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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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IKARA RIDGE AND IKARA HEAD

TOPIC

## OUR MARCH WALK

IKARA RIDGE and IKARA  
HEAD at Mt VICTORIA

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021

The major quest of the Knights of the Round Table was for the Holy Grail; our quest today was for the Holy Grail of many bushwalkers in these mountains. Predictions of once in fifty years rainfall, of high winds and possible thunderstorms could not dissuade seven walkers from setting out on this crusade of discovery.

We assembled at the Ikara Ridge trackhead on the Victoria Falls Road. (Ikara is an aboriginal name for a throwing stick or club, which the outline of Ikara Ridge and Ikara Head resembles on contour maps; a name applied by Myles Dunphy.) Forbidding dark clouds gathered in the east as we set off along the narrow footpad, led by Freda who has had more recent acquaintance with this walk than I have.

When we last walked this track in September 2016 the vegetation pressed in on both sides; following the fires of late 2019 it is a very different landscape today. There is almost no understorey and the ground cover is only slowly recovering. The smooth bark of many of the eucalypts is striated and tessellated from the extreme heat they experienced. The bright green foliage of a couple of Broad-leaf



Autumn in the Bush

Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) is accentuated by the dark charred bark of their trunks; almost hidden among the leaves are clusters of tiny young fruit. Nearby there is a Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa var spinulosa*); fresh green foliage pushing up through blackened remnants of limbs and cones; about twenty immature golden flower spikes emerge from the junctions of new born branchlets. Close to this beautiful symbol of rebirth is a charred sculptural tree trunk curving up out of the ground, its hollowed form coated with a

myriad tiny segments of charcoal, each glistening black from the moisture of the soft rain; this tree, even in death, greatly enhances the landscape.

The path led us through a variety of sedges, rushes and tall grasses interspersed with Strap-leaf Bloodroots or Blood Lilies (*Haemodorum planifolium*), their black stems and flowers contrasting markedly with the sedges.

Regenerating Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) are springing up in profusion; should make for a great display next flowering season. Soon we passed two large white-barked trees growing close together, the bare trunks following each other in a gentle curve as they rose as if in a frozen dance movement choreographed by Mother Nature.

Though we were subjected to some light showers the earlier threatening dark clouds were dissipating, indicating a rather pleasant

walk was in store. The path now led us down a slight slope, tiny rivulets coursed down the track and shed off to irrigate the nearby vegetation; we emerged onto a saddle where rock outcrops abounded. The valley to our left carries the upper reaches of the Grose River, which actually rises near the point where the Great Western Highway crosses the Main Western Railway near the old Mount Victoria Toll House. A rather unremarkable start for this powerful fifty-four kilometre long river which feeds into the Nepean / Hawkesbury system at the Yarramundi Bridge.

Soon we encountered, nestled against rock ledges, tantalising hints of our quest. Then, as we dropped over the shelf of a rock outcrop, laid out before us was our Holy Grail; a large drift of Pink Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus forsythii*). Although past their peak of flowering they presented a magnificent sight. A large rosy swath stretched out on each side of the track, interspersed with low clumps of green regrowth of other vegetation; a Holy Grail indeed. Each individual blossom consists of a pink central flower surrounded by pure white feathery bracts. These uncommon flannel flowers usually only appear after fire followed by suitable rain.

Like the Holy Grail of the legend of King Arthur and Knights of the Round Table, which vanished when approached by anyone not of perfect purity, these legendary flowers will soon disappear, not to be seen again until after the next bushfire.

We reluctantly left this meadow of pink and continued on our way. We were however treated to further occasional groups of Pink Flannel Flowers accompanied by the larger white Flannel Flower (*Actinotus helianthi*) and a smattering of the unfortunately named tiny Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*); though small in size this flower is bountiful in beauty. These trifectas of Flannel Flowers presented lovely cameos tucked in against ledges and clustered beside the track.

Off to our right now, across Ikara Gully, rocky outcrops dotted the landscape, their dark upper

surfaces, glistening wet from the rain, sat atop ochre and golden cliffs.

Shortly Freda led us down a short indistinct side track into a small arched cave where we settled down for morning tea sheltered from the light drizzle; a little local knowledge always comes in handy. Michael distributed slices of delicious bushwalker cake baked by his wife; many thanks Beth. Scrumptious.

The track then led us past some intriguing rock formations; one had a large domed cylindrical bollard rising from a circular base.

Soon we dropped down and skirted past a rock face marked with rounded indentations and decorated with Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) displaying their tufts of pendulous leaves. Also here, at the base of the rock face, were numerous tiny bright yellow fungi, possibly Yellow Earth Buttons (*Discinella terrestris*). Scattered among these yellow buttons were a few petite four-petalled white flowers of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*) looking larger than normal adjacent to the tiny fungi; everything is indeed relative.

Having climbed up from this rock face we were on another saddle and the track could be seen meandering up the slope toward Ikara Head. Beside the track now were a few examples of the Blue Damperia (*Damperia stricta*) displaying, in most cases, just one or two flowers. Near the top of this slope, on previous walks, there was a lovely example of the *Atkinsonia ligustrina* right beside the track; it is no more, a victim of the fire. Being a parasitic shrub, drawing nutrients from the roots of nearby plants, perhaps it is lurking below ground ready to emerge once more when the conditions are right.

And then we arrived at Ikara Head. The distant views today were shrouded in cloud and mist but the cliffs of Kamarah Bluffs and those below Wilkinson Hill and Valhalla Head were visible, though through a misty film. Silver cascades could be seen on the opposite talus slopes as the waters of Jungaburra Brook coursed down to feed the Grose River. Directly below us, through a much-thinned

canopy of tall timbers, a vast forest of Tree Ferns could be seen, their overlapping circles of bright green fronds presenting an impressive sight.

On the western side of Ikara Head plumes of mist rose lazily from the valley until they emerged above the lee of the ridge; they were then suddenly and dramatically snapped sideways by the stiff breeze.

The western edge of the head carries some amazing rock platforms of sculptural ironstone. There are flutes, pipes, ledges and fins twisting and turning into elaborate shapes; one area has ephemeral pools after the recent rains, reflecting the shapes around them. Decorating the edges of these platforms are the wonderful basal tufts of the Narrow-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium lineare*), their tiny curved leaves forming small feathery balls.

Across the valley west of Ikara Head the course of Surveyors Creek is seen dropping down from the Darling Causeway to feed into the Grose River. In the mid 1800s there was a proposal to build a railway line up the Grose Valley and a tunnel was planned to go under the Darling Causeway starting close to Surveyors Creek; thankfully the proposed railway never got off the ground. The view from here also shows parts of the access road to the Canyon Colliery. Coal mining operated in this area in various forms and under various names from the late 1940s to 1997.

And so we began our journey back. We passed several burnt tree stumps not noted on the outward journey. One such stump had a circular aperture surrounded by charred timber and bark presenting a view through to green leaves and mosses; an attractive little diorama. Another had two large circular holes with blackened branches rising above each 'eye' appearing as some mystical beast of the bush. (Perhaps I am being seduced by the mystique of these mountains.)

Rather than skirt around one of the rocky outcrops some of us climbed onto it and were rewarded with a view of rather special features. The top of the outcrop was mainly devoid of ironstone inclusions and consisted

of knobbly mounds and hollows. Off to one side of the outcrop however was a truncated pagoda formation topped with an almost circular flat ironstone plate with a domed mound at its centre; a Mexican hat perhaps?

We climbed down from this interesting emergence to rejoin the track and the rest of the group. Soon we were back at the little arched cave where we had morning tea, just in time for lunch which included some more of Beth's delicious cake.

I investigated closer to the cliff edge in front of this cave and there was a smaller cave with a level floor right on the edge of the cliff. It had obviously been used previously, for there was a flat slab of stone set on some rocks to form a low table. Something I hadn't noticed during our morning tea stop was that, at the cliff face outside the arched cave, there was a tree adjacent to the cliff whose trunk was growing in a shape which mimicked that of the cliff face. Intriguing.

We then made our way back to the cars; all agreed it was a very pleasant walk. We had been spared the predicted downpours, wind and thunderstorms. Though perhaps not quite as adventurous as the legendary efforts of King Arthur, nor ridiculously fantastic as the Monty Pythonesque pursuits, our crusade to find our Holey Grail had been successful. What else could you ask for? In fact there was a bonus, those who found it convenient called into Karin's lovely home for a warming cup of tea before wending our way home.

In the lower mountains we drove through some quite heavy rain; luck is indeed a fortune.

John Cardy

## MEMBER NEWS 1

Beth Raines, long time member and supporter of this walking group has been named as the Blue Mountains Local Woman of the Year on International Women's Day in recognition of her tireless work and enduring support for the community. Trish Doyle, Member for the Blue Mountains and Shadow Minister for Women, in presenting the award to Beth said: "Beth

## 4

epitomises the qualities of a good leader. She is a compassionate human being, honest and with a gift for handling a crisis with far more than just technical expertise."

We agree wholeheartedly and more with that Beth, congratulations, it is very very well deserved.

### **MEMBER NEWS 2**

Helen and I called in to catch up with Ray Nesci at his nursery on 24<sup>th</sup> March and we were pleasantly surprised at how he is progressing. He still has a long way to go as he himself said but he is doing light jobs around the nursery and wisely not pushing himself too much, sitting in the nursery when he tires, which I'm sure is very therapeutic for him. He still has his cheeky sense of humour and his memory is very good; when we mentioned we had called into Karin's place after the last bushwalk he remembered he had taken some clematis cuttings there some years ago. We all wish you well Ray on your path to recovery.

### **OUR APRIL WALK**

**FRIDAY 16<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2021**

**Spectacular Valley Views**

**Hat Hill to Anvil Rock and the Wind-eroded Cave at Blackheath**

This is a new venue for the group. It is a short walk which delivers us to a viewing point above Blackheath Walls with spectacular vistas into and across the Grose Gorge.

Meet just off the Great Western Highway in Hat Hill Road at Blackheath at 10.00am. A vehicle rationalisation will be made at the Hat Hill Road meeting point.

Bring morning tea, lunch and plenty of water.

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

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### **FUTURE WALKS**

Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021 – To be advised

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

### **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 9<sup>th</sup> April – Silva Plana**

**Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110**

**Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141**