

MINERVA HEIGHTS PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE 14th DECEMBER 2014.

A steep well maintained gravel road up the mountain eventually brought us to the Minerva Heights nature reserve, where we parked our vehicles at the farm house, and prepared for an enjoyable stroll in the country. The reserve is situated high above the Byrne valley at around 1500m above sea level. It lies along the midlands mist belt zone and well above the coastal humidity. One is immediately struck by the freshness of the air, the reason for this soon becomes clear as one looks over the spectacular indigenous forest which provide a green lung of note.



Unfortunately many of the real giants have gone, felled for timber from the 1800s to the 1940s. The network of trails in this reserve range from 2km to 20km, and are suitable for all levels of hiking fitness.

Ten of us started off from the farm house in warm cloudless conditions with a cool easterly breeze and headed along the road to descend through an indigenous forest which offered cool shady conditions. We emerged from the forest and

proceeded up to The Peak an area of particular interest for the botanist, which is controlled by the Wild Life Society. The well managed winter controlled burn and the response to the fires certainly paid off, as the abundance of wild flowers and grasses, and in particular the bright red Hilton daisy were a brilliant display to say the least.



Our route now starts to gently rise as we climbed up Cunningham Castle to lookout rock, the vista overlooks a stunning panoramic view of the beautiful Byrne valley, a patchwork mosaic of small holdings, agricultural and plantation land and surrounding indigenous forest. We then proceeded up the track to the relay masts, which is the highest point of the hike and

continued on to Picnic Rock passing a herd of Bless buck on route.

At Picnic Rock three members of the group spent time exploring the caves beneath the rock. We started our return as the development of low level cumulus cloud started to build up on the eastern horizon with the promise of a late afternoon thunder storm. At the junction to Porcupine dam the group split, with most going along with Philip leading them down to the dam. As they approached the dam there was a very loud distinctive rattling croaking sound, which



Neville identified as a Blue Crane. The Crane flew down stream still repeating its very loud call to distract them, Philip found the reason for hawk attracted by the commotion appeared on the scene, making two low swoops, much to the concern of the group who tried to chase it away, but only succeeded in agitating the Crane more.



Meanwhile Moira and I had taken the more strenuous route back through the grasslands to the farm and arrived back at the farm shortly after the main group.

Whether it be the beautiful views of the surrounding country side, the magnificent indigenous forest, the abundance of wild flowers, the inspirational encounter with the Crane or Malcom's fascinating, interesting museum this hike will always remain memorable.

Thanks to Philip, Chris, Mike, Susie, John, Moira, Neville, Earle & Mumtaz for their companionship on this enjoyable hike.

David Tighe