
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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BLUE GUM FOREST – PERRYS TO GOVETTS

TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK

BLUE GUM FOREST – PERRYS LOOKDOWN to GOVETTS LEAP LOOKOUT

Friday 21st March 2014

On Saturday 24th October 1931 the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried a story titled *The Blue Gum Forest – Plea for its Protection*, it read in part: “In the heart of the Grose Valley, in the shadow of Mt King George, where Govett’s Leap Creek joins the Grose, there is a wondrous forest of tall trees, cathedral-like in its splendour. Mountain mists rise from it in early morning, later a blue haze invests its noble aisles, and in the evening, when the setting sun is reflected from an overtowering cliff-face, sunbeams filter through the trees in shafts of dancing gold.”

This article, along with several others, was part of a campaign to buy out a lease of forty acres of the forest held by Clarrie Hungerford and to have the area declared a reserve. Thankfully a sum of about \$20,000 in today’s values was raised, at the height of the Great Depression, in loans and donations and the reserve was created; it was proclaimed in the NSW Government Gazette of 2nd September 1932.

And thus, almost eighty-two years later, we will have the privilege today of experiencing



Autumn in the Bush

the magical aura which exists among those majestic Blue Gums.

(The full *Herald* article is reproduced in Andy Macqueen’s marvellous book *Back from the Brink - Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness*, an absolute ‘must read’ for anyone interested in the history and preservation of this area.)

Today’s planned venue attracted a good roll up with twenty-three gathering at Govetts Leap Lookout. We watched the morning sun

burning through the light haze to illuminate the surrounding cliffs and glanced, perhaps askance, at the bottom of Govetts Leap Falls from which we will climb later in the day. Our primary goal for the day was hidden behind the ridge running down from the base of Pulpit Rock.

We welcomed Bruce and Lorraine Delprado friends of Stephen List and Rosie Walsh, Philip and Jane Beeby who have not been able to join us for some time and their son Nicholas, and Steve Woolfenden and his son Mitchell who were joining us for the first time.

Using her amazing mental program for car shuffles Libby quickly had a seat allocated to everyone and we set off on the drive to Perrys Lookdown. Eccleston Du Faur named this feature for Samuel Augustus Perry (1793-1854) who was Deputy Surveyor General to

Thomas Mitchell from 1829 to around 1849. The name appears on Du Faur's 1878 map.

At Perrys Lookdown we look across to the stunning sight of Mount Banks sitting atop Banks Wall, the glowing sandstone cliffs divided into three layers by horizontal lines of vegetation somehow clinging to ledges in the cliff-faces. Wisps of mist hang in the valley highlighted against the background of the green/grey talus slopes; brighter green fingers reach down the slopes where deeper gullies shelter elongated pockets of rainforest.

We drop down past Monument Lookout where there is a memorial to four young lads aged between 13 and 18 who perished in this vicinity attempting to escape a bushfire in November 1957. We then descend Dockers Head via Dockers 'Ladder' past an impressive sandstone spire and emerge onto Dockers Buttress. Judge Earnest Brougham Docker (1843-1923) was a keen and obviously a skilled explorer; he found the pass between Govetts Creek and Perrys Lookdown in 1875.

The five-petalled pinkish/mauve flowers of the Hairy Fan Flower (*Scaevola ramosissima*) appear at intervals to decorate the track as we move deeper into the valley. Soon we are at the edge of the Blue Gum Forest. The whole atmosphere of the area changes; smooth straight columns, some pure white others a soft greenish/grey, soar above a ground cover of lush ferns and long grasses. High above, the rather sparse branches of these forest giants form an open canopy. Emanating from those lofty crowns is a soft rhythmic hum; bees, obviously in their thousands, collecting pollen from the blossom on high.

We arrive at a crossroad of tracks beside the venerable old 'Big Tree' and move deeper into the forest to pause for morning tea where a large log provides ample seating.

What a pleasure, indeed a privilege it is, to relax in this cathedral of Mother Nature and let the atmosphere soak into your being. As we sit here, what is first thought to be very light sprinkles of a rain shower, are noticed. It is actually a shower of downy filaments from the eucalypt blossom, disturbed by the industrious

fossicking of the hordes of bees, floating down from the canopy; an enchanting effect.

These Mountain Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus deanei*) were named for Henry Deane in recognition of his detailed studies of the Eucalyptus genus; Deane was the Chief Engineer in charge of design and construction of the Wolgan Valley Railway in 1906-07. Prior to that he was the Chief Engineer for Railway Construction to the NSW Government. Deane had a close association with Joseph Henry Maiden, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens from 1896 to 1924, through a deep mutual interest in the Eucalyptus genus.

Making our way back toward the 'Big Tree' it is noted that some of the smooth trunks of the blue gums carry the distinctive meandering scalloped tracks of Australia's largest land slug, the Red Triangle Slug, where it has been grazing on fine algae on the bark. These slugs tend to be only seen on rainy days in the bush. There are also starburst-like grey patterns on some trunks, their origin unknown to this writer. From my usual position at the rear of the group the magnitude of the forest is put into perspective by the minute figures moving ahead through the majestic blue gums.

Though the area around the 'Big Tree' today appears as pristine forest, a sketch map by Andy Macqueen included in his aforementioned book shows otherwise. The sites of two camps of the Royal Engineers in 1859 during the survey and construction of the Engineers Track are shown along with Du Faur's Lower Camp established in 1875 to accommodate up to thirty paying visitors. Ben Carver, a Richmond farmer, held a lease over forty acres in this area between 1875 and 1884 and built a hut and stockyards, this lease transferred to the Hordern family from 1884 until 1969; it became known as The Hordern Pavilion. Clarrie Hungerford's lease was on the eastern side of the Grose. There were also stockyards at Acacia Flat. One can now see Mother Nature is slowly reclaiming that which she lost. As Horace wrote in 20 BC: "Though you drive away nature with a pitchfork, she always returns."

We now follow the track toward Acacia Flat, the hum of the bees subsides, replaced by the musical tinkle of the Bell Miners. The view through the trees to our left, across Govetts Creek, reveals the spectacular parapets of Du Faur Head and Lockley Pylon. A little further on the view along Govetts Creek leads the eye to the eastern elevation of Pulpit Rock and adjacent sheer cliff-faces; a magnificent sight.

The track rises and falls as it follows the creek and we come across a Diamond Python crossing our path. It appears completely unfazed by our presence and very slowly slides off into undergrowth while we crowd around observing and taking photographs. Although not venomous they can apparently inflict a very painful bite; this one appears to have no intention of inflicting pain on anyone.

The spectacle of Griffith Taylor Wall comes into view as we look upstream along the creekline and across to the left the cliffs below Fortress Hill loom. The waters of Fortress Creek can be seen tumbling over the cliff edge high above and we see them emerge from below thick undergrowth a little further on to add their flow to Govetts Creek. The track now leads us down to the creek edge and we pause awhile to take in the beauty of the scene. A couple of tiny cascades deliver water into a large shallow pool which then continues downstream across a bed of boulders. The view downstream reveals amazing ramparts and parapets on the cliffs opposite.

Soon we enter a shady glen where the creek banks are clothed in moss; we have reached Junction Rock at the confluence of Govetts Leap Brook and Govetts Creek. We pause here for lunch, some opting to cross the brook and sit in the sun while others choose the cool of the glen.

Rested and refreshed, fortified by Libby's bushwalker cake and spurred on by the sound of not too distant thunder, we head off along the Rodriguez Pass track toward Govetts Leap Falls. This Pass was named after Tomas Ramon Rodriguez (1860-1929). He was Station Master at Blackheath in 1890 and became a Hotel Proprietor and Real Estate

Agent; he was also a BMSC Councillor from 1917 to 1919. This track initially ran from The Fernery below Evans Lookout along Greaves and Govetts Creeks and Govetts Leap Brook to the base of Govetts Leap Falls. The track up the cliff-face to join the pass to Govetts Leap Lookout was built by, would you believe, John Cliff; started in January 1899 it was completed in April 1900.

We cross Govetts Leap Brook for the first of several times at a wide sandstone platform on the edge of which Stephen List notices what appeared to be a fossil of a bivalve mollusc; it was the classic fan shape and the hinge detail was quite evident. There are wonderful swirl pools here and a series of small cascades flow over and between the rock platforms.

The track now leads us into lush enclosed rainforest which overarches the creek. There is a continuous display of delightful cameo scenes of tiny waterfalls, limpid pools, moss and lichen encrusted boulders, water purling over pebble beds and tumbling over rock ledges and between boulders; this is an enchanted place.

The thunder is not quite so distant now and light rain begins to fall. A slight inconvenience but as they say every cloud has a silver lining; the rainforest comes alive with the added moisture. Branchlets weep gracefully under the weight of water droplets which glisten in the lower light due to the cloud cover. Fluted moss-covered logs along the track intensify in colour becoming a deep vivid green. The deeper-matted mosses become jewelled with minute beads of water, tiny ephemeral streams of water course down dark rock faces and the smooth-barked tree trunks glow when moist. Rainforests are enchanting places at any time; during or after rain they are simply magical.

The lilting water music has kept us company since we left Junction Rock, it now rises to a crescendo; we have reached the base of Govetts Leap Falls. A stupendous amphitheatre of golden sandstone and verdant vegetation, standing 250 metres high, over which a white veil of water plummets to the

huge sandstone tors lying at its base. (Du Faur insisted the only way to really appreciate these falls from below was to lie on your back with the falls behind your head and look up the cliff-face; must try that one day.)

Now for the climb up the almost vertical cliff on John Cliff's remarkable track. As we gain altitude views into Govett and Grose Gorges open up. The rain has now stopped and banks of mist, rising out of the valleys, hover at a height equal to the top of the talus slopes, leaving the cliff-faces exposed above the cushions of white. The late afternoon sun now begins to break through the clouds lighting up the cliffs, more red than gold; the full height of Pulpit Rock is more clearly defined than I have seen it before. As is Mother Nature's wont, nearing the top of our climb, amid all the grandeur of the distant views, she displays a cluster of tiny gems. Nestled among the Forked Sundews (*Drosera binata*), a jewel in their own right, are a number of minute Fairy Aprons (*Utricularia dichotoma*), flowers with a yellow centre and a broad semicircular lilac lower lip; a delightful display.

Presently everyone is back at our meeting place at Govetts Leap Lookout, the cars are retrieved from Perrys Lookdown and so ends a very special day exploring what is certainly one of the most beautiful and spectacular places in the mountains. It is one of the harder walks that we undertake but the rewards more than compensate for the effort involved. How lucky we are that people had the foresight, energy and passion in the early 1900s to fight for its preservation.

Footnote: Origins of feature names were gleaned mainly from Brian Fox's *Upper Blue Mountains Geographical Encyclopaedia*. A superb reference.

John Cardy

OUR APRIL WALK

THURSDAY 17th April 2014

(NB: 18th is Good Friday)

Deep Valleys, Spectacular Cliffs, A Sandy Beach on a River Bend and a Narrow Winding Canyon

The Wollangambe River and Joes Canyon at Mt Wilson

The group last undertook this walk in April 2010. This classic Mt Wilson walk takes us to The Beach on the Wollangambe River, we will explore upstream for a short distance then proceed to Joes Canyon. This is normally a dry canyon but that depends on the vagaries of the weather. Should rain fall leading up to the walk date it would perhaps be prudent to bring sandshoes or other submersible footwear in case we need to paddle through some puddles in the canyon. We finish with a gentle bush-bash (some steep sections) to Du Fours Rocks.

Meet at the Mt Wilson Fire Station at 9.30am.

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 16th May 2014 – Water Nymph Dell and Minnehaha Falls

Friday 20th June 2014 – Radiata Plateau and Megalong Head

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 April – Meet at Wynne Reserve

9th May – Meet at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details