
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 29 Issue 1

January 2019

HAPPY VALLEY AT MOUNT WILSON

TOPIC

OUR DECEMBER WALK

HAPPY VALLEY AT
MOUNT WILSON

Friday 7th December 2018

And so we come to the end of 2018, a year of deep sadness when we lost several walkers and ex-walkers; Robert Chesney, John Leonard, life member Helen Naylor and of course co-founder and beloved leader of the group Libby Raines. Yet it is also a time to celebrate their lives, indeed lives lived to the full by any measure. While searching for a theme with which to present the usual review of our walks of the past year I looked back to some early walk reports written by Libby. I found while reading these that Libby's soft voice lifted off the pages, images of her always-smiling face came readily to the mind's eye; I have decided to preface each monthly review with a short excerpt from Libby's early reports. I do hope you experience the same reaction that I did upon reading them; she has not really left us.

An excerpt from Libby's report of the 1998 walk to Hanging Rock below Baltzer Lookout: "---- The sun was warm as we wandered back along the winding, yellow, dusty road. Along the road a few of us stopped and waited while a tiny lizard bravely crossed the road in front of our pounding feet. I recalled how a few days earlier, while I had been weeding in the



Summer in the Bush

garden at Merry Garth, I had come across a little clutch of lizard eggs, and as I held them in my warm hand they had hatched out! Each tiny 1 centimetre lizard was completely equipped to make its way in the world immediately. They were carefully placed in some alpine phlox for cover and protection. Nature is quite wonderful! ----"

Our January walk was a Mt Wilson ramble along village pathways and nearby bush tracks, then the rainforest of the Waterfall Track. Things which come to my mind about this

walk include the very start, walking along Galwey and Davies Lanes with the enchanting Wynstay rainforest on one side and the exotic gardens opposite. The stunning views from a rocky outcrop across the northern Blue Mountains National Park and the Newnes State Forest; views which Esme Mann favoured while living on the Mount, and the tranquillity of the rainforest along the Waterfall Track where we paused for lunch.

Again in 1998 Libby wrote: "As the day dawned a thick white frost carpeted the ground, sparkling in the sunshine: mist hung low in the valleys of Bowens Creek. Above the sea of white, the top of Mt Banks stood alone, almost like a large blue island. By the time we set off from Merry Garth the mist was rising from the valleys, and although still cold, we all knew that a glorious mild winter's day was

ahead. It was our Group's fifth visit to Mt Banks."

February found us on the Shortcut Track, Den Fenella Lookout, Overcliff Track and Nature Track at Wentworth Falls. Memories from this walk include the stunning views into the Jamison Valley to Mt Solitary and beyond from Breakfast Point, Den Fenella, Lyrebird and Queen Victoria Lookouts and the beautiful fern-lined streams below Asmodeus Pool and Floras Bath were quite exquisite.

Libby began her report of the 1998 walk along part of the Fun Run route as follows: *'Some residents have expressed an interest in a walking group which would undertake walks in this lovely district ----- and it will provide an opportunity to enjoy our bushland and widen our knowledge at the same time.'*

"These were Mary's and my words of introduction to our first walk in May 1990. Now eight years later our 'little' group has trodden many paths, yet we are still exploring our local bush and discovering new and beautiful places to appreciate." And later *"Here the Pultanaea canescans grew high above our heads, golden in the sunlight. It was a wonderful sight, quite breathtaking and uplifting with the cicadas singing in the trees, the bluest of skies above and tiny native violets flowering on the ground."*

I suspect Libby could not have imagined then that the Group she and Mary started would still be meeting a further twenty years later.

In March the Group visited The Glow Worm Tunnel in the Wollemi National Park, a walk I did not attend as I was nursing a brand new shoulder. Barbara Harry was our guest scribe this month and here are some of my favourite pieces from her report. *"---- 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 graduation of intensity rather like the brushstrokes and runs of a watercolour painting."* and *"---- 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."

Sadly this was Libby's last walk with the Group, but true to her determination and tenacity she completed it; a walk of fifteen kilometres.

In 1999 Libby wrote in her account of the Grand Canyon walk: *"---- Suddenly we were in a different environment with tall Coachwoods, Sassafras and the occasional Lilly Pilly and Quintinia towering above, creating deep shade, with tree ferns, soft ground ferns and trickling water. Spellbound, we watched, then tiptoed past, a lyrebird who was scratching happily for insects which lie beneath the leaf litter, only a few metres from the track. He was quite unaware of the rare and entrancing scene he was creating for us, while a tiny white-browed scrub wren followed in his wake, sharing his feast in the disturbed soil."*

In April I was still breaking in my new shoulder (that is probably not the best expression to use), so my better half Helen led the walk. Once again Barbara Harry wielded her trusty quill to relate the story of the walk to Red Hands Cave via Jellybean Pool at Glenbrook. Here are some excerpts: *"We continued down many uneven steps to the pool, not surprisingly, in the shape of a jellybean, with a wide sandy surround and many large boulders around the perimeter. ---- Ray (Nesci) pointed out some Water Gums (Tristania nerifolia), which he said made excellent bonsai specimens and produce yellow flowers. ---- The other prevalent trees were Turpentine (Syncarpia glomulifera), identified by their rough, textured bark and small rounded nuts scattered about their bases. On our high side were many wind-worn rippled sandstone caves and outcrops in marvellous textured colour combinations."*

Libby passed away on the 10th May after her brave struggle with cancer. On the **18th May** there was a Thanksgiving and Remembrance Service for Libby; appropriately on the Friday we would normally be walking. More than

three hundred attended, indicating the deep respect, love, and affection in which she was held.

In her account of the 1999 walk from Evans Lookout to Govetts Leap Lookout via Junction Rock, Libby wrote: *"I often think of the people who made these walking tracks so many years ago. This track from the Beauchamp Falls to Junction Rock was opened in 1900 after being built by a contractor, John Cliff, for the cost of £270. Somehow the track builders found an easy way down through the cliffs where it seemed impossible to go. Many of the steps we used were made with very large flat rocks and had been in place for many years, trodden by thousands of feet over time. These hard workers left a fine legacy of miles of wonderful walking tracks all through the mountains."*

While, in her innate modest way, she would be loath to agree, like those workers Libby left her own fine legacy in so many ways. The care she bestowed on the Mt Wilson Community and Village through the Progress Association, Rural Fire, the Bushcare Group and her personal vigilance in looking for potential problems around the village on her regular morning walks. Her devotion to St Georges Church, to this walking Group, her fine botanic art, the creation and maintenance of that blessed enclosure which is Merry Garth, to the love of the bush she imparted to so many and her dedication to her delightful cherished family; she will be missed in so many ways by so many people.

In 2000 Libby wrote this passage as part of her report on our canyoning trip on October and Du Faur Creeks: *"What is it about the canyons which make these days so special and calls us back each year? Perhaps it is knowing the thousands of years it has taken to form these extraordinarily beautiful cliffs and sculptured rocks. Maybe it is the sheer beauty of the long still pools overshadowed and guarded by giant cliffs, softened with sprays of green ferns, or perhaps it is because there is nothing in these wild hidden places that is man made. The canyons are as they have been for years and it*

is a privilege to share their majestic stillness and wondrous beauty. Maybe it is the challenge required to meet the cold water, slippery rocks and after difficult exits the companionship, help and encouragement we all give each other. I guess it is a combination of all these and more!"

In June we held a Mt Wilson Tribute Walk for Libby which was planned and led by Libby's son Peter and attended by her daughter Beth. Perhaps the most pleasing memory for me from this walk was that thirty-eight people (and two dogs as was the case on that very first walk to the Tessellated Pavements) attended. Also the short talks that Peter gave during the walk at spots significant to Libby's many inputs into the Village. And the gathering back at Merry Garth where Mary Reynolds, the co-founder of the group, was present. There was a wonderful collage of photos featuring Libby on various walks over the years, put together by my better half Helen, along with a series featuring Libby on more recent walks by Simon Changson.

Also in 2000 Libby wrote her account of the walk to Blue Gum Forest via Pierces Pass, here is an excerpt where I feel you can especially 'hear' Libby's voice: *"We left the track briefly to explore Fairy Grotto, a beautiful little area below the track and beside Pierces Creek. What a lovely place it was! A protected amphitheatre, surrounded by cliff walls, with tall straight smooth-barked coachwoods towering above, many soft ferns and tree ferns and the refreshing pristine stream, forming a delightful clear pool which then flowed over the little stones between large mossy green rocks. Reluctantly we left this cool shady and enchanting place to continue on our downward way."*

Our July walk took us along Darwins Walk, then Rocket Point and Mulherans Cliff Edge Track to Lincolns Rock. Libby's son Peter and her infant grandsons Bill and Jack joined us on this walk. Memories from this walk include the panoramic views from Rocket Point, the enclosed intimacy of the Leprechaun Tunnels through the overarching vegetation along Mulherans Cliff Edge Track and the view to

Vera Falls deep in the Valley of the Waters from Te Willa Lookout.

Libby wrote, in her introduction to the 2000 walk to Leura Cascades and Gordon Falls:

“Our May walk this year was always going to be a Special Day, as ten years have slipped away since 17 members of the Mt Irvine and Mt Wilson communities set out on that first walk to the Tessellated Pavements on 17th May 1990. ----- This walk was our 141st and over the years we have walked many miles, discovered wild and beautiful places, learnt much about this wonder-filled area in which we live, its plants and animals. ---- We have learnt much about ourselves too; we have found courage and determination; we are stronger and fitter and more appreciative and tolerant. We have supported each other, helping and encouraging and we have made new friends, so that for many of us, our walk days have become the highlights of each month.”

Highlights which come to mind from our **August walk** to Asgard Swamp, Thor Head and surrounds at Mt Victoria include the magnificent displays of deep golden blossom of the Sunshine Wattles, the stunning views of the Upper Grose Gorge from Thor Head and Carol Conway’s version of Libby’s bushwalker cake wrapped in a tea towel which carried a quote from Marcel Proust; ‘Let us be grateful to people who make us happy. They are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.’ A deeply appropriate tribute to Libby.

In 2000 there was a walk from Green Gully down Breakfast Creek to Coxs River. Rather than quote Libby’s writing I shall repeat here an extract she included from Bernard O’Reilly’s book ‘Cullenbenbong’; a book Libby loved dearly and read and re-read often.

“All the peace and beauty of a clear winter’s evening was upon Green Gully as I first saw it; blue smoke from the chimney hung in the still frosty air. Early dusk, tinged with reflected purple from the giant cliffs above softened the naked willows and touched the timbered hills with mystery. High up the ridge

was the deep ‘bong’ of cow bells while baritone frogs spoke in turn along the edge of the creek.” Obviously a passage which touched Libby.

Our September walk was to Mayinygu Marragu (Blackfellows Hand Rock) and The Temple of Doom on the Newnes Plateau. Highlights from that walk were, of course, the hand, boomerang and stone axe stencils on the rock overhang, the magnificent curtain of Rock Felt Fern on a cliff face in the box gully, the stunning views into the Wolgan Valley and the spectacular pagoda formations of the Temple of Doom.

Once more in 2000 Libby began her write-up of the walk to Fairy Bower and Coxs Cave at Mt Victoria as follows: *“After a week of over 7 inches of rain we were surprised and pleased to waken on Friday to see the mist had lifted and the rain had stopped. The clouds were thick, lying on the tops of the mountains of the Great Divide to the west as we drove along the Darling Causeway. To the east Mount Banks and Mount Hay stood like large islands above a sea of mist filling the Grose Valley.”*

October saw us heading to Lockley Pylon along Mt Hay Road. Images lodged in the memory bank from this walk include the distant views of Govetts Leap and Horseshoe Falls flowing copiously after the recent rain. Also closer views of Fortress Falls appearing to emerge from a huge cavern as they drop over the cliff face, but that was an optical illusion created by the curves of the canyon walls. And of course the 360 degree views from atop the Pylon.

A walk in 2001 was to be to Erskine Creek, however on arrival at Glenbrook we found the National Park was closed due to hazard reduction burns. The substitute walk was from Yarramundi to the lower Grose River, here is an abstract from Libby’s description: *“The river was beautiful, quite wide but in many parts shallow. Often it formed long still pools and in other places it rushed through narrow spaces between great boulders. Fish were gracefully moving in the still water while*

dragonflies hovered above, dipping now and then to touch the surface. All day cicadas sang. We have not heard cicadas in the mountains this summer. It was a pleasant accompaniment in the peaceful setting."

In November we tackled the Grand Canyon Circuit at Blackheath. Sights still lingering from that walk include the grand vistas from Evans Lookout and Lizard Rock, watching, through the eyes of an unfit 75 year old, young 5 year old Bill and 4 year old Jack bouncing along the track; ah the exuberance of the young. The stunning beauty of the canyon track from The Fernery, to the Greaves Creek section of track and the enclosed environment of Neates Glen; and among all this grandeur the small curiosity of The Stripe, the red, yellow and brown strip running across the sandstone path near the Walkunder Waterfall.

And so we come to our **December walk** to Happy Valley in Mount Wilson followed by our Christmas luncheon in the Village Hall.

I shall not include an excerpt from Libby's early reports prior to this description; the reason will become obvious later.

Twenty-six walkers gathered at the Village Hall and were allocated seats in six vehicles for the short drive to the Happy Valley trackhead. By Jōve! I think I've got this vehicle rationalisation sorted. Waiting at the trackhead were Peter Raines and young Bill and Jack.

With yours truly leading and Allan Cupitt taking up the position of whip at the rear we set off on this morning walk. Initially the track led us through open eucalypt forest but very soon we entered the rainforest under a fairly sparse canopy on the margin, here the sunlight shone through the tracery of intermingled branches above. Rather quickly however the canopy became more enclosed and the ground cover consisted mainly of ferns in the more subdued light.

We passed the turnoff on the right for the Cathedral Creek Track, once known as the Water Track. This name originated from its use in early days, by people having lunch at

the picnic area beside Mount Irvine Road, taking the thirty to forty-five minute return walk down to Cathedral Creek to get water to boil the billy. This track was established prior to the extended track to Happy Valley.

As we continued on the track wended its way past superbly buttressed tree trunks; their surface roots snaking across the forest floor in search of nourishment and stability. Large Water Vines (*Cissus sp*) hung from the trees, looping across the track and lying in sinuous patterns among the leaf litter. We passed the remains of an ancient forest giant prone on the hillside, a half shell encrusted with mosses and fungi as it decays and returns to the earth from whence it came; it gave the appearance of a large war canoe.

The track then steepens and begins zig zagging down toward the creek. We passed a large vertical rockface clothed with soft deep green moss and a nearby overhang devoid of any vegetation whatsoever; such are the vagaries of Mother Nature.

Soon the number of Soft Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) increased dramatically and the sound of rippling water rose from deep in the valley, the surroundings were then much more moist and shady.

The last twenty metres or so down to Waterfall Creek are quite steep and slippery. I and a couple of others elected to remain on the higher section of track. The remaining twenty-six picked their way down the steep slope to witness the creek waters purling across a bed of smooth pebbles before dropping over the edge of a rock shelf into a pristine pool.

This area of ancient tree ferns, moss shrouded rocks, copious ground ferns and the clear rippling and swirling waters of Waterfall Creek does indeed result in a very Happy Valley. It was with great reluctance that we left this special place and made our way back up the slope to the cars.

The name Happy Valley had great significance, other than for its natural beauty, to two people. In the late 1940s and 1950s a young Elizabeth Hake used to walk this track

with her family. However the track fell into disuse and disappeared under the lush growth of the rainforest.

In 1971 Elizabeth Hake decided she would love to find the course of the track she had trodden so often in her childhood with her family; she set out on a mission of discovery. Eventually she stumbled on a curve which seemed familiar. After much difficulty, she followed the overgrown track down to the Happy Valley she remembered from her childhood days.

She was so thrilled to have finally succeeded in her search she could not wait to tell someone of her discovery. As she emerged from the forest a young man named Keith Raines happened to be walking along the road. She excitedly told of her find and her desire to clear and re-establish the track. Keith offered to help, and armed with axes, hoes, brush hooks and secateurs they set off over many days to clear fallen trees and branches and cut back vines and ferns to reopen the track.

This activity had a fairytale ending of course, for Libby and Keith married soon afterwards; a Happy Valley indeed.

Back at the Village Hall we were joined by twelve more ex-walkers and walkers who could not join us today. At this festively decorated venue a sumptuous lunch awaited, both organised by my guardian angel Helen with plates of salads, slices, potato bakes, cake, pudding and berries, etc provided by members; thanks to all those who contributed.

A series of videos, skilfully cobbled together by Helen, of the walks we had completed during the year, were shown, with the much appreciated help of Tim Gow and Barry Freeman, on the big screen. They included several walks led by Libby, including her last, of fifteen kilometres, to the Glow Worm Tunnel; poignant reminders

And so ended another year of wonderful bushwalks, a bitter / sweet year, but a year when we celebrated the lives of cherished friends; they will not be forgotten.

John Cardy

OUR JANUARY WALK

FRIDAY 18th JANUARY 2019

Lush Rainforest and Ferny Glens

The Victory Track and Sassafras Gully Track – Faulconbridge to Springwood

The group last visited this venue in June 2013. It is a creekline walk mainly through a rainforest environment. It is a medium grade walk of about 7km on mostly good tracks. There is a steepish, but not too long, climb to finish but the rewards are many.

Meet at 10.00am at the Corridor of Oaks in Sir Henrys Parade at Faulconbridge (cross the railway line at the level crossing just east of Faulconbridge Railway Station). For those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson meet at St Georges Church for an 8.30am departure.

There will be a short car shuffle to leave vehicles at our finishing point in Sassafras Gully Road at Springwood.

Bring morning tea, lunch and **plenty of water.**

Contact Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 15th February – Darwins Walk, Under/Overcliff Tracks at Wentworth Falls

Friday 15th March – Odin Head at Mt 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.

Friday 11th January at Wynne Reserve

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141