
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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GRAND CANYON AND NEATES GLEN

TOPIC

OUR OCTOBER WALK

**THE GRAND CANYON and
NEATES GLEN at
BLACKHEATH**

Friday 17th October 2014

Thirteen an unlucky number? A sign of chaos and destruction? Certainly not for the thirteen walkers who gathered at the Neates Glen parking area this morning; good fortune abounds along the paths we are to follow today. Those paths have a connection to a diverse group of people - a Solicitor, a Surveyor, an Earl, a Stationmaster and a Storekeeper; characters we shall meet along the way, so join us dear reader on this walk, with a few diversions, along one of the iconic tracks of these mountains.

We welcome Anne De Salis and Martin Barge who are joining us for the first time today, and Claire Bridge, Ray Harrington's niece who is visiting from Wales. We also welcome back Carol Conway who has joined us once before. Libby gives a brief run down of our intended route for the day and we set off in the brisk morning air, the chill perhaps a hangover from the unseasonable snowfall of two days previous in these mountains.

We make our way along the walking track that leads from the parking area to Evans Lookout; it roughly parallels the road as it meanders



Spring in the Bush

through the bush. At this time many wildflowers are on display along this track.

Libby wisely leads us on a short diversion down to Valley View Lookout; here there is an explosion of the senses as the vast chasm, which is Govett Gorge, suddenly opens up before our eyes. This great gulf, gouged from the sandstone plateau over millennia, is surrounded by the resulting sheer cliff faces. The distinctive profiles of Mount Banks, Mount Hay and of Lockley Pylon sit on the horizon. The water of Govetts

Creek, visible for quite a stretch from this aspect, glints in the morning light. All this is bathed in the lightest of mountain mists - truly a sight to behold.

One could stand transfixed by this view but other treasures await; we make our way along the link track to Evans Lookout, the first spot with a connection to our diverse group of characters. This lookout was named in 1882 after a Solicitor, George Evans, who lived nearby; George is credited with discovering the route into Govetts Gorge now known as the Horse Track, part of which we will follow shortly. The views from here are no less spectacular than from the outlook we have just left, the slightly different aspect opening up the more easterly walls and valleys.

The descent now begins as the track drops past rock faces undercut by small caves and curves around stone pillars. The abundant blossom of

Pale Pink Boronia (*Boronia floribunda*) and Pink Matchheads (*Comesperma ericinum*) decorate the trackside.

Soon we arrive at a small saddle where a signpost indicates the Grand Canyon Track leads off to the right. Libby has other ideas however and we continue straight ahead; we are heading down the Horse Track. We reach a long rock platform perched on the edge of a precipice; a perfect place for morning tea.

The outlook from here is superb. The dramatic cliffs below Point Pilcher, vertical honey-hued sandstone walls comprised of a multitude of horizontal layers defining their sedimentary origin, glow in the morning light. The cliffs below Fortress Ridge, shaded from the early sun, appear in more muted tones. The creek lines at the base of the talus slopes draw the eye down toward the Blue Gum Forest. This view is framed by Perrys Lookdown on the left, Fortress Hill on the right, and a backdrop of Mount Banks looming above the majestic Banks Wall; a superb view from this eyrie on the edge of the world.

With some reluctance we make our way back to the Grand Canyon Track and descend past a stand of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*); the vertical stance of their white trunks, bearing dark stockings of last years bark, accentuate the steepness of the path we are following.

We descend some old stone steps, possibly from the original track construction more than 100 years ago, pass a large overhang cave having a floor of red and are transported into a totally different environment.

From the vast open vistas we have just left, we are now in a magical enclosed world of ferns, mosses and lichens below a dense canopy provided by towering rainforest trees; we are in The Fernery. Here tree ferns and ground ferns dominate, crowded along the creek line and climbing the embankments; their filigree fronds produce an intense green landscape. Well placed stepping stones arc across boggy ground and over streams, blending sympathetically with the curves of the creek; a creek which at times flows wide across pebble

beds, then cuts narrow channels in the bedrock and occasionally disappears below ground to reappear as a small cascade emanating from a jumble of mossy boulders.

Soon this path leads us to one of the classic dioramic images of these mountains. We descend a rustic set of the original steps and the view back is of the top of these steps disappearing between two forest giants. The flared and fluted trunks of these huge trees are richly encrusted with moss and the surrounding area is flooded with fern fronds - an enchanting sight; an image used on many a publication promoting these mountains.

In 1881 a plan of the Village of Blackheath was drawn, this was followed in 1883 by a plan of the Parish of Blackheath; both were produced by William Albert Braylesford Greaves, a Surveyor with the Surveyor Generals Department; William is the second character we meet along our path today. Greaves Creek, the stream we have now reached, is named in recognition of his work in the area; we have now reached The Grand Canon.

No, not a typo, for what we know as The Grand Canyon was, from 1890 to 1907, known by this name; 'canon' being Spanish for 'canyon'. The Station Master at Blackheath in 1890 was Tomas Ramon Rodriguez, the third character we are to encounter today; he later became a Hotel Proprietor, Real Estate Agent and Councillor on BMSC from 1917 to 1919. Today Rodriguez Pass links the bottom of The Fernery to Govetts Leap Lookout via Junction Rock and Govetts Leap Brook; this track was commenced in January 1899 and completed in April 1900. A touch of Spain in the Blue Mountains of NSW.

Decisions, decisions – turn right for the Grand Canyon or left for a diversion to Beauchamp Falls. How could one resist the call of a Vice-Regal connection; Carol Conway has no problem with ignoring the lure of a deputy of the sovereign and volunteers to guard our backpacks as we make this side trip.

Beauchamp Falls is named for the fourth person of interest we encounter today; William Lycon, Earl of Beauchamp, who was Governor of NSW from 1899 to 1901. 'The Mountaineer' in December 1899 describes these falls as one of the 'new sights', they had however been previously known as Blackheath Falls; amazing how things can be 'rediscovered' if the occasion warrants.

We make our way downstream along Greaves Creek, pass ferny bowers, cross the creek, follow an arrow pointing the way between moss-draped boulders and arrive at a recently repaired section of track. A landslip had caused the closure of this track; it is now reconstructed with a cable provided along the narrow path for security in crossing the slip site.

In this area impressive views open up. To the right, above the falls, the dramatic cliffs below Point Pilcher loom; on the left the sheer cliff face is topped with an inclined parapet on which a single eucalypt is perched – both remarkable sights.

We drop down across the face of the landslip and arrive at a point where we are afforded good views of Beauchamp Falls. They are running quite well after the recent rains (and snow). A wide white veil tumbles down a dark rock face while from a slightly lower point, to the left, a narrow ribbon of water drops to the pool at the base of the cliff. A right regal sight; the Earl of Beauchamp should have been well pleased to lend his title to these falls.

We return to the site where Carol had stood guard over our backpacks and continue upstream into the Grand Canyon. We cross a bridge above a pool where yabbies are often seen, but not today. This pool extends back under a rock overhang from which the sound of a waterfall, initially not seen, can be heard; then, in the gloom of the cave, a silver band drops down to the pool, reflecting light into the cave and across the surface of the water. Just upstream from this point a filmy veil of water drops from the rim of the canyon. Ross Ellis of the Sydney Speleological Society recently dubbed these falls the Diaphanous

Drops Waterfall. Though perhaps not yet officially recognised it is indeed a most apt name.

Continuing through this magical landscape we presently arrive at the base of a rock bluff where there is an intersection of three tracks. An indistinct track to the left leads up to Point Pilcher, the track straight ahead climbs up to Luncheon Lookout, (the route we will follow shortly), but off to the right is a path to a spectacular area of this canyon; Libby leads us into this fascinating enclosed world.

We clamber over log jams, rock hop across the creek, climb up steep steps carved into the rock to cross a small ridge, then down to the creek level once more. We pass an ancient rainforest giant, its exposed moss-encrusted roots clinging to a rock face to maintain a tenuous hold on mother earth.

We now pass through The Slot, an area where the canyon walls almost touch, skirt around the edge of a pool via partially submerged rocks and arrive at The Cathedral. This vast open space, surrounded by towering cliffs, indeed qualifies as a cathedral to Mother Nature; adding to the grandeur is a large pool on the upstream side of The Cathedral which reflects a narrow stream of light entering between the canyon walls. What an enchanting place this is; it is hard to drag oneself away when it is time to reluctantly return to the main track.

Perhaps Luncheon Lookout, high above us, would be an appropriate place to pause for lunch, however the cool ambience existing at the base of the bluff is very inviting and we settle down here to dine.

Refreshed, refilled and revitalised by a slice of Libby's delicious bushwalker cake we begin the climb of the 258 steps up to Luncheon Lookout where the track continues along the rim of this section of deep narrow canyon.

We pass impressive remains of swirl pools in the opposite face of the canyon wall, evidence of how the relentless flow of water, at times driving rocks and pebbles which abrade circular holes in the bedrock to form this

canyon over an indeterminate period of time; indeed the process continues.

We duck under rock overhangs (some didn't duck quite low enough), we 'see from afar' the bright red globes of Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) deep in the canyon and pass a trio of stainless steel chains fastened to the rock ledge, an abseiling point adjacent to a natural arch across the canyon on which a large tree grows. As is usual there are small details among the grandeur on most walks, near the beautiful little Walkunder Waterfall (another Ross Ellis name suggestion) is The Stripe. This feature runs across the rock ledge of the track, about 150mm wide consisting of two red outer strips, two yellow inner strips and a thin central black strip; an intriguing sight.

We now feel our way through the short yet dark tunnel and emerge at the large cave and beach area. Here there is a steep climb before the track drops back down to the creek crossing which takes us to Neates Glen. John James Neate is the last of the five diverse characters we are to meet on this walk. He was a Storekeeper and Real Estate Agent in Blackheath from 1885; he completed the track to this glen in 1900. He promoted the local sights and rented out furnished cottages, as advertised in the 1887 Blue Mountains Guide.

The creek at this crossing runs over smooth bedrock where, just downstream, a small consistent swirl of water is noted - the beginning of yet another swirl pool?

We now climb through the greenery of Neates Glen, past moss and lichen draped walls dripping with moisture, through groups of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and beside rills of water burbling down the slope. We emerge into dry open forest for the final climb back to the cars. Just before the car park Mother Nature provides a farewell gift; several tiny Pink Fingers (*Caladenia carnea*) peep from the ground cover to send us on our way.

It may well be unwise to seat thirteen guests at a banquet as occurred with less than ideal outcomes at Valhalla and elsewhere. It may

well be unlucky to begin a ship voyage or undertake any new enterprise on the thirteenth of any month. These thirteen walkers however had nothing but good luck experiencing this jewel in the crown of these mountains on a day such as this - another wonderful walk.

John Cardy

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

FRIDAY 21st NOVEMBER 2014

Ikara Ridge and Ikara Head at Mt Victoria

The Group last ventured along this ridge in November 2010. This is a reasonably easy ridge top walk along a track which usually passes through masses of wildflowers at this time of year; it will be interesting to see how the bushland has recovered from the fires of October last year. The views from Ikara Head are stunning.

Meet at Merry Garth for a 9.00am departure or at Victoria Falls Road just off the Western Highway, about 1km east of Mt Victoria, 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.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 19th December – Morning walk to Boronia Point then our end of year Xmas lunch at Merry Garth - details next month

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.

14th November – Meet at Wynne Reserve

12th December – Meet at Founders Corner

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details