
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

Volume 29 Issue 5

May 2019

VICTORY AND SASSAFRAS TRACKS

TOPIC

OUR APRIL WALK

VICTORY TRACK and
SASSAFRAS GULLY TRACK
from FAULCONBRIDGE to
SPRINGWOOD

Thursday 4th April 2019

Eleven walkers gathered at the Prime Ministers Corridor of Oaks at Faulconbridge for this walk. No one appeared too traumatised by the fact that this was the first week of the month and indeed a Thursday. The first such arrangement for the group in twenty-nine years.

A car shuffle resulted in three vehicles being left at our finishing point in Sassafras Gully Road and all eleven walkers being back at The Corridor of Oaks.

In organising the car shuffle I didn't get a chance to check out the oaks but I do remember from our last visit here in 2013 that the John Howard oak had a definite lean to the right and the Kevin Rudd oak leant to the left. One wonders if, due to the turmoil in ensuing years, more recent oaks have limbs torn asunder and the occasional knife embedded in the rear of the trunk.

Leaving the political symbolism behind we set off for the beginning of the Victory Track. A veil of cloud stretched languidly across the sky creating perfect conditions for walking and photography in the mainly rainforest environment we were about to enter.



Autumn in the Bush

The sign and map at the trackhead now states this is the Sir Henry Parkes Victory Track; the first time this writer has seen 'Sir Henry Parkes' added to the title. (Apparently that happened in 2017.) The track was completed as far as what is now known as Clarinda Falls in 1887; it was subsequently continued on to meet the Sassafras Gully Track and was named the Victory Track after WWI to commemorate the allied victory.

The track initially led us through open forest where houses could still be glimpsed through the trees, Cheryl was delighted to spot a kookaburra, her favourite bird, sitting on a high branch observing the procession passing below. Beside the track was a rather weather-beaten Smooth-barked Apple (*Angophora costata*) with a substantial Bracket Fungus protruding, like a large fleshy tongue, from a section of dead wood on the trunk.

Very soon we moved into enclosed rainforest, all signs of habitation had now disappeared, belying the fact that houses were only a couple of hundred metres away; we could have been in the middle of nowhere.

The track was now lined with moss encrusted boulders, their glistening moist green contrasting markedly with the browns and greys of the deep leaf litter from which they arose. The smooth straight trunks of Coachwoods (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*) stood

sentinel-like on the slope of the valley, made conspicuous in the subdued light by their lichen blotched and mottled bark.

We were led past vertical stone walls and amazing large fallen trunks clad in green, the moss shrouded giants of the forest lying prone on the ground; the decaying effects of fungi and insects slowly returning them to the soil from whence they have come. Masses of Umbrella Ferns (*Sticherus flabellatus*) pressed in on the track presenting a very pleasant walking experience; lianas hung from the trees and wended their way across the forest floor. A few tiny cream to white fairytale toadstools nestled against logs and rocks. Glossy grass-like basal tufts of the Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) decorated the trackside huddled amongst the leaf litter. A large Angophora, having shed its bark, displayed the slanting grooves left by Sugar Gliders, when feeding on the sap long ago; nearby another Angophora exuded sap from several incisions; the trunk being stained a deep red.

Presently we arrived at the sidetrack to Clarinda Falls; these falls were named for Sir Henry Parkes' first wife, Clarinda Varney. Parkes, "The Father of Federation", purchased six hundred acres in this area in 1877 and named his property Faulconbridge after the maiden name of his mother; the village, of course, later took its name from the Parkes estate.

The little grotto into which these falls cascade is a delight to the eye. The waters of Sassafras Creek tumble down a terrace of rock shelves, shrouded by an abundance of ground ferns, and drop into a small pool surrounded by rock ledges. There is a shallow cave to the left of the falls dripping with moisture. Aerial roots descend from overhanging trees carrying water which drops off their tips into the pool. There is a pervasive green in this little alcove provided by the carpeting moss. This is punctuated by bright orange excretions; the result of the oxidation of iron in the water brought about by the action of bacteria. Beside the beautifully contorted moss-encrusted roots of a precariously leaning tree is a bright

orange column in a little rock niche. The last time we were here, almost six years ago, a small stalagmite and stalactite occupied this niche; they have since joined and formed that column. We spent quite some time taking in the beauty of this place before continuing on.

Back on the main track we were led down beside the creek where the water purred across pebble beds and dropped over tiny rock ledges forming mounds of white foam. In this area a Pepper-bush (*Tasmannia insipida*) was sighted; as the common name suggests the leaves of this shrub, when chewed, have a strong pepper taste. The track then took us across a small side stream, climbed once more where we had views down to giant tors in the creek which had crashed down from above many many years ago. In this area Ray Nesci rescued a Snake Orchid (*Cymbidium suave*) which had fallen to the ground and lay exposed; he nestled it beside a rock in some deep leaf litter. We then dropped down to and crossed another small stream; we had arrived at a small clearing at the confluence of Sassafras Creek and Numantia Creek.

Numantia is a region in northern Spain where the ancient city of the same name was besieged and taken by Scipio the Younger in 134 BC, why then does this creek take on that name? Let me explain.

Sir James Martin was Chief Justice of NSW and was also State Premier in 1863-65, 1866-69 and 1870-72. Martin Place in Sydney was named after him. Sir James Martin acquired extensive land holdings west of Faulconbridge. A map published with the 1879 Railway Guide of New South Wales shows his holdings both south and north of the railway line between Faulconbridge and present day Linden. That 1879 Railway Guide states: 'When the train has passed the Platform at Faulconbridge it -----reaches the platform at Numantia, the classical name selected for the temporary residence of His Honor Sir James Martin, the Chief Justice ---. Near here Sir James Martin is building a large family mansion.' The creek took its name from the Martin estate.

The temporary weatherboard home stood behind a high stone wall adjacent to the private platform of Numantia, opened 9th February 1876 to service the Martin estate. (The wall can still be seen today on the south side of the railway line, unfortunately, more often than not covered in graffiti) The foundations for the 'large family mansion' were laid but the mansion was never built; it became known as 'Martin's Folly'. The foundations were later used to build 'Banool' c1914 at No1 Martin Place at Linden. Sir James must have had a penchant for having streets named after his good self; as well as the famous city boulevard there are Martin Places in Linden and Faulconbridge.

After resting awhile in this delightful spot, serenaded by the burbling waters of these two creeks, we set off upstream to visit Numantia Falls.

A footpad, at times a little indistinct, led along the southern side of Numantia Creek through an enchanting area; the creek overarched by tall trees. In this shaded environment many features were clothed in luxuriant mosses. They ranged from smooth velvety varieties to thicker types appearing as micro-forests; all types embellished with fine water droplets glinting like diamonds in the sunbeams now penetrating the canopy.

The footpad at times rose above the creekline and then dropped back down to water level affording both distant and near views of the limpid pools and the murmuring, tinkling waters of the creek flowing between them. We passed a decaying log which carried perhaps a hundred tiny shallow-cupped fungi; nearby sat an Earth Star (*Geastrum sp*), its outer skin split open in stellar fashion forming a seven-pointed star, exposing the spherical sac which carries the spores of this interesting puff-ball type fungus.

As we crested the last rise the sound of falling water could be heard; we sidled down the steep bank to a creek crossing. The view upstream from this spot was magnificent. Huge moss-draped boulders rimmed a pool of clear water through which the reddish/brown

bedrock of the creek could be seen; below and behind the largest of the boulders a tiny cascade of silver water could be seen dropping into the pool.

Having crossed the creek we made our way between some large boulders and emerged onto a sandy beach which curved around the front of a large pool into which water, cascading down a high cliff, fell; we had arrived at Numantia Falls.

What a special place this is. The waters of the creek flow over two major drops, then fan out across a large sloping rock face to finally drop, as a fine curtain, in front of a low deep cave. The cliffs form an amphitheatre around the pool with the low cave stretching around the left-hand side and on the right-hand side stalactites drop from the sloping rock overhang. A large pulpit-like formation sits below this overhang.

Who could ask for a better place at which to partake of lunch?

With some reluctance we left this captivating spot; just downstream from the falls the faint line of a track could be seen which once led down from the Numantia Estate. We retraced the footpad back to Sassafras Creek.

Back on the Victory Track we headed downstream toward the Sassafras Gully Track. Along this path we were treated to the sight of some towering Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*), their huge straight trunks, clad in deeply furrowed bark, reached for the sky above the canopy; scattered on the ground around their bases were their characteristic 'flying saucer' shaped seed pods. The understorey here consisted mainly of Grey Myrtle (*Backhousia myrtifolia*). From elevated places along this section of track we had views down to several pools along Sassafras Creek.

Presently we were at the junction with the Sassafras Gully Track and began our climb out of the valley. We passed a rock overhang where Ye Olde Fountain delivers a small spout of water out of the rock face from a natural spring. 'Ye Olde Fountain' is engraved into the rock face here but has now been obscured

by moss; it was visible last time I passed this way a few years ago. It is said this supply of water has never been known to dry up.

We passed under a large dry overhang and a little further along the track we saw a Tree Fern whose trunk was illuminated by dozens of tiny white fungi; an intriguing sight. We then dropped down across a small stream and began the final climb out; passing along the way a gnarled and hollowed Angophora covered in curls of shedding bark.

As is usual on all our walks there are little gems spread among the bigger picture. Today we saw an amazing array of fungi; lots of white examples, tiny red ones, possibly Ruby *Mycena* (*Mycena viscidocruenta*) and larger red varieties, blue ones, possibly Blue Pixie Parasols (*Mycema interrupta*) and steel grey varieties. The golden fan-like Honey Fungus (*Armillaria luteobubalina*) sprouting from the butts of trees, and then, growing on the ground, as is its wont, pink Coral Fungus (*Ramaria sp.*).

Other little 'gems' we encountered today were a few leeches. I discovered one on my thigh early in the walk but it hadn't latched on to me, so I quietly 'relocated' it, not wanting to trigger a leech alarm. I think there were only three other leech reports all day so we did well in this moist lush environment.

We had almost reached the end of this wonderful walk when the weather gods decided to rain on our parade, but that was a small price to pay for a great day; a day on which we had the privilege of experiencing the grandeur of this journey through a lush green world.

John Cardy

OUR MAY WALK

FRIDAY 17th MAY 2019

'Castles in the Air' - Panoramic Views, Windblown Heath, Precipitous Cliffs.

Castle Head and Narrow Neck Plateau

NOTE: This will be the 29th anniversary of the Group's first walk and one day prior to

the anniversary of Libby's Thanksgiving Service.

The Group last visited this venue in June 2009. It is a relatively easy walk of about 8 kilometres return, about half the walk is along the Narrow Neck Plateau fire trail. The track to Castle Head (off the fire trail) is narrow and winds through low encroaching heath so long pants or gaiters are recommended. The views on this walk are expansive and spectacular.

Meet at 9.45am at the Narrow Neck Lookout carpark on Cliff Drive, just south of the Cedar Street intersection, at Katoomba. There will be a vehicle rationalisation here for the 2.5km drive along the unsealed Glenraphael Drive to the locked gate. 4WD or high clearance vehicles would be most welcome.

Those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson should meet at St Georges Church for an 8.30am departure.

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 21st June – Wongarra Ridge off the Bells Line of Road

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 10th May – Meet at Hay Lane – Ferny Corner

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141