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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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**SASSAFRAS GULLY & MAGDALA CREEK**

**TOPIC**

## OUR AUGUST WALK

**SASSAFRAS GULLY and  
MAGDALA CREEK at  
SPRINGWOOD**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1815 Governor Lachlan Macquarie and his wife, accompanied by an official party, set off to travel across the mountains on the newly opened Cox's Road. At the end of their first day of travel Macquarie wrote: "We then halted at three o'clock in a very pretty wooded plain near a spring of very good fresh water, and pitched our tent near the side of the road." Thus the locality was named.

Pitching tents and searching for a fresh water spring in the woods was far from the minds of the twenty walkers who gathered this morning; we were here to explore the lush rainforests and secluded creeks which lie in the gullies to the south of this town called Springwood.

Once again we were blessed with clear blue skies for the start of this walk though the weather wizards were predicting strong winds in the afternoon and the possibility of snow above 900 metres in the evening. We welcomed back Allan Bonfield and Robin Woods & John Wulff who had not been able to join us for quite some time. As Helen and I had recently walked part of this track with the National Parks Association and then checked



Spring in the Bush

the full circuit more recently for this walk there was a role reversal with Libby dropping back to act as whip while I was stand-in leader for the day.

From the Picnic Point Reserve we had a short street walk back up Valley Road past Bee Farm Road, into Sassafras Gully Road at the end of which is the trackhead for this walk.

(Whenever I see reference to Bee Farm Rd I cannot stop my rather twisted mind from conjuring images of farmers herding bees in paddocks; perhaps a suitable case for treatment.)

The track initially led us into open forest past a level area containing a few sandstone blocks; the remnants of an old shelter shed.

Welcoming us into the bushland is a Purple Twining Pea or False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*) its clusters of bright violet flowers with tiny yellow centres lighting up the scene. Through the open canopy glimpses of the flanks of Sassafras Ridge on the other side of Sassafras Creek can be seen, the sun illuminating the tree-clad slopes. We pass several Smooth-barked Apples (*Angophora costata*), bark colours ranging from cream to orange to pink and grey; some with smooth dimpled trunks, one with many knobby protrusions. Decorating the track sides are several exquisite examples of the Beard-heath (*Leucopogon setiger*) carrying a profusion of minute white bell-shaped flowers;

their soft delicate appearance belying the needle sharpness of the tiny linear leaves.

As we drop deeper into Sassafras Gully there is a sudden fall in temperature as we make the transition from open forest into the more enclosed environment at the rainforest margin. Soon we pass under a dripping rock overhang; the view down to the creek revealing a jumble of huge moss-covered boulders. We cross the creek at a platform of water-washed bedrock where the trunk of a fallen tree acts as a low handrail, ideal for those with either short legs or very long arms. Adjacent to the tortuous gnarled roots of a forest giant, exposed long ago by rushing waters, we step over a small side stream and climb a slight rise. Here there is a sloping bank beneath a cliff face; we pause for morning tea, serenaded by the tinkling of the creek water below.

We pass under another long rock overhang where a natural spring issues clear water from a crack in the rockface. Some walk notes state there is a faded sign here stating "Ye Olde Fountain"; either the sign has faded fully or ye olde eyesight is fading as any sign escaped my notice. Emerging at the far end of the overhang we come across a Lyrebird scratching through the leaf litter in search of insects; it treats our presence with utter disdain and continues with its foraging. Nearby is a huge old Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), a cavernous opening burnt into its base. The common name of these trees is derived from the orange-red sap which resembles turpentine, the oily resin derived mainly from coniferous trees, especially the *Pinus palustris* or Pitch Pine. The sap protects the Turpentine's timber from termites and borers, including marine borers, making it particularly valuable for wharf and bridge construction.

Presently we arrive at Sassafras Creek flowing in on the right from its source near the Prime Ministers Corridor of Oaks and Sir Henry Parkes Grave at Faulconbridge; there is an old metal sign high in a tree here pointing the way to Faulconbridge along the Victory Track. We continue downstream on the left bank of Sassafras Creek, soon cross to the right-hand bank and pass the junction of the Wiggins

Track which leads up to Bee Farm Road. (Thoughts of farmers mustering bees once again enter my head.)

We are now in the depths of beautiful rainforest. Lichen-blotched trunks of Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) contrast with the rougher barked trunks of the Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) as they soar up from the forest floor in search of light and sun. The track now contours along the slope above the creek undulating gently as it dips to cross small side streams. Many points along the track give views down to the water which alternatively flows over sandbars carrying intriguing ripple patterns and across multicoloured beds of polished pebbles. Above the pools along this creek hang several pendulous nests of the Yellow-throated Scrubwren.

Ferns abound as ground cover and thick woody vines loop across the track ready to snare the unwary walker. Thinner vines form a wiry network as they climb through the vegetation of the understorey. Ahead the forest opens up and the track descends to a clearing; we are at the camping area at the confluence of Sassafras Creek with Glenbrook Creek. At the edge of this clearing are some imposing sandstone monoliths, artistically grouped by the hand of Nature.

We cross Sassafras Creek near its junction with Glenbrook Creek, just downstream from where the waters of the latter flow across a wide rock shelf before dropping over a low ledge into a large placid pool. Mirrored perfectly in the glassy surface of the pool is the surrounding bushland and the sunlit crown of a nearby ridge more than one hundred and sixty metres above. (Glenbrook Creek rises seven kilometres from this point near The Oaks Fire Trail at Woodford. It then flows for another fifteen kilometres to discharge the waters we are walking beside today into the Nepean River.)

The track now rises and falls as it traverses the rocky terrain beside the creek. Growing in profusion along damp shaded rock walls here are the glossy-leaved Dragons Tails

(*Dracophyllum secundum*); some displaying long one-sided stems of pink-tinged white bell shaped flowers. Towering above the understorey along this section of Glenbrook Creek are some fine examples of the Turpentine; tall bare trunks sheathed in coarse deeply furrowed bark holding aloft rather sparse crowns. One of these giants, its base apparently weakened by fire many years ago, lay on the forest floor; its furrowed bark now decorated with a fascinating pattern of lush mosses. Nearby, the smooth trunk of a different species of tree lay across the track; it was embellished with the Spear Heads fungi (*Mucronella pendula*); dozens of tiny white, flat, pointed blades carried on short round stems.

The prediction of winds by the weather wizards proved to be correct as far above us we could now see the canopies of trees swaying to and fro, at ground level however we were comfortably protected. Soon there are sidetracks leading down toward the creek and from elevated spots on the main track it can be seen these lead to a series of wide shallow pools; we have arrived at the Perch Ponds. One wonders if they were so named because plentiful catches of perch were actually made here or because ever-optimistic anglers simply thought, "these ponds should be full of perch"; at least my peculiar mind wonders that, following many fruitless younger days of fresh water fishing.

We now leave Glenbrook Creek and follow the track which rises above Magdala Creek; views down to the creek reveal a series of impressive swirl pools cut into the bedrock. After the track skirts around the base of a high cliff comprised of several levels of shallow overhangs we arrive at Martins Falls. Here a wide crescent-shaped sandstone shelf juts out above an elliptical pool, forming a deep cave behind the falls. Water drops in silver strands over the edge of this shelf creating a radiating pattern of ripples as they hit the jade waters of the pool. The pool, surrounded by giant slabs of moss covered rock, nestles among tree ferns and lush understorey vegetation; a perfect place to pause for lunch. From the cave behind

the falls members of the group sitting in their red, blue and black jackets appeared as mere dots in the landscape, giving scale to the scene.

As we move on we pass a shelter cave where the sandstone colours blend from cream to red and back to cream on its beautifully sculpted smoothly curved formations. Soon we catch glimpses of the Blue Pool and Magdala Falls; clear views of these two features are unfortunately not easily accessed. A few drops of rain begin falling as we cross the creek and make our way past an exposed low cliff line which contains some wonderful intricate patterns of windworn sandstone. We veer left at a fork in the track and drop down to cross a tributary of Magdala Creek. We pause here while Robin Woods hands around a piece of chert she found along the track. Chert is a white, extremely fine-grained, dense and hard silica based rock found as seams, bands or nodules in sedimentary rocks; it is thought to originate from siliceous shells of marine organisms. Chert was highly valued by Aboriginal people as when it is fractured sharp edges are formed; cutting and scraping tools were produced by percussion flaking.

The track now crosses and recrosses the creek, affording fine views along the stream beneath overarching foliage. A pleasant and welcome chorus of frogs accompanies us as we climb gradually back toward Springwood. We are now in more open forest and a couple of memorable Angophora are seen; one carrying a large spherical burl with scales of bark lifting from its surface, the other with sun glinting off crystallised pieces of ruby-red sap exuding copiously from its reddish trunk. The leaves of the surrounding vegetation, quivering in the wind and moistened by the light shower of rain which had just passed, glisten in the now bright sunshine. Illuminating the scene are the bright yellow blossoms of numerous Guinea Flowers (*Hibbertia sp.*).

Soon we are back in a rather enclosed section of gully beside Magdala Creek and a rather strange sight looms out of the dim light. The creek meandering through the lush green

ground cover and dropping down a terraced rock face into a shallow pool is now bright orange. Surely the result of some form of pollution. Not so apparently. This colouring is a natural phenomenon due to bacteria which oxidises the iron in the water and deposits an orange coating on the rocks and creek bed. A rather surreal effect giving the impression of lava flowing through the undergrowth.

Presently we reach a small wooden bridge which takes us across the upper reaches of Magdala Creek. Though the creek is running no water is seen below the bridge, it is flowing underground as it passes this point. Stairs then zig zag up the hill to deliver us back to our starting place at Picnic Point Reserve.

Lachlan Macquarie seemed well pleased with the pretty spring in the woods at which he camped with his wife and entourage one hundred and ninety seven years ago. This group was well pleased with the area below Springwood that we explored today; an area probably little changed since the time the Governor passed this way.

As the group enjoyed the usual after walk cuppa my mind wandered, as it is wont to do, back to bee farms. I pondered that perhaps those out in the paddocks would be working bees and any that looked after the paperwork would probably be spelling bees; I think I'll make a beeline for home and have a good lie down.

John Cardy

PS: It snowed in the Blue Mountains that night; they really are wizards.

## **OUR SEPTEMBER WALK**

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012**

**Spectacular Lookouts, Historic 'Tomb' and Sunbath, Cliff Face Track to 'Coliseum'.**

**Historic Less-Used Tracks below the Hydro Majestic at Medlow Bath**

This is a new venue for the group. Above the escarpment there are fantastic rock formations, several lookouts with spectacular Megalong Valley views and a secluded sunbath. At the base of the dramatic cliffs is the amazing

'Coliseum' with remnants of extensive dry stone walls and staircases. On the upper tracks the vegetation presses in closely on both sides so long trousers or gaiters are the order of the day. The track down the cliff face contains short sections of narrow unfenced ledges, narrow clefts between rocks and a steel ladder; nothing too daunting but if being close to edges is not your thing this is not for you. Should narrow ledges not be to your liking you could participate in the upper section of the walk and either wait at one of the lookouts for the group to return from the 'Coliseum' or take the short track back to the cars for an early day. Whether you opt for only the upper section or the complete route this walk is thoroughly recommended.

Meet at 9.00am in Station St immediately past Belgravia St at Medlow Bath, turning off the Great Western Highway at the traffic lights; left if travelling from the east and right if coming from the west, or at Merry Garth at 8.15am.

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 19<sup>th</sup> Sept.**

## **FUTURE WALKS** (Tentative schedule)

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> October – An excursion to Dunns Swamp east of Rylstone

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November – Lockley Pylon

## **BUSH CARE**

**Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help would be appreciated.**

**14<sup>th</sup> September at Farrer Road (Outside 'Balangara')**

**12<sup>th</sup> October at Silva Plana**

**Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details**