
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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FAIRY BOWER, COXS

OUR JANUARY WALK 2010

**FAIRY BOWER, COXS
CAVE, THE FERRIS CAVE
CIRCUIT and THE GROTTA
at Mt VICTORIA**

Friday 15th January 2010

Light misty rain fell as seventeen walkers gathered in the picnic grounds below the old Mt Victoria Toll House (built in 1849). Libby, I'm sure, would have been well pleased to be entering the bush in more pleasant circumstances following her involvement over the last few days, giving the benefit of her intimate local knowledge, in the search for six canyoners on the Wollangambe. Tragically a young life was lost, once more demonstrating how unforgiving the bush can be; this incident also highlighting the importance of carrying an Emergency Locator Beacon.

We set off across the picnic area through ankle deep grass bejewelled with glistening drops of moisture. The track head is at the edge of the open forest that shelters the slopes forming the source of Fairy Bower Creek.

Here, on the margins of the rainforest, the understorey contains two wattles in flower at this time; the Blunt-leaf Wattle (*Acacia obtusifolia*) with its pale blossoms irregularly



AND FERRIS CAVES

spaced along flower spikes and the feathery-leaved Sydney Green Wattle (*Acacia parramattensis*) carrying cream, almost white, flowers. A little further down the slope the bright yellow nodding flowers of a Myrtle Geebung (*Persoonia myrtilloides*) caught the eye. This variety of Geebung, restricted to the Upper Blue Mountains and the western slopes, is considered vulnerable because of its limited numbers in the wild.

The track descends and the canopy becomes more dense, overarching the gully; bird calls echo through the forest. We meander through large areas of Fishbone Water-fern (*Blechnum nudum*) and Rasp Fern (*Doodia aspera*) as we drop deeper into the gully. Soon we approach a large moss-covered sandstone tor; carved into its vertical face is a life-sized impression of the fairy-winged 'Lady of the Bower' welcoming us into her realm.

Continuing along the creek line a small man-made weir is noted adjacent to the remnants of some old timber construction low down on the opposite bank. A huge fallen tree trunk bridges the creek, its ancient decaying timber being slowly returned to the earth beneath its shroud of brilliant green moss. Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) abound here and the gently flared buttresses of forest giants are clad in tiny ferns, mosses and lichens. With the overwhelming greenness, the trickling

stream and the mix of delicate foliage in this bowery maze one can easily imagine it being an ideal abode for fairies, elves, goblins and sprites.

Presently the track rises slightly and we leave the moist gully environment emerging onto the dry pavement of a rock shelf below a large overhang; we pause here for morning tea.

The reds, yellows and golds of the closer cliff faces across the gully take on soft muted tones when viewed through the light haze; the more distant cliffs below Mt Boyce are mere silhouettes in the swirling mists. The forest canopy below us is dotted white with flowering gums, probably the Sydney Peppermint (*Eucalyptus piperita ssp piperita*), the species from which eucalyptus oil was first distilled by the Surgeon of the First Fleet.

The track turns sharply to the right as we leave this rocky loft. High above, guarded by a towering pillar of sandstone, the gaping mouth of Coxs Cave beckons; a dark portal looming above the forest canopy. (The cave was probably named after George Henry Cox MLA – later MLC, grandson of William Cox the road builder and a relative of Henry Bell who, in 1876, owned the land in this area.) The track leads us beside a shaded rocky embankment embellished with cascading Dragons Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*), some still holding a few white bell shaped flowers and a Blue Flax Lily or Paroo Lily (*Dianella caerulea*) displays several bright blue berries on long arching stems.

Shortly we arrive at the base of a steel ladder and most choose to climb the twenty rungs to explore the cave. From the top of the ladder we sidle along a rock ledge below a low overhang and zigzag up a steep but short path to the entrance. The floor of the cave slopes up sharply to the rear below a high domed roof; an elevated level ledge skirts one side. From the cave we are looking down on the canopies of several Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*). Framed by the arched entrance these trees, at this time, present a magnificent sight as their myriad flower sepals turn red as they swell before fruiting.

There is an interesting spot near Coxs Cave known as Dunns Leap. Now the 'leap' in Govetts Leap or Witches Leap refers to the old Cumbrian term for waterfall; not so in the case of Dunns Leap. In 1908 John Dunn (or was it Charles?), a fourteen year old student of the Mt Victoria School, was apparently skylarking with friends in a small cave high above. He lost his footing; plummeting 55 metres. His friends scrambled down expecting to find a battered body but found nothing. On rushing back to town to raise the alarm they found their mate was already there, having picked himself up and nonchalantly walked back suffering only a few scratches and bruises.

With everyone safely back at the base of the ladder (no new 'leaps' having been created) we now wind past some buttressed forest giants and up through a tunnel-like passage below a cliff overhang as we climb out of the gully. Soon we are back in more open country; here the now dry landscape is dotted with interesting rock outcrops. We arrive at a track junction just below the summit of Mount Piddington where a sign indicates a side path to the Ferris Cave Circuit. (The Ferris family lived at Mt Victoria in the late 1800's.) Libby was not familiar with this circuit and is usually reluctant to lead the group along any path she has not checked however, as time was on our side, the group agreed we should explore the circuit.

So we plunged into the unknown, down a badly eroded track through Banksia covered with rust-coloured lichen and past many Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) displaying prominent cream flower spikes above numerous egg-shaped cones. Soon we rounded a cliff abutment and entered a cool shady area tucked in below a large rock overhang, a smorgasbord of various ferns clustered against the wall. The rock faces here are dotted with eye bolts and white splotches of rosin, many long straight branches, some with simple hooks attached to their ends lie at the foot of the cliff; this is obviously a popular rock climbing site.

The track then leads below yet another overhang where the rock is a deep red,

contrasting with the lighter shales and sandstones encountered earlier. We pause at a vantage point overlooking the Kanimbla Valley which affords views of the farmlands on the valley floor. We then follow a narrow track enclosed by head-high heath, which delivers us to the vehicle track leading from Hourn Point; the decision to take this diversion into unfamiliar territory proved to be very rewarding. A short stroll takes us to the picnic area atop Mount Piddington.

(Five hundred metres north of Mt Piddington is One Tree Hill; at a height of 1111 metres it is the highest point along the route of the Great Western Highway as it crosses the Blue Mountains. This area was known as One Tree Hill up until April 1868 when it was renamed Mount Victoria, after Queen Victoria, on the opening of the railway station; it was thought the new name would make the area more saleable to tourists.)

We took advantage of the tables at the picnic area to have lunch; literally thousands of Soldier Beetles were also lunching here, clustered in the grass and on shrubs waiting to ambush unsuspecting soft-bodied insects.

As we sat taking in the views of the valley and of the distant ridges some in the group, at an adjacent table, began applauding enthusiastically. Having just experienced the enchanting beauty of the Fairy Bower, I thought perhaps they were taken by J.M. Barrie's line in Peter Pan: "Do you believe in fairies? ... If you believe, clap your hands!" But no by jiminy, some type of cricket had apparently excited them. I didn't get to see it but I think they said it was a *Ponting* variety and it had just got 200 something or others.

Having partaken of lunch, topped off with a slice of Libby's delicious cake, we plunged into the bush once more. We zigzagged down the hill heading for the Grotto. Initially the track was lined by Hakea and Tea-tree (*Leptospermum sp*) and as we dropped deeper into the gully Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*) arched over the path. The name of this plant derives from the Greek *kalos*, beautiful; and *kome*, hair; alluding to the

tufted flowers. They must have been having a bad hair day for what remained of the flowers looked rather bedraggled.

Back in the cool moist world of ferns and mosses we were surrounded by large colonies of Umbrella Ferns (*Sticherus flabellatus*). A couple of steps carved in the sides of a moss-covered colossus of the forest, which lay across the track, gave us easy passage along our path. The overwhelming green of this environment was punctuated occasionally by the hot pink flowers of Grass-leaf Trigger Plants (*Stylidium graminifolium*).

Soon a track to the left led us into the Grotto, an area of the gully enclosed on three sides by rock walls. At the head of the Grotto a trickle of water dropped down the rock face. High above, the U-shaped channel carved in the rock indicated far greater volumes of water have flowed along this watercourse in the past. Aerial roots cling to the higher section of the dark rock face mimicking water cascading over the edge.

As we continue down this beautiful little gully the track descends a curved stairway, moss splattered sandstone blocks set amongst the leaf litter, the rustic simplicity of this installation produced a charming effect.

Presently we were back in the Fairy Bower and made our way upstream toward our starting point. This morning we experienced this area in subdued light under cloudy and misty conditions, now the sun was illuminating the still moist forest floor with a dappled sheen; two quite disparate faces of the forest, both very engaging.

The 'Lady of the Bower' bade us a mute farewell as we concluded yet another wonderfully varied walk in these beautiful mountains.

Back at the cars it was decided we would move on to the spectacular lookout at Sunset Rock, just a kilometre or so further west, to finish off the day away from traffic noise.

This elevated rock outcrop on the edge of the escarpment affords expansive views across the Kanimbla Valley, over the course of the Coxs

River to the ridgeline carrying the road to Jenolan Caves and beyond.

It also provides a different aspect of Victoria Pass. The incredible feat achieved by the convict work gangs under the direction of Major Mitchell during 1832 is more apparent from this vantage point. Charles Darwin praised the construction when he passed this way on his journey to Bathurst in 1836, stating it was "worthy of any line of road in England". The massive buttressed stone walls which bridge the deep gullies are a monument to the skills of those convicts. Built to support a track for horse drawn carts and coaches, one hundred and seventy eight years later those same walls support a road used by huge juggernauts and a continuous stream of lighter traffic; loads unimaginable at the time of building.

So we relaxed at this magical spot, contemplating the beauty and history which surrounded us, as we enjoyed the usual cuppa away from the railway and highway; having to endure the noise of trucks and trains as we sipped just wouldn't be cricket, would it?

John C

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

Friday 19th February 2010

Cascades and Waterfalls, Distant Views, Majestic Cliffs and Shady Forest

Valley of the Waters, National Pass, Slacks Stairs, Wentworth Pass, Valley of the Waters.

The group last walked the National Pass and Valley of the Waters section of this circuit in February 2008. The Slacks Stairs and Wentworth Pass section will be a new venture for the Group. We will be **descending** the Slacks Stairs section from the National Pass to the valley floor. This consists of a series of nine very steep steel ladders/stairs, most having handrails and safety cages. This is rated as a hard walk but as it is only around 5km we will be able to do it at a fairly relaxed

pace. There is a descent and thus an ascent of 400 vertical metres around this circuit.

Meet at the Conservation Hut Car Park at the end of Fletcher St in Wentworth Falls at 9.00am or 8.00am at Merry Garth.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea and plenty of water.

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.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 19th March 2010 – Carlon Creek and Breakfast Creek to the Cocks River in the Megalong Valley. (A solid walk – over 12km return with a long steady climb to finish)

Friday 16th April 2010 – The Wollongambe River and Joes Canyon at Mt Wilson.

Friday 21st May 2010 – 20th Anniversary of the formation of the Group! Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine followed by a celebratory afternoon tea at the Mt Wilson Village Hall, details later.

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 February 2010 at Wynne Reserve

12th March 2010 at Sloan Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth on 4756 2121 for details