
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 20 Issue 4

April 2010

BREAKFAST CREEK

OUR MARCH WALK

**CARLON and BREAKFAST
CREEKS to COXS RIVER in
the MEGALONG VALLEY**

Friday 19th March 2010

Bernard O'Reilly in his evocative book 'Cullenbenbong' relates his memories of visiting, as a seven year old in 1910, his aunt and uncle's little farmhouse 'Carlton Farm' at Green Gully in the Megalong Valley; his first trip away from his Long Swamp home in the adjacent Kanimbla Valley. "That, my first holiday, was the beginning of a love for Green Gully which has ever grown over the years; it is a place of that complete peace and quiet happiness which we like to think of as being in store for us in that Better Land beyond the turmoil of this world. It is the only place I ever want to go for a holiday, ... a place where you could go to stay a week and stay a lifetime."

A steep zigzag on Megalong Valley Road dropped us from Euroka Ridge into the verdant sheltered environ of Green Gully. It was immediately obvious how one could become enchanted by this place. A narrow gravel track running along a creek overarched by weeping trees, the steep slopes of the gully clothed in soft green vegetation and the old mud brick farmhouse still nestled beside Galong Creek, little changed from the day



Autumn in the Bush

TO THE COXS RIVER

young Bernard first visited one hundred years ago; but back to the present.

Fifteen walkers gathered at Blackheath where a vehicle rationalisation had us all seated in three vehicles for the drive to our starting point. It is always a pleasure to travel through the Megalong Valley, more so today with the majestic cliffs towering above lush pastures resulting from the recent rain.

At the quaint little school there was an example of the ingenuity and independence so often displayed in the country. No waiting for a government supplied \$10 000 plus warning light system here. A hand trolley, three milk crates (colour coordinated with the hand trolley of course), a battery and a flashing amber turret light quite effectively warned of a possible hazard; so simple, so cheap, yet so effective.

Arriving at the car park above Carlton Farm we are treated to a spectacular view across to the Wild Dog Mountains; the morning light emphasizing sharply creased ridges above still shaded valleys.

We set off over the stile and followed a little-used vehicle track that contoured across the hillside before turning to drop more steeply and peter out as we crossed a grassy meadow which led us to Carlton Creek. At this time it was a creek in name only as it was bereft of any water, either flowing or pooled.

As we dropped down into the gully rosellas chattered as they flew overhead and bellbirds entertained us with their tinkling chorus; high above the morning sun illuminated the rocky crags of the aptly named Bellbird Point.

After the first crossing of the creek Common Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) and Stinging Nettles (*Urtica incisa*) encroached on the track and indeed continued for most of the way to Breakfast Creek. Libby, Alex Halliday and perhaps others used sticks to beat the stingers away from the path creating an easier road for those following, especially those wearing shorts. Near a grove of Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) we came across the first of many Sandpaper Figs (*Ficus coronata*) that we would see today; some carried ripe figs and many of us taste-tested this bush tucker. A thick vine entwined the white blotched trunk of a nearby Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*).

Clumps of Paddy's Lucerne (*Sida rhombifolia*), a couple of mature plum and apple trees, the remains of an old fence and a few Trees of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) were just some of the indicators of habitation and farming of this area in the past. This route was also once used for horse trail rides to the Coxs River.

Soon the dominant trees along the creek were River Oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*); a bank of Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum aethiopicum*) above the creek a mere harbinger of much more to come.

Presently we arrived at Breakfast Creek where we paused for morning tea beside a tranquil pool; water boatmen scudded across the smooth surface. A huge River Oak rose from the creek bed, its arching lower branches dripping with lichens, ferns and tiny native orchids; a beautiful place to rest awhile.

We now followed the course of Breakfast Creek; at times meandering along its banks but frequently crossing, recrossing and crossing once again the rocky creekbed; one publication puts the total number of crossings along this four kilometre stretch at forty-one.

Some in our group would later argue there must have been many more.

Perhaps all this crisscrossing of the creek had resulted in a little fuzzy-headedness for some walkers. Bob Bearup, one of three pharmacists who walk with the group, rather cheekily and I assume with tongue planted firmly in cheek suggested that, while not wanting to put words in my mouth, I should perhaps note in the newsletter how their presence adds a little to the group. This of course was a prescription for a chemical reaction within me to formulate a suitable response. I heartily agree Bob that two of the three do add a touch of class, an elan of elegance, a pinch of panache to the group yet there is one rogue element in that trio; but Bob, two out of three ain't bad. Take solace Bob in John Becher's statement made during the seventeenth century paraphrased here: "A pharmacist can be a strange class of mortal impelled by an almost insane impulse to seek pleasure among smoke and vapour, soot and flame, poisons and poverty. Yet among all these evils he seems to live so sweetly".

The banks of the creek here are shrouded in Grey Myrtle (*Backhousia myrtifolia*) and Blackthorn or Boxthorn (*Bursaria spinosa*) creating a shady enclosed environment. In many places the steep slopes above the creek are completely cloaked in Maidenhair Fern, huge expanses of this delicate plant; a wondrous sight.

In more open areas the ground is decorated with the yellow-centred mauve starbursts of the Cut-leaf Daisy (*Brachycome multifida*) and the white-centred blue pentastar of the occasional Tufted Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia communis*).

Towering River Oaks with flared bases and slightly fluted trunks march down the line of the creek. A large Goanna was sighted climbing one such tree, moving just out of our reach but not inclined to climb any higher than necessary. Also climbing trees and twisting through the undergrowth in this venue is a vast variety of vigorous vines. One to catch the eye was the Deeringia (*Deeringia amaranthoides*)

at this time displaying racemes of small globular bright red berries, normally a climber this one was growing in a shrubby habit which is often its wont. Another plant not sure whether to grow as a climber or shrub was the Slender Lignum (*Muehlenbeckia gracillima*) with its prominent elongated heart-shaped leaves. (Both the above were kindly identified later by John Meade and he named several others on the day.)

The robust Five-leaf Water Vine (*Cissus hypoglauca*) was noted climbing high into tree canopies, two vines with heart shaped leaves were the Pearl Vine (*Sarcopetalum harveyanum*) and the Snake Vine (*Stephania japonica*), the latter having peltate leaves, ie the stalk attaches near the centre of the underside. A Wombat Berry (*Eustrephus latifolius*) displayed several bright orange fruit, a Milk Vine (*Marsdenia sp*) exuded milky sap (what else?) when broken and Morinda (*Morinda jasminoides*) climbed through the undergrowth and scrambled over rocks displaying small reddish orange berries. The ubiquitous Lawyer Vine (*Smilax australis*) with its prickly clasping stems and leathery leaves was present and the large three-lobed leaves of the Passion Flower (*Passiflora sp*) contrasted with the narrow leaves on wiry stems of the Scrambling Lily (*Geitonoplesium cymosum*). A veritable vault of twiners and climbers.

The creek is dotted with a series of beautiful deep pools reflecting the surrounding landscape; some in the group could not resist the urge to skip a few flat gibbers across the glassy surface. Adjacent to many of these pools are Spiny-headed Mat Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) another of the bush tucker plants; the white base of its leaves can be chewed to quench thirst and a flour can be made from its seeds.

We move away from the creek on a couple of occasions which takes us into much drier environs. The creek takes a long loop around a high knoll and the track shortcuts up and over this spur. Presently we again climb away from the creek then drop down into a wonderful little open area called Frying Pan Flat; another

apt name judging by the evidence that many a campfire has glowed into the night here.

Continuing to crisscross downstream we pass some grassy shaded flats beside the burbling creek, eliciting comments from many in the group that they would love to set up camp in this idyllic spot. Soon the water in Breakfast Creek disappears completely below the bed of rubble and flows unseen into the Coxs River.

Named by Governor Macquarie after the road builder William Cox, (much to the chagrin of Gregory Blaxland who considered it one of his most important discoveries), the river rises on the southwestern escarpment above the Wolgan Valley. It follows a tortuous path for more than 100 kilometres before discharging into Lake Burragorang.

At the point where we settled down for lunch it is a wide shallow languid stream. It flows over a mainly sandy bed and a tongue of rubble that reaches out from Breakfast Creek. Trees along the bank are reflected in the smooth water, as are the tree-clad mountains in the background; a tiny stark white frog was spotted swimming among the dark boulders. What a tranquil scene in which to relax while recharging the batteries.

We then set off to retrace the seven plus kilometres and many many crossings back to our starting point four hundred vertical metres above the Coxs River. The water level in Breakfast Creek was higher today than on previous visits we have made here. This necessitated some rock hopping during the numerous creek crossings in order to maintain dry feet, thus slowing our progress somewhat. Beth Raines and Ray Nesci demonstrated that they could still walk the straight and narrow by making one creek crossing via a fallen tree trunk.

As we approached Carlon Creek the sun was dropping low in the sky bathing the valleys in a soft shadowy light while the ridges were still illuminated with an orange glow. A dusting of cloud in the western sky took on a pink hue as the sun sank lower. Beth noticed a tiny bat, no bigger than a thumb, beside the track while others in the group noted similar micro-bats

taking flight in the twilight. In the diminishing light the frogs of Carlon Creek set up a rhythmic chorus. We arrived back at the cars as the thin crescent of the new moon rose above the ridgeline and the stars began to illuminate a darkening sky. A magical way to end a walk.

We indulged in the usual cuppa (supper?) by the subdued moonlight before wending our way out of the valley, passing the snug little mud brick farmhouse which enraptured Bernard O'Reilly so long ago as we made our way back to our own cosy havens after another great walk in the wilderness.

20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE GROUP

Friday 21st May 2010

We invite all those who have been associated in any way with the group over the years to attend a celebratory afternoon tea commencing at 2.00pm in the Mt Wilson Village Hall. We do encourage you to participate and catch up with walking companions from the past and reminisce about rambles in these remarkable mountains.

The afternoon tea will be fully catered and it is planned to have photographs covering the twenty years of walks being displayed in rotation on the big screen in the hall. There will also be photograph albums, newsletters and perhaps other memorabilia on display.

Our usual monthly walk will also be held that morning for those interested in some exercise. We will return to the venue chosen for the first walk in 1990, the Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine. Meeting places and times for the walk will be given in next month's newsletter as usual.

OUR APRIL WALK

Friday 16th April 2010

Deep Valleys, Spectacular Cliffs, A Sandy Beach on a River Bend and a Narrow Winding Canyon

The Wollangambe River and Joes Canyon at Mt Wilson

The group last undertook this walk in April 2006. This classic Mt Wilson walk takes us to The Beach on the Wollangambe River, we will explore upstream for a short distance then proceed to Joes Canyon. This is normally a dry canyon but Libby advises the recent rains may have changed that and it would perhaps be prudent to bring sandshoes or other submersible footwear in case we need to paddle through some puddles in the canyon. We finish with a gentle bush-bash up to Du Fours Rocks.

Meet at the Mt Wilson Fire Station at 9.30am.

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 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. (See details above)

Friday 18th June 2010 – Centennial Glen at Blackheath

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.

9th April 2010 at Sloan Reserve

14th May 2010 at Wynne Reserve (Planting Ferns)

11th June 2010 at Gregson Park (Opposite Windyridge)

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details