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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## POPES GLEN TO EVANS LOOKOUT

## TOPIC

### OUR AUGUST WALK

POPES GLEN TO GOVETTS  
LEAP LOOKOUT and across  
to EVANS LOOKOUT at  
BLACKHEATH

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014

Antarctica, a double-bowl swimming pool, Ben Chifley and a family with aristocratic lineage banished to the Colony; unlikely links to a walk in the Blue Mountains yet each entity on this eclectic list touches our walk today.

Sixteen walkers gathered at Evans Lookout car park where we welcomed Marion Bearup and Jenny Dargan who were joining us today - Marion on one of her occasional visits and Jenny for her first time. Libby, in her usual efficient manner, soon had everyone allocated to a seat for the car shuffle to our starting point adjacent to the duck pond in Memorial Park.

Blessed once again with perfect walking weather we set off along Wills Street to the trackhead of the Popes Glen Walk off Dell Street. As we drop down into the reserve there is evidence of the July 2011 windstorm which cut a narrow swathe through these mountains and had such a devastating effect on Mt Wilson; huge trees lie in the gully, their root balls ripped from the earth. Soon the pleasant sound of a running stream is heard as the track leads us closer to Popes Glen Creek, a ribbon



Spring in the Bush

of water rippling along a creek bed of ochre rock. The track now becomes rather wet underfoot and we cross a bed of branches laid across muddy patches to reach the first of three small bridges along this track. As the path rises above the creek into a drier environment several Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) along the way display streamers of discarded bark hanging in graceful curves over rough stockings at their base; smooth fresh white bark now revealed on the trunks.

After the next crossing the track rises past a large boulder richly embellished with velvet shrouds of bright green moss, it then skirts below a large rock outcrop before dropping to once more cross Popes Glen Creek.

Though papal references abound in the names of the glen, the creek and the reserve, the origin of the names is far from ecclesiastical; it stems from Parke William Norman Pope. He and his father John, who was the first mayor of Ashfield in 1872, had extensive land holdings in this area. Parke owned a grand estate called 'Karra Wera', now known as 'Parklands'. It had a six-hole golf course and a small double-bowl swimming pool; one for the ladies, the other for the gents - terribly improper for the sexes to mingle in a swimming pool. The pool was also used as a water supply; one would hope drinking water was sourced elsewhere.

Presently we divert off the main track to drop down to Boyds Beach. Here the creek courses down a series of tiny cascades into a shallow curved pool lined with an abundance of ferns on the far side and a sandy beach on the near side; a very pleasant place to pause for morning tea. The name recognises Mick Boyd, a Park Ranger from 1926 to 1945 who was very skilled at track maintenance; 'tis a pity he is not still around.

Refreshed both by the victuals and the visuals on offer we continue on our way. Soon the golden hue of emerging wattle blossom illuminates the scene. The deep gilded globes of blossom on the Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalus*) mingle with the glowing floral spikes of the Sydney Golden Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) creating that distinctive golden shade, a portent of the flood of gold to come in the springtime Australian bush.

The track leads us past an impressive sandstone pillar on the left and then through thickets of glossy-leaved Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*). The common name of this small tree derives from the stems being used extensively for wattle and daub buildings in early Sydney Town; Blackwattle Bay, home of the Sydney Fish Markets, owes its name to the once prolific growth of this plant along its shores.

We now drop down to a sandy-bottomed pool fed by a delightful little leap of water cascading down a terrace of rock shelves; misshapen images of the surrounding vegetation are reflected in the rippled surface.

We pass the track, on the left, which leads to Pulpit Rock and soon get glimpses of the cliffs on the other side of Govett Gorge. A little further on views into the vast chasm which is Govett Gorge and Grose Gorge open up in all their splendour. At one point we are looking directly down onto The Jungle, the dense rainforest below Horseshoe Falls surrounded by the horseshoe-shaped cliffline from which the falls take their name. The eye is drawn past the prominence of Pulpit Rock (the fifteen metre high spire is dwarfed in the landscape) to Mt Hay, Lockley Pylon and Fortress Ridge.

The sheer cliffs drop dramatically to the tree-clad talus slopes which angle more gently down to the creek lines of the streams that have carved out this breathtaking landscape over many many millennia.

We now climb up to Govetts Leap Lookout and pause for yet another view of Govetts Leap Falls where the waters of Govetts Leap Brook plummet 161 metres (or is it 180 metres?) over the cliff edge. A spectacular sight no matter how many metres they fall nor how many times one has seen them.

The Cliff Top Track now takes us, surprisingly enough, along the cliff top toward Evans Lookout. As we drop down toward the top of Govetts Leap Falls there are examples of the Small-leaf Tea Tree (*Leptospermum parvifolium*) displaying their crisp white flowers. The vegetation is occasionally lit up by Matchheads or Heath Milkworts (*Comesperma ericinum*), their abundant buds, yet to open, provide a distinctive display.

At Govetts Leap Brook, where there is what appears to be an impossibly small amount of water flowing to result in the spectacle of the falls, the decision is made to take a side trip along the Braeside Walk and return. This walk, which clings to the side of the brook, was probably named in the 1920s, 'brae' being a Scottish term for riverbank; there was a cottage in Govetts Leap Road in 1903 called 'Braeside'.

What an appropriately named walk this is, leading us along a narrow silver riband of water flowing between banks swathed with dense mats of deep green Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*), mimicking a Scottish burn flowing through the heather. We follow this little rill past a spectacular old tree carrying a tall tapered hollow resulting from fire; we reach a small dam, built in 1906, to supply water for locomotives back in the steam era. That need long gone, silt is now almost level with the top of the brick wall.

We return to Barrow Lookout above the falls and disturb the peace and quiet of Robert Chesney who chose to relax in the warming sun while we explored the sidetrack. This

lookout was named for Isaac Le Pipre Barrow (1844 – 1930) who was a draughtsman and surveyor with the Department of Lands; he drew many tourist and general maps of the area. The side view of the falls from here, from top to bottom, is spectacular. There is a tiny blue figure seen near the base of the falls far below, a lone walker beginning the long steep climb up the cliff face track to Govetts Lookout.

There is adequate space on the sloping sun-drenched rock face here so we settle down for lunch accompanied by the sound of the falls and an occasional misting from the light wind-blown spray lifted up from the falls; a very special place to dine.

The track climbs as it leaves Barrow Lookout and imperceptibly moves away from the cliff edge. A realignment of the track in 2001 bypassed a lookout which sat on a high point of the cliff – Luchetti Lookout. This was named after Anthony (Tony) Sylvester Luchetti (1904 – 1984); he was a trustee on the Blackheath Group of the Sights Reserve Trust. Tony's main claim to fame however was that he succeeded Ben Chifley as Member for Macquarie in 1951. (Chifley occasionally delivered impromptu 'soapbox addresses' on a street corner in Blackheath before having dinner in one of the local cafés; how times and attitudes have changed.)

As one would expect on a path named the Cliff Top Track there are sublime views into the gorge as we continue on our way; some framed beautifully by the trees. At one spot there is an ancient Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) providing a magnificent foreground to the view. Many years ago I took a photograph of the vista with Helen sitting under this tree; it is now isolated outside the safety fence.

The track now descends once more and we pass examples of two of the Epacris family. The conspicuous white bell-shaped flowers of the Blunt Leaf Heath (*Epacris obtusifolia*) sit in clusters atop erect stems on this small shrub. Far less in number, trailing over ledges, are examples of the *Epacris reclinata*, the eye is drawn to their hanging tubular red flowers.

At Hayward Gully a bridge takes us across a swampy area where tussocks of Button Grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*) thrive; we are too early to see their striking display of yellow flowers but some buttons from last season's crop still sit atop long slim stems.

This gully, and subsequently the small waterfall which drops into the gorge, are named after William Hayward, credited with being the first white man to reach the floor of Govetts Gorge in 1847.

The track now climbs toward Evans Lookout. Beside the track small clumps of a bright green plant are noted, needle-like yet soft leaves crowd along its stems. This is the Prostrate Geebung or Mountain Geebung (*Persoonia chamaepitys*); though the clumps we saw were small it can form dense mats up to two metres across. Also in this area is a lovely example of one of the Beard Heaths (*Leucopogon setiger*), its brilliant-white bell-shaped flowers hang delicately among the sharp-pointed leaves softening the rigid appearance of this small shrub.

Soon we are back at the Evans Lookout car park where we await the retrieval of the cars from Memorial Park. Such a wonderful walk in absolutely glorious mild conditions challenges the flippant claim that an accurate description of the weather at Blackheath is obtained if you delete the 'B' and the last 'h'; I won't identify the person who proffered this scurrilous suggestion but the name does rhyme with Kim.

I have always assumed, incorrectly, (like many of my assumptions) that this lookout was named for George W Evans who surveyed the route for Coxs Road across the mountains. Not so. It **was** named for a George Evans, but George Evans, a bushwalking solicitor. He owned property in Blackheath and discovered the route into Govetts Gorge known as The Horse Track. George was an Englishman of aristocratic lineage but his family was banished to the Colony under a pseudonym. This was to avoid tainting the distinguished family name with the scandal of a financial failure. One wonders how many of the lower

classes were offered that option. George studied law in Sydney and married into a wealthy family; he purchased several land holdings in Blackheath in the 1880s.

Soon the rest of the group return and we indulge in the usual cup of tea while reflecting on a fantastic walk through such superb and varied landscapes; how lucky we are to have this on our doorstep.

Speaking of landscapes, what of that early reference to Antarctica? It relates to the dramatic cliffs, up to 220 metres high, which were below us as we walked the Cliff Top Track. They are known as the Griffith Taylor Wall, named after Thomas Griffith Taylor (1880 – 1963), Professor of Geography at Sydney University and founder of the Geographical Society of NSW. Griffith Taylor accompanied British explorer Robert Scott, as his geographer, on that fateful 1910 – 1912 expedition to Antarctica.

As most of the walkers wend their way home, four of us decide to make the short walk down to Valley View Lookout to catch the view in the afternoon light; how glad we are. In stark contrast to the clear views we had enjoyed during the day, the gorges have filled with a thin smoke haze. This creates a magical effect on the landscape. The cliff lines and mountain profiles are shrouded in a translucent blue/grey veil; the effect changing as the slight breeze plays on the hanging drapes of haze. A marvellous way to bring the curtain down on another day exploring the beauty of these fabulous mountains.

John Cardy

## OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

**FRIDAY 19<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2014**

**Gigantic Granite Tors, Expansive Views, Caves and Crevices**

**Evans Crown Reserve at Tarana**

The group last visited this spectacular site in July 2007. The granite country is a dramatic contrast to our more usual venues in sandstone landscapes. This is a relatively easy walk with a short climb up to the summit followed by

exploration of the granite tors so marvellously sculpted by nature.

**Meet at Merry Garth for a 9.00am departure or at Mt Victoria near the railway station at 9.30am or at the Evans Crown Reserve car park at 10.15am. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at Merry Garth and at Mt Victoria; please ring in early if attending to allow Libby ample time to organise these arrangements.**

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.**

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## FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2014 – Grand Canyon at Blackheath

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014 – Ikara Ridge at Mt Victoria

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## 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.**

**12<sup>th</sup> September – Meet at Hay Lane – Sloan Reserve**

**10<sup>th</sup> October – Meet at Wynne Reserve**

**14<sup>th</sup> November – Meet at Wynne Reserve**

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