
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NATIONAL PASS AT WENTWORTH FALLS

TOPIC

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

**NATIONAL PASS and
VALLEY OF THE WATERS
at WENTWORTH FALLS**

Friday 17th February 2012

On Saturday 28th March 1908 the National Pass walking track was officially opened following two years under construction by a team of four men, known as the “Irish Brigade”, led by Peter Mulheran. Captain James Somerville Murray, a resident and property owner of Wentworth Falls, was a driving force behind the creation of this track. Now come forward one hundred years. Following reconstruction, which stretched over five years and was recognised by a prestigious UNESCO Award of Distinction for Culture Heritage Conservation, this beautifully refurbished track was reopened in 2008.

A smaller than usual group of nine gathered at the Conservation Hut for the commencement of this walk. We welcomed Sue Taylor, a friend of Barbara Harry, who was joining us once again. We commented on what a glorious morning it was following all the rain we had had recently; blue skies with just a few wisps of cloud on the horizon. Libby sagely commented that yes, it was a nice morning; her emphasis being on morning.



Autumn in the Bush

We set off down the Valley of the Waters Track and soon encountered two Lyrebirds scratching in the leaf litter beside the path, totally unperturbed by our presence. We veered left onto the Overcliff Track and, appropriately enough, were soon at the Lyrebird Lookout. From this vantage point Mount Solitary can be seen emerging from behind the vertical cliffline of Sublime Point while further afield, on the horizon, are the Blue Breaks in the Kanangra-Boyd National Park. Closer at hand it is evident that

the Valley of the Waters is more than living up to its name; silver torrents of water plummeting down the dark narrow gorge. William Wentworth wrote in 1813: “It is the moisture which the mountains inhale from the clouds which give rise to innumerable small streams which everywhere pervade the mountains -----”; they have obviously been breathing in very deeply of late.

Continuing on we pick our way carefully along the sodden path as it crosses the base of a hanging swamp where clumps of Button Grass or Button Bog-rush (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*) thrive. Also present here, a few carrying deep pink flower combs, are *Grevillea acanthifolia*; the distribution of this grevillea is limited to the higher areas of the Blue Mountains.

Soon we are at Breakfast Point Lookout so named, surprisingly enough, because it

became a popular spot at which to have breakfast. (It is recorded that Captain James Murray recommended in 1892 that a path be built to Breakfast Point.) And what a choice spot it would be to watch the early morning light touch the flanks of Mount Solitary, illuminate the cliffs below Inspiration Point and Sublime Point then spread across the magnificence of the Jamison Valley.

In 995 AD the daughter of the Earl of Angus was slain near a ravine in Scotland. Her name was Fenella and the ravine became known as Den Fenella. How then does this name become transported to the other side of the world and be applied to our next port of call, a beautiful little creek and glen leading to a lookout perched on the cliff face. Once again it was the influence of Captain James Murray who had a hand in naming many of the features in this area. He was born at St Cyrus close to that ravine in Scotland and this glen must have evoked memories of his birthplace.

We turned onto the sidetrack to Den Fenella Lookout which follows the line of the like-named creek whose waters have carved out a deep narrow ravine before leaping over the cliff edge and plummeting to a ledge far below. That ledge carries the National Pass Track and we will pass behind those waters later in the day. We duck under the trunk of a large tree that has fallen across the track and drop down past a series of little cascades, cross then re-cross the creek below a small waterfall and follow the track which clings to the cliff edge to deliver us to Den Fenella Lookout. We pause in this spectacular eyrie for morning tea and watch a flock of garrulous Sulphur-crested Cockatoos cavorting on the treetops and cliff faces far below. Closer at hand some Copper Tailed Skinks (*Ctenotus taeniolatus*) have obviously learnt that bushwalkers often drop crumbs, indeed can even be induced to do so if they act cheekily enough.

We now move onto the Undercliff Track. This path leads us through a diverse array of vegetation as it dips under dripping rock overhangs where ferns and mosses thrive. Large masses of Pouched Coral Fern

(*Gleichenia dicarpa*) and the occasional mound of Devil's Twine (*Cathysa sp*) form near the edges of these overhangs. Broader leafed ferns thrive in the darker spaces, including the Strap Water Fern (*Blechnum patersonii*), whose pink to red new fronds light up these sheltered spaces. On the more exposed sections of the track weather-beaten Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*) and stunted Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea sp*) complement the ruggedness of the rocky ledges along which the track winds.

Turning right onto a rather slippery steep sidetrack we descended to Eagles Nest Lookout which offers magnificent views of Wentworth Falls. Following the recent rains the falls are putting on a wonderful display. After cascading over the upper terraced section the water divides into a single silver ribbon on the left-hand side to plunge to the rocks below. On the right it spreads out into a series of translucent cascades before dropping as a wide diaphanous veil in front of the vertical cliff face. Reduced to insignificant dots in this vast landscape are people crossing the stream at the top of the falls and negotiating the stairs carved into the cliff face opposite; we will be insignificant dots ourselves soon for we will be following these paths.

A short diversion took us to Fletchers Lookout which affords dramatic views of the upper section of the falls and down to the midpoint where the track re-crosses the stream. We then crossed the stream at the head of the falls and were welcomed onto the refurbished National Pass by a sandstone pillar carrying a wonderful stainless steel sculpture of an Eastern Water Dragon. Pillars have been positioned at each end of the National Pass and at intermediate points to display historic photographs of the track and provide information on its history, original construction and the refurbishment. Most of the pillars also have sculptures of reptiles and animals native to the area, a wonderful touch; one just hopes they are very securely attached.

As we descended the stairs so ingeniously cut into the cliff face it was impossible not to be

amazed by the talent and tenacity of the “Irish Brigade” who originally cut them and to be thankful that the recent work has been done in such a skilful and sympathetic manner. On a rock ledge beside the track there were three skinks sunning themselves, their varying sizes indicating they were perhaps male, female and youngster. Their blackish-brown colour and stout bodies indicated they were probably Black Rock Skinks (*Egernia saxatilis*). They certainly knew how to pick a spectacular spot in which to soak up some energy from the sun.

As we neared the base of the stairs the view to the southwest showed those wisps of cloud present this morning were billowing quite significantly now; a beautiful sight against the blue sky. Thoughts of their beauty were diminished however and Libby’s emphasis on it being a lovely morning became more significant when the faint rumble of distant thunder was heard.

At the midpoint of the falls we paused to admire the impressively constructed stone bridge that crosses the stream and to inspect the historic photographs installed on one of the huge boulders here. One photo shows the falls in major flood in 1912, an absolutely stunning sight. Another showed a family group at this spot in about 1910 dressed ‘to the nines’ in ankle length dresses, street shoes, flamboyant hats, jacket etc; certainly no shorts and singlet-top in those days.

The thunder we were trying to ignore was getting closer and jolted us back to the present. We crossed the stone bridge and climbed up the steep rainforest-clad slope and emerged onto the more open section of track which follows the natural almost horizontal ledge formed by the band of claystone compressed between the deep deposits of sandstone.

This track is one of the most spectacular in the mountains with the almost uninterrupted views into the Jamison Valley and across to the cliffs below Kings Tableland and at a couple of spots the full drop of Wentworth Falls can be seen. Always present of course are the towering cliffs above, some starkly magnificent – dry and devoid of any

vegetation, while elsewhere they are decorated with bands of ferns and mosses and other tenacious plant life struggling to cling to the vertical walls. As the track winds into little inlets in the cliff line we walked behind and through drops and sprays of water falling from the escarpment above. Just after walking behind the most prolific of these streams of water issuing from above, the waters of Den Fenella Creek, we divert onto a rocky knoll for lunch. Here there is a view back to the now distant Wentworth Falls but in the opposite direction the view is of the approaching storm. As a few drops of rain begin to fall and lightning begins to light up the sky Libby wisely decides it would be prudent to cut short our lunch break and move off this exposed knoll. We continued along the track which now follows the line of the Valley of the Waters and becomes more sheltered as we moved deeper into this gorge.

Shortly the group came to an abrupt halt and divided slightly to allow a snake to cross the path; it was suggested it was a young Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*). A couple visiting from Britain, whom we had met a couple of times previously on this walk, caught up to us at this stage and were intrigued to watch the snake slide off into the bush; the first time they had seen a snake in the wild.

As we approached the Valley of the Waters Creek we paused below a shallow rock overhang where Libby distributed portions of her Bushwalker Cake; this would boost our energy levels for the climb out. Because our numbers were so few today there were extra slices which Libby offered to some passing walkers, they declined; they don’t know what they were missing.

The waterfalls here today were dazzling. The silvery waters of Lodore Falls crashing over the dark cliff faces when viewed through the lush green foliage of the surrounding bush were brilliant. The cascades of Sylvia Falls, much more profuse than normal were stunning, producing a fairytale landscape in this narrow ravine. As we made our way up through this enclosed moist space it was impossible to tell whether the falling drops of

water were from the rain or simply dropping off the overhanging rock faces and foliage.

Soon we were at Empress Falls, always impressive but even more so today. These falls were named after Queen Victoria who held the title of Empress of India; they were named in 1897 - the year of her diamond jubilee.

As we rested leaning on the handrail at one of the rare level sections of track I noticed someone drop something into the bush below. No worries thought I, being in my usual position of last in line I'll go and retrieve it. Scrambling back down the stairs I heard someone say don't bother, but continued. I made my way across a sloping bank, lost my footing on the sodden soil which sat me on my backside but eventually I reached the object – a small container of grapes! A small container of grapes? Now if it had been a container of grapes which had been processed into a nice savignon blanc or a crisp pinot gris ----- but a container of grapes?

We continued our climb out of the valley, pausing at Empress Lookout and Queen Victoria Lookout along the way. The views into the valleys quite different to those this morning with the clouds closing in. The heavy rain however held off until the moment we arrived back at the Conservation Hut, then the heavens opened. How lucky we were and how right was Libby, limiting to the morning period only, her agreement that it was a lovely day.

Because of the now teeming rain we decided to have after walk drinks at the Conservation Hut and so finished another great day in these marvellous mountains in comfort watching the heavy rain fall.

John Cardy

OUR MARCH WALK

Friday 16th March 2012

Beautiful Open Woodland and Wonderful Pagoda Formations

The Lost City on the Newnes Plateau

The group last visited this spectacular venue in September 2007. This is an easy walk, only

3km each way, and you will be rewarded with spectacular views. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at Clarence for the 11km drive to the Bungleboori Camping Area; 4WD vehicles would be appreciated though not absolutely necessary.

Meet at the Zig Zag Railway at Clarence at 9.00am 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. (Please note that this month Helen and John will not be available on, nor be able to access messages on the above number after the night of Tuesday 13th March) or on mobile 0418 646 487 if you need to leave a message.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 20th April – Empire Pass, Frederica Falls and Dantes Glen at North Lawson

Friday 18th May – Bellbird Point and Ironpot Mountain, Megalong Valley

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 March at Sloan Reserve

13th April at Sloan Reserve

11th May at Sloan Reserve (Planting)

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details