
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NOT MATTHIES TRK & WATERFALL CREEK

TOPIC

OUR JANUARY WALK

NORTHERN FIRE TRAIL,
DU FAURS ROCK and
PHEASANTS CAVE at
MOUNT WILSON

Friday 15th January 2016

The notice for this walk in the last newsletter stated, inter alia, that we would venture into the enclosed rainforest below Merry Garth. What, dear reader, you may well ask, constitutes a rainforest; the following references are perhaps illuminative.

The Macquarie Dictionary – rainforest: *noun* a dense evergreen forest found in tropical and temperate areas with high humidity and heavy rainfall occurring throughout the year.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary – rainforest: *n* luxuriant tropical forest with heavy rainfall.

Oxford Paperback Encyclopedia – rainforest: An area of vegetation that occurs in tropical, subtropical and temperate regions with adequate rainfall.

The astute reader may have detected a pattern emerging here; rainforests tend to be associated with rain. Perhaps then, one should not have been too surprised, that it rained very heavily all the night before and into the morning of this walk; in fact, to quote that illustrious reference, The Dinkum Dictionary -



Summer in the Bush

A ripper guide to Aussie English, it rained cats and dogs.

This inclement weather reduced the number of attendees from a proposed twenty-three to thirteen and caused a change in venue away from the rainforest to the northern side of the mountain.

So, attired in rain gear and with some wielding umbrellas, we set off from the gardens of Merry Garth where, due to the weight of the moisture they were carrying, the branches of exotic trees arched gracefully and shrubs took on a weeping

habit. Near the gate the dark leaves of a large dissectum maple took on the appearance of a burnished bronze casting due to their coating of rainwater and the subdued light which prevailed.

We dropped down off the pavement of Galwey Lane, taking care on the timber formers of the stairs which were very slippery in these wet conditions, to the margin of the lovely pocket of rainforest which slopes away steeply down to Waterfall Creek. A footpad then led us through to Stephen Lane which we followed to take us down to Cathedral Reserve; here we paused for morning tea.

Having continued on we stopped briefly at the lower corner of the reserve when a question was asked regarding the names of the beautiful feathery-leaved conifers growing there. The group consists of Dawn Redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) – love that

name – and Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*); the former, once thought to be extinct, hails from southern China while the latter is from southern USA. A distinguishing feature to determine which is which is the arrangement of their feathery leaves; those of the Dawn Redwood are opposite while the Swamp Cypress has alternate leaves. Both tolerate, indeed prefer, swampy situations; a major consideration when they were selected by Libby and our late bushwalking friend Bill Smart, for planting in this often wet area. What a sage choice, for this corner of the reserve is a wonderful sight, the geometric form of this magnificent group of deciduous conifers providing a marvellous display in all seasons; truly a great outcome from that choice by Libby and Bill many years ago.

We moved on across Mount Irvine Road to the Northern Fire Trail where Libby explained how crucial this trail is for the protection of the village from bushfires; the wet conditions today however belying any such need.

Soon views to the north opened up over the tortuous route of the Wollangambe River and across the Wollangambe Wilderness to the distant expanse of Wollemi National Park. The rain-washed surfaces of rock outcrops and cliff faces stood out more clearly than usual in the landscape; made more exposed by the fires of a little over two years ago.

Closer at hand were several flower spikes of an Old Man Banksia or Saw Banksia (*Banksia serrata*); with individual flowers still in bud form the spikes were a beautiful soft grey colour. Droplets of rain decorated the spikes; they glistened like exquisite jewels. Bright pink flowers of the Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stilidium graminifolium*) illuminated the trackside; they were also bejewelled with raindrops. Soon the track dropped down into a sheltered gully and from my usual position bringing up the rear the group appeared to be dwarfed by the towering trees rising up from among the many Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and a sea of various ground ferns.

The track took us across the freely flowing upper reaches of two small creeks; the

products of the overnight rain coursing down to contribute to the flow of the Wollangambe. We climbed up to a spot where memories of past adventures were rekindled for some of us. We were at the point where the exit track from the middle section of the Wollangambe Canyon meets the fire trail; this spot was always a welcome sight following the climb out after a day of canyoning.

A short distance further on the landscape took a dramatic turn, groups of tall Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*) dominated the scene; relatively thin trunks holding aloft deep green whorls of filigree fronds provided an almost primeval atmosphere.

A little further on we passed the track which leads down past Halfway Rock to the start of the middle section of the Wollangambe Canyon, Joe's Canyon and The Beach; once again wonderful memories of previous escapades were revived.

Soon the Northern Fire Trail emerged onto the road to Du Fours Rocks. We made our way to that lofty lookout and spent some time taking in the panoramic distant views on offer to the Newnes Plateau and across the seemingly never-ending ridges and valleys stretching to the north.

Though the distant views are impressive this rock formation itself holds points of interest; the undulating surface carries many parallel lines of curved ridges and depressions creating interesting patterns across the platform. Nestled among the trees off to the left sits the Chinaman's Hat formation; a large circular grey rock rests atop a golden sandstone turret carrying several 'windows'. The grey 'hat' curves gently from the edge up to a truncated cone at the centre; the image of the wide-brimmed hats worn on the goldfields and in market gardens by Chinese workers. (They obviously had a greater understanding of the need for sun protection than we Caucasians.)

One could sit and soak up these views for some time but other features awaited. We made our way forty metres or so back from the lookout to a track leading off to the left which took us down the slope to the top of a set of

steep steps cut into the rock face. Care was needed here today, in the wet conditions, for the treads of the steps are quite narrow and it would be very easy to slip. Those at the front of the group cleared fallen branches off the stairs and track; one of the perks of being the whip at the tail of the group - the track is clear by the time I arrive.

At the tee junction below the stairs we turned right, the track then contoured across to a sloping rock platform above a deep gully. Views to the opposite side of this gully revealed tall white trunks of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) thrusting their canopies skywards in search of the sun, their bases were concealed below the shrouding fronds of a forest of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*); a very verdurous vista.

Further along the track the wet conditions had brought out a Red Triangle Slug; this is Australia's largest land slug. It is shaped somewhat like a eucalyptus leaf, rounded at the front and tapering to a more pointed rear end. They have a cream green-tinged body with markings similar to the mid and side veins on a leaf; an effective camouflage feature. Their body is rimmed with a narrow red band. Positioned toward the front of their body is a distinctive red triangle, which is their breathing pore - a beautiful, fascinating creature. The scalloped tracks often seen on the trunks of smooth-barked trees are the result of their grazing for algae.

The track then steepened and became very slippery as we moved into the small pocket of rainforest below the cliffs. We crossed the creek and made our way upstream to the spot where a waterfall dropped over the cliff edge and plummeted down in front of a shallow cavern; we were at Pheasants Cave. It is so named because the early settlers referred to the Lyrebirds, which used to frequent this spot, as Pheasants. Due to the recent heavy rain the waterfall was flowing much stronger than I have seen it previously, presenting a rather special sight; glistening silver shards plummeting down in front of the dark cliff face viewed through a foreground of tree fern fronds - a special sight indeed. The volume of

water flowing is quite surprising actually as the small brook which feeds the falls rises in the grounds of the Study Centre, only about four hundred metres away.

We climbed out of the gully and made our way back along the hillside and around a high rock outcrop, passing along the way a wonderful display of Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*). The flowers and surrounding bracts appeared to be smaller than usual but the large number on display compensated for this.

Soon we arrived at a fascinating formation. A flat triangular slab of grey sandstone sits atop a solid stone pillar on the point of a rock outcrop; we had arrived at Tabletop Lookout. There were sweeping panoramic views to the west and looking back toward the village a view of the cliffs below Du Faur's Rocks and a different aspect of Chinaman's Hat, nestled in the hillside, were on offer. It was decided we would stop here for lunch. I have dined at some fine tables but what could be finer than this? Alfresco dining at its best.

It is logical that our Bonsai Guru, Ray Nesci, would have an interest in things miniature; during lunch he noticed that crumbs he had dropped were mysteriously moving across the surface of the rock outcrop. Closer examination revealed they were being transported by ants almost microscopic in size. We watched as two ants struggled to carry a larger crumb up a slope, a third ant soon came to lend a hand, or whatever the ant equivalent of that is, and after a determined struggle they succeeded in the task; a remarkable effort by creatures so small. In these vast landscapes that we explore there are always points of interest at a very much smaller scale.

The track then led us down to the base of the cliffs below Du Faur's Rocks and along to the impressive wind-worn cavern carved with sweeping lines into the golden sandstone. Once again a tiny point of interest caught the eye in this imposing locale. Two Common Sundew (*Drosera spatulata*) sat in the seepage beside a stone ledge. Two rosettes of red leaves carrying glistening globules of sticky

fluid to entice and trap insects, with fine stems holding aloft several tiny pink flowers; their name may well be Common Sundew but they possess a truly uncommon beauty.

Presently we were on top of the Chinaman's Hat taking in the near view of from whence we had just come and the expansive distant views on offer from here. We then made our way along the track, quite slippery in places, leading back toward Du Fours Rock, passing along the way the group of sharpening grooves, water wells and channels in the rock platform beside the track. The Aboriginal inhabitants certainly chose well when they decided to use this site to fashion their tools and weapons; what better place to spend time carrying out essential activities?

We then wended our way through Marcus Clark Reserve, down Wyndham Avenue where we were able to see the Parma Wallabies in the grounds of Yengo, across the Gregson Bridge and along Galwey Lane to return to our starting point at Merry Garth.

Libby invited us into the garden to partake of the usual after walk cuppa on the terrace near the rock garden, a very pleasant way to end the day; a day which started with very gloomy wet prospects yet developed into a rather pleasant walk around the Northern precincts of Mount Wilson.

John Cardy

MEMBER NEWS

You may well have noticed a greater sense of decorum on recent walks, a little less chit-chatting, and a complete lack of liquorice allsorts; Bob Bearup has not been with us. He and Marion have sold their Oberon property and moved to the Southern Highlands. Your sense of fun has and will be missed Bob, we do hope you can still make it to the occasional walk in the future. Best wishes to you both on your new venture.

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

Friday 19th February 2016

Two Enclosed Verdant Places, some Mysterious Holes and Panoramic Views

Mermaids Cave, the Mystery Holes and Coachwood Glen at Blackheath

Two for the price of one this month, both are new venues for the Group. (Second attempt for these venues; we should not have to worry about heavy snow causing a cancellation this time around). Two short walks with a car pool to the second after lunch. The first is only about 4km; the track down is steep in places but generally quite good. The return out of the valley is via a track also used for mountain biking, it is a little steep with a couple of short rock scrambles but we will have plenty of time to take it at a very easy pace. The spectacle of Mermaids Cave is well worth the effort and the Mystery Holes on the ridge are rather fascinating. Following lunch we will take a short drive to Coachwood Glen for a walk through beautiful rainforest.

Meet in Staveley Parade in Blackheath at 10.00am or at Merry Garth for a 9.20am departure.

To reach Staveley Pde cross the railway line at Blackheath, turn left immediately into Station St and follow it past the Shipley Rd intersection, **do not turn right at that intersection**; Staveley Pde is only about 200 metres past that point (there is a No Through Road sign there).

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 18th March – The Ruined Castle at Katoomba

Friday 15th April – Lions Head on Kings Tableland at Wentworth Falls
