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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## MOUNT BANKS AND BANKS WALL

## TOPIC

### OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

#### MOUNT BANKS and BANKS WALL

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015

George Caley was born in 1770, the son of a farrier. He first developed an interest in plants through their use in horse medications; this interest soon widened and he became a very proficient, self-taught botanist. Never short of self-belief Caley wrote to Sir Joseph Banks in 1795 seeking employment in this field; Banks arranged a job for him at Kew Gardens. George had a rather irascible nature, well demonstrated when he quit this job in a fit of anger; he wrote to his patron in a terse, infuriated manner. Banks was prepared to ignore Caley's difficult personality and still make use of his fine botanical skills. He arranged, through Governor King, for Caley to take up a spare berth on the *Speedy*, which was to transport the newly appointed Governor to New South Wales. Caley was employed by Banks to collect plant specimens; perhaps a great distance apart would make their working relationship easier.

Caley set himself up in a cottage at Parramatta, next door to Rev Samuel Marsden, with whom he soon began quarrelling. King complained to Banks about the behaviour of his protégé. Banks replied: "I feel a particular



Spring in the Bush

obligation to you for bearing with the effusions of his ill judging spirit. Had he been born a gentleman, he would have been shot long ago in a duel."

Caley was authorised to make journeys inland and one such journey was commenced on 3 November 1804 with three of the strongest men in the Colony and a dog. After thirteen exhausting and depressing days the party climbed to the summit of a prominence which Caley named Mount Banks in honour of his patron. Looking down into the yawning chasm below

he concluded it would be impossible to travel further west and he returned to Parramatta, having collected about thirty specimens of plants he had not seen before.

Our journey today to the summit of Mount Banks and on to Banks Wall will be somewhat easier than Caley's; along the way we will see examples of some of the plants from which those thirty specimens were taken and sent to Kew Gardens two hundred and ten years ago.

An invigorating wind swept up from the valley, a bank of powder puff clouds sat above the cliff line opposite, their whiteness accentuated by the brilliance of the blue sky; a glorious morning for a walk. Fifteen gathered at the Mount Banks Picnic Area in this sublime environment. We welcomed Hugo, Robert Chesney's grandson, who was joining us today, also Sara Sernack and Graham Tribe who have not been with us for some time.

The track commences beside the Caley Memorial, a large vertical slab of rock to which a plaque was attached detailing George Caley's expedition to this site; the plaque of course has been stolen. One can but wonder what the irascible George would have to say about that.

We climb up through low growing Banksia, Tea Tree and Hakea before emerging onto open heath. Here there are numerous examples of the Rush Lily or Vanilla Plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*) displaying their clusters of lilac flowers atop slim stems. Flower buds of the Broad-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) are emerging; spiky-looking globes nestled in the reddish-brown new leaf growth. Several Coneseeds or Smokebush (*Conospermum taxifolium*) are also present, their tiny white tubular flowers emerging from mauve buds in dense terminal flower-head clusters. The Silky Wax Flower or Fairy Wax Flower (*Philotheca obovalis*) – reclassified from *Eriostemon* in 1998 – carry their brilliant white five-petalled flowers above thick spoon-shaped leaves.

We divert to the right off the main track to a vantage point to take in the view across Banks Gully and over Little Blue Gum to Blackheath Walls. This magnificent vista of sheer cliffs of sunlit sandstone stretches from the Anvil Rock area past Bennett Lookout, Bald Head, Baltzer Lookout, Hanging Rock, Burramoko Head, Burra Korain Head to Asgard Head; a stunning sweeping view of the Upper Grose Gorge.

We continue our climb toward the summit. The view north, back across Bells Line of Road, reveals the profile of the Mount Wilson to Mt Irvine Range silhouetted against the skyline. Further to the east, across what appears as a gently undulating landscape, are Mount Bell and Mount Tomah; hidden in that benign-looking landscape however, are deep precipitous gorges which caused Caley so much angst in his attempt to reach Mount Banks.

Soon there is a sudden change in the vegetation as we move from the poorer

sandstone soils on the flanks of the mount to the richer soils of the basalt cap. The heath gives way to open forest containing Mountain Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) and in the understorey are examples of the Prickly Current Bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*). Here racemes of lilac/pink flowers of the Native Indigo (*Indigofera australis*) light up the forest floor.

Nearer the summit Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxydon*) and Cedar Wattles (*Acacia elata*) thrive in the rich soil and the track now leads us through basalt boulders partly hidden in the plentiful Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*).

We reach King George Trig Point at the summit; we are now 1062 metres above sea level. The name of this trig point stems from Hamilton Hume sighting the mount from the Darling Causeway which he discovered in 1827; he assigned the name King George Mount. Surveyor General, Major Thomas Mitchell, subsequently adopted this name. It was probably fortuitous that George Caley had returned to England in 1810 for there would have been hell to pay if he had still been in the Colony when his Mount Banks was renamed. The name only reverted officially to Mount Banks in 1966.

Following morning tea at this elevated locale we make our way down the eastern flank of the mount. Not far below the summit there are examples of the Tree Violet (*Hymenantha dentata*) just beginning to display their tiny bell-shaped yellow flowers; this tall shrub is indeed related to the herbaceous violets. We pass a couple of old moss and lichen encrusted wooden tables and other evidence that this was once a picnic area. Overgrown benching indicates the alignment of the road built in the 1960s, along which one could drive up to this point. We follow this old road down to the Explorers Range fire trail; a relatively new signpost here indicates we have a further 2 kilometres to go to reach Banks Wall.

As we make our way along the Explorers Range we encounter many shrubs in flower, including the *Pomaderris andromedifolia*

displaying its abundance of dense terminal panicles of bright yellow flowers. Also present are occasional examples of *Zieria laevigata*, their four-petalled white flowers, carrying a blush of pale pink, clustered in the leaf axils. The Slender Rice Flowers (*Pimelea linifolia* ssp *linifolia*) carry large heads of tubular white flowers atop slender stems. Box-leaf Wax Flowers (*Philotheca buxifolia* ssp *obovata*) also decorate the scene here, their glossy-white five-petalled flowers emerging from pink buds among warty-edged narrow leaves. Many of these plants would probably have been in flower when Caley ventured here in mid November 1804.

We follow the undulating fire trail passing below some impressive rock outcrops sculpted into amazing intricate shapes by wind and rain. Through the trees the flat-topped – well, um, what else but box-like shape of The Butterbox can be seen sitting above the Mount Hay Wall on the far side of the Grose Gorge; just a portent of the views we are about to enjoy.

The fire trail leads us up a slight rise, out of the open woodland into low open heath; there before us is one of the most magnificent vistas in these mountains.

The view straight ahead from the edge of the escarpment is along the line of Govett Gorge past Perrys Lookdown, Docker and Clarke Heads, and Pulpit Rock on the right. On the left are Du Faur Head, Lockley Pylon and Fortress Hill; at the head of the gorge are the sheer cliffs of Griffith Taylor and Carne Walls. (Government geologist Joseph Carne drew attention, way back in 1906, to the misnaming of Mount Banks.)

Wisps of mist rise from the creek lines at the far end of the gorge and a silver ribbon winds its way through the trees at the base of the talus slopes; the waters of Govetts Creek. On the ridge running down from below Du Faur Head the line of the track leading to the Blue Gum Forest can be seen; this writer has not noticed that previously, perhaps it is the light existing today, perhaps it was my lack of observation in the past.

Directly below us is the Blue Gum Forest. With the benefit of a zoom lens the magnificence of the Mountain Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus deanei*) is evident, their huge structural trunks holding aloft a surprisingly open canopy; a quite different perspective of these majestic forest giants.

That is but less than half the view on offer; to the right we are looking along the line of the Upper Grose Gorge. Sheer cliffs on both sides dropping to the talus slopes angling down to the Grose River; in the distance the horizontal line of the landscape near Darling Causeway. Indeed the essentially horizontal lay of the land beyond these deep gorges demonstrates how these Blue Mountains were formed by deep erosion of an uplifted plateau.

Soon the biting wind cuts through our enthusiasm for the sublime views before us; we don warmer gear as we settle down for lunch in this impressive landscape. Someone asks after Ray Nesci's whereabouts; he has found a cosy little nook out of the wind just below the cliff line.

As is usual Mother Nature provides a tiny point of interest in this vast scene. A Bush Cockroach is spotted trundling (certainly not scurrying) through the grass; it even performs a graceful somersault as it drops down a small ledge.

Following a slice of Libby's bushwalker cake to help replace the energy sapped by the cold wind, we reluctantly leave this place and make our way back along the Explorers Range fire trail.

As we continue along the fire trail, not far past the turn-off to the Mount Banks summit, the eye is drawn to a Coral Heath (*Epacris microphylla*). One text states this plant "has an awkward angular branching habit"; this one certainly did. One flower stem was extending at an awkward angle over the bank beside the trail. This species perhaps has the smallest leaves of all the *Epacris*, in this case the leaves were completely submerged below the abundant brilliant-white tiny tubular flowers present on this stem; a beautiful soft image against the gravel of the trail.

The view up to the eastern flank of Mount Banks reveals large swaths of green; hanging swamps retaining moisture to be slowly released, eventually seeping into surrounding streams. Near one such seepage point beside the trail is a Blue Damperia (*Damperia stricta*) carrying its crinkly-petalled blue flowers.

The generic name for the Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) is from the Greek *telopis*, 'seen from afar'. This is certainly the case here; a few single examples are spotted high above the trail. Presently we come across a group of four quite close to the edge of the trail; they make a stunning arrangement. Their flowers are at their peak; dense clusters of small deep red individual blossoms cupped by slightly lighter red bracts.

The Waratah is of course the State Flower for New South Wales, and rightly so. One wonders however if the creator of the stylised 'Lotus Flower' version used on Government publications has ever seen a Waratah.

Soon we are back at the cars parked at the picnic area and indulge in the usual after walk cuppa; most welcome today in the chill wind. A fitting way to end the day after an outstanding walk through magnificent scenery and a wide variety of wildflowers.

A final word on George Caley. His plant collecting skills were very well used in the Colony. His 'collecting' did however become a little over enthusiastic. In 1811, Joseph Banks had to arrange a passage back home for an Australian Aboriginal named Dan. George Caley had 'collected' Dan and brought him back to England when he returned in 1810; Banks was left to support Dan while he was in England and pay for his passage back to Australia.

John Cardy

## OUR OCTOBER WALK

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**Tall Open Forest, Pockets of Rainforest, Distant Views and more, along Back Tracks and Byways of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine**

## The Runners Track, Scrivener Pass, Danes Way – Mt Wilson to Mt Irvine

The group last travelled this route in October 2006. This is a relatively easy walk of about 10 kilometres through widely varying landscapes with a touch of the history of the two Mounts thrown in for good measure.

**Meet in Farrer Road West in Mt Wilson at the top of the hill outside Wendy Holland's property 'Wollangambe' at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for a 9.15am departure.**

The Farrer Road West turn-off is about 3.5 km along Mt Irvine Road from St Georges Church in Mt Wilson.

There will be a car shuffle to leave vehicles at our finish point outside 'Carisbrook' in Danes Way at Mt Irvine.

Bring morning tea, lunch, 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 20<sup>th</sup> November – Ikara Ridge at Mt Victoria

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December – Dargan Arch

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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.**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October – Gregson Park

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> November – Wynne Reserve

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