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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## WITCHES GLEN AND FAIRY BOWER

## TOPIC

### OUR NOVEMBER WALK

WITCHES GLEN, FAIRY  
BOWER and COXS CAVE at  
Mt VICTORIA

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2014

Predictions of a heatwave, strong hot winds and a total fire ban - not ideal conditions for a walk on the exposed Ikara Ridge. Not a problem, Libby simply switched the venue to the more shaded and protected area south of the highway. The fourteen walkers who had gathered in Victoria Falls Road made the short drive across to Mt Piddington.

The revised plan was to explore the Coxs Cave and Fairy Bower circuit on the eastern side of Mt Piddington and Witches Glen to the west. Sagacious as ever, Libby suggested we tackle the western side first before it became exposed to the afternoon sun.

The track zig zags down from the road through open woodland past several fine rock outcrops, then through more enclosed vegetation as it begins to follow a watercourse; a watercourse rather bereft of water at this time. The track then leads us through the aptly named Black Cave where the remains of an old seat protrude from the silt, a connection to walkers of bygone eras who enjoyed these tracks.



Summer in the Bush

Just past a rather boggy stretch of track we are in the shady environ of Witches Glen. The little creek, now on our left and carrying just a trickle of water, continues on to leap over the cliff edge as Witches Glen Waterfall, a rather extravagant description at this time.

We now climb into more open country where magnificent vistas of the Kanimbla Valley come into view. A short scramble up an embankment on the right brings us to Sundeck Cave. This cave is very popular as a camping spot for rock climbers. What a magnificent

spot to linger awhile and partake of morning tea.

The cave has two decks at right angles to each other, the south east facing deck is the most sheltered and looks down onto Witches Glen; there are obviously rock climbers in residence at the moment judging by the amount of camping gear on this deck. The south western deck is more exposed but affords an imposing outlook into the Kanimbla Valley; most of the group settle here to take in these views. The eye is drawn to the shear cliffs to the right which house the Bushrangers Cave just off the Little Zig Zag, then to the farmhouses scattered on the valley floor, dwarfed in this expansive landscape, and across to the ridgeline which carries the Jenolan Caves Road; an impressive vista.

A rather strong wind blew up to disturb our comfort and we headed back toward the

summit of Mt Piddington to tackle the next circuit of our walk.

Along the way, a shrub, carrying small berries, was noted beside the track; a blush of red indicating they were just ripening. Bob Bearup pondered whether this could be bush tucker and invited those around him to taste-test the fruit. There were no volunteers and Bob himself declined, saying they may well cause him to hallucinate. Someone wondered aloud how we would be able to tell if Bob was actually hallucinating; to avoid incriminating myself that person shall remain nameless. (The shrub in question was one of the Ballarts, possibly the Pale Ballart (*Exocarpos strictus*), a parasite on the roots of nearby plants.)

Back on Mt Piddington we now headed toward Coxs Cave, taking the more direct route, which again initially leads us through open woodland. We traversed a saddle between two rock outcrops and dropped down into a gully containing a fine stand of what appeared to be relatively young Blue Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*). We now once again entered a more enclosed environment where Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*) became prevalent and we passed through a 'tunnel' formed by a rock overhang and a huge boulder.

At the bottom of a steep set of steps carved into the rockface we were among Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*), surrounded by ferns and moss encrusted rocks; we were at the base of the ladder leading up to Coxs Cave.

Climbing the 19-rung ladder led us to a ledge with low headroom below a rock overhang, the rear of this overhang was a wall of green draped with tree roots; some dropping vertically from cracks in the rock, others snaking horizontally across ledges on the wall. A short scramble led us to the mouth of this impressive cave, the cream-coloured sandstone of the domed ceiling is streaked with red, gold and brown; ferns hanging from fault lines add a touch of green. The floor of the cave slopes steeply to the rear and a track leads to a rock platform at the mouth which

affords great views of the surrounding cliffs. It was a marvellous view looking out from near the back of the cave; the cliffs and bush framed by the arching line of the mouth.

Though some references suggest the cave is named after William Cox the road builder, it is more likely named after George Henry Cox MLA. Henry Bell, a relative of George Cox, owned land near the cave.

With everyone having safely descended the ladder we moved on toward The Corner. Below the track, off to the right, was the bottom of Dunns Leap. A now rusty length of fencing wire stretches from this point up to a cave about 50 metres above.

In 1908 some young lads from Henry Rienits' private school at Mt Victoria, known simply as "The School", were in that cave when 18 year old Charles Dunn somehow lost his footing and plummeted to the spot we were passing. His friends clambered down to find him but there was no sign of their companion. They rushed back to The School to raise the alarm and a search followed, again unsuccessful. Charles was eventually found lying on his bed at The School; he had walked back alone, while his mates were searching for his body, suffering only a few scratches and minor bruising.

The location subsequently became a tourist drawcard. Charles Dunn's granddaughter, Kirsty Dunn, was among a group who visited the cave and the landing point on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008, the centenary of the 'leap'.

We arrived at The Corner, a rock platform which, as the name implies, wraps around a corner of the cliff line. A great view of the yawning mouth of Coxs Cave can be had from here, as well as views to the lower reaches of Fairy Bower Creek, the majestic cliffs opposite, and down into the Kanimbla Valley; a wonderful corner on which to hang out for a while.

We then followed the track upstream beside Fairy Bower Creek which led us once again into a shady enclosed environment. We passed the dark entrance slot to Margeurite Cave on

the left (must explore that cave one day) and a little further on, after passing some magnificent giants of the forest we saw, to the right, a concrete dam on the creek. This provided a water supply for the 1920s workings of the short-lived chert quarry to the east of the creek. Chert is a silica mineral once used in road construction. Because it is quite hard and displays very sharp edges when broken, Aborigines put it to a much more sensible use as cutting and scraping implements.

We ignored the track leading off to the left; we will explore that shortly, and continued across a small bridge still heading upstream. Soon we passed a large boulder clothed in moss and Rock Felt Fern (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*). On the uphill side of this monolith stood The White Lady or The Angel of the Bower or The Lady of the Bower; an image carved and painted on the rock face. The image is probably of Emily Hutchinson-Cooper whose parents owned Cooper's Grand Hotel (now and originally the Manor House) in Mt Victoria. A 1906 photo exists of Emily which has several similarities to the image. Emily was an accomplished soprano, her 1905 concert was advertised in The Sydney Morning Herald "under Vice Regal patronage". HW Cotton, an artist and cartoonist stayed at the Grand in 1907, as well as signing the visitors book he included a sketch; perhaps he created The White Lady.

We then made our way back down the track to meet the Odd Couple; another image painted on a rock face and dated 1912, in fact 1: 1: 12 is inscribed on the image. It consists of two cartoon characters facing each other across a column of initials; the man on the right appears to be saluting the lady on the left, perhaps tilting his hat. What story lies behind this image?

Five of the seven initials have 'R' as the second initial. A Queensland family, the Ruthnings, checked into Cooper's Grand Hotel on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1911. The date is right but the first initials do not match; perhaps the origin of the Odd Couple will always remain a mystery and perhaps that is not a bad thing.

We then took the track on our right which led us through an enchanting little grotto, across a small stream burbling over a pebble bed and up some stone steps, beautifully constructed long ago. We then recrossed the little stream, proceeded over a small rise and arrived at Fairy Bower (also referred to as The Grotto).

Here high cliffs surround a shallow pool on three sides. A trickle of water was dripping down the rock face on the far side of the pool; a deep channel eroded into the top of that rock face indicates the water flow is often much more than a trickle. This cool enclosed space was an ideal spot to pause for lunch.

Relaxed and replenished, boosted as usual by a slice of Libby's bushwalker cake, we commenced the climb back to the cars on the summit of Mt Piddington.

As we ascended this zig zagging track we passed a couple of examples of The Grass Leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) displaying their bright pink flowers. Hiding among the ground cover were examples of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*), their tiny four-petalled brilliant-white flowers refusing to be ignored.

Back at the car park we partook of the usual after walk cuppa in the shade of a rock overhang. Another great walk, not what we were expecting but a wonderful shady substitute to cater for the prevailing hot conditions.

As we were preparing to leave and people were saying their farewells Bob Bearup lamented that he missed the ritual of farewell friends with streamers thrown from ship to wharf and the singing of "Now is the hour, etc". He suggested Helen, Anne and I could stand beside the road and farewell him with a rendition of that song ----- and we complied!

Did that really happen or was I hallucinating?

John Cardy

**OUR DECEMBER WALK**

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

**Open Woodland, Expansive Panoramas and Views down to the Wollangambe**

**Boronia Point at Mount Wilson**

The group last visited this area in April 2007. This morning walk should build an appetite for the end of year Christmas luncheon awaiting back at Merry Garth. (See details below.) It should also satisfy your appetite for mountain scenery in the evocative atmosphere of the very special Mt Wilson bushland. This is not a difficult walk and Libby intends having cars left at the fire trail near Farrer Road West for those preferring a ride for the last section back to Merry Garth.

**Meet at Merry Garth for a 9.00am start**

**Those willing to be involved in the car shuffle will need to be at Merry Garth at 8.30am. Please indicate such willingness when booking in.**

Bring morning tea only, lunch awaits at Merry Garth

**Should you be bringing food for the luncheon, Libby has suggested it may be dropped off to the kitchen at Merry Garth before we leave for the walk.**

**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 ring after the evening of Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December.**

**END OF YEAR / CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON**

Thanks once again to the generous hospitality of Libby and Keith the end of year luncheon will be held in the glorious grounds of Merry Garth. Ex-walkers, armchair walkers, family and friends are more than welcome.

Meet for lunch at 1.00pm.

A format similar to last year will be used, that is Turkey, Ham, etc; Dessert, Tea and Coffee will be provided.

Please bring one item only from the following selection **to share**: Salads, hot savoury dishes

that go with the meats which are provided or a dessert slice; or you may elect to pay \$10 per person and just come and enjoy.

Please bring your own plates, cutlery, glasses and drinks.

**To assist with catering please advise Helen Cardy (9871 3661 or 0418 646 487) as early as possible if you are coming and, to avoid over and/or under supply, which of the shared food you would prefer to bring or if you wish to make the \$10 donation.**

**CAROL SERVICE**

The annual Carol Service will be held at St Georges Church Mt Wilson commencing at 7.30pm on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> December. Everyone is very welcome to attend this service and experience the ambience of this historic church in a charmingly different light.

**FUTURE WALKS** (Tentative schedule)

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2015 – Tessellated Pavement at Mt Irvine

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2015 – To be advised

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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> December - meet at Wynne Reserve**

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