

## Evans Crown at Tarana

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2007

“My course is down the Riverlett (Fish River); it appears to lead me north of west; on the north side of it at this place is a remarkable Sugar Loaf Hill having a stone peak of it, which I named after myself.”

The above was entered in the diary of the Assistant Surveyor George William Evans on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1813. He had been sent by Governor Macquarie to survey the route taken by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson and to explore further west. It explains how this place was named and indicates that George saw no point in being modest.

Following a vehicle rationalisation at Mt Victoria we set off on this beautifully crisp winter morning and headed west. Our little convoy of five cars dropped down the Pass of Victoria, continued through Little Hartley and Hartley, climbed River Lett Hill and left the highway at Old Bowenfels. We stopped at the viewing area adjacent to the dam wall which holds back the waters of the Coxs River to form Lake Lyell. Following a quick look at the structure with its ingenious fuse gates in the spillway to manage floodwaters (should they ever arrive again) and after watching a pair of ducks decorate the dark water with chevron ripples as they scooted across the surface we resumed our journey.

The grazing country we now travel through presents many picturesque scenes. The black ribbon of road itself adds a sense of scale and perspective as it winds through this undulating landscape. Although there is little frost on the fields many of the farm dams carry a layer of ice. Most of the creeks which wend their way through the countryside are clearly defined by willows while poplars line many of the roads and laneways, both displaying the intricate skeletal form of leafless branches in their winter guise. We cross a loop of the Main Western Railway, pass through the tiny village of Sodwalls and just beyond the locality of Sandy Hollow we turn onto a side road which leads us to the entrance for the Evans Crown Reserve.

Waiting for us at the car park were several more walkers bringing the number of participants to twenty-five. Our Swiss connection, Marie and Heinz Krenger were back with us today along with their nephew Mathew who hails from Wagga Wagga. We also welcomed back Jan Northam who has not been able to join us for some time. It was great to welcome so many walkers on this magnificent day and following greetings all round we set off toward the summit.

From the initial flat ground where Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) is prominent the track rises fairly steeply, however it soon turns sharply left and then tends to follow the contours of the hillside at a gentler grade. Beside the track are some quite large Blackthorns (*Bursaria spinosa*), their mature trunks displaying deeply furrowed bark near their base and at the tips of their branches are clusters of tiny heart-shaped seed capsules. As we gain elevation pink gravel from the decomposed granite becomes apparent on the track surface and partially exposed boulders appear on the slopes. The brilliant red and

pink galls on the bright green leaves of a young trackside tree presented an attractive display to us but were probably not so appealing to the tree in question.

Soon the grassy slope above the track is interspersed with expanses of granite which carry velvety cascades of lush mosses and are encrusted with silvery lichens. Not far past this area we decide it is time for morning tea. This spot, sheltered from the brisk breeze, offers expansive views of the farmland now far below. The course of the Fish River can be seen winding its way through the open fields toward the Hampton State Forest. Occasionally the eye is drawn by the movement of a vehicle on one of the gravel roads which meander through the landscape leading to the farmhouses and sheds that are dotted sparsely across the panorama. The distant lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep is occasionally interspersed with strident screeching as a flock of cockatoos wheels across the paddocks below.

As we continue climbing we pass car-sized granite boulders that are soon supplanted by house-sized tors. We are now on more level ground atop the hill and are surrounded by an amazing array of monoliths. Some of these pink hued giants stand alone in isolated grandeur while others sit atop each other in haphazard arrangements giving the appearance of building blocks abandoned by some petulant young colossus. Many of the small caves formed below and between these stacks are used by the local animal population as evidenced by the scats on their floors.

These amazing edifices start their life underground as molten rock. Huge blocks, essentially rectangular in shape, are formed due to movement and faulting as cooling occurs. Water seeps into these cracks taking off the sharp edges and making the blocks more rounded. Much of this reshaping takes place underground however once the landscape is eroded sufficiently to expose the granite, weathering accelerates, creating the wondrous forms we see today. The granite consists of silica, mica and feldspars. The soils on this reserve are so sandy and erode very easily because the mica and feldspars weather very readily to leave behind only the grains of sand.

We make our way to a vantage point atop one of these tors which offers even more expansive views of the surrounding countryside but also reveals other stacks of these massive rocks. Some give the appearance of being perched so precariously that the slightest push would send them thundering down the hillside while others squat so firmly it is hard to imagine any force on earth being sufficient to budge them. There are many small moss rimmed pools here in shallow depressions formed by weathering which has also resulted in “onion skins”, thin plates of granite, peeling from the rock surfaces. We lingered here for some time absorbing the sublime atmosphere of this special place. It is easy to understand why the Wiradjuri people considered this to be an exceptional area and used it for initiations and corroboree; it continues to hold high significance.

Moving on to explore other features we passed beneath a group of native Cypress (*Callitris sp*) some of which had spreading, slightly drooping branches indicating they may have been the Black Cypress Pine (*Callitris endlicheri*). A little further on we encountered a mini forest of *Eriostemon trachyphyllus* containing one quite large

specimen. These trees have abundant oil glands and when brushed against a strong, quite pleasant aroma is released.

It was in this area that the strange phenomenon of people seeing imitative shapes among the rocks began to take hold. Jan Northam could see the distinct form of a wombat, I heard a dinosaur get a mention, and on top of a large tor was a relatively thin rock conforming to the contours on which it rested; Jan named this the Hugging Rock. Ray Nesci expanded on this theme when he sighted two obelisk shaped rocks which looked as though they were once joined stating they must have lived together too long and had now split up. I was puzzling over this tendency to put names to formations when I walked through a short tunnel that afforded a view along the hillside and there in the middle distance was a formation which looked just like a thatched hut, it really did!

Among the vegetation we had sighted today were some fine examples of the Ribbon or Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) festooned with narrow strips of discarded bark, Mountain Gums (*Eucalyptus dalrympleana*) displaying their smooth white bark and Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) with its fibrous brown flaky bark. In the understorey are Narrow-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia linearis*) some having a smattering of bright yellow flowers while others carry smooth green berry-like fruit and at ground level there are wide swaths of Common Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) so thick in places that the fronds formed an almost continuous knee high carpet of green.

We crossed to the northern edge of this stony coronet and climbed to a sheltered space surrounded by granite walls where we settled down for lunch. Behind us was a terrace of brilliant green mosses and grasses which provided a stark contrast to the matt grey/green of the lichens that clung to the pink stone. The nooks and crannies of an ancient tree stump near the top of this terrace carried the remnants of a recent snowfall.

Following lunch we set off to explore one more area. From my position at the rear of the group I watched as people were swallowed up by the landscape as they disappeared between the huge boulders; shades of 'Picnic at Hanging Rock'. We emerged onto a large rock platform from which we had magnificent views of the cliff faces as they dropped to the valley below.

It may have been the rarefied atmosphere at this altitude of one thousand one hundred metres or possibly just my weird perspective of the world but it occurred to me that the crows that could be heard cawing mournfully in the distance were perhaps practising Graham Kennedy impersonations. Ray Nesci must have also been affected by the height for out of this thin air he informed the group that the reason the French eat snails is that they don't like fast food. I have absolutely no idea what any of this has to do with bushwalking.

Enough of this frivolity! It was time to head back to the car park and bring to an end yet another spectacular walk. When George Evans was in this area he commented that he was more pleased with the country every day. I'm sure those who participated today were also well pleased with the country.