
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 14 Issue 5

May 2004

ZIRCON CREEK,
YELLOW GUM FLAT

Our April Walk

FRIDAY, 16th APRIL 2004

Readers will have to be a little disappointed this month as John Cardy, our regular and talented recorder of walks has been enjoying the environment in the North Island of New Zealand. The editor will try to provide something of the feel and interest of this local walk, well known to quite a few of our readers, but it may well fall short of expectations.

It was an incredibly warm day for April in Mt Wilson, reflecting the very mild weather we had been experiencing this Autumn. Thirteen walkers gathered on the track to Fields' Selection near Zircon Creek just off the Mt Irvine Road as it winds its way between Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. Driving along this road is always a delight as it moves quietly through the rich rain forest generated by the dark basalt soil and the moist coolness of the eastern and southern slopes of the mountains.

It was pleasing to welcome Amanda Butler from Blackheath who is rarely able to join us. But this time it was school holidays and Amanda made the most of it. It was nice too to have Jess, the grandson of Norma and Kevin Quinn with us. Jess, a sturdy and reliable lad is certainly a credit to his family.



Autumn in the Bush

SMITH'S HILL,
MT WILSON

The track we followed has been here for many years and is used as access to Fields Selection where a house has been built by the current owners. The vegetation on both sides is filled with a marvellous diversity of plants. Here the soil is largely from sandstone but has benefited from the wash from the basalt soils higher up the slopes. At first the track rises only slightly and then more steeply as it reaches into a more distinct rain forest

environment. Thus in the early stages we were surrounded by thriving examples of the Mint Bush or *Prostanthera violacea*, *Boronia* which flowers brilliantly here in October, many different varieties of *Hibbertia* also known as the Guinea Flower with its bright yellow colouring. One found in Mt Wilson is *Hibbertia saligna* meaning willow like leaves and it has large golden flowers up to 6cm across. There were, too, *Banksias* such as *Banksia spinulosa* with its candle like flowers golden yellow and often 15cm in length. Another tall shrub with paler green and tiny leaves was from the *Pultanaea* family or the Bush Pea. A pungent odour was noticeable at times and this probably came from *Zieria arborescens* or the Stinkwood. The unpleasant smell comes from the leaves and the timber. It grows to a small tree and is found near rain forest and has long, narrow leaves dark green in colour.

The track winds through this wonderful shrubbery and above are tall Eucalypts benefiting from the wash from basalt soils.

Subtly the environment changes as the track rises and the frequency of small dainty ferns occurs on the edges of the track while within there are samples of that well known tall *Cyathea australis*, a tree fern which fascinates so many and stands in open paddocks alone in cleared areas of Mt Wilson. Close by appear the familiar members of the rain forest *Ceratopetalum apetalum*, the tall straight Coachwood with its trunk of patches of whitish grey and rather blotched appearance and with it the *Doryphora sassafras*, another frequent occupant of this always enticing section of the forests of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. Later we would be seeing much more of the rain forest as we descended to Zircon Creek. However for the moment we had reached the boundary of Field's Selection, so called as a person named Field had first laid claim to it. From here we gazed eastward where on this day the haze of warmth had somewhat clouded the view. Never the less in the distance there was that distinct gap in the hills bounding the Cumberland Plain separating the Sydney plain from the mountains to the west. Through that gap flows Wheeney Creek as it finds its way to the Hawkesbury R. beyond.

We retraced our steps for a short distance then turned off to the right to begin the descent to Zircon Creek. This "track" we followed lacks any technique of skilled track construction making its descent a little hazardous. In 1994 it was made with the use of a bulldozer during the period of severe fires near Mt Wilson. Ten years later at least nature has managed to repair some of the man made ravages and the resilient members of the plant world have returned to soften the impact. Outstanding are tall slender members of the Mountain Ash or *Eucalyptus oreades*. On the southeastern slopes of Mt Wilson they normally thrive and here they were reclaiming their rightful place. Many of you would know that these trees do not regenerate after fire. They are dependant on seed regeneration to survive. Should a fire

engulf them before seed is produced then they will not return. Ten years is required for seed to form. As we carefully descend the all too familiar pungent odour of *Zieria arborescens* is detected and the glowing greens of *Pultanea* lit the way. Meanwhile Libby demonstrated the interesting life cycle of the Cicada from a small branch lying near the track showing evidence of cicada's presence by the markings it had left on the branch. Finally we negotiate the last steps into the creek bed where a trickle only of water is bubbling slowly over the smooth pebbles. Here coolness and a softness envelop one as the shade of the forest almost entirely shuts out the sun. Remember that for April the sun was and had been rather warm. Mosses and lichens decorate the rocks and crevices and delicate ferns form a fringe and background to these elements. The litter of the rain forest is deep covering every step of the way as we clambered up out of this gentle appealing atmosphere. Halfway up we gathered on the available rocks and logs to enjoy a short break with morning tea, overseen by the graceful Coachwoods and those lovely ferns, particularly *Dicksonia antarctica* with its extended elegant green fronds and rather furry brown tops from red - brown hairs on its trunk. Often on these same trunks are those lovely specimens belonging among the *Epiphytes* such as *Pteris rupestris* a common fern with fleshy leaves covering trunks and rock faces.

In a short distance we left this attractive setting and found ourselves climbing into a very different vegetation. Here were the tall Eucalypts, those fine upstanding Stringy Barks such as *Eucalyptus piperita* or the Sydney Peppermint. Tall here because there are more favourable conditions. It is interesting to note that this was the first tree from which eucalyptus oil was distilled by the surgeon on the First Fleet. There were fine specimens of *Eucalyptus viminalis* sometimes called the White Gum but also known as the Ribbon Gum. Its white trunk catching the light creating a sense of ghostliness. The ribbons of bark festooning the lower trunk and the surrounding ground.

We reached the tar sealed Mt Irvine road briefly as we turned towards the west to Smith's Hill and to follow the route used by runners in the Mt Wilson to Bilpin Run each year in August. Leaving this road where the letter boxes for Gowan Ross and Lindfield Park are located, we moved down hill in to vegetation that has all the signs of rain forest remnants on each side of the track stopping to view a dam held back by a rustic, green patched stone wall. Its contents were not impressive telling the tale of little rain over the last few months. It was built in the early 1950's when 'Gowan Ross' was first established by Bill and Jane Smart. There followed discussion among us of the serious problems of poor water resources we face in Australia and how people need to be educated to understand how precious water is for our survival, especially for future generations.

The track then began to swing upwards but surrounding us were attractive fern covered expanses over hung by those ever marvellous tree ferns telling us what must have been covering all this area before it was given over to settlement and grazing of animals. On upward we climbed to the top of Smith's Hill much of it now covered with *Pteridium* or Bracken Fern. It was knee deep as we ploughed our way through it to reach a point more on the northern side of Smith's Hill where across through the break in the more distant tree line there was a view of the ranges stretching into the distance over the Wollemi National Park and the flat topped Mt Yengo was to be clearly identified. Here we paused to enjoy the spirit of tranquility before turning to join a newly constructed road cut in to the chocolate deep basalt soil to give access to Smith's Hill for future settlement. We descended along this road until we reached its lower level and Libby then turned to the right taking us along a track I certainly had never walked before. It was edged with dainty ferns thickly growing and had a sense of something rather special. It reached an area with a few wonderful specimens of what long time locals call the Yellow Gum or *Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*. These are beautiful trees indeed with their tall almost white trunks and are not

unlike *Eucalyptus oreades*. It was at Yellow Gum Flat that we found a comfortable place to sit and enjoy our lunch. While the hand of man had clearly been at work here from time to time, the presence of tree ferns and the luxuriant fern growth on the ground were hopeful signs of the capacity for regeneration. For some the presence of those small rather slimy creatures, leaches made lunch a little less restful than it should have been as they were kept at bay by various techniques.

After lunch we retraced our steps to the constructed road commencing to make our way slowly up towards Farrer Road. It was slowly in my case I am afraid and a special thank you to Fred, Geoff and Gordon for being so patient and the others for waiting so many times for me. Clearly I am not up to standard these days. This section of the road passes settled property on the left and returning forest on the right. Once we were at the top Libby then led us through the bushland on the left along the border of Ern and Margaret Morgan's property. This was a fascinating finale to the whole walk for of course there was no track but we were moving through deeply littered cover amidst where true rain forest had reigned supreme. At first the ground was level but as we were descending to Zircon Creek once more it was not level for long and we were moving rapidly downward through rich leaf mould and beneath a wonderful rain forested canopy.

On a number of occasions this writer found it was easier to move down on her seat rather than her legs. Perhaps others were more agile. So we did reach Zircon Creek in various ways. It is rather challenging when one looks back up the mountain we have just descended, reminding us of the distance we have just covered. Nevertheless it was a most satisfying and rewarding walk covering a wide range of vegetation and experiences.

Libby had to return to her garden as she was expecting a bus load. Such is the way of life in April in Mt Wilson. Some of us stayed a little while, enjoying the company and the conversation.

Our May Walk

FRIDAY, 21ST MAY 2004

THE ENGINEERS' TRACK off the DARLING CAUSEWAY between Bell & Mt Victoria

This new walk has been planned for some time but weather conditions & other factors have prevented it being held. It is not a very long walk, nor is it spectacular. The track follows an up and down pattern but generally the grades are gradual. As our February Issue stated this track is of great historical interest when the NSW Government was considering using the Grose Valley as a route for the railway across the mountains. These surveys took place in the late 1850's. It is a complicated but fascinating story. Fortunately this plan never eventuated. Andy Macqueen has written about the proposal in his book, "Back from the Brink" The Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness. He calls the chapter concerning the railway as 'The Great Railway Foolery'!

MEET AT 9.30 A.M. ON THE DARLING CAUSEWAY opposite the turn off to Little Hartley and Collitts Inn. You can drive in and park near the railway on the eastern side or railway side of the road. OR

MEET at MERRY GARTH at 9.00a.m.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea

A note that it is our 14th Birthday in May 2004.

FURTHER WALKS

Friday, 18th June 2004 Govetts Leap to Evans Lookout.

Friday, 16th July 2004 Centennial Glen Blackheath.

Friday, 20th August 2004 To the Cox's River; the second section of the 6 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.

BUSH CARE

14th May will be the next date to remember for Bush Care. We will be continuing to attack the section of bushland opposite Rimon Cottage in Waterfall Road from 9.00a.m. to noon.

On Friday 11th June 2004 meet at the same place and at the same time.

Friday, 9th July 2004 ??

For further information Contact Beth Raines 4756 2121

MEMBERS NEWS

One of our more recent members, Diana Landsberg of 'Withycombe Cottage' Mt Wilson has just returned from a month's travel overseas visiting family members. Diana and Joe will be very busy on Mothers Day weekend opening 'Withycombe' along with Libby and Keith at Merry Garth, to assist organizations helping the welfare of refugees released from detention. 'Sefton Cottage' and 'Windy Ridge' are also involved.

Libby and Keith are off for a wonderful holiday in June overseas. No doubt there will be much walking involved. We wish them a truly wonderful experience and a complete change of activity and environment.

Our thoughts go out to one of our founding members, Helen Naylor, of Mt Irvine whose husband, Ron is still confined to hospital. Both Ron and Helen were wonderful supporters and helped enormously in our early days.

FOR OUR MAY WALK

Contact **Libby Raines** on 4756 2121 or **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.