
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 23 Issue 3

March 2013

NATURE TRACK AND DARWINS WALK

TOPIC

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

**NATURE TRACK, OVER &
UNDERCLIFF TRACK,
STONEHAVEN PASS &
DARWINS WALK at
WENTWORTH FALLS**

Friday 15th February 2013

This walk takes us on a journey which has connections ranging from the humble weatherboard right through to the very origin of our species; along the way, in no particular order of merit, we touch on demons, royalty, goddesses and murderous scoundrels.

The group met in beautiful weather at Wilson Park in Wentworth Falls where Michael Ihm generously distributed freshly picked crisp juicy apples. Then, in a trice, Libby had a car shuffle organised to transport the eighteen walkers to our start point in Victoria Street. Because Helen and I had checked out some interesting diversions off this walk Libby suggested a role reversal, that I lead the walk while she took up my usual position as whip.

We scrambled down an embankment in the Victoria Street cul-de-sac to gain access to the Nature Track. This path undulates through the bush beside bright green banks of Pouched Coral Fern (*Gliechenia dicarpa*), past a profusely flowering Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*), across a tiny creek carrying just a trickle of water before climbing



Autumn in the Bush

to meet the track coming in from West Street. The track then descends and crosses the face of a large hanging swamp via a steel walkway and stairs before delivering us to Edinburgh Castle Rock. This wonderfully sculptured rock outcrop carries curved rows of ironstone ridges standing above smooth weatherworn grooves in the softer sandstone; ironstone ledges and folds protrude from the sides of the outcrop. The rock was so named as it supposedly has some resemblance to the castle in Scotland; dare I suggest a rather vivid imagination was at play.

We then descend toward the creek, at times on steep but very well formed steps, past a moist ferny little alcove and emerge onto a rock platform which affords views down onto the upper reaches of Valley of the Waters Creek. Continuing our descent we pass through a fern-lined gully where the pleasant sound of falling water drifts up from below. Presently we cross Valley of the Waters Creek on a series of well built stepping stones, crest a small rise and recross the creek, this time on a series of well placed natural boulders; we are now in Lillians Glen where we pause for morning tea.

It is in this area where the first of the diversions occur. In small groups, because of the very restricted access, I lead those who wish to see the demon's pool. A scramble along the creek bank adjacent to the stepping

stones takes us to a point with a view down onto a dark pool below large overhanging ledges. A narrow silver band of water appears to emanate directly from the almost black rock face opposite and splays into a fantail as it plunges into this secluded pond. This is Asmodeus Pool, named after the evil chief spirit in Jewish demonology.

Meanwhile, Helen guides other walkers to a tributary just upstream of our morning tea spot and crosses a rock ledge in the shallows to reach the base of yet another waterfall. Here a curtain of water cascades down a dark rock face, narrow at the top and widening greatly as it reaches the shallow pool at its base. Near the top of the falls there are a few steps cut into the rock. These lead to two natural basins carved in the bedrock of the creek and fed by a stream of water issuing from a gracefully curved sluice; a goddess performs her ablutions here. Flora in Greek mythology was the goddess of flowers; this is Floras Bath, fed by Floras Bath Creek.

In this area the shallow rocky creek is overarched by trees presenting magical views through arboreal tunnels; little wonder that other-worldly thoughts entered the minds of those allocating names to features in this area.

Moving on we are soon at Lillians Bridge which spans the deep narrow gorge carved by Valley of the Waters Creek; far below, through cartwheels of tree fern fronds, the water can be seen rippling along toward its leap at Empress Falls. Soon the path meanders down a slope through the rainforest and we are at the end of the Nature Track as it reaches its junction with the Valley of the Waters Track. Here the climb out of the valley begins.

Soon we reach a vantage point where the waters of Empress Falls can be seen gushing from the slot canyon known as Empress Canyon. It is hard to believe the gentle little stream flowing past us as we indulged in morning tea could produce such a stunning effect. As we climb the stairs we have a right royal time as we pass Empress Canyon, Falls and Lookout all named after Queen Victoria, Empress of India and then, just to make sure

we know who the Empress is, we reach Queen Victoria Lookout itself.

We now turn right onto the Overcliff Track, safely negotiate the mud patch below a hanging swamp which almost devoured my better half on a previous walk and we arrive at Lyrebird Lookout. The view across to and past Inspiration Point to Mount Solitary and down to Prince Regent Glen (another touch of royalty) in the Jamison Valley are absolutely superb on a day such as this. Our next stop is Breakfast Point Lookout with its rustic low stone walls and panoramic views across to the cliffs below Kings Tableland.

As we drop down toward the Den Fenella Track junction we pass many examples of Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) which are in the process of shedding their bark. To catch these trees in this stage of undress is a joy. Some display large sheets of orange to red sheets of parchment-like bark peeling away from the trunks, their edges curling as they reveal the smooth new bark, sometimes the palest of green in other cases cream to yellow to pale orange. Other trees shed their bark in a myriad crinkled scales to expose a fresh dimpled surface of new bark. In all cases a delight to the eye.

Den Fenella introduces our first connection to a murder, though far removed from these shores. Fenella, daughter of the Earl of Angus, murdered Scottish King Kenneth III around 995 AD. Subsequently she was slain in the vicinity of a ravine near Grampian in Scotland which became known as Den Fenella. Captain James Murray was born in this area and later came to Australia, setting up home in Wentworth Falls; he named this ravine Den Fenella after the feature near his birthplace.

I was aware the path from the Undercliff Track down to Den Fenella Lookout was closed for repairs to its bridge. However, on reaching the junction we discovered the portion of track back up to Wentworth Falls Picnic Area was also closed for repair work, that was our intended route to access Stonehaven Pass; no matter, just a small change in plan required.

Continuing along the Undercliff Track, taking in the magnificent views along the way, we reach a link path which takes us up to the Princes Rock Lookout track. Heading up the hill away from the lookout we reach the very obscure start to the recently reopened Stonehaven Pass. This track was originally opened in 1926. There was apparently still some signage to features on the track in 1978, however it then fell into disuse and was lost for more than thirty years; it was reopened on the 30th October 2011 due to the efforts of Jim Smith and others. (Jim Smith, long time bushwalker and author, is passionate about preserving walking tracks – “works of landscape art” - in these mountains.)

The track is at present not well formed, more in the style of a raked path with makeshift wooden stepping blocks across wet areas below hanging swamps. There are however sections which indicate the track was originally very well constructed. Signs indicate there are unfenced lookouts and that where fences do exist they are not maintained; hopefully the track will be brought back to a proper standard in the not too distant future.

We make our way past Hickmans Rock, cross Bewleys Creek and pass Wearnes Lookout to arrive at Murphys Spiral Lookout; this is the most unusual feature on the track. From a domed base a natural rock formation rises to a narrow flat-topped pillar; there are twelve steps carved into the rock in a spiral formation with an old pipe handrail curving up to the apex. An unusual feature indeed.

We move on to the Bill Wilson Lookout, an unfenced rocky eyrie containing a most fantastic array of contorted ironstone sculptures; we pause here for lunch. This spot imparts that ‘sitting on top of the world’ feeling. Expansive views across the Jamison Valley to Mount Solitary and beyond are framed by Kings Tableland and the Kedumba Walls on the left and on the right by the cliffs below Inspiration and Sublime Points and the long horizontal line of Narrow Neck Plateau; what a privilege it is to break bread at such a place. A little further on there is Cashmans Lookout, a small platform perched right on the

edge of the precipice; the track then continues on to meet the temporarily closed Den Fenella Track. We retrace our path along Stonehaven Pass calling in to Roses Lookout along the way which sits below our lunch spot; here again there is evidence of an originally well built track with steps cut neatly into the rock outcrop.

Back at Princes Rock Lookout we look down onto the scene for which this area is famous - Campbell’s Cataract dropping dramatically into Weatherboard Gorge. Names don’t ring a bell? Governor Macquarie named these falls after John Thomas Campbell, Secretary to the Governor of NSW during his trip along the newly built Cox’s Road to Bathurst in 1815. Cox had a small hut built in the vicinity of the present junction of Sinclair Crescent and Blaxland Road as his second construction depot. (The Mitchell Library holds an 1815 John Lewin painting of the hut.) It was 17 feet by 12 feet with gable ends and by 2nd October 1814 it had been weatherboarded; the area then became known as Weatherboard. It was renamed Wentworth Falls in 1879 at the same time Blue Mountain was renamed Lawson and Wascoe’s was renamed Blaxland in honour of the three explorers. No matter what the name, the spectacle of these falls never fails to impress.

A description of this area published in ‘The Railway Guide of New South Wales – 1879’ includes a story of times long before the railway was built - “and there are more improbable stories” – of a sly grog shanty near the falls which diggers using the road frequented. “The keeper used to lure them to the precipice, rob them, and then pitch them over into the valley beneath.” A murderous scoundrel indeed.

We drop back down to the Undercliff Track and continue on toward the falls, along the way descending to Eagles Nest Lookout where a view of both the upper and lower falls can be had, the sandy pool at the base far below standing out among the surrounding greenery.

Presently we arrive at the stepping stones at the top of Wentworth Falls. Upstream are the

Queens Cascades – can't get away from those royals – where glistening crystal streams of water drop over multiple tiers of dark rock into a shallow pool that is surrounded by a sandy beach. In the opposite direction is that striking scene described by Charles Darwin when he passed this way in 1836 as “.... suddenly & without any preparation, through the trees, which border the pathway, an immense gulf is seen at the depth of perhaps 1500 ft beneath ones feet. most magnificent astounding & unique view,.... Certainly most stupendous cliffs I have ever seen.” One can but concur with Darwin's view as we set off on the Charles Darwin Walk to return to Wilson Park.

We pass the plaque that reminds us that Darwin passed this way in 1836 and are afforded a wonderful view across to Weeping Rock and the weathered sandstone platforms below. Now we have the benefit of the soothing sounds of running water as the track leads us beside Jamison Creek. We pass a series of tiny waterfalls and cascades. In some cases silver strands splash over small ledges, in others the water gurgles as it ripples along, elsewhere it glides silently over the dark bedrock like folds of liquid glass. In a fitting conclusion to our walk we were entertained by the antics of a raucous flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

As we neared the end of Darwins Walk I could not help wondering, if he were able to return today, what he would think of the mere scintilla of evolution in the human species since he published his theory one hundred and fifty four years ago. Back at Wilson Park there was a delightful scene as a group of young children frolicked joyfully with their parents after school; I don't think Charles would have too much to be concerned about.

So ended another wonderful walk in these amazing mountains – how lucky we are.

John Cardy

OUR MARCH WALK

Friday 15th March 2013

Spectacular Views, Scribbly Gum Woodland, Shady Rainforest and a climb up through the dramatic Devils Hole below a huge suspended boulder

Nellies Glen, Six Foot Track, Devils Hole and Bonnie Doon Track at Katoomba

This is a new venue for the group. It is rated as a hard grade walk with a descent and subsequent ascent of about 460 metres. There is a steep worn track down Nellies Glen and a steep, rather rough track up through the cleft at the Devils Hole, though there will be time for plenty of rest stops; the intervening sections are easy walking. The walk is approximately 12 kilometres (measured on the “Ellis Wheel”). The beauty of the rainforest and the experience of the spectacular climb through the cliffs make the effort well worthwhile.

Meet at 9.00am at the Explorers Tree west of Katoomba or at Merry Garth at 8.00am for an 8.15am departure.

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 19th April – Glow Worm Tunnel and Pagoda Track on the Newnes Plateau

Friday 17th May – Lunch Rock and Wollangambe River near Bell

BUSH CARE

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

8th March at Hay Lane – Ferny Corner

12th April at Galwey Lane – Jalscene End

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details