
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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MOUNT HAY AND BUTTERBOX POINT

TOPIC

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

MOUNT HAY AND
BUTTERBOX POINT ON
THE MOUNT HAY WALL

Friday 18th November 2011

It was a dark and stormy night. (How I've longed for an excuse to slip in that famous opening line.) It was a dark and stormy night prior to our November walk. OK, I'll admit it wasn't all that stormy, but it was certainly dark and wet and foggy and cold and misty. However, when eighteen walkers gathered at Mount Hay Road it was a glorious morning, a clear blue sky and not a breath of wind; the weather gods had been kind to us once again.

Due to Libby's efficient organisation everyone was soon allocated a seat in a reduced number of vehicles for the fourteen-kilometre drive to Mt Hay and we set off in our little convoy. The road from the park boundary was in remarkably good condition (pat on the back for the National Parks Service), allowing the drivers to take more frequent glances at the surrounding vistas. A cloud of fog sat low in Govett Gorge and wisps of mist curled up from the rocky crags of the distant cliff faces. The foliage of the heaths and woodland, still moist from the rain and mist of yesterday and last night, glistened in the morning sun. We passed a spot where in previous years there had been a large drift of flannel flowers, alas



Summer in the Bush

today there were but a few scattered clumps; our flannel flower deprivation would however be assuaged later in the day.

In 1789, on his expedition west of the settlement at Sydney Cove, Watkin Tench reached a fine river which he named the Nepean after British politician Evan Nepean. On this journey he sighted a prominence on the skyline in the west which he named Round Hill. When viewed from the carpark at the end of the road we had just travelled that prominence leaves no doubt as to why

Tench chose that name. It was subsequently named Mount Hay in 1825 after Robert William Hay, Under Secretary to the Colonial Office. The view over the undulating heath lands to Mount Hay, Mount Banks and the clifflines defining the Govett and Grose Gorges is reward enough for the drive from Leura but this landscape deserves a closer look; we set off toward Mount Hay.

The track leads us down into a small hollow and then rises to a saddle. At this time of year a myriad wildflowers decorate the heath. Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*) display their bright red flowers, delicate blossoms of the Pink Spider Flower (*Grevillea sericea*) cluster at the ends of leafy branchlets, Small-leaved Kunzia (*Kunzia parvifolia*) spread a pink haze across the landscape with their abundance of fluffy pink globular flowers.

Once on the saddle we settle down for morning tea in an enchanting meadow of low growing plants. The pure white flowers of the tiny four-petalled Mitre Weed (*Mitrasacme polymorpha*) combine with the small star-like velvet bracts of the Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*) to form a white canvas. From her extensive palette Mother Nature has chosen Dwarf Purple Flags (*Patersonia longifolia*), Common Fringe Lilies (*Thysanotus tuberosus*) and Rush Lilies or Vanilla Plants (*Sowerbaea juncea*) to add flamboyant splashes of purple, mauve, pink and violet to the scene.

While most are captivated by the big picture grandeur of the mountains, cliffs and gorges laid out before us Jan Northam's attention has been captured by an infinitely smaller detail. In a tiny rock crevice nestled under the petals of a native iris is a web structure bejewelled with droplets sparkling like diamonds; another of Mother Nature's masterpieces.

We move on toward the shoulder of Mount Hay past some beautifully patterned rock outcrops beside which several Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*) grow; not en masse but small clumps tucked in against and around the rocks. The darkness of these nearby rocks intensifies the white of the flowers and green tipped velvety bracts.

We arrive at a rock platform where we leave our packs and make the climb through open woodland toward the summit. In this more shaded environment there is a change in vegetation. We see some examples of the Mirbelia (*Mirbelia rubiifolia*) with its whorls of three tiny leaves and clusters of small pink flowers. The Silky Daisy Bush (*Olearia erubescens*) is also present carrying daisy-like white flowers among its toothed oblong leaves, glossy green above and furry white below. There are also many Prickly Currant Bushes (*Coprosma quadrifida*) with their tiny shining leaves and spines.

The sandstone gives way to the basalt cap as we near the summit, we pass some huge basalt tors draped in lush light green moss. A few

Tall Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia stricta*) display their showy white-centred blue flowers.

Soon we are at the rock cairn which marks the summit of Mount Hay, nine hundred and forty four metres above sea level. There is a less well worn track heading in a northerly direction from this cairn which a few of us follow for a short distance. It does not reveal any clear outlook as was hoped but it did lead us past a couple of Howittias (*Howittia trilocularis*), an uncommon shrub which this writer had not encountered before. It carries beautiful deep mauve cup-shaped flowers having a purple centre and numerous yellow stamens. Nearby there was a Native Clematis or Travellers Joy (*Clematis aristata*) winding its way through a low shrub, this allowed us a close view of the delicate flowers which are more usually only sighted high in the canopy of trees.

Returning to where we had left the packs we settle down for lunch. The view from this spot is outstanding. Across the Grose Gorge, beyond Edgeworth David Head, Mount Banks sits on the edge of this yawning chasm; the cliffs appear to encroach upon each other as the eye is drawn to the Upper Grose Gorge. Centred in this vista is Docker Head and Perrys Lookdown. Sweeping left the view includes Clarke Head, Pulpit Rock; Lockley Pylon above Du Faur Head and on the left-hand edge of the Butterbox is a railway tunnel. A railway tunnel? Indeed, a perfectly formed portal; straight vertical sides below a circular arch, dark internal walls leading to a patch of daylight at the end of the tunnel. An amazing sight, in fact an incredible illusion. With the sun at the right angle (the 'tunnel' was not visible when we first arrived at this spot) even when viewed through a powerful zoom lens the 'tunnel' appears to be real.

When I first spoke of the 'railway tunnel' at the Butterbox I received some rather quizzical and disbelieving looks; I am glad many people have now seen it, this is indeed a genuine illusion. (Is that an oxymoron?) Should however I one day report seeing a train emerging from the tunnel it may well be time to call for the men in white coats.

The rock outcrops and cliffs below the shoulder of Mount Hay contain some beautifully formed small caves and sculptured protrusions; one could spend all day exploring these nooks and crannies but Butterbox Point beckons. We retrace our steps to the heath lands, passing along the way some smooth wave-like rock faces embellished with vertical streams of bright orange lichens.

Walking through this low windblown heath is a wonderful experience; expansive vistas in all directions yet incredible beauty laid out at your feet. In moister areas the starry flowers of the Pink Swamp Heath (*Sprengelia incarnata*) are prominent and glistening rosettes of the Common Sundew (*Drosera spathulata*) decorate the moist soil amongst the rocks. The flamboyant yellow sunbursts that are the flowers of the Broad-leaf Drumstick (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) contrast with the tiny scarlet starbursts of the female flowers of the Dwarf She Oak (*Allocasuarina nana*). The Blue Mountains species of Black-eyed Susan (*Tetradlea rupicola*) hang dark pink flowers like tiny lanterns. The Nodding Blue Lilies (*Stypantra glauca*) hold aloft bright blue flowers with prominent yellow stamens; this is the only species of this plant in the world, we are privileged to be able to admire its delicate beauty.

Turning right off the main track we follow a path which meanders along a hillside toward Mount Hay Wall, pausing occasionally to look back across the gully to the imposing form of Mount Hay and to the view now opening up of the lower sections of the Grose Gorge. We linger at a rocky point to take in the closer view of the Butterbox and marvel at the absence of anything that even vaguely resembles a railway tunnel. The path then leads us down a rocky face strewn with large boulders comprised of convoluted layers of ironstone. At the Butterbox there is a small shelter cave where we leave our packs and climb to the top of the formation. The rock platform on top is quite flat and horizontal, a feature which, combined with the almost vertical sides, led to Cyril Byles (Chief Engineer of NSW Railways) applying the

name 'Butterbox' in about 1918. Cyril and his daughter Marie were both keen bushwalkers.

From this vantage point we look across to Explorers Wall and beyond to Mount Caley, Mount Strzelecki, Mount Dixon and Mount Barranbali on the Explorers Range. Before us is the vast void formed by the confluence of the Govett and Grose Gorges, at the bottom of this chasm nestles that jewel of the Blue Mountains, the Blue Gum Forest.

Complementing these expansive vistas are little gems closer at hand. A Small-leaved Boronia (*Boronia microphylla*) clings to the edge of the Butterbox carrying a profusion of unopened flowers, inverted pink teardrops hang like Christmas tree baubles. On rock ledges in sheltered moist areas Dragon Tails (*Dracophyllum secundum*) have stems of pinkish-white tubular flowers just beginning to open. A never-ending display of the grandiose and the graceful; that is the nature of these mountains.

Back at the cave we retrieve our packs and contemplate the possibilities of which features form the illusionary tunnel. The dark vertical cliff above, with a lower rounded-topped cliff protruding at right angles in fact forms the 'tunnel'. Against the background of the lighter cliffs on the other side of Rocky Points Creek about one and a half kilometres away and viewed from Mount Hay with the sun at the right angle, the illusion is complete; an amazing convergence of light and shade.

We then follow a track which contours around the hillside to deliver us back to the car park. At Libby's suggestion we return to the shadier environment back at the Lockley Pylon trackhead to partake of our usual after walk cuppa; a pleasant conclusion to yet another spectacular walk.

So, as the sun sinks slowly in the west we wend our way home. OK, I'll admit it was a little early for the sun to be sinking, just thought I'd finish with another famous old line.

John Cardy

Footnote: Information in these newsletters regarding origin of place and feature names is gleaned mainly from Brian Fox's wonderful publication 'Upper Blue Mountains Geographical Encyclopaedia'. Andy Macqueen's marvellous book 'Back from the Brink – Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness' is an invaluable source of information on all things relating to the Grose Gorge and its near surrounds.

OUR DECEMBER WALK & END OF YEAR / CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Friday 16th December 2011

Expansive Valley Views from a Rocky Knoll

Rigby Hill Overlooking The Grose Gorge

A short gentle walk just long enough to build an appetite for our end of year / Christmas luncheon to follow at Merry Garth (see details later). Views into the Upper Grose Gorge, weather-sculpted rock outcrops and wildflowers on the heath are just some of the features.

Meet at the Pierces Pass lower car park off the Bells Line of Road 2.5km east of the Mt Wilson turn-off at 9.30am or at Merry Garth at 9.15am.

Bring morning tea only and water on the walk. **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.**

END OF YEAR / CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Thanks once again to the generous hospitality of Libby, Keith and Beth the end of year luncheon will be held in the glorious grounds of Merry Garth. Ex-walkers, armchair walkers, family and friends are more than welcome.

Meet for lunch at 12 – 12.30pm.

The same format as last year will be used, that is Nibbles, Ham, Turkey, Dessert, Tea and Coffee will be provided from funds.

Please bring one item only from the following selection **to share**: Any salad type dish, savoury or sweet slices or cheese.

Please bring your own plates, cutlery, glasses and drinks.

To assist with catering please advise Helen Cardy as early as possible if you are coming and, to avoid over and/or under supply, which of the shared food you would prefer to bring.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 20th January 2012 – Happy Valley or Boronia Point at Mt Wilson (Depending on weather conditions)

Friday 17th February 2012 – To be advised

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 December 2011 at Wynne Reserve

13th January 2012 at Sloan Reserve

10th February 2012 at Sloan reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details