
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 9 Issue 7

SEPT. 1999

EVANS LOOKOUT LATE JULY WALK

Thank you to those who wrote in last month's news letter, paying tribute to Bill Smart and to those who expressed appreciation.

The walk on Friday, 30th July, 1999.

What a walk ! A day that will linger in our memories for a long time!

Thirteen looked down into the Grose Valley below from Evans Lookout where the first two thirds of our walk lay before us. Little puffs of mist still lay in the valley and with the thin cloud cover the valley was a soft deep blue and the surrounding great cliffs muted in colour. It seemed strange retracing our steps down into Greaves Creek so soon after our last walk there in May and it was no less beautiful. The straight golden trunks of the *Eucalyptus oreades* in the sheltered gully, the pass through the gap in the rocks to the soft green ferns, the numerous fungi, thick green mosses and the trickling water of the sheltered rain forest gully which led into Greaves Creek. Here we left Hans to walk back up to the cars while we set off down into the depths of the valley.

Beauchamp Falls was once again our morning tea spot on our huge rock beneath the Falls where much water cascaded into the pool below. For a fleeting moment the sun came out, lighting the cliff wall near us. Once again the little rainbow was dancing above the pool.

The path wound between huge moss covered rocks, forming a little grotto beneath the tall coachwood. Then we followed the stream as it tumbled down between the rocks, over little falls and cascaded over wide ledges. It was a beautiful stream with a mass of water spilling



Spring in the Bush

JUNCTION ROCK

over the steep slope while we carefully descended many stone steps.

I often think of the people who made these walking tracks so many years ago. This track from the Beauchamp Falls to Junction Rock was opened in 1900 after being built by a contractor, John Cliff for the cost of 270 pounds. Some how the track builders found an easy way down through the cliffs where it seemed impossible to go. Many of the steps we used were made with very large flat rocks and had been in place for many years, trodden by hundreds of feet over time. These hard workers left a fine legacy of miles of wonderful walking tracks all through the mountains.

We crossed at a wide flat area where upstream was a lovely scene of water cascading gently over a series of ledges. Then the track wound down through patches of rainforest, leading into more open forest of turpentine with their thick furrowed bark and large straight trunks, *Melaleucas* with their curious flaky paper like bark and the tall straight blue grey trunks of the occasional Blue Gum or *Eucalyptus deanei*.

After the junction with Govetts Creek [which commences at Leura] the valley opened out and was much less steep. Beneath the open tree canopy the beautiful Sydney Wattle, *Acacia longiflora* was in flower, a glorious sight. lighting up the bush with its bright yellow flowers and filling the air with its soft scent. The creek was different too, wider and slower in pace gliding over many smooth rocks of all colours and sizes and then forming deep sandy bottomed pools. Sometimes the path was close to the stream, at other times it led up above the stream so that we could look down on this serene and peaceful scene, while the great orange cliffs of the valley sides towered above us.

Junction Rock is where Govetts Creek joins the Govetts Leap Brook. These combined waters then make their way through the valley to the Blue Gum Forest

where they join the Grose River, flowing down to meet the Nepean at Yarramundi. We lunched here settling comfortably on the large rocks. Up stream there was a large still pool where a yabbie was seen in the clear water and downstream a magnificent large ledge of rock could be seen beside the stream.

We set off up the Govetts Leap Brook for the long ascent out of the valley firstly through open Sclerophyll forest which, as the valley became steeper and more narrow changed to a rain forest canopy. We crossed and re-crossed the little stream, enjoying its pools and rapids, the smaller pools and the delightful little flat clearings on its banks. The steps were many and we took it very slowly. As we neared the end of the valley many little streams joined the main stream. We seemed to be surrounded by tiny streams, each making its own way as it fell over the rocks.

Strangely, although we saw much scattered leaf litter where they had been scratching, we did not see a lyre bird all day but there were many small birds twittering in the trees. We were able to catch a glimpse of some and recognise the calls of honeyeaters, scrub wrens, little tits, whip birds, currawongs, rosellas, wattle birds and the little swifts flying freely near the cliffs.

A long steep climb up the ridge brought us to the bottom of the Govetts Leap Falls, where the brook falls 527 feet [159 metres] onto the rocks at the base of the sheer cliff. They are wondrously beautiful falls as the cliffs form a gentle curve and are covered with thick vegetation of sun and water loving plants. We stopped for a drink and refreshment before setting out for the final part of the walk up the cliff face.

In May 1898 Tom Williams and his son Isin from Blackheath began making this incredible track down the cliff face. It must have been impossibly difficult and hair raising as they chipped their way down. At the most dramatic point the track passes through a hole in the cliff which is negotiated by a ladder [non metal]. Apparently much of the work was performed by Tom Williams suspended over the cliff by a rope. Tom and his son must have worked rapidly for by January, 1899 the track was complete with its steps, wire rope and protective netting. Total cost 140 Pounds!! Sixty pounds from the 140 pounds was given by the Dept. of Works; the rest was donated by local people organised by **Thomas Rodriguez**.

Back to our little group 100 years later slowly making our way up this spectacular track. We marvelled at the path and the beautiful view of the Grose in the late afternoon light and the unbelievable cliff wall beside us. The falls were in the distant curve while the mass of low growing water and sun loving plants grew in profusion from the dripping rocks. We stopped often to catch our breath and to absorb the beauty of it all. As a farewell gesture the sun came out, lighting the cliffs on the far side of the valley with a radiant soft orange hue.

Mary was there to meet us at the top. She had actually walked down some of the way. We found a roomy shelter shed out of the wind for afternoon tea where we celebrated my birthday with cakes by Helen F. and Mary. Thank you so much.

Nature is a gentle healer of the spirit and she did much to sooth the sorrow of the past months on that beautiful walk; there will be some aching legs and tired muscles which will fade, but the memories of that happy day and the long walk, so full of surprises and scenes will linger long.

A special thank you to Libby for that clear, simple and moving account. I am extremely sorry that I did not undertake the walk. M.R.

OUR AUGUST WALK

FRIDAY, 20TH AUGUST 1999

TO MT AIRLY, the CAPERTEE VALLEY and GENOWLAN MT.

It was an early start for this unusual walk. Twenty eight gathered in the Lithgow Valley car park at 8.30 a.m. on a very promising morning although there was a very stiff wind, not unusual in August. Libby carried out her usual quietly efficient allocation of places in cars and some cars were left in the car park. Some had already been on the road for 2 hours or more to be on time! Out of Lithgow along the Great Western Highway then to the left to take the Mudgee Road, with the monster producing electric power at Wallerawang belching smoke and its mate at Point Piper competing equally well. There were constant reminders about coal and its production until we reached the little hamlet of Cullen Bullen. What stories it could relate of the hazardous, life threatening and back breaking work in the mines! Then into the more open country of valleys, and rolling tree covered hills with the curious cliff shaped wild mountains of the Blue Mountains to the east and to the south.

In the village of Capertee we turned right into the road that pointed in the direction of Glen Davis. Indeed it invited you to travel and tour as far as Rylestone. **Here we met Gay, Jean, Unetta, Lucy, Hilda and Narelle. These six have been members for many years but it was a rare and special treat to have them with us. A warm welcome too to Anna Marselmo who came with Anne Walker and to Judy Kammare who came with Patricia Andren and Helen Mc Innes. Yes we have another Helen!**

We were now on the last stage of our car journey as we wound our way into the Capertee valley led by Bruce and Sue Gailey who are very familiar with this part of a remote world. It is a rather mysterious world with its mountains topped with bare jagged sandstone or

smooth faced cliffs of many feet in height below which are thickly wooded slopes and narrow sheltered valleys. Like the mountains of our Blue Mountains but wilder, less tamed and unexpected!

Not far along this winding road we turned left onto a dirt track with the inevitable gate which must be opened and closed. Then to our left was this miniature bush cottage of stone, quaint and odd tucked into the land—surely a hideaway for some one! A short distance along the track, past a modest timber house on the right hidden by trees and bushes and we had reached the starting point for our walk.

We were in one of those narrow valleys, to the east was Genowlan Mountain and behind us Mt Airly. Bruce Gailey introduced us to some of its very unusual and colourful history.

He owns a wonderful book called ‘The Shale Railways of N S W’. In this book in the chapter which tells the story of the Genowlan Company, Airly it has this to say—” Perhaps the most isolated and uninhabited portion of N S W is represented by the mountainous region embraced by the upper watersheds of the Colo R.-----Few roads penetrate this vast area, which is bounded on the north by the Hunter Range, on the west by the Main Divide, and on the south by the rugged Blue Mountains Range and its off-shoot spurs. The eastern aspect is also a land of ridges---.It is a most inhospitable country which only encouraged a sparse settlement around its outer fringe.”

Bruce told us how the coming of the railway from Wallerawang to Mudgee, the first section of which reached the village of Capertee in May 1882 brought land hungry settlers and prospectors. The latter were attracted to the geological formation underlying the sandstone escarpments. In 1883 five prospectors found a workable deposit of kerosene or Torbanite shale above the banks of the Genowlan Creek which flows between Airly mountain on the west with its massive vertical cliffs stretching in straight lines, broken now and then by prominent bluffs and precipitous talus slopes covered with dense tree- growth and the eastern escarpment, equally rugged and breathtaking in its stark beauty, known as Genowlan Mountain.

The five prospectors were unable to finance the mining operation. Soon after a German Syndicate, known as the Genowlan Shale Company commenced operations and was exporting first grade shale to Germany for gas enrichment as early as 1883. As a result the small village of Airly emerged ‘with its primitive hutments made from slabs, with either bark or galvanised iron roofs, and clustered along the narrow valley floor in the vicinity of the shale adits.’ They were placed where ever land was level enough to support huge rubble outside chimneys. We were to see some of these on our walk. The

1890’s depression forced the German syndicate to sell to the Australian Shale Syndicate in 1895 who in turn leased the undertaking to the Australian Kerosene, Mineral and Oil Co. By 1914 the Genowlan mines were almost idle and by 1918 had ceased operating.

We followed a track which in part was the tramway when the mine was working and inevitably and fortunately came upon the remains of that past life. This is how John Cardy described the scene;’

Remnants of the workers “cottages”, very basic but ingenious structures providing refuge from the elements, now being slowly reclaimed for the bush by those same forces of nature. One can only wonder what human experiences had seeped into those crumbling walls.”

These sites were an archaeological paradise with every conceivable piece of evidence of human activity scattered in all directions.

In our absorption of the history do not let us forget the bush! It was thick and rich with life overlooked by those extraordinary Hawkesbury sandstone cliffs sheer gold and cream at times and at other times shaped, rugged, striated into fascinating patterns. In the bush were varieties of Eucalypts. The *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa* which we call in Mt Wilson the Yellow Gum is a fine tall tree with a smooth or slightly rough greyish-white bark. It is also known as the Mountain Grey Gum. Occasionally there was a specimen of *Eucalyptus dalyrympleana* or Mountain Gum, a fairly rare tree in the mountains but with a smooth white bark with blotches. It too is a tall very attractive tree. Below among the lower growth were *Cassinias* in flower and the purple flowered *Indigo australis*.

At morning tea we stopped amid the ruins of a miner’s home with a peach tree struggling to flower and around the surviving stone chimney pieces of glass, china, old enamel, a fragment of an iron bedstead and a pump. Not far away was an old stone horse trough and below in the valley a dam and slag heap plus a pump for the water. All echoes of that past age of mining when the horses dragged the skips along the railway where we now walked. The processing plant was on the western side of Mt Airly.

The magnificent figs [*Ficus rubiginosa*] tightly grasping monolithic boulders with their serpentine roots. A John Cardy description. This was a remarkable sight, particularly the root system entwined amidst the huge rocks. This fig rarely grows to more than 10 metres and is called the Port Jackson or Rusty Fig. The presence of these trees was very intriguing in such an unusual environment.

In the second stage of our walk we came upon more direct evidence of mining activities which is well

described by John Cardy. 'There were the remains of the mine ventilation shafts and stacks. The beautiful, precise brick work construction of the arched tunnels and gently tapered stacks contrasting markedly with the basic building methods used in housing the people who worked in the mines. The old boiler substantially intact, still nestling on its brick foundation and looking very much like a stranded, slightly off course submarine.'

While we admired all these elements, we also in the distance saw that wonderful peak, called Tayan Pic likened to the slopes of Fujiyama, the holy mountain of Japan. Tayan Pic, is over 1200 metres. No matter from what angle it is viewed it maintains its perfect shape. Among shafts and stacks trees grew in abundance, one being the *Eucalyptus punctata* with its granular bark which is shed in large irregular flakes exposing bright orange new bark which fades first to a light grey then to a dark grey.

Finally the track took us up a brief, steep shaded area with softer vegetation containing plants like *Styphelia tubiflora* or Red Five Corners. Its tubular red flowers an immediate attraction against the green of the bush. Then there was *Leucopogon lanceolata* with its long leaves [40 mm] and white star like flowers. Bounded with rocks to give comfortable lunch seats here was a vantage point to view the Great Capertee Valley. The wind was there to remind us it was August, blowing boisterously but not preventing the enjoyment of this wonderful view. This is what John Cardy had to say about this spot. 'The magnificent vista from the escarpment at the track's end and the birds' eye view of the spider web like pattern of animal tracks radiating away from a boundary fence gate immediately below' along with the patches of wooded slopes and brown roads empty and disappearing to where? all contributed to the wonder of this scene.

A special thank you to Sue and to Libby for those Bush walking cakes for lunch.

Finally we returned the way we had come to reabsorb what we had seen in the morning, especially the remnants of that past history of mining and to admire those cliffs. John Cardy describes them thus: 'The intricately weather worn cliff face on Mt Airly high above the railway formation, its deeply pockmarked rounded features giving emphasis to the smoothness of an adjacent cliff face displaying almost straight, horizontal markings!'

'Finally, afternoon tea at the walks end with treasured companions as the afternoon sun splashed fiery hues on to the escarpment of Mt Genowlan.' A special thank you to Bruce and Sue Gailey for their assistance with this walk, not least the transport they provided.

A poem by John Cardy makes a fitting conclusion.

GEMS OF MT GENOWLAN

At Mt Genowlan on the ridge up high

The elusive diamond is sought

As they turn the ground one wonders why

For the searchers really ought

To watch nature play on the sandstone walls

As the afternoon sun descends

And the cliffs are soaked by crimson falls

But I guess it all depends

If the chance to glimpse a flash of light

At the base of a hard dug hole

Is more appealing than the wondrous sight

Of sunsets which enrich your soul

Those tiny gems will perhaps one day

Appear from out of the gloom

But along bush tracks in every way

Real treasures will always bloom.

Thank you to John for his valuable contribution to the account of the August Walk.

Although we are too late for this month's Bush Care gathering, do not forget that it meets every second Friday of the month. Contact Liz Raines 4756 2121. The future dates will be Friday, October, 8th and November, 12th 1999. Check where the venue for working will be.

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

Friday, 17th September, 1999.

To Centennial Glen, Blackheath.

Our group has undertaken this walk at least twice in the past. The first time as far back as 1993. This is an excellent time of the year to experience it as the flowers will be a joy and while the track can be rough; for example it is rough along the bottom of the cliff, it is not too demanding. Centennial Glen is in fact a small canyon and has all the delights that that implies. We will also be able to see Fort Rock from which there are wonderful views of the Kanimbla Valley. In the past we have started from Bundarra Ave, Blackheath but this time we will meet at a different location.

**MEET IN THE CAR PARK A SHORT
DISTANCE DOWN CENTENNIAL
GLEN RD at 9.30 A.M.**

**To reach this road cross the railway line at
Blackheath, turn left immediately into
Shipleigh Rd and follow Shipleigh Rd almost to
its junction with the Megalong Valley Rd.
Centennial Glen Rd goes off to the right
just before that junction. The Car Park is a
short distance down that road.**

**OR MEET AT 9.00 A.M. at MERRY
GARTH.**

**Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon
tea.**

FURTHER WALKS

Friday, 15th October, 1999 The Southern Fire
Trail and back via the Waterfall Track Mt
Wilson.

Friday, 29th October, 1999 Possibly the Blue
Gum Forest via Pierce's Pass or to the Cox's
R.

Friday, 19th November, 1999 Minni Minni
Ha Ha Falls or a walk at Wentworth Falls.

**Do let us know in advance when you intend
coming on a walk, as it is a great help.**

**Contact Libby Raines [02- 47 56 2121] or
Mary Reynolds [02-4756 2006] or Alison Heap
[02-4756 2116] if you are coming on the
September Walk.**