY HILL**

Friday 15th October 2010

Many proposals have been advanced, some being put into operation to varying degrees, for the commercial exploitation of the Grose Valley. Timber getting, mining, cattle grazing, dams, power stations and transmission lines with attendant roads, towns and perhaps most ironically, railways. That irony lies in the scientific name, *Eucalyptus deanei*, given to the towering tree species that makes up the jewel in the crown of the Grose, the Blue Gum Forest. It was named for Henry Deane in recognition of his detailed studies of the Eucalyptus genus; Deane was the Chief Engineer in charge of design and construction of the Wolgan Valley Railway.

Luckily for us, and for future generations, the thoughts expressed by Myles Dunphy when the forest came under threat of the axe prevailed: *We cannot live for commerce alone, nor will our civilisation be deemed great until we thoroughly recognise the fact that the bushlands and all they naturally contain are gifts of Nature far transcending in value all monetary and commercial considerations. The*



Spring in the Bush

AND OTHER VENUES

humanising gifts of Nature are necessary for our interest, education, adventure, romance and peace of mind.

Dire predictions of atrocious weather conditions did not deter those who gathered at Pierces Pass though there were some looks of apprehension as the light rain was swirled by the chill wind. After a vehicle rationalisation organised in her usual efficient manner by Libby we set off to drive to Perrys Lookdown at Blackheath. While we are

always very appreciative of those who kindly provide their cars for these shuffles a special thankyou is in order for those involved today in getting us to the start point and being back to pick us up in the afternoon. These walks with widely divergent start and finish points could not of course be undertaken without this cooperation; many thanks to all involved.

By the time the full complement of twenty-five walkers had gathered at Perrys Lookdown the weather had taken a decided turn for the better. Eighteen set off for the descent into the valley while the remaining seven decided to explore other paths on the cliff tops; their story appears later.

We paused at Perrys Lookdown – well – to look down onto the line of the Grose River and Govetts Creek, at the confluence of which lies the Blue Gum Forest. The view from this vantage point today was stunning. The cliffs

on the opposite side of the gaping chasm were bathed in a subdued light producing muted pastel shades on the majestic sandstone walls. Wispy tongues of mist rose from the forest canopy far below, a light haze hung in the valley casting a filmy veil across this grand panorama; a magical sight.

As is Mother Nature's wont grand vistas are invariably accompanied by things of beauty on a much smaller scale. Making our way toward the lower or Monument Lookout we were treated to the showy racemes of pink flowers of numerous Matchheads (*Comesperma ericinum*) lining the track. Tucked in among the ground cover were small terrestrial orchids, delicate flowers of the White Caladenia (*Caladenia catenata*) and the Pink Fingers (*Caladenia carnea*). A plaque at the lower lookout is a memorial to four young boys, aged from thirteen to eighteen, who lost their lives in a bushfire below this point in November 1957; a stark reminder of the care needed to be exercised when venturing into the mountain bushland.

The track then descends rather steeply winding past mossy rockfaces and large rock overhangs emerging into a more open area before crossing a small babbling brook. Here there are Purple Flags or Native Iris (*Patersonia serica*) contrasting with the abundant yellow flowers of the unfortunately named Prickly Shaggy Pea or Native Holly (*Podolobium ilicifolium*). The track zigzags then dives into a small pocket of rainforest and drops down a narrow gully.

As we move into more open country the False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*) displays its purple pea-like flowers as it twines through host shrubs. The pendulous cream bell-shaped flowers of the Appleberry (*Billardiera scandens*) hang from slender stalks.

Emerging from the gully we are at the top of Dockers Ladder. Here we are looking along the face of a shear cliff to a towering sandstone pillar jutting skyward; an impressive sight. We descend the steep stairs and begin moving down Dockers Buttress. Here in more open country there is a plethora

of wildflowers; the golden blossom of the many Prickly Shaggy Peas dominate the scene however the large number of climbers and twiners in flower catch the eye. The unusual large showy red flowers of the Dusky Coral Pea (*Kennedia rubicunda*) are dotted throughout the undergrowth while the Twining Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia dentata*) displays its brilliant buttercup yellow blossoms among dark tooth-edged leaves. The abundant dazzling white flowers of the Traveller's Joy or Wedding Veil (*Clematis aristata*) with their four long narrow sepals, usually seen hanging high in host trees, here adorn low shrubs and even trail across the ground.

We move into a small clearing to pause for morning tea and here a smaller-flowered species of Kennedia, the Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*), as the name implies spreads across the ground. Also present here is a small-leaved Mint Bush, possibly the Violet Mint Bush (*Prostanthera violacea*) carrying an abundance of tiny mauve flowers; this attractive small shrub appeared regularly along this walk, as did patches of Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum aethiopicum*).

Continuing on we soon move into open forest where rough-barked Eucalypts, charred by the bushfires four years ago, now carry fluffy tufts of foliage along their trunks; adventitious buds having been triggered by the fires. Several Paper Barks (*Melaleuca sp*) carry fire-blackened outer layers of bark, peeling away in places to expose pristine white layers of fine parchment.

We approach the valley floor and there before us are the towering trunks of the Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus deanei*); smooth vertical columns spread across the landscape merging one with the other as they disappear into the distance. Pillars of cream and grey and white and green, totems to the beauty and power of nature; this is a very special place.

We made our way to Acacia Flat to partake of lunch. Seated on a large log in this magnificent environment we sated our appetite while the unique atmosphere of this sublime locale revitalised our spirits.

Reluctant though we are to leave this place we have a four kilometre walk to the bottom of Pierces Pass so we set off following the path which meanders through the Blue Gums. From my usual position at the rear of the group it is amazing to see the extent to which we walkers are dwarfed below these lofty leviathans. Also amazing is the realisation that so few of these arboreal giants were lost in the 2006 fires and the degree of regeneration of the understorey since that time.

As the track now leads us beside the Grose River we are entertained by the pleasant sounds of real water music as we look down onto clear almost still pools and whitewater cascades rushing between dark boulders. We continue to be treated to many wildflowers along the course of the river including little gems like the bright yellow Tiger or Hornet Orchid (*Diuris sulphurea*), the delicate white flowers of the Grass Lily (*Caesia parviflora* var *parviflora*) and racemes of cream to yellow flowers of the Rock Orchid (*Dendrobium speciosum*).

Presently we are rock-hopping, sliding, crawling, slipping over huge boulders to cross the river. Now begins the ascent of Pierces Pass. About three-quarters of the way up we are treated to the sight of many brilliant red globes of the Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*), a farewell gesture from the open forest as we approach the rainforest area. Beth Raines made a farewell gesture of her own to a Diamond Python that was reluctant to move off the steps; the gesture was made, I believe, with a very long stick. Alison Halliday assures me there are at least 756 steps on our ascent of the pass; I'm not going back to check.

John C

And now, courtesy of Anne Clarke:

The Breakaway or "Special" Walking Group

We are the SPECIAL group, not because we couldn't do the Blue Gum Forest walk, but because we are a group of SPECIALISTS.

Helen is our special leader, Jan a specialist in noticing special rocks and plants in their environment, Rosemary is a specialist in describing such plants, George a special gentleman helper to ladies in or not in distress, Jeanie a specialist in advising on long distance driving, Don a specialist in following and Anne a specialist whip and editor.

Having cleared that up, the said seven members farewelled those eighteen intrepid walkers at Perrys Lookdown and decided under Helen's guidance what our day would be.

First we went to the Perrys Lookdown lookouts (a bit of alliteration there), and marvelled at the massive scenery and at how quickly our comrades had disappeared from sight and sound.

A bumpy ride to Pulpit Rock to start the SERIOUS walking. Down the staircase following our excellent leader to the "pulpit". Here Jan started to come into her own pointing out the beautiful rock formation and the regenerated mallee bushes growing alongside the lookout. No one was inspired to give a sermon, so we returned to an overhanging rock to enjoy our first cup of tea or coffee. Here Jeanie had us discussing the best ways of combating fatigue on a long distance drive – possible helps are (a) eat lots of chocolate, (b) drink lots of coca cola or coffee, (c) listen to CDs of interesting stories or (d) get John Cardy to drive for you. Our morning tea break was extremely informative!

Next we walked a "Nature Trail" towards Govetts Leap. Here both Jan and Rosemary came into their own. We saw "orchids with dear little faces" (Helen), "adorable little pink orchids" (Rosemary), clumps of non-hybridised waratahs, (Rosemary and Anne). Jan stopped us to admire sundews trapping insects and trigger plants on the side of moss and lichen covered rocks, and later spotted a double sided rock – smooth on one side and honeycombed on the other, with a prostrate (not to be confused with prostate) epacris blooming beautifully in its shelter. On the return journey, with Gentleman George

coming to our rescue and Don following along, we spied some orange fungi growing on a burnt out log. The description varied from: Smith's crisps" to "a slice of dried preserved orange peel" (Jan and Jeanie).

Onto our second destination and a well deserved lunch in the gazebo at the Rhododendron Gardens. Here we admired the mix of azaleas, rhodos, pieris, flowering cherries and other exotic plants planted among native gums, and tended over years around a small lake with its own resident bullfrog. While here, we were glad to hear that our comrades were halfway and "all right" (courtesy of Allan and Ray).

Next stop, by car to Pierces Pass, through driving rain and a growing feeling of sympathy for our comrades. So sympathetic were we, that five of us "struggled" through the pouring rain and driving winds to Rigby Hill – turning back before actually reaching the summit. We were so concerned for the others, that we had a cup of tea and some bushwalking cake, before setting off to meet them.

After the rigours of Rigby Hill, the walk down Pierces Pass was a cinch, and in twenty minutes we met the first walkers, who although tired, had not experienced driving rain, but had climbed up steep tracks and fought off pythons, and were glad to know that they were nearly THERE! We joined them for the walk back up and for another cup of tea!

Many thanks Anne for that insightful account of how those who remained on high filled their day while we explored the low roads. John C.

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

Friday 19th November 2010

Ikara Ridge off Victoria Falls Road at Mt Victoria

This is a relatively easy walk with lots of wildflowers and great views. The group last walked this track in November 2005.

Meet at Merry Garth at 9.00am or at Victoria Falls Road just off the Western

Highway, about 1km east of Mt Victoria, at 9.30am.

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

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

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th December 2010 – Jinki Ridge off the Bells Line of Road east of Bell followed by the end of year luncheon at Merry Garth.

Friday 21st January 2011 – A Mt Wilson Ramble.

MEMBER NEWS

Marie and Heinz Kaenger, our Swiss connection, recently spent some time staying at Yengo in Mt Wilson. They were prevented by other commitments from attending our walks but sent best wishes to all in the group.

Christine Allen and Micheal Kluckner also wished to say hello from far off Vancouver; Judy and Graham Tribe, on their recent trip to the USA to meet and greet their newly arrived grand-daughter, caught up with Chris and Micheal.

Sadly we note the passing of Betty Clarke. Betty came to Mt Irvine as an infant in 1919 and lived there for sixty-eight years; she was a long time armchair walker with the group.

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.

12th November 2010 at Wynne Reserve

10th December 2010 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details