

The daily grind: Mt Kau Kau Wellington



The view of Wellington from Mt Kau Kau.

By Clare Gleeson

My phone buzzing around 7.40am is the call to arms. The text comes through “walking this morning?”

Whether I go or not, every morning at 8.00am a group of not-so-young women meet at the Khandallah Park swimming pool and begin their ascent.

We are no Hillarys or Tenzings but the climb up Mt Kau Kau is no walk in the park, despite its location. It is a challenge for all of us though some are fitter than others.

The track, in the heart of suburbia, transports us to the New Zealand bush as soon as we enter. Ferns, trees, moss and climbers mingle in their special configuration.

As we walk birds sing and we spot white necked Tuis and pretty Fantails. The Kererus whirr as they fly to perch on a branch and watch us pass. Seemingly unafraid of people it is no wonder they were almost wiped out when the Europeans settlers arrived.

After a steep hill climb and several flights of wooden steps we reach farmland and wander across grassy fields in what I have dubbed the English section of the walk.

As I traverse this part of the climb I

imagine myself in Wainwright’s Lake District or the Pennines, although I know the gorse and bright blue sky belie this.

At various points along the way there is a clearing and we get a glimpse of the city. With its green hills and twinkling blue harbour it’s an impressive sight on a beautiful day.

However our walks are not constrained by the weather and many the time we’ve battled our way up in wind, mist and rain with no hope of seeing anything once we got to the top.

The panorama of the city before us is the reward for the stiff climb and then comes the pleasure of descent. We scramble down a hill before clambering over the stile nicknamed the Hillary Step and re-entering the bush.

Now we’re in what some think is the most special part of the walk. With its dark trunked trees and heavy canopy this area of bush has a magical air to it and a hobbit or wizard wouldn’t seem out of place.

On Wednesdays we walk with gloves, not for the cold but because it’s Weedy Wednesday,

the day we stop for 10 minutes on our way down to pull out the flourishing weeds clogging up the wooden steps.

A disparate group, we are united in our enjoyment of walking and appreciation of such a lovely place to walk on our doorstep.

We chat as we trudge along, steepness of track and fitness permitting, and have come to know each other well.

Some days we don’t see anyone else but usually we see other regulars.

On a nice day there are lots of people, enjoying the fresh air, the exercise and the bush. We see walkers and runners, old and young, fit and unfit, and lots of dogs. We’ve got to know the dogs as well as we know the owners and they love the freedom of romping up the track.

After our arrival back in Khandallah Park we sometimes stop for coffee – or sometimes not.

We know that the next day most of us will be up again, enjoying the bush and the company as we complete our daily but pleasurable grind, the ascent of Mt Kau Kau.

