
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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THE GRAND CANYON AT BLACKHEATH

TOPIC

OUR NOVEMBER WALK

THE GRAND CANYON AT BLACKHEATH

Friday 16th November 2018

This walk was influenced by a solicitor, thirsty lizards, a surveyor, a stationmaster of South American origins, an artist and a wonderfully innocent view of the world. Do join us as we explore this magical canyon; a jewel of the Blue Mountains.

Despite my limited fitness due to recovery from illness and injury over the last couple of years, I explicitly wanted to keep this medium grade walk, with lots of steps, on the program. When Libby and I sat down in January to plan the walks for the year this was one she particularly wanted included. She would have been well pleased that thirty walkers attended, especially so as the group included her son Peter, daughter-in-law Linda and 5 and 4 year old grandsons Bill and Jack.

We gathered outside Karin Kirkpatrick's home to start this walk as she had kindly invited us to afternoon tea on completion of the walk. We introduced and welcomed Linda who was joining us for the first time, also Julie Attwood, a friend of John Maule, and Bruce Dawkins, a friend and neighbour of Jeanie and Allan Cupitt. These pleasantries completed we set off down Evans Lookout Road under



Summer in the Bush

lightly overcast skies; ideal walking conditions.

It was with some feeling of foreboding on my part as we approached Neates Glen car park for it was here that I tripped and smashed my shoulder eight months ago. But all is well that ends well, I now have a new titanium shoulder joint which is working well.

The track then led us into the bushland which had that clear crisp appearance following the recent showers. The bright yellow freshly emerging flowers of Broadleaf

Drumsticks (*Isopogon anemonifolius*) decorated the trackside, along with the pink hanging flowers of the Dog Roses (*Bauera rubioides*). Also present were the ubiquitous Mountain Devils (*Lambertia formosa*), their terminal clusters of bright red tubular flowers illuminating the area.

Soon we were at the Grand Canyon Loop car park where there were lots of shallow pools of water across the open space, a magnet to young Bill and Jack. They proceeded to show that, like Alan Marshall, they too could jump puddles; or in Jack's case, jump into puddles.

Then we were at Evans Lookout, named after solicitor George Evans who owned property in this area; not George Evans the surveyor of the road to Bathurst as is often thought. When five year old Bill arrived at the lookout and peered down into the Govett and Grose Gorges and the cliffs and mountains beyond

he declared: "Wow, I can see the whole of the world from here!" The delightful innocence of the young.

Having taken our fill of the magnificent view down Govett Gorge between Pulpit Rock and Fortress Hill to the Blue Gum Forest and The Grose Gorge below Mount Banks and beyond, we headed down toward the Grand Canyon.

As the track levelled out on a small spur we ignored the sign indicating the Grand Canyon was to the right and proceeded straight ahead. This led us down past the start of the Horse Track, once used to take cattle into and out of the Blue Gum Forest and climbed onto Lizard Rock where we paused for morning tea.

This long flat rock on the edge of the precipice is so named because people are known to lay down and look over the edge into the valley below, appearing flat out like lizards drinking water. Once again we were treated to amazing valley views and of the sheer cliffs of Carne Wall, golden sandstone with a dark stripe where, after heavy rain, water from a swamp near Point Pilcher drops down into the valley to join the waters of Greaves Creek far below.

We then returned to the track down into the Grand Canyon. From about 1890 the canyon was known as the Grand Cañón, this being the Spanish spelling for canyon, probably named by Tomas Ramon Rodriguez, born in the Dominican Republic; he was station master at Blackheath from 1889 to 1900. The Grand Canyon Track, following the route we know today, was opened in February 1907 by New South Wales Premier JH Carruthers.

The track leads us down through the lower fringe of the dry sclerophyll woodland which was very soon replaced by cool moist rainforest, the change being quite sudden. We dropped down past the Cave of Red, a huge rock overhang whose sandy floor is quite red, due no doubt to the iron in the sandstone.

We then entered the Fernery where tree ferns and ground ferns abound. The always-pleasant sound of running water was then evident, initially emanating from unseen streams but as we descended silver ribbons of water could be

seen rushing down mossy furrows. As the track crossed and recrossed the main stream, fed by these side streams, the volume of water increased, forming glassy cascades sliding over the dark rocks and across pebble beds.

Here Coachwood, Sassafras and Lilly Pilly flourish, towering skyward seeking the sun; their bases forming wonderful buttresses as their roots spread across the rainforest floor seeking nourishment and stability.

Much of the track has been upgraded with new stepping stones which snake across the stream and uniform steps which make the walk much easier. At one point however the original steps have been sensitively retained where the track squeezes between two forest giants whose moss encrusted surface roots encroach on the edges of the steps. These steps, climbing up between the two giant trees, is one of the iconic scenes in the mountains. Unfortunately one of these forest giants has succumbed to age and broken off several metres above the steps; at least the base remains intact and may survive for many years to come.

Soon we were at Greaves Creek, the waterway which has carved the canyon over aeons. Greaves Creek was named after surveyor William Albert Braylesford Greaves (1829-1925). He drew a plan of the Village of Blackheath in 1881 and the Parish of Blackheath in 1883. He became President of the Royal Historical Society in 1917.

We rested here awhile before turning right and heading upstream, Bruce commented that he guessed it was all uphill from here; essentially that is the case. We passed through some rock overhangs on each side of the creek then passed a spot where a waterfall, only partially visible, drops noisily into a deep pool. On previous walks we have seen quite large orange yabbies cruising the bottom of this pool in search of food.

A little further on is the site of the Diaphanous Drops Waterfall, after substantial rain these falls form a wide sheer curtain across the dark cliff face; today there was but a trickle. There were however long strings of vegetation hanging from the bottom ledge of the falls,

looking at first glance like streams of water dropping; nature's substitute falls in the dry.

Soon we were at the point where the Point Pilcher Track drops into the canyon; we rested here awhile before tackling the climb up to Luncheon Lookout. From that elevated point you are looking down into the canyon some thirty metres below. There are spectacular formations in the cliffs here, the remains of swirl holes formed as the canyon was being created. The holes wore down into the rock, ground out by swirling water and pebbles, but eventually the sides eroded away leaving 'half holes', if such an expression is possible.

The track then led us through many overhangs where it was easy to crack your head on the ceilings if care was not taken. We passed a natural arch from which a tall tree has decided to grow; nearby there is a set of stainless steel chains; an anchor point for abseilers dropping down to explore the depths of the canyon.

Soon the track and the creek again approach the same level and just before reaching the Walkunder Waterfall there is an interesting feature running right across the track. A stripe, about fifteen centimetres wide, has two outer bands of bright red, then two narrower bands of yellow with a thin central band of brown. A real curiosity embedded in the sandstone track.

Shortly after walking under the Walkunder Waterfall we arrived at the tunnel. It is about ten metres long and was formed by a rock fall, the naturally formed tunnel only required minor enlargement to make it passable. After negotiating the tunnel we arrived at the Camp and Camp Cave where we paused for lunch.

We then climbed up from the Camp and the canyon opened out considerably. The sloping cliffs above the opposite bank of the creek carried an amazing display of wildflowers. There were pink flowering shrubs, possibly Boronias, interspersed through a wall of bright yellow; when I suggested to Allan Cupitt they were probably one of the Bush Peas his quick riposte was that he had one of them earlier.

As we approached the creek crossing into Neates Glen the view down to the creek

revealed a beautiful little cascade on a side stream feeding into Greaves Creek.

Neates Glen was named after John James Neate (1848-1921) a member of Blackheath Reserve Trusts and Councillor for the then Blue Mountains Shire Council. The family owned commercial properties on the corner of the Highway and Govetts Leap Road. He was an artist who had a studio on the Highway.

Stepping stones led us across Greaves Creek and we began the climb out of the canyon via Neates Glen. Here the track passes magnificent tree ferns and the rock faces beside the track are embellished with an array of fine moist mosses; the sound of trickling water adds to the serenity of this area.

Gradually the ferns and mosses declined and we moved back into dry sclerophyll woodland; the track then zigged and zagged its way up the slope. Though the more luxuriant ferns were no longer present in this more open environment there were ground ferns along the way including the Spreading Fan Fern (*Sticherus lobatus*). The unfurling croziers atop stems of other ferns added a touch of interest on the trackside.

The cloud cover began to break up and the sun came out just as we approached Neates Glen car park, perfect timing. So, with some very much-appreciated assistance, I completed the Grand Canyon circuit. Freda and Jenni were waiting with their cars to transport we stragglers (the others were only straggling to keep me company) back to Karin's place.

Karin's garden was in its spring garb with a beautiful Tulip Tree in flower, Rhododendrons a mass of colour and a yellow rose which had the most amazing scent I have encountered for many a year. It was in this inviting environment that we settled down for afternoon tea which included not one but two of Libby's bushwalker cakes baked by Karin; and very nice they were, many thanks Karin.

And so ended a lovely walk through one the jewels in the crown of walks in the Blue Mountains; Libby would have been pleased that we experienced it in such ideal conditions.

Postscript: During the walk Robyn Hyde, Helen Naylor's daughter, told me she was amused to read in the tribute to Helen, included in the October newsletter, the story of her mother's childhood activity, along with other local kids, of throwing stones over the cliff along the Tessellated Pavements Track. Robyn said she and her brothers were never allowed to throw stones!

Footnote: Information regarding origins of place and feature names were gleaned from Brian Fox's very informative publication 'Blue Mountains Geographical Dictionary'.

John Cardy

OUR DECEMBER WALK

Friday 7th December 2018

NB NB: First Friday not the usual third.

Shady Enclosed Rainforest

Happy Valley at Mt Wilson

This morning walk of about 2 hours is of moderate grade, the final section to the creek is steep and can be quite slippery. However, being a there and back walk, like me, you can elect to do as much or as little as you wish.

Meet at the Mount Wilson Village Hall (opposite the Fire Station) at 9.45 for a 10.00am departure. There will be a vehicle rationalisation for the 3.2 km drive to the trackhead.

Bring morning tea only, lunch awaits at the Mt Wilson Village Hall; see details below.

For this walk and/or the luncheon Contact Helen & John Cardy on 9871 3661 or mobile 0400 444 966. TO ASSIST WITH CATERING PLEASE BOOK IN BY SUNDAY 2nd DECEMBER, NO LATER PLEASE. To avoid over and/or under supply, state which of the shared food you would prefer to bring.

CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

The luncheon will be held in the Mt Wilson Village Hall. **The hall will be decorated to create a festive atmosphere for this event.**

Meet for lunch at 12.30pm.

Cold turkey and ham will be supplied, please bring one of the following **to share**. Salads or savoury dishes (hot or cold) to go with the turkey and ham.

Mixed berries and Christmas Pudding, Tea and Coffee will be provided. Please bring your own plates, cutlery, glasses, coffee mugs and drinks.

Should you be bringing food for the luncheon you can give it to Helen at the Village Hall meeting place prior to the walk. Please bring your own esky or cooler bag.

Should you need to leave a message after the evening of Wednesday 5th December do so on Helen's mobile only, BUT PLEASE BOOK EARLY.

CAROL SERVICE

The annual candle lit Carol Service will be held at St Georges Church Mt Wilson commencing at 7.30pm on Saturday 15th December. Everyone is very welcome to attend this service and experience the ambience of this historic church in a charmingly different light. Supper will follow at the Village Hall.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Fri 18th Jan 2019 – 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.

14th December - meet at Wynne Reserve

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141