

## **Du Faurs Rocks and the Pheasants Cave Track – Our Christmas Walk**

Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007

Over the past year we have covered an amazing variety of terrain under varying weather conditions. We have explored rainforest and heath lands, plateaux and gorges. We have lunched on the edge of escarpments with panoramic views and beside a pond rimmed with sphagnum moss in a rocky crater. We have climbed sandstone pagodas and wandered along picturesque village lanes. Come with me then as we fleetingly revisit the venues we explored during 2007.

What better way to start the year than to assemble in the Fairy Glen at Merry Garth before following Matthie's Track down through the rainforest as we headed for The Throne overlooking Bowens Creek? We visited the remains of the Old Mill and skirted around the Wynstay dam as we made our way to the falls on an almost dry Waterfall Creek. Following the village roads we arrived at Wynnes Rocks Lookout and then returned to a newly raked track which dropped steeply down to a lovely little creek and climbed to the bottom of the zigzag where we had cars waiting to transport us back to Merry Garth.

February saw us assemble at Leura where we walked beside the cascades replenished by the recent welcome rains. A closed track brought Plan B into effect and we called at several lookouts before dropping down through the Fern Bower, past gushing waterfalls to emerge into the cathedral-like space beneath the canopy of the Leura Forest. The Federal and Dardanelles Pass tracks led us to the Katoomba Falls and the Scenic World boardwalks.

Gooch's Crater, that magical spot among the pagodas on the Newnes Plateau was our destination for March. Walking in this spectacular area is always a special experience made even more so today when we employed a rope to assist in descending a steep rock face. The clear waters of the lagoon enclosed by the crater walls carried many thin-stemmed rushes waving in the gentle breeze.

April saw us once more exploring the byways of Mt Wilson as we made our way from Merry Garth to Boronia Point. This walk offered a mix of lush rainforest, quaint village lanes, open woodland and heath. The views from Boronia Point down to the Wollangambe as it snakes its way between imposing sandstone cliffs are spectacular.

The rain on the day of our May walk caused several changes of plans. We finally opted to walk the Furber Steps. Suitably clad in our rain gear we plunged into the bush, moisture dripping from the canopy and water flowing down the rock faces. Katoomba Falls in full flow are a special sight and the cascades at Witches Leap were stunning.

Cloudy conditions greeted us on Mt York in June as we gathered to walk the Coxs Road to Hartley Vale and return via Lockyers Road. The remaining evidence of what was achieved by the work gangs in constructing these roads in the early 1800's with what would have been very basic equipment indicates a high degree of skill and tenacity. This walk was completed in light rain which brings a special atmosphere to the bush.

Quite a large group gathered to explore the fantastic granite tors of Evans Crown in July. A brisk breeze whipped around these majestic stone sculptures and here and there, in protected little nooks, were remnants of the snow which had fallen in this area a few days earlier.

We gathered at John and Kay Meade's property at Mountain Lagoon before driving the last six kilometres to the starting point for our August walk to the junction of the Colo River and Tootie Creek. This walk initially followed a ridge which afforded magnificent views and provided an amazing diversity of vegetation. At the end of the ridge a steep track led down to the sandy riverbank.

In September we returned to the Newnes Plateau to explore the Lost City. We were blessed with a perfectly clear sunny day on which to wander among these dramatic pagoda formations sitting above the headwaters of the Marrangaroo Creek.

The intriguing geometric patterns of the Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine drew us to our October venue. We were treated to the glorious sight of a drift of Pale-pink Boronia and to dramatic views into Bowens Creek and the Wollangambe River as we proceeded along the ridge which gives access to this rock platform. We partook of afternoon tea at Ray and Kath Harrington's beautiful property 'Chalumeau'.

The valleys were filled with mist as the group began their walk into the Grand Canyon at Blackheath for the November walk. This is a lovely place to walk at any time but more so after rain when water cascades from the rock overhangs and the greenness of the moss that covers the rocks and embankments is accentuated by the abundant moisture.

Thus we come to the last walk of the year. We gathered at Merry Garth for this afternoon walk to be followed by the Christmas barbecue. Today we were joined by Marion Bearup, Janelle Nesci and David Newman and at the start of Du Fours Rocks Road we met up with Mary and Ellis Reynolds' daughter Sue and her son Vaschka bringing the number of walkers to twenty-four. Welcome to you all.

We set off along Galwey Lane and stopped as Libby pointed out the refurbishment work being carried out on the Wynstay stables and recounted some history of the property. Before we had even reached Waterfall Road leeches were spotted lurking in the undergrowth ready to pounce and suck the lifeblood from their victims. This prompted much tucking of trousers into socks, application of repellent sprays and other evasive action. What does a poor defenceless leech have to do for a feed these days?

We continued past Chimney Cottage, through Gregson Park and along Wyndham Avenue. At the construction sites for the houses replacing Wyndham and Applecot Libby explained some of the history of the original buildings and we carried on to The Avenue. Here Libby led us into the community block to be named the Marcus Clark Reserve. A meandering wood chip path has recently been laid through this area. There were many examples of the Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) here, as indeed there were in many areas on this walk, displaying their showy heads of bright pink flowers.

The short stroll down the gravel road which leads to Du Fours Rocks leads us past some interesting vegetation. There is the uncommon root-parasitic shrub *Atkinsonia ligustrina*, devoid of blossom at the moment though it does normally flower from October to December. (We encountered a second example of this shrub in the vicinity of the Table Top Rock.) Also here is the exquisite little Slender Violet (*Hybanthus monopetalus*) most definitely in flower for you would hardly notice this little plant when it was not displaying its bluish mauve blossom which gives the appearance of having only one fan-like petal.

Close to the lookout the sandstone carries a cluster of sharpening grooves indicating the original inhabitants of the area appreciated the grandeur of this spot. Many tadpoles populated one of the transitory pools of water here, a common sight some years ago but unfortunately now rare enough to attract attention.

We had afternoon tea here while taking in the magnificent views along with Libby's traditional bushwalking cake. Some in the group opted for the short version of today's walk and returned to Merry Garth via the Village Walk to assist in preparations for the evening barbecue. The remainder headed off toward the Chinamans Hat formation. This cliff top track takes us past some more sharpening grooves and depressions carved into the rock to hold water, an essential element when fashioning and sharpening tools.

The recent rains have brought the bush to life, evidenced by the prolific lush new growth on the Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*) and Broad-leaf Geebungs (*Persoonia levis*). We drop down below the cliff line and dodge (or not, whatever your inclination) the trickles and drops of water which plummet from the cliff edge far above. The plinking, plonking and plashing as the falling water hits the tiny pools on the floor of the overhang provides a lilting melody which echoes off these spectacular cliff faces. The orange and golden sandstone of these cliffs contains a horizontal seam of pebbles, the remnants of some ancient creek bed which flowed aeons ago.

The rock walls are decorated with Dragons Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) and a grass-like plant carrying many minute white flowers possibly *Alania endlicheri*. The Dog Rose (*Bauera rubioides*) was prolific, decorating the trackside with its delicate pink flowers bowing shyly. Not at all shy was young Vaschka who bounced along the track leaping from rock to rock, ah what a bonus it would be to have just a shred of that youthful energy.

In a sheltered little corner there were many varieties of fern and the Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*) was prominent with its glossy bright green leaves. Cedar Wattles (*Acacia elata*) towered skyward seeking the sun, their distinctive cream new growth standing out against the dark green mature foliage. The track climbed slightly and a few Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) were sighted. Quite large drifts of this splendid flower soon followed. In this more open country the Tea-trees (*Leptospermum sp*) were putting on a display with their multitude of green centred white flowers.

By the time we reached the point where the stairs back to Du Fours Rocks meet this track Libby realised we would be hard pressed to reach Pheasants Cave and get back in time for the barbecue. It was decided we would continue on to a point which gives a view down into the little valley in which Pheasants Cave nestles. We spent a short time here admiring this verdant vale and while doing so noticed orchid flowers extending above a clump of sharp edged grass. A quick check of Burnum Burnum's guidebook showed them to be the Large Tongue-orchid or Cow Orchid (*Cryptostylis subulata*). It was an orchid I had not seen before and I suspect that whoever gave it the common name of Cow Orchid had never seen a cow before.

So we headed back to Du Fours Rocks via the 'short cut stairs' and continued back to Merry Garth along the Village Walk. As the group was walking down Davies Lane Helen Freeman drove by offering anyone a lift for the last two hundred metres or so. Most declined this kind offer but not George Knott. George clambered into the back seat, wound down the window and gave a regal wave as they passed the rest of the group. George VII perhaps?

It was a beautifully clear still evening as, thanks to the generosity and hospitality of Libby, Keith and Beth we gathered in the blessed enclosure of Merry Garth to bid farewell to yet another year of fabulous walks. Who could not be enthralled by what these mountains have to offer and who could not be fired with anticipation and enthusiasm for the adventures awaiting us in the coming year?