

---

---

# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

---

---

Volume 21 Issue 6

June 2011

---

---

## MOUNT BANKS AND BANKS WALL

## TOPIC

### OUR MAY WALK

MOUNT BANKS AND  
BANKS WALL  
OVERLOOKING THE  
UPPER GROSE GORGE

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Spectacles such as those on offer as one stands on the cliff edge at Banks Wall are rare indeed. Spectacles of another kind proved to be quite rare today also, more on that later.

Our venue today suffered from an identity crisis for around one hundred and thirty nine years. The explorer and botanist George Caley ended his attempt to find a path to the west on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1804 when he reached the summit of this mountain. He felt the vertical-walled valley before him would be impossible to cross and, based on his experiences crossing the Devils Wilderness over the previous two weeks, he felt there would be other valleys further on of a similar nature. He named this prominence Mount Banks after his benefactor Sir Joseph Banks. Hamilton Hume, on his journey of discovery across the Darling Causeway in 1827, sighted this mount's distinctive double humps and named it King Georges Mount; Surveyor General Mitchell adopted this name. In 1906 geologist Joseph Carne pointed out this error, however the name did not officially revert to Mount Banks until 1966. It was also referred to on occasion as St Georges Mount and Camels Back. The now redundant line of



Winter in the Bush

sight trig point on the summit still retains the name King George. (It is interesting to note that Joseph Banks, well known of course for his botanical pursuits, also imported merino sheep into England from Spain and sent them to Australia.)

Seventeen walkers gathered near the memorial to George Caley at the Mount Banks Picnic Area on this glorious sunny morning with the wind force at a Beaufort scale of nil; (Francis Beaufort incidentally was a contemporary of Caley).

We welcomed Ken Poppett and Brian McLean who were

joining us today; it was also pleasing to have Sara Sernack and Allan Bonfield back with us for this walk. Libby gave a short run-down of our plans for today and mentioned the conflicting names for the mountain; she remembers it being referred to as Mount King George.

We climbed through a passageway between low shrubbery containing Hairpin Banksia (*Banksia spinulosa*) carrying their impressive golden flower spikes at this time and Mountain Devils (*Lambertia fomosa*) which were spot flowering with their tubular red blooms; secreted among their foliage were many tiny green satanic faces.

The track soon emerges onto an open landscape where the male flower spikes of the dominant Dwarf She-oaks (*Allocasuarina nana*) spread a reddish-brown hue across the field of heath. The rigid Dagger Hakea (*Hakea*

*teretifolia*) are also plentiful here, their elongated beak-like fruit prominent among the stiff needle-pointed leaves. Nestled against the edges of rocks are the low growing *Cryptandra amara var amara* carrying tiny five petalled bell-shaped white flowers.

We climb up the face of a rocky outcrop and move onto scattered rock platforms to the right of the track. The view on offer here across the Upper Grose Gorge to the cliff faces bathed in morning light is magnificent. The sandstone walls stretch from Perrys Lookdown across Blackheath Walls, past Bald Head, Baltzer Lookout, the jutting form of Hanging Rock, Burrarako Head to Burra Korain Head; a stunning vista. The original inhabitants of the area obviously appreciated this view as the rock platforms carry axe grinding grooves and small man-made water wells near naturally formed rock pools.

Standing at vantage points such as this, one can be entirely consumed by the spectacle, however, in the opposite direction lies a different yet beautiful scene. The undulating tree clad landscape stretching beyond the ridge which carries Bells Line of Road, the profiles of Mt Tomah, Mt Bell, Mt Haystack and Mt Wilson; the line of the access road we used this morning giving a human scale to the scene.

The thin soils of the sandstone ridge give way to deeper more fertile basalt soils as we climb more steeply toward the summit. Here, above an understorey containing Prickly Current Bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*), Mountain Grey Gums (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) and Blaxland's Stringybark (*Eucalyptus blaxlandii*) form a high open canopy. Closer to the summit there are Cedar Wattles (*Acacia elata*), Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and a smattering of Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) forming a more dense canopy under which the Tree Violet (*Hymenanthera dentata*) thrives; this tall shrub which carries tiny yellow flowers is indeed related to the tiny herbaceous violets.

Arriving at the summit, an elevation of 1062 metres, we pause for morning tea. Basalt

blocks provide suitable seating at ground level while some decide to partake of high tea, perched atop the circular stone base of the trig point. (A photograph in Andy Macqueen's superb book 'Back from the Brink' of the first party to climb the cliff face of Mount Banks sitting atop this point, taken in 1952, shows a complete lack of vegetation. In those days of course free line of sight had to be maintained between these trig points.)

We now proceed down the southeastern side of the mount and the soft lush vegetation of the basalt soil is slowly replaced by the harder foliage of the sclerophyll plant forms as we descend. The regrowth of the understorey in this open woodland four and a half years after the fires of November 2006 is now quite thick and tall, masking most of the blackened tree trunks. There was however a touch of Mother Nature's after-fire art beside the track, several ferns nestled in the hollowed trunk of a burnt scribbly gum, their brilliant green fronds illuminating the dark recess; a delightful tableau.

Soon we turn right onto the fire trail which leads us to Banks Wall. This track undulates as it meanders around the base of Mount Banks leading us across dry open crests and into moist shaded gullies. For much of its length the edge of the track is decorated with Curly Sedge or Old Mans Whiskers (*Caustis flexuosa*) while the embankments in the moister areas are covered with Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*). We pass (rather quickly) a sheer cliff with a long deep fissure in its face. Near the edge of the track are what at first look like fruit fallen from a tree. Closer inspection however shows them to be a type of puffball, possibly the Horse Dung Fungus (*Pisolithus tinctorius*), their brittle outer skin beginning to flake away exposing their powdery spores to the wind.

We encounter a couple of solitary travellers in this area. Walking along the track is, of all things, a praying mantis! I have not seen one walking on the ground before, only sitting in their prayerful manner among foliage; perhaps this one is embarking upon a mission. Not far from this I spot a lone bull ant. Now we all

know ants are not solitary creatures, on a picnic you do not get bothered by a lone ant, they come in their hundreds, you never find one ant in the sugar bowl, there is always a multitude. So why would a single bull ant be walking along this fire trail? Perhaps it intends to rendezvous with the praying mantis.

In more sheltered areas along the track, none flowering at this time of course, are a few examples of Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*), an abundance of Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) along some sections and many young Waratahs (*Telopea speciosissima*) scattered through the woodland. The blooms of an occasional Flannel Flower (*Actinotus helianthi*) brighten the scene. The Broad-leaf Geebung (*Persoonia levis*) seems to be more prominent than usual here and an Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) sitting atop an embankment had at one time been reduced to a bare stubby stump but has defiantly re-shot and would now hold its own in any Bonsai collection.

Presently the height of the surrounding vegetation begins to gradually reduce and as we crest a small rise we emerge into low wind-clipped heath. Just a few more strides and we are standing on the edge of the precipice which is Banks Wall.

Standing here before this great expanse of valley and mountain we feel we can see forever, or most of us do. Brian McLean may beg to differ as when ducking under a low tree on Mount Banks he was unknowingly dispossessed of his glasses. Minus his spectacles one can but speculate whether this spectacle was diminished to a mere speck for this spectator without specs.

One never tires of gazing into this magnificent yawning chasm; it possesses a fearful grandeur. A place of immense beauty tempered by lurking hazards for the unprepared and unwary. There is a seductive force tempting you to explore this grand amphitheatre.

The majestic sandstone walls rising above the tree-clad talus slopes, the shadow play on the cliffs and forest canopy, the glint of sunlight

off the waters of the valley streams as they flow through the forests below. All this and more beckon you to investigate what is hidden on the valley floor.

How lucky we are in this group to have explored so many of the features on show from this vantage point. Mount Hay, Du Faur Head, Lockley Pylon, Fortress Hill, Pulpit Rock and Rigby Hill are just a few. To have walked along the banks of Govetts Creek, Greaves Creek, Govetts Leap Brook and of course the mighty Grose. To have stood at the base of the towering *Eucalyptus deanei*, in awe of the sublime beauty of this jewel in the crown of the mountains, the Blue Gum Forest; how lucky indeed.

After taking in as much of the vista laid out before us as is possible without going into visual overload we settle down for lunch in this breathtaking al fresco dining spot. Some found suitable spaces amongst the heath, others sat on the edge of the cliffline. Michael Ihm found a rock outcrop near the edge and after lunch reclined in this hammock-like formation, a man at peace with nature.

Following lunch we retraced our steps along the fire trail, people taking advantage on this wide clear track to walk in groups and catch up with news and activities of each other.

On reaching the junction of the track on which we had descended from Mount Banks this morning we paused while it was decided who would go back that way in search of Brian's glasses. It was considered four would be the optimum number so there was no opposition when Brian, Fred, Peter and Michael opted to set off on this optional path in search of the optics, rather optimistically I opined.

The rest of the group continued along the fire trail now bordered with the many-stemmed Blue Mountains Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*). There are Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*) carrying rather large flower heads on reddish coloured stems and Sweet-scented Wattles (*Acacia suaveolens*) adding a touch of colour and scent to the scene.

A glance up to the summit of Mount Banks, silhouetted against an azure sky dotted with fleecy clouds, elicits thoughts of the spectacle search. Have they tracked down those fugitive frames?

The fire trail rises and falls as it dips into little gullies carrying feeder streams of King George Brook. Across this brook are views of Camels Hump (another previous destination for the group) and Mounts Tomah, Bell and Charles prominent in the afternoon light. From crests in the fire trail, looking back over our right shoulder, the peaks of Mounts Caley, Strezelecki and Dixon are visible. Presently the track swings left and we drop down to our starting point, the end of an amazing circuit covering a huge variation in vegetation, geology and scenic wonders. To have spent time in this area on a glorious day such as this was magical.

And what of the ocular odyssey you ask? The search party arrived back in triumph; the glasses were found, Brian can see clearly again.

As we were partaking of the usual after walk cuppa Allan Bonfield showed us a lovely photograph. Allan's wife Barbara is blind and has a Seeing Eye Dog to help her in her incredibly busy life helping and promoting causes for the blind. She is an inspiration to all but must be doubly so to other blind people. The photo was taken at the Seeing Eye Dog Centre when Barbara and Allan were presented with a portrait of Barbara's retired dog, a painting which truly captures a much-loved companion.

John C

## OUR JUNE WALK

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011

**Tumbling Cascades and Glistening Waterfalls, Tranquil Pools and Shady Beaches, Ferny Nooks and Mossy Crannies**

**Waterfall Circuit at Lawson and Terrace Falls Circuit at Hazelbrook**

Two for the price of one this month! This is a new venue for the group; two circuits

exploring the creeks and gullies south of Lawson and Hazelbrook linked by a ridge top fire trail through open woodland. Come along and be pleasantly surprised by the beauty of this area.

(Note: This walk has been scheduled for June while the creeks are, hopefully, still flowing well. The Kanangra Walls walk has been rescheduled for August and the Govetts Leap to Evans Lookout walk has been deferred.)

**Meet at the small parking bay in Honour Avenue (opposite Livingstone Street) in Lawson at 9.30am, the walk will start and finish here; 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 15<sup>th</sup> July 2011 – Coxs Road and Lawsons Long Alley

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> August – Kanangra Walls

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September – Six Foot Track; Megalong Cemetery to Coxs River

---

## 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.**

**10<sup>th</sup> June 2011 at Galwey Lane near Jalscene**

**8<sup>th</sup> July 2011 at Galwey Lane near Rimon**

**12<sup>th</sup> August 2011 at Sloan Reserve**

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