
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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NATURE TRACK AT WENTWORTH FALLS

TOPIC

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

**SHORTCUT TRACK, DEN
FENELLA LOOKOUT,
OVERCLIFF TRACK and
NATURE TRACK at
WENTWORTH FALLS**

Friday 16th February 2018

An immigrant from Ireland, the wife of a State Premier, the assassination of a Scottish King; the plotter and murderess, a Sea Captain, the Matron of a major hospital, a Greek goddess, a demon of ancient Persia, an alfresco liaison and a Scottish castle; all things which touched this walk in some way. So tag along as we weave through this diverse array. Oh, by the way, some magnificent Blue Mountains scenery will be encountered along the way.

Rather hot weather was predicted for today; I am sure all sixteen walkers who gathered at the Conservation Hut were hoping that the cloud cover present would not burn off as the day progressed. (The Conservation Hut, when it opened as the meeting place for the then named Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society in 1963 was indeed a hut; a renovated galvanised iron tea room built privately in 1930. 'THE HUT' was later proudly displayed on the facade above the society's name. The present more substantial mud brick building, owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, was completed in



Autumn in the Bush

1991; it remains the headquarters for the now amalgamated and renamed Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.)

We welcomed back Anne de Salis & Martin Barge, and Mark McDonnell who have not been able to join us for some time. Though unable to walk with us today because of other commitments, both Freda Moxom and Carol Conway met us at the starting point to say hello and wish us well.

As Libby had not walked these tracks recently she asked me to

lead and Karin Kirkpatrick then Martin Barge shared the whip position.

We headed down the hill and very shortly turned left onto the Shortcut Track, this led us to a crossing of tracks and we turned right. This track took us downhill to meet the Overcliff Track; directly opposite was our first stop, Breakfast Point Lookout.

Retired Sea Captain James Somerville Murray and his wife were local residents; he was one of the first trustees of the Wentworth Falls Reserves. He recommended, in 1892, that a track be constructed to Breakfast Point; it was a popular place for people to have breakfast, probably to watch the sunrise light up the valley. Reference was made to this lookout in a tourist guide in 1903: "a fine vantage point giving a magnificent view of Jamieson (sic) Valley." A curved stone wall, beautifully crafted by Irish immigrant Peter Mulheron,

guards the front edge of the lookout. This is one of the eight lookout walls he built when working as a track builder at the Reserve from 1879 to c1899. (More on Peter Mulheron following our walk along his Cliff Edge Track in May.)

After taking in our fill of the expansive views on offer which stretched along the Kedumba Walls, down to the line of Jamison Creek wending its way below the forested talus slopes, across to Mount Solitary, the cliffs below Inspiration Point with the edge of Sublime Point peeking out from behind, we continued east along the Overcliff track.

Here we encountered several Smooth-barked Apples (*Angophora costata*) displaying newly exposed bark; some small delicate curls of discarded bark still clung to the trunks. Sixty metres or so along this track we passed a fenced off path on our right; this leads to the closed Lady Sees Lookout; one hopes it will be reopened in the not too distant future. This lookout, opened in December 1904, was named for the wife of Sir John See, NSW Premier from 1901 to 1904. 'Yester Grange' was their Wentworth Falls summer retreat from 1902; the home remained in use by the family until 1938.

We dropped into a more sheltered gully and turned sharply right where the track led us down beside Den Fenella Creek. We were then accompanied by the pleasant sound of burbling water as the tiny rill cascaded over rock terraces embellished with shrouds of moss. We crossed; then recrossed the stream, just before it leapt over the cliff edge to plummet down to the National Pass Track far below. The track swung left, then right; we had arrived at Den Fenella Lookout, a narrow ledge hanging on the cliff face.

The name Den Fenella originates from Captain James Somerville Murray's birthplace in Scotland; a ravine nearby was known by that name. Fenella was the daughter of the Earl of Angus; she plotted the murder of Scottish King Kenneth II and was slain herself in the vicinity of the ravine in 995 AD. We paused here for morning tea, taking in the

spectacular view on offer while I contemplated the rather tenuous connection between feature names in these mountains with places on the other side of the world.

We made our way back along the Overcliff Track, continued past Breakfast Point Lookout and arrived at Lyrebird Lookout. The comment was made that there appeared to be no sight nor sound of the presence of lyrebirds. There was a reply, almost in unison, from Mount Wilson residents that they were all probably in their gardens digging up precious plants and destroying the lawn.

We continued on along the lower track which led us across the hanging swamp where there was a swath of Pouched Coral Fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*) rising above the track; water draining from Lyrebird Dell has made the track along this area very muddy. On a walk some years ago my better half Helen became stuck in this quagmire; today Anne Rodrigues sank one foot into the slough.

Presently we arrived at the Valley of the Waters Track, turned left and were at Queen Victoria Lookout. Again there were magnificent views on offer; we lingered here awhile to take them in. From Empress Lookout, a little further on, glimpses of the waters of Empress Falls emerging from the darkness of the slot canyon on Valley of the Waters Creek, then fanning out as they fell to the pool below, were on offer through the scattered foliage of the trees.

We descended a series of steel stairs, made our way along a rock platform while ducking under a low overhang and arrived at the point where the Valley of the Waters Track and the Nature Track diverge. A right turn led us into a shady glen nestled in a delightful little pocket of rainforest. A picnic table sits beside a streamlet which is fed by a small waterfall cascading down a series of terraces. Ground ferns abound here; a thick layer of leaf litter carpets the area. An information sign declaring the start of the Nature Track indicates that walkers have traversed this track since 1894.

We stood aside while a group of canyoneers passed, each carrying a bright yellow dry bag;

they were on their way to tackle the Valley of the Waters Creek canyon and Empress Falls abseil.

Following in the footsteps of this rather excited, perhaps nervous, garrulous group we arrived at Lillians Bridge and walked to its centre to look down into the deep ravine; the canyoneers would soon be making their way down the dark waterway thirty metres below.

A short distance further on we arrived at Lillians Glen. This Glen, and Lillians Bridge, are named after Elizabeth Lilla Murray, wife of Captain James Murray. She was the first Matron of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. The Glen is a beautiful, usually tranquil spot. Today the canyoneers were preparing to enter the water at this point, the male members were suited up and ready to go; the young ladies were a little further upstream changing into their wetsuits with much laughter and chatter. We waited awhile ---- and awhile longer, giving them their privacy; obviously a lady has to get the grooming just right before plunging down a canyon. Eventually they all appeared and we moved up to a spot at the base of the waterfall which drops down from Floras Bath; we settled down for lunch.

Floras Bath, a deep circular pool, takes its name from Flora, the Greek Goddess of Flowers; it was once referred to, rather less poetically, as The Round Pool. A few in the group braved the slippery steps to climb up and view the pool.

This is a magical spot. The water spilling from Floras Bath cascades down a tall domed rock face to drop into the fern-fringed pool below. It then flows across pebble beds and between boulders to join the waters of Valley of the Waters Creek flowing from Asmodeus Pool. The combined flow purls and swirls along a narrow race carved into the wide rock platform forming glassy ripples and eddies as it makes its way to eventually plunge over Empress Falls; the creek line is edged with the arching fronds of a variety of ferns. An exquisite scene both upstream and downstream from our lunch spot.

Following lunch we took the stairs over the small knoll on the bend in the creek, stopping on the way to admire a Grass Leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*); I attempted to demonstrate the trigger mechanism to Simon but the flower was not cooperating. We dropped down to the stepping stones below Asmodeus Pool. This pool, fed by a waterfall in a dark cavern-like bend in the creek and hiding behind two huge boulders, takes its name from a demon that has his roots in ancient Persia. He is a nasty piece of work whose chief objectives are to wreck new marriages and force husbands to commit adultery; he can also make people invisible when properly summoned.

We then began our climb out of the valley. The stairs zig and zag up the hillside interspersed with a few more level sections of track. We passed rock walls displaying intricate ironstone patterns and housing little fern-filled alcoves.

Soon the term Nature Track took on a rather different connotation. At one sharp bend in the track Ann Mikkelsen declared it to be Honeymoon Corner. She went on to explain that some years ago she was walking the track, rounded this bend and surprised a young couple flagrante dēlictō! One wonders if it was the destructive powers of the demon Asmodeus or the seductive powers of the goddess Flora who brought on this event, but I am sure the young couple fervently wished that Asmodeus had used his powers to make them invisible. Ann said they desperately tried to make themselves disappear when she saw them again back at the car park.

Following that little piece of light relief we continued on and reached Edinburgh Castle Rock; this formation is said to resemble its Scottish namesake when viewed from across the valley. It has remarkable ironstone patterns and protrusions and affords nice views into the valley. Aboriginal axe grinding grooves can also be found here if you search among the surrounding vegetation. Also to be found near here, though I have yet to see one, is the Feathertail Fly; they frequent this area in May.

The track then led us across a couple of gullies where swaths of brilliant green Pouched Coral Fern once again decorated the hillside.

There was not an abundance of wildflowers on show today; I did see the delicate white blossoms of some Slender Rice Flowers (*Pimelea linifolia*). I also spotted, probably appropriately, just a single late flowering Slender Violet (*Hybanthus monopetalus*), its large, by comparison, lower mauve petal giving the impression it is the only one it has, as its species name implies. Also on show were a few Coral Heath (*Epacris microphylla*), only spot flowering at this time but their tiny purest of white blooms were very attractive.

Soon we were on the old Pipeline Track which delivered us back to the Conservation Hut; here we shared slices of Libby's Bushwalker Cake which we held over from lunch - delicious.

The weather was particularly kind to us; the cloud cover did not burn off, making walking conditions very pleasant. Having wound our way through that rather quirky and eclectic list of things which touched this walk in some way, we covered a wide variety of landscapes. We enjoyed outlooks ranging from expansive valley views to intimate little cameos in the rainforest and along the creek lines; a walk where these mountains showed off just part of their huge coffer of precious treasures.

John Cardy

OUR MARCH WALK

Friday 16th March 2018

Pagodas Aplenty, Tall Shady Forest, Valley Vistas and a Magical 'Starlit Cloister'.

The Old Coach Road Pagodas, Wolgan Valley Railway and the Glow Worm Tunnel in the Wollemi National Park.

The group last visited this venue in April 2013. The drive to the start of this walk can be an adventure in itself with much of the road following the old railway per-way and passing through one of the railway tunnels. (Depending on the prevailing condition of the

road it can be a *real* adventure.) It is approximately a 34km drive from Clarence to the walk venue and **4WD or high clearance vehicles would be much appreciated.**

Though the walk is approximately 10km long it is a relatively easy route on mostly good tracks, the only steep pinch being the rise to the pagodas on the Old Coach Road.

Remember to bring a small torch for the walk through the tunnel.

Meet at 9.00am for a 9.15am departure at the Zig Zag Railway parking area at Clarence or at Merry Garth at 8.20am for an 8.30am departure.

Bring morning tea, lunch and 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 20th April 2018 – Jelly Bean Pool and Red Hand Cave Circuit at Glenbrook

Friday 18th May 2018 – Mulheran's Masterpiece, The Kings Tableland Cliff Edge Track and Darwins Walk at Wentworth Falls

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.

9th March – Meet at Hay Lane (Ferry Corner)

13th April – Meet at Hay Lane (Sloan Reserve)

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details