
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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ASGARD SWAMP AND THOR HEAD

TOPIC

OUR JUNE WALK

ASGARD SWAMP and THOR
HEAD at MOUNT VICTORIA

Thursday 17th June 2021

Thor, god of thunder, possessed a large hammer typifying thunder and lightning, which returned to him when thrown, a belt which doubled his strength and iron gloves to aid in throwing the hammer. Asgard, dwelling place of the gods and slain heroes, is situated at the centre of the universe and accessible only by the rainbow bridge.

Today, as we explored these namesakes from Norse mythology, though buffeted by strong winds, we were not subject to any thunder or lightning nor did we cross any rainbow bridges, yet the scenery was as impressive, if not more so, than such phenomena.

(Names in this area, drawn from Norse mythology, were attributed by Myles Dunphy in the mid 1960s.)

Ten walkers gathered in Victoria Falls Road, all suitably rugged up against the blustery winds. We were welcomed into the edge of the bushland by the swaying blossoms of a few Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*) growing close to the road. As stated by Merren Dargan on our Woodford walk last month, where we saw this Wattle with pale yellow flowers, at this higher altitude the flower heads were deep golden in colour.



Winter in the Bush

We rationalised the vehicles down to three and headed off on the four-kilometre drive to the starting point for our walk.

We made our way down the hill and soon, close by the edge of the track, there was a group of Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthus*) displaying their soft, velvety, green-tipped white bracts, surrounding their central flower heads.

A little further on, in the sandstone, well cut benching was evident, probably associated with access to and from the ill-fated McKenzie

and later the R Sands and Company mine.

As we descended into the gully we were protected to some extent from the wind and soon we reached one of the seven small tributaries of Asgard Brook, formerly known as Lamington Creek. The creek was given that name by Stan McGaghey and George Brown in 1948; another enigma of place names in these mountains. Did they give it that name because they sat and ate lamingtons beside the creek one day or because of some deference to Lord Lamington, Governor of Queensland in the late 1890s, after whom the chocolate and coconut covered cake was reputedly named? One can but wonder.

Since the group's last visit to this area a plank bridge and stepping stones have been installed, replacing the raft of logs, which had to be carefully negotiated in order to avoid wet feet

while crossing the creek; many thanks to the NPWS.

As we climbed up the small rise from the creek and continued on toward Asgard Swamp there were many trees ravaged by the bushfires. Their trunks carried dark charred hollows and were often pierced by large apertures, in many cases it was hard to see how there was enough live bark to keep the trees alive; yet this is the way of so many trees in the Australian bush, they simply refuse to die.

Soon we arrived at the path which delivered us to the large rock formation which overlooks Asgard Swamp - Pagoda Rock; time to pause for morning tea. Some climbed onto the pagoda while others were content to remain at ground level to partake of Helen's version of Libby's bushwalker cake. Scrumptious.

What a delightful spot this is. The reeds, rushes and sedges spread across the swamp in patchworks of greens and browns, in the foreground was a small Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa* var. *spinulosa*) carrying several brilliant reddish-gold flower spikes. In the background was the looming form of Thor Head, a narrow path meandered across the reed bed; it is obviously well used but I know not where it leads.

Sediments eroded from the plateau in times of much higher rainfall, which settled in the gully and remained there when rainfall levels reduced, formed Asgard Swamp. The environment created provided rich and varied natural resources of food, a diverse ecosystem in a limited space and a relatively favourable climate making this area a prime occupation site for Aboriginal people. Adjacent to the coal seams exposed below the cliff lines were outcrops of chert, an ideal mineral from which to fashion cutting and scraping tools.

Following morning tea we headed off to climb to the top of Thor Head. The track, which leads there, was far more pronounced than the vague footpad which existed on our last visit here; there has obviously been a significant increase in visitation.

A short distance along this track are the scattered remains of housing built during the coal mining ventures in this area. Blocks of roughly hewn sandstone, a few with arched carving, bricks and small pieces of broken flat glass lay beside the track.

Walter Mackenzie and his brother John, sons of a coal mine owner in the north of England, came to Australia about 1862. Walter, a doctor, first settled in Maitland and John, a geologist, first went to the south coast.

Seeing the successful development of the oil shale mining ventures in Hartley Vale and the increasing demand for lighting oil and candle wax, the Mackenzie brothers explored the geologically similar upper Grose Valley. They discovered seams of oil shale and claimed they were viable, however they were never worked and in fact proved to be only about 450 millimetres thick.

When John Mackenzie returned to government employment in about 1875 Walter became involved with a businessman and politician of dubious repute, Thomas Garrett, member for Camden and an undischarged bankrupt. Together they decided to exploit the coal seam located just above the shale deposits discovered by the Mackenzies. Around 1881 they arranged for six adits to be driven at various places between Asgard and Thor Heads.

Walter Mackenzie died in 1886 and R Sands and Company took over the leases. It was this company which proposed building a tramway to Mt Victoria and built a coke oven near one of these adits. It has been stated some excellent coke was made in this oven, though there is conjecture that it was in fact never used. The whole venture never really got off the ground, probably due to the downturn in the economy in the late 1880s. The leases over this area changed hands a number of times after 1891 and up until 1925, however they were last worked, and obviously only to a very limited extent, in 1908.

As we continued on our climb we came across a Waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*) with an early terminal bud forming atop a vertical

stem and nearby, on a eucalypt leaf, was a cluster of tiny Sawfly larvae, dozens of them crowded together in a circle no bigger than a 20c piece.

We topped the ridge and tantalising glimpses of the views soon to be had were seen through the vegetation. A short stroll along the ridgeline brought us to a wide flat rock platform and there before us were the most amazing vistas. However, as grand as these views were, there were even more expansive panoramas to be had. We left our packs and made the short climb to the very summit of Thor Head, marked by an intriguing little parapet of ochre sandstone decorated by seams of dark ironstone. Now here was a commanding prospect.

On the other side of the yawning gap of the Upper Grose Gorge are the magnificent vertical sandstone walls below Wilkinson Hill, Jinki Ridge and Dalpura Head. Rock outcrops and jutting pagoda formations dot the slopes leading up to the skyline ridge where the occasional glint of sun reflecting off vehicles travelling along the Bells Line of Road catch the eye.

The line of the gorge can be traced from the Kamarah Bluffs in the west down past Birrabang Walls and Liversidge Hill until it swings left to disappear behind the headlands. On the south side of the gorge the vista is of the rugged cliffs below Burra Korain Head, Burramoko Head, Bald Head and the Blackheath Walls; a magnificent spectacle.

A short stroll from the cliff face to the south side of the head leads to a rocky outcrop, in this more exposed environment the strength of the blustery wind gusts increased dramatically making it difficult to maintain your stance. Here there was a view back across Asgard Swamp to Pagoda Rock, our morning tea spot, now far below. This outcrop is embellished with the most amazing ironstone sculptures. Slender vertical spines twist and turn as they run across the expanse of flat rock, in some cases forming elongated ponds still holding water. Impossibly thin ledges defy the forces of gravity as they reach out horizontally before

curving and curling into wildly fanciful shapes.

A few hardy plants cling tenaciously to life here. Dwarfed by the scarcity of nutrients and the battering of the winds, one plant that stood out was a small weather-beaten example of the uncommon Tea Tree (*Leptospermum macrocarpum*). Its thickish gnarled trunk lay low on the rockface snaking along a ledge for protection, short wind-clipped twigs carry, as the species name suggests, large silver/grey seed capsules from the previous season; almost metallic in appearance.

Having taken our fill of the views from this eyrie, if that is indeed possible, we retreated to the lower rock platform to escape the wind and settled down for lunch warmed by the glorious winter sunshine. I know I have said this many times before but we do dine in some amazing places; yet none more spectacular than this perhaps.

We reluctantly roused ourselves from this sheltered suntrap and, though disinclined, turned our backs on the magnificent views to head back toward Victoria Falls Road. Along the way we passed a rock outcrop beside the track which carried a long line of Dragons Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) clinging pendant to a narrow ledge. Back at the creek crossing, a wide swath of sedges, not so noticeable on the outward journey, swept up the rise above the little bridge to an arc of trees at the head of the gully; an impressive sight.

Soon we were back at the cars after what could only be described as an outstanding walk; not even the blustery winds could detract from the enjoyment of this special day.

John Cardy

My walking future, or limited walking future

I am afraid my reduced fitness, which I am having trouble regaining, possibly due to my medical treatment, and a reduced confidence in my balance on rough uneven tracks seems to be signalling to me it is time to call it a day as far as bushwalking is concerned. I hope to

make it to the end of this year but that will only be achieved by having short easy walks as we have been having lately. At the end of the year I am pretty sure I will be hanging up my boots.

That brings up the point whether anyone else is prepared to take on the organisation, running and leadership of the group. I will not kid you that it is easy but I have found it to be very rewarding and I have had a lot of help from Helen.

Alternatively, so that we can stay in touch, we could meet say four times a year, avoiding the height of summer and the depth of winter, at say Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens, Everglades, Mt Wilson Gardens, Blackheath Rhododendron Gardens, etc as the seasons dictate. We could stroll around the gardens and have a picnic or BBQ lunch.

This plan of action may also entice our ex walkers and armchair walkers to reconnect with the group

We would only have to decide on and circulate a programme for the year and people just turn up on the day, there would be no need to call in before hand.

I apologise for dropping this on you all but felt I should give ample notice of my impending bushwalking retirement, something which leaves me with a heavy heart but I feel the time has come.

Regards John

OUR JULY WALK

FRIDAY 23rd JULY 2021

NB: This is THE FOURTH FRIDAY OF THE MONTH. In light of the Covid lockdown situation I thought it may be judicious to walk one week later than normal in the hope that the lockdown will not be in force by then.

A series of short walks to spectacular views

A quadrella of lookouts in the Leura area

We will walk to Moya Point Lookout, Gladstone Lookout, Sublime Point Lookout and Golf Links Lookout with a short drive

between lookouts two and three, and three and four.

Meet near the tee intersection of Watkins Road and Sublime Point Road in Leura at 10.00am.

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 20th August 2021 – To be advised

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.

July Bush Care may be effected by Covid restrictions, please check with Alice Simpson.

Friday 9th July – Meet at Wynne Reserve

Friday 13th August – Meet at Queens Avenue

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141