
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 30 Issue 8

August 2020

WATERFALLS NORTH SIDE OF LAWSON

TOPIC

OUR JULY WALK

ECHO POINT AND THE
WATERFALLS CIRCUIT ON
THE NORTH SIDE OF
LAWSON

Friday 17th July 2020

There are nice mornings, there are pleasant mornings, then there are glorious mornings such as occurred when eleven walkers gathered at North Lawson Park for our first walk since the coronavirus lock down began more than three months ago.

There was a clear azure sky, not a breath of wind and an invigorating chill in the air; perfect conditions for a bushwalk. On the slope, above where we parked our cars, was a line of low growing wattle in full bloom, creating a golden hedge glowing in the morning sun.

The group welcomed Helen's and my ten-year-old grand-daughter Rahni who had been staying with us for the last week; she was embarking on her first ever bushwalk.

We made our way past the notice board detailing the walks accessible from here and soon turned right onto the track leading to Fairy Falls. The portion of these falls above the track drop over a series of rock ledges before forming a three part curtain in front of a rock overhang before spreading across a platform and dropping deeper into the valley. Both the water and the surrounding rock faces



Winter in the Bush

appeared much cleaner than the last time I was here some years ago; perhaps some polluting source has been rectified.

We crossed Fairy Falls Creek on the rock platform and made our way to an unnamed fenced lookout which gives a view back to the falls; a view which reveals both major drops, above and below the track. In the late 1800s the falls above the track were known as Cecilia Falls, probably after the patron saint of music Saint Cecilia. Those below the track were known as Sebastian Falls for Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of archers and soldiers. Later, both falls were combined to become known as Fairy Falls.

We continued on past some interesting large water-worn boulders and arrived at a large rock platform with a split about a metre wide containing steps dropping toward the valley; this is the start of the Round Walk zigzag which we will follow later.

As there was plenty of convenient seating, allowing social distancing in the warming sun, we paused here for morning tea. Freda distributed generous slices of her version of Libby's bushwalker cake and very nice it was.

As I was sitting with my back to the main track, out of the corner of my eye I saw what I thought was a small horse coming along the track; but neigh, it was a very very large dog;

one never knows what you will encounter on these walks.

A couple of times in past years, when this platform was wet from showers of rain, I have seen the Red Triangle Slug feeding on algae on the rocks. These slugs have a yellow body fringed with a fine red line and have a red triangle on their back which is their breathing mechanism. They are the largest native land slugs in Australia and can often be seen in wet conditions in these mountains, feeding on rocks and smooth-barked tree trunks where they leave distinctive scalloped tracks.

Having had our fill of morning tea and the views across the valley which carries Dantes Glen Creek we continued along the Fairy Falls Track towards Echo Bluff. This is a pleasant walk through open woodland on a substantially level path. We passed a few examples of Smooth-barked Apple or Red Gum (*Angophora costata*); their silky dimpled trunks crying out to be touched. Also present here were Heath Banksias (*Banksia ericifolia*) carrying a few prominent orange/red flower spikes rising out of their crowded linear foliage and the ubiquitous Old Mans Whiskers or Curly Sedge (*Caustis flexuosa*), their bright green coiled stems glinting in the sunlight.

Soon we turned left onto a track constructed in 1896 which led us along a headland known as Echo Bluff and delivered us to a rocky outcrop which overlooks Lawson's Echo Point. We left our packs here and took the short track which leads down to the rock platform which is Echo Point.

Helen took umbrage when I suggested she was best suited to try and elicit an echo; don't understand why. But Rahni stepped up with a loud cooee which was reflected with an echo as clear as a bell.

We spent some time here as others tried out numerous vocal variants; each rewarded with resounding results. Echo Point indeed.

We then made our way back up the slope beneath a canopy of She Oaks (*Allocasuarina sp*); the track and surrounds covered with a bed of fallen She Oak needles. This reminded

me of a statement by an indigenous tour guide on the South Coast who said children were taught, if lost, to seek shelter under She Oaks as snakes would not travel across these beds of needles. Interesting.

As we collected our packs back at the rock outcrop a case of pareidolia struck again. There on a large boulder was the profile of a face formed by a combination of the boulder formations and shadows; of course it was Simon, our pareidolia expert, who first saw this image.

We then retraced our steps back to the start of the Round Walk.

Here, where steps lead down between the split sections of the rock platform where we had earlier paused for morning tea, are the faded painted letters and arrow on the rock surface declaring it to be the start of the Round Walk.

Before setting out on this track I explained to the group that there is supposedly a rock feature off to the right, soon after we start our descent, known as Turtle Rock; the head of a turtle extending from its shell. I have passed this way many times yet have never been able to see it. So, as we descended, the rock overhangs were carefully studied until Rahni declared "There it is!" Now I took some convincing but I could make out what perhaps may have resembled a turtle shell, but you would need a better imagination than mine to see the projection resembling a turtle's neck and head. Rahni's grasp of pareidolia, the art of seeing animate images in inanimate objects, is obviously greater than mine.

Following this bit of excitement on finding Turtle Rock we continued down the Round Walk zigzag, utilising stone steps constructed around one hundred and twenty years ago; we owe so much to the skills, determination and diligence of the early track makers in these mountains.

Soon we arrived at the Dantes Glen Track and turned left to head towards St Michaels Falls and Dantes Glen.

This track contours along the side of the gully high above Dantes Glen Creek. The waters of

this creek arise near the railway line at Bullaburra and form part of the headwaters of Blue Mountain Creek, which flows into Wentworth Creek which flows into the Grose River. For the rest of our walk we were treated to the very pleasant melodious sounds of cascading, rippling, burbling water as we followed the creek line.

We were now in the shaded environment of rainforest. From far below us majestic Coachwoods (*Cerapetalum apetalum*) and Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) towered toward the sky seeking the energy of the sun. The smooth whitish/grey lichen-blotched bark of the Coachwoods was in stark variance with the dark fine scaly bark of the Sassafras. The bases of these lofty pillars were hidden below overlapping filigree circles of deep green fronds of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*). Through gaps between these wheels of fronds minute waterfalls, cascades and pristine still pools could be sighted far below. Truly enchanting surroundings.

Along this sheltered track, which would see very little sunlight, were splendid examples of the Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*); not in flower this early in the year but displaying their stems of lush, linear, gently curving foliage. In this area Rahni's keen young eyes spotted a crowded cluster of silver/grey hairs rising from a small circular mound; I know not what it was.

Soon the track and the creek converged onto the same level at an old picnic area, identified by the remains of a wooden table and seats.

A sidetrack led us across Fairy Falls Creek, on improvised stepping stones, and a further sixty or so metres on we arrived at the base of St Michaels Falls. Here a silver ribbon of water drops to a dark rock outcrop where it spreads and cascades as a lustrous white curtain into a sandy pool; a delight to the eye. We spent some time here enchanted by the surroundings; none more so than Rahni who was determined to get as close as possible to the falling water and let it touch her hands.

The three 'Saint' falls; Cecilia, Sebastian and Michael were named by Joseph Hay who was

an employee of the Lands Department in 1876. He arranged for this area to be reserved as a public park.

We reluctantly turned away from this sublime scene, recrossed Fairy Falls Creek, almost immediately crossed it again, then crossed Dantes Glen Creek and headed for Dantes Glen Falls. These falls were previously known as Christabel Falls after Christabel Lucy Hay (1874-1888), daughter of Joseph and Eliza Hay, who owned land at North Lawson. The present name was possibly applied by Charles Badham, a professor of literature at Sydney University, who owned a house in Lawson. (Names of features in these mountains obviously did not have any degree of permanency.)

These falls drop as a diaphanous veil in front of a fern and moss encrusted rock wall, silver shards of water glistening against the dark cliff face in the subdued light.

Large boulders sitting beside the pool here have names carved into them dated 1883; there is also what appears to be the outline of a teapot. It is odd how graffiti seems to become more acceptable with great age.

It is interesting to note that The Railway Guide of New South Wales 1879 (For the use of Tourists, Excursionists, and Others) devotes almost a full page to expressing the delights of this area. It concludes with: *It has been justly said, by an excellent authority (Burton): "There is nothing more beautiful to be seen in the whole of the Blue Mountains than this wonderful spot."* One could of course argue with that, but what we have seen on this walk today has indeed been beautiful.

We then crossed the bridge over Dantes Glen Creek, maximum of three persons at a time the sign warns, and began the climb back to the park. Initially we were climbing steps constructed perhaps one hundred and forty years ago. Near the top of the steps recent refurbishment work has been carried out using dressed sandstone blocks dropped in by helicopter; wonderful reconstruction work but what a silent tribute these modern track

4

building methods pay to the original track makers.

And so we passed the turn off to Fairy Falls, thus completing this mainly circular walk. We settled down for lunch in the welcome sunshine on boulders placed to prevent vehicles entering the park, which perchance were perfectly spaced to provide social distancing.

So ended another wonderful day enjoying just a tiny portion of what these mountains have to offer; open woodland, views across deep valleys, enclosed rainforest and splendid waterfalls. What more could one wish for?

John Cardy

POSTSCRIPT: Following the walk we took Rahni to Blackheath to show her, for her first time, the view from Govetts Leap Lookout. What a glorious bonus that was to finish off the day. As the sun hung low in the western sky the cliffs were bathed in the most beautiful soft light; Helen and I have visited this lookout many many times but have never seen the view look so spectacular; Rahni stood there awe struck. It was a lesson that one should make a quick visit, if passing, to the various easily accessed lookouts in the mountains; you never know what reward may be awaiting.

OUR AUGUST WALK

FRIDAY 21st AUGUST 2020

**A Basalt Capped Peak of 1062 metres,
Woodland and Heath, Panoramic Views
and Awe-inspiring Cliffs**

Mount Banks and Banks Wall.

The group last walked this circuit in September 2015. This is an easy to medium walk of about 9 km. A gentle climb of approximately 180 metres, with some steep sections, to the summit of the mount, then down through open woodland and heath to the edge of the chasm where there are majestic views. The return is via the fire trail which skirts around Mt Banks.

Meet at the Mt Banks Picnic Ground off the Bells Line of Road about 4km east of the Mt

Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Wilson turn off at 10.00am. Those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson meet at St George's Church for a 9.30am departure

Bring morning tea, lunch and plenty of water.

Contact Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.

FUTURE WALKS (Very Tentative Schedule.)

Fri 18th September – Coxs and Lockyers Roads, Mt York to Hartley Vale and Return

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.

Friday 14th August – Silva Plana

Friday 11th September – Wynne Reserve, next to Church

Friday 9th October – Wynne Reserve, next to Church

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141