
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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FORTRESS RIDGE TO FORTRESS HILL

TOPIC

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

**FORTRESS ROCK
LOOKOUT, FORTRESS
RIDGE and FORTRESS HILL
north of LEURA**

Friday 15th November 2013

“Get me fifteen inches of inch-wide lead piping and bring it to me.” She secreted the piping in her fur muff. “They’re planning to knock you out. If they start it I’ll finish it. The things I can do to those bastards with my foot of lead piping you’d be surprised!” Appropriate fighting words from someone who had a connection to this place called Fortress Ridge - more on that later.

After a transport rationalisation at Leura the sixteen walkers set off along Mount Hay Road in four vehicles for the eight and a half kilometre drive (measured on the ever reliable ‘Ellis Wheel’) to our starting point. The road had recently been graded, as had the fire trails we would walk today, due of course to the recent fires which thankfully did not reach this side of the Grose and Govett Gorges.

The forecast was for scattered showers and a possible late storm but we set off in very pleasant conditions of sunny breaks interspersed with periods of cloud cover. At a fork in the freshly graded fire trail we veered left to head toward the cliff top above Govetts



Summer in the Bush

Creek. Along the way we paused at a track that leads off to the right; Libby explained this led to Darks Cave.

About 1929 Doctor Eric Payten Dark was instrumental in forming the first recreational rockclimbing club in the Blue Mountains; they were known as the Blue Mountaineers.

Those who did not understand this new activity derisively referred to them as the Katoomba Suicide Club.

During WWII Eric was a member of the Blue Mountains Volunteer Defence Corps (he received the Military Cross for

bravery while serving in the Medical Corps during WWI). He and his men were given the task of seeking out caves in the mountains from which guerilla activities could be carried out in the event of a Japanese invasion. One of the caves he found he did not record; it became a retreat for Eric and his family. His wife named the cave Jerikellimi, made up with letters from family first names; apparently she didn’t mind however, nor did she correct people, if they believed it was an Aboriginal word meaning ‘the retreat of the dark people’.

Eric Dark had a very conservative upbringing but following the Depression he held strong socialist views due to the extreme hardships he witnessed people suffering while he worked in his flourishing medical practice at Katoomba; he became a communist sympathiser. He suffered unrelenting harassment and smear campaigns because of this; his once thriving

medical practice declined markedly and he was threatened with physical violence when on night medical calls or out at evening political meetings. His feisty lady was having none of this. His wife, Eleanor Dark the author, accompanied him on many of these night time appointments; she was the lady with the leaden pipe cosh up her sleeve.

No wonder then that Dr Eric Dark once told a journalist "Going to our cave was very refreshing. As soon as we were in the bush our hearts lightened". I'm sure we can all relate, from a much more comfortable base, to that feeling.

Now we were at the turning circle at the end of the fire trail and a narrow track led us down the end of the ridge. At a rocky outcrop which provided suitable seating we paused for morning tea; we were just above Fortress Rock Lookout.

What a magnificent vista was laid out before us. Far below, unseen from this position, the waters of Govetts Creek could be heard plunging over Arethusa Falls into the narrow Alpheus Canyon. (In Greek mythology the river god Alpheus pursued the nymph Arethusa until she was transformed into a fountain – just as well he never encountered Eleanor and her lead cosh.) Before us was the eastern end of Carne Wall, a majestic sheer bluff dropping vertically to the talus slopes, the morning sun illuminating the gold and cupreous tones of the sandstone. In the distant view, framed by Carne Wall to the left and Fortress Wall to the right, the sweep of cliffs stretching from Evans Lookout around to Pulpit Rock sit above the forested slopes rising from the valley floor; rugged ramparts rising from a sea of green. (Carne Wall was named after Joseph Edmund Carne, a Government Geologist who studied coal and kerosene shale deposits in the Blue Mountains during the late 1800s and early 1900s.)

As we turned to begin our return up the ridge, the more intimate works of Mother Nature replaced the magnificent panorama we had just been enjoying. Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*), miniaturised by the winds

in this exposed area, grew out from among the wonderfully convoluted rock faces on the embankments, their stubby trunks and branches, bent by the elements, mimicking the tortuous shape of the rocks amongst which they were growing. Struggling to be noticed among the ground cover beside the track was the exquisite little Lesser Flannel Flower (*Actinotus minor*), its tiny flowers and surrounding bracts no more than 10mm diameter. This dainty plant persisted along most of the tracks we followed today, its cousin, the larger Flannel Flower (*Actinotus helianthi*) putting in but a few appearances. The fluffy flowers of the Pink Kunzea (*Kunzea capitata*) lit up the scene, as they did for most of our journey today, being perhaps the most prolific of the wildflowers on display at this time.

Soon we were back at the fork in the fire trail and turned left to head along Fortress Ridge proper. In the view to the east, as we gained elevation, were the distinctive forms of Flat Top and The Pinnacles; the horizontal profile of the former contrasting markedly with the craggy lines of the latter. To the northeast the dome of Mount Hay loomed.

Presently the graded fire trail terminated and we were walking on a track where the vegetation of the heath pressed in from both sides. Here the Dagger Hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*) grows in profusion, their distinguishing long narrow dagger-like seedpods held among their sharp, rigid, needle-like leaves. Also here, and contrasting in form, is the Broad-leaved Hakea (*Hakea dactyloides*) displaying at this time clusters of white flossy flowers along stems of soft flat leaves. At ground level, held aloft on very thin stems are the minute flowers of one of the Smokebushes, the Long-leaf Coneseed (*Conospermum longifolium*), the lower lip of these exquisite tiny tubular flowers has three lobes and the base of the tube is slightly bulbous, an intriguing floral form.

The track divides and we take the right hand route up onto a little knoll capped with expanses of rock outcrops. The patterns on these rock shelves are amazing. Shallow

elliptical depressions containing lines of concentric ridges, two or three levels of thin smooth ledges extend out from edges of rock shelves, convex surfaces carrying patterns of closely spaced shallow grooves – fascinating. From this vantage point there are views back to our morning tea spot with Carne Wall beyond and, in the opposite direction, to Lockley Pylon with, across the expanse of Grose Gorge, Mount Banks in the background.

We dropped down to a saddle where the bright yellow flowers of the Broad-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) illuminated the scene along with the bright red tubular flowers of the ubiquitous Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*). At ground level there were many Native Iris or Silky Purple Flags (*Patersonia sericea*) holding aloft, on this sunny day, their large purple petals on short stems. Also spotted here were a few Rush Lilies or Vanilla Plants (*Sowerbaea juncea*) with their clusters of lilac flowers atop smooth stems. On the last occasion we were in this area these flowers were in abundance while today they were very few and far between, perhaps due to the long dry period.

Having crossed the saddle we began to climb Fortress Hill. This took us into open woodland where the trackside was decorated by Black-eyed Susan (*Tetralochea juncea*), their pink four-petalled flowers brilliant in this more shaded area. Old Mans Whiskers or Curly Sedge (*Caustis flexuosa*) sprawled across the ground here, light glinting off the twists and curls of its convoluted stems. The large heads of tiny flowers of the Slender Rice Flower (*Pimelea linifolia*) added a touch of white to the scene.

At an elevation of 938 metres we had reached the highest point along the ridge; we were atop Fortress Hill. (We had started at 900 metres.) Fortress Hill was originally known simply as The Fortress; a 1933 tourist map of the mountains showed it by that name. On the 1965 Katoomba Topographical Map it had become Fortress Hill.

From a point on Fortress Hill there is a view looking across the western face of the cliffs

below Lockley Pylon. Jutting from this cliff is a sandstone column looking like a small version of Pulpit Rock; a stunning sight silhouetted against Mount Banks.

As we begin the descent from Fortress Hill the track passes between several gnarled and battered Old Man Banksias; silent sentinels lining the way. The extreme end of Fortress Ridge is clothed in low windswept heath with a bare rock platform at the point of the prominence.

The panorama laid out before us here is overwhelming. Five hundred and fifty metres below us Govetts Creek is a mere silver ribbon wending its way to the Blue Gum Forest where it contributes its flow to the Grose River. The cliff line running from Docker Head near Perrys Lookdown past Pulpit Rock to Govetts Leap Lookout, on to Griffith Taylor Wall and Evans Lookout, past Point Pilcher above Beauchamp Falls and back to Carne Wall is truly a sight to behold.

Evidence of the preventative measures taken to stop the recent fires impacting the Blue Gum Forest and areas beyond could be seen below Mount Banks. Ridges running up the talus slope to the baseline of the cliffs showed signs of the back burning. On the ridge closest to the Blue Gum Forest, below Banks Wall, a thin line could be seen. This was the raked trail which was put in from which the back burning could take place. Thankfully the measures taken were successful and the fires did not reach Blue Gum Forest.

We had lunch in this very special place while trying to take in the majestic scene surrounding us. Libby of course, in spite of how busy she has been over the last few weeks, produced her very welcome Bushwalker Cake as usual; many thanks from us all Libby.

We then retraced our steps back to Mount Hay Road. Not far from the cars a few rather large drops of rain were felt and just before reaching the cars small hail began to fall; the predictions were proving to be correct.

Back at the meeting point at Leura some decided to call it a day as other commitments called. Kim and Tim Gow, who walked with us today, kindly invited us to call around to their block of land nearby; the rain and hail had stopped by now and we could have our after walk cuppa there.

Very shortly we were at the block and what a lovely place it is. The upper two arms of Govetts Creek run through the block, the source of that 'silver ribbon' we had been looking down on from Fortress Hill. How nice it will be to walk through the front gate to the sound of not one but two little streams burbling and gurgling below the access bridges.

A great way to end yet another wonderful walk; afternoon tea at Kim and Tim's place.

John Cardy

OUR DECEMBER WALK

!!! FIRST FRIDAY IN DECEMBER !!!

Friday 6th December 2013

**Open Woodland and Lush Rainforest –
Some of Mt Wilson's Secret Places**

Zircon Creek Area at Mount Wilson

This morning walk should build an appetite for the end of year Christmas luncheon awaiting back at Merry Garth. It should also satisfy your appetite for lush mountain scenery in the evocative atmosphere of the very special Mt Wilson bushland. (In stark contrast we will also be passing through areas ravished by the recent fires.) There are some steep uphill and downhill sections on the proposed route but they are relatively short and this is not a difficult walk. The group last visited this area in January 2008.

Meet at Merry Garth at 9.00am

Bring morning tea only, lunch awaits at Merry Garth

Should you be bringing food for the luncheon, Libby has suggested it may be dropped off to the kitchen at Merry Garth before we leave for 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 ring after the evening of Wednesday 4th December.

END OF YEAR / CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Thanks once again to the generous hospitality of Libby and Keith 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 12.30 – 1.00pm.

A format similar to last year will be used, that is Nibbles, Turkey, Dessert, Tea and Coffee will be provided.

Please bring one item only from the following selection **to share**: Items for a cheese platter, salads, hot savoury dishes that go with the turkey which is provided or you may elect to pay \$10 per person and just come and enjoy.

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

To assist with catering please advise Helen Cardy (9871 3661 or 0418 646 487) 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 17th January 2014 – Bowens Creek Road – Bilpin to Mt Irvine

Friday 21st February 2014 – Grand Canyon - Evans Lookout to Neates Glen

Friday 21st March 2014 – Blue Gum Forest - Perrys Lookdown to Govetts Leap Lookout

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.

13th December - meet at Hay Lane

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details