
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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HAPPY VALLEY AT MOUNT WILSON

TOPIC

OUR JANUARY WALK

**A VILLAGE STROLL then to
HAPPY VALLEY at MOUNT
WILSON**

Friday 20th January 2012

During the 1880s two men who would have significant impacts on the village of Mount Wilson, indeed on Sydney, were at opposite ends of their careers.

One, Henry, was establishing a modest retail store in Newtown.

The other, Richard, was using the fruits of his endeavours as a building materials merchant, since arriving in Sydney on an assisted passage in 1842 as a 19-year-old bricklayer, to improve facilities at his Mount Wilson property. While Henry was building up his fledgling department store business, Richard was planning the construction of a Turkish Bath on his country estate.

Having walked away from his estate, Drachenfels, at Mount York following the accidental death there of his six year old son in 1899, Henry built a home at Mount Wilson in about 1910 - Sefton Hall. He often expressed to his family a desire for a church to be built at Mount Wilson; he unfortunately did not see this come to fruition as he died unexpectedly, at Sefton Hall, in 1913.

Today we visited two iconic buildings of Mount Wilson; Richard Wynne's Turkish bath



Summer in the Bush

on the Wynstay estate and St George's Church, built on land provided by Richard Wynne's grandson, in memory of department store entrepreneur Henry Marcus Clark.

An enthusiastic group of twenty-four gathered under clearing skies at Merry Garth. It was very pleasing to have long-time member Gillian Pembroke joining us once again today and to have Christine Allen and Michael Kluckner, who regularly walked with us from 2007 to 2009 before returning to Canada, join us during their

short visit back to the land down-under. We also welcomed Heather Blicharski, a friend of Anne Rodrigues, who joined us for this walk.

As we made our way along Galwey Lane on this first walk of the year a new beginning was beautifully symbolised by a newborn calf being suckled by its mother, perhaps for its first time, in the Wynstay paddock. A delightfully rustic scene with the Wynstay stables, coach house and domed well in the background.

This scene and our walk below the overarching trees along Waterfall Road and The Avenue to the Church and the Turkish Bath have prompted a small pinch of self-indulgence. I have included just a few lines from a lyric poem I wrote some years ago about Mount Wilson - 'A Seasonal Place'; although based on a winter day, I feel these lines are appropriate to the situation. Actually

it is a huge slab of self-indulgence on my part
but here goes.

.....

On through this tunnel

Of trees without leaves

There stands the lychgate

Lichen draped from its eaves

Beyond this fine portal

Is a sight heaven sent

The Church of St George

Built in asbestos cement

And up on the hill

There are stone walls - crenellated

Near the old Turkish Bath

Where heat was once generated

.....

Enough of that – more than enough did I hear?
We shall move on.

Standing at that lychgate Libby pointed out the extension pieces which had to be spliced onto the four large support posts to raise their height; just one of the many ongoing problems that have to be dealt with in order to maintain this church to service such a small community.

At the Church and the Turkish Bath I gave a brief overview of their histories and building details while Libby filled in some finer points from her extensive local knowledge both of the church and the Wynstay estate, including the details of a rather remarkable coincidence. Three people (their memories all very dear to Libby) who came from the North Riding of Yorkshire, in fact from places within five miles of each other, now lie at rest in the small cemetery of St George's Church. Matthie Davies who was batman to Colonel Richard Owen Wynne during WWI and came to Australia with him to work as his butler and general hand at the Wynstay estate, Charles W (Daddo) Jefferson, a real character who

contributed much to Mount Wilson and was related to the pioneering Gregson family and thirdly Libby's own mother, then Elizabeth (Betty) Barton. Three people from Yorkshire, totally unrelated, end up living in a tiny village, rather isolated in their times, on the other side of the world. As is often said truth can be far more intriguing than fiction.

We then set off along the Anniversary Walk to the Cathedral Reserve where we paused for morning tea. Here we were joined by Jeanie and Allan Cupitt bringing our attendance to twenty-six.

Continuing on we made our way through the magical Cathedral of Ferns; the subdued light in this space provides a mystical atmosphere. Tree Ferns with trunks inclined at crazy angles, some even lying on the ground, strive to bend vertically to support their parasols of lush green fronds. High on the trees, below the dense enclosing canopy, Orange Blossom Orchids (*Sarcochilus falcatus*) cling to trunks while Bird's Nest Ferns (*Asplenium australasicum*) nestle in forks of branches. We pass the forlorn form of the Giant Tree, a once magnificent Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) which held its head a little too high, was struck by lightning and is now paying the ultimate price. We emerge onto a track which takes us up onto Lambs Hill and swing right to follow the powerline easement down to the start of the Happy Valley Track.

Here Libby related that Tom and Peter Kirk formed the track down to Happy Valley around 1920. While the Cathedral Creek section had always remained open due to people using it to collect water for use at the picnic area, the continuation of the track to Happy Valley was less often used and became overgrown and hidden by the deep leaf litter of the rainforest. Libby knew of the existence of this track and harboured a strong desire to rediscover the route, yet many attempts proved unfruitful. Eventually, forty years ago, she found evidence of the zigzag section and worked her way back up the hill to the roadway. Here she excitedly told of her discovery to a young man who happened to be walking along the road and expressed her

desire to clear the track and open it once more. He offered to help and they spent several weeks working in the rainforest clearing the way to Happy Valley and beginning to build a path to a happy future; that young man was Keith Raines. In more recent years Libby and Keith's son Peter installed the timber steps and retaining structures, making passage of the steeper sections of the track far easier.

As we leave the road we initially move through tall open forest but are soon walking beneath the more enclosing canopy of the rainforest. Tall straight trunks, emanating from flared and buttressed bases, tower above us. Lush ferns form a feathery carpet of ground cover while their tallest cousins, the Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*) hold aloft cartwheels of gently cascading fronds.

The track begins to descend gently down the hillside. A swing to the right delivers us to a set of stairs which leads us past a large vertical rockface covered in velvety deep green moss. A turn to the left leads us over a moss encrusted tree trunk laying across the track, the brilliant green of its coating contrasting markedly with the muted tones of the surrounding leaf litter. Water Vines (*Cissus sp*) lie like giant serpents on the forest floor before coiling skyward, their foliage seeking the energy of the sun.

As the descent steepens the track zigzags past some large rock overhangs, the upper sections of these are quite dry and support very little vegetation while the lower sections are carpeted with ferns, including the Strap Fern (*Blechnum patersonii*) among many others. The small fleshy fronds of Rock Felt Ferns (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*) decorate many of the rocks and tree trunks and a rather uncommon fern, the Mother Spleenwort (*Asplenium bulbiferum*) is also present here. This fern, as the common name implies, produces small plantlets near the ends of its fronds.

Below the largest of these rock overhangs, an overhang which protects an area resembling an amphitheatre, the pleasant sound of cascading water can be heard and the first glimpses of the waters of Waterfall Creek can

be seen still far below. The track becomes quite slippery now, more so than normal following the wet summer, and we carefully make our way down the last steep bank into this little piece of paradise aptly named Happy Valley.

Fronds of the Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and the King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) arch gracefully over the creek. The little stream burbles and purls across the dark rock of the creek bed before leaping over a ledge to generate intricate ripple patterns in the limpid pool below. The waters of this small creek, which rises in the village of Mount Wilson, then continue on down this steep-sided valley through a magnificent array of ferns and forest giants to Bowens Creek. They then flow via the Wollangambe River to the Colo and Hawkesbury Rivers to finish their journey in Broken Bay.

After spending some time allowing the atmosphere of this special place to seep into our beings we began the climb back up the steep flank of the valley. On reaching the amphitheatre-like rock overhang we paused to have lunch. Some sat in the aisles, others in the front stalls with a few opting to settle high up in the gods, the upper circle, to be entertained by the soothing sounds of an unseen waterfall deep in the valley.

When Libby rose high in the dress circle, to begin distributing portions of her cake as is usual, she fell victim of the slippery conditions. A disaster was averted when Graham Tribe saved the day (and Libby) and prevented the Bushwalker Cake from becoming an Upside Down Cake.

We then made our way back to the junction with the Cathedral Creek Track. Here some decided to continue on directly to Mount Irvine Road and return to Merry Garth; the remainder veered left and dropped down toward Cathedral Creek.

There are some amazing rainforest trees along this track, large straight trunks devoid of low branches appear as columns reaching for the sky; none more spectacular than a giant Lillypilly (*Acmena smithii*), some references

state this species is “a small tree” – the authors obviously haven’t trodden this path. At Cathedral Creek immediately downstream of the end of the track is a quite unusual Soft Tree Fern. It has toppled from the bank on which it was growing, its long trunk coming to rest in a horizontal position supported in the fork of a tree. The trunk, as is their wont in these situations, has bent into a vertical position to support its crown of fronds but the underside of the trunk has formed a perfect sharp-edged right angle, very unusual in nature.

We now begin to make our way up the creek line through this magical forest of tree ferns, carefully picking our way through the undergrowth and past banks of moss and ground ferns. Suspended above the creek is a large bulbous cocoon-like structure; the nest of a Yellow-throated Scrubwren. Moving higher up the gully we pass an outcrop of basalt, the darkness of these rocks accentuating the silver of the water cascading over them. Soon we are jolted from the fantasy world of this tranquil forest by the sound of vehicles on Mount Irvine Road.

Back at Merry Garth we gathered in Libby and Keith’s enchanting garden for our usual after walk cuppa, a very pleasant way to end a day exploring some of the special places in Mount Wilson and to reflect on the beauty of the environments we had just experienced.

Most of us have our own “Happy Valley”, whether real or imagined. Secret places in nature or in the mind where we are at peace with the world. If you are still looking for yours it would be hard to find a place more sublime than Happy Valley at Mount Wilson.

John Cardy

MEMBER NEWS

Libby has renewed the registration of the Group’s Distress Beacon for a further two years as is required by the Emergency Response Division of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

Friday 17th February 2012

Dramatic Cliffs, Magnificent Waterfalls, Ferny Glens and Valley Vistas

The National Pass and Valley of the Waters at Wentworth Falls

The group last visited this spectacular venue in February 2008. This circular walk is only about 5km long but is graded as hard. There is a descent of 210 metres and, surprisingly, a subsequent ascent of 210 metres. There are lots of stairs both down and up so knee-bend excises beforehand would be prudent.

Meet at the Conservation Hut Car Park in Fletcher St at Wentworth Falls at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and 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 16th March – The Lost City on the Newnes Plateau

Friday 20th April – To be advised

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 February at Sloan Reserve

9th March at Sloan Reserve

13th April at Sloan Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details