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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## FORTRESS ROCK AND **OUR NOVEMBER WALK**

**FORTRESS ROCK  
LOOKOUT, FORTRESS  
RIDGE and FORTRESS HILL  
north of LEURA**

**Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

We encountered an odd mix of triumphalism and defensiveness as we gathered for this walk.

Seventeen walkers met at Leura in an area where streets had names such as Victory Lane, Britain St, Winston St, Churchill St, Franklin St, Roosevelt St and Curtin St; obviously assigned after the Allied Forces thankfully prevailed in WWII.

We were then to proceed to an area where features were apparently named while a feeling of vulnerability, perhaps paranoia, of possible attack existed. Fortress Ridge runs out to Fortress Hill above Fortress Creek; a shorter spur leads to Fortress Rock. Even the nearby Arethusa Falls on Govetts Creek are named after a nymph of Greek mythology who was changed into a spring to escape the pursuing river god Alpheius.

Guardianship and victory were obviously on the minds of those who selected these names.



Summer in the Bush

## FORTRESS RIDGE

Today was one of those hot brooding days; a 'snaky day' is the description we would have used in my younger days at Mulgoa. In the distance, north of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine, a pillar of dark smoke rose into the clear blue sky from a lightning-induced fire.

Changing the walk location to a shadier venue was considered, however a gentle breeze enticed us to venture onto the open heath as planned.

As we made our way along Mt Hay Road to the starting point

the roadside was festooned with groups of the Purple-flag or Native Iris (*Patersonia sp*), a showy portent of the magnificent display of wildflowers which awaited on the heath.

The fire trail initially climbs over scarred bedrock and swings to the right to follow the ridgeline. About four hundred metres further on the track forks and we take the left hand option. This leads us through open woodland where the satiny silver-grey trunks of Hard-leaved Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*) are almost devoid of their characteristic calligraphy; the insect larvae must be suffering writer's block - I know exactly how they feel.

Scattered across this area are the tiny pure white four-petalled flowers of the Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*) accompanied in profusion by the flowers of the Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*); their tiny white

central flowers surrounded by small velvety bracts.

Soon we are in exposed windblown heath decorated with a plethora of multicoloured wildflowers. The ubiquitous Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) are thrusting their bright red flowers forth while the fluffy flower heads of the Pink Kunzea (*Kunzea capitata*) line the track. Rush Lilies or Vanilla Plants (*Sowerbaea juncea*) hold aloft clusters of lilac-pink flowers on smooth slender stems and occasional small clumps of the Tufted Blue Lily (*Thelionema caespitosum*) carry, atop thin wiry stalks, bright blue flowers with yellow filaments. The brilliant yellow globular flowers of the Broad-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) stand out among the mid-green foliage.

Presently we pause at a narrow track which leads off to the right. This path, which we do not intend following today, leads to Dark's Cave. Dr Eric Dark and his author wife Eleanor discovered this cave in January 1937. Eleanor Dark is best known perhaps for her trilogy 'The Timeless Land'. Eric Dark was the founder, around 1929, of what was probably the first rockclimbing club in Australia, The Blue Mountaineers; Eleanor was also an enthusiastic member. Eleanor named this cave Jerrikellimi; a witty choice as it is purported to mean 'the retreat of the dark people'. Indeed that is what they used it for, a retreat for their family from the hassles of everyday life.

Continuing on we encounter some stunning stunted Banksias; ravaged by fire and battered by winds, they presented as perfect 'natural Bonsai'. Keep those hands in your pockets Ray Nesci!

From the end of the fire trail a narrow path leads us down through the heath toward the cliff edge. Looming before us is the eastern end of Carne Wall; a golden sandstone cliff with a vertical edge forming a fearsome drop to the talus slopes of Govett Gorge. What a magnificent spot to pause for morning tea.

A quite stiff breeze rushed up from the valley floor as we sat at this magnificent eyrie taking

in the breathtaking views. To our left the cliff faces converge to form a deep narrow canyon through which the waters of Govetts Creek flow before plummeting to the valley floor as the Arethusa Falls. Across the yawning gap that is Govett Gorge the forested slopes rise from the creek lines to the base of the cliffs. The horizontal sedimentary lines in the sandstone accentuate the broad sweep of the cliffs. One never tires of the majesty of these mountains.

No matter where you are there always seems to be a disruptive family bent on spoiling your tranquillity. Today the Formicidae family was the culprit; tiny black ants, not content with just being in pants, found their way into other sensitive parts thus causing many of us to indulge in a quick anti-ants dance to dislodge the little blighters.

We retrace our steps back to the fork in the fire trail and head toward Fortress Hill. We drop down into a small gully and climb onto Fortress Ridge. Off to our right the jagged profile of the Pinnacles is prominent above the Lockley Pylon Track while back beyond Mt Hay Road the horizontal line of the summit of the Flat Top formation contrasts with the undulating surrounds.

Once back in heath country we move through more meadows of wildflowers. Dwarf Purple-flags (*Patersonia longifolia*) sit low in the ground cover to escape the wind, their showy short-lived flowers heralding their presence. Green-tipped white velvety bracts radiate from the central flower head of the Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) grouped in clusters through the heath. The track is lined with the low growing Blue Damperia (*Damperia stricta*) displaying its small crinkled blue flowers while its taller relation, the Purple Damperia (*Damperia purpurea*) puts in an occasional appearance with its yellow-centred purple flowers.

The track drops below the crest of the ridge and the heat becomes more oppressive as the breeze is cut off. Some in the party decide to rest in the shade on this little knoll rather than continue on to the end of the ridge; this is

always an option when walks return along the same path.

A little further on a full view of the imposing Carne Wall opens up; the multicoloured sandstone cliffs framed by the olive green of the surrounding eucalypt forests. We cross a saddle of open heath and gain some relief from the increasing temperature as we enter the shade of the lightly wooded Fortress Hill. Continuing on toward the end of the ridge magnificent views open up across Govett and Grose Gorges in a grand sweep from Lockley Pylon past Mount Banks to Docker Head past Pulpit Rock to Govetts Leap and around to Evans Lookout. Absolutely stunning!

At the end of the ridge we are looking down on Junction Rock at the confluence of Govetts Leap Brook and Govetts Creek. Rodriguez Pass walking track and the track which leads to the Blue Gum Forest are clearly visible winding along the banks of these creeks.

We spend only a relatively short time taking in the wondrous vista before us, then retreat to the southern slope of Fortress Hill to escape the relentless sun and to pause for lunch.

Muffled rumblings of distant thunder could be heard as we lunched, moving closer as we resumed our return journey. Soon large raindrops plopped to the ground generating that wonderful earthy aroma of rain hitting scorched soil. Spectacular streaked lightning was seen in the distance as the centre of the storm thankfully passed some distance south of our location.

Soon we were back at the cars after yet another great day enjoying fantastic scenery and abundant wildflowers. This day also demonstrated how a relatively easy walk is made more arduous by prevailing weather conditions and how important it is to always be properly prepared.

The variety of weather conditions we experienced today brought to mind the quote attributed to Mark Twain: "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it". I feel this famous quote however was overshadowed by a less well known

statement attributed to the late Paul Landa when Minister for the Environment in the NSW Government: "I regard the weather as a Federal Government responsibility". The ultimate in buck passing?

John C

### **LORD HOWE ISLAND**

Some members of the walking group have booked into Pinetrees Guest House on Lord Howe Island from 7<sup>th</sup> August to 17<sup>th</sup> August next year. All members of the group (and friends) are welcome to join us during that period to participate in walks on this little piece of paradise (or to just laze around) and indulge in the gastronomic delights at Pinetrees.

This is a casual get together, not an organised tour, so booking of accommodation and flights will be your responsibility if you decide to participate. If you are interested contact Helen Cardy on 9871 3661 and she will be happy to answer queries and send you comprehensive printed information.

Do hope you can join us.

### **PERSONAL LOCATOR BEACON**

The group has purchased an Emergency Locator Beacon which is GPS equipped and will allow Emergency Services Personnel to locate us within a radius of 50 metres in the event of anyone suffering a serious injury or illness while walking with the group.

Of course we hope to never have to activate this device however it could literally be a life saver should a serious incident occur.

(For the last few years we have been carrying an EPIRB kindly lent by Geoff Kelly, however the system under which this equipment operated has been shut down.)

We are asking active walkers to make a one off contribution of \$20 each towards the \$600 cost of this beacon.

If paying by cheque please make payable to HL Cardy and send to 14 Gum Grove Place, WEST PENNANT HILLS NSW 2125 or pay direct to Libby or Helen on the next walk.

## **OUR DECEMBER WALK & END OF YEAR LUNCHEON**

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2009

**Open Woodland and Heath, High Vantage Points, Valley Views, Weatherworn Rocks.**

**Birrabang Ridge and Yileen Spur opposite the Mt Wilson turnoff from Bells Line of Road**

This is a new venue for the group. A short gentle walk just long enough to build an appetite for our end of year luncheon to follow at Merry Garth (see details later). Views into the Upper Grose Gorge and some unusually weather-sculpted rock outcrops are just some of the features.

**Meet at the junction of Mt Wilson Rd and Bells Line of Road at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 9.15am.**

There is plenty of parking space adjacent to the cutting opposite the turn-off; **please take extreme care with traffic passing at speed.** Bring morning tea only on the walk.

**Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0418 646 487 if you need to leave a message.**

## **END OF YEAR LUNCHEON**

Thanks once again to the generous hospitality of Libby, Keith and Beth the end of year luncheon will be held in the glorious grounds of Merry Garth. Ex-walkers, family and friends are more than welcome.

Meet for lunch at 12 – 12.30pm.

**We intend trying a change of format this year; instead of having a BBQ cold meats will be supplied from funds.** Ham, Turkey and Chicken will be provided along with tea and coffee.

Please bring one item only from the following selection **to share**: Any salad type dish, cake/slice, fruit/berries.

As usual please bring your own nibbles, plates, cutlery, glasses and drinks. If anyone

can help with sun umbrellas it would be appreciated.

**To assist with catering please advise Helen Cardy as early as possible if you are coming and, to avoid over and/or under supply, which of the shared food you would prefer to bring.**

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## **FUTURE WALKS** (Tentative schedule)

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2010 – Fairy Bower, Coxs Cave and Mt Piddington at Mt Victoria.

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## **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.**

**11<sup>th</sup> December 2009 at Wynne Reserve**

**Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details**