
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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THE WOLLANGAMBE OUR APRIL WALK

WOLLANGAMBE RIVER and JOES CANYON then to Du FAURS ROCKS

The Wollangambe River rises at an elevation of nine hundred and twenty four metres adjacent to the Bald Trig Station on the Newnes Plateau, a vantage point we have visited on a few occasions after walks in that area.

It then winds its way across the plateau past Gooch's Crater and Lunch Rock, two of our previous walk venues, and past Wollangambe Crater where its course becomes more tortuous; it then forms deep narrow ravines and canyons as it cuts more deeply into the sandstone. It drops eight hundred and sixty nine metres over its length of fifty-five kilometres to its confluence with the Colo River. These figures give some indication of the enormous amount of erosion by mountain streams that has taken place over an aeon to carve the Blue Mountains as we know them today from the vast plateau which once stretched well out past the present coastline. The section of the river we are to visit today is just one of the gorges formed during that interminable process.

In 1920 KJ Back, under the pseudonym Australianus, wrote in his publication *The Royal Toast*: "It is impossible for anyone who



Autumn in the Bush

AND JOES CANYON

has not lived in Australia to fully realise what we mean when we talk about a beautiful morning, ---." A morning such as this almost justifies that rather audacious statement; hardly a zephyr is present to rustle the autumn-tinted leaves and just a few puffs of cloud hang in the azure sky as twenty-eight walkers gather at the Mt Wilson Fire Station.

Libby gives a brief rundown of the plans for the day and we set off along the track much trodden by walkers and

canyoners keen to experience the beauty of this stretch of the wild and wonderful Wollangambe. Initially our route follows the fire trail which allows people to walk in groups and catch up with news of happenings since we last met.

Soon the Wollangambe Track leads off the Northern Fire Trail and we continue in single file down the hill. The abundant small glossy dark green leaves of the Prickly Currant Bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*) stand out in the morning light beneath the open canopy of Blaxlands Stringybark (*Eucalyptus blaxlandii*) and Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*). Presently the path becomes more enclosed as it is overarched by one of the broad-leaved Wattles (*Acacia sp*) and the Bush Pea (*Pultenaea sp*) crowds in on the trackside.

The track descends more steeply and the predominant tree is now the Hard-leaved

Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla*), though the dearth of scribbles perhaps indicates a severe case of writer's cramp. The prickly-leaved Native Holly or Prickly Shaggy-pea (*Podolobium ilicifolium*) is present here as are gnarled Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) carrying many old flower spikes; the whiskered faces with hooded eyes of the Big Bad Banksia Men.

We pass an example of the *Leptospermum macrocarpum*, an uncommon Tea-tree which displays large seed capsules, as the name implies; the capsules take on a silvery metallic appearance as they mature. The form of the sandstone outcrop known as Halfway Rock soon looms before us and Libby pauses here to give an overview of the various sections of canyons on the Wollangambe and of the exit points and tracks. Never one to miss an opportunity Helen, my better half, immediately assumes this to be the morning tea stop and has the food out of the haversack in a flash while encouraging others to follow suit; she is not amused as she repacks the victuals and we continue on our way.

The track now drops down through a cleft in Halfway Rock and follows the contour across the hillside. A few Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) are spot flowering along this section of track and a patch of flaky bark had been rubbed off the trunk of a Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) exposing the stunning deep red bark below. As we swing around to the right we approach a flat saddle where there is a group of Scribbly Gums whose lustrous silver-grey bark glistens in the sunlight contrasting markedly with the blackness of the burnt hollows in the bases of the trunks. There are still however only a few scattered scribbles on these trees.

Bush Pea, Tea-tree and other low growing vegetation enclose the track once more as we continue. Emerging into a more open environment we divert to the left to reach a rock platform which gives views down onto the line of the river. Here Libby points out the course of the Wollengambe, the cliffline upstream from The Beach and the junction of Bell Creek with the river.

The track approaches a knoll around which the river sweeps and at a tee junction we take the more obvious path to the left and drop down an enclosed gully. We clamber through the branches of a fallen tree and nearby a few red tubular flowers of the *Epacris reclinata* stand out on the shaded embankments.

We are now on the bank of the river which we cross to reach The Beach. Many make use, in various modes, of a large tree trunk bridging the stream. Some walk nonchalantly across; others creep on hands and knees while some feel more comfortable shuffling across in a sitting position; very interesting to observe from my position at the rear of the group. Then of course there were some that simply waded through the water.

We pause in this magical spot for morning tea. Locals once referred to this area as the Lake; a still pool reflects the towering cliffs above and the overhanging trees. As I walked along the river edge taking photographs of the scene while the group rested on the sand I recalled a passage I had read about this spot.

Helen Warliker (nee Gregson), a daughter of one of the pioneering families at Mt Wilson, in her book *A Mount Wilson Childhood* concludes with a chapter on the Wollangambe River in which she describes childhood walks, with other village children during the 1930s, to the river for summer swims and exploratory adventures. She recalls making a fire to cook chops along with the occasional freshly caught yabbie and to boil the billy. She concludes the chapter and indeed the book with a beautifully wistful paragraph about sitting on what is now known as The Beach: "A trip to the Wollangambe was the supreme adventure for us in our youth and epitomised more than anything else those halcyon days. At the end of my last school holidays I remember sitting on the sandy shore by the Lake and thinking; 'Life will never be the same again.' And of course it wasn't."

We now make our way upstream below the dense canopy of a smorgasbord of small trees and shrubs including the Scrub Beefwood (*Stenocarpus salignus*), Pepperbush

(*Tasmannia insipida*), Bush Muttonwood (*Rapanea howittiana*) and the Water Gum (*Tristania nerifolia*); the ground cover includes an abundance of Umbrella Fern (*Sticherus flabellatus*) and occasional tiny fungi, Blue Pixie Parasols (*Mycena interrupta*) peek out from the leaf litter.

Just above the Bell Creek junction we pick our way between several King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) and cross the river at a ford of black pebbles. We scramble carefully over huge moss covered boulders and along rock ledges; at one point a young Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) only about ninety millimetres tall grows on a dark sandstone tor, viewed in isolation from its surrounds it appears as a distant conifer clinging to a craggy mountain.

Soon we are standing on the sandy floor of a cavernous ravine known locally as Clarence Creek, though it is part of the Wollangambe. Sandstone cliffs arch inwards and from some viewing points appear to touch; the stream burbles along beside one cliff face undercutting the rock. A few slim bare tree trunks rise up against the cliffs, the foliage at their apex searching for sun. Where the cliffs open out there is a wide reflective pool fed by an unseen waterfall producing that lilting music of water cascading over rocks. The grandeur of this place is overpowering, there is a quietness among the group as we stand, each with our own thoughts, and absorb the atmosphere; some are deeply moved by the sublime beauty.

As we turn to reluctantly leave this memorable place I notice Barbara Harry, Alice Simpson and Sara Sernack closely studying something in the water. There are tiny tadpoles in varying stages of 'morphing' into frogs and as we watch the activity in the water we notice tiny frogs on the sand, smaller than the nail on your little finger and so well camouflaged they are virtually invisible unless they move.

We now return to The Beach, recross the river and make our way back along the track to the flat saddle we passed this morning. Here we turn right and drop down into the creekline

which leads to Joes Canyon. Before reaching the canyon however we climb onto some rock platforms to pause for lunch in the sun. Scattered around the rock outcrops are many Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa* var *spinulosa*) carrying their prominent golden-yellow flower spikes, also present are a few Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) displaying their short stubby flower spikes.

Continuing down the creekline we pass a clump of Red Five-corners (*Styphelia tubiflora*) displaying, as the name implies, tubular red flowers with protruding stamens and we encounter a pair of dark purple fungi possibly the *Cortinarius* sp.

As Libby had predicted the normally dry Joes Canyon is not so today, water calf-deep in places is flowing. As we approach the canyon the water purls along a serpentine rill eroded into a rock platform; high above a sunlit eucalypt stands prominent on the cliff edge. We wade through the narrow dark canyon past the wonderfully curved sculptured walls formed by swirl pools carving down through the sandstone over millennia, we squeeze through a very narrow passage and emerge onto a rock shelf overlooking a limpid rock pool in Du Fours Creek. To describe these canyons too many cliches are never enough, too much rhetoric is scarcely sufficient; they are simply mystical, enchanting, magical places.

Now comes the gentle bush-bash up along the ridge which descends from below Du Fours Rocks. Libby warns everyone to make sure they keep the person immediately in front of them in sight as there is no track to follow and the bush is quite thick in places. Along this route we pass many Lyrebird mounds and Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) are carrying slim emerging flower spikes. The Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*) carry masses of green buds, tiny nuggets of bullion ready to burst into clusters of golden globes through autumn and winter.

We rest at a couple of rock outcrops which afford great views back down into the valley from whence we have just come. Soon we are

walking at the base of the spectacular cliffs below Du Fours Rocks. We make our way past Chinaman's Hat and the many axe grinding grooves on the rock platforms and return to our starting point at the Fire Station; the end of a great day exploring some of the classic features of Mt Wilson.

John C

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, and their partners, 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 more than two hundred 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.

To assist with catering please RSVP by 14th May to Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen Cardy on 9871 3661 if you will be attending.

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 place and time for the walk are given below.

OUR MAY WALK

20th Anniversary of the Group

Friday 21st May 2010

**Expansive Views, Open Woodland,
Windblown Heath and an Intriguing Rock
Platform**

The Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine

A journey back to the beginning; this was the locale for the first walk by the Group on 17th May 1990. The group most recently undertook this walk in October 2007. This walk follows the ridge which runs north between the Wollangambe River and Bowens Creek; there are vantage points from which great views are to be had over and beyond both these wild streams. As you will be treated to a sumptuous afternoon tea we are thinking of your figures and will not (heaven forbid!) be pausing for morning tea.

Meet near the shelter shed in Cathedral Reserve at Mt Wilson at 9.00am. A vehicle rationalisation will be carried out here for the trip to Mt Irvine. (Parking is restricted at the walk start point especially if there has been wet weather, so the fewer cars the better.) Please ring in as early as possible to aid in the organisation of vehicles.

Bring lunch only 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 18th June 2010 – Centennial Glen at Blackheath

Friday 16th July 2010 – Valley of the Waters, Slacks Stairs, Wentworth Pass at Wentworth Falls

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.

14th May 2010 at Wynne Reserve (Planting Ferns)

11th June 2010 at Gregson Park (Opposite Windyridge)

9th July 2010 at Gregson Park

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details