

## Little Forest - Jamie Derkenne

About 200 metres west of my place are the sandstone cliffs that mark the Little Forest escarpment in the Moreton National Park, on the edge of the vastly beautiful Budawang wilderness; wild untrammelled sandstone gorge country that extends all the way to the Southern Highlands. I live off Little Forest Road, but to get to the escarpment you go down to the highway, then take the Porters Creek Dam Road that snakes between giant boulders to climb the cliff. The Little Forest walk to Florence Head meanders through swampy heath country and open eucalypt forest. Even here, the Currowan fire has left scars, small blackened trees that never recovered. But the heath is full of life. A red belly, upset its sunbake on the path has been interrupted, slithers into the sedge. Two falcons lazily circle off the escarpment, so we see them from above. Black-faced wallabies thump away from us. An unperturbed quoll sitting in a tree branch overhead looks down on us.

At Florence Head we snack on cheese and dolmades, sitting down on the jutting rock to take in the views to Pigeonhouse and down to Durras, then north to Jervis Bay, with the sea horizon so far away it hazes into infinity. Below, through the still skeletal white trunks of burnt wattle, I can see my house and land, but they are too far away to make out any detail. The spur on which I live was once known as Cedar Hills, but those red-tipped trees were logged out by 1828. When the wattles burnt, the ground became so hot the clay entrances to wombat burrows vitrified.

For once the wind is absent; there is no sound but of us eating, breathing and occasionally pointing out landmarks on the horizon. In the far distance is the angry growl of a bush bike climbing a steep hill.

It starts to rain, not hard, a gentle cold weeping. The rain sheens on the rock, making the return path slippery. On the side of the path is a large reddish brown wombat, it stares at us and doesn't move, even though it is early afternoon. As we get nearer it turns around. All along its flank is the scabbed hairless flesh from mite attack. It walks away slowly, as if it has all the time in the world.