

Carlton and Breakfast Creeks Towards the Coxs River

Friday 16th August 2002

An apt number of walkers gathered at the National Park carpark near Packsaddlers in the beautiful Megalong Valley. Thirteen was the number, the Devil's own, and the sign at the track head indicated this was the way to the Hell Hole! We however were headed to cooler climes to experience a walk which was closer to paradise.

As was the case at our last walk this one began at a stile and indeed this was a very stylish stile. The fence it crossed followed a ridge which afforded northerly views of the historic homestead of the Carlton family nestled in Green Gully. To the south, the direction in which we were heading, were the majestic ridges and valleys of the Wild Dog Mountains.

We zigzagged down a fairly steep slope through a lovely grove of quite large Prickly-leaved Paper Barks (*Melaleuca styphelioides*) and emerged onto an open grassy hillside. A veritable symphony of birdcalls greeted us here and indeed was to accompany us for most of this walk. There were bellbirds, rosellas, finches and whipbirds along with the ubiquitous currawongs and an occasional mournful interjection from a large crow which followed us for most of the day.

Crossing a little frost covered gully we descended to the course of Carlton Creek and the landscape became lightly wooded. Unlike most walks we undertake where changes in habitat from dry open woodland to rainforest are usually quite sudden, here there was a continuous gradual transition from the dry country on the ridge to a cooler and more moist environment as we descended toward Breakfast Creek. Soon we encountered small Sandpaper Figs (*Ficus coronata*) and a delightful thicket of Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) whose discarded flower petals lay confetti-like on the bare earth. A little further on stood a Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) its smooth white-blotched trunk entwined by a thick vine. We came upon a large cluster of leafless trunks of the exotic Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) like a group of spears embedded in the ground. The presence here also of a mature apple and plum tree indicated the area was perhaps the site of some form of dwelling in times past.

Many wombats obviously frequent this area as evidenced by the little cubic packages placed atop almost every rock on or near the track! Either there are lots of wombats or just a few with bowel problems. Further evidence of their presence was the tracks running straight down the steep slopes toward the creek, no following contours for these fellows, nature's bulldozers indeed!

Carlton Creek at this time is not flowing, containing only occasional puddles of water. As we descend further there is the exquisite sight of a hillside entirely covered with Maiden Hair Fern (*Adiantum aethiopicum*). Not to be outdone, around the next bend there is a similar display put on by the Fishbone Fern (*Blechnum nudum*). The main trees along the

creek banks are now the River She Oak (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*), quite large specimens however nothing compared to what we are about to see.

At the junction of Carlon and Breakfast Creeks the pristine scene of rubble strewn creek bed and crystal clear pool is dominated by the most magnificent She Oak one could imagine. Beautifully buttressed roots clung to a raised islet in the creek and the superb slightly fluted trunk tapered toward the canopy far above. The branches of this tree were horizontal and sinuous unlike its usual habit of upright branch growth. The icing on the cake was the branches being encrusted with lichens, mosses and tiny native orchids, truly a sight to behold!

The gradient is more gentle now as we follow Breakfast Creek to the always-welcome accompaniment of softly running water. The track now criss crosses the stony creek bed. Expansive shallow mirror-like ponds are encountered along with the sporadic deeper pool. One such pool was partially encircled by the Spiny-headed Mat Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) whose strappy leaves cascaded to the pool surface creating the illusion of a green waterfall. The rocky expanse of the creek bed was at times illuminated by the brilliant glow of the Sydney Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) obviously escaping from the city smog.

Between Black Horse Creek and Ironpot Gully the course of Breakfast Creek forms a large loop around a prominent knoll. Here the track rises over this spur creating a short cut and rejoining the creek at the end of the loop. This higher terrain is much dryer but no less pretty as it is decorated with the False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*) creeping over the bare earth or twining up through host shrubs to better display its purple pea like flowers. The Nodding Blue Lily (*Stypandra glauca*) with its dainty flower heads shyly bowed and the occasional Variable Groundsel (*Senecio laetifolius* ssp *dissectifolius*) provide contrasts of blue and yellow.

An added word or two about the wonderful bird life on this walk contributed by Libby.

“Wonga Pigeons, Lyre Birds, the White Browed Scrub Wrens and the White’s Thrush along with the Red Browed Finches were represented. Darting about were Welcome Swallows and a flock of Wood Ducks were feeding on the grasses. The Wonga Pigeons flew off with their loud flapping of wings while we passed a Lyre Bird’s ring and large areas of disturbed soil where the Lyre Birds had been looking for their breakfast. The silent but charming White’s Thrush was quietly hopping about in the undergrowth. Such was the richness of the bird life”.

Back to John.

This walk began with a rather loose itinerary to follow Breakfast Creek perhaps as far as the Coss River if time permitted. On arriving at a large clearing not far past the big loop

it was apparent we had been spending a lot of time smelling the flowers and taking in the beauty of the glorious little dioramas on view along this route. Time would have been very tight if we continued on to Cocks River so it was decided to have a leisurely lunch here and then make the return journey. What a delightful lunch spot it was. Seating was available on a rock outcrop above a limpid pool or waterfront positions lower down could be chosen. The surface of the pool was perfectly still on this sunny windless day save for the tiny delta shaped bow waves of the water boatmen which scurried hither and yon.

It transpired the decision to lunch here was amply rewarded. We were treated to a very special and unusual birdcall. A low trilling repetitive call which we later learned belonged to a relatively rare bird for this area. Its normal habitat is among lots of tiny trees and it only flies on very rare occasions. Its call sometimes transmutes to a sound remarkably like the ring tone of a mobile telephone. We discovered it was a *Raymondissia Nescii* lurking in the bushes! (The whereabouts of Ray Nesci, a regular walker and Bonsai nurseryman, will have to be checked if future unusual calls are heard.)

Shortly after commencing the return journey a quite splendid scene was encountered. The stone paved creek bed led away to a shallow pool which was surrounded by tall Casuarinas. The fine needle foliage of these trees in the shaded foreground created the effect of viewing the sunlit Eucalypts on the hillside beyond through a delicate grey/green mist – one of those fortuitous events in nature! As we continued through this deep gully under the thick cover of the Grey Myrtles (*Backhousia myrtifolia*) the light at times became quite subdued, in stark contrast to the occasionally visible ridges still bathed in sunlight.

Afternoon tea back at the carpark was taken while watching the afternoon sun bring into strong relief the ridges and valleys of the area we had just explored. At our backs the rugged escarpment of Black Billy Head on the Narrow Neck Plateau took on that magical glow characteristic of the sandstone cliffs of these mountains when the sun is low in the sky.

We reluctantly made our way home through this very pleasant valley past two picture postcard little churches and the quaint tiny schoolhouse, all nestling comfortably in this idyllic setting. This had proven to be a particularly enjoyable walk with much pleasant banter and good humour in a truly picturesque and unique environment. Once again Libby a big heartfelt thank you from us all!

**The combination of Libby's skills and knowledge as a bushwalker and observer and the capacity of John Cardy to record the walks with clarity and fervour produces a wonderful story for you all to enjoy in your quiet moments. We are deeply grateful.
M.R.**