
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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BLUE MOUNTAINS BOTANIC GARDEN

TOPIC

OUR DECEMBER WALK

BLUE MOUNTAINS
BOTANIC GARDEN at
MOUNT TOMAH

Friday 6th December 2019

As announced in the December newsletter we did not schedule a walk for January so this is the first newsletter for 2020; as usual I shall start with a review of last year's walks.

I had been struggling to think of a theme to use for that review until I hit on the brilliant idea of prefacing each walk with a verse or two of relevant early Australian poetry. I selected verse which had a connection with the following walk, some obvious, some tenuous, some verse well known, some obscure.

The 'brilliance' of the idea is that it saves me from racking my brain to write introductions to each walk. Cheating? Perhaps, but here we go, a look back on the walks of 2019, a year with a few disruptions and disastrous fires; nonetheless, a year of very enjoyable walks.

In January our planned walk was cancelled due to extreme temperatures and total fire bans. No walk, no verse.

February saw us on Darwins Walk and Undercliff and Overcliff Tracks at Wentworth Falls. What better verse excerpt to choose than



Summer in the Bush

from Australasia, written by William Charles Wentworth after whom Wentworth Falls was named?

“---- How mute, how desolate
thy stunted woods,
How dread thy chasms, where
many an eagle broods,
How dark thy caves, how lone
thy torrents roar,
As down thy cliffs precipitous
they pour, ----”

Freda Moxom kindly led this walk. The constant musical accompaniment of the waters of Jamison Creek burbling and purling across rock shelves, the

magnificent views into the Jamison Valley and back to the upper section of Wentworth Falls from vantage points along the way, and lunch in the shady oasis of Freda's front yard to end the day are highlights from this walk.

In March we ventured onto a new walk for this group; we visited Odin Head and the Blair Athol Coal Mine; Freda leading the first section and I led the second. It was a still, cloudy day and Charles Harpur's *A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest* captures some aspects of the bush on such a day; here is the first verse.

“Not a bird disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods.
Even the grasshoppers keep
Where the coolest shadows sleep;
Even the busy ants are found

Resting in their pebbled mound;
 Even the locust clingeth now
 In silence to the barky bough:
 And over hills and over plains
 Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.”

Memories from this walk include the array of intriguing stone cairns along the way to Odin Head, the magnificent views, from the headland, of rugged cliffs near and far. Also the torch-lit walk of about two hundred and fifty metres down the incline into the mine, as far as the flooding waters.

April saw us exploring the Victory and Sassafras Tracks from Faulconbridge to Springwood. We started in perfect conditions under a veil of cloud but, shortly before we finished the clouds burst. Two verses from Henry Lawson’s *Rain in the Mountains* seems an appropriate way to introduce the review of this walk.

“The valley’s full of misty clouds,
 Its tinted beauty drowning,
 Tree-tops are veiled in fleecy shrouds,
 And mountain fronts are frowning.

The sky is leaden grey,
 Save where the north looks surly,
 The driven daylight speeds away,
 And night comes o’er us early.”

The vivid greenness in the moisture-laden rainforest sections of the walk, (Oh for some moisture-laden bushland at this time.) the bright orange tiny stalactites, stalagmites and columns at Clarinda Falls and fungi of all colours and shapes emerging from the leaf litter beside the track and on trunks of tree ferns are just some of the memories from this walk.

May found us on the Wonderland Track, at Marks Tomb and visiting The Three Brothers below the Hydro Majestic. Some of the atmosphere of this walk is captured in James Cuthbertson’s *The Bush*

“Give us from dawn to dark
 Blue of Australian skies,
 Let there be none to mark
 Whither our pathway lies.

Give us when noontide comes
 Rest in the woodland free –
 Fragrant breath of the gums,
 Cold, sweet scent of the sea.

Give us the wattle’s gold
 And the dew-laden air,
 And the loveliness bold
 Loneliest landscapes wear.

These are the haunts we love,
 Glad with enchanted hours,
 Bright as the heavens above,
 Fresh as the wild bush flowers.”

Images stored in the memory bank from this walk include the new Bowerbird’s bower near the Sunbath and Helen, Jenny and Freda lying on their backs in that Sunbath looking like three chooks having a dust bath. Also the expansive views into Megalong Valley, the intriguing Marks Tomb cave formation and the stark freshly exposed vertical sandstone cliff left by the October 2016 rock fall near ‘The Coliseum’.

June saw the group at Jinki Ridge off the Bells Line of Road. The chosen introductory poetry for this walk has nothing to do with a daytime walk on Jinki Ridge, however, if one were to be on the Ridge in the evening, I feel it would be eminently relevant. Here is Furnley Maurice’s *Bush Night*

“On either hand
 The gums like bowed monks stand;
 The night’s deep blue
 Shines like a staunch faith through.

When over this shaken blue
 Comes the moon’s encrusted light,
 What ever I want to do
 Seems right.”

I was unable to attend this walk so Karin Kirkpatrick kindly stepped in to lead. The selected images are gleaned from photographs taken by Helen. They included the view across the Upper Grose Gorge to the grandeur of Asgard Head with Asgard Swamp beyond. The richly sculptured sandstone outcrops with thin ironstone inclusions, some incredibly convoluted and others sitting as flat horizontal caps. The long view down the Upper Grose of

sheer sandstone cliffs rising from the tree-clad talus slopes.

In July we visited Radiata Plateau, recently purchased by the State Government for inclusion into the National Park; three hearty cheers for that after a very long fight by so many. For reasons, which will become obvious from the following highlights, I have chosen as introduction to this walk the first two verses of Henry Lawson's *Reedy River*

“Ten miles down Reedy River
A pool of water lies,
And all the year it mirrors
The changes in the skies.
Within that pool's broad bosom
Is room for all the stars;
Its bed of sand has drifted
O'er countless rocky bars.

Around the lower edges
There waves a bed of reeds,
Where water-rats are hidden
And where the wild-duck breeds;
And grassy slopes rise gently
To ridges long and low,
Where groves of wattle flourish
And native bluebells grow.”

Ann Mikkelsen led this walk having earlier checked it out with Freda Moxom. Soon after the start of the walk we came across a dam carrying a crusty surface of ice with a sunlit clump of reeds on the far side; on our return the ice had melted and the surface of the water was mirror-like, reflecting those reeds and the surrounding eucalypts to perfection. Ann led the group down into the Pink Canyon, so named because of the layer of pink shale at its base. Above the canyon the term 'cliff face' took on a different connotation when Simon pointed out a very distinctive profile of an old man's face; pareidolia strikes again.

In August we ventured to Castle Head on Narrow Neck Plateau. I feel the spirit of the bush is captured in the second last verse of John Le Gay Brereton's *The Presence of the Bush*

“But all too weak am I to tell the tale
The spirits of the sweet bush murmur to me;

I strive, but all in vain,
To sing the songs of wonderland – I fail
To give the notes again
That like a wave of joy thrill through and
through me”.

Things which stick in the mind about this rather windy day are the amazing concentric circular and elliptical ridges and ironstone plates rising from the rock platform where we paused for morning tea. The view from Castle Head down onto the Ruined Castle; dwarfed by the looming form of Mount Solitary in the background. And an ancient gnarled and battered Heath Banksia clinging to the cliff edge.

September found us at Walls Lookout, Rigby Hill and grottos on Pierces Pass. Capturing the essence of the landscape we covered on this day is Henry Lawson's *The Blue Mountains*

“Like ramparts round the valley's edge
The tinted cliffs are standing,
With many a broken wall and ledge,
And many a rocky landing.

And round about their rugged feet
Deep ferny dells are hidden
In shadowed depths, whence dust and heat
Are banished and forbidden.

The stream that, crooning to itself,
Comes down a tireless rover,
Flows calmly to the rocky shelf,
And there leaps bravely over.

Now pouring down, now lost in spray
When mountain breezes sally,
The water strikes the rock midway,
And leaps into the valley.”

Early morning wisps of mist spiralling up from the valley, playing like an opening and closing curtain on the view of the cliffs opposite. The sheer cliffs below Baltzer Lookout and the ship's bow form of Hanging Rock, the contrasting cool enclosed spaces of grottos on Pierces Pass and the male Red-headed Mouse Spider we encountered on Rigby Hill; just some of the memories from this walk.

Evans Crown Nature Reserve was our venue for October followed by afternoon tea at Jenny

and Greg Dargan's nearby property. The essential tenor, both of the Reserve and of Jenny's garden are reflected in the first two verses of C.J. Dennis's *Green Walls*

"I love all gum-trees well. But best of all,
I love the tough old warriors that tower
About these lawns, to make a great green wall
And guard, like sentries, this exotic bower
Of shrub and fern and flower.
These are my land's own sons, lean, straight
and tall,
Where crimson parrots and grey gang-gangs
call
Thro' many a sunlit hour.

My friends, these grave old veterans, scarred
and stern,
Change less throughout the changing seasons
they.

But at their knees their tall sons lift and yearn
Slim spars and saplings – prone to sport and
sway

Like carefree boys at play;
Waxing in beauty when their young locks turn
To crimson, and, like beacon fires burn
To deck Spring's holiday."

Indelible images from this walk include the group sitting atop a large granite tor, their size diminished by the adjacent overpowering Crown Rock. The variety of forms and sizes of the granite tors, spherical, pyramidal, haystack and loaf shaped; all with smoothly rounded edges. The beauty of Jenny and Greg's garden; an oasis in this drought stricken landscape and the view from this garden back to Evans Crown; glorious.

In November we revisited the Little Zig Zag, Bushrangers Cave, Rienits Pass and Wilson Glen. To introduce this walk I have selected two of the perhaps less-remembered verses from Dorothea Mackellar's *My Country*

"The stark white ring-barked forests,
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree tops
And ferns the warm dark soil.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land –
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand –
Though earth holds many splendours,
Where ever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly."

Stashed away for future recall from this walk includes the rock shelf just off the Engineers Track projecting out over the valley and the uncharacteristic and unbelievable dryness, at this time, of the rainforest along Rienits Pass. The fascinating 'letter box rock' and Bedes Lookout, where the distant views on offer of the Kanimbla Valley and the cliffs below Hourn Point are enhanced by the red shale surface of the lookout itself.

And so we come to our December walk and Christmas / end of year celebration.

This was held on the 6th December at the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden, Mount Tomah. From elevated areas of these gardens, the view to the north, on this day, was of huge plumes of smoke billowing into the air; smoke from the Gaspers Mountain bushfire. Sadly, only nine days later, this fire would impact on Mt Wilson and Mt Tomah.

Illustrating the long history of such events, here is John Dunmore Lang's comment on the conflagration of the forest around Sydney November 25th 1826.

"Fearful I stood on the moss-covered rock
Whose rugged cliffs adorn our beauteous bay:
The forest blazed around, volumes of smoke
Towering to heaven obscured the face of day:
And as the red sun shot his parting ray
Through the dense atmosphere, the lurid sky
Glowed with a fiercer flame – spreading
dismay –
As if the dreadful day of doom were nigh!
Alas! where shall the fear-struck sinner flee
From that great day's all-devastating blaze,
When the earth burns, the hills melt to their
base,
And with intensist heat boils the deep sea!
O then to stand upon the Rock of Ages,
While all around the conflagration rages!"

Then of course, unprecedented conflagrations raged right across Australia. Our sincere thoughts are with all those effected by these present day infernos.

OUR CHRISTMAS WALK AND LUNCHEON

First a little history of the Gardens. They sit 1000 metres above sea level on part of the traditional lands of the Darug and Gundungarra Aboriginal people. George Caley passed this way on his venture of discovery and search for botanical specimens in 1804; he named it Tree Fern Hill. Archibald Bell, with guidance from an Aboriginal lady, discovered a route across the mountains in 1823; this of course became known as the Bells Line of Road. In 1830 Susannah Bowen received the first land grant in the area.

In 1934 Effie and Alfred Brunet acquired the property the garden now occupies and set up a cut flower farm to supply florists in Sydney. In 1972 they presented their land to the Sydney Royal Botanical Gardens.

The Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens were developed as a Bicentennial project; their official opening was on 1st November 1987. The Gardens occupy 28 hectares within 252 hectares of land. The gardens were recently renamed The Blue Mountains Botanic Garden, Mount Tomah.

Twenty-eight gathered at the shelter adjacent to the Formal Garden where there was some protection from the stiff breeze. We welcomed Faye Hargreaves and her friend Elaine; Faye walked with us many years ago and has remained an 'armchair walker' ever since; Faye spent her childhood in Mt Wilson. Other 'armchair walkers' present were Maurie Rodrigues, Anne's husband, Beth Ihm, Michael's wife and Helen Freeman. Also back after a long absence was Jan Northam.

Here we were treated to a sumptuous Devonshire Tea prepared by my better half Helen; the logistics of preparing this and transporting it from Sydney did not seem to faze her at all. What a civilised way to start the day.

The remains of the Devonshire Tea were packed away and the supplies for lunch, again organised by Helen, were spread among the group and we made our way down the hill to the Brunet BBQ Area at the Brunet Meadow.

Here Helen and Rosemary Knott set about preparing lunch while I led the group to explore the Lady (Nancy) Fairfax Walk.

This track leads us out of the formalised Gardens proper, across the route of the Old Bells Line of Road and into remnant rainforest. Here, at the first sharp corner in the track, sits a bronze plaque set on a granite block which declares: "FAIRFAX WALK DEDICATED ON BEHALF OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE JUNGLE BY HIS EXCELLENCY ADMIRAL SIR DUDLEY DE CHAIR K.C.B. M.V.O. TO THE MEMORY OF SIR JAMES FAIRFAX K.B.E. MARCH 23RD 1929".

A nearby sign explains. In 1912 this rainforest was under threat; a group of businessmen saved the day when they purchased 700 acres and opened a 'conservation park'. Known as the 'Jungle', the park included tearooms and a number of tracks to features such as the 'Temple of Nature' – a grotto with sandstone pagodas, ferns and rainforest trees. The bronze plaque commemorated its opening. Due to the Great Depression the business closed in 1934.

In 2008, with the generous support of John and Libby Fairfax, the Botanic Gardens Trust purchased the remaining 33 hectares of the Jungle, adjacent to the Gardens. That purchase provides a secure base for the future development of Mount Tomah Botanic Garden and ensures a block of temperate New South Wales rainforest for future generations. 80 years to the day after its initial opening, the area was re-opened to the public on 23rd March 2009, The Jungle is named in honour of Lady (Nancy) Fairfax AO, OBE.

With that little bit of history out of the way we proceeded down the hillside, zigzagging beneath the rainforest canopy; the area was uncharacteristically dry at this time. We came across the remaining butt of a forest giant, just a thin outer wall of wood a little over a metre

high and about two metres or more in diameter. Nearby a tangle of vines looped and twisted their way up to the canopy. Then we encountered the first of two rings of trees along this track; a circle of Sassafras trunks (*Doryphora sassafras*) regrowing coppice-style around the perimeter of their long-decayed parent tree.

Soon we zigzagged back up the slope and emerged from the rainforest opposite the main entry gate to the Gardens. We made our way up the main drive and turned right onto the Plant Explorers Walk. This took us up the hill past many signs telling the stories of those who roamed the world in search of new plants.

At the start of the Board Walk I waited until most walkers had caught up to explain that if they walked quietly and kept an eye out to the left they would be guaranteed a sighting of a couple of lyrebirds. There was some suggestion that perhaps I was the liarbird, but not so, for there beside the track were two fine larger than life sculptures of lyrebirds; I made no claim we would see the feathered live variety. We then made our way across the Formal Garden and individuals were free to wander at their leisure before returning to the BBQ area for a wonderful sausage sizzle lunch followed by mixed berries kindly supplied as usual by Ray Nesci, and various slices and cake. Many thanks to all who supplied various items of food and a very big thank you to Helen for her major effort in organising it all. A wonderful way to end a year of great walks, yet, as we made our way back to the car park the plumes of smoke to the north were a grim portent of the imminent destruction of so much of the bushland we love.

John Cardy

OUR FEBRUARY WALK

FRIDAY 21st FEBRUARY 2020

As you can imagine options for walks in the mountains are very limited at the moment due to the unprecedented fires; I have managed to find one for February.

Panoramic Views, two Mystery Holes and a Selection of Caves

Various walks from Mount Piddington

The group last walked some of these tracks in November 2014. We will walk four different trails, all of fairly easy grade, totalling about five kilometres; there is an option for an additional two kilometres of a medium grade walk if so desired.

Meet at the Mt Piddington Lookout at the end of Mt Piddington Road at 10.00am. If travelling from the east turn left into Mt Piddington Road. Note that this road is discontinuous but follow the signs into Sylvania St and Apex Ave. If travelling from the west it is probably safer to turn right into Kanimbla Valley Rd, left into Victoria St, veer right into Carlisle Pde, which becomes Mt Piddington Rd.

Those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson should meet at St Georges Church for a 9.30am 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 (Very Tentative Schedule. Venues will depend upon the opening of Council and National Park Tracks)

Friday 20th March – Walks at Medlow Bath

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 14th February – Queens Avenue opposite Windyridge

Friday 13th March – Hay Lane

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141