
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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KANANGRA WALLS IN KANANGRA-BOYD NP

TOPIC

OUR AUGUST WALK

The Plateau and Dance Floor
Cave at Kanangra Walls

Friday 19th August 2011

“There is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather.” So said English author, art critic and social reformer John Ruskin. Based on this premise the cold, the rain, the wind and the fog that greeted us as we arrived at Kanangra Walls was all good.

The thirteen optimists who gathered at our last meeting spot at Hampton decided that despite the weather beginning to close in, we would continue on to Kanangra Walls; the journey is through very nice country regardless of the weather.

We headed south through the varying terrain of open farmland, native bush and large tracts of pine forest to that wonderfully serpentine piece of road which drops us down to the enclosed valley in which the Jenolan Caves nestle. Across the enchanting little stone bridge, past the lichen-blotched stone walls, into the gaping mouth of the Grand Arch and down its narrow dark throat which delivers us to the Caves House precinct. We paused here for a quick comfort stop. Those already comfortable enough watched the antics of the Crimson Rosellas and admired the narrow waterfall dropping down the near vertical rockface while they waited.



Spring in the Bush

We then continued on to climb up onto the Kanangra Range. The last three vehicles in this little ‘convoy of confidence’, led by Geoff Kelly, made a short tour of inspection of the upper carpark when the sultry voice on Geoff’s satellite navigation device seduced him into turning right at that point for some unknown reason. (Geoff assures me he always does exactly as he is told.)

Back on track we made it to the start of the twenty-five kilometres of unsealed road; a sallow sandy ribbon which leads us along the Kanangra

Range to the Walls.

The tall open forest traversed by this road for much of its length provides a spectacular sight in these wet conditions and under the subdued light. There is little understorey present and this facilitates an almost uninterrupted view through a mix of smooth-barked and fibrous-barked trunks; stout pillars holding aloft weeping canopies of rain-soaked foliage. The rain has intensified the colours of the bark on these trees. The fibrous trunks are much darker when wet and display patches of white froth as the rainwater reacts with the bark, on the moistened smooth bark the soft greens and creams glow in the muted light.

In some areas the tall open forest is replaced by dense stands of Blue Mountains Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*), their multiple trunks forming a palisade of slender pickets topped with canopies of glossy green foliage. In these

more open areas there were also many examples of the Dwarf She Oak (*Allocasuarina nana*), weighed down by the burden of rainwater they were even more diminutive than normal. At one point along this road there is a cluster of large, almost spherical rocks draped with mosses and lichens; a stunning sight.

After some minor slipping and sliding on the last couple of kilometres we arrived safely at the Kanangra Walls parking area. There to greet us were Rosemary and George Knott who usually walk with us but just happened to be here today with a group from their Probus Club on a four day 4WD tour.

After waving off Rosemary and George and their group, comfortably ensconced warm and dry in their 4WDs, we assembled in the shelter shed where we welcomed Jane Wholahan, Mick's wife, who was joining us for the first time today. An unfortunate choice for a first walk Jane, but we assure you it is unusual to have wet weather on our walks. (That was probably a rather injudicious statement to make, hope I haven't stirred up the weather gods.)

Suitably garbed against all this 'good weather' we were having, we set off to enjoy the view from the first lookout on Echo Head; I did say we were a group of thirteen optimists. Lo and behold, when we reached the lookout, the grandeur of the cliff faces of Kanangra Walls was on full display. The mist and cloud concealed any features beyond the edge of the plateau and this seemed to intensify the golden glow of these majestic sandstone cliffs. On the wooded talus slopes below the cliffs several long narrow scars resulting from landslides were evident, adding to the brooding atmosphere of the mist-shrouded Kanangra Deep. Five hundred metres below us the line of Kanangra Creek, punctuated by a few cushions of fog, could be traced only a short distance before it disappeared into the haze. Mount Cloudmaker had done just that and hidden itself, along with all other features more than a couple of kilometres away from our lofty eyrie.

After allowing us to take in the magnificent vista before us for several minutes Mother Nature decided to give us even more 'good weather' and the clouds obscured the view as the rain intensified.

We then followed the track which drops down to the small saddle that leads across to the plateau. The cliffs here are composed of a conglomerate of waterworn pebbles and larger stones embedded in the sandstone. In the shaded area near the sidetrack to the Dance Floor Cave the exposed rounded protrusions of these captive rocks are encrusted with lichens and mosses forming hundreds of velvety little mounds spread across the rockface. We diverted to the shelter of the Dance Floor Cave where we paused for morning tea.

As the name implies, a timber platform was constructed in this large cave in 1891 by the younger folk of Oberon. (In that same year a boy was born upon whom this area would have a huge influence and he upon it.) People from as far away as Camden, Picton and Burratorang, as well as those from Oberon, attended functions held here. David Howell, who was walking with us today, related that his father spoke of attending dances here. (David's father owned the general store in Oberon and apparently the family name is still displayed on the building.) Travelling long distances to socialise was of course a necessity for those who lived in these isolated communities.

Travelling long distances was something that never deterred Myles Dunphy. Born during the year when that dance floor was constructed, he had so much to do with the exploration and mapping of this area, the naming of many of its features and indeed with its conservation. In October 1912 he made his first visit to the area with Bert Gallop when they attempted to walk to Burratorang Valley from Jenolan Caves. The rugged nature of the country defeated them yet Myles returned year after year, captivated by the beauty and grandeur of the area. So impressed in fact that he named his son Milo *Kanangra* Dunphy.

(Kanangra is an Aboriginal word for beautiful, however its adoption for this area appears to derive from the Gundungurra name for the creek 'Koo-nan-goor-wa' which was corrupted to 'Koonangaroo' and subsequently Kanangra was adopted.)

Milo Dunphy made his first journey to Kanangra in early 1931 aged twenty months. Myles modified a pram in which to convey Milo along with some supplies and fashioned leather boots to protect his dog's feet; he and wife Margaret then walked from Oberon to Kanangra walls. That modified pram and the tiny canine boots are now in the National Museum of Australia in Canberra.

We spent some time in the cave looking out at all that 'goodness' falling from the sky while watching a cheeky Rock Warbler hopping around close to our feet, flicking its tail from side to side as it searched for elusive crumbs. Situated toward the far end of the cave is a water container placed here by two bushwalking families, the Halls and the Crafts, during Christmas 1940. It is fed by water that is filtered as it seeps through the sandstone roof of the cave; the weather being so 'good' of late, the container doth runneth over.

We leave the sanctuary of the cave and make our way up onto the plateau via the rough stairs which are at the position of the original Aboriginal route; they employed a notched tree trunk to gain access to the plateau. Off to our right is Seymour Top which overlooks First Ascent Creek, the route taken by brothers Johnny and Thomas Seymour in the 1860s to make the first ascent by white men to the Walls. Though I can't find it on any map that I have, there is a high point nearby known as Headless Rider Point. Apparently this was named after drovers reported seeing a headless rider and his white horse charging over the cliff; not surprisingly the sightings were always around midnight – I think I'd like some of whatever they were on!

The rock platforms on the plateau have many depressions of varying depths, on previous visits a few of these held some water but most were dry; today they were all brim-full. One

large shallow pool perfectly reflected a truncated cone-shaped rock formation at its edge; the white lichen near its apex completed the impression of a snow-capped mountain beside a lake. In the foreground the stunted Bonsai form of a Narrow-leaf Drumstick (*Isopogan anethifolius*) holding aloft its bronze-tipped needle-like foliage added an oriental touch to the scene; "Mount Fuji in miniature" quipped Jan Northam.

The low wind-clipped vegetation took on the appearance of an undulating tapestry tinted in muted shades of bronze and gold, russet and olive, crimson and orange, rust and verdigris; all bejewelled with glistening droplets of rain clinging to the foliage. The appearance of this tract of heath, viewed against the background of swirling clouds of mist, was magical.

We passed little moss gardens nestled in rocky depressions and squeezed through narrow passages between the encroaching rain-soaked heath as we continued along the plateau. I was reminded of that wonderful Australian writer Alan Marshall as we made our way across open areas of rock shelf for we too 'could jump puddles'.

Soon we diverted to the cliff edge to gain a view of the spectacular rock overhang featured in Charles Chauvel's 1955 film "Jedda". Via some local knowledge of David Howell we learnt that the rock platform we were standing on once carried white crosses which marked set camera positions for the shooting of that film.

By now the wind and rain were beginning to increase and the views were completely obscured by the mist and low cloud; it was obvious the weather was becoming 'too good' for us to continue. So at the point where the final scene for "Jedda" was shot we decided to let the curtain fall on our walk for today and made our way back to the shelter shed at the carpark where we sought refuge to partake of lunch.

I was contemplating our curtailed walk as we drove back through the glistening moist landscape of the open forest on the Kanangra Range and past the verdant farmlands of

Oberon. Seeing the Walls in that special subdued light before the view was snatched away by the encroaching cloud, experiencing that special feeling of heightened comfort in the Dance Floor Cave as the rain fell outside. Feeling the wind and the rain on our faces as we walked through that magical heath on the plateau, the sight sound and smell of the bush when it is dripping with moisture. Perhaps John Ruskin was right; perhaps there are only different kinds of good weather.

John Cardy

GENERAL NEWS

Following our June walk to the Waterfall Circuit at Lawson and Terrace Falls Circuit at Hazelbrook Libby wrote to the Blue Mountains City Council. She complimented them on behalf of the Group for the track maintenance they were undertaking in this area. Libby also suggested that they include directions as to how to combine these two walks (as we did on the day) in any new signage they plan for these walks.

Libby received a reply from Council thanking her for her kind words regarding track maintenance and that her comments would be forwarded to field staff and for her thoughts regarding new signage, stating that new signs should be in place soon. (Helen and I walked these circuits with the National Parks Association Group on 1st August and some new directional signs have indeed been installed since our Group's visit but major track head signage is yet to be installed.)

Many thanks Libby for taking the time to pen that letter as it is good to let Council know the community is making use of the walking tracks and to have some input into their upgrading.

Jan Newman has telephoned Libby and asked to be remembered to the Group; she hopes to join us again in the near future. (John C)

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

Friday 16th September 2011

Open Pastures and Majestic Cliffs, Tree-clad Mountainsides and River Cascades

Six Foot Track, Second Section, Megalong Cemetery to Coxs River and Return

The group last walked this second section of the Six Foot Track in August 2004. This walk is a little over 12km in total, however, as the return journey is along the same route as the outward trek it is possible to do only part of the walk if you wish, provided you are prepared to wait where you stop until the group returns.

Meet at St Aidan's Church in Hat Hill Road (just off the Great Western Highway) at Blackheath at 8.30am or at Merry Garth at 8.00am. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at Blackheath for the drive into the Megalong Valley.

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

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 21st October – Asgard Swamp near Mt Victoria

Friday 18th November – Mt Hay and the Butterbox

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.

9th September 2011 at Sloan Reserve

14th October 2011 at Silva Plana

11th November 2011 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details