
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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EMPIRE PASS CIRCUIT NTH LAWSON PARK

TOPIC

OUR APRIL WALK

EMPIRE PASS, FREDERICA
FALLS, LUCYS GLEN and
DANTES GLEN in NORTH
LAWSON PARK

Friday 20th April 2012

A swamp, a hollow or a mountain? The early settlers obviously had different priorities when deciding on which aspect of the topography to give prominence to when naming the area we were to explore today. It was named Christmas Swamp by John Oxley in 1817. In the 1830s it was known as Twenty Four Mile Hollow, being 24 miles from the Emu Ford of the Nepean at Penrith. In 1848 Henry Wilson built the Blue Mountain Inn near the present-day intersection of the Great Western Highway and Honour Avenue and the locality became known as Blue Mountain, as did the railway station when it opened in 1867. (Henry Wilson's Inn was demolished in 1917.) All references to topography in the name of the locality were expunged when the railway station was renamed Lawson in 1879 and a sketch map was prepared in 1880 for the proposed Village of Lawson; recognising of course the explorer and pastoralist William Lawson.

Those early names reflect the priorities of the times. Swamps and hollows were important places for travellers and merchants using horses and driving stock. They provided protection and feed and a place to rest animals.



Autumn in the Bush

The arrival of the railway however brought tourists who had different priorities and a far greater interest in 'Blue Mountains' and Inns. (There is in fact a Blue Mountain Trig Station, elevation 726 metres, still noted on maps about two and half kilometres north of the railway line between Hazelbrook and Lawson.)

In the days leading up to this walk Sydney was deluged with the heaviest April rains in many years; the mountains also received a good though lesser soaking. How pleasing then that when twenty-one walkers

gathered at the parking area at North Lawson Park we were greeted by just a few tongues of wispy cloud licking across a brilliant blue sky. We welcomed Peter Carr-Boyd, a friend of Robert Bearup, who was joining us today. Peter began the day as a visitor and ended it as a signed up member; we must be doing something right.

I mentioned in the notice for this walk that there were some boggy stretches of track; following the recent rain that could have been modified to 'there may be occasional patches of dry track'. As we set off the track was more like a little rivulet with water cascading down the steps; adds to the adventure though – doesn't it?

The rain of course has ensured the waterfalls are working at their best and this is demonstrated in spades as we reach the first of six unbridged creek crossings below the upper

section of Fairy Falls. The waters of the upper falls drop in two steps, spreading across the rock face to form a filigree veil falling into a shallow pool on a wide rock platform; the lilting sound justifying the falls previous name Cecilia Falls, after St Cecilia - the patron saint of music. (Joseph Hay who had an extensive landholding in this area named three falls on this creek. From the highest they were Cecilia, Sebastian for the patron saint of archers and soldiers, and St Michaels after the Archangel to God; only St Michaels retains that name. Sebastian was the section of Fairy Falls below the creek crossing and appears to now be included as part of Fairy Falls.)

We squelch our way to the little fenced lookout (a shelter shed once stood here) which affords a view back to the full drop of Fairy Falls as the creek plunges into the steep-sided gully. We then climb slightly on firmer ground to where some steps drop down between two rock shelves to the left. This is part of the shorter 'Round Walk' to Dantes Glen; we however are heading further afield.

Along walking tracks and in cave systems there is a propensity to give names to various rock formations, mostly alluding to petrified forms of living creatures; one such feature lies just near this spot. I must admit I often have trouble identifying such likenesses, probably a lack of imagination on my part, however we divert onto a rock outcrop to view this creature-like edifice. Responses included 'what are we looking at?' – 'where is it?' – 'it's a frog' - 'a nice rock overhang' and 'oh yes, it's a Labrador'. The feature is known as Turtle Rock!

Continuing on we pass some wonderfully gnarled Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*) displaying dark whiskered faces of Banksia Men and a profusion of Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) lining the track are at this time carrying many golden-yellow flower spikes. We pass a couple of Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*), their newly exposed smooth pastel-hued bark irresistible to touch.

We veer left and a well-worn and eroded track leads us down Echo Bluff to a pleasant level area beneath a clump of Forest She Oaks (*Allocasuarina torulosa*). Surrounded by interestingly shaped rock outcrops which provide perfect seating we pause for morning tea here at Echo Point, a slightly less hectic spot than its namesake at Katoomba. I shouted a 'Hello' to test the echo but the only response that I got was a squeaky 'Hello' from Ray Nesci standing behind me.

Following morning tea we take the short track down to the lookout at the end of the bluff. From this point we can look down into the valley through which we would be following the creek later in the day.

We then climb up through open woodland to reach a junction with a firetrail; turning left we follow this rather steep route down toward Frederica Falls Creek. Along the way there are great views of the distinctive profiles of Mount Banks and Mount Hay rising above the ridgeline while closer at hand it is a delight to see pools of water alive with tadpoles. As we approach the creek there are some wonderful rock formations above the track and a long wide bright-green swath of Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) cascades down the hillside.

Soon we are at Frederica Falls; the upper section is a small narrow band of water dropping perhaps a metre before spreading out to flow across the firetrail. Below the firetrail they drop in a series of cascades before dividing into two for the final drop over the lip of a deep rock overhang into a large pond. The falls are named after Effie Alice Frederica Roberts whose parents Benjamin and Alice owned land in the area.

We now follow the creek line and are accompanied by the soothing sounds of the flowing water, sometimes visible below the track, at other times hidden beneath the thick vegetation. Initially we are moving through a fairly open landscape though the low vegetation crowds in on our path. Dagger Hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*) with their long beak-like fruit and Broad-leaved Hakea

(*Hakea dactyloides*) with sparse foliage and woody fruit attached directly to thick stems crowd in upon us; Devils Twine (*Cassytha glabella*) winds its way through the shrubbery taking sustenance from its host plants.

The sides of the valley begin to close in and we are soon in quite dense rainforest. The track leads us beneath a rock overhang; showers of water streaming from its overarching face. Silver bands of water can now be seen flowing between moss covered boulders in the creek.

Soon we divert to the right and follow a zigzag of stone steps down to an enchanting area just above the creek; we are at Lucys Glen. (This little hideaway was possibly named after Christabell Lucy Hay, daughter of Joseph and Eliza Hay who had a grant of 300 acres here.) On a small level area formed by the construction of a stone retaining wall, sitting atop two stone supports, is a tiny timber bench seat now lushly upholstered with a thick padding of moss. What a delightful retreat this is. There is an overwhelming greenness here with lichen-blotched tree trunks pushing up past moss-encased boulders and the creek babbles down a small cascade as it courses through this idyllic domain. One could spend hours here letting the beauty of the surroundings seep into your soul.

Leaving this little piece of paradise the track climbs into more open woodland as it follows the line of Frederica Falls Creek toward its confluence with Dantes Glen Creek; the combined waters then flow into Blue Mountain Creek and on to Wentworth Creek. As we pass above this meeting of the waters we move into glorious rainforest consisting mainly of Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) as we drop down toward the creek once more.

Shortly we are at the first major creek crossing and the water is a little too high to use the normal crossing where a couple of steps are carved into the rocks at the face of a cascade. Instead we cross a little further upstream onto a large rock platform. With several people positioned across this route to lend a

supporting hand everyone makes it safely across to the steps on the opposite bank.

The track now contours along the steep slope of the valley past dripping rock overhangs and a long moss covered rock wall before descending once again through a ferny glade to the second major creek crossing. Along the sides of the creek here there is sufficient clear space to pause for lunch and what a magical place it is to rest awhile. The creek plunges into this area between two large boulders as a narrow silver ribbon of water then spreads to form a wider shallow stream to continue its journey downstream in a gentler mode through a vale of dense rainforest. Below the towering Coachwoods and surrounded by ferns of all descriptions, including tree ferns and lower growing varieties, it is hard to imagine a more pleasant place to dine.

Don and Anne Clarke were perched alone high on a sloping rockface. It appears the charming romantic atmosphere of the place stirred feelings in quixotic Don; he was sighted lying proclumbent upon a supine Anne. He claims that he slipped and fell; you don't really expect us to believe that do you Don Juan?

Moving right along we climb the stone stairs which lead up from the creek and we are treated to wonderful views back down to the watercourse through lichen and moss encrusted columns of Coachwood trunks. The creek, now far below, is a series of small waterfalls and cascades linking beautiful clear pools surrounded by a sea of green. We cross what is normally a dry creek which, after the recent rain, is flowing quite well and upstream is a lovely transitory waterfall, shimmering slivers of water viewed through a tangle of trees. We pass the lower end of that shortcut track we noted earlier near Turtle Rock. Remember? That rock shaped like a turtle. Soon we arrive at a sidetrack which leads us to St Michaels Falls. Crossing Fairy Falls Creek we make our way over a small rise and there is a superb wide waterfall dropping over the cliff edge and cascading off a low rock shelf into a large sandy pool; a wonderful sight.

Returning to the main track we cross Dantes Glen Creek and are soon at Dantes Glen Falls, another wide veil of water tumbling down the dark rock face which is decorated with bands of ferns and moss. These falls were formerly known as Christabell Falls after the previously mentioned Christabell Lucy Hay. Dr Charles Badham, professor of Languages at Sydney University applied the present name after Italian poet Dante Alighier (1265-1321). Dante came to international fame through his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, telling of his spiritual journey. Badham had a house near the railway line and constructed walks in the glen. There are many indecipherable names carved into a large boulder beside the pool here, one having the accompanying date of 1888; strange how graffiti tends to gain acceptance with great age.

We now cross the timber bridge and make our way up the stone steps back toward our starting point. One can but wonder at the skill of the track builders all those years ago; tracks were constructed here between 1878 and 1910. It was gratifying to note that stocks of both dressed and undressed sandstone blocks have been helicoptered into this area for track maintenance and repairs; the beauty hidden in this park deserves a wider audience.

Back at the picnic area Helen Cardy produced a cake to celebrate Ray Nesci's rather significant birthday before we headed for home after experiencing one of the lesser visited jewels of these Blue Mountains.

Footnote: Most of the details regarding names of various features and their history were gleaned from Keith Painter's Pocket Pal booklet on North and South Lawson Walks and from Brian Fox's Upper Blue Mountains Geographical Encyclopaedia; both marvellous references.

John Cardy

OUR MAY WALK

Friday 18th May 2012

A Verdant Valley Drive, Spectacular Views to the Accompaniment of Tinkling Bellbirds

and the Unusual Rock Formations and Carved Water Bowls on Iron Pot Mountain

Bellbird Point and Iron Pot Mountain in the Megalong Valley

The group last visited this venue in 2006.

There are two walks on offer here; the first to Bellbird Point then a short drive to the start of the Iron Pot Mountain walk. The short ascent of Iron Pot is quite steep but the walk is then fairly level as we make our way along the rocky ridge.

Meet at St Aidan's Church in Hat Hill Road (just off the Great Western Highway) at Blackheath at 9.00am or at Merry Garth at 8.20am. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at Blackheath for the drive into the Megalong Valley.

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 15th June – Leura Forest with a twist
(Note: This is a change to the schedule)

Friday 20th July – Hassans Walls at Lithgow

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

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.

11th May at Sloan Reserve (Planting)

8th June at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details