
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 28 Issue 4

April 2018

GLOW WORM TUNNEL AND PAGODAS

TOPIC

OUR MARCH WALK

THE OLD COACH ROAD
PAGODAS, WOLGAN
VALLEY RAILWAY and the
GLOW WORM TUNNEL in
the WOLLEMI NATIONAL
PARK

Friday 16th March 2018

*Barbara Harry is our guest
scribe for this month; here is her
entertaining report.*

Well, John promised in his notes; “Pagodas Aplenty, Tall Shady Forest, Valley Vistas and a Magical Starlit Cloister”. He did not lie. This was almost an understatement, as there was all that and so much more on this magnificent walk. And why is John not writing this report? Earlier this week, he and Helen were about to check out a little side track near Neates Glen when he tripped and fell heavily, his shoulder hitting the treated pine log barrier in the car park shattering it, (the shoulder, not the log). I’ve since spoken to Helen and he has had excellent treatment, a complete shoulder reconstruction and is recovering well. (More on that from John later.)

The 21 people on this walk were so sorry to hear this news and that Helen and John would miss the next few walks. Libby told us this as we gathered in the misty cool morning air at the Zig Zag Railway parking area in Clarence, before the 34 kms rough road journey to the start of the walk. Welcomed to the walk today



Autumn in the Bush

was Jenni Neary, a friend of Anne de Salis and Martin Barge; Daniel, Ray Nesci’s cousin and Jenny Dargan’s friend, Fiona.

Five generous drivers, with suitable cars, transported us through the Newnes State Forest, where in parts some small stands of pine remain, but there are large areas of bleak denuded barrenness. Maybe the highlight of this drive was the hewn stone railway tunnel about 100 metres long, we drove through as we neared our destination.

This was the smaller of the two tunnels constructed on the Wolgan Valley Railway; built for a cost of £130,000 or £4,000 per mile and finished in just 19 months; it was an amazing feat. The second and longer tunnel was called “Bells Grotto” and later the Glow Worm Tunnel. Completed in 1907 it has been renowned for its spectacular display since the railway fell into disuse in 1932 and the glow worms decided it was an ideal habitat.

Our route, however, led by Libby with Des as whip, in place of John, meant we would encounter the longer tunnel at the end of our walk and not the beginning. This proved to be a very wise decision, (explanation later).

We set off on the Glow Worm Tunnel Track, which was easy walking on a steady incline. At one point the track led down around 20 steps to a metal bridge crossing a small ravine, and up again along the well defined track

leading us to the start of the Pagoda Track; just short of the Glow Worm Tunnel.

The most spectacular and prevalent feature on the entire walk was the Grey Gums (*Eucalyptus punctata*), which were anything but grey. Their strips of dark peeling bark revealed orange/ochre trunks beneath. These, especially when catching the sunlight, became a glowing contrast to the grey/green bushland. The colours varied in graduations of intensity rather like the brushstrokes and runs of a watercolour painting. At one point, the looming cliff face on the high side of the track was a deep burnt orange reddish hue. In the foreground, the peeling trunks with their stripes of orange/ochre, matched the colour of the cliff like a clever design or fashion feature; a further marvellous contrast to the muted grey/green of the surrounding bush. (Barbara commented that a colour photo would be excellent here; I feel her wonderful description obviates the need for such, John C.)

Competing for the title of most outstanding and spectacular feature on the walk was in fact the sandstone in all its forms and colours. Wind carved caves, dark foreboding pagodas, striated cliffs in hundreds of tonal shades from palest cream to pinks and deep dark grey, and splotched walls covered in green to burgundy lichen. Some even had Mondrian type linear patterns; Alice likened some of these to Venn diagrams.

Back to the walk and the “wise decision”; the shady incline became slightly steeper as Libby led us from the Pagoda Track up the Old Coach Road for morning tea. Here we sat munching and drinking with the grand view across the valley. From the floor of the valley, the cliff tops and ridges sprouted dark stone pagodas in varying sizes and in different states of exposure and weathering.

Refreshed, the next few kilometres led us gently down down down; it was on this downward track that we encountered a group of older walkers trudging up the other way. Many of them commented that we had indeed gone the “wise way”. We then made our way along the old railway track, at times reduced to

a narrow path as sandstone blocks and rubble had tumbled down from the cliffs to reclaim much of the high side of the track. Tall hunks of old sleepers regularly protruded from the earth. The sharp pure notes of Bellbirds added music to the air.

It was on this stretch, with a steep fall away on one side and still the gleaming strips of orange trunks and swathes of lime green tree ferns, that Alice recalled it was here that we lost Wayne on a previous walk. His wife Cheryl, nor anyone else, had noticed he was missing for quite some time. To Cheryl’s relief and with some back tracking, the “little boy lost” was found, safe and well!

The day had heated, but the path gave us shelter from the sun. We stopped for lunch at a shady spot on the track, with loads of fallen sandstone blocks to sit upon. Some smart people such as Kim and Alice had cushiony things for a softer seat. Libby’s cake, as always, was a welcome treat. (By my magical electronic device we had walked 9.4 kilometres, two thirds of the total.)

As we continued towards the tunnel, we marvelled at the ingenuity and enterprise of the early engineers and workers who had constructed the roads and railway in their endeavour to mine the oil shale in the Wolgan Valley. (High-grade shale was known to exist in the Wolgan Valley as early as 1865. Limited mining occurred from 1903, the shale being transported out of the valley by road team via the Wolgan Gap and Lidsdale. The Commonwealth Oil Corporation Ltd, established in England in December 1905, approached Railway Engineer Henry Deane in April 1906 to take over the survey and construction of the Wolgan Valley Railway. JC) Day labour was employed to build a single-track railway of 32 miles from Newnes Junction near Clarence to Newnes in the Wolgan Valley. It was completed in November 1907. The difference in elevation between these two locations is over 700 metres and to facilitate this drop, curves and grades were frequently quite extreme. By 1912 the oil company had gone into liquidation, and subsequent attempts by other companies to

revive the Newnes oil shale works failed; operations ceased in 1934.

Our next adventure on this fabulous walk was to enter the Glow Worm Tunnel itself; our first sighting was a dark gaping entrance in the shape of a perfect arch. The area around the entrance was rather clear except for numerous tree ferns dotted about. Torches emerged from packs and Freda lent me a walking pole to try, which I found excellent. The tunnel has a small, barely flowing stream meandering through, and many protruding rocks. The earth floor is smooth and hard, the result of many many feet trampling it down. We stopped several times in the darkness of the centre of the tunnel, with torches off, to admire the "Magical Starlit Cloister". There are numerous clusters of glowing irregular patches both on the walls and the ceiling. These are the larvae of insects belonging to the Order Diptera (Flies). The emitted light attracts small insects such as mozzies, who become ensnared in the hanging sticky, silken threads spun by the larvae. The larvae grow over a few months and when about to pupate; they shrink and shed their larval skin. The pupal stage lasts about 12 days. When the adults emerge, they also glow but live only about 4 days, enough time to lay their eggs and so continue the cycle of life.

The final stage leads gently uphill on a well-trodden path. Our walk had delighted us with the natural beauty (did I mention the Grey Gums and sandstone?), the geology, the flora and the fascinating history. On this final stretch, however, we were treated to a little native fauna in the guise of a Lyre Bird busily digging with her powerful clawed toes. It is always a treat to observe our wondrous wildlife, but I think some Mt Wilson residents have mixed emotions regarding Lyre Birds. Ray Nesci as usual had a silly Lyre Bird joke to share which elicited some light-hearted groans.

The traditional cuppa was enjoyed back at the cars, where some had to leave, as it had been quite a long walk. Our various devices recorded a similar amount of steps and distance at just about 15 kilometres. It had not

been an exhausting walk, due to the chosen "wise way", the easy pace, the kind weather and the interesting conversations as we enjoyed the natural treasures revealed to us in this beautiful valley.

Barbara Harry

Many thanks Barbara for taking us on that entertaining walk through such a fascinating area of Wollemi National Park. (John C)

A few interesting little snippets relating to the Wolgan Valley Railway:

To cope with the particularly severe track conditions Shay locomotives were used. Three 70 ton locos were purchased from the Lima Locomotive Co of Ohio, USA. A fourth, larger, Shay loco went into service in 1910. These locos had a large bronze bell which swung in an ornate bracket. In 1953 the No4 loco was lying derelict in the valley but its massive bell had been secured against theft. It was presented to the All Saints Church of England in the Canberra suburb of Ainslie; a very appropriate railway historical connection for that church was built with stonework from the Mortuary Station at Rookwood. The rich peal of the bell which once echoed through the Wolgan Valley can still be heard on Sundays in Canberra.

Henry Deane, having completed the Wolgan Valley line, received a Commonwealth Government appointment in 1908 as controlling and consulting engineer for the survey of the Transcontinental Railway between Port Augusta and Kalgoorlie, becoming Engineer-in-Chief in charge of that railway's construction in 1910.

In addition to being a brilliant railway engineer Henry Deane built up a reputation in the fields of Botany and Palaeontology. He wrote several papers on the Eucalypt genus, some co-written with JH Maiden, Director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens. To honour Deane, Maiden applied the name *Eucalyptus deanei* to the Mountain Blue Gum, the dominant tree in the iconic Blue Gum Forest, cradle of conservation in the Blue Mountains.

VALE ROBERT CHESNEY

Sadly we lost one of our long time and much-cherished walkers when Robert passed away suddenly at his Turramurra home on Monday 26th March. Robert was a regular walker with the group for eighteen and a half years, from February 1999 until June last year. His decision to “hang up the boots” was certainly not due to lack of fitness, as anyone who walked with him would attest; but he had a reduced confidence in his balance. Robert stated he hoped to be able to be selective and come on the occasional walk; indeed he did come on our Christmas walk along the Knight – Brown Firetrail, to The Ramparts and the Kookootonga Firetrail; sadly his last walk with the Group. Robert was a very congenial walking companion, always pleasant and thoughtful of others; truly one of Nature’s Gentlemen. May his spirit now explore winding bush tracks and exquisite pathways in another place.

John Cardy on behalf of the Group

INJURY REPORT

A little multiple choice quiz:

What is the most hazardous situation?

- (a) Climbing ladders up to a height of two storeys to clean out the gutters
- (b) Walking in a level car park

I was involved in both activities on consecutive days and (b) proved to be far more dangerous. A simple trip and I absolutely smashed my shoulder resulting in the need for a reverse total shoulder arthroplasty or a total shoulder rebuild. Have had the most amazing care from initial assessment at Katoomba Hospital and surgery and after care at Hornsby Hospital and the San Clinic.

Walking activities of course curtailed for some time but still able to produce the newsletter with one-finger typing of reports by Barbara in this case or other guest scribes.

Cheers from John Cardy

OUR APRIL WALK

FRIDAY 20th April 2018

Reflective Pools, Forested Creek Lines, Shelter Caves and a Touch of Indigenous History

Jellybean Pool, Red Hands Cave and Campfire Creek Circuit at Glenbrook

The group last walked this circuit in July 2014. This is a medium grade walk of approximately 10 kilometres, mostly on well-formed track; there is a descent and ascent of 300 metres over that distance. The walk covers a wide variety of vegetation and terrains.

Meet at the parking area at the entrance gates at the Glenbrook NPWS Visitor Centre in Bruce Rd Glenbrook at 9.30am or at Merry Garth for a 7.45am departure. There is an \$8 fee to leave your car in this car park unless you have an annual pass. Only alternative is to park in Bruce Road north of the railway line.

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 18th May 2018 – Charles Darwin Walk and Kings Tableland Track, Wentworth Falls

Friday 15th June 2018 – Asgard Swamp and Thor Head north of Mount Victoria

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.

13th April – Meet at Hay Lane – Sloan Reserve

11th May – Meet at Hay Lane – Sloan Reserve

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details