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# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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FORTRESS RIDGE AND FORTRESS HILL

TOPIC

## OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

FORTRESS ROCK  
LOOKOUT, FORTRESS  
RIDGE and FORTRESS HILL  
north of LEURA

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017

This group has gathered, over the years, quite a few armchair walkers; mainly, but not exclusively, ex-walkers who continue to receive the monthly newsletter to stay in touch with group activities. Today we inherited an 'armchair walker' of a different ilk; more on that shortly.

It was a very brisk, blustery morning when the group of fifteen walkers met in Mount Hay Road, not a cloud in the sky but the warming rays of the early morning sun were no match for the chill wind. Wind speeds of around forty kilometres per hour were predicted; I was surprised to discover that meteorologists describe this as a 'fresh to strong breeze'; 'breeze' in my lexicon refers to a far gentler, balmy movement of air – one lives and learns.

We welcomed Sue and Steve Woolfenden to the group and Libby soon had each of the sixteen attendees allocated to a seat in the four vehicles for the approximately nine-kilometre drive to the trackhead; many thanks to the drivers involved.



Spring in the Bush

What's that I hear you astute readers ask? Weren't there only fifteen walkers? Indeed that's true. For the first time that I can remember, we had a mobile armchair walker joining us today. Freda Moxom, following a minor foot operation, was under doctor's orders not to walk, but Freda found the call of the bush too great to resist; she accompanied us to the trackhead where she did a little bilingual study and absorbed the bushland atmosphere while she awaited our return.

We bade Freda farewell in this sheltered sunny spot and set off along the fire trail, once more led by Libby while I again took up the position of whip at the rear; a little normality is returning to the group. As we crested the first rise the trees were swaying in the wind, or 'breeze', and the chill factor took effect. We passed the turnoff to the track we would follow later and continued on toward the beckoning cliff line.

We noted the indistinct track which leads to Darks Cave: a cave discovered in 1937 by Dr Eric Dark and his wife Eleanor; Eric and Eleanor bushwalked and rock climbed extensively in this area. They used this cave as a family retreat; Eleanor named it Jerrikellimi, a name made up of pieces of family given names. Eleanor was apparently amused with, and did not discourage the belief by some, that the name was Aboriginal for 'retreat of the dark people'.

Soon we were at the turning circle at the end of the fire trail and continued on down an obscure track for a short distance to a rock outcrop; here we paused for morning tea. Some sat on the exposed rocks while others sought shelter from the 'breeze' among the shrubs of the heath.

Before us then, from this eyrie above Fortress Rock Lookout, were the cliffs of Carne Wall; cream, grey, gold and honey coloured precipitous walls of sandstone illuminated by the morning sun. Off to the left a large silver/grey rounded rock formation rose from the heath; topped by a formation which, to my eye, resembled a rear view of an Akubra hat. There was little chance of that 'hat' being dislodged by the 'breeze', unlike the caps and hats worn by we walkers which were strewn across the landscape; luckily all were retrievable after some searching.

Hidden in the deep valley, carved out by Govetts Creek, far below our vantage point is Arethusa Falls. In Greek mythology Arethusa was one of Diana's nymphs who, when being pursued by the river-god Alpheus, was transformed into a fountain. Not far downstream from these falls is Medusa Falls, Medusa being, again in Greek mythology, chief of the Gorgons; she had snakes for hair and her face was so terrible that all who looked upon it were turned to stone. The ancient Greeks were such a happy lot weren't they? Adjacent to Arethusa Falls is a small, predominantly permanent creek and waterfall which feeds into Govetts Creek. These are known, among all this Greek mythology, as Lerida Creek and Vida Falls; names given by Eric Lowe for his daughters Lerida Dorothea and Katherine Vida; a pleasant local touch among all the Greek drama. Eric walked and climbed in this area in the 1930s.

Having partaken of morning tea, and a portion of chocolate kindly offered by Karin, to replace the energy sapped by the biting wind, we made our way back along the fire trail and turned left onto the route which leads us toward Fortress Ridge. Beside the track in this area were a group of four slim trunks of Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus haemastoma*), each

sitting at the corner of a square, the result of the parent tree having been naturally coppiced by fire.

Soon the fire trail petered out and a narrow track led us across a saddle, through low heath, and we climbed up past a sculptured sandstone pylon to an exposed rock platform. From this vantage point we had a view back to the large Flat Top formation, sitting at an elevation of nine hundred and twenty nine metres, and across to the sawtooth profile of The Pinnacles beside the track to Lockley Pylon.

As we continued on, the track led us over rocky rises through open woodland and across sandy saddles of low heath. Conesticks (*Petrophile pulchella*) and Narrow-leaf Drumsticks (*Isopogon anethifolius*) lined the track; the former displayed an abundance of elongated cones while the latter carried their characteristic globular cones among their tan to red new winter foliage.

The occasional Heath Banksia (*Banksia ericifolia*) carried orange flower spikes among their fine foliage while the shaggy-haired spent flower spikes of the Old Man Banksias (*Banksia serrata*) peered out from among their leathery serrated leaves through hooded eyes with mouths agape. An abundance of Old Mans Whiskers or Curly Sedge (*Caustis flexuosa*) curled and weaved its way through the ground cover while the slender upright stems of sedges splayed out forming elegant green sprays.

As the terrain rose and fell we were exposed to very variable conditions; at one moment we were completely protected from the wind, then without any obvious change to our surroundings gusts were strong enough to literally blow you off your feet. As we climbed Fortress Hill, through the threshing thin trunks of the Blue Mountains Mallee Ash (*Eucalyptus stricta*), we caught glimpses across the vast expanse which is Govett Gorge, of Griffith Taylor Wall extending around to Govetts Leap. Soon we dropped down to complete the last stretch through windblown heath to the end of Fortress Ridge.

What a marvellous panorama opened up here. On the western side of the ridge Govetts Creek, with the sun glinting off its rippling water, could be seen wending its way along the vee of the gorge, picking up inflows from Greaves Creek and from Govetts Leap Brook at Junction Rock before continuing on to its confluence with the Grose River at the Blue Gum Forest. Across the gorge Pulpit Rock was hiding in the shadows of the cliffline and the eye was drawn along to the cliffs at Perrys Lookdown and to the form of Mount Banks sitting above Banks Wall in the background.

To the east the view was across Fortress Creek to the jagged cliffs below Lockley Pylon, aged sandstone in mainly tones of grey with just a few patches of honey-coloured stone more recently exposed, in geological terms. Below the pylon there is, what looked from this angle, to be a large spire, appearing to hang precariously from the cliff face; perhaps there will be another honey-coloured patch of newly exposed cliff in the not too distant future. In the background, across the undulating tree and heath clad ridges and valleys was the distinct rounded summit of Mount Hay; little wonder it was once called, as early as 1789, Round Hill.

We settled down in the lee of the ridge for lunch, each seeking out a sheltered nook or cranny with stupendous views (how does one know if what they have found is a nook or a cranny); once again we were experiencing alfresco dining at its best. Libby of course distributed slices of her bushwalker cake before we set off to retrace our steps back to the cars.

As is always the case when you walk a path in the opposite direction you note things missed on the outward journey. Back on Fortress Hill there was just a small section of track where uninterrupted views of Griffith Taylor Wall were on offer; the grandeur of this feature in the afternoon sun was amazing. Sheer vertical cliffs dropped to the talus slopes and the horizontal line of the horizon beyond underscored an almost clear blue sky; this view clearly demonstrated the origin of these mountains as an eroded plateau.

Some flora tucked away in little nooks (or were they crannies) on the outward trip proved to be less elusive when viewed on the return journey. (Perhaps my head hanging lower on a weary body brought them more into view.) There were some Coneseeds or Smokebush (*Conospermum sp*) on show displaying their crowded heads of tiny tubular white flowers. Also noted were some Slender Rice Flowers (*Pimelea linifolia ssp linifolia*) with their conspicuous white flower heads. A couple of examples of Pale Pink Boronia (*Boronia floribunda*) were sighted; the four petals of each flower still closed, forming tiny slightly pointed globes ready to unfurl into pink stars

Back at the rock platform, where views of The Pinnacles and Flat Top were on offer, the city skyline could be seen, a much clearer profile of the high rise buildings in the afternoon light; a reminder of how lucky we are to have a huge expanse of bushland such as this so close to a major population centre. There is much for which to thank our forebears, yet future vigilance is required to keep it that way.

As we approached the end of the walk, Carol Conway found the filter which Simon Changson had lost from his camera on the outward journey; a find much appreciated by Simon when it was handed to him back at the cars. It was here, reunited with Freda, that we had our usual after walk cuppa before heading back along the rather dusty and somewhat potholed Mount Hay Road after yet another day exploring just one of the many jewels in the treasure chest of these mountains.

Libby, who had suggested she may only complete some of the walk, led us all the way; a truly inspirational lady. For my own part, with a little help from my guardian angel Helen, I also completed the walk, albeit on weary legs; fitness lost is certainly not easy to regain. But what a joy it is for both of us to be back in the bush we love so much. That joy to be back in the bush made the walk much easier; felt like a bit of a breeze really.

John Cardy

**OUR OCTOBER WALK**

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017

**Enclosed Rainforest, Open Woodland,  
Fields of Wildflowers and Views down to  
the Wollangambe**

**Boronia Point at Mount Wilson**

The group last visited this area in December 2014. This walk should satisfy your appetite for mountain scenery and the evocative atmosphere of the very special Spring time displays of wildflowers in the Mt Wilson bushland. Starting and finishing at Merry Garth, this is a relatively easy walk of about six kilometres. Over this short distance you will experience a wide variety of vegetation types and be rewarded with views down into the Wollangambe River canyons.

**Meet at Merry Garth for a 10.00am start.**  
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 0400 444 966.**

**FUTURE WALKS** (Tentative schedule)

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 – Lunch Rock and Wollangambe River near Bell

Friday 15 December 2017 – Knight-Brown Fire Trail at Mt Irvine, then our **Christmas / end of year luncheon**

## **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.**

**13<sup>th</sup> October – Meet in Hay Lane**

**10<sup>th</sup> November – Meet in Hay Lane**

**8<sup>th</sup> December – Meet at Wynne Reserve**

**Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details**

## **VALE DON CLARKE**

We have sadly lost a long time active walker and armchair walker of more recent times; Don passed away peacefully on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup>

September. Don and his late wife Anne walked with the group for many years; Don's first walk was the last section of the Six Foot Track from the Binda Cabins to Jenolan Caves in July 2005. (Anne first walked with the group in January 1998 along Matthies Track to The Throne and Waterfall Creek.)

Don was very cheerful company and always ready to have a chat with anyone we met along the track. He had a quirky sense of humour, I remember times when we stopped at signboard maps along the tracks with those typical arrows pointing to the spot and declaring 'you are here' he quipped 'how on earth do they always know where you are'.

Don worked tirelessly for the St Vincent De Paul Society in Lithgow, he will be sadly missed by the community and his bushwalking friends; our sincere condolences go to his family.