
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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BLACKFELLOWS HAND ROCK

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

**BLACKFELLOWS HAND
ROCK to the TEMPLE OF
DOOM on the NEWNES
PLATEAU**

Friday 20th February 2015

Two Hundred and Thirty million years ago (or thereabouts) a massive river delta flowing from the north west laid down deposits which formed the sandstones of the Blue Mountains. Eleven Thousand years ago (or thereabouts) the Wiradjuri people first occupied the western plateaus and slopes of the Blue Mountains. Two Hundred and Twenty Six years ago (or thereabouts), a mere scintilla of a nanosecond ago compared to the geological and Aboriginal histories of the land, men of European origin first ventured into the Blue Mountains. Join us dear reader as we explore the dramatic landscape arising from that massive river delta of so long ago and the impressions left on it by the touch of both Aboriginal and European occupiers.

Twenty-one walkers gathered in the car park of the Lithgow Valley Shopping Centre where we transferred into a reduced number of vehicles, prearranged by Libby, for the drive to our starting point off the Wolgan Road just short of Wolgan Gap. We welcomed back Cheryl and Wayne Pascoe who have been unable to join us for quite a long time (some in



Autumn in the Bush

the group had indeed been wondering 'Where's Wayne?') We also welcomed Mark McDonnell who was joining us for the first time. (We must have done something right as Mark had decided to become a member of the Group by the end of the walk.) Also on the welcome list was Sarah Howell who was walking with us for the first time; she and David hope to join us more often in the future.

Following the drive of about 23 kms through some very scenic country we parked beside a group of Eucalypts, the trunks of which, for quite a height, were clothed with the most amazing shawls of loose bark. Layers of short shards of curled bark sitting at all angles and looking as if they had been clinging to the trunks for a long time; an amazing sight this writer has not seen elsewhere.

We now followed a track adjacent to these trees which rose steeply to a large rock outcrop. There were wind-worn caves on the approach side of the outcrop displaying horizontal layers of golden sandstone; from the constant action of the wind, thick deposits of fine sand spilled onto the slope below.

We made our way around the left-hand side of the outcrop where the cliff above sloped outward protecting the rock face at its base; we were in the art gallery of Mayinygu Marragu - Blackfellows Hand Rock (or Cave as shown on some maps and in some texts).

Here there are hand stencils, large and small, stencils of boomerangs, one having been extended with a wrist and hand (the perpetrator obviously had an artistic bent) and an outline of a stone axe; white ochre has been used to create these stencils. Although there is a large expanse of rock face the artwork covers only a relatively small area. It does appear that the rock face has exfoliated to some extent so stencils may have been lost over the years. Near the far end, well away from the main artwork, a small waterfall drops from a crevice in the rock face into a ferny depression; here there is one lone hand stencil, perhaps an introverted loner in the group.

The jury is still very much out on the reasons for the placement of hand stencils; a strong theory is that stencils were created to signify belonging to that land. It is believed youths placed stencils at the time of initiation ceremonies and as adults made a stencil beside the original; indeed there were examples here of small and large stencils side by side.

There are many sites on the Newnes Plateau containing Aboriginal engravings, axe grinding grooves and wells, and deposits of artefacts which have been recorded but have not been well studied. Mayinygu Marragu however is the only site in this vast area given protection from mining operations; an area of about four square kilometres was set aside as an Aboriginal Place in 2009. (Forests NSW has returned the Blackfellows Hand Trail to the traditional name of Mayinygu Marragu Trail.) One very pleasing, indeed surprising, aspect of this obviously oft-visited site is, despite it being easily accessed and having no protective barriers, there are no signs of vandalism; may that remain so in perpetuity.

We spent some time at the site soaking up the atmosphere created by the touch of the Wirajuri people and perhaps of their neighbours, the Dharug and Gundungurra people. The impressions they have left on the landscape over many thousands of years indicate just how lightly they trod on this land.

We then made our way back down the slope and followed the Mayinygu Marragu

(Blackfellows Hand) Trail into an impressive narrow gully enclosed by high cliffs on both sides. Some of these large rock faces were completely shrouded with Rock Felt Fern (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*), deep green drapes with a mix of circular and elongated patterns created by the sterile and fertile fleshy fronds of this creeping plant; certainly the most magnificent examples of this fern which I have seen.

The enclosing cliffs here all carry closely spaced horizontal patterns, some decorated with mosses and ferns, others bare of any vegetation. At their base, in several cases, there are quite deep caves and higher up are large, magnificently sculptured overhangs and open caverns. Narrow vertical crevasses divide some of the cliff faces, one having a large boulder wedged near its apex. The floor of the gully is well decorated with a variety of ferns.

Soon we reached the end of this box gully and climbed up what was initially an indistinct footpad; this took us past some rock outcrops which afforded views into an adjacent deep narrow gully. The track became more obvious as we reached the top of the slope and now meandered through open woodland with a quite sparse understorey. Just over a rocky crest we came upon a group of Pagoda Daisies (*Leucochrysum graminifolium*) displaying their bright yellow papery bracts. These delightful little plants grow only on, or in the vicinity of, pagoda rock formations; their distribution is limited to an area from Lithgow, across the Newnes Plateau to Wolgan Valley.

The track dipped into a shallow gully, rose past a couple of small pagoda-like formations before bringing us to a fire trail. We turned left onto this trail which led us downhill and swung right as it emerged from the forest. Without warning it had delivered us to the edge of an abyss; laid out before us was the Wolgan Valley, the line of the Wolgan River some three hundred metres below this stunning vantage point.

This immense gulf is enclosed by lines of vertical cliffs dropping to steep angular talus

slopes; these curve more gently as they sweep to the valley floor. The essentially horizontal lines of the landscape above the cliffs accentuate the depth of the valley.

James Walker, of the Royal Marines, established the 'Wallerowang' station nearby, circa 1823. He soon entered this lush valley and set up an out-station which he called 'Wolgan'; it appears this was the Aboriginal name for the locality and it became adopted for the whole valley and its river by the European settlers. Thomas Archer, whose father managed 'Wallerowang', wrote: "Wolgan, where Scranny (his horse) and I frequently went on stockdriving excursions was a wonderful valley ----- completely surrounded by precipices. The end next to Wallerowang (about 6 miles off) was the lowest, and here a path had been cut in the face of the precipitous rock, and formed the only access to the valley for cattle and horses. ----- The pass in the precipice was barred by sliprails, so that stock, when once in the valley, found it nearly impossible to get out again, and this made it a very valuable weaning paddock." (Charles Darwin descended this pass in 1836 while staying two days at 'Wallerowang'. He wrote copiously in his notebook on Tuesday 19th January regarding the precipitous nature of the cliffs and the cutting of the pass.)

And so the first enduring touches by white men were made in this valley when that pass was cut. Indeed, as we stood at the edge of one of the precipices described by Thomas Archer, we could see the sealed road which now drops from that pass (Wolgan Gap) emerging onto the valley floor and snaking into the distance beside the Wolgan River. Later agricultural and industrial developments in the valley of course left far greater imprints on the landscape than that initial pass and sliprails.

(That short extract on 'Wallerowang' and the early use of the Wolgan Valley for grazing has a poignant connection to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. It was taken from 'A Short History of the Wolgan Valley' written by Harold Arthur MacLeod Morgan in 1959. MacLeod Morgan was engaged to be married, in 1964, to Wilga

Smart whose family established Carisbrook in Mt Irvine. Her brother Bill later owned Gowan Ross and then Wynstay at Mt Wilson.

MacLeod Morgan died just five days before he and Wilga were to be married at Mt Wilson.)

Having taken our fill of the magnificent views we returned along the fire trail to its junction with the Mayinygu Marragu Trail. We followed this trail for a short distance past the occasional pagoda formation nestled among the trees. These structures were a mere portent of what awaited near the top of a small rise. Laid out before us, stretching into the distance and only partially visible from the road was an amazing array of pagoda formations; we had arrived at The Temple of Doom.

A footpad led us down off the road and through a narrow passage beside the first pagoda. As we made our way around the base of the formations the grandeur of the area we were entering became more apparent. The first of these pagodas were relatively smooth-surfaced with few, if any, protruding ledges or plates. We climbed onto one of these pagodas, a relatively squat formation, atop it sat a pedestal carrying a thin horizontal plate of ironstone extending well beyond its vertical support to form a large table; what better place to pause for lunch.

From this more elevated spot the extent and amazing variation in form of this vast array of pagodas became spectacularly apparent. There were relatively smooth-sided conical formations surrounded by pagodas having the most incredibly contorted ironstone ledges and plates extending from their sides. Some were light grey in colour, others dark; there were patches of orange and gold where the eroding wind is still exposing fresh sandstone surfaces. There are windows to the sky through some of the thin plates while dark portals in the sides of some formations appear as arched windows leading to a mysterious unseen interior.

Lunches were quickly dispensed with; the urge to explore these amazing pagodas was overwhelming. Ever mindful not to damage the fragile ironstone protrusions we set off through this maze of Mother Nature's

sculptures. There were slim columns capped with ironstone roofs, thin ledges extending so far they appeared to defy gravity, a cluster of squat columns sat below thin horizontal protective caps, ironstone shells curved gracefully while some twisted into the most amazing contortions. Hidden in crevices and hollows among all this sculptural splendour were tiny Pagoda Daisies growing in the most impossibly minute amounts of soil.

And so we are fortunate indeed to reap the visual rewards from those silts laid down by that river delta two hundred and thirty million years ago. Little is known about exactly how and why these unusual landforms develop. What is clear is that the pagodas are differential weathering formations which develop in Banks Wall and Burra Moko Head type sandstones of the Triassic Narrabeen Group; the platy pagodas tend to form in Banks Wall Sandstone. Whatever the technicalities of their creation they are indeed a spectacular landform in which to spend time exploring and in which to simply sit and contemplate the grandeur of this landscape.

Toward the extremity of this array, silhouetted against the cliffs of the Wolgan Valley, sat a pair of conical pagodas, tops truncated by horizontal plates, perhaps the spires of this Temple of Doom. I think those who have just explored these formations would rather describe them as the Temple of Delight.

We then made our way back to the cars via the Mayinygu Marragu Trail; a relaxing walk to end a very special day in these wondrous Blue Mountains.

OUR MARCH WALK

Friday 20th March 2015

**Dramatic Views, Waterfalls and Cascades,
Ferry Glens and Enclosed Rainforest**

**Evans Lookout, Beauchamp Falls, Junction
Rock, Govetts Leap Lookout**

It is sixteen years since the group last walked this route; how time flies. This is rated as a hard walk and is for the more fit walkers in the group. It is about 9 kilometres with a descent

of 620 metres from Evans Lookout to Junction Rock and a subsequent ascent of 620 metres to Govetts Leap Lookout. The final 250 metre ascent is the steep climb from the base of Govetts Leap Falls; this will be done at a pace which is comfortable for all participants. The scenery and features encountered along the way make the walk more than well worthwhile but be aware of the effort required.

There will be a car shuffle from our meeting point at Govetts Leap Lookout to the start of the walk at Evans Lookout.

Meet at 8.45am at Govetts Leap Lookout at Blackheath or at Merry Garth at 8.10am for an 8.15am departure; this is a long walk and we will need to get under way on time.

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.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th April 2015 – National Pass and Valley of the Waters at Wentworth Falls

Friday 15th May 2015 – Centennial Glen, Porters Pass, Walls Ledge at Blackheath

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 13th March at Wynne Reserve

Friday 10th April at Hay Lane (Ferry Corner)

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details