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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## LEURA CASCADES AND LEURA FOREST

## TOPIC

### OUR OCTOBER WALK

**LEURA CASCADES, LEURA FOREST, KATOOMBA FALLS and FURBER STEPS**

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016**

Tag along with us dear reader as we explore a spectacular area of these mountains. We will traverse tracks touched in some way by an eclectic collection of personalities and features; Lords and Ladies, Prime Ministers and Princes, Saints and Sinners - even beaches, both near and far. So do join us as we take in amazing panoramic views and enclosed rainforest scenes along this rather special walk from Leura to Katoomba.

Sunshine filtering through a light layer of cloud does little to offset the chill breeze which greets the twenty-two walkers gathered at Katoomba Falls Reserve. We welcome Karen Bailey who is joining us for the first time today and welcome back Anne Pigott, Karin Kirkpatrick and Merren Dargan who have not been able to join us for some time; a car pool soon has us transported to our starting point at the Leura Cascades parking area.

We head off past the rather kitsch yet somewhat endearing faux rock shelter and toilet, then through the faux rock arch and drop down beside the creek. The volume of water coursing over the rocks (these are the



Spring in the Bush

real thing) below Chelmsford Bridge bodes well for the flow of the Leura Cascades further downstream. At the base of the cascades the track leads us into a dark overhang from which a view back up the cascades is on offer. Looking out from the subdued light in the overhang enhances the sparkling waters of the Leura Cascades dropping over the many ledges of dark rock; the green of the overarching vegetation completes the scene.

Next we pause at the top of Bridal Veil Falls where there is a magnificent view of Mount

Solitary framed by the nearby sheer cliffs; those on the right glowing in the sun, those on the left brooding in shade. Zig zagging steps lead us up to Evelyn Lookout which gives views down onto the face of Bridal Veil Falls and a second view, between the cliffs, of Mount Solitary.

The track now leads us, via steep sets of stairs, down into lush rainforest. Below us is a large group of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) their cartwheels of fronds presenting an amazing spectacle. We are now walking in a cool ferny glade, rock faces are clothed in velvety moss dripping with moisture; one such vertical rock face carries a carving of a cartoon-like character, a green face overlooking the track. Soon we are at the base of the Bridal Veil; we pause here, on the rock platform, for morning tea. And what a pleasant place to rest awhile. Above us silver

threads of water drop over the rock face, entwining with billowing wind-blown spray creating a filigree robe which shrouds the cliff face; a Bridal Veil indeed.

Moving on we drop down a little lower and pass the Leura Weeping Rock to the left of the track; running reasonably well today but this feature is a special sight after good rain. The track now climbs rather steeply to the now closed McKillops Lookout, named for Duncan McKillop (c1850-1929), Mayor of Katoomba Municipal Council in the late 1890s and who was involved in the construction of the track to Leura Forest. This lookout gives good views of the Leura Falls (once known as the Lower Leura Falls); hopefully it will be reopened in the future.

Continuing on we pass examples of the Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) which curiously carry their delicate pink-tinged white tubular flowers on only one side of their stems. Also in this area are the brilliant white star-like flowers of the Rock Sprengelia (*Sprengelia monticola*).

Soon we enter a large semi-circular indentation in the cliff face; we have reached The Amphitheatre. Here, in this shaded cool environment, Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*) thrive, their tall trunks contrasting markedly with the squat stout trunks of the King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) which also inhabit this area. The stand out feature in this enclosed glen however is a magnificent example of a forest giant which has spread its sinuous roots across a large flat-surfaced boulder before they dive into the soil in search of nourishment. A wonderful sight, especially so for Bonsai practitioners such as Ray Nesci and myself, 'root-over-rock' being a traditional Bonsai style.

As we move on toward the Fern Bower area we pass, clustered on the rock face above the track, numerous small yellow orchids, their long cylindrical leaves indicating they are probably the Streaked Rock Orchid (*Dendrobium striolatum*); a beautiful display of delicate flowers. We turn left at the junction of The Amphitheatre and Fern Bower Tracks

and descend a long steep stairway; we are now on Federal Pass.

Skirting around the base of the cliffs above Linda Creek we pass numerous tiny cascades and waterfalls partially hidden among the foliage. We cross the small bridge in front of Lila Falls; these falls drop over a series of rock ledges and finally cascade over a wide bank of lush ferns nestled beneath a narrow mantle.

Continuing our downward journey we arrive at Linda Falls; a tall narrow silver ribbon of water dropping into a shallow pool surrounded by ferns; a beautiful sight. Linda Falls was named after Linda McKillop (1877-1918), daughter of Duncan McKillop who discovered them. Linda was cousin of Sister, now Saint Mary McKillop. There's our Saint connection, where are the Sinners?

We now catch glimpses of Sylvia Cascades through the trees as we descend further and arrive at Marguerite Cascades, a wide bench of dark rock with a major fall of water on the right and a series of smaller falls extending across to the left. Soon we arrive at a small bridge across Linda Creek below a rather pretty unnamed tiny cascade and very shortly we arrive in Leura Forest.

Thousands of years, perhaps tens of thousands of years ago, huge sandstone tors thundered down from the escarpment above and formed a sill, against which soil built up, creating a fertile platform on which rainforest trees have thrived. Majestic Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*), Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) and Lilly Pilly (*Acmena smithii*) tower skyward seeking the energy of the sun, their canopies producing a dense shade across the forest area. Tree ferns flourish in the understorey as does the Pepper Bush (*Tasmannia insipida*); one example was in flower, each tiny flower displaying a starburst of pink-tinged white stamens above two long narrow petals. Also present here is the Fragrant Fern (*Microsorium scandens*) climbing up tree trunks to a great height.

We settle down in this magical environment for lunch; a lyrebird, running through its

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extensive repertoire, serenades us while standing atop a nearby moss-shrouded tor. Bliss!

We cross the tiny Banksia Streamlet and are now adjacent to the shelter shed; originally built in 1893 it was destroyed by a falling tree and was rebuilt in 1991.

The Carrington Hotel was named after Lord and Lady Carrington. Lord Carrington was Governor of NSW 1885-1890. What, you may well ask, has this got to do with Leura Forest? Let me elaborate. Shortly before 1890 tables and seats were constructed below the tree ferns in this area. It was said to look like the Carrington Dining Room in a bush setting and became known as Lady Carrington Dining Room. There is our Lord and Lady connection.

Lady Cecilia Margaret Carrington perhaps had a penchant for lending her name to locations; she also gives us our first beach connection. A Sydney beach and suburb took its name from her maiden name, Harbord.

As we leave this sublime area our second beach connection immediately materialises; we leave via the Dardanelles Pass. This track commemorates those whose lives were lost and the many more whose lives were ruined on the beach at Anzac Cove in the Gallipoli campaign.

This pass, tucked in close to the base of the cliffs, leads us through some imposing rainforest, past the Giant Stairway and delivers us back onto the Federal Pass. Just before reaching that junction we pass an abundance of the pure white flowers of the Branching Grass Flag (*Libertia paniculata*) beside the track, each flower having three large petals separated by three smaller petals.

This section of the Federal Pass, perhaps the most walked piece of track in the mountains, leads us past some magnificent Smooth-barked Apples or Red Gums (*Angophora costata*), and through the trees to the left there are glimpses of the cliffs below Narrow Neck Plateau. Soon the sound of rushing water indicates we are approaching the bottom of

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Katoomba Falls and the bridge at Cooks Crossing takes us over the Kedumba River. Cooks Crossing is named after Sir Joseph Cook, formerly a coal miner from Lithgow, who was Prime Minister of Australia in 1913/14; that takes care of the PM connection.

We arrive at the base of the Furber Steps. Here some elect to continue on and take the Scenic Railway back to the top of the escarpment; the rest head off to take the thousand or so steps to the top.

Shortly after the start of our climb we pass through a large rock overhang, this is known as York Cave. It was named after the visit to Katoomba in 1901 by Prince George Frederick Ernest Albert (Duke of Cornwall and York), later King George V. There's our Prince connection, only the Sinners to go.

We climb the Furber Steps proper, about one hundred and forty steep steps cut into the solid rock face, and rest at Queen Victoria Lookout. These steps, completed in 1908, are named after Thomas Frederick Furber a government surveyor who was instrumental in getting a government grant of one hundred and forty pounds to finance their construction. The views from the top of these steps are magnificent. The full drop of Katoomba Falls and the Three Sisters look rather special in the prevailing muted light.

The final stage of our climb takes us past the Rainforest Lookout and Witches Leap to emerge at the Katoomba Falls Kiosk. As we waited in this small park for the cars to be retrieved from Leura I noticed some bush had been cleared since the last time I was here. This clearing has exposed another of those faux rock structures, a toilet which appears to have been completely hidden in the thick growth for many many years; hopefully it will be restored to add to the collection of these quirky structures dating from the 1930s.

With the return of the vehicles we now head for Kim and Tim Gow's new home on the north side of the highway at Leura for afternoon tea, and what a lovely home it is. The house sits so snugly into the hillside and the view through the extensive glazing into the

small vale and across the upper reaches of Govett Creek are sublime. What a joy it must be to come home and be greeted by the purling murmuring sounds of those two small streams. Many thanks Kim and Tim for your hospitality.

What a pleasant way to end yet another wonderful walk, a walk which revealed some of the very best aspects of these mountains.

And what of the Sinners do you ask? Well, unless anyone wishes to raise his or her hand I will leave you by paraphrasing American writer Damon Runyon, and perhaps that in itself is a sin, with a possible explanation as to why we didn't connect with any sinners on our walk.

'No sinners were encountered, for at this time of day sinners are still in bed, resting up from their sinning of the night before, so they will be in good shape for more sinning a little later on.'

John Cardy

## OUR NOVEMBER WALK

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

**Wide Mountain Vistas, Deep Valley Views and Amazing Rock Formations**

**Mount Hay and Butterbox Point north of Leura**

The group last visited this venue in November 2011. This area has beautiful heath lands leading to the wooded slopes of Mt Hay; a side track leads us to the spectacular ramparts of Butterbox Point. This is a relatively easy walk with a fairly gentle rise of about 180 metres from the car park to the summit of Mt Hay; you can choose not to go to the summit if you wish. It is then mostly downhill back to Butterbox Point and on to the car park.

**Meet at Leura on Mt Hay Road in the 'dip' just past Churchill St at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for an 8.30am departure.**

There is no direct access to Mt Hay Road from the Western Highway at Leura Primary School. When travelling from Sydney it is necessary to approach via the roundabout

above the tunnel. Turn back toward Sydney at the roundabout, travel back down the hill parallel to the highway and turn left into Mt Hay Rd at Leura Primary School, and then proceed to the 'dip' just past Churchill Street. Those travelling from the Katoomba side should also approach via this roundabout. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at the meeting point for the 14km drive to the track head. Four-wheel drive vehicles would be most welcome.

**\*\*\*Bring morning tea and lunch only\*\*\***

**Carol Conway has kindly invited us to her home, on the south side of the highway, just a short drive from our Leura meeting point, for afternoon tea.**

Remember to bring 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.**

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## FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016 – Matthies Track, The Throne and Waterfall Track at Mt Wilson followed by our end of year Christmas lunch at Merry Garth.

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017 – A Mount Wilson Ramble

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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.**

**11<sup>th</sup> November – meet at Wynne reserve**

**9<sup>th</sup> December – meet at Wynne Reserve**

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