
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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May 2015

NATIONAL PASS AND VALLEY OF WATERS

TOPIC

OUR APRIL WALK

**DARWINS WALK,
NATIONAL PASS and
VALLEY of the WATERS at
WENTWORTH FALLS**

Friday 17th April 2015

It was 50 minutes before midnight on the 11th January 1836 when the ten-gun brig HMS Beagle hove to in sight of the lighthouse on the south head of the entrance to Port Jackson; on board was the twenty-six year old Charles Darwin. Early the following morning the brig entered the harbour.

Early on the morning of 17th April 2015 light misty rain fell as fifteen walkers gathered at Wilson Park in Wentworth Falls. We welcomed Merren Dargan who was joining us for the first time and welcomed back Alex Halliday after a long absence. A car shuffle organised by Libby soon had sufficient vehicles at the Conservation Hut to bring us back to this spot at the conclusion of our walk. We were now ready to set off along the course of Jamison Creek; a delightful little rill of water running freely after recent rain.

Early on the morning of the 17th January 1836 Charles Darwin, accompanied by a local guide, crossed the Nepean River via the Emu Ferry and: "In the middle of the day; we baited our horses at a little Inn called the Weatherboard. The country here is elevated



Autumn in the Bush

2800 ft above the Sea." Darwin then set off to walk: "----- down a little valley & its rill of water, suddenly & without any preparation, ----- an immense gulf is seen at the depth of perhaps 1500 ft beneath one's feet." He was at the top of Wentworth Falls, then known as Campbell's Cataract. He wrote in his notebook: "Certainly the most stupendous cliffs I have ever seen." By the end of the day Darwin and his companion had moved on to Blackheath.

An aside: Just as Darwin was no ordinary person, his

notebooks were no ordinary notebooks. The label inside the covers stated; "Velvet Paper Memorandum Book, so prepared as effectually to secure the writing from erasure; with a Metallic Pencil the point of which is not liable to break." He carried these notebooks on any inland expeditions and later expanded on the notes for entries to his diaries.

And so, one hundred and seventy nine years and ninety days after Darwin, we followed in his footsteps along the Charles Darwin Walk.

The overflow from Wentworth Falls Lake was coursing down Jamison Creek producing that pleasant sound of water burbling, gurgling, purling and plashing across rock shelves, over pebble beds, down cascades and dropping over diminutive waterfalls. The path was lined with a Grevillea endemic to the upper Blue Mountains, *Grevillea acanthifolia* ssp *acanthifolia*, its holly-like leaves having

sharply pointed lobes; only a few of its toothbrush-shaped red flowers were spotted at this time of year.

After meandering along this delightful little stream past several small cascades the track drops down to Weeping Rock. This waterfall may well normally be weeping; today it was far more tearful with copious amounts of water streaming over the rock ledge.

We continued past a small plaque high on a rock face declaring that Charles Darwin did indeed pass this way in 1836 and were soon at the top of Wentworth Falls. The view upstream was of a strongly flowing Queens Cascade, downstream the view was of ----- a white wall of mist. It is fortunate that Darwin was not here on a day such as this for he would not have seen “an immense gulf” nor the “most stupendous cliffs I have ever seen”. As we paused here awhile the mist did lift slightly revealing a tantalising glimpse of those “stupendous cliffs”.

We continued on, taking the Round Walk up past the little waterfall in the gully to the left, then looped around to drop down to the Arch Cave; we paused in the shelter of this cave for morning tea.

We then walked down to take in the view from Rocket Point; what magnificent scenes greeted us there. The top section of the Falls and the view up to the historic house Yester Grange were clear of mist, the rain-moistened vegetation appeared more lush than usual and the Falls were working particularly well; two opaque ribbons of white and a wide diaphanous curtain dropped to the rocks below. The view in the other direction provided an ever-changing panorama; cliff tops thrust up through white shrouds, plumes of swirling mist rose from the valley, clouds hung from the cliffs. We lingered for some time absorbing the rather special atmosphere which existed here today. (Sir John and Lady See purchased Yester Grange in 1902 as a summer retreat. He was Premier of NSW from 1901 to 1904.)

Back at our morning tea spot we collected our packs, walked through the Arch Cave and

made our way down to the beginning of the National Pass. This is denoted by a beautiful life-size stainless steel sculpture of an Eastern Water Dragon attached to a sandstone pillar; a replacement sculpture actually, the first having been prised off the pillar and stolen. Darwin’s theory of evolution does not appear to have worked for the better with that particular human being.

We then made our way down the spectacular steps carved into the cliff face by Peter Mulheran and ‘The Irish Brigade’ in 1908; just one of the many legacies left by that energetic track builder. It is usual to enjoy magnificent valley views from these steps; today we looked down onto a blanket of white. As we approached the mid-point of the Falls, where the track crosses the creek, only the lower cascades were clearly visible. The main drop of the Falls was reduced to three ghostly white streamers just visible through the mist.

On the opposite side of the creek the National Pass took us into dense rainforest, the combination of the forest having a thick canopy and being tucked closely into the cliffs resulted in the deeply shaded forest floor being almost devoid of any ground cover. We climbed up to the point where the track levels out as it contours along the layer of claystone compressed between the massive sandstone deposits. A National Parks publication shows a view from this track with features identified up to 35 kilometres away. The most distant features we could see were trees beside the track silhouetted against the fog and the cliffs above us disappearing into a white haze; features nonetheless which had a special atmospheric attraction.

Walking in these conditions, where the distant panoramas were excluded, brought into greater focus the smaller features close by. A tiny *Epacris reclinata* with just a few bright red tubular flowers clung to a rock face beside the track, it would probably have gone unnoticed competing with distant views; today it screamed for attention. Miniature ephemeral waterfalls dropping over moss-encrusted rocks into minute streams burst into prominence. Stairways and lines of stepping stones

disappearing into the mist presented enchanting scenes. There was much to please the eye close at hand.

A far less pleasing discovery was that another of the stainless steel sculptures, a coiled snake, had been stolen, levered from its sandstone pillar by another low example of the human species.

Having walked mostly in a very moist environment we rounded a corner on the track and entered a totally dry area protected by a high overhang; Libby decided it was a perfect place to pause for lunch. We sat, lined up on a rock ledge, facing the valley but, of course, we were looking at a wall of white. A passing walker asked ironically if we were enjoying the view. True, the distant views were nonexistent but the gnarled, twisted branches and dimpled trunks of a couple of Smooth Barked Apples (*Angophora costata*) along with a lone Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea sp*) carrying a dense spray of narrow arching leaves provided points of interest; they were a foil to the rugged beauty of this dry rock overhang.

Soon after moving on we re-entered a moist environment, the sound of rushing water heralded our approach to the Valley of the Waters. Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) grew in dense clumps on a bank above the track. Framed by nearby foliage Lodore Falls came into view, whitewater cascading down an almost vertical rock face. Stairs led us up to the stepping stones which cross Valley of the Waters Creek; the view downstream revealed wicks of mist rising from the valley partly concealing the cliffs. Upstream a veil of water fell into a shallow pool at our feet, the lower drop of Edith Falls.

We then began the climb up through the Valley of the Waters; the most wonderful conditions existed in which to experience this very special feature of these mountains. The surrounding foliage was glistening with moisture, water dripped from the moss banks and lichen encrusted rock faces beside the track, the brightness of the falls and cascades

was enhanced by the subdued light; a valley of the waters indeed.

The path led us across a rock platform where a view of Sylvia Falls opened up; what a stunning sight in these conditions. A narrow band of water coursed down a channel on the left-hand side of the falls, dropping over a series of high steps in the rock face. On the right-hand side the water tumbled over the cliff edge in a single transparent curtain. This then fanned out to create several silver shrouds of water cascading into the pool at the base of this almost black rock face. (Sylvia Falls is so named for the silvery appearance of the shards of broken water dropping over the rugged black cliff face.)

Just above Sylvia Falls the creek flows wide and shallow across an area of bedrock which imparts a smooth, glassy, dark appearance to the water. It then drops over a series of three wide steps and is instantly transformed into a brilliant white cascade to drop into a pool overarched by the surrounding ferns; truly a sight to behold.

A short climb brought us to the highest falls in the valley, the spectacular Empress Falls. At their apex the water issues from a narrow slot at the end of what is known locally as Empress Canyon; it runs from near Lilians Bridge. Free of the constraints of the canyon walls the water quickly fans out as it plummets down to a deep rock pool where it slows momentarily. It then cascades over the lower rock shelves, spreading even wider as it reaches the shallow sandy pond at its base; a splendid sight at the head of this Valley of the Waters.

The track then led us under rock overhangs, up ladders, past a little waterfall where the waters of Isobel Creek spill over a rock shelf above the track, and then on to Empress Lookout.

A short distance further on we took the diversion to Queen Victoria Lookout. The expansive views usually on offer here were absent today; the Jamison Valley was filled with swirling mist. Fragments of the Kedumba Walls cliffs below Kings Tableland appeared momentarily then disappeared below the shifting shroud. As we stood taking in the

changing scene before us a long line of cotton wool puffs of cloud formed toward the end of Kings Tableland, illuminated by the sun partially breaking through the clouds. Above and beyond this line the distant landscape appeared as a darker line stretching to the horizon - a rather magical scene.

We were in drier more open forest as we made our way up to the Conservation Hut to complete this walk. We were then ferried back to Wilson Park in the cars left here earlier; many thanks to those involved in the shuffle.

Back at Wilson Park we indulged in the usual after walk cuppa in one of the shelter sheds, carefully checking there was no wet paint on the seats or table first; therein lies a sticky tale I shan't go into here.

And so we wended our way home after a wonderful walk in very agreeable conditions; no expansive panoramas as promised in the announcement notes, a magical intimate atmosphere prevailed instead. Another example of the many guises these mountains can take on to stimulate our senses.

Postscript: The site of the Weatherboard Inn is today marked by a large evergreen Holm Oak (*Quercus ilex*) planted in January 1936 to mark the centenary of Darwin's visit. It is in the north-eastern corner of Pitt Park, Wentworth Falls, near to Jamison Creek where it flows under the railway line; this was the point where Darwin commenced his walk along the creek to Campbells Cataract.

John Cardy

OUR MAY WALK (The Twenty Fifth Anniversary of the Group!!!)

Friday 15th May 2015

Secluded Grottos, Extensive Heath, Expansive Views, Cascades and Waterfalls, perhaps even glimpse Cleopatra bathing

Centennial Glen, Porters Pass and Walls Ledge at Blackheath

The group last undertook this walk in June 2010. This is a medium grade walk of about 6km with a descent and ascent of 215 metres.

The walk is a wonderful combination of open heath, shady gullies, waterfalls, precipitous cliffs and waterworn grottos. It is one of the oldest walking tracks in the Blue Mountains and is situated on the western side of Blackheath.

Meet in the car park at the end of Centennial Glen Rd at Blackheath 9.30am.

To reach this road cross the railway line at Blackheath, turn left immediately into Station St and follow it as it merges right into Shipley Road. Follow Shipley Road for about 0.75km, almost to its junction with the Megalong Valley road; Centennial Glen Rd goes off to the right just before that junction.

Or meet at Merry Garth for an 8.50am departure

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 19th June – Golden Stairs and Ruined Castle at Katoomba

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

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 8th May at Hay Lane (Sloan Reserve)

Friday 12th June at Hay Lane (Sloan Reserve)

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details