
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NELLIES GLEN AND THE DEVILS HOLE

TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK

**NELLIES GLEN, SIX FOOT
TRACK, DEVILS HOLE and
BONNIE DOON TRACK at
KATOOMBA**

Friday 15th March 2013

Today we are to visit the Devils Hole, what a coincidence then that we have thirteen walkers, the Devil's number. (Coincidence or supernatural powers at work, is my previously stated scepticism waning once again?)

We meet adjacent to the Explorers Tree, the stump of a tree allegedly marked by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson in 1813. The 'protective' wall built around the tree in the 1880s resulted in its demise. The upper trunk was removed and stood in the grounds of the Hydro Majestic Hotel where it became a feature, covered with visiting cards pinned to it by guests; it was destroyed in the fire which engulfed the Belgravia wing of the hotel in 1922. While its legitimacy with regard to the three explorers remains shrouded in mystery the stump itself is at present shrouded in black plastic, standing like a forlorn Christo wrapped sculpture. Enough superstition, mystery and history for now, time to walk.

Before setting off we welcome two guest walkers, Jane Mayne and her young friend who was visiting from Austria, Laura Schroeder - it was a pleasure to have them join us for the day. We make our way down to



Autumn in the Bush

Norths Lookout where the heavy mountain mist obliterates any long views but where the rushing waters from the recent rains can be heard plunging into the valley via the Bonnie Doon waterfalls. (Norths Lookout is named after John Britty North who commenced many of the coal and kerosene shale mining ventures in Katoomba in the late 1800s.)

With high hopes that the mist will burn off we head down into Nellies Glen to negotiate over 400 steps into the Megalong Valley. (The glen

was named after North's daughter, not Nellie but Ellen, who was known as Nellie.) Along the way Peter Wholahan and I divert up a short sidetrack to photograph Ethel Waterfall in full flow. (Ethel Waterfall was named for another of North's daughters - her name *was* Ethel.) Part of the Bonnie Doon set of falls, it is a waterfall this writer had not previously visited, it is a wonderful sight; a tall single drop spreading to a wide cascade at its base.

As we carefully pick our way down through the glen we wonder at the stamina of the more than six hundred runners who came this way last weekend on the Six Foot Track run to Jenolan Caves. That route is usually walked over three days; the winning runner last weekend took about three hours twenty minutes – amazing!

After stepping upon conveniently placed boulders to cross the unbridged and freely

flowing Megalong Creek we are on a track that levels out to some extent. We meander through the open forest with the crowns of the trees veiled in mist, foliage and trunks glistening with moisture, damp mosses and lichens glowing green and grey; the ambience of the bush in conditions such as this is very appealing.

Libby chooses a rocky knoll beside the track as a perfect place to pause for morning tea. The vertical rock faces here are decorated with crustose grey/green lichens and small Finger Ferns (*Grammitis sp.*). The beauty of the surroundings is soon forgotten by some when the first leech of the day is sighted. Copious supplies of sodium chloride appear from nowhere, enough I venture to turn Megalong Creek into a temporary salt-water stream if it all escaped. There was some nervous shifting and shuffling, lifting and inspection of feet and legs; it is amazing what reactions the humble little *Hirundo medicinalis* can elicit.

Continuing along the track we pass some wonderful examples of the Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*), their newly exposed bark ranging through pale green/grey to salmon to orange. Soon the bush track emerges onto a wider vehicular track – Nellies Glen Road. It is now an easy stroll, accompanied by the sound of water flowing in Megalong Creek which runs parallel to the road, to the track we will take running off to our left. That track runs to the base of the cliffs below the pumping station on Narrow Neck. Before taking that route however we continue on for a short distance to the site of the old mining village which once occupied this area.

The Nellies Glen Village serviced the needs of the miners who worked the Glen Shale Mines and of their families. The Glen Shale Mines were situated on the western side of Narrow Neck below the Corral Swamp area. A plaque at the village site and other references state there was a thirteen room hotel (there's that number again), a school, a public hall, a butcher's shop and a bakery; the village existed in various forms between 1885 and 1904. The hotel was taken by bullock team to

Lurline Street in Katoomba for re-erection; other salvageable building materials were also used in Katoomba.

Laura, our young guest from Austria, is thrilled when she gets to see some young wallabies and several kangaroos in the wild at the village site; she especially wanted to see these animals in their natural environment.

Because I had walked the Devils Hole a few times recently, I take over as leader back at the sidetrack and Libby drops back to my usual position as whip. The group now follow me (they know not what they do) past a lovely woodland of Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus haemastoma*) whose white trunks carry the amazing zig zag patterns created by the chewing of the larvae of *Ogmograptis*, the Scribbly Gum Moth. Even without the artwork of Ogmo these trees are a stunning sight, their contorted trunks and branches present a wonderful sculptural appearance, in some cases enhanced by the bushfire-created dark hollows at their bases; one of the delights of the Blue Mountains bushland.

A stone cairn marks the spot where we divert to the left off the 4WD track and follow a narrow footpad through the woodland. Usually from this area the dark form of Boars Head Rock can be seen far above indicating the height we have to climb. Today, perhaps fortuitously, mist shrouds the escarpment disguising the height of our climb. We cross Devils Hole Creek which is flowing more fully than usual, pass between two magnificent Angophoras forming a portal on the path, cross another small arm of Devils Hole Creek and begin the climb toward Devils Hole.

The track climbs steeply through open forest and we stop frequently to rest. Slowly the canopy becomes more enclosed as we approach the cliffs and the environment becomes moister.

More moisture of course means the possibility of more leeches. We arrive at a large fallen tree trunk and pause to rest though rest is far from the minds of some. A leech is spotted and so begins the leechy leap or *Hirundo* fandango. Part of this ritual involves dusting

legs, ankles, shoes and socks with copious amounts of good old sodium chloride while hopping from foot to foot with head swinging from side to side examining the lower limbs. Freda I think claimed the champions sash. Finally calm returns and we move on, leaving behind a well-seasoned section of bush.

We pass a huge boulder carrying an array of velvety moss ledges and now, under the shadow of the escarpment, we move into the rainforest. The track becomes more level now as it contours across the slope and usually presents an easier section of this walk. Today however, resulting from the recent storms, we encounter several fallen trees lying across our path, impeding our progress and, along with some minor washaways, making identification of the route more difficult.

These minor setbacks however do not detract from the beauty of the surrounding landscape. Forest giants march down the steep slope, huge moss-draped tors dot the scene, tiny ephemeral streams sparkle as they trickle through the rocks; there is an overpowering greenness below this dense canopy. We negotiate the last of the fallen trees and now climb steeply to regain the marked track and are soon at the junction of the Devils Hole and Waterfall Tracks. It is decided we will pause for lunch before beginning the climb through the cleft: a) to give us all some energy and b) so that Libby can distribute her much appreciated Bushwalker Cake so she doesn't have to carry it on the rest of the climb.

We retreat to a dry overhang we had passed earlier so we can dine in a leech free zone; during lunch we do see a couple but they are ones who have hitched a ride. I remove from my socks two of the tiniest leeches I have ever seen and others seem to also encounter these baby bloodsuckers. I know nothing of the breeding cycle of these little critters but it appears it could be leeching season. (Unfortunately the Homo sapien variety of leeches also seem to be breeding in profusion of late.)

During the inevitable discussion on leeches while we were having lunch Rob Bearup

produces a packet of liquorice allsorts. Offering them around, he states they are a known deterrent for leeches; now who am I to question the medicinal knowledge of a retired pharmacist, I reason, as I accept some of the sweet treats. (I chose not to check the veracity of Rob's claim with our other retired pharmacist Robert Chesney.)

Suitably re-energised we continue. Leaving our packs at the bottom of the Devils Hole Track we divert to the nearby unnamed waterfall. These falls on the upper reaches of Devils Hole Creek commence as a series of small cascades near the top of the cliff and combine into a tall single drop at the base. There is a fall with a smaller volume of water to the left of the main fall which drops over a sheer cliff then cascades over fern and moss covered rock shelves at its base. On the remote side of these falls is a large cave which curiously is named Waterfall Cave although the falls themselves carry no name; perhaps they could be called Cave Waterfall to create a circular nomenclature. After taking in the beauty of these falls we return to our packs and begin the final climb to the Devils Hole.

What a spectacular image this cleft in the cliff presents. Two dark vertical rock faces form a bright slash of sky when viewed from the glorious gloom of the lower section. A huge boulder, the size of a small hut, is wedged tightly (one hopes) between the rock faces, breaking the slash of skylight. Truly a sight to behold.

The Gundungurra people used this route out of the valley probably for thousands of years. Tree trunks were notched to provide footholds and were used as ladders, as they also were at Nellies Glen; these became known as Blacks Ladders by the European settlers. Miners from the Glen Shale Mine used this route in the late 1800s. The first known reference to the name Devils Hole was in 1923.

The climb through the cleft involves a couple of scrambles up rock faces but everyone handles it well and are rewarded by the spectacle of the huge boulder overhead and the views back to the cliffs of Narrow Neck

dramatically framed by the walls of the Devils Hole. An added bonus today was the yabby well sighted by Rob Bearup beside the track about halfway through the Devils Hole. Nestled defensively against a rock it holds its body erect with blue-tipped red nippers held menacingly aloft; a bonus for we locals but a real treat for our young visitor from Austria.

And so we arrive at Cliff Drive, the skies having now cleared we are rewarded with panoramic views across to Narrow Neck, Castle Head, Ruined Castle and the edge of Mount Solitary.

A short street walk brings us to the Cliff Top or Bonnie Doon Track. This initially leads us through dry heath land before dropping down past the sidetrack to Therabulat Lookout, across the creek at Birdies Bower then down to a creek crossing where the slopes are clothed in masses of Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*). A short climb then delivers us back to Norths Lookout, now offering expansive views into the valley, part of which we have just travelled. A climb up a rather steep section of Nellies Glen Road takes us back to our starting point. Another great walk which exposed us to so many different aspects of these beloved Blue Mountains.

FOOTNOTE: Most information re origins of names of various features and historical details were gleaned from Brian Fox's "Blue Mountains Geographical Encyclopedia" and from Keith Painter's Pocket Pal booklet "More Katoomba Walks", one of a series of eight (that I know of) very informative pocket-sized booklets on walks in the Blue Mountains. Incidentally, it was Keith Painter who proposed naming Norths Lookout after John Britty North; it was previously unnamed.

John Cardy

OUR APRIL WALK

Friday 19th April 2013

Amazing Pagoda Formations, Views into the Wolgan Valley and a Tunnel Dotted with Glow Worms

The Old Coach Road, Wolgan Valley Railway and Glow Worm Tunnel in the Wollemi National Park

The group last visited this venue in July 2008. The drive to the start of this walk can be an adventure in itself with much of the road following the old railway per-way and passing through one of the railway tunnels.

(Depending on the prevailing condition of the road it can be a *real* adventure.) It is approximately a 34km drive from Clarence to the walk venue and **4WD or high clearance vehicles would be much appreciated.**

Though the walk is approximately 10km long it is a relatively easy route on mostly good tracks, the only steep pinch being the rise to the pagodas on the Old Coach Road.

Remember to bring a torch for the walk through the tunnel.

Meet at 9.00am at the Zig Zag Railway parking area at Clarence or at Merry Garth at 8.20am for an 8.30am departure.

Bring morning tea, lunch and 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.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th May – Lunch Rock and Wollangambe River near Bell

Friday 21st June – Numantia Falls and Victory Track at Faulconbridge

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help would be very much appreciated.

12th April at Galwey Lane – Jalscene End

10th May at Wynne Reserve

Contact Libby or Beth Raines on 4756 2121 for details