
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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DEEP PASS ON THE NEWNES PLATEAU

TOPIC

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

DEEP PASS on the NEWNES PLATEAU

Friday 16 September 2016

A rift or cleft, a chink or chasm, a split, a crack or perhaps a fissure - a fascinating feature of Deep Pass, call it what you will, it beckons, almost irresistibly, to be explored; just one of the many attractions of this special place hidden on the expansive Newnes Plateau.

Twenty-one walkers gathered near the Zig Zag Railway at Clarence, there was some scattered cloud and a very chill breeze but it looked as though the day would remain fine. We welcomed Jenny Dargan's daughter Louise and Tina Slattery, a friend of Jenny, also Paul Mulholland, all of whom were joining us for the first time today.

A vehicle rationalisation organised by Libby had each walker allocated a seat in one of five four wheel drive and all wheel drive vehicles (one of which became a temporary three wheel drive, more on that later); we headed off on the twenty-seven or so kilometre drive to Deep Pass. Many thanks to those who provided vehicles today, and to those on many other occasions, to get us to our various walk locations.



Spring in the Bush

We headed along Old Bells Line of Road to the State Mine Gully Road and turned onto the Glowworm Tunnel Road, which took us past the evocatively named Bungleboori Camping Ground. This name has always tended to educe a sense of mystery to me; today it evoked a sense of the past. The only pines still standing in the area are those at the camping ground; the pine forest having been clear felled since the last time we travelled this way. The prospect before us, now devoid of trees, resembled a moonscape; that, of course,

being an inevitable consequence of plantation forests.

At the end of the Twelve Mile Pine Plantation (a rather redundant name at this time) we turned off Glowworm Tunnel Road. Just past Cockatoo Hill, now more prominent sitting in the moonscape, we turned onto the track toward Deep Pass; we were now back in native forest.

The trees arched over the narrow track and the understorey vegetation pressed in on both sides, a far more pleasant environment in which to travel. Soon we entered Wollemi National Park, dropped down a very steep short section of track (mental note to self: it could perhaps be 'interesting' getting back up that section) and a couple of hundred metres further on we were at the car park.

We set off down the track, rather steep in places, and were welcomed into the area by

the cheery golden blossom of the Sunshine Wattles (*Acacia terminalis*). About three-quarters of the way down the hill we climbed atop a pagoda-like rock outcrop to pause for morning tea. Most sought sheltered sunny spots out of the wind; those with a touch of mountain goat in them climbed onto the pinnacle at the summit of this outcrop.

The views from here were very rewarding. Above the cliffs on the opposite side of the gully were amazing intricately patterned pagoda formations. On a sloping hillside the pervading grey/green of the eucalypt tree cover was rent by a slash of gold; a group of wattles proclaiming their presence. Scattered across the landscape were the bleached skeletal remains of trees which did not survive the fires that swept through here in the early 2000s; stark white sculptures reaching for the sky against the dark background of the tree canopies.

Closer at hand, on the sloping sun drenched side of this outcrop were two examples of that uncommon root parasite we encountered on Ikara Ridge, the *Atkinsonia ligustrina*; their soft glossy light green lanceolate leaves contrasting with the rugged sandstone on which they grew.

Continuing down the hill the track tunnelled through a patch of low vegetation as we reached the floor of the gully. Here we came across the realm of a Satin Bowerbird. A cleared area perhaps two metres in diameter with the bower positioned toward the back. The usual array of blue objects: bottle tops, feathers, wrappers, even a plastic container – possibly a soap holder stolen from a camper – scattered in the foreground to impress any visiting females. No matter how many of these sites you encounter, one cannot fail to be impressed by the complexity of the bower and the collections of blue trinkets.

We crossed a branch of Nayook Creek, a creek that rises close to where we left the Glowworm Tunnel Road, and emerged onto the clear flat camping area. This area was once the site of a farm, I have not been able to find

when its operation ceased; there is virtually no evidence now that it ever existed.

What a beautiful area this is. An open grassed space dotted with large mounds of Spiny-headed Mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*), tall wattle trees in full bloom, conical columns of gold against the taller eucalypts, and a backdrop of sheer cliffs displaying thin horizontal layers; a foil to the vertical growth of the trees in the foreground. A very special place with much more yet to be revealed.

We left our packs beneath the trees and made our way toward the cliffs. We paused beside a little stream while Libby and Ray checked the path ahead. While waiting here Freda had a pareidolia moment. She could see the form of a seahorse atop the cliffs above us. Now I am not one who is given to seeing animate forms in inanimate objects, yet I must admit, if you tried hard, you could indeed make out the likeness of a seahorse silhouetted against the sky.

We continued on beside the little burbling stream, clear sparkling water fringed on both sides by Fishbone Water Ferns (*Blechnum nudum*). Then, looming above us, the sheer cliff face was split by a dark foreboding fissure; the narrow vertical cleft indeed beckoned to be explored.

We crossed the creek just downstream of a tiny cascade, climbed up past the spreading base of an ancient eucalypt which had moulded itself over a rock face and squeezed beneath a huge boulder to reach the access point to the chasm.

To enter the bowels of this cliff one must scramble up a ledge, worm your way over a large rock and drop down to the floor of this narrow crevice; you have now entered another world, encased within the cliff. This fissure, only a little over a metre wide, leads to a similar, longer fissure running at right angles; the slit of sunlight above provides an eerie illumination to the vertical walls. Horizontal matching ironstone veins appear on each side showing where they were joined before this monolith was rent asunder, an awe-inspiring place to explore.

Having managed to extricate ourselves in various, mostly undignified ways, from the fissure, we made our way across the gully. We passed rock faces draped with Rock Felt Fern (*Pyrrhosia rupestris*), sterile oval fronds and fertile elongated fronds cascaded down the rocks. We then made our way along the base of a wind-worn cliff, its angled overhang providing a very dry environment; there were several very faint hand stencils here. Back at the clearing we took advantage of a couple of convenient logs to pause for lunch.

Reinvigorated by lunch and Libby's bushwalker cake we set off south along the gully which skirts the cliffs below Mt Norris. This led us to the actual Deep Pass which lies on the border between the Blue Mountains National Park and the Wollemi National Park; here a small saddle forms a watershed. Rain falling here either flows north into Nayook Creek or south into Dingo Creek. The waters of both Nayook Creek (directly) and Dingo Creek (via Bungleboori Creek) flow into the Wollangambe River, albeit by very diverse routes through the web of ravines and valleys which cut across this plateau.

As we headed back toward the camping area we diverted to the right and walked along the rock shelves below overhangs at the base of the cliffs. These cliffs have two semi-circular flutes within which mosses and ferns grow, taking advantage of the moisture provided by the water flowing down the flutes; we walked behind those trickles of water as they dropped from the edge of the overhangs. Again the areas below the overhangs were very dry and the walls contained quite a few hand stencils; they had been produced using white, straw-coloured and red ochre.

We climbed down from the rock shelves to regain the track and passed an example of the *Zieria robusta* displaying its tiny four-petaled pinkish white flowers. Also in this area was an unusual *Hakea* (*Hakea pachyphylla*), with profuse yellow flowers and rigid needle pointed leaves. This species is endemic to the Upper Blue Mountains and was formerly regarded as an upper mountains yellow flowered form of the white flowered *Hakea*

propinqua; the new species name reflects its thicker more rigid leaves.

It was then time to explore the third different environment of this area. We set off through open forest containing some She Oaks (*Allocasuarina* sp), a short distance from the track the mauve pea flowers of a Velvet Hovea (*Hovea purpurea*) lit up the scene. A little further on a large tree trunk lying across the track had a step cut into it, the horizontal tread a perfect place for a wombat to deposit some cubic droppings.

Soon we were walking beside Nayook Creek, at first only noticed by its musical murmuring below the knee-high ferns, and then it was visible; a crystal clear purling rill flowing over a bed of pebbles.

The area was then becoming more enclosed, more canyon-like. The path led us by moss-encrusted boulders and lichen-decorated buttressed tree trunks. King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) began to dominate the scene, some trunks so short and stout they appeared as Buddha bellies supporting whorls of luxuriant fronds.

The track took us through a deep cave dripping with moisture; we crossed the creek, scrambled over a couple of large mossy boulders and arrived at a pristine pool. It was fed by a small waterfall, a ribbon of white dropping down a sluice carved into the almost black rock and fanning out slightly as it reached the deep turquoise water. The flow of water out of the pool was across a wide pebble bed, the ripples catching the sparse light in this enclosed shady area; a sublime little glen.

It was then time to leave this special place. We made our way back past the Satin Bowerbird's domain and began the climb back to the car park.

Earlier in the day Jan Northam asked if I had any idea what a shrub she had seen beside the road on the way in could have been. With its weeping habit and its plethora of globular fruit it had put her in mind of the El Alamein Fountain in the Fitzroy Gardens at Kings Cross; I had no idea what it could have been.

On the way up the hill Jan spotted the same plant, a far more sparse example, but it was that plant - a Native Currant (*Leptomeria acida*). An example with a more dense growth, its thin branches having inconspicuous leaves and hanging in a weeping fashion, carrying an abundance of glossy spherical fruit; one could well imagine the fountain relationship.

As I drove away from the car park I came to that steep section of track I had thought might prove 'interesting'; it did! As the car crested the slope progress halted; our all wheel drive had become a three wheel drive with a rear wheel airborne. I suspect this was not the first time this had happened for there were several large flat stones laying on the track. Judicious placement of these in front of the airborne wheel had us mobile once more and we headed back to Clarence after yet another wonderful day walking in a very special place.

John Cardy

OUR OCTOBER WALK

Friday 21st October 2016

Wide Mountain Vistas and Deep Valley Views, Wildflowers in Profusion, Perhaps an Optical Illusion and Amazing Rock Formations

Mount Hay and Butterbox Point off the Mt Hay Road north of Leura

The group last visited this venue in November 2011. This area has beautiful heath lands leading to the wooded slopes of Mt Hay; a side track leads us to the spectacular ramparts of Butterbox Point. This is a relatively easy walk with a fairly gentle rise of about 180 metres from the car park to the summit of Mt Hay; you can choose not to go to the summit if you wish. It is then mostly downhill back to Butterbox Point and on to the car park.

Meet at Leura on Mt Hay Road in the 'dip' just past Churchill St at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for an 8.30am departure.

There is no direct access to Mt Hay Road from the Western Highway at Leura Primary School. When travelling from Sydney it is necessary to approach via the roundabout

above the tunnel. Turn back toward Sydney at the roundabout, travel back down the hill parallel to the highway and turn left into Mt Hay Rd at Leura Primary School, and then proceed to the 'dip' just past Churchill Street. Those travelling from the Katoomba side should also approach via this roundabout. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at the meeting point for the 14km drive to the track head. Four-wheel drive vehicles would be most welcome.

*****Bring morning tea and lunch only*****

Kim and Tim Gow have kindly invited us to their new home, which is just a stones throw away from our Leura meeting point, for afternoon tea.

Remember to bring plenty of water.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966. Note Helen's new mobile number.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 18th November 2016 - Leura Cascades, Leura Forest, Furber Steps

Friday 16th December 2016 – Matthies Track, The Throne and Waterfall Track at Mt Wilson

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.

14th October – meet at Queens Avenue outside Holly Lodge

11th November – meet at Wynne reserve

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details