
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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MOUNT HAY AND BUTTERBOX POINT

TOPIC

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

**MOUNT HAY and
BUTTERBOX POINT north of
LEURA**

Friday 18th November 2016

Trains Planes and Automobiles. Indeed they are hobby and model shops both in the Blue Mountains and the City. Also, it was the title of a 1987 American comedy film, that is true. But what do Planes Trains and Automobiles have to do with a walk in the Mount Hay area; don't give up, read on, all will be revealed.

We must be a reasonably respectable looking group for two visitors joined up on the spot this morning; Monica Hayes, a friend of Libby Selkeld and Jenny Wilkins a friend of Barbara Harry – a warm welcome to you both.

Rather high temperatures were forecast today and this walk is mainly in exposed areas. We were under clear blue skies and still conditions with a little heat already in the air as we left Leura but the dust raised by our small convoy of vehicles as we proceeded along the ridge was being swept aside by a stiff breeze; this augured well for more comfortable walking conditions.

We arrived at the Mount Hay Parking Area, surely one of the most spectacular car parks in these mountains with views of Mount Hay, Mount Banks, The Butterbox and the sheer



Summer in the Bush

cliff lines of the Upper Grose Valley; a fabulous vista.

Libby outlined our plans for the day and we nineteen walkers set off toward Mount Hay.

We had a portent, on the drive out, of the proliferation of wildflowers that would be on show; now, at closer range, there was an explosion of colour.

The track initially was lined with Broad Leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*); their flamboyant bright yellow globular flower heads lighting up the scene. The abundant tiny

white flowers of the Coral Heath (*Epacris microphylla*) provided a stark contrast. A little further on the delicate spherical flower heads of the Pink Kunzea (*Kunzea capitata*) dominated. At ground level, nestled among the rocks, were many wind-pruned examples of the shrub *Pseudanthus pimeleoides* in full flower, narrow pointed petals forming starbursts of pure white.

We paused for morning tea on a saddle below Mount Hay with spectacular views of the Explorers Wall cliffs across the Grose Gorge, of Mount Caley and Mount Banks, and past Edgeworth David and Frank Hurley Heads into the Upper Grose Gorge. Nestled at the junction of Govetts Creek and the Grose River, far below, is the iconic Blue Gum Forest.

Seated in this low heath land we could see many smaller plants making their mark on the

landscape. Blue Damperia (*Damperia stricta*) displayed their small crinkled blue flowers, the Rush Lily or Vanilla Plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*) held aloft clusters of lilac flowers on slender stems, Black-eyed Susan (*Tetradlea sp*) hung their bright pink four-petalled flowers, hiding, in most cases, their distinctive black eyes. Also present were occasional Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) with their velvety green-tipped white bracts along with its much smaller cousin the Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*). Also in the small vein was the tiny four-petalled white flower of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*). A little further down the slope was a small group of Leafy Purple Flags or Native Iris (*Patersonia glabrata*) and among the ground cover were examples of the Common Fringe Lily (*Thysanotus tuberosus*), their delicate fringed flowers anything but 'common'.

As we continued we climbed onto the rock shelves at the base of Mount Hay, passing on the way several gnarled Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*) growing in seemingly impossible positions on the rock outcrops. Someone ahead advised that there was an unusual flower beside the track, Barbara Harry stated it looked somewhat like a Geraldton Wax; it was in fact a large fruited Tea Tree (*Leptospermum macrocarpum*). This is an uncommon shrub found mostly north of Bells Line of Road and indeed its flower does have some similarity to the Geraldton Wax.

We rested atop a rock outcrop with views back toward The Butterbox and along Grose Gorge. These pristine valley views could have been quite different; we could have been watching trains run up and down the Grose Gorge. In the 1850s there were serious plans and surveys carried out to run a railway line from Yarramundi up the Grose Gorge and through a tunnel under the Darling Causeway to emerge at Hartley Vale; thankfully the plan was abandoned in 1860.

So, with no train spotting, we were able to simply relax here taking in the natural scenery across the heath to the rugged cliffs and the ridges beyond, but what is that near The

Butterbox, a ghost from the past? A Railway Tunnel? No, it is not the work of an overenthusiastic railway engineer in the 1850s, but an amazing optical illusion. The morning light playing on the edge of The Butterbox formation and the cliff face beyond creates a perfect illusion of an arched railway tunnel; a chimerical illustration of what may have been in this beautiful valley.

We then began the ascent to the summit of Mount Hay, known in 1789 as Round Hill its present elevated name was bestowed in 1825 after Robert William Hay, Under Secretary to the Colonial Office.

As we climbed we were initially in sandstone country but soon there was a sudden transition to the basalt cap of the mountain. We were now stepping over blocky geometric basalt boulders, the same boulders used to construct a large cairn at the summit; at an elevation of nine hundred and forty four metres. As line of sight to these trig points is no longer required for survey purposes clearing has ceased and the forest has regenerated, blocking any distant views from Mount Hay.

We paused for lunch back at the tunnel view point and, reinvigorated by a slice of Libby's Bushwalker Cake, we retraced our path back toward the car park. We turned right and contoured around a knoll to a point overlooking The Butterbox formation. This large rectangular rock outcrop was so named in 1918 because of its similarity to the wooden butterboxes of the time. We then dropped down and crossed a small saddle to the cave in the side of The Butterbox, continued around the formation and climbed to its summit. The views from this vantage point are amazing. The cliffs of Walford Wall extending out toward the conical Lockley Pylon and across the Grose Gorge and Blue Gum Forest to the cliffs of Banks Wall and Mount Banks; absolutely stunning.

Back at the base of the formation we skirted around its northern side close to the edge of the Mount Hay Wall and headed for Butterbox Point. Here there is a series of the most amazing rock formations.

The combination of sandstone platforms and ironstone inclusions has created some stunning sculptural arrangements. One area gives the impression of the remains of a whale skeleton; another replicates the ribs of a decaying wooden boat. There are thin 'onion skins' of ironstone appearing as stacked pancakes and curved vertical flutes of ironstone giving the illusion of breaking waves. There are multiple long parallel ridges appearing as petrified ripples of water and numerous arched shells of ironstone protruding from the hillside. All this against the background of the sheer cliffs and talus slopes of the Upper Grose Gorge; a superb array of some of Mother Natures best works.

As we gazed in wonder at these astounding works of natural art and the scenic beauty of this point, the planes and automobiles mentioned earlier come into play.

In 2004 a film company was granted permission to shoot the final scenes of its military movie *Stealth*, about a remote controlled fighter/ bomber, at Butterbox Point. (There is the plane connection, a little tenuous perhaps, but bear with me.)

The permit allowed construction of a helipad, several camera decks, boardwalks and installation of power generators in this sensitive area. It also allowed about seventy-five people to work in this wilderness area and an equivalent number of staff and equipment in the car park.

In early April 2004, Jenny Rich, who was a member and walked with this walking group in 2008 and 2009, wrote to the Blue Mountains Gazette on behalf of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society. She pointed out that the filming would not be allowed under the Wilderness Act, the National Parks and Wildlife Act, the Blue Mountains National Park Plan of Management nor the Department of Environment and Conservation policy on wilderness and filming. There were many objections and public protests about the filming permit but to no avail.

Then the Automobile connection was put into effect. On the 25 April a group blockaded

Mount Hay Road to prevent the film company vehicles from entering the site. Two days later the police broke the blockade, arresting several people in the process.

Court hearings and appeals followed but eventually the film company accepted an alternative site, though they had insisted Butterbox Point was crucial to the final scene.

So there you have it, Trains Planes and Automobiles have had a significant involvement with the Mount Hay and Butterbox Point area.

(The film was released in 2005 and was a box office bomb, lambasted by critics it made one of the worst financial losses in cinematic history; karma perhaps?)

We then made our way back toward The Butterbox and skirted around the southern side of the formation. The track led us past a narrow column of rock with a weather-beaten wind-pruned tree clinging to the top; reminiscent of those stylised Chinese paintings of mountain scenes. Above this point there was a tall wind-worn cave in the base of The Butterbox.

The track then led us into the shaded side of the formation; Pale Pink Boronia (*Boronia floribunda*) was present here in abundance beside the track - a veritable Boulevard of Boronia.

After resting awhile in the shade of The Butterbox formation we made our way back to the car park thus ending yet another rewarding walk in perhaps one of the most spectacular areas in these mountains.

Back at our meeting point at Leura we farewelled some of the group who had other commitments; the rest of us called in at Carol Conway's home for afternoon tea. What a welcoming oasis of coolness her lovely garden was after spending the day in rather exposed conditions. Thank you so much Carol for your hospitality, refreshing drinks and the delicious cake and scones which you provided.

John Cardy

OUR DECEMBER WALK

Friday 16th December 2016

Enclosed Rainforest, a Babbling Brook and Views from a Rather Royal Seat

Matthies Track, Waterfall Creek and The Throne at Mt Wilson

We will follow Matthies Track into the rainforest behind Merry Garth and drop down to explore Waterfall Creek, then visit The Throne in more open country before returning to the shade of the rainforest along the Waterfall Walk.

Meet at Merry Garth for a 9.00am start.

Bring morning tea only, lunch awaits at Merry Garth; see details below.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or, if you need to ring after the evening of Wednesday 14th December, on mobile 0400 444 966. Note Helen's new mobile number.

END OF YEAR / CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Thanks once again to the generous hospitality of Libby and Keith the end of year luncheon will be held in the glorious grounds of Merry Garth. **Ex-walkers, armchair walkers, family and friends are more than welcome.**

Meet for lunch at 12.30pm.

We intend using a more casual format this year to ease the burden of setting up and dismantling. Rather than a sit down luncheon it will be a finger food format.

Please bring a plate of savoury finger food, cold or hot, **to share**.

Mixed berries and ice-cream dessert, Tea and Coffee will be provided.

Please bring your own glasses and drinks.

Should you be bringing food for the luncheon, Libby has suggested it may be dropped off to the kitchen at Merry Garth before the walk, please bring your own esky or cooler bag.

CAROL SERVICE

The annual Carol Service will be held at St Georges Church Mt Wilson commencing at 7.30pm on Saturday 17th December. Everyone is very welcome to attend this service and experience the ambience of this historic church in a charmingly different light.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 20th January 2017 – A Mount Wilson Ramble

Friday 17th February 2017 – To be advised

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 December - meet at Wynne Reserve

13th January – meet at Davies Lane

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details