



North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

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MISSION STATEMENT: It is the mission of this club to encourage the study, appreciation and preservation of our natural and cultural environment, the animals, plants, geology and landforms, including those of the coastal and marine areas in the North East region of Tasmania.

From the President: As mentioned in the program on page 2, our June outing will be something a little different—a visit to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

It is about ten years since our last visit 'behind the scenes' at the museum; on that occasion it was absolutely fascinating to see the amount and variety of material stored in The Bunker. Most memorable was the 'Beetle Room', which is not all that it sounds. Hopefully, we visit it again this time.

We appreciate Simon Fearn's offer to guide us

us through the collection and I hope many of you will be able to join us on Thursday 8 June.

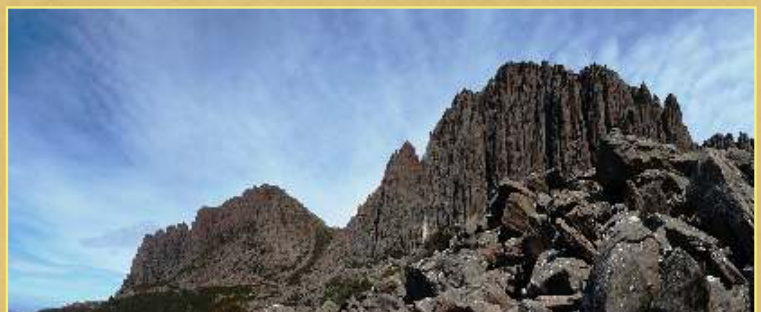
A worrying email came from Leonie Geard on 29 May. Adrian fell down some steep stairs at his daughter's home in Ireland and sustained serious head injuries; he is in an induced coma for 10 days.

I know I speak for all members in sending Leonie and her family our best wishes and our hopes that Adrian will make a full and speedy recovery.



Rattler Range – photo by Lesley Nicklason

Members' photos of Northern Tasmania



Stacks Bluff (left) and Denison Crag (right) – photo by Ross Coad

Program for June-August 2017

NB Please read the notice at the bottom of this program about the cancellation process

JUNE 8th: VIEW THE MUSEUM COLLECTIONS WITH SIMON FEARN

Note: this is a Thursday

This is a fantastic opportunity to see the natural history collections of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Park, Wellington Street, Launceston. Simon is the Collection Officer and will show us around.

Unfortunately, he cannot host this on a weekend, but it's too good an opportunity to miss, so apologies if some are excluded because of the change from our normal date.

Meet at 10.00 am in the foyer at 2 Wellington Street.

Contact person: Lou Brooker 0417 149 244

JULY 8th: PICTURES + LUNCH AT THE LINC, SCOTTSDALE

Patrick Wilson will present his pictorial account of recent walks he's done in Tasmania's South West. 'Great pics', says our private film critic.

We are in the process of arranging the rest of the program; details will be disseminated later.

Meet at the LINC, King Street, Scottsdale at 11.00 am. Bring lunch to share.

Contact person: Lou Brooker 0417 149 244

AUGUST 12th: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING + LUNCH + GUEST SPEAKER (TBA)

The AGM will be at the home of our Secretary, Lou Brooker and will follow the usual format.

Meet at 11.00 am at 20 Edward Street, Bridport for the AGM, followed by shared lunch.

The remainder of the program is still being arranged.

Contact person: Lou Brooker 0417 149 244

Cancellation of Field Nats Outings

If there is unpredictable and severe weather, or for any other reason, it may occasionally be necessary to cancel with short notice. Here is the process for cancellation: an outing will be cancelled if the leader considers that the conditions are not safe. If an activity is cancelled, a global email will be sent by 0700 (i.e. 7.00 am) on the day of the outing. If members are uncertain, it is their responsibility to contact Jill, Lou or the leader. Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.

Editorial Note: The March newsletter included an article by Mike Douglas about the February walk to the top of Mt Stronach from Three Mile Creek. Mike had warned that the track was steeper and rougher than the usual track from Buckneys Road, so Club Secretary Lou Brooker decided to take the ‘soft option’, as described below.

Sometimes the soft option can be really interesting, as I found out poking around at the base of Mt. Stronach while the rest of the group toiled their way to the summit.

The south-facing wet sclerophyll forest held a wealth of interesting plants. The ones that produce berries had done so quite early, probably due to the heavy rains earlier in the season. There were quite a few pepper berry trees (*Tasmannia lanceolata*), only one of which I saw in berry.

On the banks of the stream that flowed through the forest there was *Pimelia drupacea*, the bushman’s bootlace. It was easy to see how this plant got its name—the bark on the stem could have been peeled off and used by the early settlers as bootlaces. Some plants have too many branches, but this one had a long straight stem. Also streamside was *Coprosma quadrifida*, the native currant, with its bright red berries.



Pepper berry - *Tasmannia lanceolata*



Bushman’s bootlace - *Pimelia drupacea*



Native currant - *Coprosma quadrifida*

I was surprised to see the coffee berry (*Coprosma hirtella*) on the rocky slopes above the stream. It has leathery leaves and a red drupe about three times the size of the native currant. Its ripe berries are the colour of roasted coffee beans and have a bitter taste, though as shown in the photo below, these berries had not yet attained that colour.

On the ground, amongst the larger bushes, I saw two autumn orchids: *Eriochilis culcullatis*, usually known as the Parsons bands, but sometimes called the Pink autumn orchid; and *Chiloglottis reflexa*, the Autumn bird orchid. Both are quite common.

Overall, the soft option proved to be a good choice on this occasion!



Coffee berry - *Coprosma hirtella*



Parsons bands - *Eriochilis culcullatis*



Autumn bird orchid - *Chiloglottis reflexa*

MARCH 2017: SEARCHING FOR THE CRUSADER BUG

Article by Penny Reeves and Lou Brooker, with Chris Forbes-Ewan
Photos by Penny Reeves (PR) and Lou Brooker (LB)

On a sunny early-autumn morning in March, a small but enthusiastic group of members and guests met at the township of Bellingham on the north coast of Tasmania, with the aim of determining if the 'crusader bug' (*Mictis profana*) was in this area. The walk was led by Simon Fearn, Collection Officer in the Natural Sciences section of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

Simon had previously discovered a population of the crusader bug, which is common on the mainland but hadn't been observed in Tasmania until Simon spotted several specimens at Beechford, which is about 20 km west of Bellingham. Simon was interested in investigating if the bug's distribution extended to Bellingham, hence this 'crusade' to find the crusader bug.

Simon explained that the crusader bug feeds on boobyalla bushes (*Acacia longifolia* var. *sophorae*) at high tide mark on the leeward side of the bushes, below waist height, and in clusters. So we set off through the boobyalla bushes with our specimen jars (and with Ann Scott cutting a dashing figure with her grandfather's trout-fishing net!)



Ann Scott uses her grandfather's venerable trout-fishing net to show those pesky insects who's the boss (PR)

The crusader bug wasn't found, but to know that it isn't there (or at least isn't there in large numbers) was perhaps just as scientifically significant as finding it.

Many other insects were observed, including the flightless weevil *Leptopius duponti*, commonly known as the broad-back weevil on the mainland. Simon explained that it doesn't have a common name in Tasmania, but suggests that it be called



Leptopius duponti - 'boobyalla weevil' has been suggested as an appropriate common name in Tasmania (LB)

boobyalla weevil.

Another interesting insect that was observed was the fearsome-looking parasitic wasp (genus *Gasteruption*) which has a rather macabre (by human standards) means of reproduction. The female detects larvae of other insects in dead wood, pierces the wood with its long ovipositor and lays eggs in the unfortunate grubs for its own larvae to feed on when they hatch.

The leaf-curling spider *Phonognatha graeffei* was also seen. This small (~1.4 cm long) orb weaving spider makes a complicated and rather untidy web with a curled leaf at the centre. The curled leaf provides protection from predators such as birds and parasitic wasps. The spider hides inside the leaf, with only its front legs exposed. These are placed on the web to feel for movement made by its prey.



The home of a leaf-curling spider - *Phonognatha graeffei* (LB)



Leaf-curling spider - photo by Mike Gray, Australian Museum (approval obtained)

In summary, although unsuccessful in achieving our primary aim (finding the crusader bug), we enjoyed pottering around in the sunshine and identified some interesting insects and arachnids.



The reckoning – no crusader bugs, but several interesting insects and spiders were identified (PR)



Seeking the elusive crusader bug *Mictis profana* among the boobyalla near Bellingham (PR)



The view from the top of Australia Hill in the Blue Tier region of North-Eastern Tasmania - photo by Chris Forbes-Ewan

APRIL 2017: AUSTRALIA HILL (NARLEWALKENER)

Article by Chris Forbes-Ewan; photos by Chris (CFE) and Lou Brooker (LB)

The April activity was a walk to Australia Hill, or *Narlewalkener* as it is known to the traditional owners of the Blue Tier (or *Meenamatta*). A total of 17 members and guests took part in the walk, which was led by Club Secretary Lou Brooker.

The starting point was Poimena. Although now a ghost town, Poimena was once a bustling village supporting the tin mining that operated intermittently in the region from the 1880s until the 1950s. There is no permanent human population there now, and only a few relics remain to indicate that in the late 19th century Poimena was large enough to have three hotels, three stores, a blacksmith, a butcher, a school and many cottages.

Australian Geographic rates Poimena as one of the ten most interesting ghost towns of Tasmania: <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/topics/history-culture/2016/05/top-10-tasmanian-ghost-towns>

The Australia Hill walk is one of six walks—all through magnificent wilderness—that begin at Poimena. Approximately four kilometres in length, it starts with a steady climb for about one kilometre through regenerating rainforest and past the Summit Mine (an abandoned tin mine).

Here several walkers detoured to see the abandoned mine and its 'bull wheel'. This wheel was part of the overhead haulage line that was constructed in 1912 to carry tin ore from the Summit Mine to be processed at the Anchor Mine 335 metres below. Unfortunately, the Anchor Mine experienced financial difficulties in 1913, and closed. As a result, the haulage line was dismantled and sold for scrap by 1919.



The 'bull wheel' - part of the haulage line used to move tin to the Anchor Mine for processing (CFE)

Continuing to the summit of Australia Hill we passed many myrtles (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), native peppers (*Tasmannia lanceolata*), woolly tea-trees (*Leptospermum lanigerum*), waratahs (*Telopea truncata*) and mountain currants (*Coprosma nitida*). We also saw several celery-top pines (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*). Several of these species date back to the time of the ancient forests that existed here tens of millions of year ago, when Australia was part of the southern supercontinent Gondwana.

The terrain then gently undulates until the top of Australia Hill is reached. A feature of this region is the myriad exposed granite boulders. We stopped here to have lunch and to admire the spectacular



The site of the abandoned Summit Mine (CFE)

view of the surrounding mountains, including Mt Littlechild (which, at 855 metres above sea level is the highest mountain in the Blue Tier), Mt Poimena (818 m) and Mt Michael (802 m).



A granite outcrop - or perhaps an open-mouthed whale

In addition to the trees previously mentioned (sassafras, myrtle and so on) there is an abundance of smaller native species in this area, including the long clubmoss (*Huperzia varia*)—a Gondwanan fern ally (i.e. similar to ferns, but not a true fern); pink mountain berry (formerly in the genus *Cyathodes*, but recently reclassified as being in the genus *Leptecophylla*; sphagnum moss; and several varieties of lichen, including coral lichen (*Cladia retipora*) which was dotted with *Hygrocybe reesiae* fungi.



Long clubmoss - *Huperzia varia*, a 'fern ally' (CFE)



Pink mountain berry - genus *Leptecophylla*; formerly assigned to the genus *Cyathodes* (CFE)

constitutes an early form of art).

When they were discovered in the 1950s they were initially thought to be the result of mining activity, although some experts believed even then that they were examples of Aboriginal rock art.



Hygrocybe reesiae fungi amongst the coral lichens (*Cladia retipora*) - photo by CFE

This area also has special significance to archaeologists and to Aboriginal Tasmanians because of the existence of 'cupules'—circular holes several centimetres deep and with diameters typically in the range 5–10 cm that appear to have been dug out of the granite. These may be a form of petroglyph (i.e. a carving or inscription on a rock that



Purple fungus and coral lichens (CFE)

More recently, scientific analysis suggested a minimum age of 1000 years for some of these cupules. If this result is correct, it implies that they cannot be of modern human origin (i.e. the result of mining, which began only about 130 years ago).

Another interesting aspect of these cupules is their location near the peaks of mountains. Although such positioning of rock art is common in other continents—particularly in South America, where the sites have been described as ‘Andean high mountain sanctuaries’—it has not been extensively reported elsewhere in Australia.

The suggestion has been made that the consistent location of cupules near mountain peaks in the Blue Tier indicates the spiritual importance of these sites to the early inhabitants of this region.

Although the exact origin of the cupules remains controversial, the traditional owners of the Blue Tier believe that the rock markings are the tracks left by ancestral beings, and their existence relates to Dreamtime myths about the creation of the world.

Whatever their origin, they are of considerable archaeological significance, and perhaps even more importantly, of great cultural importance to Aboriginal Tasmanians. Consequently, their preservation should be accorded a high priority.



Club President Jill Van Den Bosch on descent from the top of Australia Hill, with a native pepper (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) to her right and a stand of mountain tea-trees (*Leptospermum grandifolium*) emerging from a carpet of sphagnum moss