
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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TRANSIT OF VENUS TRACK, WOODFORD

TOPIC

OUR MAY WALK

TRANSIT of VENUS TRACK
at WOODFORD

Friday 21st May 2021

Nine walkers gathered at the parking bay near the end of Woodbury Street in Woodford for this walk. The number should have been ten but one intending walker, who shall remain nameless, missed his train; as we will see later accurate timing can mean everything.

This walk was the 31st anniversary of the formation of this group by Libby Raines and Mary Reynolds; two remarkable people who are greatly missed by anyone who had the good fortune to know them. Absent friends indeed.

It was perfect walking weather, pleasantly cool, with a light cover of cloud and not a breath of wind as we set off with yours truly leading and Des bringing up the rear as whip.

Immediately after the start, on the right hand side of the track, is a stunning sight. A large twin-trunked Hard-leaved Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*), its white bark glowing as one trunk rose vertically while the other curved gracefully skyward.

Soon we are at the gated entrance to the Transit of Venus Track proper. Tracks have existed here since the early days of settlement but this walk was opened as the Transit of



Winter in the Bus

Venus Track in June 1991. It was so named to commemorate the astronomers camp set up by prominent astronomers with tent observatories and huts, on well-known Sydney businessman and amateur astronomer Alfred Fairfax's property, to record the 1874 transit; just one of many observation points across the world.

Observing the Transit of Venus was important to early astronomers as it would allow them to determine the distance from Earth to the Sun; the Astronomical Unit. With this

knowledge astronomers could deduce the size of the solar system and the distances to the stars.

Following is the John Cardy take on calculating the distance to the Sun.

Venus appears as a small black dot as it approaches and crosses the disc of the Sun. By recording the varying times for the transit from different positions on Earth a base line for a pair of triangles could be established and the distance from Earth to Venus could be determined and thus the distance from Earth to the Sun, using basic mathematics and a little trigonometry. That doesn't sound too hard does it?

From the observations of the 1769 transit, as observed by Lt James Cook from Tahiti, the distances calculated ranged from 146,000,000km to 151,000,000km, within

2.6% of the correct figure of 149,597,900km; not a bad result considering the equipment they would have had back then. Cook's measurement of the time for the transit varied from the reading by the ship's astronomer, Charles Green, who observed the transit beside Cook, by 42 seconds.

Inaccuracies in the exact start and finish time of the transit could have been due to the phenomenon known as the 'black drop effect'. This phenomenon occurs when the black dot of Venus nears the edge of the Sun disc; the edge of the black dot appears to jump across to the disc making it difficult to determine exactly when the actual transit commenced; the same effect occurring at the end of the transit. This optical effect can be demonstrated at a slightly smaller scale than the Venus / Sun disc interaction by bringing your thumb and forefinger slowly together; they appear to touch momentarily before they actually do. (Come on, admit it, you are all looking at your thumb and forefinger at this point.)

And so, let us leave Venus to continue on its merry way orbiting the Sun and come back down to Earth after that 'very scientific' look at why the observation of the Transit of Venus was so important.

Not far through the gate there are wonderful examples of the Smooth-barked Apple or Red Gum (*Angophora costata*) displaying their tactile bark; impossible to pass them by without rubbing your hand across the trunks. One example presents a full trunk of smooth live bark to the track while closer inspection reveals the remote side of the trunk consists of dead wood right up into the canopy; active bark rolled across the edges of the lifeless section of trunk.

The understorey here is densely foliated, providing ideal protection for small birds, which can be seen flitting between the shrubbery; their birdsongs creating a very pleasant atmosphere as we make our way down the well constructed path and steps.

There are small Hairpin Banksias (*Banksia spinulosa var. spinulosa*) beside the track, many, if not most, only carrying a single

flower spike early in the flowering season. To me, a quite different perspective of these cylindrical blooms is presented by these conspicuous lone spikes.

Soon we reach a track junction and turn left to head for Mabel Falls. It is but a short walk to the edge of the pool at the base of these falls.

The waters of these falls drop vertically over the edge of an almost flat horizontal rock ledge, the central main flow falls as a translucent film. Then, stretching across the rock face on either side of this glassy sheet, numerous silver strands fall, forming a diaphanous curtain in front of a lush wall of ferns.

The pool at the base of these falls is now rather small, but sandstone blocks, some of which still lay on the creek bank, once dammed the waters. An archival photo from the early 1900s shows eight boys bathing in a much larger pool; their postures indicate the water was far from warm.

It is thought these boys were from the nearby Woodford Academy, once the home of Alfred Fairfax; if this were the case the photo would be from some time after 1907. This property began its life as a series of Inns, some illegal, in the early 1830s, and passed through several hands while known as the Kings Arms. In the 1860s it was purchased by William Buss, indeed the locality was known as Buss's Inn and the railway platform as Buss Platform in 1868. Fairfax purchased the property after the death of William Buss and named it Woodford House, after his birthplace in England; the platform became Woodford Platform in 1871.

From the 1890s the property was used as a guesthouse, private hospital and once again as a guesthouse until, in 1907, it was opened as the Woodford Academy, a role it played until the early 1930s. It is now the oldest building standing on the Blue Mountains.

We then take the track which follows the creek downstream and leads us to a well-paved small causeway where a bridge once crossed the creek. In this area a male Whipbird could be heard making its whipcrack call but

he was getting no response from his female partner; a lovers tiff perhaps.

Soon we emerge onto an open area which we cross to head to Edith Falls. Both Edith Falls and Mabel Falls were named after daughters of Alfred Fairfax; Edith from his first marriage and Mabel from his second. This area is in Mabel Falls Reserve, created in 1917.

Just after catching a glimpse of Edith Falls through the trees to our right we pass an old fireplace, sturdily built from stone with a robust steel grate; a remnant from a time when it was possible to drive into this area.

At the end of the aged fence on our right the track hairpins back to take us down to the base of Edith Falls. We pass a dark damp rock overhang with ferns hanging along its front; a possible home for glow worms. Then the track steepens considerably and becomes very slippery for the final descent to the falls; we all make it safely to the sandy area beside the creek.

These falls course through a narrow sluice at their apex, widen as they drop vertically onto a rock platform and cascade down a series of black and orange terraces before dropping into a small pool at their base, partly hidden behind a huge boulder. White froth, generated by this final drop, spreads across the surface of the pool as a filigree fan floating above the umber rock base of the pool; a beautiful little cameo. What better place to pause for morning tea, partake of some of my better half Helen's delicious version of Libby's bushwalker cake while serenaded by the cascading waters of Edith Falls.

Presently, and reluctantly, we leave this magical little haven and climb back up the slippery slope to regain the main track.

The path then leads us past a substantial tree trunk encrusted with large scale-like shards of loose bark; an impressive sight. On the other side of this narrow footpad is a small Prickly Moses (*Acacia ulicifolia*) carrying only a couple of pale cream flowers at this time. A little further on, on the high side of the track, is a Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalis*) well

decked out with flower heads of pale yellow. Merren explains that the flowers of these wattles deepen in colour the higher up the mountains they grow; another curious little quirk of Mother Nature.

Shortly we arrive at a wooden walkway across the lower edge of a hanging swamp. Above this walkway is a large triangular swath of bright green Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) which narrows to an apex as it rises up the slope away from the walkway.

Large rock outcrops appear above the track as it slopes down toward Hazel Falls and then drops more steeply to deliver us to a ledge behind the falls. The view from this ledge is through a sheer curtain of water into a gully strewn with large boulders, those closest to the falls water-worn and bare, while further down the creek they are blanketed with moss. Trees in this gully grow straight and tall seeking the energy of the sun.

Hazel Falls were named after the township of Hazelbrook. They were previously known as Fairy Falls and were renamed to avoid confusion with Fairy Falls at Lawson.

We spend some time here taking in the serenity of the scene; some scramble down to the creek line to gain a front view of the falls before we head back up to emerge onto a fire trail. Along the way there is a large elliptical ironstone protrusion on the face of a boulder, not unlike the eye of a crocodile; I'm sure it would have struck a chord with our absent pareidolia expert Simon.

As we head back along the fire trail toward Edith and Mabel Falls the landscape is becoming shrouded in mountain mist, a splendid scene. The fire trail dips down to the clear area near Edith Falls and we recross the creek at the causeway but then take the left fork in the track. This leads us past a line of low Scribbly Gums across the way, their white, twisted trunks and branches standing out against a dark background; we arrive back at the start of the track to Mabel Falls.

There are several large logs beside the track here and we take advantage of them to settle

down for lunch in this tranquil setting. The mist that was closing in only a short time ago is clearing, the small birds dart in and out of the protective foliage, a Dragon Fly alights momentarily on a nearby leaf but then is gone; a perfect alfresco atmosphere in which to dine.

We head back up the track to the cars after what everyone described as a very pleasant, rather special walk; three waterfalls of very different form and the tranquillity of the bush, what more could one ask for.

John Cardy

MEMBER NEWS

Helen and I called in to see Ray Nesci at his Bonsai Nursery recently. We are very happy to report he is much improved since we last saw him; his speech has improved markedly and he retains his impish sense of humour.

He had seen his specialist a few days prior to our visit, who was very pleased with Ray's progress.

Ray still spends lots of time in the nursery but sensibly, is not over doing it; he finds it very therapeutic just being in the nursery, which one can totally understand. If determination means anything Ray will continue improving.

OUR JUNE WALK

THURSDAY THURSDAY THURSDAY THURSDAY 17th JUNE 2021

We had to change the day for this walk due to Helen and I having a family commitment; dare I say we received a better offer.

Open Woodland, Reeds and Sedges, Spectacular Views

Asgard Swamp and Thor Head at Mount Victoria

The group last walked in this area in August 2018. It is a 'there and back' walk of 6kms with a short climb onto Thor Head for astounding views of the Upper Grose Gorge.

Meet in Victoria Falls Road just off the Great Western Highway, about 1km east of Mt Victoria, at 10.00am. A vehicle rationalisation will be made at the Victoria Falls Road

meeting point for the 4km drive to the start of this walk.

Bring morning tea, lunch and plenty of water.

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

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative Schedule)

Friday 16th July 2021 – A Quadrella of Leura
Lookouts

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 11th June – Meet at Wynne Reserve

Friday 9th July – Meet at Wynne Reserve

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

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141