
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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SIX FOOT TRACK SECOND SECTION

TOPIC

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

SIX FOOT TRACK, SECOND
SECTION, MEGALONG
CEMETERY to COXS RIVER

Friday 16th September 2011

Following a vehicle rationalisation at Blackheath we dropped down into the Megalong Valley - the 'valley under the rock' in Aboriginal parlance. The road winds through a little pocket of rainforest past Coachwood Glen and emerges onto the floor of the valley. The sandstone cliffs below the escarpments which enclose this verdant vale tower above. We proceed through lush farmland, past the quaint little school and church, cross the Megalong Creek at Old Ford Reserve and arrive at our start point (the end point for many early settlers) - the old Megalong Cemetery.

Libby gave a short rundown on the development of the Six Foot Track as a bridle track, six feet wide, allowing horses to travel two abreast from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves. Prior to this route being opened visitors to the caves travelled by rail to Tarana and then by horse and buggy over a very rough coach road; the journey from Sydney could take twenty-four hours. The twenty-six mile (42km) route was surveyed in April 1884; two thousand five hundred pounds was allocated to build the track which quickly became very



Spring in the Bush

popular. With the construction of the road to the caves via Hampton and the increase in travel by motor vehicle, use of the Six Foot Track had declined markedly by the 1930's. Subsequently those stretches of track that had not been developed as roads or fire trails fell into disrepair. In the centenary year of the original survey the Orange Lands Office re-marked and signposted the route; the track was reopened to walkers in 1985 and soon became a classic three day walk from the Explorers Tree at Katoomba to

Jenolan Caves. For the more energetic those three days could be reduced to three hours thirty-five minutes as taken by the 2011 winner of the now world-renown marathon run on this track.

We welcomed Margaret Hahn, a friend of Barbara Harry, who was joining us today and, twenty-one in number, we set off toward Coxs River. Initially we follow the gravel road which provides access to the few properties in this vicinity. Below us to the right is the Megalong Creek, a series of ponds reflecting the golden blossom of the overarching wattles that line the stream.

We crest a small rise and encounter a group of teenage girls from the Wyong Christian School who are on the last leg of their walk from Jenolan Caves; some stragglers we passed later indeed appeared to be on *their* last legs. Discussion with one of the teachers

revealed a group of boys from the school were also walking, they however started at Nellies Glen and were walking to Jenolan Caves; a prudent piece of planning.

With good wishes from the girls we follow the track which now leaves the road and drops into a little gully where it crosses Guyver Bridge and climbs to a stile. Here a friendly horse has taken up position and readily accepts all the pats and rubs on offer from passing hands.

The skeletal form of a long dead but beautifully sculptured old tree rises from beside a small pond in the next gully; a wonderfully melodious chorus of frog calls emanating from the pond echoes across the paddock. The track then snakes up to the top of a hill which affords magnificent views. Lush pastures and tree-clad hills in one direction, imposing sandstone cliffs in the other.

Once more we descend into a tree-lined gully where granite boulders begin to appear; this shady niche proves an ideal spot to pause for morning tea. We were entertained here by a plethora of bird calls while two Wedge-tailed Eagles slowly spiralled on thermals, soaring high into the clear azure sky – Bliss!

From this point on, all the way to the Coxs River, huge rounded granite tors dot the landscape; some stand alone as monuments to time while others lie in jumbled piles like discarded playthings of a young colossus. Many are decorated with lichens; some crusted with greys and greens, others splashed with bright orange. In more sheltered places these monoliths are wrapped in velvet mosses or draped with the fleshy fronds of Rock Felt Ferns (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*). While most of these monumental megaliths remain intact some have portions removed or are split asunder as though struck by some huge cleaver; the fractures are so precise.

Blackthorns (*Bursaria spinosa*) are abundant on this land which has obviously been cleared in times past, some are decorated with the Purple Twining Pea or False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*) scrambling up trunks

and along branches. As we move into more wooded country we are serenaded by the mournful cawing of a pair of passing crows.

Through one of the three gates on this section of track the landscape is suddenly illuminated by a profusion of Native Indigo (*Indigofera australis*). Their lilac/pink flowers, carried in racemes, are complemented by the delicate pale green compound leaves. A few Long-leaved Lomatia (*Lomatia myricoides*) were also present here. This shrub has long narrow leaves; not in flower at this time but carries greenish yellow blossom in the leaf axils during summer.

Beside the track I notice a piece of towelling-like material tied neatly around the trunk of a tree, perhaps as a marker. It had been there so long it was almost completely covered by beard-like and crusty lichens that had attached themselves to the material; one wonders what stories are also attached. At a high point with a view down the valley a timber seat has been installed declaring it to be 'Ron's Roost'. The seat is in memory of Ron McSevney (1949-2001) a Scout Leader for twelve years with the 2nd Peshurst Group and Commissioner for four years of the Georges River District; one assumes Ron often passed this way.

Soon the distant sound of cascading water filters up from the valley below as Megalong Creek adds its flow to the Coxs River. Glimpses of rocky pools and shimmering rapids can be seen through the sparse crowns and between the scattered trunks of Brown Barrels (*Eucalyptus fastigata*), Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) and Ribbon or Manna Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). Beside the track now are many examples of the Granite Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia graniticola*) obviously well at home in this environment. The Native Leek or Golden Lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*) is also present here, their bright yellow flowers sit in clusters atop tall erect stems; the lower flowers opening first in this early stage of the season. Nearby there is a Mountain Dragon sunning itself on a rock face; its tail almost twice as long as its body.

We enter a shady glen where the track passes between two enormous granite tors, one overhanging a small pool fed by a trickle of water dropping from a mossy watercourse. Nearby native bees have occupied a space below a granite boulder, building inverted triangular honeycomb stalactites suspended from the ceiling. Across the track there is a cluster of Green Hood Orchids, probably the Blunt Greenhood (*Pterostylis curta*) nestling in the grass.

In this more sheltered area the trees and shrubs of the understorey are draped with Traveller's Joy or Wedding Veil (*Clematis aristata*), their abundant closely clustered white flowers light up the forest. The tiny brilliant yellow flowers of the Button Everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpioides*) spread across the sunnier patches beside the track.

Soon glimpses are caught through the trees of the silver web-like ribbon of the swing bridge stretching across the river. Here the waters of the river cascade over ledges and through channels in the granite bedrock imperceptibly deepening and widening the dozens of swirl pools present; carved over millennia by the interaction of the rapidly flowing water and river pebbles, these pools form intriguing patterns in the riverbed.

Soldiers of the 1st Field Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers, Holsworthy, constructed this swing bridge in 1992. It is named in memory of Corporal Robert Walter Bowtell, a member of this unit who was killed in Vietnam in 1966. As he was born in Katoomba one can but hope that Corporal Bowtell's spirit now resides at this beautiful peaceful stretch of the Coxs River rather than in the killing fields of Vietnam.

Following the stated rule, we cross the swing bridge one by one; the styles of perambulation employed in attempting to reduce the inevitable swaying varied widely as did the perceptions of the experience. Back on terra firma we make our way across a hillside where Devils Twine (*Cassytha sp*) has entangled everything in sight. We then drop down to an area adjacent to the Coxs River

Camping Ground where we sat on the shaded riverbank for lunch; most chose the riverbank, Michael Ihm chose a granite boulder surrounded by gently flowing water on which to perch.

After lunch, Tim Gow and I set off to see if we could find a spot where the group could comfortably boulder-hop back across the river. While Tim did reach the other bank it was decided it would not be prudent to have the full group cross in this manner. Tim carried on to the bridge while I went back to let the group know we couldn't find a suitable crossing; I also couldn't find the group!

I made my way back to the swing bridge assuming the group had done just that, but not so. Now here was the walk whip (me), Tim Gow and Bob Bearup waiting, not sure what path the rest of the group was following. It was suggested this was not a particularly good look, the whip and two others standing on a granite rock shelf by the river not sure of the exact whereabouts of eighty five percent of the group. Losing one or two might go unnoticed but misplacing eighty five percent may be a tad more difficult to explain.

Meanwhile, Alison Halliday and some of the ladies, being much more innovative and resourceful than we mere males, led the group safely across the river by wading. Presently of course Libby and the rest of the waders arrived back at the bridge, and reunited, we set off to retrace our path back to the start point.

As we neared the end of this walk the sandstone cliffs were glowing under the light of the afternoon sun, a stunning backdrop to the verdant farmlands.

In the notice for this walk I suggested the return distance was a little over 12km. When I arrived at the track head notice board there were a few members of the group closely studying the map thereon; fingers pointing to notes, hand spans used as measuring dividers. This intense technical investigation revealed we had probably walked 17.5km. (Just as I had suggested 'a little over 12kms'.) The change in elevation between our start point and the Coxs River is around three hundred

metres with several ups and downs in between; this and the extra couple of kilometres may have contributed to any leg-weariness present but the bushland experiences on offer more than compensated.

As we drove out of this beautiful valley I was reminded of a philosophical gem proffered by Bob Bearup on a walk some years ago. Bob suggested that if you start at a particular elevation, descend several hundred metres then return to your starting point, you have neither gained or lost anything, the status quo has been maintained. I will leave you now dear reader to ponder that deep and meaningful theory.

John Cardy

MEMBER NEWS

Mary Reynolds, co-founder of this group, has recently returned home after a little more than two weeks in Lithgow Hospital. It was perhaps a little extreme Mary, fracturing your pelvis in order to get a couple of weeks rest. Your many friends from the walking group wish you well Mary and hope you have a speedy full recovery.

The bush telegraph has also alerted us that David Salkeld has had a short stint in hospital. Trust all is now well David and that we will see you and Libby back walking with the group in the near future.

OUR OCTOBER WALK

Friday 21st October 2011

Open Woodland, Reeds and Sedges, a Historic Oil Shale Mine, an Old Coke Oven and the Bonus of Some Majestic Views

Asgard Swamp and Surrounds

This is a new venue for the Group. Majestic views from a swamp? Well may you ask; come along and be amazed by the sweeping vistas. This is a relatively easy walk made up of four distinct branches totalling about 9km,

so choices can be made as to which you undertake.

Meet on Victoria Falls Road just off the Great Western Highway about 1km east of Mt Victoria at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 9.00am. There will be a vehicle rationalisation for the 4km drive on unsealed road to the track head.

Bring morning tea, lunch, 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.

NB: Helen and John will not be available on their home phone after Tuesday 18th, call on mobile only if you ring after that date.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 18th November – Mt Hay and the Butterbox

Friday 16th December – Rigby Hill followed by end of year Christmas lunch at Merry Garth

Friday 20th January 2012 – A walk in the Mount Wilson area - 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.

14th October 2011 at Silva Plana

11th November 2011 at Wynne Reserve

9th December 2011 at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details