
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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LEURA FOREST WITH A TWIST

TOPIC

OUR JUNE WALK

**LEURA FOREST with a
TWIST then FERN BOWER
or SCENIC RAILWAY EXIT**

Friday 15th June 2012

The disparity between the landscape at Leura in the Blue Mountains and the pastoral lands of Central Queensland is as wide as the physical distance between these two areas yet the name of this mountain town derives from Queensland. When Frederick Clissold purchased land in this area he named his holding Leura after the Central Queensland pastoral estate of that name. Myles McRae, Benjamin Chapman and William Robertson subsequently put land in the area up for sale; their plan of subdivision, dated August 1881, carried the name "Leura Estate" and this charming village was born.

The fourteen who gathered on this crisp morning however were not off on a village stroll; they were here to explore the majestic forests, ferny glens and exquisite waterfalls below the escarpment of this very special place.

With Libby away I became stand-in leader and Allan Cupitt kindly took on my usual role of whip. Libby and Keith of course were in Switzerland strolling through alpine meadows of knee high wildflowers and taking in spectacular views of lakes nestled below four thousand metre snow capped mountains. I too



Winter in the Bush

found myself with much better views having moved to the front of the group compared with the usual scene before me when bringing up the rear. (How is the view back there Allan?)

We make our way down past the terribly kitsch yet rather appealing faux rock shelter shed, toilets and archway; I do hope there is a preservation order on these types of structures, which are scattered throughout the mountains, as they provide a link to bygone days. Soon we are beside the tumbling waters of the Leura

Cascades as they course down to the sandy-bottomed pool below the rock overhang where we pause awhile to admire the beauty of these silver terraces. At the top of the Bridal Veil Falls (once known as the Upper Leura Falls) we take in the view to Mount Solitary framed by the majestic cliff lines of the nearby headlands. Atop the next set of stairs there is a wonderful view down onto the face of the Bridal Veil and from this angle a patch of clear grassed land can be seen far below; soon we will traverse that area.

We turn left off the Round Walk and drop down some stairs which lead us into lush rainforest. A wide variety of small ferns line the track and we wind past a huge boulder adorned with mosses, lichens and tiny ferns. Soon we are at the base of Bridal Veil Falls where our faces are touched by the fine mist

from the filigree curtain of water cascading down the curved rock face.

The track then drops down into a shaded glen strewn with moss covered boulders. Sitting atop one such boulder is a magnificent giant of the forest. A mature Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) with exposed roots tightly clasping the boulder as they radiate sinuously from its fluted base before dropping over the edge to seek sustenance from the rainforest floor. Our Bonsai man Ray Nesci is absolutely enthralled by this sight, 'Root-over-Rock' being one of the classic styles of Bonsai. As he sits among the roots of this magnificent specimen one can sense the thought processes: "There just has to be some way this can be transferred to my backyard".

Soon we emerge into more open terrain as we near the cliff edge and find an area where rock ledges provide convenient seating and we pause for morning tea. From near this spot the eye is drawn to a large area of pure white; a layer of fog nestling in the valley between Mount Solitary and the Kedumba Walls. We continue on to a junction in the track. Straight ahead is the route to Fern Bower which we will tackle after lunch; we turn left and descend the long steep stairs which take us back into the rainforest.

We are now in the enclosed little gully which carries Linda Creek; this is a very wet environment. We duck under low rock overhangs weeping with moisture, brush past saturated foliage, slosh along muddy ledges and are splashed by the waters dropping over the rock face at the base of Lila Falls. Presently we are at Linda Falls, a narrow silver ribbon dropping from a smooth sluice worn into the sandstone, fanning out slightly across a rock face as it enters the pebble-strewn pool at its base; a delightful sight. These falls are named after Linda Florence McKillop, daughter of Duncan McKillop a Katoomba Trustee of Waterfall Reserves. Linda was a cousin of Sister (now Saint) Mary McKillop.

Dropping lower into the valley off to the right, visible through the trees, is Sylvia Cascades

and further down we approach Marguerite Cascades; the bridge below these cascades leads directly to Leura Forest. This however is where our journey takes a little twist; we leave the Federal Pass and take a lesser known path. This track takes us to a crossing of Linda Creek further downstream of Marguerite Cascades and leads us into more open terrain on the edge of the rainforest. We are now in tall open forest where there are several magnificent examples of Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*). The freshly exposed new bark of their trunks is glowing deep orange while the recently discarded bark forms multi-coloured mats around their bases.

Soon we emerge from this forest into the clearing we could see from the cliff edge high above. We are now at the site of the sewerage plant which once serviced Leura and southern areas of Katoomba. The plant was closed in 1998 and the site has been revegetated; one assumes the bush will eventually completely reclaim this clear space. We skirt around this area, pass a clump of Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) carrying many small bunches of their characteristic glossy blue berries and move onto a fire trail. This was once the vehicular access to the sewerage works; there was also ladder access from the top of Bridal Veil Falls and a flying fox system also dropped into the valley from a point east of these falls now known, surprisingly enough, as Flying Fox Lookout. The access road runs right across the Jamison Valley to emerge onto Kings Tableland near Kedumba Hill.

To the accompaniment of tinkling Bellbirds we make our way along this trail which skirts the rainforest margin. There are some wonderful examples of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) here and a startled Lyrebird (well I assume it was startled; may have just been in a hurry I suppose) is seen scurrying across the road to disappear into the bush. A small cairn tucked in against the embankment indicates where we leave the road and follow a short raked path up the hill to once more join the Federal Pass.

Here it was suggested that those who intended taking the Scenic Railway exit follow Federal Pass directly back to Leura Forest, where we would all meet for lunch, as they would experience Dardanelles Pass on the way to the railway. The rest, who were to exit via the Fern Bower would continue along Federal Pass to its junction with Dardanelles Pass and return to Leura Forest past the bottom of the Giant Stairway. This was of course just a little warm up for the climb out.

Helen Cardy led three other 'rattler riders' directly to the forest while ten brave souls followed me in the opposite direction after Rob Bearup was assured the walking was reasonably level; I did say 'reasonably' Rob.

This section of the Federal Pass is truly beautiful; the lush green of boundless ferns and mosses contrasts dramatically with the orange and gold hues of the Angophoras as the track gently undulates (right Rob?) through the forest. A couple of Lyrebirds were sighted foraging in the leaf litter and as the track nears Dardanelles Pass distant views into the valley and across to Mount Solitary are there to be had. The coming together of these two paths not only forms the junction of two major mountain walking tracks it also merges two significant symbols of our nation. Federal Pass was named for the federation of the Australian states on 1st January 1901 and Dardanelles Pass was named of course to commemorate the Gallipoli campaign in WW1; the birth of the ANZAC legend.

Here we turn right and head back toward the Leura Forest. Along the way we pass a young family trying to catch a glimpse of a Lyrebird, a couple of Japanese tourists with giant cameras, appropriately enough near the base of the Giant Stairway, and a grand old Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), its widely flared base hollowed by fire. The canopy now becomes more dense and the mosses and ferns more prolific in the subdued light; we descend some stone stairs and rejoin the rest of the group in Lady Carrington's Dining Hall for lunch. Indeed, Leura Forest was once known by that name; bush tables and seats were installed below the tree ferns some time

around 1890. (Lady Cecilia Margaret was the wife of Lord Charles Robert Wynne-Carrington, Governor of NSW from 1885 to 1890.) The present day shelter shed, recently rebuilt after being crushed by a falling tree in the early 1990s, is perhaps a little too modest to carry the title 'Dining Hall' though it does sit comfortably in the forest.

Sitting in a fairytale setting such as this tends to elicit extreme flights of fancy as appeared to strike one of the more loquacious members of the group, Rob Bearup. He claimed that in kindergarten he was the quietest kid in the class, this reserved nature carrying through to adulthood when he was still so reticent that his mother had to say 'I Do' for him at his wedding. After the sputtering and spluttering had died down following this most fanciful tale we decided to leave this magical fairyland before the goblins infected anyone else in the group.

Helen and her three rail riders set off along Dardanelles Pass to make their way to the Scenic Railway while the remaining ten set off through the forest to climb out via the Fern Bower. We cross the charming little Banksia Streamlet and pass huge mossy tors before once more reaching Linda Creek below Marguerite Cascades; this is the point at which we diverted off the main track this morning.

Having climbed back to the junction of the Amphitheatre and Fern Bower Tracks with the prospect of even steeper stairs ahead the Scenic Railway option looked a tad more attractive but come on, this is character building.

The track, or perhaps more correctly the stairway, from this point up to the Prince Henry Cliff Walk essentially follows the line of Linda Creek. There are numerous quite beautiful but apparently unnamed little waterfalls and cascades along the way. A fern-filled rock overhang not far from the junction is believed to be the original Fern Bower, that name now being applied to the full length of this section of track. The track was originally built between 1893 and 1894 and included many wooden stairs and ladders; it was rebuilt

in 1997-98 with one short section of wooden stairs replicating the original construction.

By now construction methods and historical or natural features appear to be receiving less attention. As we round a bend to be confronted with yet another steep stairway disappearing into the distance I suggest they don't look up. Allan Cupitt has a wrist watch altimeter and when he states we only have about another 150 vertical metres to climb the response is not one of jubilation. This track has very few level or gently sloping sections, just an almost constant series of stairs; by comparison a climb up Furbers Steps is akin to an escalator ride. Soon however we reach the top and divert to Jamisons Lookout to take in the panoramic views and peer down into the valley out of which we have just climbed. Character building? Maybe. Though I suggest, we already have our fair share of marvellous 'characters' in this group.

John Cardy

MESSAGE FROM LIBBY

Helen and I received a card from Libby and Keith; they were having a wonderful time surrounded by the beauty of the Swiss Alps and asked that we pass on love and best wishes to the walking group. (They will be home before you receive this newsletter but the love and best wishes still apply.)

OUR JULY WALK

Friday 20th July 2012

Spectacular Views, Open Woodlands and Unusual Rock Formations

Braceys Lookout and Hassans Walls at Lithgow

This is a new venue for the group. From this elevated spur there are spectacular views to the north, east and south of the diverse country surrounding Lithgow. The walk is approximately 6.5km, there is a short steep climb to start then it is reasonably level walking mainly on fire trails through tall open forest. We finish, unusually for venues in the Blue Mountains, with a down hill walk.

Meet in Finlay Ave in Lithgow at 9.00am or at Merry Garth at 8.15am. There will be a car shuffle to our starting point at the end of Esbank Street. If approaching from the east along the Great Western Hwy after passing the Lithgow Hospital on your left, take the second turn right into Rabaul St, right into Suvla St and left into Finlay Ave. If coming via the Bells Line of Road drive through to the western side of the Lithgow Business Area and turn left off Main St into Martini Parade, proceed through a set of traffic lights, then through a roundabout and then left into Finlay Avenue.

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. NB: Helen and John will not be available on their landline number after the evening of Wednesday 18th July.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th August – Sassafras Gully and Magdala Creek at Springwood

Friday 21st September – Victoria Falls and Burra Korain (or Junction Rock at Blackheath)

Friday 19th October – Dunns Swamp

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 July at Wynne Reserve (Planting)

10th August at Wynne Reserve

14th September at Farrer Road (Outside 'Balangara')

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details