
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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LOST CITY ON THE NEWNES PLATEAU

TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK

LOST CITY on the NEWNES
PLATEAU

Friday 16th March 2012

The Macquarie Dictionary, whose founding Editor in Chief and major driving force behind its development was long time member of this walking group, Prof Arthur Delbridge, defines a pagoda as follows: “-- a temple or sacred building, usually more or less pyramidal or forming a tower of many storeys”. The Lost City, our destination today, is comprised of many hundreds of pagodas. Pyramidal sandstone towers with layers of ironstone dividing them into many storeys; indeed what revealing stories these ancient structures could tell of the creation of this awe-inspiring shrine to nature.

Sixteen gathered at the Zig Zag Railway at Clarence where we welcomed Timothy Sterling-Levis who was joining us today. A vehicle rationalisation was organised by Libby and soon, comfortably ensconced in four vehicles, we set off on the thirteen-kilometre drive to the starting point of our walk. As one would expect, after the almost continuous rainy weather of late, there was a tad more than a pothole or two along the route to the evocatively named Bungleboori Camping Area.



Autumn in the Bush

We left Clarence under a clear blue sky but here, as we prepared to walk through the open woodland of this high plateau, long wisps of white cloud stretched over that blue while small dark clouds scudded across the sky. With the thought that the weather may close in we set off on the three and a half kilometre trek to the Lost World. (Recently, Ellis Reynolds, a foundation member of this walking group and now armchair walker, very kindly gave me a map-measuring wheel which he used extensively during his

bushwalking days. Distances quoted in this newsletter were determined using this precision German made device. All distances quoted by me, and any disputes regarding lengths of walks will, in future, be resolved using the ‘Ellis Wheel’.)

The track, which was dotted with large shallow pools, led us into the scattered shadows of the forest. The tangle of sunlit trunks and branches were reflected brilliantly on the still surface of those pools. At several spots vehicles had gouged deep furrows in the track, churning up yellow ochre-like material which held impressions of the tyres that had kneaded the sticky sludge in those long ditches. Soon we came across a couple of fallen tree trunks that provided convenient seating and we paused for an early morning tea.

The track continues to meander on through the forest and we are forced to detour around

many large pools. The eye is drawn to the smooth white trunks of the Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*), growing in a more spreading and shorter habit on this exposed plateau than it does in sheltered valleys; long ribbons of discarded bark drape over the stockings of dark fibrous bark at their bases. The smooth white trunks of these trees contrast markedly with the rough brown bark of the many Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) scattered throughout the forest.

Soon, and quite suddenly, the forest gives way to tall heath containing banksia, mallee ash, hakea, drumsticks and dwarf she-oak among many other plant varieties. The Hairpin Banksias (*Banksia spinulosa*) at this time carry many golden flower spikes with their prominent dark 'hairpin' styles. Nearby there are several Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) still carrying the withered flower spikes of last season, small reddish-brown hairy mops beside slender lime green candles, the emerging flower spikes of this season. At ground level the tiny white flowers of the Narrow-leaf Platysace (*Platysace linearifolia*) decorate the scene, compensating for their minute size by appearing in vast numbers.

We climb a slight rise and there, through gaps in the tall heath, are our first glimpses of the Lost City. The ridges and valleys stretching away to the west are lined with pagoda formations of all sizes, the morning sun illuminating their predominately grey sloping flanks against the darker landscape. The plume of water vapour rising from the hidden water cooling towers of the distant Wallerawang Power Station adds a surreal element to the scene. This is an amazing sight, yet we have only touched on the outer suburbs of this Lost City.

Dropping down from this high point of the track the heath becomes more stunted and panoramic views of the pagoda-dotted landscape open up; the Lost City has been found. Now pagodas can be seen nestling in the valley, clinging to hillsides, clustered together in circular groups, side by side in regimental rows or standing alone in splendid isolation. The animated chatter and friendly

banter among the group has now ceased; we stand enthralled by this magnificent vista.

We make our way down the hill to inspect these amazing structures at close quarters. They are comprised mainly of quite coarse sandstone with veins of ironstone running through them at all angles but predominantly in the horizontal plane. The more aged surfaces of the sandstone are grey, interspersed with blotches of yellow and gold where the elements are still exposing fresh surfaces; the ironstone veins are mostly reddish-brown.

The warm colours of sandstones are produced by iron oxide minerals and it was these minerals which, carried by water aeons ago, percolated through the pores of the stone and along fault lines and solidified into ironstone veins. These veins are much harder than the sandstone which encloses them and subsequent erosion by water and wind leaves the veins exposed, protruding from the sandstone base. I believe there is still some conjecture about the details of the formation of these veins however, in simple terms, the above is the generally accepted process. Regardless of how they are formed their presence results in a fantastic array of intricate sculptures.

The pagodas are decorated with curved ironstone ledges, thin-walled pipes and undulating channels, vertical walls and horizontal roofs, convoluted patterns and dished depressions, windworn caves and see through apertures. Some pagodas have rounded sandstone apexes while others are flat topped, capped by horizontal layers of ironstone. There was a gently curved vertical 'sail', no more than fifteen millimetres thick and around one metre square, held aloft on the end of a horizontal outcrop. Daylight could be seen through many windows in the formations and pipes and apertures framed views of the landscape beyond. A sizeable windworn cave was embellished with a honeycomb pattern eroded into the golden sandstone rear wall. Among all this grandeur set in stone, as is usual with Mother Nature, there was a stark contrast; an occasional cluster of delicate

bright yellow flowers. Growing in a minuscule amount of soil on exposed ledges and in nooks and crannies were examples of the Pagoda Daisy (*Leucochrysum graminifolium*). This tenacious little plant only grows on, or very near, pagoda formations in the Newnes Plateau area; we were fortunate to be here near the end of its flowering season of October to March.

We spent some time here exploring these fascinating surroundings; climbing the pagodas but taking care not to damage any of the fragile ironstone protrusions. Some pagodas gave views down to two small dams, one to the south of us on Marrangaroo Creek proper and one to the north on a small tributary of that creek; in both cases water could be heard cascading over their spillways. At times it was fascinating to stand back from the formations and observe people scrambling over their flanks, sitting in sheltered nooks or standing on apexes transfixed by the splendour of the surroundings.

As people had their fill of individual explorations we congregated at various levels on the one pagoda to have our fill of an early lunch. Libby of course was not perturbed that she had to do some rock climbing when it came time to distribute slices of her delicious bushwalker cake, climbing from base to apex to ensure no one missed out.

Following lunch there appeared to be little enthusiasm to leave this magical place. Some opted to sit in the warming sun and let the atmosphere of this special place seep into their psyche. Others felt there were many more nooks and crannies to be explored. I knew there were many many more crazily curved sections of ironstone or wind and rain eroded sandstone sculptures out there waiting to be photographed. I set off to capture just a few more to add to the dozens already taken; too many photos are never enough when surrounded by such intriguing features.

Inevitably the time came that we had to leave this idyllic place and make our way back to the cars. We climbed the steep little hill back up to the ridge with many a backward glance

to the spectacular landscape we were about to leave. As we moved back into the tall heath the views became obscured and the Lost City became just that once more. Having visited this site however, the memory will never be lost; the image of those pagodas stretching across the landscape will remain imprinted on the brain. Part of the dictionary definition of a pagoda was 'a temple or sacred building' this landscape of hundreds of pagodas is surely a temple to nature and a sacred site to all.

Back at the cars Libby suggested that as it was still quite early we could take the diversion to Bald Trig Station on the way back to Clarence. We parked the cars not far off the Old Bells Line of Road suspecting, correctly, the track to the Trig Station would not be in very good condition, and walked up to the lookout. This spot is 1180 metres above sea level and affords magnificent views across to Mounts Banks and Hay and beyond, across the site of Gooches Crater to Mount Wilson and to the long horizontal ridge of Mount Irvine. How lucky we are that we can stand at a place such as this, so close to a major population centre, and look out across so much unspoilt bushland. Admittedly you have to refrain from turning your head too far to the right to avoid seeing the coal mine and sand quarry but these things are a necessity to service that population centre. One can but fervently hope that a sensible balance is maintained and that places like the Lost City do not become a City Lost.

Back at Clarence we rounded off the day with the usual after walk cuppa and delicious slice and biscuits and headed for home after yet another wonderful day exploring a tiny part of our huge 'backyard'.

John Cardy

OUR APRIL WALK

Friday 20th April 2012

Open Woodland, Shady Glens, Exquisite Waterfalls, Steep Valley Rainforests

Fairy Falls, Frederica Falls, Empire Pass and Dantes Glen at North Lawson

This is a new venue for the group. The medium grade circular walk is about 6km long with a change in elevation of around 100 metres and a few ups and downs in between. There are some boggy stretches of track and some unbridged creek crossings but nothing too demanding; the scenery and atmosphere on offer in this enclosed valley make the effort well worthwhile.

Meet at the Picnic Area at the end of St Bernards Drive (past the Wilson Park Olympic Pool and right to the end of the unsealed section of the road) on the northern side of the railway line in Lawson at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

(Turn off the Great Western Highway at the lights at the top of the hill in Lawson into San Jose Ave, across the railway line turn left onto Loftus St, past the Bowling Club and first right into St Bernards Drive. The St Bernards street sign is not obvious but there is a large sign at the junction indicating Wilson Park Olympic Pool and a small sign to Fairy Falls, Dante Glen Walk and Empire Pass.)

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 18th May – Bellbird Point and Ironpot Mountain in the Megalong Valley

Friday 15th June – Hanging Rock and Baltzer Lookout at Blackheath

Friday 20th July – Hassans Walls at Lithgow

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 April at Sloan Reserve

11th May at Sloan Reserve (Planting)

8th June at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details