

The North-Eastern Naturalist

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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.

The Club conducts outings on the second Saturday of the month.

- APRIL 14** **CUBE ROCK.**
Moderate grade walk suitable for most people to this interesting feature on the Mt. Cameron Range. Meet 10am at the Little Blue Lake car park on the Gladstone Road, about 8km's from Gladstone. Leader : Mike Douglas. Phone: 6356 1243.
- MAY 12** **BLACKBOY PLAIN OVERHANGS.**
A fascinating day exploring these overhangs carbon dated back to 1490. Hopefully we can engage Gloria Andrews an aboriginal elder to accompany us. Easy walking. There's an option for those who want a BIG day to climb Mt. Albert after lunch. Meet at 10am at the junction of Mathinna Plains Road and Mt. Albert Road. Leader: Lesley Nicklason 6373 6195 or 0400557418.
- JUNE 16** **THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF INVERTEBRATES.**
Use the micro[scope] to discover the world of macro[invertebrates]. Debbie Searle has spent many years as a Waterwatch Co-ordinator and will lead this day of discovery in the laboratory of the Scottsdale High School. **Meet 10am** in the carpark of the Scottsdale High School, Coplestone Street, Scottsdale. Contact : Ross.
- JULY 14** **A DAY OF FILMS.**
Helen and Revel will host a day at home, where we'll run DVD's and picture shows all day. The new Blue Tier DVD will feature, plus much more. Details by e.mail closer to the date. Bring lunch to share and sit back and relax. **Beginning 11 am.** at "Kanara Neika", Telita. Take Derby Back Road turn into Telita Road. Revel and Helen : 63542254.
- AUGUST 11** **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

news and reports

Bush Fires.

I'm sure all of us were thinking of Pam and her family and Robina and Carl as they sat out a tense fortnight waiting to see which way the fires would go early in the December. It was an experience they would never want to repeat. Thankfully, they were spared. The fires devastated places nearby to them like St. Mary's Pass, Scamander and Four Mile Creek.

Below is an account from Deny of what happened in the Winifred Curtis Reserve at Scamander....

The fire did not start at any boundary, but rather from an aerial fireball that landed in the middle. It blew up a large eucalypt, spreading in all directions and destroying the Reserve in an hour !

Physically, it destroyed the board-walk, seating, four picnic tables and all directional posts and signs. I am fairly sure the John White table is still more or less in-tact.

Approximately a third of the eucalypts have been destroyed with casuarinas and banksias virtually eliminated. The bare ground revealed large quantities of rubbish - broken glass, wire, stoves and twelve dunny cans ! All this material has since been collected and disposed of.

Regeneration of the understorey plants has been spasmodic. The usuals : *Xanthorrhoea*, *Lomandra*, *Patersonia* and bracken fern have been the first to begin recovery. Tim McMannus is making a record of the botanical recovery over the next few months and perhaps years.

There are stories of echidnas being the first vertebrates to reappear in as few as three days after the fire. It is known that they can survive by burying themselves.

The Westbury Rotary Club, with local help repaired the boundary fencing with hardware being donated by Loone's Rural Supplies and One Steel Metaland. Leon and Carlene Kohl have donated blackwood staves to replace the burnt track markers. Colin Kohl is to donate the timber needed for the bridge across the ford.

Donations have flowed in to help with the important signage and directional information. The Board of Management has refrained from applying to the Red Cross for financial assistance - with 28 homes destroyed priority should be given to those families affected.

The Chairman of the Board has been able to secure a further 12 ha. of land on the eastern boundary, thus bringing the Reserve's total area to 88 hectares.

So, thanks to 100ml of rainfall and the generosity of many people, the Reserve will be nurtured back to its old self over the years ahead. Tim McMannus, as usual has been the prime mover and shaker and is doing a tremendous job leading the recovery program.

Federation Weekend.

It was the Central North Field Nat's. turn to host the Federation Weekend in March. It was held at the Guide House, Deviot and attended by about twenty field natters from around Tasmania.

I was really looking forward to the Friday night session when Ron Nagorka and Sarah Lloyd were to collaborate in a presentation of music, images and recorded bird calls, collected around their property at Black Sugarloaf, Birralee, north of Westbury. I had already listened to some of Ron's music on a CD I bought years ago, but had never heard him perform live. It was brilliant. The presentation is designed to give the audience an introduction to Tasmania's wildlife and will be performed overseas in April.

After the outing to Holwell Gorge to look at fungi, there was a short meeting in which club reports were presented, then a magnificent buffet of curries prepared by Marriama, a member of their club.

Dr. Harry May, mycologist with the Royal Melbourne Botanical Gardens gave a power-point presentation about the fungi of the Tarkine.

Once again, the Federation Weekend proved its worth by expanding our knowledge and introducing us to other like-minded naturalists.

Two books of interest.

I am presently dipping into Sarah Lloyd's little book *The Silent Cicada* and other Natural Sounds. It contains a collection of some of Sarah's natural history stories. It's personal writing and intimate. She begins by recounting how it was for she and Ron in the early days of their living on Black Sugarloaf—a life lived mostly outdoors - with a studio to retreat to in rough weather.

A subsequent chapter records observations of the dawn chorus, when Sarah believes there is a set daily sequence. But these are no ordinary dry, scientific observations. Rather, she recounts her experiences and observations with a refreshing keenness that drags one into the natural world she is commenting on.

This is a self-published book and is filled with thumb-nails of Sarah's close-up photos, diagrams and even the music of a round composed by she and her friend for the pamphlet 'Leave Frogs for Logs'.

Fuller's Bookshop sells this and Sarah's other book about the Blue Tier, the proceeds from which she has donated to the Save the Blue Tier Campaign.

Northeast Highlands Walk

During January for the past three years, Lesley Nicklason and the "Friends of the Blue Tier", have organised a walk to showcase the beauty of the Northeast highlands and to raise awareness of their plight.

This year 37 people took part in the walk—some just coming to camp for the night, some for a couple of days and others walking the entire 65 kms.

The walk goes through forests that are reserved, or are under threat from roading [the Rattler Range Reserve] and clear-fell logging [Emu Flats and Groom River Valley].

The area covered by the walk forms part of the proposed North-

news and reports

east Highlands National Park—which would protect the headwaters of the North and South George, Cascade, Weld, Wyniford, Frome, Anson's, Great Musselroe, Groom and Ransom Rivers, and secure a continuous tract of native forest protecting wildlife habitat and addressing the problem of fragmentation of forests throughout the northeast.

Each night, the campsites are located near old roads, thus allowing vehicle access for walkers to come and go on a daily basis. A trailer is towed from campsite to campsite by a support crew, negating the need for walkers to carry a heavy pack.

All those taking part had great fun and were blown away by the beauty and diversity of the forests. Hopefully, it will be possible to do the walk in 2008, so it would be worth preparing for.

Tasmanian Herbarium

In August last year, the Tasmanian Herbarium completed the first phase of their involvement in Australia's Virtual Herbarium [AVH], an on-line botanical information resource created by Australia's major herbaria.

They have sent us and other clubs like ours a short DVD called Seeds of Knowledge with information about the AVH, its uses and potential benefits.

It will be put into the club library and accessed at our outings. The Virtual Herbarium itself is located at avhtas.tmag.tas.gov.au

Tamar NRM Conference—June

This conference named Biodiversity: Balancing Conservation and Production, will be held at the University of Tasmania's Launceston Campus from Tuesday 26th - Thursday 28th June this year. The full registration fee for the conference is \$450. A public forum will be held at 7.30 on the evening of Tuesday the 26th at the Tramsheds, where speakers will give short presentations to set the scene for a dialogue with the audience. This is being billed as a consciousness-expanding, vision-arousing opportunity to consider social, ethical, economic and environmental realities and concerns. It could be good!

Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

The Mole Creek Karst Forest program is part of the Forest Conservation Fund which is an Australian Government initiative. The Tas. Land Conservancy was invited to run the program because of its experience in negotiating land purchases and conservation covenants.

The Mole Creek Area is an internationally significant karst [cave-forming limestone] system, which contains over 300 known caves and sinkholes as well as gorges and large underground streams and springs. The system has evolved through erosion of limestone rock by acidic water which has created numerous ecological niches.

The area contains important forest communities—*Eucalypt viminalis* and *E. ovata*, a number of threatened flora and fauna species—the endemic Cockerills Cave Beetle, the cave harvestman and the extremely rare cave false scorpion. A feature of karst areas is the close relationship between the above ground and the below ground environments. This means that above ground land use can seriously impact upon the cave environ-

ment, requiring careful management.

The program is voluntary and private landholders have the option to sell or covenant their land. Funds are available to pay landholders for either option. Purchased land will be added to the Mole Creek National Park or revolved through TLC's revolving fund process. Covenanted land remains with the existing owners. These covenants will protect the existing cave systems by ensuring the forest on the surface is managed for conservation.

More on: www.deh.gov.au/land/forestpolicy/fcf/index.html.

Source: Tasmanian Land Conservancy Newsletter, Issue 11, 2006.

Halls Falls in December.

All three drivers approaching the meeting point for the Halls Falls outing had underestimated the time needed to get there. We all saw each other on the windy road down to Pyengana. Some others had given up waiting and had set off to the falls without us.

Luckily, we all coincided at the entrance to the walk and there we heard from Lesley a little bit about the story of how these Falls became a popular destination for tourists and visitors. She paid tribute to the Kohl brothers who live nearby and who were instrumental in forming the track to the falls and the weir. They also formed the car park and the entrance way to the walk.

It was a short, pleasant walk through dry Eucalypt forest. The predominant understorey plant was the varnished wattle, *Acacia verniciflua* which is said to reach 5metres in height. Many specimens here were twice that height.

Despite dry conditions everywhere else, the Groom River flowed strongly with water from the nearby Blue Tier. On its banks were the usual water ferns, the Fishbone Water Fern, *Blechnum nudum*, the Strap Water Fern *Blechnum patersonii*, the Hard Water Fern *Blechnum wattsii*, the Manfern *Dicksonia antarctica*, the King Fern *Todea barbara*. Other ferns seen on the track were the Leathery Shield Fern *Rumohra adiantiformis* and the Common Fork Fern *Tmesipterus oblique* which is an epiphyte growing on the trunk of the *Dicksonia*. The Silky Fan Fern *Sticherus tener* occurs in two forms; this one was Type A. Last time we visited the falls, we heard about pleas with Forestry Tas. to stop logging next to the falls track. That was in 2001. After lunch by the river, we opted to walk through another piece of bush, to a pleasant spot on the river further upstream. We walked along the boundary of a coupe where the natural trees had been harvested in 2001 and the forest left to regenerate with native species. A slightly better situation than replanting with a monoculture, but of course there was a huge weed problem as a result.

One particular plant that was growing like a weed here was in fact a native, the Wild Parsnip, *Trachymene anisocarpa*. It was quite prolific.

A delicate trailing plant that interested us was the Forest Starwort, *Stellaria flaccida*. It appears to have ten petals, but on closer examination it is seen that these are five deeply divided petals.

Also of interest was the trailing Apple Dumplings, *Billardiera*

news and reports

scandens and the Turquoise Berry, *Dryophila cyanocarpa*.

Thanks to Lesley for her input on the day and to Mike for identifying some of the plants we weren't sure about.

Cockles and Mussels - practicing for Bush Tucker Day

Early morning. Low tide. The swans are still asleep. Heads tucked under their wings. In that part of the lagoon where a little bit of stream flows. You try not to disturb them.

The lagoon is littered with open cockles and mussels. The oyster catchers are busy. Peck, pecking. They see you in the half light. Startled, they fly overhead telling the world about the invasion.

Barefooted, bucket in hand, you start to drag your toes through the sand. Nothing yet. Too near the edge of the lagoon. Out into the middle you go.

Something has been here before you. Long lines through the sand. Not a human sign though. Maybe a water rat?

Then your foot feels something beneath the sand. Just a little way. A couple of centimetres. You bend over dragging your fingers systematically through the sloppy sand, sometimes digging deeper. Lovely plump cockles. Toss them into the bucket. They can be washed later.

Now over to the mussel beds. The best ones are poking their lips a little above the sand. Below, they are attached to the weed by the byssus thread. Pull them away. Its best if there's a little resistance. Toss them into the bucket. Wash them later.

Over to the stream. The cockles are O.K. Clean those little soft anemones off the shell of the mussels. Pull the strong hairs off and leave them to soak in a bucket of salt water.

Now, how shall we eat them?

Bush Tucker Day : February 10

Bush Tucker Day began in November, cumbungi pollen collecting. This required still mornings, before the wind rose, winding through the tall reeds looking for pollen spikes just appearing from their sheaths. The head was bent down into a container and tapped to loosen the golden pollen.

In early January, the *Acacia sophorae* seed pods were collected, the shiny black seeds removed later.

In autumn, many months before, Ross had collected mountain pepper berries, and via the local butcher, he also provided tender saddles of wallaby.

So everything was set for a day of collecting, preparing, cooking and eating.

Rain started falling the night before, the wind increased and

by morning Little Musselroe Bay was being lashed by horizontal rain.

A handful of hardy gourmands arrived, a reluctant dash was made onto the lagoon to gather cockles and mussels, then a hurried retreat made to a shed behind the lagoon to shelter and eat golden pollen pancakes sprinkled with lemon and sugar.

The rain eased and another foray was made down to the lagoon to gather samphire, *Sarcocornia quinqueflora*.

On the gatherers return, mussels and cockles were scrubbed by Jay and Gary whilst solving the worlds problems. The wallaby was marinated in oil and crushed pepper-berries. The acacia seeds roasted, ground and added to flour to make a damper.

Lou, Helen and Chris washed and carefully prepared the samphire pulling the tender green fleshy segments off the woody core. Then Chris chopped the samphire finely and grated parmesan, chopped almonds, garlic and oil were stirred through. The samphire pesto was then eaten on chunks of hot acacia seed damper.

The cockles and mussels were cooked in white wine and vinegar and eaten straight from the shell.

The wallaby was grilled over she-oak coals and eaten with more samphire pesto.

All of this was accompanied by wine and good conversation.

Thanks to Dee for her enthusiasm and commitment on the day and for this report.

Denison Crag

Six members made the ascent of this rocky peak which is adjacent to Stacks Bluff.

A modicum of effort was required to clamber over the vast dolerite block fields which girdle Ben Lomond, and the reward was a superb panorama from amongst a garden of alpine flowers.

From the summit we looked across the tree-less plateau to Legges Tor and Mt. Barrow to the north, the Hazards to the southeast, and Mt. Wellington to the south.

Flowers seen included Richea scoparia [Scoparia], Richea sprengeioides [Candle Heath], Epacris serpyllifolia [Alpine Heath], Ewartia catipes [Diamond Ewartia], Senecio pectinatus [Alpine Groundsel], Taraxacum aristum [Native Dandelion], Brachyscome spathulata [Spathulate Daisy], Cyathodes glauca [Cheeseberry], Leptecophylla juniperina [Pink Mountain Berry], Bellendena Montana [Mountain Rocket], Euphrasia collina [Eyebright], Pimelia sericea [Alpine Rice Flower], Chiogentias diemensis [Gentian], Leptospermum rupestre [Alpine Tea tree], Baekea gunniana [Alpine Baekea], Orites acicularis [Yellow Bush], Pultenaea juniperina [Prickly Beauty], Stackhousia monogyna [Candles], Olearia phlogopappa [Variable Daisy Bush].

Prominent trees and shrubs amongst the dolerite talus were Eucalyptus delegatensis [White Top] and, higher up, E. archeri [Archers Gum] and Hakea lissosperma [Needle Bush]. Archers Gum is a Tasmanian endemic and is classified as a nationally rare species. It is the most elevated tree species on Ben Lomond. #

During the last of the Pleistocene glacial phases, which reached its peak about 20 000 years ago, there was a limited ice cover on the plateau and a few small cirque glaciers on the slopes. The permanent snowline on Ben Lomond at that time was at about 1200 metres. The ice is thought to have been much thicker during the Henty Glaciation [more than 140 000 years ago] and other earlier glacial phases.

Amongst the glacial relicts is Lake Valhalla [syn. Tranquil Tarn] - a moraine dammed lake that we passed en-route to Denison Crag.

A few roche moutonees are apparent on the plateau—these are residual hummocks of resistant rock with a characteristically streamlined form which is related to the direction of ice movement.

Borrowdale, which can be seen in the distance between Coalmine Crag and the Giblin Fels, is a U shaped valley.

After the ice melted, severe periglacial action continued on the plateau and slopes—frost action caused extensive shattering, solifluction, soil heaving and down-slope movement of weathered material. The dolerite sill was attacked by the expansion of ice in the jointing [water expands when it freezes] causing dilation and toppling of columns and blocks.

The dolerite escarpments of the Ben Lomond horst, with their massive cliffs, continue to retreat under the impact of these mass-wasting processes.

Eucalyptus archeri or the alpine cider gum, is a species associated with cold, relatively poorly drained, shallow, peaty soils of rocky outcrops at, or immediately below tier and plateau escarpments along the northern edge of the Central Plateau and mountains of the north-east. It occurs predominantly between 1000 and 1300 metres.

It has been treated by some authors as a sub-species of E. gunnii, but in the north-east the habitats of these two species are geographically separated. E. archeri is much more restricted in its distribution than E. gunnii. It occurs on Ben Lomond, Ben Nevis, Mount Barrow, Mt. Maurice and Mt. Saddleback.