
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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GRAND CANYON AND NEATES GLEN IN FEBRUARY. GOOCHS CRATER IN MARCH

TOPIC

ALAN HEAP – A LIFE TOO SHORT

‘One of Nature’s Gentlemen’ is an infinitely appropriate term to use in describing Alan Heap who, tragically, was suddenly snatched away from us on 20th March. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word; unassuming despite his very high achievements in the business world, polite, charming - generous to a fault. Alan’s first outing with the group was a canyoning trip on the Wollangambe in January 1997. He attended several walks and canyoning expeditions over the next few years until business commitments prevented his participation. Alan did however continue his membership of the group and was an avid reader of this newsletter to keep in touch with group activities.

Alan and Diana were planning an Antarctic trip next year and Alan was already in training to undertake a three day trek across the mountains of South Georgia Island, following that epic



Autumn in the Bush

walk of Ernest Shackleton. Perchance as Alan now flies free there may be a meeting of spirits above Grytviken on South Georgia where Shackleton now lies. We are all the better for having known Alan; our deepest and heartfelt sympathy to you Diana.

(John Cardy on behalf of the Group)

OUR

FEBRUARY WALK

The GRAND CANYON and NEATES
GLEN at BLACKHEATH

Friday 18th February 2011

Alison Halliday kindly offered to write up this walk, read on and be thoroughly entertained and enthralled as she transports us into this idyllic environment. (John C)

As John and Helen decided on a cold holiday, I have taken on the task of writing about the walk for this month. I am already failing to match John’s poetic prose for he has introduced the walk in the newsletter as one of ‘striking vistas, ferny glens, gentle waterfalls and spectacular canyons’; in short we were destined for the Grand Canyon and Neates Glen at Blackheath.

It was one of those wonderful 'summer' days when the cloud seems to fall to head height and the mist rises up from the ground so that the landscape is veiled and grey vapour swirled around us offering tantalising glimpses, mainly of our fellow walkers, as we gathered at Neates Glen on Evans Lookout Road. Twenty of us braved the weather, damp but not cold, and our spirits unaffected by the weather. Libby appointed George as whip and he did a great job ensuring that no-one was lost in the clouds or left behind. We got ourselves organised and walked down the path parallel to the road to the lookout. Beside the path were the occasional red flourishes of the mountain devil flowers and on low growing banksias (*Banksia spinulosa*) there were rather tattered old flower remnants and tiny tight spears of the new ones. The name 'lookout' was a misrepresentation on the morning for the only things just visible were the tops of the first layer of eucalypts immediately below the fence; all else was invisible. There was some reminiscence about just what we could not see and, fortunately, many of us had walked down into the valley or along the edge of the cliffs and we knew the loveliness that was concealed, as Libby reminded us. Ray Nesci identified two quite different she-oaks or casuarinas, both of which seemed to be growing out of the sandstone slabs, one low growing and spreading and the other delicately drooping from about three metres tall. Rain pearly spider's webs clung to every bush and we decided that the spiders must carefully select their leaves and then curl them into neat water-proof homes, placing them in the centre of the web. I am not a botanist, as is now self-evident, and I urge you to re-visit Libby's write up of our last visit to this walk in December 2007 for far more botanical detail than I am able to give. Interestingly the weather then seemed to be very similar. It seems as though the Cardys make a point of avoiding this walk...perhaps they prefer their summer dampness to be further south.

At the lookout is a sundial which has the following Latin phrase around the

circumference 'Horas no numero nisi serenas' which I think roughly translates as 'I count only the sunny hours', so not much work for the sundial on this day. Our latitude is given as 33 degrees, 53` S and longitude 151 degrees, 16`E. The monument was erected in memory of George Evans esq. and notes that he was a 'solicitor of Sydney and London who was a pioneer of this district. He discovered this lookout and entrance to the Grose Valley in the year 1882'. He must have come on it on a fine day. The memorial was erected by his daughter, E.E. MacLaurin, in 1932. The George Evans of this memorial is a mystery. My first thought was of George William Evans who was the first person to cross the Blue Mountains, travelling as far as the Macquarie River, in 1813/14 but he died in 1852, at which time he was living in Tasmania, where he had been since 1844. He was also a surveyor, not a lawyer. There is not a suitable reference in the Australian Dictionary of Biography so, for the moment, our Evans must be notable for his lookout; and that should be sufficient. Libby told us that, due to a landslide, the track to the Valley is closed at Beauchamp Falls. But it was acknowledged that it should lie in the 'future intentions' folder. It is also possible to walk along the cliff tops to Govetts Leap; but today we were headed in a different direction.

From the lookout we continue on a track which allowed tantalising glimpses through the mist of taller trees until we stopped for morning tea at the start of 'The Old Horse Track'. As Libby mentioned, this track is now not maintained which is a shame as its route indicates the way in which stock used to be taken down into the Grose Valley. Unless a track is maintained it is hard for bushwalkers to use it; and it then quickly deteriorates, and also its history becomes elusive. George had been hoping that Libby had not forgotten the importance of tea for those at the rear, and by this time we were well spread out, and the mist muffled our conversations. Those at the front apparently startled a lyrebird which swooped away down into the mist from the pipe railing. Flying is hard for these wonderful

birds and Libby told us that they climb and scramble up trees to fly only downwards. They have learnt to build in trees and on rocky ledges to keep away from the foxes. Their nests are a ragged untidy affair and they lay just one egg.

We continued along The Grand Canyon track which has seen major repairs to a number of sections over the past couple of years. In preventing people from using the track during this time, a couple of high wire fences and gates have been installed but today they are all open. The repairs may be seen at several points: steps and stairs with wood risers replaced, new railings and ladder steps, heavy blocks across swampy places and even stepping stones in a stream or two. There was some discussion about these stones, whether they were made of hewn sandstone or carefully formed concrete, tinted yellow. In either case the surface was deeply dimpled to make a non-slippery surface and they were a good size and firmly in place. The newness was already being tempered by mosses and leaf marks but it all made the walking an easier experience and we saluted those who must have done the hard, and often wet, work. A sign at the start tells us that the final (complete) construction consists of about 1200 steps, stairs and stepping stones.

The track passes through a section of mountain ash which was burnt out four years ago. Many of the trees seem to have rejuvenated and no doubt the young saplings are a result of the fire; the undergrowth and the tree ferns seem untouched. Against one of the trees was a plate-like collection of handsome bright terracotta fungi; and it may be an indication of *Phytophthora*. We identified coachwoods and sassafras by their different bark, and these trees seem to like growing together, one giving shelter for the other. In one place the roots of a tree high above us had descended straight down the cliff face seeking a hold at the base of the wall. The track descended down into the centre of the canyon with a series of steps, and suddenly we were well below the cloud and mist. The rock

walls came in so we could see the striations and every cleft and gap held its own collection of ferns, fungi and all was gently dripping and oozing water. The track continued to follow one stream and then another as they joined. Even when we lose sight of it the sound of bubbling water continues to be heard, a constant melody of a million notes. A scrubwren's nest hangs over the creek. It is a rather untidy twiggy and mossy teardrop but apparently inside is lined with feathers. These are usually built by the yellow-throated scrubwren but may be taken over by the large-billed scrubwren.

The track turns back along and through the Grand Canyon proper as we start to walk upstream instead of down. This track is one of the oldest walking tracks in the Blue Mountains, and one of the few where you can walk along through a canyon and out the other end. It was first constructed over 100 years ago, officially opened in 1907. One can only imagine how the women in their long dresses coped with the damp, and the steps. The track is circular and we are opting to walk up stream, to end at Neates Glen car park, but we pass a couple of groups of young men and women going in the opposite direction, Irish, Germanic and Scandinavian accents are heard. They all look very strong and fit; and young!

Greaves Creek is our constant companion as we occasionally stop to take in the graceful arch of the giant King fern, the tiny mosses and myriad varieties of fern, from gossamer leafed to dense tangled fronds. The cliff is covered in things green, growing, and wet. This stream is more substantial than the one we followed on our route in and down, the water seems clear and on the first crossing we spied a yabby. The heights of the canyon walls are testament to the power of wind and water over the millennia. In several places water comes down in fine sprays or seeps and tracks its way along the rock strata and all feed into the stream with its rushing water and then the long dark pools. No one seems keen to swim. This is an ancient place.

The track demands our attention for, despite the work, the rocks, logs and steps are all slippery; as I proved on trying to look up while stepping down! At least there was plenty of water to clean up the skinned knee. I have never seen so many tones of green in just one place. From the ribbon like ferns with green-black leaves to the bright light green of the new tree fern fronds everything seems to be vividly alive and growing. We cross a stout wooden bridge which announces that we are now at Neates Glen, a long way from the grand sweep of a Scottish glen, and from here we can look down onto the elegant 'nested' tops of the tree ferns.

The group divides before the climb out and those stronger and more agile souls continue to follow the stream up to where the walls come right in and there is another long deep pool. We all then face the simple proposition that what goes down must go up! The steps rise steeply in a couple of zig-zags and then we stop at an open level place with sand, rocks and even a log or two for sitting on while having our lunch. Here conversations overheard cover a range of topics: keeping chooks, Cockatoo Island, eating rabbits, golf, banana sandwiches, broken tea-cups; and of course, water, trees and ferns. Curiously, leeches are also mentioned but for once we had a walk through perfect leech territory and I don't think any one actually 'caught' one. Perhaps they all fell off before being discovered. While traversing the cliff along a narrow path we pass a double loop of strong chain. Libby commented that her son Peter had been there recently to abseil down into the dark hole, along the stream and through the natural tunnel out to the long pool. The dark was full of glow worms...Birds, often invisible but for their voice, follow us out of the depths. A rufous tailed flycatcher put up a lovely display along a tall tree trunk for those in front, probably displaying to the other members of the tribe flitting through the branches. Eastern spinebills were also busy feeding in some of the flowering shrubs.

Our walk down and then out of the canyon prompted thoughts of time and its various measures: the few hours of our lovely walk, the millions of years of this ancient landscape, the slow erosion of rock by water, and the seemingly eternal nature of this fragile ecosystem. On reaching the car park we enjoyed a cup of tea and I investigated a fern guide but too many looked too similar! I leave that to the more botanically expert among us.

Many thanks Alison for that wonderfully evocative description of the walk. Helen and I were thinking of you all on that day and of the starkly contrasting environments we were enjoying. We walked among hundreds of small icebergs stranded on the pebbly beach at Vega Island just off the Antarctic Peninsula in the Weddell Sea. An island with jagged snow-streaked rocky peaks above a gravel-strewn plateau, the surrounding sea covered by brash ice and dotted with large sculptural icebergs which dwarfed our ship. No one seemed keen to swim there either! (John C)

OUR MARCH WALK

GOOCHS CRATER on the NEWNES PLATEAU

Friday 18th March 2011

Fog, low cloud, heavy mist; call it what you will, its effect on the psyche can vary enormously. Driving along the Bells Line of Road with almost zero visibility, huge articulated juggernauts passing perilously by, spray from their tyres adding to the gloom, causes one to wish fervently for clear skies. Travelling along a fire trail on the Newnes Plateau through a fog-shrouded tunnel of Blue Mountain Ash, towering creamy/yellow trunks aglow in the muted light, long ribbons of bark hanging from barely visible branches, ghostly canopies disappearing into the haze; what a rich gift, on the other hand, these foggy conditions can bestow upon us.

Twenty-five walkers managed to find their way through the murk and assembled at

Clarence where Libby soon had us organised into a reduced number of vehicles. A very big thankyou to Meri, Alex, David, Fred, John and Peter for transporting the group onto the plateau. It is great to have Kim and Tim Gow walking with us and Michael Ihm from Mountain Lagoon joined us today; welcome all, we hope to see you on many future walks with the group.

While the condition of the 'road' to our starting point was not quite as bad as I thought it may have been, considering the amount of rain which has fallen on these mountains over summer, the route did provide some challenges for our drivers. Several pools of indeterminate depth (far too large to be called puddles) had to be crossed, deep water-gouged furrows and jagged rock outcrops to be negotiated. These obstacles however were taken in their stride and we were safely delivered to the starting point for this very special walk.

Initially we follow a fire trail along a ridge and from my usual position at the rear of the group I am presented with a wonderful vista as the lines of glistening moist foliage lining the track converge in the distance and the group disappears into the wall of fog which engulfs the forest ahead. We pass through open woodland, the understorey containing some wonderful examples of the Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*), their bright green leaves contrasting markedly with the dark flaky bark of their trunks and major branches, the bark is deep red under the outer flakes. Soon a narrow single-line track crosses our path, rising from a gully to the right and disappearing into the bush to the left. Tracks such as this always elicit a desire for exploration; from whence does it come - to where does it go? The local ants are not distracted by such whimsy, they have been busily bringing orange and yellow soil to the surface and building volcano-like cones with shallow craters descending to their nest entries; there must be even more rain in the offing.

We reach a turning circle where the track narrows and then meanders through groups of

Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus sclerophylla* or perhaps the *E haemastroma*). The distorted trunks and branches of these trees were displaying freshly revealed golden/orange bark, discarded grey bark lay on the forest floor; scraps of brittle parchment carrying indecipherable messages scattered to the wind. One such Scribbly Gum had subsided into the arms of a nearby Geebung; the intensity of its smooth golden trunk enhanced against the dark rough bark of its supporter. Peeking out from among the Curly Sedge or Old Mans Whiskers (*Caustis flexuosa*) were a few blooms of the Purple Flag or Native Iris (*Patersonia sp*). I sighted a lone late-flowering spike of the Narrow-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium lineare*) though there were many many clusters of their basal tufts, exquisite small spiky balls, on display.

A stony spine now runs along the ridge as we skirt around a rock outcrop, its intricately patterned surface embellished with lichens and moss. We climb onto a rocky knoll where we pause for morning tea beneath a mist-shrouded canopy of foliage.

Continuing on we emerge onto open heath. Here the dark egg-shaped fruit of the Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) are prominent and the many Dwarf She Oaks (*Allocasuarina nana*) add a touch of softness to the landscape as do the clusters of tiny white flowers of the Narrow-leaf Platysace (*Platysace linearifolia*). Off to the left the wooded hillside is dotted with hanging swamps; recharged by the recent rains they will release their moisture long into the future. As we reach the end of this ridge the fog has lifted right on cue to reveal a view down onto the pagoda formations which surround Goochs Crater; an amazing sight. The discovery of this formation, as recently as 1978, is attributed to Nicholas Gooch who was a keen bushwalker; it is hard to imagine no European had stumbled upon it before that time. However as a tribute to Nick Gooch the Springwood Bushwalking Club applied for the name "Goochs Crater" to be officially gazetted by the Geographical Names Board and this was granted in late 2004. (Faint hand stencils in

some of the rock overhangs indicate it has been long known by the Aboriginal people who frequented this plateau.)

These pagodas possess an incredible magnetism; people are irresistibly drawn to them, to climb their sloping walls, explore nooks and crannies, admire intricately shaped ironstone ledges and wind worn caves, to reach their summits and stand in awe of the views from atop these unique structures. We spend some time exploring this incredible landscape of fantastically sculptured formations and the nearby sheer cliff faces so straight it is hard to imagine how they could have formed. At the base of these cliffs is the lagoon of Goochs Crater; a swathe of luxuriant brilliant green reeds standing in stark contrast to the surrounding sandstone walls.

We then make our way around to the opposite side of the crater past Blue Mountains Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*) and through closed heath which contained examples of that uncommon member of the Tea-tree family *Leptospermum macrocarpum* carrying their characteristic large seed capsules. We pass many more fantastically shaped rock formations including beautiful natural water bowls filled to the brim and cliff-framed views into the crater, arriving at a point where there is a view through an aperture in the roof of a large open cave to the gully below. Close to this point there is a route down into that gully; a steeply sloping rock face rendered quite slippery by the recent rains. Time to get out the rope! ... To be continued. - Was the rope long enough? Indeed was it strong enough? Did everyone negotiate the slippery slope safely? And what of the dark serpent and the forceful femme? Don't miss the exciting conclusion in the newsletter next month when all will be revealed!

John C

OUR APRIL WALK

Friday 15th April 2011

Spectacular Scenery, Pockets of Rainforest and a Touch of the United Nations

Prince Henry Cliff Walk from Katoomba Falls to the Giant Stairway, down to Dardanelles Pass, to Leura Forest then Federal Pass to the Furber Steps (or Scenic Railway/Cable Way ride back to the top)

Giant Stairway has 911 steps so a programme of knee bends in the days leading up to this walk would be prudent. If you intend riding back to the top make sure you bring money for the fare, now \$11.

Meet at the Katoomba Falls Car Park at the corner of Katoomba Falls Rd and Cliff Drive at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 8.30am.

Bring morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

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 20th May 2011 – Mount Banks

Friday 17th June 2011 – Kanangra Walls

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.

8th April 2011 at Wynne Reserve

13th May 2011 at Wynne Reserve - planting ferns

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details

MEMBER NEWS

Heinz and Marie Krenger have contacted Libby and send best wishes to everyone in the group. Changed family conditions mean they will not be able to join us in the near future but hope to enjoy walks with the group again if circumstances change.