
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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CENTENNIAL GLEN AT BLACKHEATH

TOPIC

OUR MAY WALK

WALLS LEDGE, COLLIERS
CAUSEWAY, PORTERS
PASS and CENTENNIAL
GLEN at BLACKHEATH

Friday 15th May 2015

As we made our way through the heath and across rock outcrops at the beginning of this walk the appealing chinking sound of the ironstone scree underfoot elicited, for me, memories of this walk five years ago. I feel sure Libby would have had memories flooding back, not of five years ago, but of twenty-five years ago. It was then that she led the first walk for this group on Thursday 17th May 1990. (Walks were held on Thursday up until May 1992 when a survey determined Friday was a more suitable day for many of the increasing number of walkers becoming involved.) This walk thus celebrates the silver anniversary of the establishment of this Group by Libby Raines and Mary Reynolds; those who have reaped so much pleasure over the years from these walks would agree, I am sure, rather than silver this is a golden occasion.

Seventeen walkers, the same number incidentally who attended that first walk, (Is that a bit spooky?) gathered at the end of Centennial Glen Road in glorious weather. We welcomed David Cockerell, a friend of Robert Chesney, who was joining us for the first time. We also welcomed back Jan Northam who has



Winter in the Bush

not walked with us for some years yet still retains her infectious enthusiasm, seeing and enjoying beauty in the bush at every turn.

The track led us west off the road through shoulder-high heath, domed mounds of Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*), Dwarf She-oak (*Allocasuarina nana*), Coral Heath (*Epacris microphylla*), Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) and many other varieties of wind-pruned shrubbery. Across this tapestry of diverse foliage forms and muted hues the sandstone walls of the eastern

escarpment of Shipley Plateau rose, illuminated by the morning sun; the wooded talus sloped down to the floor of Kanimbla Valley.

Land on the corner of Centennial Glen and Shipley Roads was purchased in 1908 by a retired sailing ship captain, James Wall. He, with wife Annie and his family made their home, 'Wallville', on that block. We approached steps cut into the rock face; these steps led us down to Walls Ledge. A magnificent panorama opened up below of the farmlands in Kanimbla Valley and of the enclosing mountains; a stunning autumnal bucolic scene. A row of large exotic deciduous trees were clothed in their golden autumn cloaks as was a tree standing alone near a farm dam; the glassy surface of the dam reflected mirror-like images of surrounding features. 'Kanimbla' is an Aboriginal word for fighting

grounds; no description could be further removed from this tranquil scene.

The Walls Ledge Track, as the name suggests, contours along a claystone ledge below a weathered cliff face with many ironstone inclusions. Further along the track the cliff face became lighter in colour, yellows and golds exposed by wind erosion of the sandstone. The views into the valley and across Centennial Glen Creek to the cliffs above Colliers Causeway were indeed spectacular. Yet a tiny vertical garden on a moist section of rock face beside the track caught the eye; a host of red Common Sundew (*Drosera spatulata*), their fine hairs tipped with glistening globules of sticky fluid to entice unwary insects, were nestled among the light green fronds of small ferns. The track dipped slightly as it passed below a high overhang and we paused in this sunny sheltered spot for morning tea.

The track dropped down into a moister environment as we continued. We arrived at a rectangular bath formed by a low rock wall within a natural pool; it is fed by a trickling waterfall. We were at the rather exotically named Cleopatras Bath; origins of this glamorous local usage name are, like Cleo, buried in the mists of time. Soon we descended some rather steep stairs and we were on the bank of Centennial Glen Creek. The sound of an unseen waterfall emanating from within an enclosed grotto was an irresistible enticement to take the narrow path upstream into this beautiful canyon-like environment; the effort did not go unrewarded, a narrow ribbon of white dropped into a pool surrounded by mossy rock walls. It is not hard to understand why this spot is sometimes referred to as Fairy Grotto.

Just downstream of the grotto and above Slippery Dip Falls there was a wonderful little rock pool. Oval in shape its perfectly clear water revealed a smaller oval at its base filled with a bed of sand and pebbles; water flowing into and out of this pool had the silky appearance of molten glass folding over the rock.

We then descended the steps beside Slippery Dip Waterfall, the calm conditions today resulted in a dry passage rather than the windblown shower often experienced on these steps. These falls are well named as the water courses down a large, curving, dished gutter worn into the sloping rock face; what a ride it would be if only it ended in a deep pool rather than onto the jumbled rocks that it does.

At the base of the falls it was necessary to cross the creek over and between large boulders and across slippery rocks. At this point Jan Northam questioned my description of this walk as being fairly easy. You should know Jan that in 'guide-speak' its always just over the next rise, just around the next bend and it is always 'easy'. With everyone providing assistance where needed we all safely crossed Centennial Glen Creek and were then on Colliers Causeway.

Henry Justice Collier (1856 – 1933) was a Blackheath Storekeeper, a trustee of the Blackheath Reserves and was later a Councillor. The track which takes his name was built in 1916 and skirts the top of the talus slope along the base of some spectacular vertical cliff faces. It initially traverses rather dry terrain passing under large rock overhangs and occasionally moves away from the cliff line. Where it swung back to the base of the cliffs, in an area below an unnamed tributary which flows into Porters Pass Gully, the track passed over quite wet patches and was lined by lush moss banks of the most incredibly deep greens. On previous occasions, when strong winds were blowing, we have seen the waters of this small stream leaping high into the air rather than falling over the cliff edge; in calm conditions today the usual expectations of a waterfall prevailed.

Soon the track led us through a narrow gap between two large boulders; this gap formed a metaphorical gateway between the dry forest of the talus and the moist rainforest of the gully; we were nearing the junction of Colliers Causeway and Porters Pass.

The track then took us across a beautiful little unnamed cascading waterfall; Keith Painter,

writer of the Pocket Pal series of walk booklets suggests Porters Cascades would be appropriate, and why not? A couple of metres further on was a smaller trickling fall which fed a small rectangular trough carved into the rock; perhaps a baby bath for Cleopatra's three children whom she had with Mark Antony, then again perhaps the bewitching atmosphere of this enchanting place was addling my brain. (It was in fact a drinking trough conveniently placed at the junction of these two walking tracks.)

Now let us go to The Rocks in Sydney (bear with me, the brain isn't becoming more addled) where, in 1827, a son was born to convict parents. Timothy became a tinsmith, married Lydia Boulton in 1850 and was living in Blackheath (or Paradise Hill) in the 1880s. He wanted to go hunting in the Kanimbla and circa 1886 discovered a pass into the valley; it was named Porters Pass after that tinsmith - Timothy Porter.

The climb up Porters Pass began with a series of well-worn stone steps winding up between the gnarled trunks of ancient forest giants, the surroundings decorated with luxuriant ferns, rock walls coated with mosses exuding glistening beads of moisture. The track dipped to a rocky creek crossing then continued up steep stairways cut into the rock face. We rested on a rock outcrop at a point on the margin between the rainforest of the gully and the dry open forest and heath of the hillside.

After a short spell we continued up the hill and turned right at the track to Lamberts Lookout, an impressive rock outcrop which provides ample seating places for lunch with panoramic views into the valley and of the surrounding cliff faces, both near and far; we do dine in some of the best places. The lookout is named for Lambertus Vandenburg who worked as a signwriter at the Blue Mountains Council for twenty-nine years. The naming was a farewell gesture from the council on Lambert's retirement in 1987; the wooden sign bolted to the rock formation was painted by Lambert, the last he made for the council. There is also a plaque here declaring it is Logans Rest; the

story of this sign is another buried in the mists of time.

Time in the present was now moving on so we reluctantly left this eyrie and continued up the slope, the heath plants pushed in on the track which was quite eroded in places. We passed examples of the Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) their small nectar-rich flower spikes result in the alternative common name of 'Honeysuckle' being applied. Also along this section of track were the Prostrate or Mountain Geebung (*Persoonia chamaepitys*) enhancing the scene with their clumps of light green foliage.

We emerged near Burton Street, followed the fire trail to the right and took Cecil Road up to Kanimbla Road; it was on the corner of these two roads that Timothy Porter lived with his family in their home 'Avoca'. We then made our way across the exposed heath of Centennial Glen Recreation Reserve to Fort Rock; a track was first constructed to this isolated formation in 1936. We spent time here taking in the expansive views; some took the track toward the escarpment while others clambered to the top of the Fort to obtain preferred vantage points.

Having taken our fill of the views on offer (including to our cars, way over on the other side of this deep gully) we headed down to a rock platform. There a track led off to the left toward Bundarra Street; we hairpinned sharply to the right and began the descent into Centennial Glen.

We passed a magnificent display of flower spikes on a tall Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) as the track began to follow a tributary of Centennial Glen Creek. The track was badly eroded; slippery and muddy in this area, yet progress was relatively easy - wasn't it Jan? Presently we were on more solid footing adjacent to the cliffs which are very popular with rock climbers, as indicated by the installed rock anchors and smudges of white rosin on, at times, imperceptible handholds.

We were now back in an enclosed, shaded, ferny and mossy area; we were in Centennial Glen. This glen was named in 1888 for the

centenary of European settlement in New South Wales. The track then hugged the base of the cliff line and led us behind the waters of Centennial Falls; a silver curtain of water through which a unique view of the surrounding landscape was revealed. A little further on was a view, framed by lush foliage, of the lower section of Centennial Falls cascading over a steep rock face. The track then led us around to the opposite side of this little glen where there was a lovely view, back across the gully, of the full vertical drop of the falls crashing onto the rocks beside the track we had just traversed; a wonderful sight.

So then we left this pleasant little vale and climbed back up to the cars, passing some rather sculptural rock formations on the edge of a cliff along the way. Thus ended a magnificent walk under the most idyllic weather conditions; a very pleasant way to spend a day in the mountains. Timothy Porter's daughter Amy used to say she lived in Paradise; who could argue with that?

To celebrate the twenty fifth anniversary of the group, while we were partaking of the usual cuppa, my better half, Helen, presented a little cameo bushland scene, (she is certainly better by half at creating cameo bushland scenes). It showed Libby leading a group on a walk; stick in hand and, as always, hair tied with a blue ribbon. We have calculated that over those years, with the many check walks she has done and the extra walks the group used to do in 'five-Friday months', Libby has walked a distance that would have taken her from Sydney to Perth. We are all so glad you stayed in the mountains Libby and didn't actually head for the West; many, many thanks to you Libby, and to you Mary, for all your efforts in establishing the group and keeping it viable for a quarter of a century.

John Cardy

OUR JUNE WALK

Friday 19th June 2015

A Walk Through History With Magnificent Views, Coachwood Rainforest and the Tinkling of Bellbirds

The Golden Stairs, Ruined Castle, Giant Landslide and Furber Stairs at Katoomba

The group last undertook this walk in 2010. This is a spectacular yet challenging walk of approximately 12 km with a descent and ascent of about 370 metres. That ascent however can be made by riding the Scenic Railway if you wish, rather than tackling the Furber Stairs, **but be aware the cost of that ride is now \$16** so, as Joe the Gadget Man used to say: "Bring your money with you".

Meet at the car park in Katoomba Falls Reserve (opposite Katoomba Falls Kiosk and next door to the Caravan Park on Katoomba Falls Road) at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for an 8.30 departure.

There will be a car shuffle to the top of the Golden Stairs on Narrow Neck along the recently refurbished Glenraphael Drive.

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.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17th July – Mermaid Cave and the Mystery Holes at Blackheath

Friday 21st August – Waterfall Circuit, Woodford to Hazelbrook

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.

Friday 12th June at Hay Lane (Sloan Reserve)

Friday 10th July at The Avenue (outside Fernhill)

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details