
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NELLIES GLEN - THE

OUR MAY WALK

THE SIX FOOT TRACK - NELLIES GLEN to the MEGALONG CEMETERY

Friday 15th May 2009

On the 17th May 1990 seventeen walkers set out in mild and overcast conditions for the Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine. That walk was the genesis of the Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group, a splendid concept by Libby Raines enthusiastically supported by Mary Reynolds. This walk, the two hundred and fiftieth undertaken since that first venture, marks the nineteenth anniversary of the Group's formation.

We initially gathered near the rather forlorn Explorers Tree (now often referred to as *Eucalyptus concretus*) as the invigorating winds whipped through the crowns of the nearby stands of Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) and Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita*). We welcomed David Howell who was joining us for the first time, also Dennis and Sue Byrne, friends of Cheryl and Wayne Pascoe.

Those not involved in the longish car shuffle, once again efficiently organised by Libby,



Winter in the Bush

SIX FOOT TRACK

sought a sheltered spot at the lookout near the track head to have morning tea whilst awaiting the return of the rest of the group from Megalong Cemetery. (No rising from the dead involved; merely transporting people back from the car shuffle.) Presently we had a full complement of twenty-one walkers assembled at the top of the Glen.

Were we fazed about tackling this walk in the chill windy conditions? Not on your Nelly!

Nellies Glen was once known as the Megalong Cleft and Blacks Ladder. It took its present name from the daughter of John Britty North the founder of the Katoomba Coal and Shale Co that commenced mining the coal seam below the Katoomba escarpment around 1879. To haul coal from the valley JB North built the track which has since become the Scenic Railway; his family home was 'Essendene', a two-storeyed house which was located not far from Nellies Glen.

As we dropped into this enclosed chasm we were sheltered from the strong winds. The steep path led us down beside a sheer rock face clothed in mosses and lichens dripping with moisture. Beside the path, fungi of varying shapes colours and sizes were attached to decaying tree trunks, hastening their inevitable return to the soil from which they came.

The colours of the distant sun-drenched cliffs below Narrow Neck Plateau appeared more vibrant when viewed through the gap from this relatively dimly lit area. The impressive exposed vertical cliff to our immediate left was devoid of any vegetation while the more sheltered bluff to our right was embellished with ferns and stunted cascading flora. A fallen giant of the forest lay supine on the steep slope, its trunk striated with shallow longitudinal furrows.

Dropping deeper into this narrow cleft we cross several tiny rills; water trickling across the rocky track. Coachwoods (*Cerapetalum apetalum*) tower above us, their canopies capturing the majority of sunlight allowing only thin slivers to penetrate and light up the recesses of the gully. King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) line the transient watercourses; many overarched by the ubiquitous Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*). The bare dark trunks of Cedar Wattle (*Acacia elata*) appear as soaring poles topped with foliage seeking the life sustaining energy of the sun.

Soon the track crosses Megalong Creek below a series of delightful little cascades; silver bands dividing the deep green of moss encrusted rocks. Here, though we were still well protected, gusts of wind could be heard bustling through the treetops as the glen becomes more exposed to the open valley. Beside the track in this vicinity the sometimes harsh reality of nature was evidenced by the scattered feathers of a bird which had been 'invited to dinner'.

Gradually the forest becomes more open; glimpses of the sandstone abutments high above can be seen through the foliage. The forest floor is now drier, scattered with large boulders and smaller rocks that have crashed down from the escarpment over millennia. The Smooth-barked Apple or Sydney Red Gum (*Angophora costata*) becomes prominent here and the King Ferns are replaced by tall Rough Tree-ferns (*Cyanthea australis*). A lone Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*) stands among the Angophoras, displaying its brilliant yellow-orange newly exposed bark.

The track meanders through this pleasant shaded woodland emerging onto Nellies Glen Road which follows Megalong Creek down through the valley. Here Hard-leaved Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) are predominant; their glistening silver-grey trunks beautifully complemented by the hundreds of golden flower spikes on the Hairpin Banksias (*Banksia spinulosa*) scattered throughout the understorey. On reaching the junction of the Dixons Ladder (now removed) and Devils Hole track we paused for lunch in the warming sun.

A short distance past our lunch spot is the site of the old Megalong Village. Although discovered in 1870 mining of the kerosene shale commenced at the Glen Shale Mine in the valley around 1892 and a small village grew to house the workers and their families; it contained a school, general store, bakery, butchery, hotel and a hall where Saturday night dances were held. Twenty thousand tons of export quality shale was extracted with an additional forty thousand tons of lesser quality material. A tunnel was driven under Narrow Neck (the Daylight Tunnel, 3 metres high by 2.7 metres wide) to transport the shale to the tramway leading to what is now the Scenic Railway, here the shale was hauled up to the Western Railway.

At the height of activity there were around two hundred people living in the village. Full-scale mining only lasted about five years and the village quickly waned following the decline in operations. The hotel was moved to Katoomba by bullock team and re-erected in Lurline Street; most of the other buildings were demolished and the building materials used elsewhere. Today a lone horse occupies the site.

The Six Foot Track continues along Nellies Glen Road, sturdy steel stiles being provided to allow easy passage over the property boundary fences along the way. Tea-tree, Hakea, Wattle and Banksia line the track as it meanders beside Megalong Creek. It was very pleasant ambling along this wide track; the sun was shining, bellbirds were chiming, the cares of the world were a million miles away.

Presently drumbeats of the bush telegraph could be heard; the Nokia message stick brought tidings from the deep south. 'It's a boy! It's a boy!' reverberated through the ether. Helen Freeman's daughter Mel, who resides in Melbourne, had just given birth to Jack Thomas and the group roundly cheered his arrival into this wonderful world.

Soon the countryside gradually changes to cleared grazing land and off to our left is the old Oakburn Homestead, previously known as Glenwood, the only early homestead remaining along the Six Foot Track. It once served as the Megalong Post Office run by Jane O'Reilly as postmistress while her husband Peter contracted to deliver mail throughout the valley on horseback. Peter and Jane were the parents of Bernard O'Reilly who wrote *Green Mountains, Cullenbenbong* and *Over the Hills*. In these books he describes the family's life in the Kanimbla and Megalong Valleys, the development of O'Reilly's Guesthouse at Green Mountain in Queensland and his epic search for and discovery of survivors of the Stinson aircraft that had crashed in the McPherson Ranges remaining missing for many days.

In *Green Mountains* Bernard O'Reilly describes his boyhood memory of Nellie's Glen as follows: "---- the track climbed sharply; gums and stringybarks gave way to lofty turpentines, sassafras, cedars, wattles, treeferns and waratahs. High above was Boar's Head, a thousand foot crag of yellow sandstone, capped by a grotesque looking head more suited to a dragon than to a boar. This was the beginning of Nellie's Glen, a narrow, awful crevice in the gigantic cliffs, through which the track zigzagged amongst hanging balconies of ferns and dripping spray of waterfalls. Down the glen even on the hottest days, rushed an icy draught, the breath of waterfalls and the pungent scent of sassafras."

Peter O'Reilly assisted with the original survey of the Six Foot Track in 1884 when a Government survey party was sent to find a track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves suitable for horse riders to negotiate. The forty-two kilometre route was surveyed in

eleven days and two thousand five hundred pounds was granted for track construction. It was specified that horses were to be able to travel two abreast, thus the minimum six foot width from which the name derives. Tourists could now travel from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves in less than eight hours. For many years two men maintained the track using only picks and shovels and a wheelbarrow.

Shortly the Six Foot Track leaves the road and continues across farmland, however we make the short diversion down to a bridge over Megalong Creek. In the water here we discover a UFO, perhaps appropriately coloured green, for we all know the tiny beings who travel in these devices are invariably of that hue. Further investigation revealed however that this Unidentified Floating Object was nothing more than a stream gauge.

Back on the track (and back to reality) we meandered over some grazing land, crossed Mitchells Creek and then entered open woodland as we neared the end of our walk. Among the Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) beside the track the bell shaped flowers of the Tufted Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia communis*) swayed atop slender stems, their white throats contrasting markedly with the blue-mauve petals. Presently we crossed Megalong Valley Road, surmounted the last stile and arrived at our destination, Megalong Cemetery.

Few individual memorials remain in the cemetery however an obelisk, erected in 1988 as a bicentennial project lists the fourteen people known to have been interred here between 1894 and 1931.

We imbibed the usual cuppa as we rested in this pleasant spot before heading off to drive back through this charming vale; the afternoon autumnal sun softly illuminated the undulating hills on the valley floor and the enclosing sandstone escarpments. The word Megalong in the language of the original inhabitants of this area translates as "Valley under the Rocks" - how very fitting!

John C

OUR JUNE WALK**Friday 19th June 2009****‘Castles in the Air’ – Panoramic Views,
Windblown Heath, Precipitous Cliffs.****Castle Head and Narrow Neck Plateau**

The group last visited this venue in September 2002. This is a relatively easy walk covering a total of around 8km, about 5km being along the Narrow Neck Plateau fire trail. The track to Castle Head (off the fire trail) is narrow and winds through low encroaching heath so long pants or gaiters are recommended. The views on this walk are expansive and spectacular.

Meet at the locked gate on Glenraphael Drive (about 2.5km of gravel road off Cliff Drive at Katoomba) on Narrow Neck, a little over half a kilometre past the Golden Stairs car park at 9.30 am or at Merry Garth at 8.45am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Because of continuing medical treatment (see below) Libby will not be available to take calls regarding your attendance at this walk. Please note revised contact details below.

Contact Mary and Ellis Reynolds on 4756 2006 or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661. Note that Helen and John will be available at the above number until the evening of Tuesday 16th June, after that they can be contacted on Arthur Delbridge and Florence Smart’s Mt Wilson number 4756 2063.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th July 2009 – Leura Cascades,
Gordon Falls and Pool of Siloam

Friday 21st August 2009 – Deep Pass on the
Newnes Plateau

Member News 1**Mary Reynolds – Stop Press!**

Unfortunately Mary fell victim to our health system and her operation was postponed until 6th July. Hopefully she will be entering the Royal Hospital for Women at Randwick at

that time for her operation (now secret angry women’s business). Best wishes from us all Mary for a successful admission this time and a speedy and full recovery.

Member News 2**Libby Raines**

By the time you receive this newsletter Libby will be proceeding through a course of precautionary ray treatment for her neck problem. Our thoughts are with you during this time Libby, we do hope any side effects from this treatment will be minimal.

Member News 3**Rob Bearup**

Libby received a note from Rob explaining his absence from recent walks and sending his best wishes to all in the group. He is troubled by an as yet unidentified condition that causes him problems climbing stairs or negotiating steep terrain. (I have that problem too Rob, in my case it is called a lack of fitness – John C.) We all hope your problem is soon solved Rob and you are back with us in the bushland.

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.

12th June 2009 at Sloan Reserve

10th July 2009 at Sloan Reserve

14th August 2009 at Gregson Park

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details