
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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June 2004

THE ENGINEERS' DARLING CAUSEWAY VICTORIA

Our May Walk

Friday, 21st May 2004

The margins of geographical features are special places and hold a strange fascination for most people, certainly for yours truly. The summits of mountains, the mouths of rivers, the highest escarpment, the deepest valley all beckon you to explore them more closely. Today we were to touch on two such places. We would pass close to the source of the mighty Grose River while traversing the most westerly section of the Engineers Track.

Our journey begins at the Darling Causeway just north of the Hartley Vale Road junction. Fifteen members stood atop the steep railway embankment pondering the most dignified method of descent. The announcement in our May newsletter for this walk stated, *inter alia*, "It is not a very long walk, nor is it spectacular". True it was not all that long, however some of the "slippery dip" antics through the tussocks of grass down this slope could arguably be described as quite spectacular!

It was of course fitting that this walk started at an embankment on the main western railway. The track was built to facilitate a survey of the Grose Gorge with the view to building the



Winter in the Bush

TRACK OFF THE BETWEEN BELL & MT

main western line beside the river from Yarramundi to Hartley Vale via a tunnel under the Darling Causeway. Thankfully this plan did not eventuate however the remnants of the Engineers Track stand as testimony to the determination and skills of those involved with its construction. A detailed history of this track can be found in Andy Macqueen's marvellous book "Back from the Brink -

Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness" in a chapter most aptly titled "The Great Railway Foolery".

The survey started at the Nepean end of the Grose River in the latter part of 1858 by members of the Royal Engineers Corps, thus the track name. It is believed the work was intended to consist of a rough track cut through the bush. The track builders however had much loftier ideas and proceeded with the construction of a more permanent track.

Just as plans associated with railways in this millennium seem to regularly go awry so too did this survey project. After about 15 kilometres of work had been carried out along the Grose the team mistook Wentworth Creek for the continuation of the Grose, the mistake only being discovered after several hundred metres of quite substantial track had been

completed along this creek. It is interesting to ponder what the conversation may have been upon the realisation of this mistake - "Oops!" perhaps.

Following the delay caused by this mistake it was decided another team would start from the western end. Work on the section we were to explore today was commenced in April 1859 - 145 years ago!

The full length of the Engineers Track was completed in early 1860 and a short time later the Sydney region suffered major flooding. Louisa Atkinson, the renowned botanist, travelled the eastern section of the track in the early 1860's and recorded that the track was even then in poor condition. With the railway project abandoned and the track ravaged by floods so soon after completion, one can only wonder at the feelings of those who had expended so much energy on its construction.

The present track initially skirts north along the hillside and affords a magnificent view of Mt Banks and some of the sandstone cliffs forming the Grose Gorge. It is open dry woodland here consisting of Silver Top Ash (*Eucalyptus sieberi*) and a very sparse understory. The track takes a sharp right turn and begins to follow the contours above Surveyors Creek. There were a few examples of *Eucalyptus sclerophylla* here, the newly exposed bark on their trunks glowing in the sunlight. The insect larvae here were obviously suffering from a collective case of writers block for these silver/grey parchments were devoid of their usual scribbles.

As the path continued down the gentle slope the woodland slowly became more dense though the terrain remained very dry. Many Prickly Shaggy Peas (*Oxylobium ilicifolium*) or Native Holly were evident here (whoever came up with that common name obviously had a nasty experience with this sharp leafed but pretty little shrub) and Old Mans Whiskers (*Caustis flexuosa*) provided a softening effect to the landscape. A few examples of the Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) and the Hairpin

Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) were dotted across the hillside sparsely furnished with developing orange flower spikes.

We are now closer to the creek line and the opposite side of the gully consists of vertical walls and rock ledges supporting some huge sandstone blocks. One such block was immediately named Dog Rock by someone who shall remain nameless (momentarily) who then spent some time endeavouring unsuccessfully to convince the rest of us that it resembled a dog's head. Sorry Rosemary, I'll pick on someone else next time!

At a point where the track descends more steeply through a rocky outcrop, the remains of a rock drill hole provides some evidence of the extent of work involved in building this track. A little further on a survey benchmark is seen chiselled into the rock face, the patina of time giving the arrow symbol an almost natural appearance. In this area wind worn cliff faces and rock overhangs carry wonderfully complex sculptural patterns, their beauty enhanced as they are touched by the morning sun.

Up to this point we had encountered bone dry territory but suddenly we were squelching through mud even though we were still on the hillside far above the creek. This seepage it is assumed emanates from hanging swamps further up the hill. If one can be so presumptuous to assume that assumption is correct it demonstrates the extreme importance of the water storing capacity of hanging swamps for the well-being of the bushland during long dry spells.

The canopy became more enclosed here, a few Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) were noted and rising majestically from the gully were examples of the Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) their white trunks towering above the surrounding bush.

We crossed an unnamed creek which at this time consisted of a few small unconnected pools, skirted around a headland and the

imposing cliff faces of Ikara Head came into view. A short descent and we were at the Grose River which we crossed and followed a short distance downstream to an attractive rock pool which we decided was a perfect spot for lunch. A tiny waterfall dropped into this pool where water striders scurried about making temporary dents in the surface of the water with their spindly legs. The stream continued past some large King Ferns (*Todea barbara*), edged around a gigantic sandstone tor which would have once resided up on Ikara Head and then carried on through an enchanting filigree tunnel formed by overhanging foliage.

We lingered here for quite a while, some solving the world's problems while others simply allowed the atmosphere of this delightful spot to engulf them completely and forgot entirely about the outside world.

Eventually reality returns and we leave this little piece of paradise to retrace our path to the Darling Causeway. Here we celebrated the 14th anniversary of this Bushwalking Group. It is interesting to reflect on what must be by now the quite large number of people who have been given the opportunity through the existence of this group to explore the delights of these beautiful mountains, to gain an increased knowledge of the local bushland and to enjoy the camaraderie during those years - we trust there will be many, many more!

A word of appreciation to John Cardy who now produces his excellent descriptions of our walks on a disk. This means they can be transferred to the newsletter very simply indeed and the editor no longer has the task of typing it in. My warm thanks for that assistance.

Our June Walk

FROM GOVETTS LEAP TO EVANS LOOKOUT; a cliff walk

FRIDAY 18TH JUNE 2004

This is the third time for our Group to undertake this walk. Last time was in 2001 in March. Libby and Keith had gone to Western Australia and our dear Hans led us on that occasion. Today Libby and Keith will be in Switzerland enjoying a month of walking and observing which will bring wonderful rewards for them.

This is a very spectacular walk with breathtaking views of the Grose Valley. There is also a short walk called the Braeside Walk which can be explored. The leader will be the very reliable John Cardy.

MEET AT GOVETTS LEAP LOOKOUT AT BLACKHEATH AT 10.00 A.M.

OR

I would be happy to take members from Mt Wilson. Meet in the Avenue at 9.30a.m.

[Mary]

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea

FURTHER WALKS

Friday, 16th July 2004 Centennial Glen Blackheath.

In July there will be an additional walk on the 5th Friday i.e. 30th July 2004. This walk will be for our very fit walkers. From Perry's Lookdown Blackheath into the Grose Valley to the Blue Gum Forest and out via Pierce's Pass. It will be a long day. Practise knee bending in preparation for it.

Friday, 20th August 2004 To the Cox's River; the second section of the Six Foot Track.

Friday, 17th September 2004 Leura cascades to Gordon falls; to the Pool of Salome & Lyre Bird Dell.

Friday, 15th October 2004 Mt Irvine Danes Way, the Ramparts & Mt Irvine Road

Friday, 19th November 2004 to Lockyer's Pylon of the Mt Hay Road.

BUSH CARE

Some heavy work was carried out on 14th May 2004. Those hollies were dealt with and removed.

Friday 11th June meet in Waterfall Road Mt Wilson once more at 9.00a.m.

Friday, 9th July 2004 again at Waterfall Road Mt Wilson.

Friday, 13th August 2004 at Galwey Lane Mt Wilson.

Beth Raines will let you know about the future venues but it is always the second Friday in the month. Contact Beth on 4756 2121.

MEMBERS NEWS

We send our good wishes to Libby and Keith Raines for a happy, relaxed and joyful time in Switzerland in the coming month.

We hope all our members are well and enjoying our newsletters as well as walking.

A Story for Nature Lovers.

Libby has some delightful nature observation and stories. Here is one to share with you. There will be more next month.

"Last week late one afternoon when I walked to the gate at the nearby fields, a Wedge Tail Eagle was sitting on a large log about 40 yards from me. We were both surprised ! He flew off into some trees a short distance away, while I walked to the log where there was a freshly killed rabbit on it. I continued to walk up into the fields and he flew off towards the west with his great slow flapping wings --oh so close to me. I could see the markings on his feathers. When I returned to the gate, I looked back and there he was with his mate, riding the air currents round and round low over the fields. I watched ,enthralled for a long time before leaving and letting him return to his dinner! ---The rabbit was gone early next morning."

In 1966 when Ellis and I first came to Mt Wilson it was not uncommon to see Wedge

· Tail Eagles high over the valley of the Wollangambe. Today Libby's experience is rare and very precious.[Mary]

FOR OUR JUNE WALK

Contact **Mary Reynolds** on 4756 2006 or **Helen Freeman** on 4756 2053

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of **C&W printing Mort Street Lithgow** with the printing of this newsletter.