
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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LEURA CASCADES TO

OUR JULY WALK

**LEURA CASCADES to
GORDON FALLS, POOL OF
SILOAM, LYREBIRD DELL**

Friday 17th July 2009

This promised to be a many faceted walk; features we would encounter today allude to royalty, biblical tales, treachery, murder, warfare, tribal culture, botanical mysteries and more. Throw in some touches of kitsch, imposing views, abundant natural beauty and a good day seemed assured.

Twenty walkers set off, with Libby back leading the group and Beth, her daughter, to join us later in the day. We moved past the mock rock arch and the fake stone toilet. These and similar imitation stone structures, situated at several locations in the mountains, evoke for me a sense of the recreational activities in the area of early last century. They may well fall into the kitsch category yet I do hope they will continue to be protected.

We made our way down the path beside Leura Falls Creek and gathered below the rock overhang which affords a great view back up the course of the Leura Cascades. On this sunny day the copious waters from recent rain



Winter in the Bush

GORDON FALLS

glistened as they tumbled over the many rock terraces and dropped into the sandy-bottomed pool at our feet. After taking our fill of this tranquil scene we retraced our steps up the creek line, noting along the way the remnants of path lights remaining from the days when the cascades were floodlit.

We turned onto the regally titled Prince Henry Cliff Walk which was opened in two stages; the Katoomba end in 1934 and the Gordon Falls end in 1936. Henry, Duke of

Gloucester was a son of King George V and became Governor General of Australia in 1945. He did however have an earlier intimate association with the Blue Mountains, visiting Katoomba in 1934; the scheduled ten minute stop at the railway station extending to a full twenty minutes. According to The Katoomba Daily of the time "... a very gay crowd, with pulses beating fast in anticipation united to form an atmosphere of brightness and cordiality which could not have been excelled."

We made our way along the eastern cliffline above the creek. Passing a towering Cedar Wattle (*Acacia elata*) we entered a bower of arching Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) then skirted around some rock shelters and made our way past the area known as Flying Fox Lookout. This spot is so named because material was once lowered from this point by

flying fox to the now defunct sewerage plant below.

Soon we divert to the right onto a narrow track that delivers us to Bridal Veil Lookout. This narrow vantage point perched on the cliff edge gives a stunning view of the falls; a narrow ribbon of water plunges down the left hand side of the cliff face while to the right a veil of water spreads thinly across the broad sloping rock face. In the foreground, clinging to the cliff below us, are several Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea sp*) their dark scapes thrusting skyward from tufts of long elegantly cascading leaves.

The area beside the track just above this lookout appeared an ideal place to indulge in morning tea. We sat surrounded by a plethora of native vegetation. Red Five-corners (*Styphelia tubiflora*) display a smattering of tubular flowers with their projecting stamens, Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) carry many ovate cones clinging to their stems, clusters of white flowers sit atop the stems of the Woollisia (*Woollisia pungens*). Many Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*), Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) and several varieties of Tea-tree including the Flaky-barked Tea-tree (*Leptospermum trinervium*) crowd the understorey beneath a low canopy containing Cliff Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus cunninghamii*). At ground level the sun glints off the convoluted glossy green stems of the Old Mans Whiskers or Curly Sedge (*Caustis flexuosa*); what a fine place this is to relax awhile.

Our next diversion takes us to Tarpeian Rock Lookout. The rock platform here is decorated with an amazing pattern of raised swirls of ironstone standing above the weathered sandstone.

Now picture this; a young vestal virgin betrays the ancient Romans to a hostile tribe from central Italy, the Sabines. Understandably, the Romans are not particularly overjoyed by this and take the girl to a high rock outcrop and it's not to show her the view - they toss her to her death. The young girl's name was Tarpeia, thus the outcrop became known as Tarpeian

Rock and gained a reputation as being a great place from which to dispatch traitors. How a rock outcrop in the Australian bush, on the other side of the world, came to take on the name I'm unsure, nor am I sure whether any virgins have been thrown from this point to test its effectiveness; the view however is fantastic.

The imposing form of Mount Solitary dominates the centre of this view, its impressive cliff faces dropping vertically to the talus slopes below. Kings Tableland, sitting atop the Kedumba Walls, stretches into the distance at the left of the scene leading the eye to the distant forms of Mount Jellore and Mount Gibraltar (The Gib) in the Southern Highlands. Below Castle Head the craggy parapets of the Ruined Castle nestle on the ridgeline which sweeps across to the right of Mount Solitary.

Cedar Valley lies between this ridge and the cliffs of Narrow Neck Plateau. The young English backpacker, Jamie Neale, had spent eleven nights lost in this wild area undetected by the many people who gave so much of their time searching for him. Thankfully, only a few days prior to this walk, he emerged from the usually unforgiving bush near Medlow Gap at the far end of Narrow Neck Plateau; a very lucky and apparently resourceful individual indeed.

Continuing on we pass rock shelters on our left housing rather forlorn looking old seats while off to the right glimpses of the distant views can be seen through gaps in the vegetation. Closer at hand the pure white terminal flower heads of the Slender Rice Flowers (*Pimelia linifolia*) are beginning to emerge while an occasional *Epacris reclinata* clings to the rock ledges displaying tiny tubular red flowers. In more open areas the deep gold blossom of the Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalis*) decorates the setting.

As I looked back to the now distant Tarpeian Rock Lookout a lone figure stood there waving, returning the courtesy I continued along the track. It transpired that the waving figure was Libby's daughter Beth and my

myopic view of the scene failed to discern it was her, let alone that her hand signals indicated she intended to stop there for a quick drink and would catch up to us shortly.

We move into a more sheltered area where moisture seeps from the hanging swamps above. Passing an impressive stand of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) we reach Fernery Cave nestling in a small pocket of rainforest. Here Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*) thrive in the moist environment while a wide variety of ferns crowd below the rock overhang.

Presently we arrived at Olympian Rock Lookout, named after the home of the gods of ancient Greece. The sun god Apollo must have been home today, we spent quite some time here soaking up his gifts though Zephyrus added a little west wind. Beth caught up with us at this point and we lingered here awhile taking in the glorious scene before us. This point offered a quite different perspective of the Three Sisters and meandering creases in the thick canopy of the forest below traced the courses of Gordon and Leura Falls Creeks.

Leaving the home of the gods we proceed through some heath, round a point where the rock face above contains some extraordinary patterns and presently arrive at Buttenshaw Bridge. This bridge, which crosses a deep ravine, is named after E.A. Buttenshaw who, as Minister for Lands, opened this section of the Prince Henry Cliff Walk in 1936. The views from this bridge, both down into the narrow ravine and out to the valley are spectacular. On the upstream side of the bridge a couple of unusual trees growing from the depths below an old concrete dam wall attracted our attention; more on this later.

From this structure, located between Olympian Rock Lookout below and Olympian Parade above, not a single Greek God was visible. Instead, surveying the scene from the Leuralla amphitheatre was a larger than life effigy of the comic strip character Boofhead – a wonderful foil to the surrounding allusions to mythological triumphalism.

We continue on past Elysian Rock (named after a place of perfect happiness in Greek mythology) through open forest and heath and around Inspiration Point. A shady stretch of track containing many Soft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) delivers us to the turn off to Gordon Falls Lookout; despite its name this lookout has only very limited views of the falls but offers a fantastic panorama of the Jamison Valley.

Beside more examples of those kitsch mock rock structures we stopped for lunch in Gordon Falls Park.

After lunch we follow the path down toward Gordon Creek. This track initially passes through a grove of magnificent Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) and as we drop deeper into the moist gully the track is lined with Dragons Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) and Fishbone Water-fern (*Blechnum nudum*). Beside a towering cliff face aerial roots from trees high above hang dripping wet in the moist environment.

Soon we arrived at the Pool of Siloam, named after a biblical reference to a pool in Jerusalem where sight was bestowed upon the blind. This spot certainly opened one's eyes to the beauty of nature. A silver band of water tumbled down a dark rock face and splashed into a clear sand-rimmed pool. The rock beside the fall was clothed in lush green moss; King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) overarched the stream leading from the pool.

We then headed upstream to the large rock shelters at Lyrebird Dell. Stone artefacts that have been found in these shelters indicate Aboriginal occupation dating back at least twelve thousand years. The roof of the smaller of these shelters has an intriguing 'moon crater' pattern.

Two trees growing beside the small waterfall which drops into this little dell caught our attention. One carried tiny cup-shaped cream to pink flowers hanging below the smooth edged leaves. The other had prominently veined finely toothed leaves and carried a few tiny black berries. No one in the group could identify them and I sagely proffered they were

probably exotics, the seeds having washed down the creek from the residential area above. Later investigation by both Libby and John Meade confirmed they were indeed natives; the first was the Black or Southern Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*) and the second was the Black Oliveberry (*Elaeocarpus holopetalus*). Both of these trees are described as being uncommon and not often seen as they only grow in deep moist gullies.

Climbing the steps out of this little gully we encounter an Armistice Day memorial, '1918' embedded in a concrete step in ceramic tiles with '11/11/11' below; a rather poignant little reminder of the end of such a devastating conflict.

Just before we emerged from the bush back at Gordon Falls Park we were treated to the enchanting sight of a clump of Greenhood Orchids (*Pterostylis sp*) nestled among the grass. We then set off to retrace our outward journey. At the Buttenshaw Bridge it was noted that one of the trees in the deep gorge which attracted our attention this morning was the same as the mysterious flowering variety seen at Lyrebird Dell. (A confirmation that they prefer to grow in deep gullies as found later in the texts.)

Presently the melodious calls of the birds and the restful rustling of the trees were replaced by the dulcet drone of vehicles on Cliff Drive indicating our walk was drawing to a close.

Back at our starting point a birthday cake mysteriously appeared in celebration of Libby's birthday of the previous Tuesday, a birthday which, Libby remarked, was very special to her considering her health problems of the last year.

So we wended our ways home after yet another day absorbing the ambience and beauty of these magical mountains. Bliss!

John C

Member News

Mary Reynolds' operation was successfully carried out on 6th July and following ten nights

in hospital she is now recuperating at home and is well on her way to a full recovery. We all wish you well Mary.

OUR AUGUST WALK

Friday 21st August 2009

**Curious Crevices, Incredible Cliffs,
Bubbling Brooks and Placid Pools.**

Deep Pass on the Newnes Plateau

The group last visited this venue in May 2005. This is a relatively easy day made up of three separate circuits so you can opt out of one if you wish. It is a fascinating area with surprises for those who have not been to this spot before. **We would appreciate 4WD vehicles for the trip from Clarence, if you can help in this regard please contact Libby early to allow her plenty of time to organise the vehicle rationalisation.**

Meet at Clarence near the Zig Zag Railway at 9.00am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661. Remember it is important that you let us know in advance if you are coming on a walk.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 18th September 2009 – The Pipeline Track at Newnes in the Wolgan Valley

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated both by the other workers and by the native vegetation.

14th August 2009 at Gregson Park

11th September 2009 at Gregson Park

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details