What lies beyond Dunns Leap?

Keith Painter

After writing Centennial Glen and Porters Pass Pocket Pal in September 2009, I decided to prepare a book on the walking tracks on the southern side of Mount Victoria. I made one research walk in February 2010 and then life diverted me to Papua New Guinea on four trips to help the Evangelical Church of PNG re-open the printshop that I had previously managed for several years from 1998.

On March 13th 2012 I started again on the Mount Victoria project. From Mount Piddington I walked down to Fairy Bower and around to the Coxs Cave ladder. Then I retraced my steps back 40 metres to where some tags (made from pieces of Coca Cola cans) nailed to trees had attracted my attention. Also “DL” and a triangle were carved on a tree. Figure 1. And there was a complete Fosters beer can nailed to a tree about 15 metres away in the gully!

I recognised it as a direction to Dunns Leap, so I set off to explore this sidetrack. It was easy to follow so the frequent Coke tags were really not necessary. I had to clamber over a recently fallen tree next to the Dunns Leap sign but fortunately the sign and wire were still intact1. Figure 2. Someone had left an explanatory paper about Charles Dunn’s “leap” in a plastic pouch attached to a nearby tree. Figure 3.

More track beyond Dunns Leap

Then I noticed the track appeared to continue up toward the cliff. I followed this path which turned left at the cliff base, climbed up stone steps, swung around on stepping stones under an overhang and ended at a seat behind the base of a small waterfall. Figure 4. (This waterfall is the stream that forms in the Ferris Cave Gully followed by the northern track from Mount Piddington to Ferris Cave. So I named it “Ferris Waterfall”.)

I thought there could be more track beyond the waterfall but there was nothing obvious except to try and stay close to the cliff base scrambling over and between rocks and through a tangle of bushes. I emerged in a dry area protected by the cliffs above. Climbing a slope beside the cliff didn’t reveal any further signs of a constructed path so I retreated.

A few days later I told Brian Fox (avid bushwalker and author of Blue Mountains Geographical Dictionary) where I had been and

asked him if the track went any further. He thought it just stopped at the waterfall.

I was intrigued with the idea that there was something more, so in following weeks I returned twice to Dunns Leap and the waterfall seat and scouted around the area near the waterfall but found no further tracks.

On Saturday 31st March 2012 I went down part of the old track to Kanimbla Valley which Jim Smith has called the “Kinderan Track” (Hut News, Issue No. 186, January 2003, Blue Mountains Conservation Society, p3, “Some enjoyable bushwalks”). I cleared a section of path where walkers had been detouring around a fallen tree and subsequent growth of ferns and bushes. (I always believe in leaving walking tracks in better condition after I have walked them!)

I also searched for a track around the base of the cliff as per Jim Smith’s description: “By sticking to the base of the cliffs, it is possible to walk from Fairy Bower to the base of Horne’s Point. An old, abandoned track goes part of the way” (Smith, Jim, How to See the Blue Mountains, second edition, Second Back Row Press, Leura, 1986, p35). I wrongly thought the “base of the cliffs” meant the cliffs that begin near the top of the Kinderan track as shown on Jim’s Map 5. But I found nothing.

Then I set out to Dunns Leap once more and followed the base of the cliff further than previously. A climbers’ “pad” went down a few metres to a boggy patch and then turned up and over a great tangle of swordgrass, ferns and fallen branches. I thought this was not suitable to go in the book so I turned back.

More path found!

As I scrambled up from the boggy bit I spotted an overgrown benched path to my right! Figure 5.

I cleared the path for about 30 metres along one level, then found three stone steps down to another benched section. Figure 6. After another 30 metres the track curved up more stone steps to come out beside the rocks just 30 metres from the waterfall seat! Returning to where I had started clearing I scouted around but found no sign of further track.

On Saturday May 2nd 2012 I mapped the Kinderan Track and then the 96 metres from the waterfall seat beyond Dunns Leap to the end of my cleared track. Past the “jungle” blockage the cliff curved right and I could see another waterfall. Several possible “tracks” petered out. Then I spotted stone steps under a tangle of ferns. Pushing back the ferns with my feet I could see at least 10 steps heading down a slope.

Two days later I returned with a helper and we cleared the newly-found steps which were followed by stepping stones curving around under a rock overhang. After about three hours we had cleared 20 metres revealing 11 steps down (Figure 6) and 22 stepping stones. I estimated we were just 20 metres from the second waterfall.

Brian finds steps

Brian Fox and his brother John came with me later that week. John was our expedition photographer while Brian and I tackled the mystery path. Brian is very “energetic” and wanted to climb over the fern blockage to see what was beyond. I coaxed him back with the warning that there was a steep drop somewhere hidden.
beside it. So while I continued to clear he scouted around on the rocky point 30 or so metres back. A few minutes later I heard him call, “I've found steps!”

John and I abandoned our activities and hurried over. Brian was off like a rabbit down 50 stone steps which curved down and around to the base of the waterfall. Figure 7. Across the stream he spotted several steps carved in the rock. We found two further sections of benched path and then nothing except for an amazing spring — water bubbling up out of the ground.

Brian then found a way onto a ledge behind the waterfall and we estimated we were less than 10 metres from where I had been clearing. As the ledge is very wet and mossy with a sheer drop on one side I have abandoned the track clearing due to the potential danger for other walkers.

**Fox Junction and Pig Head Rock**

I never expected to find a junction of two tracks! (This is where my 11 steps go down and around under the overhang and Brian’s 50 steps go down to the base of the waterfall.) I have called it “Fox Junction” as I had two Foxes (Brian and his brother John) with me and one of them found it!

On a subsequent trip in the other direction with Colin, another “research assistant”, we succeeded in struggling through the bush for two hours from Hourn Point to the cleared track. On one of the rocky points where we rested Colin named one of the features “Pig Head Rock”. Figures 8 and 9.

I have found another benched section of path that links to the ledge behind the second waterfall showing that the original track had a loop below and behind the waterfall. This waterfall is the stream which forms in the gully of the Boronia Point/Ferris Cave track. So I have named it “Boronia Falls”.

Beyond this second waterfall we have found three further sections of constructed track with some “lost” areas between. The last piece of constructed path is about 250 metres from Boronia Falls and 50 metres past Pig Head Rock.

**Track Mystery**

Why did the constructed track stop here?

I don’t know of any other tracks in the Blue Mountains that just stop in the middle of the bush.

We know that Charles Dunn took his “leap” on 10th May 1908. By September 1908 we know that postcards showing the wire and sign in position had been printed (Halbert and Ellis, *Sandstone Caves of Mount Victoria*, pp31-34). So we can deduce that the path to the sign had been made by that time also.

My theory is that between 1908 and 1914 the path beyond Dunns Leap was being made with the aim of connecting with the end of Hourn Point, but work was halted by the outbreak of World War I. By the end of the war the world had changed. Possibly different people were involved as reserve trustees and the track was forgotten.

A route has now been tagged from Dunns Leap to the bottom of the climbers’ steps at the end of Hourn Point. I called it the Jack Austin Pass. Details can be found in my *Great Walks at Mount Victoria Pocket Pal* guidebook. It’s suitable only for experienced bushwalkers.
Map references

The track to Dunns Leap (from near Coxs Cave) appears on several maps:

- The Railway Department’s Map and Detailed Descriptions of Walking Tours on the Blue Mountains between Wentworth Falls and Bell, No. 2, which was drawn by Ninian Melville. (Portion of the map is shown above (Figure 10) and Figure 11 at right shows a further enlargement with red oval line highlighting the track.)

  This is the most accurate map of Mount Victoria walking tracks that I have seen. However, Melville incorrectly shows Dunns Leap at the end of Witches Glen. Sadly, the young lady who fell from the cliff at Witches Glen in 1919 was not as lucky as young Dunn — her body was found several weeks later by workmen constructing the Wilsons Glen track (now mistakenly signposted as Rienits Pass — Rienits Pass is actually the 1912 track from Pulpit Rock to Ross Cave) and the sidetrack to the base of Witches Glen Waterfall.

  (Other errors did creep into a later “copy” of Melville’s map where it seems somebody has drawn over the track lines making them continuous lines and then joined the wrong bits.)

- Jim Smith’s How to See the Blue Mountains, second edition, Map 5 p88-89, but shows the track in the wrong location as it extends beyond Dunns Leap not as a branch off the Kinderan Track.


  However, none of them show or mention the loop around the waterfall.

  I hope that people will continue to walk the Dunns Leap Track and Jack Austin Pass. This will ensure this lovely track is not lost again!

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