
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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EVANS LOOKOUT TO GOVETS LEAP

TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK

EVANS LOOKOUT,
BEAUCHAMP FALLS,
JUNCTION ROCK,
GOVETTS LEAP LOOKOUT

Friday 20th March 2015

“It was reached for the first time – at least for many years – in the month of October, 1875, from a sketching camp formed by the writer, at the junction of Govett’s Leap Gorge with the Valley of the Grose, to be hereafter described. That junction is situated almost 12 miles down the Grose Valley from the Hartley Vale Siding (80 miles from Sydney), and 2,270 feet below the Railway; thence, owing to the roughness of the upper part of Govett’s Creek bed, and the denseness of the scrub, fully three and a half hours are required to reach the foot of the Falls, although the distance, as above stated, is only about 3¼ miles in a straight line. As described by its visitors on that occasion, the scene at the bottom of the Falls is, if possible, grander than that from above. From the top you can see nothing distinctly, only an awful gulf, with a confused mass of foliage far below; but from below it appears a large amphitheatre, filled with trees of luxuriant growth, and ferns and mosses. The water coming down sometimes like falling rockets, sometimes dissipated by the wind into clouds of spray before it has half completed its downward course, is wafted over a large area,



Autumn in the Bush

and insures the conditions of perennial moisture so plainly evidenced by the luxuriance of the surrounding vegetation. Then again, from below you have a skyline broken into many fantastic shapes, and lighted up in parts with delicate light hues, while others are in deep shade in lieu of the almost uniformly level horizon seen from above. Standing at the basin at the foot of Govett’s Leap, which is only about 25 yards from the perpendicular wall of rock, it is almost impossible to look up at the Falls. The better plan is to lie

on one’s back, and look upwards to the zenith, when the 700 feet cliffs forming the ends of the horse-shoe bend in which the Falls are situated, tower above you on either side, while the waterfall appears to be coming down from a depression in their centre almost on to your face. Few persons, perhaps, could lie in that position for more than a minute or two at a time without feeling giddy, the sight is so grand.”

This description of Govetts Leap, reproduced in The Railway Guide of New South Wales published in 1879, is from the pen of Eccleston Du Faur. In September of 1875 Du Faur set up an artists camp in the Blue Gum Forest. Over two months, artists and photographers, mostly from the Academy of Arts, spent time at the camp making expeditions, under very trying conditions, to the base of Govetts Leap and other areas in the valley. The German photographer Joseph

Bischoff and Tasmanian landscape artist William Piguénit were perhaps the most accomplished of the participants; both produced important images of the landscape at that time.

Today, the eight walkers who decided to accept the challenge of this harder rated walk, will get to view Govetts Leap from above and below, and compare notes with Eccleston Du Faur's descriptions of 140 years ago.

We meet at Govetts Leap Lookout; some take a furtive glance to the base of the falls and of the 250 metre high cliff face we will climb to conclude this walk. But hey, on fresh legs and invigorated by the crisp morning air, one can't perceive any problems there. A car shuffle then delivers us to Evans Lookout car park for the start of the walk.

Libby suggests we first visit the Valley View Lookout, a lookout first opened in January 1946 as Bradshaw Lookout, after an Alderman of Blackheath Municipal Council; the present name being allocated in 1991. This vantage point gives a fine view of the line of Govetts Creek as it meanders along the base of the wide 'V' formed by the talus slopes to reach its confluence with the Grose River in the Blue Gum Forest; Mount Banks is silhouetted on the skyline. In the foreground the junction of Govetts Leap Brook with Govetts Creek can be seen, that is the site of Junction Rock which we will pass later today – all looks quite easy from here.

We make our way along the short link track to Evans Lookout. From this point a silver ribbon of water glistens in the morning sun as it cascades down the face of Carne Wall just east of Point Pilcher; drainage water from the hanging swamp above the cliffs. A line visible in the canopy of the forest far below is the course of Greaves Creek making its way to Govetts Creek; indeed the course we will be following shortly.

We drop down from Evans Lookout, initially through open woodland, then into a deep narrow gully. We pass the Cave of Red (named by Erik Halbert of the Sydney Speleological Society in 2014) with its

distinctive red floor and walls under a large overhang. We now enter an area of luxuriant rainforest where Coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) and Sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*) tower above us seeking the energy of the sun above this deep ravine. We look down on a forest of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*); green cartwheels of filigree fronds illuminated by shafts of light streaming through the canopy. We are in The Fernery.

New stepping stones have been recently installed during upgrade works on this track. Soon however we pass between two magnificent gnarled and craggy, moss and lichen encrusted old giants of the forest. Here the original stone steps have been retained; smooth depressions on their tread surfaces clear evidence of the innumerable feet which have climbed up and down these stairs over many years, carrying enthralled visitors into this wonderland. These steps, climbing up between the flared trunks and surface roots of those two trees, are one of the iconic rainforest images of these mountains.

Presently we reach Greaves Creek at the lower end of the Grand Canyon; here we turn left onto the Rodriguez Pass Walking Track. We follow the creek, recrossing it a little downstream, then negotiate a recent landslide area to reach Beauchamp Falls.

Rodriguez Pass is named for Blackheath Station Master from 1889 to 1900, hotel proprietor, real estate agent and Councillor on the Blue Mountains Shire Council from 1917 to 1919 – Tomas Ramon Rodriguez. Beauchamp Falls was named in 1899 for the then Governor of NSW, William Lygon, 7th Earl of Beauchamp; it was previously known as Blackheath Falls.

We enjoy morning tea while taking in the beauty of these falls; falls comprised of two distinct drops. A wide curtain of water drops over the horizontal ledge at their apex and drops as a broad cascade down the rock face. To the left a second, quite separate, relatively narrow stream emerges, it breaks into a wider series of cascades as it tumbles over jagged

boulders then recombines to complete its drop down a dark rock face displaying outcrops of coppery-coloured stone; the combined effect is an impressive sight.

We now make our way downstream on the left hand side of the creek. The enclosed forest here contains Cedar Wattles (*Acacia elata*), young Turpentines (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) and in the understorey of these taller trees are Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*). We hear, but only catch fleeting glimpses through the trees and shrubs, of several small waterfalls along the way. In order below Beauchamp Falls they are Popes, Foy, John Harris, Bettington and Campbell Falls; the latter being near where we cross to the right hand side of the creek at a point where the sparse remains of a long lost bridge remain embedded in the rock platform.

We sight several Water Dragons sunning themselves on the rocks beside the creek; heads held high and long tails trailing down the rock, they are obviously accustomed to people passing by for they appear totally unperturbed by our presence.

The track now leads us through magnificent stands of giant Turpentines (*Syncarpia glomulifera*); their towering trunks clothed in deeply furrowed fibrous bark. Scattered at their base are many tiny 'flying saucer' shaped seed pods formed by the fruits being joined; 'syncarpia' meaning fruits united together. Here also are a few wonderful examples of large Paperbarks (*Melaleuca sp*) and a couple of Port Jackson Figs (*Ficus rubiginosa*) are also sighted; one having spread its roots over a large boulder before seeking the nourishment of the soil, the other growing 'strangler-fashion' on a host tree.

We boulder hop across Greaves Creek at a spot where limpid pools in the rocky creek bed reflect the overhanging trees and azure sky; we are just upstream of the confluence of this creek with Govetts Creek.

The track now takes us through more open country on the left side of Govetts Creek whose waters burble and gurgle across multi-hued beds of smooth river stones. We pass the

point where the Horse Track, a shorter steep route into the valley from just below Evans Lookout, (constructed c1900 and used as a horse and cattle track up to 1980), joins Rodriguez Pass. Looming above us are the imposing cliffs of Fortress Hill. We negotiate a narrow shelf jutting from a rock face and arrive at Junction Rock; this spot was previously known as The Junction. (Landscape artist William Pigenit and two others camped near here from 5th to 9th October 1875 while on the Du Faur expedition.)

We pause for lunch just upstream of Junction Rock beside Govetts Leap Brook, here it traverses a large rock platform via a series of small cascades and rock pools; some sit with feet dangling in the cooling waters. Bliss!

Suitably rested and refreshed, fortified by a generous piece of Libby's bushwalker cake, we now commence the 620 vertical metres climb out; it is all uphill from here.

The line of Govetts Leap Brook takes us back into a glorious enclosed rainforest environment. The lilting tunes of the tumbling brook, the series of delightful cascades, the many miniature waterfalls dropping into mirror-like pools all framed by lush ferns and moss-encrusted rock faces almost alleviates the constant ascent of the track; almost but perhaps not entirely.

A small diversion takes us to Trinity Falls on Popes Glen Creek, just upstream of its junction with Govetts Leap Brook. Du Faur named these falls during his 1875 expedition; he described them as "consisting of three leaps". Indeed that is the case, two narrow ribbons of water course down at different angles between huge sandstone tors and spread across a horizontal rock shelf to drop as a wide cascade onto a pebble bed before continuing along the creek. (Landscape artist Pigenit felt these falls offered far greater artistic merit than did Govetts Leap.)

It is now a fairly steep climb before we reach the base of Govetts Leap but what a magnificent spectacle. Though any breeze is imperceptible the falling water is indeed

“dissipated by the wind into clouds of spray” and “wafted over a large area”. I didn’t notice anyone lying on his or her back here, at least not to view the falls; would have been a good excuse though to have a rest.

We are now at the end of the Rodriguez Pass which stretches back to the Grand Canyon Track and at the lower end (unfortunately) of the Williams Track which leads to Govetts Leap Lookout. Tom Williams and his son Samual constructed this track, commencing on 4th May 1898 and completing it on 20th January 1899. James Daly, a Trustee of Govetts Leap Reserve and Tomas Rodriguez conceived the idea of this track; its completion allowed the construction of Rodriguez Pass to begin. It was commenced by Jack Cliff in January 1899 and completed on 21 April 1900 for a cost of £270. The government subsidised it at a rate of 10 shillings for every pound raised publicly.

And so we begin our climb of about 250 vertical metres to the lookout. They advise, “don’t look up”, but of course it is impossible to ignore the cliffs towering above. The effort of the climb is allayed to some extent by the spectacular views to be had along the way.

Presently we arrive at Govetts Leap Lookout, a little weary it is true, but with a sense of achievement and satisfaction in having once more experienced the splendour of the various sublime environments along this circuit.

I shall give the last word to Mr Edwin Burton, ‘an indefatigable littérateur’, describing the Govetts Leap area in the Railway Guide of 1879. “The full sublimity and majestic grandeur of the scene is not realised at a first glance. After contemplating it for a time the mind becomes filled with awe and wonder as it vainly strives to comprehend.”

OUR APRIL WALK

Friday 17th April 2015

**A Gentle Rill, Charming Cascades,
Dramatic Waterfalls, Stunning Views – A
Natural Selection for a walk really**

Darwins Walk, National Pass, Valley of the Waters at Wentworth Falls

The group last walked this route in March 2009. Charles Darwin last walked here in 1836 and described the view of the falls as “extremely magnificent”; who am I to argue with that?

Meet at Wilson Park in Falls Road just off the Western Highway at Wentworth Falls, (near the Bowling Club) at 9.00am or at Merry Garth for an 8.10am departure. A short car shuffle to the Conservation Hut will be required. This is rated as a medium walk with a descent and ascent of about 210 metres. It is about 7 kilometres and includes the gentle walk beside Jamison Creek, the stairs beside Wentworth Falls then the National Pass Track, both superbly refurbished recently, and the ascent up through the Valley of the Waters.

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 15th May 2015 – Centennial Glen, Porters Pass, Walls Ledge at Blackheath

Friday 19th June – Golden Stairs and Ruined Castle at Katoomba

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 10th April at Hay Lane (Ferry Corner)

Friday 8th May at Hay Lane (Sloan Reserve)

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details