
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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GOOCHS CRATER-THE STORY CONCLUDES. KATOOMBA FALLS,
GIANT STAIRWAY,
FURBER STEPS LEURA FOREST AND
TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK cont'd

**GOOCHS CRATER on the
NEWNES PLATEAU**

Friday 18th March 2011

You will recall dear reader that the group was left hanging by a thread when lack of space prevented this story being completed last month. In true matinee serial fashion did good prevail over evil? And what of that dark serpent and the forceful femme? Read on, all will be revealed.

With the rope firmly anchored, looped around a conveniently placed tree for a change in direction and with people stationed at strategic points to assist, the descent began. One by one we sidle across the slippery rock face then drop straight down to the gully below. True to Saturday arvo tradition the cliff-hanger was resolved without serious incident, everyone handling this descent very well and all arriving safely at the base of the cliff; a great team effort.

We are now standing in an amphitheatre looking out onto an array of tall trees marching down the slope. To our left there is a vertical moss-covered wall and the aperture through which we had peered is visible high in



Autumn in the Bush

a huge wind sculpted cave. We head right to a long rock overhang where the floor carries huge blocks of stone which have dropped from the roof of the overhang many years ago. A short distance on there is a smaller moister cave surrounded by ferns where there is a deep red stalactite and corresponding stalagmite forming while nearby there is a large column of the same material. The material is quite soft and silky to feel, probably iron oxide mixed with the

earthy substances which form ochre, leaching through the sandstone; an intriguing sight.

It is then a gentle bush bash around the base of a high bluff, a climb up through a thick ground cover of ferns between some huge boulders and a cliff face draped in thick moss and small filigree ferns, in order to enter the crater proper. As we make our way around toward our lunch spot we pass the track we will be following after lunch. Right beside this track lay a coiled Black Snake, its head resting atop its dark glossy body, it watches with beady little eyes apparently unperturbed as we pass. Its rather large girth and relaxed self-satisfied demeanour may indicate it has partaken of the 'eat all you can' smorgasbord of frogs on offer in the lagoon.

Seated under a large rock overhang looking out over the lagoon we settle in for lunch, or most of us settle. Let me warn you, and don't

be fooled by her svelte form, never stand between Victoria and a can of food when she is feeling peckish. Attempting to open the can she rips the ring pull completely off the lid with Amazonian gusto; a forceful femme indeed!

We then head back toward the dark serpent. Will it block the track? Will it strike? No, it decides to take the easy option and slithers slowly off the track allowing us to pass.

We make our way around the edge of the lagoon across the spongy sphagnum moss, climb through thick brush and return to the cars. On the way back to Clarence we call in to Bald Trig Point to gain a panoramic view over the area from whence we have just come; a fitting way to end a very special walk.

John C

OUR APRIL WALK

**KATOOMBA FALLS, ECHO POINT,
THE GIANT STAIRWAY,
DARDANELLES PASS, LEURA FOREST,
FEDERAL PASS and FURBER STEPS**

Friday 15th April 2011

We really are a peculiar society. Prince Henry William Frederick Albert, Duke of Gloucester, Son of King George V fleetingly visits Katoomba Railway Station in 1934, spends twenty minutes on the platform, just a tad longer than it would take to introduce him with his full title, and we name a classic nine kilometre walking track, the Prince Henry Cliff Walk, after him. In 1911 track ranger Jim McKay conceives the idea of connecting Echo Point with the Federal Pass more than three hundred metres below. He and his assistants cut more than three hundred and seventy steps, working with hand tools only, from 1916 until work was stopped in 1918 due to council concerns at the cost. Council subsequently agreed to complete the project in 1932. Jim McKay with assistant Walter Botting spent many more months, at times suspended from cliffs on ropes, finishing the job commenced sixteen years earlier. This magnificent creation, conceived and largely constructed by

the efforts of Jim McKay, was opened with great fanfare in October 1932 and officially named ----- The Giant Stairway; a peculiar set of values indeed.

As part of our walk today, with little sovereign assistance but greatly reliant on the efforts of McKay and Botting, we would descend this stairway to paradise – the delights of Leura Forest and the Jamison Valley.

It was a calm sunny morning as twenty-three gathered at the picnic area near Katoomba Cascades to commence this walk. We welcomed Peter Wholohan's brother Mick who joined us today and welcomed back Bob Bearup who has not walked with us for some time.

Our first stop was at the Cliff View Lookout for our first glimpse of Katoomba Falls and as the name implies, spectacular views of the cliff face below Malaita Point and Narrow Neck. Through a gap in the rainforest canopy red carriages of the Scenic Railway stood out, already transporting tourists from all corners of the world into this beautiful valley.

Through a patch of Dwarf She Oak (*Allocasuarina nana*) we reach Wollumai Lookout, (Wollumai is Aboriginal for lookout so I guess this is Lookout Lookout). Here the views down into Pitts Amphitheatre and out across Jamison Valley become more expansive and on a day such as this are sublime. The track then drops down past a rocky outcrop now known as Bellbird Lookout. Across a little gully we arrive at Allambie Lookout (Aboriginal for quiet place or place of meditation). Here a rock bench seat below an overhang provides an ideal spot to sit awhile and contemplate the world around you or perhaps just indulge in a little navel-gazing.

Continuing on we pass some Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*) in the now more moist environment, cross a trickle of water and move through a copse of tall Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*), walk through a moist area below a large overhang and climb up to Lady Darleys Lookout. (Lady and Sir Frederick Darley built the nearby

Lillianfels House in 1899 and had extensive land holdings in this area.) Here we pause to take in the magnificence laid out before us. The monolithic Mount Solitary floating above a sea of eucalypt forest, the ramparts of the Ruined Castle sitting atop the ridge below Castle Head, distant peaks disappearing into the characteristic blue haze; all this framed by the sandstone walls below Narrow Neck Plateau and Kings Tableland.

Soon we arrive at Echo Point and pause for a while at Queen Elizabeth Lookout; originally known, by the more descriptive name, as the Projecting Platform. Views of the iconic Three Sisters are on offer here along with a cross section of different nationalities of the world delivered by the tourist buses; lucky tourists indeed to be here in such wonderful weather conditions. We retreat to the park above the lookout area to pause for morning tea.

The name Echo Point of course derives from the aural echo reflecting off the surrounding cliffs. Sitting at this elevated point looking out (as one does at a lookout) at the vast panorama before us, one ponders echoes of a different kind. The echoes of geological time involved in forming this magnificent landscape; the uplifting and subsequent erosion to form these majestic cliffs and picturesque valleys. The echoes through time of the Aboriginal people who once inhabited this land; roaming these plateaux and valleys hunting and gathering and leaving their marks engraved and painted on the ancient rocks. The echoes of early European explorers and settlers who battled to cross these mountains and establish a life in these unfamiliar and unforgiving surrounds. The echoes, more recent, of holidaymakers luxuriating in establishments of art deco splendour, treading many of the paths we walk today, they too left marks in the ancient rocks; messages of love and of hope, messages simply declaring their presence in these magical mountains. And echoes of our own adventures in these captivating mountains, exploring ridges and valleys, clifftops and canyons; gathering images which will echo in our memory for years to come.

Enough reflection, time to move on. We cross the first of the nine hundred and eleven steps to begin our descent of the Giant Stairway; pick marks in the sheer rock walls along the way are lasting evidence of the enormous energy expended by McKay and his helpers.

An equivocal sign at about the halfway point of the track declares 'Walkers Beneath'. Observing the pained looks of exhaustion on a couple of people laboriously ascending in this area my twisted imagination conjured visions of walkers interred where they fell.

Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*), Rock Sprengelia (*Sprengelia monticola*), *Epacris reclinata* and other cliff-dwellers decorate the upper sections of the stairway and as we descend we enter woodland containing Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*), Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) and Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*). Rising up from the valley below is the tinkling call of the Bellbirds.

At the base of the stairway we turn left and follow the Dardanelles Pass. A giant Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), one of many in this area, grows beside the track, a tall narrow triangular opening reveals its dark hollowed base. Soon the canopy begins to close as the track leads us into rainforest. Filigree fronds of tree ferns catch the light, their soft green contrasting with the darker tones of nearby foliage. A huge vine, coiling and curling as it reaches for the tree tops, hangs across the track; it is impossible to pass without reaching up to touch.

Presently we reach the Leura Forest. This is a magical place with moss-shrouded rocks and boulders, many hosting a variety of tiny ferns, scattered across open ground deeply carpeted with leaf-litter from the towering trees enclosing this space. Here the tinkling of the bellbirds is replaced by the equally pleasant burbling and gurgling of the Banksia Streamlet which flows through this enchanting area. What better place to pause for lunch and allow the sublime beauty of this forest to wash over us and seep into our souls.

We now take the Federal Pass which runs parallel with Dardanelles Pass but at a position further away from the cliff line. This means we are soon walking in more open woodland but the surrounds are no less impressive than on our earlier path. Towering Blue Mountains Ash and Turpentine are interspersed with Angophoras displaying recently revealed new bark in glowing colours of orange and gold. One example had a very knobby trunk while nearby there was a perfectly smooth-trunked tree; others carried many dimples in their trunks, such are the variations presented by the Angophoras.

Continuing along the track we now begin to meet other walkers in this more frequented area; great to see so many younger families exploring the bushland. A particularly beautiful little mushroom was spotted growing on the embankment. Sitting atop a slender pure white stem the centre of the cap was a purple/mauve colour fading to white at the serrated edge; a delightful sight.

We arrive at Cooks Crossing (named after Sir Joseph Cook, Prime Minister of Australia 1913-14). Here at the base of Katoomba Falls the headwaters of the Kedumba River cascade between huge mossy boulders deposited here as the cliffs above have collapsed over thousands of years. Adjacent to the small bridge grows a tree uncommon in this district, the Black Sassafras or Southern Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*). With the accompaniment of the water music we rest here awhile before climbing the slope which delivers us to the base of the Furber Steps Track. Here some decide to glide effortlessly out of the valley on the cable car while the remainder of the group begin the climb.

The Furber Steps are named after Thomas Furber, Government Surveyor who arranged a grant for their cost. This track zig zags under large rock overhangs and through enclosed forest and affords wonderful views of the Three Sisters and the Katoomba Falls. Back at our start point I overheard Allan Cupitt say to Libby: "How fortunate we are to have all this on our doorstep". How fortunate indeed!

OUR MAY WALK

Friday 20th May 2011

A Basalt Capped Peak, Woodland and Heath, Panoramic Views and Awe-inspiring Cliffs

Mount Banks and Banks Wall.

We last walked this circuit in June 2006. A gentle climb to the summit of the mount, then through open woodland and heath to the edge of the chasm which is Grose Gorge.

Meet at the Mt Banks Picnic Ground off the Bells Line of Road about 4km east of the Mt Wilson turn off at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 9.00am.

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 17th June 2011 – Kanangra Walls

Friday 15th July 2011 – Govetts Leap to Evans Lookout and the Braeside Track

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 May 2011 at Wynne Reserve - planting ferns

10th June 2011 at Galwey Lane near Jalscene

8th July 2011 at Galwey Lane near Rimon

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details