
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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DU FAURS ROCKS AND CHINAMANS HAT

TOPIC

OUR DECEMBER WALK

**RAMBLE TO DU FAURS
ROCKS, CHINAMANS HAT,
PHEASANTS CAVE TRACK,
SHORTCUT STEPS and
VILLAGE WALKS**

Friday 16th December 2016

“The four seasons are what a symphony ought to be: four perfect movements in harmony with each other”. A quote from Polish-born US pianist Arthur Rubinstein.

The four seasons and the weather seem to have a remarkable effect on people. Many, but not all, wax lyrical about autumn and spring, some cherish winter while others despise the cold, and the summer heat is a blessing for some, a curse for others. As we review our walks over the four seasons let us look at some quotations, paraphrased where necessary to suit our hemisphere and climate, which those seasons and their accompanying weather have inspired over the years.

Our first walk of the year was of course in mid summer, as we began the walk the weather had a rather English feel about it. Heavy overnight rain, which caused a change of venue from Matthies Track in the rainforest below Merry Garth to the Northern Fire Trail and Pheasants Cave also caused a reduction in attendance from twenty-three to thirteen. The



Summer in the Bush

rain continued into the morning but we battled on. The beautiful groves of Rough Tree Ferns along the Northern Fire Trail, their fronds, wet by the rain, weeping more than normal was one of the sights remembered from this walk. Also the Pheasants Cave waterfall running full after the rain and a Red Triangle Slug taking advantage of the wet conditions to forage on a tree trunk remain in the mind. As we approached the end of this walk, in rather damp conditions, patches of blue sky appeared as the cloud cover broke and sun glinted off

the wet foliage in the afternoon light. This brings to mind, and perhaps validates, a quote from British novelist and critic Henry James; “Summer afternoon – summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.”

Our next walk was toward the end of summer in late February. Long Australian summer days can lead to a certain lethargy, a sapping of energies, a state of drowsy dullness; apparently the much milder English summers can do the same, as indicated by the following.

An annotation to a ministerial brief, said to have been read out inadvertently in the House of Lords, said: “This is a rotten argument but it should be good enough for their lordships on a hot summer day.”

Unlike ‘their lordships’ there was no lethargy when we set off to explore Mermaids Cave, the Mystery Holes and Coachwood Glen at

Blackheath. Memories from this walk include the verdant beauty of Mermaids Cave, moss-encrusted boulders and a fern-filled creek line below the ribbon-like waterfall. The Blotched Blue-tongue Lizard, its black body decorated with blotches of pink cream and yellow with cream bands on its tail, completely ignoring us as it sunbaked on the track. The cluster of tiny cairns standing among blocks of chert in the creek at Coachwood Glen, surely the work of the little people.

How lucky we are to have our wonderful Australian summers. Way back in the 1700s, Horace Walpole, the 4th Earl of Orford, lamenting English summers wrote; “The way to ensure summer in England is to have it framed and glazed in a comfortable room.”

And so we arrive at autumn. British writer of detective stories Phyllis Dorothy (PD) James appears to have a rather pessimistic view of autumn as she wrote; “It was one of those perfect autumnal days which occur more frequently in memory than in life.” John Donne, British poet and preacher, on the other hand had a much more optimistic view of autumn when he wrote in his 1635 elegy; “No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace, As I have seen in one autumnal face.” It was indeed ‘one of those perfect autumnal days’ when we set off on our March walk which took us via the Golden Stairs to the Ruined Castle, back across the Giant Landslide and up Furber Steps.

Images which remain imprinted on the brain from this walk include the scale of the majestic sandstone tors which make up the Ruined Castle formation. Also the view of the full drop of the strongly flowing Katoomba Falls from the Furber Steps and the mist rising from the Jamison Valley in front of the sunlit cliffs of Mount Solitary.

Our April walk took us to Lions Head Ridge and Lions Head on Kings Tableland at Wentworth Falls. We were then in the middle of autumn; Chinese writer Lin Yutang wrote this lovely piece extolling autumn. “I like spring, but it is too young. I like summer, but it is too proud. So I like best of all autumn,

because its tone is mellow, its colours are richer, and it is tinged with a little sorrow. Its golden richness speaks not of the innocence of spring, nor the power of summer, but of the mellowness and kindly wisdom of approaching age. It knows the limitations of life and its content.” An eloquent description of this season which contrasts markedly with a quote from Laurence Binyon, English poet, dramatist and art scholar who wrote a far more pragmatic description of autumn; “Now is the time for the burning of leaves.”

Impressions lodged in the memory bank from this walk include the magnificent views from the very edge of the escarpment into the Kedumba Valley and across to Mount Solitary and beyond. The awe-inspiring sheer cliffs below our feet at several lookout points along the ridge and the views back to Lions Head, illuminated by the afternoon sun, from the lookout point near the gate on Kedumba Valley Road; a magnificent day was concluded with afternoon tea at Freda Moxom’s place.

Now, in the last month of autumn, the walk takes the group to Leura Cascades, Gordon Falls, Pool of Siloam and Lyrebird Dell at Leura. (Helen and I were away on holidays for this and the next walk.) Gleaned from Libby’s report on this walk are the following charming encounters. The wide white ribbon of water formed by Bridal Veil Falls dropping into the shadowy gully far below. Sighting the rather rare Black Sassafras trees near Lyrebirds Dell and at Elysian Rock Lookout the group saw several little rock warblers hopping about on the rocks, they were joined by white-browed scrub wrens darting in and out of the clumps of tea tree.

We bid autumn farewell with the following quotes. British novelist Samuel Butler wrote in his semi-autobiographical *The Way of the Flesh*; “Youth is like spring, an overpraised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellow season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits. French novelist and dramatist, Albert Camus, beautifully summed up autumn in one of his writings - Martha:

'What is autumn?' Jan: 'A second spring where every leaf is a flower.'

And so we arrive at winter, and a grey day with chill winds greeted the group as they gathered for the June walk through Popes Glen, on to Pulpit Rock and back to Govetts Leap. Again, from Libby's account of this walk, are a few of the highlights. The clear creek waters cascading over low rock ledges into the shallow fern-fringed pool at Boyds Beach. The dark brooding vertical cliffs at Pulpit Rock, so close to the lower viewing platforms. The sunshine occasionally breaking through the cloud, lighting up the orange cliffs and illuminating the trees on the talus slopes with little circles of green.

American author and aviator, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, wife of Charles Lindbergh, had the following thought regarding her relationship with winter; "Perhaps I am a bear, or some hibernating animal underneath, for the instinct to be half asleep all winter is so strong in me."

July, the middle of winter, and we headed for Newnes in the Wolgan Valley to explore the ruins of the shale oil complex and the Philosophers Track. The remains of the expertly constructed beehive kilns in the coke oven bench were one stand out feature of this walk. The surrounding cliffs of Mystery Mountain, Old Baldy, Hotel Hill and Eldorado Walls glowing in the winter sun and the large mobs of kangaroos sighted as we drove through the valley were also features of the day. The Philosophers Track proved to be elusive and the horrendous condition of the unsealed section of road was memorable, especially for the drivers.

English comedian and writer Arthur Smith makes the following point about people's reaction to winter; "Come July, people always say, 'Isn't it cold?' Well, of course it's cold. It's the middle of winter. You don't wander around at midnight saying, 'Isn't it dark?'"

Our last walk for winter was along Ikara Ridge to Ikara Head; the chill wind and threatening distant clouds reminded us it was indeed still winter. The magnificent views of the Upper Grose Gorge and down past

Valhalla and Thor Heads to the double humps of Mount Banks was one memorable aspect of this walk. Encountering a couple of examples of the rather uncommon, partly parasitic shrub *Atkinsonia ligustrina* and the extensive doodling of *Ogmograptis scribula*, the larvae of the Scribbly Gum Moth, also come to mind.

We will leave winter with a Mark Twain quote; "Cold! If the thermometer had been an inch longer we'd all have frozen to death."

We move into spring, a season which lifts the spirits, as indicated by a quote from American columnist and editor Doug Larson; "Spring is when you feel like whistling even with a shoe full of slush."

Slush was not on the agenda when we ventured to Deep Pass in September; spring blossoms most certainly were. The brilliant gold of the wattle blossom, exploring the dark foreboding fissure in the cliffs, hand stencils on the rock overhangs and the exquisite little waterfall on Nayook Creek are among the many images of this walk which remain in the memory bank.

Our next walk was in mid spring and American poet and playwright, Edna St Vincent Millay, describes this part of the season as follows; "October comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers."

This month our walk took us from the Leura Cascades, down to the Leura Forest, past the bottom of Katoomba Falls and up the Furber Steps. Memories from this walk include looking down onto the cartwheels of tree fern fronds as we dropped into the valley and the exposed roots of a forest giant clasping a huge boulder in The Amphitheatre. Also the sublime white ribbon of water which is Linda Falls dropping into a pristine pool and a cluster of cream orchids draped over a rock shelf. A wonderful afternoon tea at Kim and Tim Gow's lovely new home nestled into the hillside at Leura was a fitting end to this walk.

Not all people wax lyrical about spring. Dorothy Parker, American poet and critic had this to say about the arrival of spring; "Every year, back comes spring, with nasty little birds

yapping their fool heads off and the ground all mucked up with plants."

Solomon introduces our last spring walk with a more complimentary view of the season. "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come."

Our November walk saw us at Mount Hay, The Butterbox and Butterbox Point. Stand out features of this walk included the magnificent views into Govett and Grose Gorges, the illusionary arched railway tunnel beside The Butterbox as viewed from the flank of Mount Hay, the kaleidoscope of wildflowers stretched across the heaths and the amazing rock formations on Butterbox Point. This walk was rounded off beautifully with afternoon tea in Carol Conway's cool garden.

And so we arrive at our last walk for the year; a new summer is introduced by British poet, critic and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge as follows; "Summer has set in with its usual severity." Others had a more laid back approach to the season: Somerset Maugham; "It was such a lovely day I thought it was a pity to get up." Essayist and critic Logan Pearsall Smith; "Thank heavens, the sun has gone in, and I don't have to go out and enjoy it."

Twenty-one walkers did get up and did go out to enjoy our December walk, our first for this summer, although the weather was anything but summer-like. The much-needed rain arrived two days too early but as British critic, art theorist and water-colourist John Ruskin wrote; "Summer is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces up, snow is exhilarating; there is no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather."

Matthies Track, in the rainforest below Merry Garth, was planned as our first walk of the year, and again as our last walk of the year; rain thwarted both attempts. We shall get there one day.

With wet-weather gear zipped and buttoned, umbrellas held aloft, we set off from Merry

Garth and headed along Galwey Lane. Atop the rise to the right the Wynstay stables and the domed roof of the well appeared ghost-like in the mist, the barbed wire of the boundary fence was jewelled with water droplets.

We emerged onto Waterfall Road, crossed the bridge over the clear running headwaters of Waterfall Creek, in which platypus have been sighted, and made our way up Wyndham Avenue; the leading walkers slowly disappearing into the mist. We then meandered through Marcus Clark Reserve, a remnant of native vegetation, and continued down the road, lined with a plethora of brilliant white blossoms of the Tea Trees (*Leptospermum sp*) to Du Fours Rocks.

Views from the rocks were very limited today, only the closest ridges visible through the mist rising from the valley. This however concentrated our attention to the rocks themselves with their intricate patterns of ironstone ribs rising from the softer sandstone. Off to the left was a veiled view of the Chinamans Hat formation snuggled into the hillside; this was our next port of call.

The track to the Hat was lined with some rather bedraggled examples of the Rush Lily or Vanilla Plant (*Sowerbaea juncea*), their rain-soaked flowers weighing down their slim grass-like stems. On the opposite side of the track were many splendid examples of axe grinding and sharpening grooves with attendant water wells interconnected by carved channels. This was obviously a favoured place for the Aboriginal inhabitants to spend time fashioning tools and weapons.

We dropped down beside the Chinamans Hat, past a large mushroom-shaped formation and entered a large rock overhang where Libby pointed out the remains of some faux rock paintings carried out by a film crew many years ago; thankfully the rock faces are fading back to their natural colours.

This area below the cliff line usually has only a few sparse streams of water dropping from the cliffs above; not so today. There is a multitude of ephemeral falls leaping from the ledges above. Some are light tenuous curtains

of ethereal beauty; others are transient sheets of water plummeting to the rocks below. A sight this writer has not seen here before was a narrow silver ribbon of water rushing down a cleft in the rock face, cascading over a lower ledge and spreading into a wide shower before hitting the track; a transitory delight to the eye.

We paused for morning tea at a huge rock overhang having beautifully curved walls of gold and ochre sandstone. A wonderful spot to rest awhile serenaded by the differing, intermingled sounds of falling and running water.

Continuing on we followed the track which leads to Pheasants Cave; this led us past Tabletop Rock. Near here there were swathes of Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*), their brilliant white flower heads bowed under the weight of the rainwater, yet they were no less appealing, perhaps even more charming. Nearby there were lots of Grass Leaf Trigger Plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*), holding aloft their bright hot pink flowers which contrasted markedly with the white of the Flannel Flowers.

We passed a small grove of Broad Leaved Geebung (*Persoonia levis*), their black flaky bark and bright green leaves more brilliant in these wet conditions. We dropped down a steepish slope, contoured along below rock outcrops and turned right onto the Shortcut Steps, for their most part carved into solid rock; they led us quickly back up to Du Faur's Rocks.

Back at the Fire Station we then followed the Village Walk beside the road past the lichen and moss encrusted dry stone wall below Sefton Cottage and Sefton Hall, squeezed past the magnificent thick twisting vine above the track and emerged onto more open ground beside Nooroo and Withycombe. The numerous tall tree ferns in the field across the road were silhouetted in the light mist. The tree cover here combined with the thick cloud cover meant we were walking in a very subdued light, giving a very different evocative view of The Avenue.

Past the Wynstay lodge we continued along the Anniversary Walk. This led us below the magnificent Wynstay house sitting in the mist above the crenellated stone wall, keeping watch over the Wollemi Wilderness.

Then we were in Davies Lane, in my opinion one of the loveliest lanes in Mount Wilson. It meanders gently between the tree ferns, the fronds of which, on this day, were weeping under the weight of water. Overarching these are the giants of the adjacent rainforest, creating a magical atmosphere. A turn to the right and the lane leads us back to that Blessed Enclosure which is Merry Garth.

So ended our last walk for the year, not what we planned but there was something special about exploring the surrounds of Mount Wilson in the rain; a lovely perspective.

American author journalist and naturalist, Hal Borland, summed up the enticing nature of summer when he wrote; "Ah, summer, what power you have to make us suffer and like it." He was probably referring to conditions quite different to those we experienced.

In these inclement conditions Libby and Keith kindly invited us into their beautiful home to partake of lunch. In Libby's always-thoughtful way she provided towels, dry socks and track pants to those who needed them.

With many thanks to those who 'brought a plate' there was more than ample sumptuous food to share with our many bushwalking friends, ex-walkers and partners; a wonderful way to end the day and indeed the year.

And now is an appropriate time to mention those who make this group work and to offer them most sincere thanks. To Helen Freeman, an ex-walker who will hopefully return in the near future, who maintains and prints the mailing labels. To my better half Helen who updates the membership list, writes receipts, organises the printing of the newsletters, produces photo display boards, etc, etc.

To Libby who co-founded this group with Mary Reynolds almost 27 years ago and has led the walks ever since. For her organisation of the walk list for each year, for her

thoughtful and responsible leadership, for her ability to relocate walks at short notice when the weather or other things dictate, for her organisation of car shuffles and of course for her bushwalker cake which she bakes on the morning before each walk. And a big thank you to all the participants who make these walks such pleasurable and friendly activities; thank you all.

And, as an added bonus, I get the enjoyment of mentally walking these walks several times over as I write the monthly newsletters; a task which I find enjoyable (mostly) and from comments received they also bring enjoyment to you dear readers.

We have visited each of the seasons on our walks and US essayist and poet, Henry David Thoreau, gives the following advice. "Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Let them be your only diet, drink and botanical medicines."

After another year of wonderful walks it seems appropriate to end with a quote or two about walking itself. American author essayist and environmentalist Edward Paul Abbey; "That's the best thing about walking, the journey itself. It doesn't matter much whether you get where you're going or not. You'll get there anyway. Every good hike brings you eventually back home."

And a quote from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche; "All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking."

A thought of my own to end the year. On our many walks in these glorious Blue Mountains, I consider we have been blessed with the very best of all four of the seasons ----- but don't quote me!

John Cardy

OUR JANUARY WALK

Friday 20th January 2017

A Magical Mystery Tour on the Mount

A Mount Wilson Ramble

A walk anywhere in the Mt Wilson / Mt Irvine area is always rewarding; come along, be surprised and delighted.

Meet at Merry Garth at 10 am

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 17th February 2017 – Giant Stairway, Katoomba Falls, Boardwalk and Furber Steps

Friday 17th March 2017 – Glow Worm Tunnel on the Newnes Plateau

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.

13th January – meet at Stephen Lane & Shadforth Road (outside the New Bywood second gate)

10th February – meet at Wynne Reserve

10th March – meet at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details