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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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## SIX FOOT TRACK TO **OUR SEPTEMBER WALK**

### **SIX FOOT TRACK – LAST SECTION – KIAORA HILL TO JENOLAN CAVES**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

Katoomba and Jenolan Caves are linked by the forty-two kilometre long Six Foot Track yet also connecting these two areas is the great influence water has had on their development. Katoomba of course has many waterfalls which leap or cascade into the deep valleys carved into the uplifted plateau by the eroding action of water over aeons. “All shiny falling waters”, “valley of waterfalls” and “tumble-down-water” some of the meanings attributed to the Aboriginal name Katoomba. The underground wonders of Jenolan Caves result from the dissolving action of water initially, erosion and collapse as underground streams form, then the deposition of dissolved calcite by dripping or slow flowing water to form the cave decorations; all this occurring over many millions of years.

Today we were to be treated to spellbinding sylvan scenery as we walked the last section of the Six Foot Track and to spectacular subterranean sights as we explored the bowels of the mountain; all largely created by the



Spring in the Bush

## JENOLAN CAVES

actions of water, that basic essential element to life.

A smaller than usual group of twelve walkers arrived at the turn-off to Jenolan Caves Cottages atop Kiaora Hill on yet another spectacular day; clear blue skies and crisp exhilarating air. We welcomed back Allan Bonfield who was joining us after a long absence; Allan hopes, as do we, that he will be able to attend more regularly in future.

Libby left my better half Helen in charge of the group while

three vehicles were taken down to the caves and left to transport us back up the hill in the afternoon. On our return from the car shuffle we found the rest of the group settled down on a grassy field adjacent to the cottages; Helen having managed to lead them the few hundred metres to this spot without losing anyone.

Here we were entertained by a large and friendly group of Eastern Grey Kangaroos, many with joeys peering out of their mother's pouches, a delightful sight. Sitting in this charming sheltered spot soaking up the glorious sunshine while indulging in an unplanned early morning tea break it would have been very easy to settle in for the day.

The call of the caves was strong however and we set off to follow the Binoomea Ridge and drop down to the treasures which lay in wait in the deep valley below. (Binoomea was the name given to the caves area by the

Gundungara people, very appropriately it means 'dark places'. The name Jenolan, from Jen-o-lan, an Aboriginal term for high mountain and the indigenous name for a hill beside the nearby Coxs River, was officially gazetted for the caves in August 1884, the same year that the Six Foot Track was established.)

Initially we meander along a firetrail through an open forest consisting mainly of Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*), their open canopy throwing dappled shade onto the almost bare forest floor. The only vegetation growing below the tree cover here is the Spiny-headed Mat Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*), numerous clumps spread between the rough-barked trunks of the Brown Barrels. The absence of understorey growth allows an almost uninterrupted view through the forest to the tree-clad slopes beyond. The land begins to slope more severely away from the trail and the view through the maze of tree trunks rising vertically from the steeply oblique forest floor is quite stunning.

As the firetrail drops a little more sharply a smattering of Mountain Gums (*Eucalyptus dalrympleana*) begin to appear through the forest, their smooth white trunks and branches standing out against the rough fibrous brown bark of the predominant Brown Barrels. In this now slightly more sheltered environ the embankment on the high side of the trail carries cushions of moss and is decorated with thick clusters of grass whose tresses of long thin blades cascade down the face of the cutting.

Soon the track narrows and here understorey and ground cover vegetation begins to appear. Beside the track are examples of the Prickly Beard-heath (*Leucopogon juniperinus*) their nondescript straggly form belying the delicate beauty of their tiny bell-like tubular five-lobed flowers. Narrow-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia linearis*) carry clusters of light green globular fruit and Blackthorns or Boxthorns (*Bursaria spinosa*) have long grey whiskers of lichen hanging from their thorny branches while their trunks are blotched with silver/grey crusts of lichen. A touch of vibrant colour is added to

the scene by the abundant purple pea flowers of a False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*) twining its way up through a host shrub.

An occasional example of the Eurabbie (*Eucalyptus bicostata*) is present on this lower area of the ridge, a tree that grows only in scattered areas of the state. It has leaves up to 250 millimetres in length, rough bark at the base of the trunk while the upper portions and branches are smooth grey/green to blue/green.

Presently the landscape changes as limestone cliffs come into view. Greyish rock tinged with splashes of orange and cream, occasional small dark openings in the rockface hint at what may be hidden inside. We pass between some limestone outcrops for we are now above the Devils Coachhouse, make our way down some steps and we are looking through the Carlotta Arch down onto the Blue Lake; a sublime introduction to the Jenolan Caves precinct.

We make our way down the path which leads to that cavernous open arch, the Devils Coachhouse. I first set eyes on this and the other open arches, Carlotta and the Grand Arch, in my early teenage years and was totally enthralled by these majestic formations; that feeling remains today.

Dwarfed by our surroundings we stand in awe of the scale of this space. Light streams in through the irregular openings in the roof yet dark nooks and crannies in the walls and at their base beckon to be explored; the view back to the valley framed by the cave entrance is outstanding. Allan Cupitt points out some unusual formations here, several stromatolites sit on high ledges. These domed sedimentary rock formations with column-like structures around their periphery are made up of layers of fossilised blue-green algae (cyanobacteria, probably among the first living organisms to evolve on earth) rather than the calcite deposits which form most of the cave decorations. We then meander through the aptly named Grand Arch and on to the car park where we had lunch with the Crimson Rosellas and Currawongs.

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While we lunched Allan Cupitt performed his 'Clarke Kent / Superman' impression, disappearing for a short time and reappearing in the guise of a Jenolan Caves Guide; must have been an old-style telephone booth around here somewhere.

Allan then led us on an exclusive extended tour of some of the gems of Jenolan. We made our way back through the Grand Arch and climbed the stairs to gain access to the cave system. We entered a chamber of the Lucas Cave to begin our journey through this underground labyrinth of exquisite beauty. I will not attempt to describe features in the order in which we encountered them for this place is so overwhelming in its splendour all sense of time and sequence is lost. We visited the Lucas Cave, the River Cave and the Temple of Baal on this tour so thoughtfully put together for the group by Allan, spending almost two and a half hours underground.

The range and variation within types of cave decorations is astounding. The sparkling crystalline appearance of dry flowstone contrasts with the smooth silky appearance when the surface is wet. The delicate translucent shawls vary from a white so pure through soft golden hues to reds and browns as seen in one shawl resembling a giant bacon rasher. The incredible blue/green of the pool in the River Cave with its astounding bridge reflection is a sight to behold. Stalactites hang as single needles or in elaborate clusters, at times melding together to form more complex ceiling projections. Stalagmites rise as slender cones or more obtuse pillars occasionally meeting the stalactite that feeds it to form a column. Helictites, the nonconformists of the caves, twist and turn, following no rules while producing the most intricate shapes. Balconies, canopies, fluted colonnades, terraces and pillars are formed evoking names such as Angel's Wing, Minaret, White Altar, Gabriel's Wing and the iconic Grand Column. As the current promotional material so aptly states: "Magic happens here."

And magic did indeed happen when we stood on a high platform in the Temple of Baal and watched as various features were lit in turn to

the accompaniment of classical music; a truly enchanting way to finish this very special journey through the Jenolan Caves. Many thanks to you Allan for organising and leading the tour.

So, after spending almost two and a half hours exploring these treasures of the underground, climbing up and down hundreds of steps (yes, yes, I know I said this walk was all downhill) we emerged back into daylight at the Binoomea Cut behind Caves House.

At the kind invitation of Jeanie and Allan Cupitt we then drove to their beautiful home at South Bowenfells for our usual after walk cuppa; it was far from 'usual' however. Thanks to Jeanie and Allan's gracious hospitality we relaxed in their lovely home taking in the 180 degree views from Hassans Walls down into the verdant valley which carries the Cocks River and across to the cliffs below the Narrow Neck Plateau. Closer at hand we watched their black Labrador Janda proudly doing demonstration laps of their dam. With the more than ample spread provided by Jeanie in addition to that brought by other walkers we were well fed, very relaxed and quite comfortable when it was time to reluctantly head for home as the sun began to wash the distant cliff faces with a tinge of red.

So ended another great day in these amazing mountains, a good mix of perambulation and spelaeology. A very pleasant walk through beautiful countryside and a journey of discovery through the cave complex.

A short aside with which to end. It is interesting to note that Baal was the Phoenician god of fertility while the word baal is an aboriginal term for 'NO'; an intriguing juxtaposition don't you think?

John C

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### OUR OCTOBER WALK

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2010

**A Smorgasbord of Walks on Offer This Month – Take Your Pick! The Blue Gum**

**Forest for Those Who Feel Up to the Challenge or alternatively an Amalgam of Shorter Walks Near the Top of Pierces Pass for Those Seeking a Gentler Day.**

**The Blue Gum Forest via Perrys Lookdown and Pierces Pass or a Combination of Walls Lookout, Rigby Hill and a Partial Descent of Pierces Pass**

The iconic Blue Gum Forest is a long walk with steep grades, down 600 vertical metres and then up again, to test the knees and various other bits and pieces; it is most suited for our more fit walkers. To cater for as many as possible in the group it was suggested that an alternative to the more strenuous Blue Gum Forest walk be offered on this day. To that purpose Helen Cardy and Anne Clarke will lead those who take the second option on two short walks; to Walls Lookout (2 hours walking time) and Rigby Hill (1 hour walking time). For those who would like a little additional exercise a partial descent of Pierces Pass in the afternoon to meet the Blue Gum walkers as they climb gasping and wheezing from the Grose River is also planned.

It is hoped that the numbers participating in each of the alternatives are such that those walkers on the Pierces Pass side can be called on to transport the Blue Gum walkers to Perrys Lookdown and then return to commence their walks. This will do away with the need for a second car shuffle at the end of the day with all participants assembling at and then finishing at the top of Pierces Pass. (Depending on the numbers participating in each option and the availability of cars it may prove necessary to do an afternoon car shuffle, however we do hope to avoid this.)

**Meet at Merry Garth at 8.00am or at Pierces Pass top car park (Walls Lookout car park) just off the Bells Line of Road 2.5km east of the Mt Wilson turn-off at 8.15am. Early notification of your participation and of your willingness to be involved in the car shuffle would be appreciated.**

**Contact Libby Raines, on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen & John Cardy on 9871 3661**

**or on mobile 0418 646 487 if you need to leave a message.**

Bring lunch and morning and afternoon tea and plenty of water (especially those doing the Blue Gum Forest).

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

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2010 – Ikara Ridge at Mount Victoria

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010 – Jinki Ridge off the Bells Line of Road east of Bell

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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.**

**8<sup>th</sup> October 2010 at Sloan Reserve**

**12<sup>th</sup> November 2010 at Wynne Reserve**

**10<sup>th</sup> December 2010 at Wynne Reserve**

**Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details**

### **Footnote**

I neglected to mention in the last newsletter a quite attractive and, as investigation has shown, an interesting and indeed unique plant noted on the Bowens Creek walk. It appeared as bright green tufts of grass growing on moist vertical rock faces beside the road. It is in fact the herb *Alania* (*Alania endlicheri*) which is the only species of this genus in the world. Its distribution is restricted to the upper Blue Mountains with limited occurrences recorded near Gosford and Rylstone. It produces clusters of white flowers in summer.

It is amazing the number of rare treasures these mountains hold.