

The Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine

Friday 19th October 2007

At the end of Mt Irvine Road a ridge extends northward between the Wollamgambe River and Bowens Creek. Today we would follow a track along this ridge mainly through open woodland and emerge onto a large expanse of sandstone surrounded by heath. This is the aptly named Tessellated Pavement. The Macquarie Dictionary gives a definition of tessellated as “formed or arranged in a chequered or mosaic pattern” and a mosaic is certainly what comes to mind as you walk onto the geometrically patterned surface of this platform.

Merry Garth, the gardens resplendent in their colourful spring robes, was the meeting place chosen by most of the walkers on this clear sunny morning. We then set off in convoy past the magnificent exotic floral displays of various Mt Wilson properties and along that beautiful stretch of road that winds through the rainforest near Cathedral Reserve. In the Zircon Creek area the scene was decorated with the mauve blooms of an occasional Mint Bush (*Prostanthera sp*) standing out against the overwhelming greenness of the roadside vegetation.

As we proceeded toward Mt Irvine additional cars tagged along behind us and there were other walkers already waiting at the spot where we parked the cars. We were joined today by Wendy Holland and her friend Jenny, Graeme and Judy Tribe were accompanied by friends Michael and Christine and Ken Poppett, who was introduced to the group by Ellis Reynolds, also joined us today; welcome to you all and we hope you enjoyed the experience.

After a careful count I determined there were twenty-eight in the group as we proceeded along the fire trail. At the point where we leave the fire trail to take the track along the ridge Helen Naylor was waiting to join the group bringing the number to twenty-nine, including me this time.

Helen's father Harold Morley was one of the three pioneer settlers who took up land in Mt Irvine in 1897. Not that long ago a young Helen ran free in this area and still lives on part of that original selection. I'm sure this was a nostalgic journey for her. Indeed off to the left as we commence this walk a gully wends its way down to the Wollamgambe carrying Morley Creek named after Helen's father.

The group now proceeded in single file along the narrow track which winds through the understorey. There was a distinct feeling of an Australian summer in the air; that unique eucalypt aroma intensified by the heat and the constant rhythmic drone of the cicada serenade. The numerous Aussie salutes indicated the ubiquitous bush flies were making their presence felt. All these are signs that summer is nigh.

Near the start of the track the ground was adorned with the tiny four-petalled white flowers of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*) and a little further on the Blue

Dampiera (*Dampeira stricta*) put in an appearance. The trees along this ridge include the Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) displaying their silky smooth pink and grey hued bark, many contorted and gnarled Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) carrying the scars of past fire damage with their silver/grey bark inscribed by the convoluted doodling of insect larvae and Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) with their rough fibrous bark.

The Bush Peas (*Pultenaea sp*) and the Eggs and Bacon or Parrot-peas (*Dillwynia sp*) fill the landscape with waves of gold. Pink Spider-flowers (*Grevillea sericea*) and white Wax Flowers (*Philotheca hispidulus*, formerly *Eriostemon*) float throughout this sea of yellow. Fiendish little horned seedpods are cloaked by the foliage of an occasional Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*) whose blossoms provide flashes of red. The graceful feathery leaves and delicate lilac flowers of the Native Indigo (*Indigofera australis*) add a touch of softness to the scene.

As the track twists and turns, undulating gently along the ridge top we pass the first of two bare earthen lyrebird mounds we were to encounter today. The male lyrebird stands atop this mound preening and displaying, running through its extensive vocabulary of mimicry, endeavouring to convince its audience that it is the most attractive option. One is reminded of a campaign presently being waged elsewhere by birds of a different feather, the habits similar, the name analogous.

We divert to the left and emerge onto a rock platform which affords magnificent views into the gorge cut by the Wollangambe. Rugged vertical cliffs are visible at a point where the river sweeps toward the west before resuming its northerly flow. The expansive panorama across the seemingly never ending ridges and valleys was stunning and apart from some landmarks that could be identified in Mt Wilson there were few signs of human occupation. Soon after returning to the track we divert right and find ourselves on a bare rock outcrop overlooking Bowens Creek. In contrast to the previous view we now take in the cleared farmland of Mount Tootie and Little Mount Tootie, patches of light green pastures surrounded by bushland.

There was something quite odd about this vantage point. The very observant in the group may have noticed that unlike the platform overlooking the Wollangambe, this area was devoid of small rocks. If something were needed to throw at some attacking animal or a dissident walker it was not to be had here. Was it a mysterious quirk of nature that had deemed this spot would not be littered with small stones, as is the case along the rest of this ridge? Was there some other reason for the dearth of any decent gibbers here? One of the culprits was in our midst! A young Helen Naylor (then Helen Morley) and other local kids used to gather at this spot and throw rocks over the edge, counting how long it took for them to reach the bottom. This game was obviously repeated until the supply of ammunition became severely depleted; the spirit of Sir Isaac Newton would have been well pleased.

Continuing along this wonderfully enclosed path which imparts a feeling of belonging to the landscape we pass many magnificent examples of Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*).

This is the dominant species of the *Banksia* genus in this area and many variations in growth habit were on display. Gnarled stunted trees which would be at home in any May Gibbs children's story stood alongside straighter trees, some growing tall and vertical while others took on a decided list. A twin-trunked tree had taken on the laws of gravity and lost, one trunk splitting from its base and now lying forlornly on the forest floor. As we dropped down into a sheltered dell the trunks of several *Banksia* carried a light crust of pinkish coloured lichen while their branches were adorned with delicate greenish/grey bearded lichens.

In stark contrast to the moist, mist-shrouded atmosphere which prevailed here on our last visit in October 2003 the area has been parched by the recent hot winds and early summer conditions. The thick moss that blankets the many boulders and rock outcrops scattered throughout this sheltered area is dry and coarse to the touch. Sprouting from a tree hollow the strap like leaves of a Snake Orchid (*Cymbidium suave*) surround a cluster of flower buds about to burst into bloom.

At the far extent of this charming glade stands a wind worn rock face. Under the ledge on one end of this wall of rock was a sloping stack of sandstone wafers, an intriguing sight. The eroded cavern at the opposite end of the wall contained a circular cavity in the ceiling that had been chosen by a lyrebird as a perfect nesting site. The nest chamber formed by the tangle of interwoven sticks and the sandstone cavity must have proved effective for the nest has been used for many years. The rock-face here is decorated with a shawl of Rock Felt-fern (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*).

Skirting around this outcrop we climb to a higher level where we pass a small cluster of Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) waiting patiently for the correct time to burst into bloom. Nearby there were a few examples of that rather uncommon member of the Tea-tree family the *Leptospermum macrocarpum* displaying its large pink tinged flowers. The Large Wedge Pea (*Gompholobium grandiflorum*) was also present here lighting up the scene with its showy yellow blossoms.

Once more we divert to the left to take in the overwhelming beauty of a large drift of Pale-pink Boronia (*Boronia floribunda*). Such a concentrated mass of these small shrubs in full flower is a stunning sight; abundant flowers indeed.

Soon we scramble down a short steep incline and emerge onto the Tessellated Pavements. The mosaic patterns of pentagonal and hexagonal shapes on the sandstone platform are quite intriguing, made more so by the fact that some areas of the pavement carry no pattern at all. Ironstone protrusions form rims of what were shallow moss-bordered pools on our last visit here but are at this time completely dry. On the downhill extent of the platform a domed patterned section of rock gives the impression of a giant turtle shell. Despite the prevailing dry conditions there are several hardy dwellers decorating the platform including the Rice Flower (*Pimelea sp*) with their large heads of tubular white flowers and on the lower edges of the pavement a large cluster of Tufted Blue Lilies (*Thelionema caespitosum*) illuminated the area with their bright blue six petalled flowers sitting atop slender stems.

It is not surprising that this rock shelf also contains a carving of a female figure and several sharpening grooves. The Indigenous people who occupied this area would have appreciated its elevated position affording distant views and were perhaps also intrigued by the unusual natural patterns. To be here on a day such as this it is abundantly clear why the original inhabitants would have chosen a site such as this in which to spend time creating rock art and fashioning tools.

We indulged in a leisurely lunch sitting in what shade was on offer around the edges of the platform. Libby, ever thoughtful, produced not one but two bushwalker cakes to feed the masses. Relaxed and sated we reluctantly retraced our path back to the cars to the continuous accompaniment of the song of the cicadas.

Ray Harrington invited us to have afternoon tea at his and Kathy's enchanting property 'Chalumeau'. What nicer way to end the walk than taking in the expansive views beyond this lovingly groomed garden with its array of unusual exotic trees and then viewing Ray and Kathy's exquisite artworks adorning the studio walls. Molly the dog also seemed to appreciate the extra attention.

So we headed back to Mt Wilson, but the day was not over yet. Near Zircon Creek Libby motioned us to stop and led us along the road which leads to Fields Selection. Only a short distance from the main road was a stunning display of tall Boronia, perhaps Pinnate Boronia (*Boronia pinnata*), a sea of pink against a backdrop of mauve provided by an abundance of Mint Bush (*Prostanthera sp.*). A breathtaking finale to yet another marvellous day in the mountains.