

Boronia Point via the Byways of Mt Wilson

Friday 20th April 2007

It was one of those magical autumnal mornings when we gathered for our April walk. The sun lit up the Wynstay fields highlighting the remnants of the old windmill standing forlornly near the foot of the hillside. The pocket of rainforest opposite Merry Garth was decorated by an intricate tracery of light and shade. Complementing these scenes were glimpses of the magnificent garden skilfully created and lovingly nurtured by Libby and Keith.

Many in the group I am sure would have been content to spend the day soaking up the ambience of this tranquil neck of the woods. Victoria however had bravely and single-handedly negotiated the route from her city abode, through thick fog, across the formidable barrier of the mountains and found her way to the gates of Merry Garth; how could she be deprived of a walk after such an effort?

We welcomed Moira and Ron Green along with Stephanie Culliton who were joining us for the first time today and the group of eighteen then set off to explore the back lanes of Mt Wilson.

Davies and Galway Lanes together present one of the prettiest thoroughfares imaginable yet when you drop down into the rainforest behind Campanella Cottage you enter a different world. This enchanting enclosed domain dominated by forest giants also contains tiny gems like the brilliant red new growth of the Rasp Ferns (*Doodia aspera*) decorating the ground while clumps of orchids compete with the Rock-felt Ferns (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*) for a toehold on trunks and branches. Contributing to the canopy of this forest are Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) with their aromatic leaves and scaly bark, Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) with their lichen blotched trunks and the huge Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia* var. *compar*) at this time carrying many yellow flower spikes much to the delight of the local avian population. The view through the towering trunks of these trees as they march down the steep hillside toward Waterfall Creek is something special.

Libby pointed out a mature Possumwood (*Quintinia sieberi*) with its corky bark. The seeds of this tree typically germinate on the trunks of tree ferns, the Possumwood eventually killing its host as it matures. An example of a young specimen was noted close by protruding from the side of an ill-fated tree fern.

Soon we followed a track down the hill that led to a small dam which provides water for nearby properties. This tiny pondage nestling in the sheltered gully presented an appealing scene. The pendulous nest of a Yellow-throated Scrubwren was suspended from a branch above the water. The group was quietly absorbing the charm of this place when someone mentioned leeches. I immediately wondered what possible connection petrol companies could have to this spot when I noticed people checking arms and legs and realised the reference was to the far less voracious blood-sucking variety.

On returning to the boundaries of the properties on the edge of this forest we provided some entertainment for a group of chooks who ceased their scratching and foraging to cast beady eyes on the passing parade. Libby pointed out a patch of Periwinkle encroaching on the edge of the forest and stated there is also a quite large area on the banks below the church. These intrusions of exotic species into native bushland will of course be a continuing occurrence in a garden village like Mt Wilson and underlines the importance of the work carried out by the local Bush Care Group.

This walk was taking on a community affairs flavour for we also discussed the status of designated laneways as we continued on toward Cathedral Reserve. As we approached the picnic area Libby surprised us all when she doubled back toward where we had just been. Of course there was a good reason for this move as it led us into the rainforest adjacent to the reserve. We moved down the slope and followed the creek line through this delightful area past trees whose buttressed bases and exposed spreading roots were swathed in velvety mosses. This dry creek bed was bridged in several places by fallen tree trunks and in one case by a tree fern which although lying horizontally had twisted its trunk to support a healthy head of fronds.

Emerging onto Mt Irvine Road we crossed into that jewel of the mountain, the Cathedral of Ferns. We wandered slowly through this wondrous space past fantastically gnarled trees, thick serpentine vines and Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) whose gracefully curved trunks added to the whimsical aura in this forest.

Having paid a quick visit to the 'Giant Tree', that battle scarred old Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) which looms over this area, we made our way out of the forest and continued up toward Lambs Hill. The lush growth here on the margin of the rainforest is accentuated by the curtains of Hanging Moss (*Papillaria sp*) which festoon the trees. We veered right and followed the route of the power line along another of the byways which delivered us to the Happy Valley Picnic Area where we paused for morning tea.

Continuing on we follow yet another of the back roads which skirts around the western and northern flanks of a hill. This route offers magnificent views across the Wollangambe Wilderness and the rugged terrain of the Wollemi National Park beyond. It also provides a not so magnificent view of the old rubbish tip which thankfully the regrowth of the bush is slowly camouflaging. Soon we are back on Mt Irvine Road near the start of Farrer Road West and head off along the fire trail which leads to Boronia Point.

Initially we are in sheltered woodland and dip down into a gully where there is a fine stand of Rough Tree-ferns (*Cyathea australis*). As we move along the ridge the woodland is more open and contains Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*) along with many Stringybarks. The Heath, Hairpin and Old Man Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*, *B. spinulosa* and *B. serrata*) are all well represented on this ridge. Soon the dominant tree is the Hard-leaved Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) whose glowing smooth silver/grey trunks contrast with the pinkish bark on the occasional Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) present in this area.

Soon the fire trail began to descend and beside the track was a Sourbush (*Choretrum candollei*) displaying its tiny creamy/white flowers. Nearby was another of Mother Nature's little quirks; climbing through the rigid sharply pointed foliage of a Prickly Shaggy-pea (*Podolobium ilicifolium*) were the soft convoluted stems of the Curly Sedge or Old Man's Whiskers (*Caustis flexuosa*) providing a distinct contrast in plant forms. Beside the trail was a lone fully developed mushroom while on the track another two feisty fungi were forcing their way up through the hard compacted soil.

We were now in open heath-like country as we approached the cliff edge at Boronia Point. The boronias of course were not in flower at this time however a tiny splash of red was provided by the female flowers of the Scrub She-oak (*Allocasuarina distyla*) which was prominent here displaying their elongated cones with pointed ends.

What an impressive place to settle down for lunch. Framed by the silhouette of Lambs Hill are the majestic cliffs formed by the action of the Wollangambe as over aeons it cut its tortuous path through the sandstone. From far below us came the soothing sound of the water as it snaked along the river course cutting deeper still. Occasionally the sun glinted off the water as it cascaded into deep green pools. Seemingly defying the laws of gravity a Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea sp*) grew right on the edge of the cliff thrusting its scape out over the void.

Reluctantly we left this magnificent spot to make the return journey to Merry Garth. Along the way, in keeping with the community affairs flavour which had developed earlier, the 'wheelie bins' and 'port-a-loos' at the various picnic grounds prompted discussions on the complexities of garbology and the closet science of toilets, however we didn't let ourselves get too bogged down.

The logs stored in the Wynstay field provided ideal seating for our usual after walk refreshments, a fitting end to yet another great walk in glorious weather.

Now all that remained was for Victoria to find her way home again. Do hope she didn't run up a huge E-tag bill inadvertently exploring the toll road system of Sydney.