

---

---

# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

---

---

Volume 24 Issue 5

May 2014

---

---

## WOLLANGAMBE AND JOES CANYON

## TOPIC

### OUR APRIL WALK

WOLLANGAMBE RIVER  
AND JOES CANYON at  
MOUNT WILSON

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2014

The Macquarie Dictionary has forty definitions for the word 'fire'; I am sure the people of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine would at this time have many more – none of them printable in such an august newsletter as this. Today we will venture into areas effected by and now recovering from the October fires. (You may wish to substitute your own expletives.)

It was one of those magical autumnal mornings when we gathered near the Mount Wilson Fire Station, just a slight chill in the air; air so clear and so still that the morning light took on a special brilliance and bird calls resonated.

Old habits do die hard yet no one appeared too traumatised by the fact we were meeting on a Thursday rather than the usual Friday; very adaptable this lot.

We welcomed Margaret Murdoch who is only able to join us infrequently due to other commitments and a friend of hers Alison Hey. We also welcomed Louise Marsden a friend of Barbara Harry, Peter Henchman from Mountain Lagoon and his son Richard who was visiting from England and Des Barrett



Autumn in the Bush

who was joining us for the first time, though a member for some years.

We proceed, twenty in number, behind the Fire Station and make our way through groups of tree ferns, their fronds risen Phoenix-like from the ashes, shimmering brilliant green against the blackened landscape. At the Northern Fire Trail we cross to the footpad opposite and begin our descent.

There is now of course no understorey in the forest and very little ground cover; blackened tree trunks dominate,

carrying just a smattering of green foliage. The forest floor is carpeted with dead leaves; leaves which escaped the inferno but were desiccated by the intense heat. Regrowth of ground ferns, lomandra and various shrubs is now under way, beginning to soften the ravaged landscape.

The ants are obviously not convinced the rain has gone. A host of small volcano-like cones rise beside the track, some clustered in groups, others in splendid isolation, glowing gold from the clay material the ants have brought to the surface in building these protective structures at their nest entrances. Beside one such structure a minute seedling is emerging of the Native Holly or Prickly Shaggy Pea (*Podolobium ilicifolium*), its pointed holly-like leaves too soft at this stage to be prickly.

Soon we are at Halfway Rock. Now I have heard it said that this rock is not really

halfway; something I have never quite got my head around. Fellow bushwalker and renowned oracle, Bob Bearup, often asserts that if you leave a particular point and descend one thousand metres, then ascend one thousand metres back to the same point, you have neither lost nor gained anything. Using that well reasoned logic I believe Halfway Rock is indeed halfway. It is halfway between any two points equidistant from it and therefore is in fact halfway. Having successfully put my mind at rest regarding that dilemma I join the rest of the group here, halfway between somewhere and somewhere else, for morning tea.

The view across the valley from this vantage point is usually of tree-clad hills extending into the distance, barely a cliff line to be seen through the foliage. Today there are vast numbers of exposed rock outcrops ringed by the skeletal remains of trees, ridge tops surmounted by stick figure trunks and branches silhouetted against the sky. A changed landscape indeed.

The track now leads us along a more gentle slope as it contours past the junction of the path to Joes Canyon. There are some remarkable sights in this area resulting from the fire. A broad smooth eucalypt trunk has shed much of its charred outer skin yet still carries many small pieces of burnt bark - shards of black on a pure white background. In other cases normally smooth bark is segmented into a mosaic of small white 'tiles' of bark and there are many dark hollows and tunnels burned into and through the bases of surrounding trees. As is often the case, catastrophic events can have unexpected results; cameos of beauty among the destruction.

Soon we are on a rock ledge overlooking the Wollangambe - another dilemma of definition arises; is the Wollangambe a creek or a river. A map included with the 1879 Railway Guide of New South Wales shows it as Wollangambe Creek as does a circa 1939 map, a circa 1950 map shows a track to Wollangambe River. Two circa 1968 maps refer to it as a Creek. A 1972 CMA Tourist map also refers to it as a

Creek. The Wollangambe Topographic Map of 1976 and subsequent references call it a River. So, since around the time Mount Wilson was first settled it has been Creek, River, Creek and River again; to add to my confusion the ravine on this stream, just upstream from the Bell Creek junction, is known locally as Clarence Creek! Just wondering why is it so? I feel I am getting a little up the creek here; perhaps I should get out more.

From this ledge it is usual to see but a glimpse of the river and the cliffs near 'Clarence Creek', today a large section of the river and Bell Creek is clearly visible through bare scorched branches and the cliffs opposite are almost fully revealed.

Soon we are at the little saddle where the track divides; left to The Beach and a lesser track to the right leads downstream beyond the knoll around which the river sweeps after passing the sands of The Beach. I remember a flourishing Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) at this track junction when we were last here in 2010; it is no more, indeed the saddle is bereft of live vegetation.

As the track drops steeply toward The Beach however there is ample evidence of the ability of the bush to regenerate after fire. Blackened trunks of old Banksias sport pairs of tiny brilliant green leaves emerging from adventitious buds, their sheen enhanced against the charred bark. Higher in these devastated trees, truncated limbs support a profusion of new growth. Vertical clefts in the bare cliffs to the right carry a large number of ferns, their luxuriant fronds glowing amongst the fire-blackened walls of stone.

A wade across the shallow creek, sorry river, and we are at The Beach. (Some, we'll call them the dries, choose to cross on a log bridge further upstream.) Again, what a contrasting scene is laid out before us compared to our last visit. Then the tall smooth trunks of the Blue Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) emerged through the foliage of a profusion of lower growing trees and shrubs lining the banks of the river. The only green on the scorched earth

of the banks now is but a few quickly recovering Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*) and the abundant regenerative low growth on the trunks of the rough-barked eucalypts. The Blue Mountain Ash now rise fully exposed from their bases to their depleted crowns. There is evidence of some regrowth, one can only hope for their long-term survival.

Leaving our packs at The Beach we make our way toward the Bell Creek junction and the 'Clarence Creek' ravine. Again, on our last visit, we were walking below a low dense canopy provided by an assortment of trees and shrubs including Scrub Beefwood (*Stenocarpus salignus*), Pepperbush (*Tasmannia insipida*), Bush Muttonwood (*Rapanea howittana*) and Water Gum (*Tristania nerifolia*); today only a few Water Gums remain. Ground ferns are beginning to return and there is a host of young Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) emerging; it should make for a spectacular display in four years; a time when, it is said, Waratahs perform best after a fire.

Soon the hidden rapids of Bell Creek are heard as it feeds its chilled flow into the Wollangambe and as we veer right the waters flowing from 'Clarence Creek' purl silently over a gentle cascade; liquid silver flowing over ebony bedrock. Water Boatmen scud across the surface of a nearby still pool. We cross to the opposite bank and make our way upstream past a series of tiny cascades tumbling down between the boulders and greenery; this little section escaped the ravages of fire.

We now make our way carefully along mossy ledges, over large boulders and wade through a shallow pool, its bottom muddied by silt and ash washed downstream from the now bare banks; we are in the 'Clarence Creek' ravine.

What a majestic place this is. From some positions the water-sculpted walls appear to touch; from others a narrow slot, open to the sky, admits sunlight to illuminate rippled reflections in the elongated pool. In places the normally clean sandy banks are coated in dark

ash-filled silt; at other spots clean ochre banks of sand are decorated with thin horizontal lines of black silt, indicating brief pauses in the changing levels of the water. Each time we visit here people tend to stand quietly soaking up the very special atmosphere which pervades this place; each absorbed in their own thoughts.

Dragging ourselves away from this special place we head back toward The Beach. Along the way a small blue flower is noticed just peeking above the leaf litter; its identity is confirmed when, closer to The Beach, more developed plants are seen. It is the *Lobelia dentata*; some texts note that flowering of this herb peaks six months after fire - they appear to have got that right.

We climb up from The Beach and retrace our steps to the track down to Joes Canyon. Along the way it is good to see moisture seeping from the hillsides to aid in the regeneration of the bush. Other signs of future recovery are the gaping mouths of the seedpods of the Needle Bush or Silky Hakea (*Hakea sericea*) and of the Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*); both triggered to open and release their seeds by their exposure to fire.

We drop into the creek line which leads to Joes Canyon. In this area two of the small shrubs which carry abundant tubular flowers are seen. The Fuchsia Heath (*Epacris longiflora*) with its white tipped red flowers and the Red Five Corners (*Styphelia tubiflora*) with its slightly curved tubular flowers having conspicuous protruding stamens.

Progress down the creek is not as easy as on our last visit, it is necessary to clamber over and around many fallen tree trunks and branches. The journey has its rewards however, the banks in places are clothed in ferns and mosses and in the creek there are pebble beds made up of water-polished stones in hues of gold, red, bronze, purple, orange and black; a kaleidoscope of colour.

Soon the walls of the creek narrow and become higher; the remains of ancient swirl pools provide gracefully curved decoration to the sandstone. We reach the point where we

would normally drop down to Joes Canyon proper and are confronted with a log jam barring our way. There is a small space we could perhaps squeeze through however Libby wisely decides not to proceed; log jams can be quite unstable and, having got through, it may well have been difficult to climb back out. So we reluctantly turn back, leaving Joes Canyon to the snake, or its descendants, after which it was named.

Now we make our way up the trackless ridgeline which leads toward Du Fours Rocks. We would normally refer to this as a gentle bush bash but the fires have not left a lot of bush to bash. We pause at a couple of rock outcrops which elevate us above the fire-ravaged remnants of bush to admire the views back into the valley; and just perhaps to rest a little as well. Presently we emerge at the Table Rock formation and make our way below the cliff line, passing along the way a Coral Fungus, possibly Salmon Fairy Clubs (*Ramaria sp*) and arrive at the Chinamans Hat formation.

During this day we have experienced the ravages of a very unwelcome fire. As we pause atop this Oriental chapeau the sun is getting low over the Wollemi and lighting up the cliffs below Esmes Lookout and Du Fours Rocks with a fiery glow; in this case, by contrast, a most welcome fire-borne effect with which to end the day.

John Cardy

## OUR MAY WALK

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014

**Two Walks for the Price of One!  
Waterfalls, Rainforest and Great Views**

**Minnehaha Falls at Katoomba and Water Nymph Dell at Wentworth Falls**

These are two new venues for the group separated by a short drive. We will first visit Minnehaha Falls for a walk of just under 3km return with rather steep stairs to the bottom of the falls; the walk entails a descent and subsequent ascent of 90 metres. We will then rationalise the vehicles to a reduced number

for the short drive (about 10km) to Wentworth Falls for the Water Nymph Dell walk. This old track, mentioned in the 1879 Railway Guide to New South Wales, leads us down into lush rainforest; an enchanting place. The track can be slippery in places and there is a descent and ascent of about 110 metres. This circular walk of just over 3km includes 1km of street walking. We will return to the Minnehaha Reserve for afternoon tea and to retrieve the cars left there.

**Meet at the Minnehaha Falls Reserve Car Park at the end of Minni-ha-ha Road and Fifth Avenue in North Katoomba at**

**9.30am.** (Difference in the official spellings is a bit funny; perhaps the reason for the ha-ha?) Turn off the Highway in Katoomba at the lights at the Council Chambers and travel via Civic Pl and Station St, left into Camp St, right into Victoria St, right into South St and left into Minni-ha-ha Rd.

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.**

---

## FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014 – Radiata Plateau and Megalong Head

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014 – Jellybean Pool and Red Hands Cave at Glenbrook

---

## 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.**

**9<sup>th</sup> May – Meet at Wynne Reserve**

**13<sup>th</sup> June – Meet at Silva Plana**

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