
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 26 Issue 9

September 2016

IKARA RIDGE TO IKARA HEAD

TOPIC

OUR AUGUST WALK

IKARA RIDGE to IKARA
HEAD at MOUNT VICTORIA

Friday 19th August 2016

A guided missile screaming through the air at 650 kilometres per hour is a far cry from an Aboriginal throwing stick, yet the anti-submarine missile deployed on RAN ships from 1963 to 1991 was named 'Ikara' after that throwing stick. 'Ikara' however, to the Adnyamathanha (pronounced ad-na-mut-na) people of the Flinders Ranges, means 'meeting place'. How ironic, if 'meeting places' were used more often perhaps the need for 'throwing sticks' and 'missiles' would be greatly reduced.

Our venue for today was given the name Ikara Neck (more commonly now referred to as Ikara Ridge) and Ikara Head by Myles Dunphy in the mid 1960s. The cliff and contour lines on maps of the area appear in the shape of a throwing stick or club; the ridge was formerly known as Waratah Ridge for more obvious reasons.

The air was crisp, the sky was clear when twelve walkers gathered on Victoria Falls Road; we welcomed back Jenny Dargan and Freda Moxom who have not been able to join us for a while and set off in three vehicles to our starting point further along the road.



Spring in the Bush

An indistinct track, a track which makes you feel close to, almost part of the bushland, led us into the open forest. On either side of the track there were large tussocks, possibly Slender Saw-sedge (*Gahnia microstachya*) and Saw-sedge (*Gahnia subaequiglumis*), the former with light green tufts of, as the name implies, slender grass-like stalks, the latter with deeper green more robust stalks topped with prominent black seed spikes. Soon there were many Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) some carrying spent seed pods from last

season, some displaying plump buds almost ready to explode into brilliant red globes, others carried both pods and buds; the basis for the former Waratah Ridge name was becoming evident.

This area was engulfed by fire in October 2013; the understorey and ground cover are still recovering. Broad-leaf Geebungs (*Persoonia levis*) stand out with their bright green foliage, their flaky bark, usually of dark colour, remains even more blackened after being singed by the fire. One example of this tall shrub stood bare of leaves up to a height of about two metres, then carried a tiny apex of foliage; a very unusual sight. The Prostrate Geebung (*Persoonia chamaepitys*) was also present here, small brilliant green mats of soft foliage rather than the usual large carpets of green.

The smooth silver and grey bark of the Hard-leaved Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) was a brilliant contrast to the charred hollows in their trunks while the usually brown fibrous bark of the Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) remained fire blackened and blended almost seamlessly into the burnt hollows; a more sombre display.

Also rising out of the ground cover was a scattering of the wire-thin spent stems of the Bloodroot or Blood Lily (*Haemodorum planifolium*). They presented a rather odd sight with their relatively large clusters of seed capsules sitting atop such thin stalks more than half a metre tall. The trifurcated capsules, now divested of their winged seeds which had taken flight long ago, were surrounded by stellar filaments of the old flower heads; an intriguing display. These plants flower after fire, explaining why there were so many old stems present at this time.

As we progressed along the track the deep golden globular blossom of the Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalis*) illuminated the scene, as indeed it did for most of this walk; glowing under the full sun, their display seemed even more brilliant than normal.

On the western edge of this ridge we were exposed to a stiff breeze; we settled down for morning tea, taking advantage of the alcoves in a rock outcrop to seek shelter. From this spot we were looking down onto the upper reaches of the Grose River which rises just across the railway line from the old toll house at Mount Victoria. An inconspicuous start for this mighty river which has carved a fifty-four kilometre tortuous path through the mountains to reach the Nepean / Hawkesbury River System at the Yarramundi Bridge.

We continued on, then following the path trodden by Hamilton Hume in 1827 when he was looking for a route from the Coxs Road across to the route of Bells Line. He followed the ridge we were walking on until, of course, his progress was halted at Ikara Head. He was forced to return almost to the Coxs Road and cross the gully to the next westward ridge; he followed that ridge to the Bells Line route. He

named it the Darling Causeway, and why wouldn't he? Governor Darling had offered a grant of 1280 acres as a reward for finding a better westward route from Mt Victoria; Hume was able to claim that grant.

The track then led us out of the open forest, down a gentle slope and onto a saddle punctuated with rock outcrops. These weatherworn outcrops were decorated with the convoluted forms of exposed ironstone veins; narrow curved fins jutted vertically from the base sandstone, others formed thin undulating ledges, then there were veins curled into pipe-like formations. Irregular apertures pierced sandstone columns and horizontal surfaces carried depressions and furrows resulting from the actions of wind and water. Mother Nature's sculpture gardens contain fascinating objects.

Nestled against ridges and steps on these rock outcrops were numerous basal tufts of the Narrow Leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium lineare*), not flowering at this time yet the compact, golf ball sized tufts themselves are quite attractive.

We dropped down beside a sandstone buttress which carried some almost circular indentations; the environment here was much more moist. Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) spread across the ground and Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) decorated the rock face with its tufts of pendulous leaves; flower panicles just beginning to form. An Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) stood near here; contorted trunk and limbs attested to a hard life. The recent fire had added more hardship, hollowing trunk and limbs, yet this Old Man refused to give up, continuing to produce new shoots.

The increasing force of the wind was evident when we climbed atop this rock outcrop to take in the view across to the Darling Causeway and back to Mt Victoria. Buffeted by the wind we did not linger long and continued on our way.

Crossing a flat sandstone area we came across some Short-leaved Heath-myrtle (*Baekkea brevifolia*) carrying minute five-petalled white

flowers. Narrow-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anethifolius*) grew here in abundance, their grey globular cones nestled among the orange to deep red winter foliage; very striking, as was the burgundy winter guise of the base tufts of the Grass Leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*).

As we moved from the open heath into a small lightly wooded area we came upon a rather uncommon shrub, the *Atkinsonia ligustrina*. This is an interesting shrub in that it is partly parasitic, drawing nourishment from the roots of nearby plants; more interesting perhaps is the derivation of the monotypic genus name *Atkinsonia*.

The shrub is named for Louisa Atkinson. Caroline Louisa Waring Atkinson (1834 – 1872) was a remarkable woman.

She was a botanist, naturalist, writer, illustrator, artist, taxidermist and more; she was the first Australian born woman novelist and the first to illustrate her own writings.

Born in Berrima she moved to Kurrajong Heights in the late 1850s, living with her mother at a property named Fernhurst. She made many excursions into the mountains, on foot and horseback, studying the natural environment and collecting specimens. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Sydney Mail* published many of her articles and illustrations resulting from those trips; they were very well received by the public and highly praised.

Her plant collecting was quite prolific; several other plant species were named for Atkinson. The herb *Xanthosia atkinsoniana*, the fireweed or groundsel *Erechtites atkinsoniae* (a synonym of *Senecio bipinnatisectus*) and the fern *Doodia atkinsonii*, no longer recognised but believed to be a form of *Doodia caudata*.

She raised many eyebrows among her contemporaries however, as she had the audacity to take the very practical and sensible decision to wear trousers, rather than ankle length skirts, on these explorations into the bush; what shock and horror.

She married James Calvert after the death of her mother, who had not approved of the

proposed union, and moved back to Berrima in 1869 where she gave birth to a daughter. Louisa tragically died just eighteen days later; she was only thirty-eight years of age.

The white flowered *Epacris calvertiana* var. *calvertiana* and the pink flowered *Epacris calvertiana* var. *versicolor* recognise her married name, as does the paper daisy *Helichrisum calvertiana*. She may well have upset a few old fogies with her flouting of the dress code of the day but she was obviously very well respected in the world of botany.

The track then led us over a small rise through some Blue Mountain Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*) and between the soft foliage of Dwarf She Oaks (*Allocasuarina nana*) into the very open low heath of Ikara Head; we were then exposed to a strong buffeting wind. We took in the magnificent views on offer from this vantage point.

In the west Surveyors Creek flows down from the Darling Causeway to join the upper reaches of the Grose River; the old Canyon Colliery road can be seen dropping down into the gorge. Across the gorge the majestic cliffs of Kamarah Bluffs and below Wilkinson Hill sit above the talus slopes angling down to the course of the Grose. The eye is led down the line of the Upper Grose Gorge until the northern cliffs disappear behind Valhalla and Thor Heads; the double humps of Mount Banks are visible on the far skyline. One could stand and take in this magnificent scene for some time but the chill wind was beginning to bite.

We sought shelter from that strong wind in the lee of a rock outcrop to have lunch. Sitting in this protected spot, soaking up the warmth of the sun while watching the crowns of nearby trees thrashing about in the strong cold wind, elicited a very comfortable feeling; akin to the feeling one gets sitting in a snug room and watching wind-blown rain beat against the window.

The clouds in the west were beginning to look more threatening so we traced our steps back toward Victoria Falls Road. Along the way we passed some examples of the Prickly Moses

(*Acacia ulicifolia*) displaying their pale cream globular flower heads and nearby were other wattles with pungent leaves (or phyllodes to be more correct), the *Acacia brownii* with smaller but much deeper yellow flower heads. As is often the case when retracing steps you notice things not seen on the outward journey. Sitting atop a truncated conical rock formation was what looked like a man-made cairn of graduated rock slabs, closer inspection with the zoom lens revealed it was a natural formation; Mother Nature's artistic bent once again comes to the fore.

As we approached the Scribbly Gums back near the start of the track we noted they were inscribed with lots of doodling by the larvae of the Scribbly Gum Moth (*Ogmograptis scribula*). We puzzled over what induces the tiny larvae to chew in such tortuous paths, as indeed must have Graham Alcorn when penning a poem about the Ogmos published in the Hut News; a few lines follow.

The thing I'd dearly love to learn, Is what makes every Ogmo turn?

Off to the left, then to the right, Another about turn, very tight,

Chomping a track, Forward and back,

On various species of gum tree.

What indeed makes them turn so much?

We drove back to the Mount Victoria Cemetery to partake of our usual after walk cuppa; here we were sheltered to some extent from the wind, a fitting end to an exhilarating walk along Ikara Ridge.

Cemeteries are interesting places; they tend to concentrate the mind. One wonders whether the spirits of the departed ever reconnect at an 'Ikara', a meeting at some other place.

John Cardy

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

Friday 16th September 2016

A Hidden Valley, Incredible Cliff Faces, A Pool and Waterfall in an Enclosed Canyon, Narrow Rock Clefts to Explore

Deep Pass on the Newnes Plateau

The group last visited this venue in August 2009. This is a relatively easy day made up of three separate circuits so you can opt out of one if you wish. It is a fascinating area with surprises for those who have not been to this spot before. **We would appreciate 4WD vehicles for the trip from Clarence, if you can help in this regard please contact Libby early to allow her plenty of time to organise the vehicle rationalisation.**

Meet at Clarence near the Zig Zag Railway at 9.00am or at Merry Garth for an 8.30am departure.

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 0400 444 966. Note Helen's new mobile number.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 21st October 2016 – Mount Hay and The Butterbox

Friday 18th November 2016 - Leura Cascades, Leura Forest, Furber Steps

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.

9th September – meet at Queens Avenue opposite Hollyridge

14th October – meet at Queens Avenue / Wynnes Rocks Road

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details