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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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HAT HILL TO BALD HEAD

TOPIC

## OUR APRIL WALK

**HAT HILL and BALD HEAD  
RIDGE to BALD HEAD at  
BLACKHEATH**

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2017**

Health Report: Libby has had three sessions of chemo and is coping well. In fact she was considering coming today to walk just some of the route but with the busy autumn period for visitors to her garden she decided otherwise. (By the time you receive this she will have started her second session of three infusions.) I had my last chemo April 26, still no bad side effects.



Autumn in the Bush

John Cardy

Yes, we walk again! Many thanks to Karin Kirkpatrick and Freda Moxom for offering their services to lead and act as whip for this walk.

A little self indulgence if I may. I decided to tag along to perhaps complete just some of the walk then sit and read to await the group's return; with some help I managed to complete the whole walk. Many thanks to John Meade and Wayne Pascoe who carried my pack when I found the going a little tough, to Freda who aided with a gentle push on some of the steeper climbs (not a usual duty for the whip), and to my guardian angel Helen who helped with a tow up some of the slopes; all this help was very much appreciated. What a joy and a

lift to the spirit it was to be back in the bush once more. (As we were driving home I said to Helen I felt as if I was on a bit of a high.)

Sixteen walkers gathered in Hat Hill Road where we welcomed Ann Mikkelsen, a friend of Freda Moxom (Ann joined up to the group at the end of the day; we must be doing something right). A rationalisation of vehicles reduced the number from eleven to five for the drive to our starting point. Here we welcomed Jan Allen who had been invited along by John

Meade.

It is one of those magical autumnal mornings, not a breath of wind; the brilliant blue sky washed with streaks of high thin cloud below which bouffant pillows of cloud hang, lustrous white in the morning sun.

We begin the climb to the crown of the Old Mans Hat, a local usage name for the Hat Hill formation, dating from 1878; used by surveyor Henry James Mylne in a letter to the Surveyor General; Mylne marked out a 20 acre reserve at this site. The track, eroded sandstone in places, leads us through low heath to the summit, 1035 metres above sea level; the highest point on the Blackheath Plateau.

What grandiose views are to be had from this vantage point. Across the Grose and Govett Gorges past the sheer vertical drop below Edgeworth David Head, over the Blue Gum

Forest to the rounded form of Mount Hay; to the right of Mt Hay the forms of The Butterbox, then Lockley Pylon and Fortress Hill. Below these formations the early morning sun illuminates the sandstone cliffs; deep purples, copper and gold. The cliffs of Banks Wall and below Frank Hurley Head, not yet touched by the sun, sit brooding in shadow; a magnificent vista with much more to come.

Closer at hand sits Hen and Chicken Rock, a formation previously known as The Rooster. Now, at the risk of ending up with egg on my face, try as I may I fail to conjure up any images of poultry; nonetheless these two large rocks are impressive sculptural forms. At their base sits a small example of the *Epacris reclinata* displaying its deep pink tubular flowers.

We now drop down onto Bald Head Ridge past some Old Man Banksias (*Banksia Serrata*) naturally stunted by the winds in this exposed environment. Many carry the inspiration for the May Gibbs scary Banksia Man; gaping mouths and hooded eyes partly hidden among the withered hairy remains of the spent flower heads. Stretching out before us the track meanders along the ridge, adding a human perspective to this vast landscape. We cross some elongated rock outcrops bleached off-white by exposure to rain, wind and sun. Beside the track near here we spotted a bright green Praying Mantis, probably praying that we would leave it alone and move on, which we do, and climb slightly into an open wooded area.

The Old Man Banksias here grow tall in a much more sheltered environment and help provide some shelter for the ubiquitous Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*) with its pungent foliage and prominent flowers; clusters of red tubes with extended styles. Here there are also a few examples of Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*), some displaying fresh golden flower spikes. Beside the track, as it meanders through this open woodland, are many attractive grassy clumps; limey-green arching foliage surrounding slim vertical stems supporting dark seed heads. These,

along with the bright green foliage of the Broad-leaved Geebung (*Persoonia levis*), lift the subdued ambience below the tree cover.

Soon we emerge onto a rock platform; time for morning tea. Karin had inveigled from Libby her Bushwalker Cake recipe and baked it this morning, replicating Libby's pre-walk activity. She cut and served some of it for morning tea: Jan Allen had kindly also brought along a cake which she passed around; we certainly didn't go hungry.

From this rock platform we can see our destination point on Bald Head and the gully in between, it looks like quite a climb; Karin assures us it looks worse than it actually is. That proves to be the case as we drop down to a saddle to cross the gully and climb onto Bald Head.

What an explosion to the senses it is when the view opens up as we crest Bald Head. There in the foreground are the magnificent sunlit cliffs below Baltzer Lookout on Burrarako Head and the front-on view of Hanging Rock, like the bow of some Gargantuan ship emerging from the cliff face. Then the shaded cliffs stretching around to Burra Korain Head; the wooded talus slopes contrasting markedly with the bare vertical rock faces.

Moving toward the point of Bald Head the view into the Upper Grose Gorge opens up even more: the shimmering silver ribbon of the Grose River far below; winding its way along the base of the vee formed by the north and south talus slopes. On the north side of the gorge the cliffs below Liversidge Hill and the Birrabang Walls sit in more subdued light casting shadows onto the slopes; toward the head of the gorge are the shaded cliffs below Wilkinson Hill.

A turn to the right and there, across this wide abyss, sits the conical form of Rigby Hill beside Pierces Ravine, the site of Pierces Pass, then Walls Lookout and the continuous line of cliffs stretching around past Mount Banks to Banks Wall; a magnificent panorama.

As is Mother Nature's wont, she provides tiny gems to contrast with these grand views.

Along crevices in the rock platform are the tiny basal tufts of the Narrow-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium lineare*), none in flower at this time yet their golf ball-sized tufts of foliage provide a charming foil to this grand vista. Adding to these little gems of matt grey-green foliage is the sun glinting off the glossy green convoluted stems of the Curly Sedge or Old Mans Whiskers (*Caustis flexuosa*) scattered in clumps among the heath.

Time to pause for lunch. I have often written in the past of the fine places we find in these mountains in which we dine; this must surely however, be the finest spot for alfresco dining we have encountered.

Having partaken of lunch, absorbed as much as is possible of the surrounding majestic landscape to store away in the memory bank, to recall in times when a diversion is required; we turn to retrace our outward path.

Again we encounter some of the smaller natural curiosities of the bush. Beside the track is a perfectly cylindrical tube about seventy-five millimetres high, the entrance to an ant nest, probably to guard against flooding. Then a mounded bull ant nest made up of pieces of material larger and heavier than the ants; material which they manage to collect and build into a mound; little wonders of nature.

Back at the rock platform where we had morning tea we pause for a rest, much appreciated by yours truly after the climb back up from the saddle.

We continue along the ridge and climb back to Hen and Chicken Rock; again I fail to see a fowl. We skirt around the summit of Hat Hill, perhaps on the brim, and pass two large blocks of stone made up almost entirely of flutes and tubes. Amazing. Near this spot are two Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) displaying velvety green-tipped bracts surrounding their central umbels crowded with creamy flowers; a delightful contrast to the surrounding dark weathered sandstone. Soon we link back onto the track which takes us down to the car park.

So ends a wonderful walk, a first for this group, many thanks once again to Karin and

Freda, yet the day is not finished; Karin has kindly invited us back to her place for afternoon tea.

We collect the cars left back at our morning meeting place and head off along Wentworth Street through a tunnel of fiery autumn colour; a brilliant exclamation mark with which to end this walk.

Back at Karin's lovely home we walk down the drive lined with camellias covered with exquisite white flowers carrying a blush of pink and are welcomed into the large patio area. Here the remains of both the Bushwalker Cake and Jan's cake along with some pastries are on offer with the tea and coffee. We spend some time relaxing in this very pleasant setting before heading home; many thanks for your and your family's hospitality Karin; a lovely way to end a very special day.

Many areas in which we walk carry stories of personalities associated with the landscape; in this case it is The Hermit of Hat Hill.

William Andrew Murphy (1846 – 1927) lived in a stone hut which he built at the base of Hat Hill. He communed with nature, feeding the animals and birds; they became unafraid of being with him. Tourists would come out to his hut in late afternoon and he would bring out the food, whistle, and wallabies, possums and birds of all kinds would come to be fed.

As a source of income he made "millet" brooms from a native shrub which grew in the area; though it was claimed by some that as his brooms dried out another broom was needed to sweep up the fragments which broke off. In about 1918 his life was threatened by a bushfire, he saved himself by sheltering under a small waterfall he used as a shower; his hut was destroyed. Volunteers helped to rebuild his hut; today its ruins can still be seen beside Hat Hill Road not far from the start of the walking track. William Murphy died at Kogarah on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1927.

Following is a poem written by Karin's daughter Vanessa Kirkpatrick, dedicated to The Hermit of Hat Hill.

John Cardy

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### *The Slow Path*

*for William Murphy*

The stones of his shack  
speak their histories.

He sleeps to the music of flames,  
the slow path of the moon.

Stars burn holes in the fabric  
of sky, like memories.

The valley surrenders its absence  
to wind and to clouds.

And he, to simplicity's hold –  
spring rain nesting in his beard,  
leaves in the folds of his clothes.

Wallabies gather at dusk by the cliffs,  
intently chew the last  
sweet stalks of sun.

Wrens flirt with his shoulders,  
find songs in the brim of his hat,  
the shimmering air.

Those inexplicable little mysteries of the bush  
continue, though they appear to have reduced  
today, by about half in fact. Movement seen  
out of the corner of the eye behind Hen and  
Chicken Rock, yet there was nothing there.  
Was that a shadow moving across the rock  
platform as everyone was seated for morning  
tea? The sound of a snapping twig for no  
obvious reason. Stay tuned. (JC)

### **OUR MAY WALK**

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

**Open Heathland and Vast Valley Views**

**Fortress Rock Lookout and Fortress Ridge  
off the Mt Hay Road north of Leura**

The group last visited this venue in November  
2013. This is a relatively easy walk, about  
nine kilometres return, which follows  
ridgelines with very few ups and downs, just

## **Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group**

some gentle undulations. We will first visit  
Fortress Rock Lookout with views to the west  
across Govett Gorge to Evans and Govetts  
Leap lookouts; we will then continue along  
Fortress Ridge to Fortress Hill which offers  
360 degree views.

**Meet at Leura on Mt Hay Road in the 'dip'  
just past Churchill St at 9.15am 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 new  
tunnel, turn 180 degrees and travel back down  
the hill to turn left into Mt Hay Rd at the  
school. (Or travel via Britain St or Victory  
Lane and Churchill St to avoid the school.)  
Those travelling from the Katoomba side also  
approach via this roundabout. 4WD vehicles  
would be most welcome. There will be a  
vehicle rationalisation for the approximately  
9km drive to the start of the walk.  
Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

**Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after  
7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871  
3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.**

**FUTURE WALKS** (Tentative schedule)

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017 – Tessellated Pavement  
at Mt Irvine

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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.**

**12<sup>th</sup> May – Meet at Wynne Reserve**

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