
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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GIANT STAIRWAY AND FURBER STEPS

TOPIC

OUR PLANNED FEBRUARY WALK

GIANT STAIRWAY,
FEDERAL PASS,
KATOOMBA FALLS,
SCENIC WORLD
BOARDWALK and FURBER
STEPS at KATOOMBA

Friday 17th February 2017



Autumn in the Bush

It never rains but it pours. Last month I announced my encounter with cancer. This month I sadly have to announce that Libby had to have major surgery for cancer on the Friday before the above scheduled walk. The operation went well, she was in intensive care for almost a week. She came home on 28th Feb but it is expected she will have an extended recovery period. Libby feels, at this stage, that quietness and her privacy will aid in her recovery, so please no phone calls; I am sure cards and letters would be appreciated.

With both Libby and I unavailable to lead, the above walk was cancelled, as will be the case until further notice. There may be walks offered on an ad hoc basis, as for April.

We will continue to issue the monthly newsletter, albeit in an abbreviated form of course, giving a little history of the intended walk for that month, perhaps some botanical information relating to the flora that would

have been encountered, etc; as has been done in this issue. I will also include updates on Libby's and my progress. I have had my third chemo session, half way, still no bad side effects. Professor of Oncology so pleased with my progress he issued doctor's orders that Helen and I go home and crack a bottle of champagne, so that augurs well.

Another Touch of History

Following are a few points of interest relating to paths the group would have trodden on

this walk.

Just off Cliff Drive near what is now known as Solitary Restaurant is an unkempt, un-maintained, un-signposted lookout. Not far from the top of the Golden Stairs is a lookout which is signposted but again it could only be described as unkempt and could certainly do with some maintenance. Those two neglected lookouts were originally named to honour two men who perhaps had the most significant impact on track construction in the Blue Mountains.

The first is McKays Lookout, named for Jim McKay, a ranger with the Katoomba Municipal Council in the early 1900s. The second is Bottings Lookout, named for Walter Botting, an assistant to Jim McKay.

Jim McKay had the vision of constructing a stairway to link Echo Point to the Federal Pass; he suggested its construction in 1911; it

would be twenty-one years before the stairway was completed and became known as The Giant Stairway.

The Council did not grant approval for the stairway until 1916 when McKay and his assistants began cutting the steps into the cliff face using only handtools; no explosives were used on this project. By 1918 the Council was becoming concerned about the slow progress and expense; work was stopped. Four years later an estimate for the cost of completion was sought which must have been considered unacceptable as work fell into abeyance until 1932.

Prominent Blue Mountains photographer Harry Phillips and Councillor WC Soper launched a campaign to complete the project and work recommenced.

Often forced to hang over the cliffs on ropes, Jim McKay and Walter Botting worked tirelessly using only crowbars, picks, hammers and chisels to complete the stairway; take time to look for the pick and chisel marks on the rock faces next time you are on the Giant Stairway.

Thus the Giant Stairway was officially opened by Bertram Stevens, Premier of NSW on Saturday 1st October 1932. Several thousand onlookers gathered for the event and watched three rockclimbers scale the second Sister and unfurl the Australian flag.

Other than the neglected lookouts, what acknowledgment did the two main protagonists receive for this remarkable achievement? A plaque at the top of the stairway states the steps were cut by Ranger McKay; Botting doesn't get a mention. Contrast that with Prince Henry Cliff Walk, it was named for that member of the royal family after he spent 20 minutes at Katoomba Railway Station in 1934. The stop was only scheduled for 10 minutes; perhaps those extra 10 minutes sealed the deal.

Part of the Federal Pass would have also been followed on this walk. The first section of this pass, from Leura Forest to Katoomba Falls, was opened in November 1900. A plethora of

VIPs and Members of Parliament were present for the opening; the ceremony cost over £82; the track construction cost was only a little more than £52. It appears a sense of entitlement is nothing new.

One of the plants encountered on this walk would have certainly been the Dragons Tail (*Dracophyllum secundum*) trailing from ledges on the Giant Stairway and around the Furber Steps. With a bit of luck a few may have been making a late display of clusters of their beautiful pinkish white tubular bell-shaped flowers. These plants usually grow to about half a metre; in well-protected spots they may reach two metres. I have seen a close cousin of this plant, *Dracophyllum fitzgeraldii*, on the summit of Mount Gower on Lord Howe Island; it can grow up to thirteen metres high, but certainly doesn't on the wind blown Mt Gower summit, yet it has all the characteristics of the *secundum*. Mother Nature is amazing.

John Cardy

Those chimerical occurrences continue in the bush, in fact they have increased twofold. Was that a figure in Honeymoon Cave just off the Giant Stairway, but no it's gone? On Federal Pass the crunch of a footstep in the discarded angophora bark, yet there is nothing there. An unseen presence brushes past a walker on the Furber Steps. The mystique of the bush continues; stay tuned. (JC)

FUTURE WALKS

Karin Kirkpatrick and Freda Moxom have kindly offered to lead a walk in April, see details in next newsletter.

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held 9am to Noon. Any help would be very much appreciated.

10th March - meet at Hay Lane near the War Memorial

14th April - Good Friday – No Bushcare