
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 20 Issue 9

September 2010

BOWENS CREEK ROAD OUR AUGUST WALK

**BOWENS CREEK ROAD
from BILPIN to Mt IRVINE**

Friday 20th August 2010

The small crowd that had gathered to witness the ribbon-cutting ceremony on the unpretentious timber bridge across Bowens Creek provided connections to a bridge of much greater repute. The Coathanger, the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge, is a tad larger and slightly more striking in appearance than Bowens Creek Bridge yet there are connections between the two structures; more on that later.

The Bowens Creek Road provided a much-needed direct link between Mt Irvine and Bilpin. The cutting of the ribbon at the bridge on Saturday 12 January 1935 signified the official opening following a long and difficult gestation period.

The route from Bilpin to Mt Irvine, surveyed by C.R. Scrivener in 1897 and marked with blazed trees, was kept open by Mt Irvine settlers for use as a foot and bridle track. In 1902 W.S. Campbell, writing in the Agricultural Gazette, rather optimistically stated "A road is now in the course of construction ---- and will be completed before very long". It was a further 32 years before the



Spring in the Bush

BILPIN TO MT IRVINE

road was opened thus providing easier and quicker access to markets for the primary producers of Mt Irvine.

A fine exhibition on the chequered history of this road is presently on display in the Turkish Bath Museum - well worth a visit. (Open 12.30pm to 3.30pm every Sunday – September and October, third Sunday – November and December.)

Our aim today was to explore the full length of this marvellous monument to the

endeavours of man that winds through stunning country standing in testimony to the creative hand of Mother Nature.

Following a slightly more complex than normal car shuffle efficiently organised as usual by Libby (many thanks to those who provided the necessary transport) we met just off the Bells Line of Road at Bilpin. Twenty walkers gathered a short distance west of the newly renamed Ramones Convenience Store; a name which will strike a chord with any early 1970s rock-n-rollers out there.

Libby gave a brief history of the road construction as an unemployment relief project and the trials and tribulations involved over the years in endeavouring to keep it open and maintained to a useable standard. The shared ownership of the road, in approximately equal parts by Blue Mountains

City Council and Hawkesbury City Council, has complicated this task.

Blessed once again with a clear blue sky and invigorated by a bracing breeze we set off along the road.

This first section of road was built on an easement through land owned by Abraham McKeown, an irascible teller of tall tales. Lieutenant Archibald Bell Snr, father of the young Archibald Bell who discovered the Bells Line route across the mountains apparently stirred his ire. Abe insisted the bullocks and horses refused to drag the hearse at Lieutenant Bell's funeral and it had to be pulled by convicts, as 'He was such a bad man'.

Initially the road is in quite good repair as it serves several impressive properties, however the standard rapidly deteriorates when the last of these homes is passed. The country is interesting here as on the left hand or high side of the road the vegetation is windblown heath while on the low side taller timber grows as the land drops down into a deep gully. Off to the right the open grazing land on Mt Tootie was visible.

Beside the road here are examples of the Narrow-leaf Hovea (*Hovea linearis*) displaying its mauve pea-like flowers emanating from its leaf axils and the occasional small pale-flowered wattle, possibly the Boomerang Wattle (*Acacia amoena*). As the road descends more steeply wind-worn caves appear on the high side, near one such cave the inscription '1M' appeared to be carved into the rock however it was rather indistinct. Not indistinct at all were the many pick marks still visible on the vertical rock faces indicating the amount of hard work with rudimentary tools which went into the road construction.

Soon we reached a sun-drenched rock outcrop sheltered from the wind and we paused for morning tea.

Continuing on we turn left onto the first leg of the zigzag which drops the road down to Bowens Creek. Here remnants of the safety

fence line the edge of the road. Charred by bushfires over the years some of these wooden posts still support rusting chain wire which in turn is all that holds the more badly burnt posts upright; battle-scarred sentinels disappearing into the distance.

On the high side of the road a Dog Rose (*Bauera rubioides*) scrambles along the base of the cliff, its many-petalled pink flowers bowing shyly on slender stems. Here, on patches of moist rock face, and indeed in many other places along the road are clusters of Common Sundew (*Drosera spathulata*), the sticky fluid on their rosettes of red leaves glistening in the sun, tempting unwary insects. Also scattered sparsely along the length of the road are Native Iris or Silky Purple-flag (*Patersonia serica*), the sunny day encouraging them to display their showy yet fragile and short-lived three-petalled flowers.

We sweep right at the first of the hairpin bends and pass a high rock face over which a small waterfall drops before splashing into a tiny clear pool at its base. The view down onto the canopy of the trees on the far side of Bowens Creek is interesting. The predominant grey/green of the eucalypt foliage is interspersed with long fingers of bright green indicating the rainforest species reaching down the more sheltered gullies which feed the creek. Rounding the second hairpin we descend the final leg of the zigzag past rock overhangs containing some amazingly intricate patterns sculpted by the wind.

Arriving at the Bowens Creek Bridge we leave our packs and venture a short distance upstream. Here we are in a different world. The sheltered moist environment encourages mosses and lichens to shroud rocks, fallen logs and bases of tree trunks creating a lush green setting which is reflected in the glassy pools of the creek. Debris caught high in the tree branches indicates however that the creek is not always so benign. A small tree noted in this area was the Pepper-bush (*Tasmannia insipida*) which, as the name implies, produces a strong peppery taste when the leaves are chewed. With the thought of chewing in mind we return to the bridge and sit in the sun to

partake of lunch. What a glorious spot this is to while away a little time.

Though a load limit of 7 tonnes has been applied to the bridge it still appears to be generally in quite good condition. The main beams of the bridge were of local turpentine and local timbers were also used in the framing. G & D Mackay of Wards River on the north coast supplied the decking timbers. Two huge angled props on the downstream side secure the bridge against the force of floods.

Relaxed and refuelled we set off toward Mt Irvine and as Tenzing Norgay may well have said to Edmund Hillary - it's all uphill from here.

After a short distance we pause at a small watercourse which drops down a mossy rock face and into a culvert under the road; Libby points out that Glow Worms can be seen at this spot after nightfall. In another sheltered gully John Meade, ever alert to unusual plants, spotted a Native Crab-apple (*Schizomeria ovata*) a tree with many similarities to the Coachwood. Soon we leave the road to climb down to inspect one of the campsites used by the road builders. Steps had been cut into the rock ledges to facilitate access and there were several opposing mortices in the rock which would have once supported wooden steps. The overgrown path leads to a long rock overhang which still contains evidence of occupation; a rusty enamel pot, tin cans and old packing case timber.

While continuing the climb it is quite obvious that the road on this side of the creek is in much better condition than on the Bilpin side. In 2007 the Blue Mountains City Council did resolve to maintain this section of the road to a 4WD standard; the reason however for the good condition of this section lies elsewhere. When the bushfire broke out north of Mt Irvine in November 2009 a Section 44 was declared allowing the RFS to bring heavy machinery (graders, bulldozers, etc) to the area to clear firetrails. When boggy conditions prevented the grader from working in other areas the Bowens Creek Road on the Mt Irvine

side of the creek was graded under the direction of Beth Raines, Captain of the Mt Wilson / Mt Irvine RFS.

As the road twists and turns its way up the hill the country becomes more open. We pass some wonderful examples of Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) and Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*) light up the scene with their golden blossom. The white flower heads of a few Slender Rice-flowers (*Pimelea linifolia ssp linifolia*) are conspicuous in the open woodland while the bright pink blossoms of a single early flowering Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) stand out brilliantly against a dark rock embankment.

We pass an inscription carved deeply into the face of a rock ledge '1½ MILES START OF ROAD', the letters 's' being reversed in both cases. Higher up the hill Mother Nature has been doing some carving of her own, illuminated by the afternoon sun there is a series of golden wafers of sandstone stacked obliquely below an overhang; a stunning sight.

Presently we reach the cars which were left at Mt Irvine in the morning shuffle and are all transported back to our starting point at Bilpin where we indulge in the usual after walk cuppa. Another great day spent enjoying the superb bushland and scenery in these beautiful mountains and marvelling at the skills and tenacity of the men who surveyed and carved this road out of the bush.

And what of the links between Bowens Creek Bridge and the Sydney Harbour Bridge you ask? One is the peculiar statistics which were recorded for posterity. In the case of 'The Coathanger' it was noted that 60,000 gallons of Berger paint were required to coat the new bridge; Bowens Creek countered that 24 gallons of tea were consumed at their opening; the brand name however was not recorded. The other link relates to the personalities present at the opening ceremonies. In a front-on photograph of the Bowens Creek ceremony the tall man standing behind the ribbon cutter, his eyes shaded by a broad brimmed hat is in fact none other than Francis Edward de Groot who of course was famously present at the

1932 opening in Sydney. He must have developed a penchant for being present when there was a ribbon to be cut, though he did refrain from bringing his horse and sword to Bowens Creek.

John C

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

Friday 17th September 2010

A Downhill Walk – What a Bonus! A Walk Through Open Forest into Limestone Country and a Cave Inspection to Follow

The Last Section of the Six Foot Track from Kiaora Hill to Jenolan Caves

In giving details for the August walk I suggested leaving the twists and turns of electioneering behind. We may indeed be no closer to a result when this walk takes place so it is quite fitting that our destination is the fantasy world of Jenolan Caves; full of illusions and black holes.

We last trod this path in July 2005. This is a relatively short walk of a little over 4km, all downhill. A vehicle shuffle will need to be organised to leave some cars at the caves to transport us back up the hill to our starting point.

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 will apply, around \$20 to \$25 per person - (normally \$35 to \$40). Allan has suggested the Temple of Baal or Orient cave with perhaps an added bonus of a variation to the normal exit from the complex.

Allan and Jeanie have kindly invited us to call into their property 'Majic Views' at 157 McKanes Falls Road at South Bowenfels, just a short deviation on the way back to Mt Victoria and Mt Wilson, for afternoon tea.

Meet at Merry Garth at 8.00am or Mt Victoria station car park at 8.30am. Those coming from the Lithgow area may prefer to meet at the hotel at Hampton at 9.00am. Early notification of your attendance would

be appreciated to allow Libby ample time to organise vehicle rationalisations and the car shuffle to the caves.

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.

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

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 15th October 2010 – The Blue Gum Forest, Perrys Lookdown to Pierces Pass. 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

Friday 17th December 2010 – Jinki Ridge off the Bells Line of Road east of Bell

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 September 2010 at Sloan Reserve

8th October 2010 at Sloan Reserve

12th November 2010 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details

Footnote

The trip to Lord Howe Island in August by fifteen members, partners and friends of the group proved to be a resounding success. Mountains were climbed, forests were explored, beaches were strolled, coral reefs were viewed and fish were fed, as were, more than amply so, the participants. Flight cancellations forced many in the group to endure two extra days in this little piece of paradise courtesy of Qantaslink; what a shame!