
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 28 Issue 10

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TEMPLE OF DOOM ON NEWNES PLATEAU

TOPIC

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

MAYINYGU MARRAGU
(BLACKFELLOWS HAND
ROCK), VIEW OVER
WOLGAN VALLEY and the
TEMPLE OF DOOM on the
NEWNES PLATEAU

Friday 21st September 2018

Before starting the story of the September walk, a short note regarding the December walk and Christmas get together. The third Friday in December this year is only four days before Christmas Day which we felt is too close and may clash with other Christmas arrangements. There was some discussion about this on the walk but we now feel the best option would be to hold our December walk and get together on the **first Friday in December, that is the 7th December**. This would still give a three week interval from our November walk and hopefully minimise clashes with other Yuletide commitments; do hope that this is OK for the majority of participants.

Now, back to the September walk.

“.... a grand valley surrounded by Cliffs of Sandstone... large ordinary form, like a bay with arms: so precipitous tho with [labour] in one spot a cattle track has been [cut] down, generally vertical walls, many hundreds feet high: sides perpendicular reaching to general



Spring in the Bush

level of country; about 7 miles long, & one mile broad – appears to have all been removed – form modelled by water: yet exit of the valley, is by a narrow creek, a few hundred yards wide, with stupendous vertical sides, no cattle can pass [out] & twice the Surveyors have attempted to pass down the head of the small river, but have failed.” So jotted Charles Darwin in his notebook on Tuesday 19th January 1836 when he visited the Wolgan Valley on his trip to Bathurst while the Beagle was anchored in Sydney

Harbour. Today we will gaze into that valley which captivated Darwin one hundred and eighty two years ago and view stencil art by the Wirajuri people who have occupied these lands for tens of thousands of years. Terra Nullius? Not likely!

Eighteen gathered in the Lithgow Valley Shopping Centre Car Park on a refreshingly cool morning under a clear azure sky. Once again Peter Raines joined us with young Bill and Jack. Bill had just celebrated his fifth birthday, proudly raising an open hand to indicate this special event. We also once again welcomed Judy Fakes who has walked with us a couple of times and today signed up as a member; welcome Judy. Following a minor miracle when a vehicle rationalisation, organised by yours truly, had everyone ensconced in one of five cars, we set off for the 23 kilometre trip to our starting point.

The drive out along the Wolgan Road takes us through some wonderful scenery; green pastures surrounded by high ridges, some carrying exposed cliff faces and pagoda-like formations. About four kilometres past the Angus Place Mine two blue arrows painted on a tree trunk indicate the turn-off to our starting point. I took on the rather unfamiliar role of leader for this walk and Des Barrett once again acted as whip.

Since our last visit to this area, three and a half years ago, money has been spent on some signage, railing around the parking area, some much needed road repairs and steps up to the rock overhang where the Aboriginal stencil art embellishes the rock face. It is so good to see that, although unprotected in any way, this site has not suffered any vandalism.

The art consists of hand stencils of varying sizes, a few hand and forearm stencils, a stone axe and boomerang stencils, and something a little different, one stencil of a boomerang with a hand extension. The images are not all that clear when we first arrive but after we have spent some time here for morning tea the change in the angle of the sun brings them into greater clarity.

While here it is a joy to see the exuberance of young Bill and Jack bouncing along the track and clambering over rocks; at one point young Bill emerges after climbing up between two large boulders, his smiling cherubic face peering out from beneath the upturned brim of his hat.

We then descend back down to road level and pass a few large trees with lower trunks wrapped in astounding thick shawls of loose discarded bark, possibly Ribbon or Manna Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) though this writer has not seen this decorative cloaking effect on Ribbon Gums elsewhere in these mountains.

We then proceed along Mayinygu Marragu Trail (Forests NSW returned Blackfellows Hand Trail to this traditional name some years ago) which leads us past some amazing high cliff faces with wide overhangs, deep caverns and a huge rock face shrouded in the fleshy

fronds of Rock Felt Fern (*Pyrosia rupestris*); the sterile spoon shaped fronds contrasting markedly with the long narrow fertile fronds. This is by far the largest, most astounding example of this fern I have encountered; a huge glossy-green curtain adorning the vertical cliff face, a curtain-raiser indeed for things to come.

The Mayinygu Marragu Trail turns sharply right and climbs the hill but we continue straight ahead now following a path through knee high ground ferns which leads us toward the end of this box gully. A short scramble up a sloping rock face leads us to a footpad which takes us into open bushland. We pass a few examples of the Prickly Moses (*Acacia ulicifolia*) carrying sparsely scattered pale cream flowers among its needle-like phyllodes. Nearby the red flowers of a couple of *Epacris reclinata* light up the scene.

The path leads us over a rock outcrop where, on our last visit to this area, there were several Pagoda Daisies (*Leucochrysum graminifolium*) displaying their bright yellow papery bracts; at this time of the year they were just coming into bud. These were one of Libby's favourite little plants. With this in mind, Des Barrett suggests that rather than the cumbersome scientific name they have been inflicted with, perhaps a more appropriate substitute could be *Libbyinus rainesius*; I am sure henceforth that suggestion will come to mind whenever I encounter these plants.

Soon we emerge onto a fire trail and turn left to drop down the slope. Near here we pass a wattle, a shrub about 1.5 metres tall, displaying deep yellow racemes of flowers clustered among narrow leaves, or more correctly phyllodes, about 50 millimetres long. This writer has not previously been attracted to the very showy floral display of this shrub; it is perhaps the *Acacia meiantha*, an uncommon shrub that does flower from July to October.

The fire trail swings left, then right, and suddenly we are on the edge of an abyss; below us is the splendour of the Wolgan Valley. Indeed, as Charles Darwin wrote in his

notebook, the valley has “generally vertical walls, many hundreds feet high: sides perpendicular reaching to general level of country”; these horizontal lines of the landscape above the cliffs accentuate the depth of the valley. The line of the Wolgan River, about three hundred metres below us, meanders along the valley floor. A stunning view from this vantage point; indeed young Bill declares it to be a great “yookout”.

With your indulgence dear readers, I will repeat here some of the history of the Wolgan Valley which was included in the newsletter covering our last visit to this spot.

James Walker, of the Royal Marines, established the ‘Wallerowang’ station nearby, circa 1823. He soon entered this lush valley and set up an out-station which he called ‘Wolgan’; it appears this was the Aboriginal name for the locality and it became adopted for the whole valley and its river by the European settlers. Thomas Archer, whose father managed ‘Wallerowang’, wrote: “Wolgan, where Scranny (his horse) and I frequently went on stockdriving excursions was a wonderful valley ----- completely surrounded by precipices. The end next to Wallerowang (about 6 miles off) was the lowest, and here a path had been cut in the face of the precipitous rock, and formed the only access to the valley for cattle and horses. ----- The pass in the precipice was barred by sliprails, so that stock, when once in the valley, found it nearly impossible to get out again, and this made it a very valuable weaning paddock.” (Charles Darwin descended this pass in 1836 while staying two days at ‘Wallerowang’. He wrote copiously in his notebook on Tuesday 19th January regarding the precipitous nature of the cliffs and the cutting of the pass – see extracts earlier.)

And so the first enduring touches by white men were made in this valley when that pass was cut. Indeed, as we stood at the edge of one of the precipices described by Thomas Archer, we could see the sealed road which now drops from that pass (Wolgan Gap) emerging onto the valley floor and snaking into the distance

beside the Wolgan River. Later agricultural and industrial developments in the valley of course left far greater imprints on the landscape than that initial pass and sliprails.

(That short extract on ‘Wallerowang’ and the early use of the Wolgan Valley for grazing has a poignant connection to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. It was taken from ‘A Short History of the Wolgan Valley’ written by Harold Arthur MacLeod Morgan in 1959. MacLeod Morgan was engaged to be married, in 1964, to Wilga Smart whose family established Carisbrook in Mt Irvine. Her brother Bill later owned Gowan Ross and then Wynstay at Mt Wilson. MacLeod Morgan died just five days before he and Wilga were to be married at Mt Wilson.)

We reluctantly leave these magnificent views and make our way back along the fire trail; past the junction of the footpad we had walked earlier, and emerge once more onto the Mayinygu Marragu Trail. Here we turn left to make our way to the Temple of Doom pagodas. We dip down into a gully and climb a steepish little pinch as we near the path to the pagodas. I pause here to allow everyone to regroup and looking back saw that Peter is not only carrying young Jack in his backpack seat as he had been for most of the walk, but now also has Bill perched atop his shoulders; a dedicated Dad.

We make our way down off the trail and through a narrow passage beside the first pagoda, then continue around between the bases of the formations. We then climb onto a relatively squat pagoda that carries a sandstone pedestal, atop of which sits a relatively thin horizontal plate of ironstone extending well beyond its support, thus forming a large table; time for lunch.

Following lunch most of the group set off to explore these amazing formations. Still very wary after smashing my shoulder and lacking confidence to some degree in climbing, I spend the time on the first pagoda taking in the splendour of this area. So, once again, with your forbearance dear readers, I shall draw on my notes from our last visit here for a detailed description of this astounding landscape.

There is an amazing variation in form in this vast array of pagodas. There are relatively smooth-sided conical formations surrounded by pagodas having the most incredibly contorted ironstone ledges and plates extending from their sides. Some are light grey in colour, others dark; there are patches of orange and gold where the eroding wind is still exposing fresh sandstone surfaces. There are windows to the sky through some of the thin plates while dark portals in the sides of some formations appear as arched windows leading to a mysterious unseen interior.

There are slim columns capped with ironstone roofs, thin ledges extending so far they appear to defy gravity, a cluster of squat columns sit below thin horizontal protective caps, ironstone shells curve gracefully while some twist into the most amazing contortions.

Little is known about exactly how and why these unusual landforms develop. What is clear is that the pagodas are differential weathering formations which develop in Banks Wall and Burra Moko Head type sandstones of the Triassic Narrabeen Group; the platy pagodas, those with extended ledges of ironstone, tend to form in Banks Wall Sandstone. Whatever the technicalities of their creation they are indeed a spectacular landform in which to simply sit and contemplate the grandeur of this landscape.

Then, reluctantly, we leave this exceptional landscape and make our way back to the cars via the Mayinygu Marragu Trail; a relaxing walk to end a very special day in these wondrous Blue Mountains.

John Cardy

VALE HELEN NAYLOR

Helen, a foundation member, and later a life member of this Walking Group, passed away on the 25th August. The September newsletter had already been printed at that stage so we take this opportunity to make a slightly belated tribute to Helen.

Helen and her late husband Ron were on the inaugural walk of this group to the Tessellated Pavements on 17th May 1990 and

subsequently often walked with the group. It was always a pleasure to have Helen accompany us on the various bushwalks; not only because of her always very pleasant demeanour but especially so when we walked in Mt Irvine or Mt Wilson because of her intimate knowledge of the area. Helen grew up in Mt Irvine, the daughter of Harold Morley, one of the three original settlers there.

Following are a few extracts from bushwalking newsletters relating to Helen.

15th October 2004 to The Ramparts

“----- Soon we reach “Booralee”, the property of Ron and Helen Naylor and take advantage of some convenient logs as seating for morning tea. Helen Naylor joined us and regaled the group with a story of the wombat which had recently stolen all her rhubarb. Her stated hope that the ill-gotten gains made the wombat sick immediately generated a picture in my seriously weird imagination of a wombat with one paw holding a swollen belly and another across its mouth with bulging cheeks as it dashed to the WC (Wombat Closet). ----- Helen decided she could not pass up the opportunity of spending a few hours in such fine company and elected to join us for the rest of the walk. She graciously invited the group to wander through her garden while she booted up. (She was already switched on.) ----- the fire trail descends toward Humpy Creek, so named because Basil Knight-Brown and Harold Morley, two of the first settlers on Mt Irvine, built a bark humpy for shelter in this vicinity. Helen Naylor provided our direct historical link; Harold Morley was her father. ---- We are now at The Ramparts. Helen Naylor reminisced about riding her horse out to this point and of cooking sausages over a fire set in the hollows of the rock platform.”

This platform also gives a great view down to the Bowens Creek Road as it snakes its way down to the creek and up toward Bilpin on the other side. Helen mentioned how after the opening of the road in 1935 the local children would gather on this rock outcrop when visitors were expected. On sighting a vehicle

commence the descent on the Bilpin side they would run home and announce the impending arrival before the vehicle could negotiate the steep and twisting route.

15th October 2007 to Tessellated Pavements

“----- At the point where we leave the fire trail to take the track along the ridge Helen Naylor was waiting to join the group -----.

Helen's father Harold Morley was one of the three pioneer settlers who took up land in Mt Irvine in 1897. Not that long ago a young Helen ran free in this area and still lives on part of that original selection. I'm sure this was a nostalgic journey for her. Indeed off to the left as we commence this walk a gully wends its way down to the Wollangambe carrying Morley Creek named after Helen's father.

We divert to the left and emerge onto a rock platform which affords magnificent views into the gorge cut by the Wollangambe. Rugged vertical cliffs are visible at a point where the river sweeps toward the west before resuming its northerly flow. The expansive panorama across the seemingly never ending ridges and valleys was stunning and apart from some landmarks that could be identified in Mt Wilson there were few signs of human occupation. Soon after returning to the track we divert right and find ourselves on a bare rock outcrop overlooking Bowens Creek. In contrast to the previous view we now take in the cleared farmland of Mount Tootie and Little Mount Tootie, patches of light green pastures surrounded by bushland.

There was something quite odd about this vantage point. The very observant in the group may have noticed that unlike the platform overlooking the Wollangambe, this area was devoid of small rocks. If something were needed to throw at some attacking animal or a dissident walker it was not to be had here. Was it a mysterious quirk of nature that had deemed this spot would not be littered with small stones, as is the case along the rest of this ridge? Was there some other reason for

the dearth of any decent gibbers here? One of the culprits was in our midst! A young Helen Naylor (then Helen Morley) and other local kids used to gather at this spot and throw rocks over the edge, counting how long it took for them to reach the bottom. This game was obviously repeated until the supply of ammunition became severely depleted; the spirit of Sir Isaac Newton would have been well pleased.”

This I believe was the last walk Helen undertook with the group. Thank you Helen for your always pleasant manner, for sharing your knowledge of the local history and on a personal note for your generous encouragement to me regarding the writing of these newsletters; may your spirit be exploring bush tracks in another place.

John Cardy on behalf of the Bushwalking Group

OUR OCTOBER WALK

Friday 19th October 2018

Mountain Vistas, Valley Views and Wildflowers in Profusion

Lockley Pylon off the Mt Hay Road north of Leura

The group last visited this venue in November 2012. This walk has the rocky crags of The Pinnacles, beautiful heathlands, wooded flanks of Mt Stead and spectacular 360° views from atop Lockley Pylon. This is an easy to medium walk of about 8km return with ascent and descent of 160 metres.

Meet at Leura on Mt Hay Road in the 'dip' just past Churchill St at 9.30am. For those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson meet at St Georges Church at 8.30am.

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 180 degrees and travel back down the hill to turn left into Mt Hay Rd at the school. (Or travel via Britain St or Victory Lane and Churchill St to avoid the school.) Those travelling from the Katoomba side also

approach via this roundabout. There will be a vehicle rationalisation at the meeting point for the drive of approximately 10km to the track head. 4WD vehicles would be welcomed.

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 16th November 2018 – The Grand Canyon circuit at Blackheath

Friday 7th December 2018 – Sunday Walk Spur and Bogey Holes at Mt Wilson followed by our Christmas / end of year get together at Mt Wilson Village Hall

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 12th October at Sloan Reserve

Friday 9th November at Wynne Reserve

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141