
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 19 Issue 5

May 2009

LITTLE ZIG ZAG AND

OUR APRIL WALK

LITTLE ZIG ZAG, WILSONS GLEN AND RIENITS PASS - THEN BERGHOFERS PASS AT MT VICTORIA

There are good days, there are nice days, there are excellent days; then there are absolutely perfect days. Such a day greeted the twenty who gathered for this walk; the clear sky an intense blue, the air crisp and still with just a hint of the approaching winter. Under such ideal conditions everyone appeared to have an extra spring in their step as we set off to descend the Little Zig Zag; Libby perhaps more so as she, as a young girl, used to walk in this area with her parents.

This access to the Kanimbla Valley was built as a bridle track (as in horses not 'here comes the') around one hundred and thirty years ago. It zigs and zags along seventeen ledges cut into the hillside and built up with low stone walls as it drops from the escarpment to the valley floor. Unlike most other areas on the mountains the loose scree on the upper sections of this track is red in colour. These shingles are a product of the band of red shale that runs through the sandstone. The colour is due to iron on the particles that formed the



Autumn in the Bush

RIENITS PASS

rock millions of years ago having been exposed to a period of desert conditions that produced an iron oxide, much like rust. The sandstones below this band of shale belong to the Narrabeen Group.

Prominent here and indeed for much of this walk were Hairpin Banksias (*Banksia spinulosa*) displaying fresh crops of flower spikes with their characteristic blue-black styles from which the common name derives. The view to the west reveals sun-drenched cliff faces on the

slopes of Sugarloaf and Mount Victoria along with glimpses of the farmhouses and pastures in the valley below.

Soon we divert from the main track, scramble down an embankment and arrive at the gaping entrance to the Bushrangers Cave.

We clamber up the rock face, squeeze between large boulders (some more squeazy than others) and enter the tall narrow cavern which extends fifteen metres or more into the cliff. Fred Roberts produced a torch which allowed us to explore, one by one, a narrow vertical passage at the rear of the main cavern that opened into a secluded chamber.

The name of this cave stems from the discovery here, in 1897, of fragments of a Sydney newspaper dated 1822 which contained notices regarding the escape of four prisoners. Did these four escapees hide in this cavern? Some in the group may have pondered

this question as we partook of morning tea below the entrance.

An aged Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*) stood adjacent to the cliff in this vicinity; upright stems arising from an ancient gnarled and battered trunk. Clinging to the vertical rock face was a lone *Epacris reclinata*; pendent tubular pink flowers set off by the sandstone background.

Back on the zig zagging path we continued our descent past scattered Wattles (*Acacia sp*) with a myriad flower buds beginning to swell among the broad green-grey foliage. The Native Holly or Prickly Shaggy-pea (*Podolobium ilicifolium*) thrives in this dry environment, displaying its multi-lobed sharply pointed leaves.

As the path moves further away from the cliffs the Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita ssp piperita*) becomes prominent and we are now walking in beautiful open woodland to the accompaniment of lyrical birdcalls. Framed views of the valley floor can be seen through the sparse understorey. Scattered here and there beside the path are mauve starbursts of the daisy-like flowers of the *Brachycome angustifolia* and continuing this colour theme were a few examples of the Tufted Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia communis*) carrying their five-petalled flowers on thin wiry stems.

The path descends further into the gully and begins to wind back toward the cliffline. The vegetation in this moister environment becomes lush and contains Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*). The name applied to this tree by early settlers who used its stems for the construction of wattle and daub buildings resulted in the naming of Blackwattle Bay in Sydney Harbour. The name wattle then of course carried over to the common name for the Australian Acacias, possibly because of the similarity of the *Callicoma* and *Acacia* flowers. Also present here are Cedar Wattles (*Acacia elata*) with their dark green foliage, King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) and leathery fern fronds clumping among the rocks, possibly the Hard Water-fern (*Blechnum wattsii*).

We traverse the face of the gully, ascend some moss-encrusted stone steps and begin climbing as we follow the line of a small stream. We are now in the shadowy environs of a pocket of rainforest. Sassafrass (*Doryphora sassafrass*) and Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) are just two of the tree varieties which form the dense canopy supporting thick vines which loop and twist through the branches. The gentle sound of running water now adds to the pleasant ambience as we climb higher.

A sheer rock wall looms out of the subdued light; a small waterfall which feeds the stream we have been following cascades down its face. The path now turns and drops down to this little stream which we cross then duck under a large fallen tree trunk. Tiny mosses growing on this trunk and nearby rocks provide the illusion of a diminutive coniferous forest.

Suddenly we emerge from the enclosed moist atmosphere of this gully as we climb toward the base of the cliffs. At the cliffline we take the short diversion to a waterfall. Here the rather limited discharge from a stream high above leaps from a narrow cleft in the cliff top and plummets to a pebble bed several metres out from the cliff face. This was a delightful little enclosed space and a short climb onto a rocky knoll afforded spectacular views into the valley.

John Meade, Ray Nesci and other fellas in the group spent some time taking in the view and then became engrossed in a discussion on the various native flora present here, thus lagging behind the group. This prompted Victoria, a 'shy and retiring type' herself, to chastise them for their nattering about secret men's business and urged them on to catch up with the rest of the group. Had absolutely no effect but it sounded good.

The vertical rock face here is quite straight and the fallen pieces are symmetrical, some appearing as if hewn by stonemasons. One piece of stone beside the track was almost a perfect cube about a metre high and carried a curious horizontal aperture cut by the relentless westerly winds.

As we moved along the base of the cliff toward the gully there was a rather rapid transition from the dry rocky environment to a moister enclosed domain. Dragons Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) cascade from embankments and we negotiate a spongy section as the track crosses a large mass of a wiry twining plant, perhaps a large clump of Devils Twine (*Cassytha sp*) lying across the slope. We then enter the pocket of rainforest known as Wilsons Glen, a beautiful fern-filled dale which leads back into the cliffline.

Soon we arrive at a junction in the track and turn hard left to begin the ascent of Rienits Pass. This section of track is named after Henry Rienits who established a school at Mt Victoria in 1880. An article published in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1889 exhorts people to consider leaving the 'enervating heat' of Sydney for the exhilarating atmosphere of the mountains. The article states 'All is catered for including an excellent college for boys ('The School' at Mt Victoria).' Rienits became an enthusiastic promoter of Mt Victoria and pushed for the development of tourism to the area.

He was a member of the Mt Victoria Reserves Trust, became President of the Victoria Falls Reserve Trust and the Mt Victoria Progress Association. It was after heavy campaigning by Rienits that the road to Victoria Falls Lookout was built in 1908 and the track down to the falls was improved. He was influential in the development of many walking tracks in the upper mountains. He died in 1928 and is buried in the Mt Victoria Cemetery just off the lookout road for which he fought so hard.

Presently we emerge onto a spur which affords panoramic views of the Kanimbla Valley and its enclosing ridges. Off to the left we could see some rock climbers challenging themselves on the cliffs of Hourn Point while further on are the cliffs below Mt Blackheath and the Shipley Plateau. To the right is the ridgeline which carries the road to Jenolan Caves while the view straight down the valley leads the eye to the distant Kanangra Walls region; a superb vista.

A short climb through drier vegetation and we arrive at Pulpit Rock, a perfect spot to pause for lunch while we enjoy the spectacular outlook.

As the day was still young after completing this wonderfully varied walk we decided to make the short drive to Mt York Road and explore Berghofers Pass.

John William Berghofer arrived in Australia as a 12 year old lad in 1855. In 1892, having worked as the manager of the large Kanimbla station in the valley, he purchased the Mount Victoria Inn at the bottom of Victoria Pass. He modified the building for use as his residence and renamed it 'Rosenthal', a name he remembered from his childhood in Germany meaning Valley of the Roses. He was very civic minded making many contributions to the community. He served as Chairman of the Mt Victoria Progress Association and was elected as the first President of the Blaxland Shire Council in 1906.

In their early days the newfangled motor vehicles had trouble climbing the steep grades of Victoria Pass often suffering the indignity of having to be assisted by horses. It was due to the efforts of Berghofer that this alternative pass with gentler grades was opened in 1912 and became the main road up and down the mountain. By 1920 cars had become more powerful and Victoria Pass was upgraded; both routes were then used until Victoria Pass was further improved and widened and in 1934 Berghofer Pass was closed.

Berghofer was a driving force behind the construction of the obelisk to Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson at Mt York in 1900. He became known as 'The Father of the Centenary Movement' for the effort he put into the organisation of celebrations for the centenary of the 'first' crossing of the Blue Mountains and the unveiling of the Memorial Pavillion at Mt York. He was enthusiastically applauded for a speech he delivered at those celebrations on 28th May 1913.

Then came the outbreak of World War One.

Though Berghofer was a naturalised citizen of the country he had lived in for 61 of his 73 years and was a tireless worker for the local community he, like so many others at that time, was vilified due to his German ancestry. He was dismissed as a councillor and his name was obliterated from the sign 'BERGHOFERS PASS' that had been carved into the sandstone above his road. He felt compelled to anglicise the name of his property to 'Rosedale', the name the building carries to this day.

The vilification of people purely because of their ethnicity or beliefs regardless of their character, ethics or devotion to community is demonstrably not a modern phenomenon.

Ironically, though the man was ostracised, there appeared to be no qualms about taking advantage of the road that he had built; the Coo-ee volunteer recruits to the army marched up Berghofers Pass on 5th November 1915 on their way from Gilgandra to Sydney.

The pass is now a popular walking track and evidence of the herculean tasks required in achieving its construction during the early part of the last century are obvious. The high cuttings into the cliffs are dramatic and the stone culverts built to cross the many small watercourses are impressive. The dual water trough near the hilltop carved into the sandstone, having both a large and a small cut-out to slake the thirst of the horses and of the dogs indicate this road was well planned in addition to being well built.

While walking along this pass was historically interesting it was also very pleasant. The wide even surface and gentle grade allowed us to walk in groups and catch up with what our fellow walkers had been doing and what plans were being hatched for the future.

It was pleasing to see that 'BERGHOFER' had been reinstated to the vandalised original sign.

At one point, towering above us, are the massive buttressed walls constructed under the direction of Major Mitchell in 1832 to retain the tremendous amount of rock and earth fill required to carry the road of Victoria Pass

across a narrow ridge. As we were admiring the stonework a huge semi-trailer lumbered up the hill. What a graphic indication this was of the skill of the nearly four hundred convicts employed on the construction of Victoria Pass. Built to carry horse drawn carriages and wagons almost one hundred and eighty years ago this section of road, unchanged except for the pavement, is today comfortably carrying these juggernauts.

We ambled right to the bottom of Berghofers Pass taking in the bucolic scene below of the Hartley Vale farmlands; the rich pastures looking particularly lush in the afternoon light which glinted off the water of the scattered dams.

A deep and meaningful discussion took place between some in the group regarding the large meat ant mound beside the track. Ray Nesci revealed that the gravel brought to the surface by the ants was an ideal ingredient in soils and for decoration in Bonsai pots. I reminisced about running barefoot over these nests as a dare when a young boy, urged on by my older sister (no TV in those days).

The shadows were growing longer and we returned to the cars at the top of the hill.

A hugely varied walk, perfect weather, good company, what better way to spend a day in these beautiful mountains?

John C

KATHLEEN HOWARD-SMITH Libby's Tribute to a 'Free Spirit'

Kathleen was a much loved and admired member of our community. She was very talented and had many interests, many of which she shared.

She joined our Bushwalking Group and our Bush Care Group, she loved gardening and often came to see Keith and me to buy plants and talk about the garden. She was one of the original members of Ray Harrington's Art Group on Tuesday mornings.

She loved the bush and Nature, which was all about her, and she loved birds.

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I will share a rather delightful bird story with you.

Every month I send a list of the birds seen at Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine to the Blue Mountains Bird Observers. A brush turkey has lived in the rainforest above the house at 'Arellana' for some years. One June after a very wild winter storm I asked after the brush turkey. Kathleen's reply was so typical of her originality. A few days later I received a gorgeous large coloured drawing she had done with crayons of a brush turkey and she wrote: "Been seen alongside the lyrebird in the howling gale, scratching happily in the leaf litter."

Kathleen's first walk with us was our fifth walk on 18th September 1990 when she joined us on her horse down to Bowens Creek; she rode down chatting happily from her elevated position and later rode back again. My brief comment for the day: "A lovely spring day - 11 people 3 dogs 1 horse."

Since then Kathleen walked with us more than fifteen times, her final walk with us was last May out to Lunch Rock near Bell.

We all admired her courage and determination in fighting her long illness and we will miss her bright personality and free spirit.

OUR MAY WALK

Friday 15th May 2009

Escarpment Views, A Shady Glen, A Stroll Beside Megalong Creek on the Valley Floor.

Nellies Glen to the Megalong Cemetery – The First Section of the Six Foot Track.

The group last visited this venue in September 2003. This is essentially a downhill walk of approximately 8km with an initial descent of around 240 metres over the first kilometre then an amble beside Megalong Creek on the valley floor. As a longish car shuffle will be required to leave vehicles at the Megalong Cemetery, please make contact as early as possible if you intend walking to allow plenty of time for organisation.

Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Meet at the 'Explorers Tree' on Pulpit Hill west of Katoomba at 9.30 am or at Merry Garth at 8.45am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 after 7pm or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 19th June 2009 – Castle Head and Narrow Neck

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

A little self indulgence by Helen and me:

IT'S A BOY!!! Ryley Langworthy Cardy, our first grandchild, began his life's journey on 28th April 2009. Baby and mother both fine, father beaming! Grandparents over the moon!!

Mary Reynolds

Around the time you receive this newsletter, Mary, a stalwart and original member of this group will be entering the Royal Hospital for Women at Randwick for an operation (secret women's business). Best wishes from us all Mary for a speedy and full recovery.

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.

8th May 2009 at Wynne Reserve

12th June 2009 at Sloan Reserve

10th July 2009 at Sloan Reserve

Contact Libby on 4756 2121 for details