
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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LEURA CASCADES TO POOL OF SILOAM

TOPIC

OUR MAY WALK

LEURA CASCADES to
GORDON FALLS RESERVE,
POOL OF SILOAM and
LYREBIRD DELL

Friday 19th May 2017

Health Report: Libby continues with her chemo sessions, some uncomfortable side effects emerging. Having finished my chemo sessions with all going well I will not bore you with further personal updates.

‘Heavy rains on the way’ the weather boffins declared; ‘a month’s normal rainfall in one or two days’ they pronounced. Not the sort of conditions to be caught in at our planned venue of Fortress Ridge; it is very exposed without any caves or rock overhangs in which to seek shelter; perhaps we should change to a different location.

It was dry when we left Sydney and remained so into the lower mountains; the sun was even trying to break through the cloud cover. At Hazelbrook we encountered fog and misty rain; Jenny Dargan rang to say it had been raining all night at Oberon and she had decided to pull out; the portents seemed to indicate the prophets of doom might be right. As we approached our meeting place on Mount Hay Road at Leura we were engulfed by thick fog and the rain was getting heavier. The decision was made; we would walk from Leura Cascades to Lyrebird Dell via the Pool



Winter in the Bush

of Siloam; there are places in which to shelter along this route. Our little convoy drove across to the Leura Cascades car park.

Twelve walkers gathered here in very light rain; more a mountain mist compared with what we left on the north side of Leura. We welcomed Simon Changson who was with us for the first time today: Simon joined up to the group at the end of the day; we are obviously continuing to do something right with new members joining on consecutive walks.

With Libby still unavailable I took over the leadership while Des Barrett kindly took on my usual position as whip.

We set off through the mock stone arch past the flat grassed picnic area, the backfilled remains of the Katoomba Baths, opened circa 1912. At the bottom of the first flight of stairs two large fallen trees lay beside the track marring the view of the Meeting of the Waters; the cascading headwaters of Leura Falls Creek flowing below Chelmsford Bridge. This was one of the earliest structures to be floodlit as a tourist attraction in the 1930s. (Floodlighting of Leura Cascades and the Three Sisters was opened on 3rd December 1932; there used to be 2-hour nightly bus tours of these attractions. I have been unable to find exactly when the lights were removed from the cascades but have seen a 1968 photograph of them under floodlight.

Remnants of the lighting installations can still be seen beside the track.)

We then made our way down to the base of Leura Cascades. What a pleasure it is to be in the bush in these conditions; moist foliage glistening in the subdued light and releasing water droplets onto the path; the patter of these drops on the pathway overcome in places by the babbling and purling of the cascades. We paused in the shadowy cave at the base of the cascades to take in the sublime beauty of the silvery opalescent water coursing over the dark rock terraces and dropping into the sandy pool at their base. Bliss.

We continued on to the cliff edge where the Upper Leura Falls, often called Bridal Veil Falls, plunge into the valley; today they plunge through a wall of fog obscuring what is normally a spectacular view. With no point in tarrying here we made our way back to the top of the cascades and turned onto the Prince Henry Cliff Walk.

Not far past the now closed Flying Fox Lookout, so named as it used to be the site of the top tower for a flying fox which serviced the now defunct sewage works in the valley below, we paused at a rock overhang for morning tea. In the process we drove off a lone Asian walker who had been resting there, despite our pleas that he stay. Karin handed out slices of Bushwalker Cake, which she had once again baked in accordance with Libby's recipe. Delicious - many thanks Karin.

We made our way past the turn offs to Bridal Veil Lookout and Tarpeian Rock Lookout knowing there would be no views on offer.

Walking in these conditions, where the distant views are obliterated by thick fog, concentrates the mind on features closer at hand. The honeycombed rock faces display many fascinating patterns and, in places, carry tiny ferns and fine mosses. Some of the recesses were draped with webs bejewelled with water droplets. Plants grew in seemingly impossible positions devoid of soil. Mother Nature never fails to provide points of beauty and intrigue.

As the track led us into moist gullies the brilliant white flowers of Tea Trees (*Leptospermum sp*) decorated the trackside. A few trees carried mats of Devils Twine (*Cassytha sp*) twining, how else but devilishly, over the canopy, parasitically drawing sustenance from the host tree. In a mist shrouded gully several Blue Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) thrust their white trunks skyward, some tilting slightly downhill; their canopies disappearing into the mist.

At Olympian Rock Lookout, which is adjacent to the main track, the group stood at the handrail looking out onto thick fog; there was nothing visible beyond that rail, the usual panorama hidden by a wall of white. But here was a blank canvas; an opportunity for each member of the group to reach into the palette of colours in their mind's eye and paint their own chimerical landscape.

We then dropped down onto the Buttenshaw Bridge, recently rebuilt to replace the old structure, which had been made unsafe by bushfire damage. This bridge, which spans a deep ravine, was named for Ernest Albert Buttenshaw (1876-1950), Minister for Lands, who opened this section of the Prince Henry Cliff Walk in May 1936. The chasm below us disappeared into the fog; on the high side the curved wall of a dam was just visible through the mist, this small dam supplies water for the gardens of Leuralla in Olympian Parade above.

Leuralla was built by wealthy yachtsman and big-game fisherman Harry Andreas and his wife Alice between 1910 and 1912. Clive Evatt QC, brother of 'Doc' Evatt, married Marjorie Andreas, daughter of Harry and Alice, in 1928, thus starting the Evatt family connection to the property which continues to this day. The 5 hectare formal garden and home now houses the Toy and Railway Museum.

As we continued on, the track led us through stands of Black Wattle (*Callicoma serratifolia*), not in fact a wattle at all but it was given that common name because it was used by early pioneers in Sydney Town for the

construction of wattle and daub huts. Blackwattle Bay on Sydney Harbour took its name from the tree, as it grew profusely in that area.

Presently we arrived at Gordon Falls Reserve. The reserve and the falls take their name from Gordon Creek which in turn was named for British General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885) who was commissioned as lieutenant in 1852, was wounded and decorated in Crimea in 1855. He commanded colonial military forces in South Africa where he worked to suppress the slave trade. He conducted Biblical archaeology in Palestine in 1883. In 1884 he was sent to evacuate Egyptian forces from Sudan but was killed in Khartoum two days before a British relief force arrived. Gordon obviously had a distinguished military career in several theatres of war but it escapes me as to why a creek in the Blue Mountains in Australia would take his name.

We made our way across Gordon Falls Reserve, which incidentally is adjacent to the home of our whip for today, Des Barrett, and began the descent to the Pool of Siloam.

As the track wound steeply down it led us past some lovely clusters of fungi, one in particular was a multi-tiered group of ten or more honey-coloured discs fringed in white; quite exquisite. Then, as the track swung to the left and took us into a moist rainforest environment, interwoven ropes of aerial tree roots hung beside the path, dripping with moisture; as were the brilliant green fern fronds and moss banks in the background.

The track then became very wet underfoot and steepened somewhat as we approached the Pool of Siloam; the sound of falling water beckoned us into this delightful little glen.

Silver ribbons of water cascaded down the dark rock face and split into finer threads to fan out before dropping into the sandy-bottomed pool. The sand extended across to a crescent of stepping stones which linked to a stairway that curved up the hill and disappeared into the mist; a real delight to the eye. Downstream of the stepping stones

Gordon Creek rippled across pebble beds and tumbled over mossy boulders; tall straight forest giants reached skyward seeking the energy of the sun, today their dark trunks were silhouetted against the wall of fog. The shallow pool was fringed with overhanging ferns and a large cave nestled into the cliff beside the falls; this was the Pool of Siloam.

The name of the pool derives from a rock cut pool of that name in Jerusalem on the ridge upon which Jerusalem was built. It is said it was at that pool that Jesus performed the miracle of healing the blind man. The name was probably bestowed on this pool on Gordon Creek because of the connection with General Gordon's investigation of Biblical archaeological sites in that region.

Standing in this otherworldly atmosphere, Des Barrett, who, as was stated, lives nearby, asserted that he uses these falls and pool for his bathing when his water is cut off due to him not paying his water bill. Perhaps Des is hoping for a miracle of his own in not getting any more water bills.

Back to reality. We spent some time taking in the atmosphere of this special place before heading off toward Lyrebird Dell.

The track took us along one of the upper reaches of Gordon Creek, which rises in Rest Park adjacent to the railway line. The fronds of King Ferns (*Todea barbara*) pressed in on the track here and we were accompanied by the pleasant sound of the rippling gurgling creek; though we were only afforded occasional glimpses of the running water.

We crossed the creek and climbed slightly, passing a quite large cave before dropping down to an even larger cavern where we paused for lunch.

The Aboriginal occupiers of these lands used both of these caves; excavations in the larger cavern indicate occupation stretching back more than 12,000 years. The ceilings of both these caves carry intriguing circular patterns.

We then headed down to cross the creek once more. Upstream of the small bridge a waterfall drops into the dell; the first two thirds falling

freely to hit a sloping rock face where it cascades into a pool having a small sandy beach on one side. We then began the climb out of the dell up a hundred or so steps with the wet foliage pressing in from both sides.

We visited the Lone Pine Peace Park and the gnarled yet still surviving pine planted in July 1919 by Alderman Chas Dash to honour the men of Leura who served in the Great War 1914 – 18. We then made our way along Lone Pine Avenue and Malvern Road where we took in the sublime beauty of the autumn colour of the street and garden plantings before entering Leura Park. Here we took the recently refurbished track (thank you Blue Mountains City Council) down to Cliff Drive and crossed Chelmsford Bridge to return to the cars.

We had our warming after walk cuppa in the kitsch but quaint mock rock cave to end yet another wonderful walk; the group's twenty-seventh anniversary walk; twenty-one years since Helen and I began walking with the group. It was a walk where we saw no distant views but experienced the bush at its best in the light misty rain. Misty rain which, even the boffins would have to admit, confirmed that weather forecasting is far from an exact science.

John Cardy

Those mystical enigmatic happenings in the bush continue, still at about half the rate they were, but continue they do. Out of the corner of the eye a figure disappearing into the wall of fog at Leura Falls. Was that a face at the circular window in the mock rock cave at Gordon Falls Reserve? But no, it was gone. Perhaps there is more to come. (JC)

OUR JUNE WALK

Friday 16th June 2017

Open Forest and Heathland, Views across the Wollemi Wilderness and Wollangambe River, Fascinating Rock Platforms

The Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine

The group last visited this venue in January 2015. This is a relatively easy walk of about 6

kilometres return; it follows the ridge, which runs north, between the Wollangambe River and Bowens Creek; there are vantage points from which great views are to be had over and beyond both these wild streams.

Meet at Merry Garth in Davies Lane/Galwey Lane in Mt Wilson for a 9.30am departure. A vehicle rationalisation will be carried out here for the trip to Mt Irvine. (Parking is restricted at the walk start point especially if there has been wet weather, so the fewer cars the better.) Please ring in as early as possible to aid in the organisation of vehicles.

Bring morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and plenty of water.

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 (after 7pm) or Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.

FUTURE WALKS (Tentative schedule)

Friday 21st July 2017 – Pulpit Rock to Cripps Lookout and perhaps Boyds Beach and Return

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.

9th June – Meet in Hay Lane – Ferny Corner

Contact Libby Raines on 4756 2121 for details

Footnote: Much of the history and derivation of place names in this and other issues of the newsletter are gleaned from Brian Fox's wonderful publication *Blue Mountains Geographical Dictionary* and Keith Painter's informative *Pocket Pal* series of bushwalking booklets.