

Armidale Bushwalkers



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www.armidalebushwalkers.org phone 6775-2026

GIBRALTAR RANGE NP WALK 10TH JAN

by Betty Noad

When Armidale Bushwalkers leave at 7am and return at 7pm after a day walking in Gibraltar Range NP, a day without rain is doubly appreciated! A planned walk in the Washpool NP was abandoned because of high creek levels, so the day was spent walking from the Granite picnic area, along Coachwood Drive towards The Needles, and returning via Tree Fern Forest. This was a walk that took us in and out of rainforest and dry eucalypt forest, for the most part along old logging tracks – which prompts the imagination of how the forest must have looked 200 years ago.

For our part, walkers enjoyed identifying the odd cedar, tallow and corkwood from the remnants of logged rainforest, and were especially pleased to see half a dozen pencil cedars – up to 5m tall, straight and pencil thin indeed. Tree Fern Forest was a diversion well worth taking, as the ferns soar (sometimes 10m) above all walkers and reflect the light green hue that Australians love. In the dry eucalypt forest, the more subtle white/grey/brown colours of coachwood were compared frequently with distinctive white/grey/brown blotches on the bark of callicoma regrowth stands, the latter giving an almost Scandanavian eeriness to the forest walk. Magnificent mountain gums

appeared in clusters at intervals along the way, surprising us with their sheer size and majesty.

On the forest floor walkers found a giant rainforest snail (a shell the size of a child's fist), an obligatory black snake, bracket fungi, wild raspberries to avoid, and 'walking stick' palms lining our path. Leech-avoidance behaviour created much amusement – from



The Needles

constant checking of boots to generous sprinklings of salt on boots! Lunch was at The Needles, where we could see two of the six granite columns that rise above the edge of the escarpment (pictured), and where we could look down on Little Dandahra Creek and Dandahra Creek itself, and speculate on where they joined the Mann River. Looking down into more gorges from that vantage point simply reminds us of how much more walking is to be done in these world heritage forests of the New England.

HYATT'S FLAT WEEKEND 26-28 JANUARY 2008

SATURDAY 26 JANUARY

Although the weather looked definitely iffy, David Lawrence, Paul McCann, Jack Patton, Eric Gibson, Alan Cunningham and Kathy King went off in two 4WD vehicles and Alan's little red car to the campsite at Hyatt's Flat. Alan left his car on Forest Way to suss out the condition of the road into camp but as soon as his feet hit the ground, he began to hop up and down as a multitude of leeches crept onto his white volleys. David drove Alan back to retrieve his camping gear out of his red car as he had decided not to drive it down.

We then walked up the road to the Styx River Cabins as we planned to go along the Styx to the cascades and back to camp. We were halfway up the road when Kathy asked where Alan was. "Oh, he went home". So great were her powers of observation that they immediately made her the leader! He'd been feeling guilty being away for Stephanie's birthday that weekend and the leeches provided the final incentive to return to Armidale. We found the sluice above the weir and as we looked across the river – surprise! A camel was looking back at us. Later, we saw a group of them grazing.

We descended the rocky sluice onto the traverse across the bank opposite the long cascade on the Styx River. The cascades were running beautifully. We had lunch opposite, mesmerized by all the white water plunging into the waterhole. After lunch, we checked out the hydroelectric relics which formerly powered the old Styx sawmill. We edged around the steep bank and finally made it onto the river flat. We then followed

the fluorescent star posts that marked this section of the track.

The tall forest here is just magnificent but while we were taking a botanical break at a yellow-flowering geebung when we heard an



almighty crash – a large tree fell somewhere in the distance. Eric was in the lead when he suddenly stopped – a small copperhead was coiled in the sun. We came across many orchids here – hyacinth orchids, greenhoods, pale pink parsons bands, green onion

NOTE ABOUT LEECHES

**THE USE OF SALT ON LEECHES IS TO BE AVOIDED, AS IT WILL KILL THEM AND UPSET THE BALANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT;
JUST FLICK THEM OFF.**

orchids and lurid pink ladies' tresses. We eventually ended up on the road into Hyatt's Flat which we followed back to camp. After a swim in the Styx, which could only be described as "bracing", we gathered for Happy Hour followed by dinner. David set up his table and botanized, getting his day's collections labeled and pressed, as we chatted and ate the chocolates he'd provided.

SUNDAY 27 JANUARY



We drove to Cathedral Rock National Park and walked up the Round Mtn road to a grassy track that Paul knew. We followed the track through forest and grassy glades along the top of the Snowy Range with the Macleay River watershed to one side and the Guy Fawkes River catchment the other. Orchids, fungi and wild flowers attracted our attention so progress was slow. We climbed to the top of the range where Paul had been told there might be a view. We could see a large rocky outcrop that looked promising so we scrambled over to it. There was a wonderful 180° vista from Mt Duval near Armidale, Chandler's Peak, Mt Mitchell, north towards Glen Innes and the Guy Fawkes River, then to Chaelundi Mtn. The season had been so good that the

whole countryside was a brilliant green. We sat and marveled and ate our lunch on "Paul's Rock", after which we walked to the top of the nearby hill for a view to the east to Cathedral Rock and Round Mtn. We retraced our steps but at the junction with the bitumen road, we continued to the top of Round Mtn where there is a radar station. There was a wide view to the east from here. We could see people on Cathedral Rock through the

binoculars, the scarp with its two communication towers, Pt Lookout, Anderson's Sugarloaf in the lower Macleay Valley, the Carrai Tableland with Mary's View, the upper Macleay gorge – Tabletop and the Cocks Comb were just out of view. Paul could make out Banda Banda on the

horizon. Mist was pouring over the edge of the scarp.

Jack and Eric returned to Armidale while David, Paul and Kathy went back to camp at Hyatt's. We lit a fire and were sipping a cuppa when the dreaded sound of trail bikes broke the peace. These were being ridden by tiny kids who threatened to invade our camp. This got to David who went over and said his piece to the parents. No more trail bikes! After dinner we went to Pt Lookout to see the lights of the coastal towns. Unfortunately, we entered the mist zone at the park entrance. From the lookout platform, we could only see the ghostly shape of a eucalypt emerging from the gloom.

MONDAY 28 JANUARY

David and Paul were intrigued by Softwood

MARENGO FALLS 8

DEC 2007



Remains of the pumping station of the Hydo scheme

Rd which gives off Forest Way. We wandered off into the forest where Paul thought there might be a way down a gully to Georges Creek. The undergrowth was sparse under the Antarctic Beeches and Paul could see the possibilities of this route but decided that it was a walk for another day. So we headed down Softwood Rd with Paul muttering that he thought he'd taken a party down this track another time and got tangled up in thick overgrowth. Sure enough, we gave up on that track after nasty close encounters with several varieties of prickly vine. We then spent time helping David botanize as we walked back to the car. We finished off the weekend with lunch at Pt Lookout. The view was splendid. We could even see the sea and with binoculars, we could make out several emergent hoop pines that Paul pointed out in the headwaters of the Bellinghen Valley below. We spent time there chatting with visitors before driving back to Armidale. We'd had splendid weather all weekend despite an unpromising start.

Four Armidale Bushwalkers were starters for this walk: David, Alan and Kathy were joined by Chris from the Inverell Club. It was probably too close to Xmas to expect a big group. However, we had magnificent weather and the storms that had been a daily occurrence all week, didn't blow up for their usual afternoon deluge.

After all the rain, Marengo Creek was flowing strongly so we had to decide which bank to walk along to the falls. The property owner had told us of a more interesting way back but that involved us staying on the northern side of the swollen creek.

We were soon waylaid by the myriad of wildflowers that were out. Purple orchids, pink trigger plants, Billy buttons – all had to be inspected, identified and photographed. We sidled around the steep hills surrounding the creek and found a way to get to the top of the falls without getting wet feet. David photographed an elegant pale pink callistemon growing on rocks in midstream while the rest of us stared across the falls to the Guy Fawkes Valley beyond, over to MacDonald's Spur – a five km spur of reasonably gentle grade which takes you down to Marengo Creek just before it merges with the Guy Fawkes River. This day we were on the wrong side of the creek to see the full majesty of the falls. You need to view them from the

southern rim of the gorge but the water was too high to cross safely. After taking in our fill of scenery, we backtracked and found a road

attached in an uneven fashion. We looped back to the road where our car was parked, passing by the farmhouse where David found



a grateful horse to give a good rub over. The horse's eyes glazed over in pleasure but we had to move on, back to the car.

Chris and Alan found they had been leech bait. Alan had a huge one firmly attached to his sock so he changed into clean white socks which was a mistake, as they turned bright

heading north. This was the one mentioned by the property owner.

We walked through delightful bright green grassy interspaces between the trees. David snapped off a few leaves and handed them to Chris. "You can see why they call this tree *Eucalyptus oblique*" David said pointing to the stem where each side of the leaf was

red in no time. We went into Ebor Falls for lunch and found the waterfalls just glorious. The surrounding countryside was bright green from all the rain and formed a wonderful backdrop to the white veils of the falls. We then continued onto Wollomombi Falls. As we passed the Ebor cemetery, Alan remarked that you could probably get a cheap plot in this out-of-the-way place. "Well," said David,

"People are just dying to get into the place". "Yeah" said Alan, "where they'll be pushing up daisies" in reference to the swathes of white daisies blanketing the graves.



Wollomombi and Chandler Falls were running well too. Brown water gushed over the edge and light shining through the mist formed a permanent rainbow over the narrow ridge at the junction between the two rivers.

WAITING FOR THE WARRIORS

by *Paul McCann*

Back in 2005 three members walked from Walcha to Coffs Harbour. Two of us thought it would be interesting to walk from Walcha to Newcastle the following year. This was deferred to 2007 but did not eventuate. One section was from the Oxley Highway south through a new national park called Mummel



Paul McCann at "steep drop"

Gulf. Anyhow to cut a long story short there was a vacant weekend in the Spring 2007 program with "venue to be decided". So it seemed a good idea to organize a weekend walk in the Mummel Gulf area over the last weekend in October.

So three members met at the Armidale Visitor Information Centre and headed south through Walcha to Yarrowitch where we met Allen who had driven up from the coast. We then headed to the New Country Swamp rest area and left the vehicles at the track which descends a spur to the Mummel River. We past Dicks Hut which was built by the lessee when the area was leased State Forest. The hut has since fallen down. We dropped our packs and clambered up to the hill near the hut for a view but the tree cover was too thick. We then heard the piercing sound of a trail bike nearby and all thought we might have to put up with lot's of

noise over the weekend. We returned to our packs and began the steep descent down the fire track to the Mummel River through tall eucalypt forest. We arrived at the clearing at the bottom and decided to have lunch there alongside the Mummel River which joins the Manning River near Wingham. It was very peaceful with no one else to bother us.

During lunch I put to the group a few suggestions including camping at the clearing and walking downstream without the packs.

There was evidence of regular use by trail bikes nearby and Peter responded with the words "we might be visited by the Wauchope Warriors if we camp here". So we opted to continue downstream with our packs and look for a more secluded camp site. However as we walked downstream the sides got steeper and the likelihood of a suitable campsite seemed to be diminishing. So we decided to return to the clearing and set up camp alongside the river. We then followed some of the tracks that headed up the spurs on the western side of the valley and returned to our camp expecting the "Wauchope Warriors" to arrive at any time with their trail bikes. Fortunately the "Wauchope Warriors" did not arrive and we had an enjoyable evening.

Next morning we packed up and walked upstream, leaving our packs in the bush away from the track. The river was very pretty with rainforest and tall gums along the banks. We walked upstream for a few hours then returned to the packs for lunch. After lunch we ascended the steep track back to Dicks Hut and the vehicles. We then followed the foot track near the rest area to a lookout overlooking Mummel Gulf before saying farewell to Allen and returning to Armidale. It was a most enjoyable weekend and we decided that the area offered potential for future weekend walks particularly upstream from where we had been. We hope that our luck continues next time and we don't run into the "Wauchope Warriors".

BACK FROM THE BRINK, WELL AND TRULY

*Andy Macqueen**

"The dreary appearance, abruptness, intricate and dangerous route we experienced at this place, induced me to call it the Devil's Wilderness."

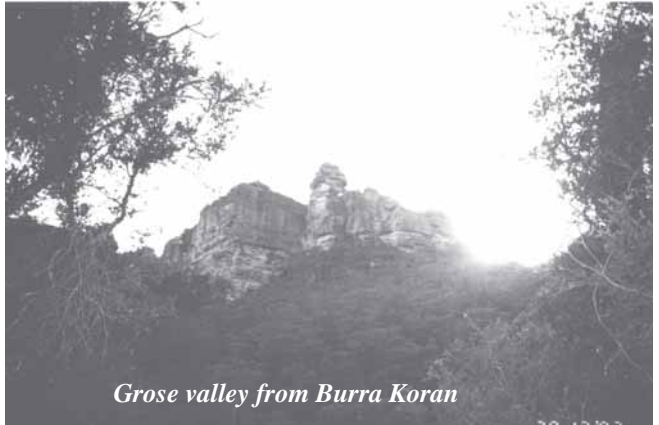
So wrote George Caley after clambering down to the confluence of the Grose River and Wilderness Brook in 1804. He was on an epic journey to Mount Banks, and his troubles were only just beginning. At every turn he was confronted by canyons, strange rock formations, thick vegetation or amazing insects.

Caley and his convict assistants did not appreciate the natural values and opportunities for solitude afforded by the Grose Wilderness. When they camped in the sassafras in Dismal Dingle, near Claustral Canyon, his men found it so oppressive that on the return journey they refused to stop there even for a rest. "We'd prefer the worst cell we've ever seen in a prison," they said.

Such places were no prison to the Aborigines. They had travelled through and lived in the Grose area for thousands of years. There is evidence of significant occupation quite close to Blue Gum. But the early whites were repelled, and many are still repelled. Even in the tracked areas, many people find the prospect of a walk deep into the valley or out amongst the mazes of ridges too unpleasant, too difficult, or too scary to contemplate.

Development has been kept out of most of the Grose area for two centuries, thanks to its ruggedness and to various moves to preserve

it. As early as 1875 a large part was reserved partly in recognition that it was a "national spectacle", thereby defining what could be described as Australia's first national park. This did not however prevent leases being taken up at Blue Gum Forest, and it was one of these that became the focus of the



Grose valley from Burra Koran

campaign in 1931-32 - a campaign which probably did more than anything else to give momentum to the national park campaigns of Myles Dunphy and his bushwalking followers.

In 1959, when Dunphy's Blue Mountains National Park dream started to be realised, parts of the Grose formed the lions share of the new reserve.

Not that there haven't been real threats to the area's integrity. Schemes for dams, mines, power stations, roads and logging have all surfaced at various times. In the 1920s a mining company proposed to transform the valley "from a riot of scrubland to a hive of industry". In the 1850s the Grose River offered the favoured route for the western railway. And as recently as 1999, Earth Sanctuaries proposed to fence off part of the valley for a wildlife sanctuary with

associated tourist developments.

None of these things got off the ground. Except the fire trails. After the 1957 bushfires it was judged that the best means of preventing future such disasters was to bulldoze a road along every ridge. Today most of these roads are redundant and – consistent with Confederation's vision – some of them have been closed and are revegetating. Others, although they are in the wilderness, are to

Govett Gorge and the popular tracks there. Fittingly, the patch of ground all the fuss was about in 1931-32, the original Blue Gum Forest Reserve, is included in the wilderness. (The wilderness boundary runs alongside the Perrys and Lockleys tracks: people walking from Pierces pass or Victoria Falls are now in wilderness, and need to limit their party to eight people, unless they obtain approval for a greater number.)



The Grose valley - Blue Mountains NP

continue as management roads, though public traffic will not be allowed – except for bicycles.

A glaring anomaly is the Mount Hay Road, which is to remain as a non-wilderness finger penetrating deep into the wilderness, in spite of a strong case put by Confederation and the conservation lobby in general that the road should be terminated at Fortress Ridge or The Pinnacles. Many fear that the tranquil spot out near MounThe Grose Valley - t Hay will one day be an Echo Point.

Of course, bushwalkers and campers have their own impact on natural areas. For this reason Acacia Flat, with its high visitation, toilets and signposts, has not been included in the Grose Wilderness – along with the

In *Back from the Brink* I wrote "If the Grose Wilderness comes into being, the wild values of the area will be enshrined in legislation. Generations to come will be able to explore its hidden recesses, or sit

and contemplate it in solitude, without further threat from new roads or tourist developments. They will be able to contemplate the activities of people like George Caley, ... and countless Aborigines before them – and wonder that the place has survived intact."

It has a few warts, but the Grose Wilderness has now come into being, and the area will indeed survive intact.

*Andy was president when Confederation nominated the Grose Wilderness. He is also author of *Back from the Brink: Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness*. Copies of the book are still available in some shops, or direct from the author at 8 Angel Street Wentworth Falls 2782 or andymacq@pnc.com.au
