



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: I would like to thank everyone for their contributions throughout the year, with a special thank you to Lou, Chris, Penny and Lloyd and all the excursion leaders.

Our best wishes to everyone for a Happy Christmas. Most of us are looking forward to seeing friends and family now the Covid 19 restrictions have been eased. I'm sure we are all eager for the New

Year to begin—2021 when old friendships can be enjoyed and new friends welcomed.

While you are enjoying the holidays and exploring your favourite areas of the state, keep in mind that we are looking for new ideas for outings, so let us know if you have suggestions. Perhaps these could form part of a future group excursion.

Members' photos of NE Tas Wildlife



Lichenomphalia chromacea (Yellow Navel) – Jay Wilson



Calyptorhynchus funereus (Black Cockatoo) – Lou Brooker



Anoglypta launcestonensis (Granulated Tasmanian Snail) – Susan McClenaghan

Program for Dec 2020-Early 2021

DECEMBER 12th: CAPE PORTLAND

Meet at Gladstone at 10 am.

Explore the northern coastal section of the wind farm, watch for migratory shore birds; follow-up from last year's visit. Dig Probert will once again be our guide.

There is a fairly prescriptive list of requirements this time:

1. Clothing - Please wear strong shoes with gaiters, or wear gumboots. **NO SHORTS!** This is for safety reasons; because it has been a wet year, the likelihood of seeing snakes is fairly high. And remember how windy it is there!
2. Since part of this outing is observing shore birds and waders – bring **BINOCULARS**.
3. Please bring some **PLASTIC BAGS** in which to collect rubbish from the beach.

The house we stayed in last year is available again. People will need their own bedding and food. **PLEASE LET LOU BROOKER KNOW IF YOU ARE STAYING THE NIGHT.** Mob. 0417 149 244.

The program for early next year is still under development. As we approach each outing the details will be disseminated by email.

Cancellation Process: *If there is unpredictable and severe weather, or for any other reason, including if the leader considers the conditions to be unsafe, it may occasionally be necessary to cancel with short notice. Here is the process for cancellation: an activity 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 1900 (i.e. 7.00 pm) on the previous day, or by 0700 (7.00 am) on the day of the outing at the latest. A notice will also be posted on the website netasfieldnats.com.au*

If you are unsure, contact Ann, Lou or the activity leader. Note that phone reception is not always available, so you may have to try alternative numbers.

Suggested Further Reading

Members may enjoy one or more of the following articles.

What's the oldest thing alive today:

<https://www.livescience.com/57941-what-is-the-oldest-living-thing.html>

Photos of the tallest trees on Earth:

<https://www.livescience.com/31676-giant-sequoias-redwoods-pictures.html>

Earth's most ancient organisms:

<https://www.livescience.com/44657-photos-earths-most-ancient-organisms.html>

SEPTEMBER 2020: EDDYSTONE POINT

Text by Chris Forbes-Ewan with Lou Brooker; photo by Penny Reeves

The September activity of the NE Field Naturalists Club was a trip to Eddystone Point, also known by its Aboriginal name *larapuna*, which is in Mount William National Park and marks the northernmost tip of the Bay of Fires region. *Larapuna* is the homeland of the Palawa (indigenous Tasmanian) people, and features the historic Eddystone Point Lighthouse.

Despite the almost constant drizzle, 24 hardy souls took part in the visit. The intention was to do lots of walking—looking for interesting native flora—in addition to visiting the lighthouse and the quarry that was used to provide the stone for the lighthouse.

However, because of the inclement weather only three short walks took place. These involved walking along a nearby beach, to the lighthouse, and to the quarry.

In addition, we were very pleased to hear about the history of the lighthouse from Lindsay and Margie Dawe, who are Friends of Eddystone Point (a Facebook site). We gathered in an old cottage to hear the talk.

The lighthouse is very impressive, consisting of huge blocks of locally-quarried pink granite, and rises 35 m above ground level (with an elevation of 42 m above sea level). Before it was constructed in the period 1887–1889, dozens of ships were wrecked on the treacherous coast near Eddystone Point (see the map on the next page).



Eddystone Point Lighthouse

Three stone cottages were also constructed using the same pink granite. During the period of construction 70 people lived on-site, and the facilities included a bakers shop and butchers shop.

The historic significance of the lighthouse was recognised in 2004 when it was placed on the Commonwealth Heritage List. In 2020 a very comprehensive Heritage Management Plan for the lighthouse was published by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

As implied by the alternative name *larapuna*, this area is also of great cultural significance to Northern Tasmanian Aboriginals.

Before occupation by Europeans in the early 19th century, meetings occurred at Irapuna between the Ben Lomond Tribe and Northern Midlands Tribe, who gathered there during the mutton bird and seal seasons.

The headland around Irapuna is made up of one midden which is now mostly covered in vegetation. In recognition of the significance of this area to Tasmanian Aboriginals, in 2006 the Tasmanian Government leased Irapuna to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc.

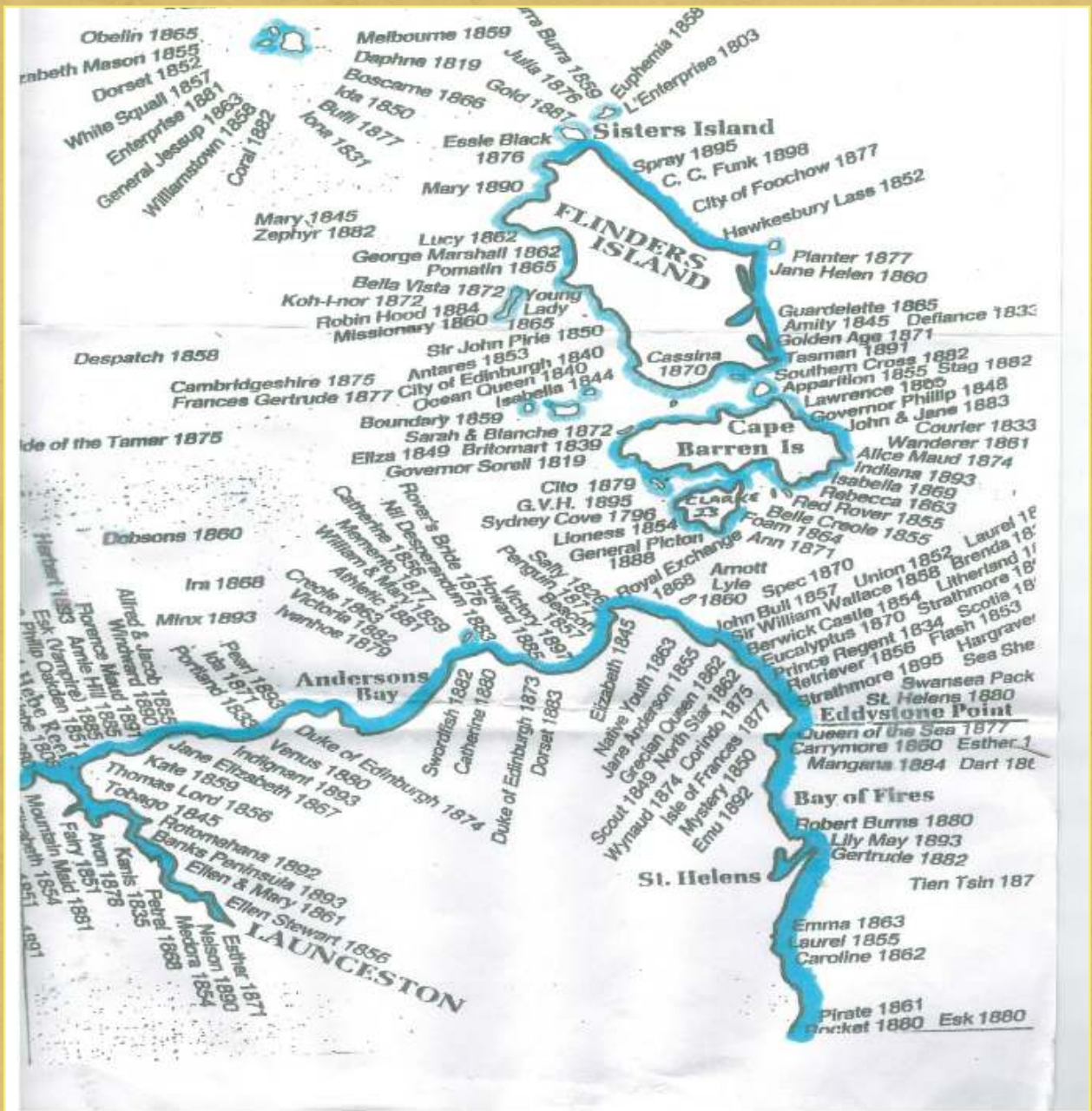
A Healthy Country Plan for Irapuna was published in 2015. The goals of this plan include:

Strengthening connections to country;

Making an annual trip to Irapuna using cultural resources;

Strengthening the cultural landscape—burial places, cultural resources, stories and ancestral connections; and

Removing rubbish on an annual basis, and conserving important species of flora.



Map showing the names, locations and dates that ships that sank off NE Tasmania in the 19th Century

OCTOBER 2020: WINIFRED CURTIS RESERVE

Text by Lou Brooker; photos by Lou Brooker, Penny Reeves and Lloyd Reeves

Due to inclement weather, the planned exploration of the Avenue and Scamander River catchments on the 10th October was postponed to November. As our October activity, a group of nineteen members visited the Winifred Curtis Reserve on the outskirts of Scamander.

This was the day after a major rain event and, as expected, rivers everywhere on the east coast were full to overflowing. Although it's nearby for some who visit it regularly, the Reserve is a place that always has something of interest for field naturalists.

The Reserve covers 80 hectares and consists of multiple habitats, including marshlands, heathlands, dunelands and wetlands bordering Henderson's Lagoon. It represents a remnant of coastal vegetation largely unchanged since European settlement in 1828. It also has many records of threatened species, including the Tasmanian Smokebush (*Conospermum hookeri*), Twiggy Guineaflower (*Hibbertia virgata*), the Lesser Guineaflower (*Hibbertia calycina*), which is only found around Scamander and St Helens, Juniper Wattle (*Acacia ulicifolia*) and Mauvetuft Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra malvina*).



Anne Witherden and Ian Cameron standing by the plaque commemorating their mother Mary Cameron – photo by Lou Brooker

The Reserve is named after Tasmania's most distinguished professional botanist, Dr Winifred Curtis, who is best known for her five volumes of *The Students Flora of Tasmania*, which describe the native flora of the state. Winifred died in 2005 aged 101 years.

In its early days, a number of female botanists were involved as Trustees of the Reserve. A memorial stone with a plaque commemorating the contribution of Aida Ball and Mary Cameron was laid in 2001. We took the opportunity to photograph Mary's son and daughter, Ian Cameron and Anne Witherden, who are active members of our Club, beside the plaque.

Local resident and NEFN Vice President Pam Bretz led a walk along tracks through dry sclerophyll bushland and heathland. Many of the species we observed were familiar to members. One of the threatened species, the Juniper Wattle (*Acacia ulicifolia*)—a small shrub with prickly leaves called phyllodes—is protected there and in the Wildflower Reserve at Bridport. The species name *ulicifolia* refers to the gorse-like foliage on this wattle.

Another plant of interest was the grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*), several of which were in flower (see photo on page 7). The flower stalks were full of small flowers attracting many insects to the sweet nectar. The grass tree is one of the first plants that is affected when the root rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, a soil-borne mould, starts to cause die-back.

There are only remnants now of a ferocious bushfire that roared through the Reserve in 2006. The ABC reported winds of up to 120 kph during this period. The *Xanthorrhoea* made an early recovery here after the fire.



Flower of Juniper Wattle (*Acacia ulcifolia*) - photo by Lou Brooker

Plants identified by members (list compiled by Lloyd Reeves)

Acacia mucronata (caterpillar wattle), *A. suaveolens* (sweet scented wattle), *A. genistifolia* (spreading wattle)
A. ulcifolia (gorseleaf acacia) – threatened species
Allocasuarina littoralis, black sheoak – with interesting virus-affected leaf clusters (see photo to the right)
Hibbertia – two species
Xanthosia pilosa (woolly xanthosia); *pilosa* is Latin for softly hairy
Persoonia juniperina (the prickly geebung)
Xanthorrhoea australis – in flower (see photo next page); other examples with crown rot; *Phytophthora* suspected
Tetradlea labillardierei (black-eyed Susan)
Philothea verrucosa (fairy waxflower)
Comesperma volubile (blue love creeper)
Leucopogon parviflorus (coastal beard heath)
Ampera xiphoclada (broom sage) leafless in mature form
Xipho – Greek (from Egyptian) means sword-shaped
Eucalyptus viminalis (white gum), *E. Amygdalina* (black peppermint)
Euryomyrtus ramosissima (the rosy baekea), prostrate, formerly *Baeckea* sp., small tea-tree like flowers
Glossodia major – wax-lip orchid or parson in the pulpit

Birds identified by members

Two juvenile dusky wood swallows (*Artamus cyanopterus*) perched on a branch together

Grey shrike thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*)

Black-faced cuckoo shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*)

chasing a honey eater

Fan-tailed cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*), plaintive descending trill

Pallid cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*), series of rising notes preceded by *pee-pee-pee*; brighter sound than fan-tailed cuckoo

Yellow-throated honey eater (*Lichenostomos flavicollis*)

metallic *tonk-tonk-tonk* repeated 3-4 times



Virus-affected *Allocasuarina littoralis* (black sheoak) – photo by Lloyd Reeves



Xanthorrhoea australis (grass tree) in flower – photo by Penny Reeves

NOVEMBER 2020: THE AVENUE RIVER AND SCAMANDER RIVER

Text and photos by Lou Brooker

Our November activity started with a 'stroll on the Avenue' (Avenue River, that is), led by Liese and Paul Fearman.

Our first glimpse of the Avenue River was a few kilometres from where it flowed into the Scamander River at the ford where it went under the road. Other than our guides, no-one appeared to have heard of this river until now.

We had followed the Scamander River upstream about five kilometres (by road), though the river itself at this juncture was about 12 km from the sea. We had been here with Liese in 2018, and heard the amazing stories of the many bridges that were built and collapsed for one reason or another since 1865. The Scamander River is muddy, wide in places, edged by fertile river flats, winding back and forth on itself, forming ox-bow lakes. It is a river that hardly ever enters the sea, being affected over the years by the deposition of tonnes of silt and sediment.



The great grey-green greasy Scamander River (with apologies to Rudyard Kipling for the plagiarism)

Where the road crosses the Avenue River we see a totally different kind of river—crystal clear, quietly flowing over a bed of flat, washed river stones—and a pavement of shingles on the banks, all dolerite!

The surrounding hills come down steeply to the river's edge and are thickly wooded. Here and there we see piles of rocks on the edge of the river indicating the entry of a creek joining the stream.



Strolling on the bank of the Avenue River

Now we are heading further up the Scamander River for a look at the granite country. As we drive I can hardly keep my eyes on the road, because through the trees I am glimpsing steep, V-shaped gullies covered with large trees, but with very little understorey. At the bottom of the gullies, some 300 metres below, winds the Scamander River. This is Ironbark country – *Eucalyptus sieberi*.



The List Map with the TASVEG overlay shows the extent of *E. sieberi* here. In Tasmania it grows only in the north-east, but it is also found on the mainland.

Here *E. sieberi* grows on both granite and on dolerite and reaches 40 metres in height.

In this area there is a distinct differentiation between the ironbark trees growing on granite [forest type DSG] and those growing on different soil type, i.e. not granite-based [forest type DSO]. The gullies and hills north of the Scamander River are covered with both forest types,

with little understorey in each case. Both DSG and DSO grow on dry sites. The line of differentiation between the two runs approximately north/south.

North of the Avenue River, and as far as the Scamander River where the hills and gullies are just as steep, the dominant flora is *E. obliqua* (Stringy Bark) with broad leaf shrubs [TASVEG - WOB]. It is a very tall forest with a wet sclerophyll understorey containing up to fifty species. There is a huge difference in the amount of vegetation between the two catchments!

When I observe this difference, I visualise what happens in one of those east coast downpours when 100 mm of rain can fall in 24 hours. One record shows 109 mm in two hours. I imagine the water running down the steep hills of the *E. sieberi* forest carrying rocks, gravel and forest debris straight into the river. I also think, by way of contrast, how the flow might be slowed by the uptake of water by the trees and understorey in the *E. obliqua* forest.



Thelmytra ixioides (Spotted Sun Orchid)

We drive the windy road around, into and on the ridges above the gullies whose names give cause for wonder—Cartroad Gully, Poison Gully, Horrible Hollow Gully, Queen of the Earth Creek—until we come to Brilliant Creek, whose bridge had been washed out. Luckily, the water was low enough, allowing us to cross and so begin our exploration on foot.

We cross where the substrate is dolerite, but not far down the creek there are huge granite boulders in the stream.

We begin our exploration, and straight away we see two plants of interest—*Goodia lotifolia* (Small goldentip) in full bloom, just a couple of examples near the creek—and *Micrantheum hexandrum* (River tridentbush), with its tiny yellow flowers; an erect shrub here rather than the softer examples we've seen elsewhere.

The appearance of a Mountain dragon, *Rankinia diemensis*, provides a photo opportunity. We linger over a wealth of orchids calling us to attention every hundred metres or so, including the eye-catching *Thelymitra ixioides* (Spotted Sun Orchid; see photo on previous page). That meant slow progress was made to the bridge.

After crossing the Scamander we turned left off the road into dry open sclerophyll forest dominated by eucalypts, including *E. amygdalina* (black peppermint) and *E. sieberi*. It seemed that the fire-damaged *Allocasuarinas* had died and not re-generated. Ground covers and shrubs—among them, *Lomatia tinctoria* (guitar plant), *Hibbertias* and Forest candles (*Stackhousia monogyna*)—had colonised here.

Lunch was eaten in a clearing above the Scamander river (it wasn't visible though), sitting on granite boulders and complaining about the mosquitos.



Crossing the Brilliant River

It was decided there was not enough time to climb up to Granite Knob, which had been the goal for the day. After getting back to the road, we took a small detour on the other side to scramble above the Scamander River and look down on the granite boulder river bed with deep pools and a 'cauldron'.

Thank you to Liese and Paul who had spent a day reconnoitring our route. They now have a more realistic idea of the pace of a typical Field Nats outing. We hope they will join us again sometime in the quest to see Granite Knob. Thanks also to the four people who helped me put this report together—Ann, Penny, Pam and Lloyd.

Afterword: The Avenue Forest Reserve covers 4300 ha, and is classified by the Government as future potential production forest.

Birds observed or heard (list compiled by Pam Bretz)

- Grey shrike thrush - *Colluricincla harmonica*
- Blackfaced cuckoo shrike - *Coracina novaehollandiae*
- Yellow-throated honeyeater - *Lichenostomus flavicollis*
- Spotted pardalote - *Pardalotus punctatus*
- Pallid cuckoo - *Cuculus pallidus*
- Shining bronze cuckoo - *Chrysococcyx lucidus*
- Bronzewing pigeon - *Phaps sp.*
- Grey fantail - *Rhipidura fuliginosa*

Orchids Observed (list compiled by Ann Scott)

- Pink sun orchid - *Thelymitra rubra*
- Spotted sun orchid - *Thelymitra ixioides*
- Leopard orchid - *Diuris pardina*
- Pink hyacinth orchid - *Dipodium roseum*
- Strap beard orchid - *Calochilus paludosus*

Orchids Observed (Continued)

- Pink fingers - *Caladenia carnea*
- Nodding greenhood - *Pterostylis nutans*

Other plants observed

- Common everlasting - *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*
- Swamp native primrose - *Goodenia humilis*
- Small goldentip - *Goodia lotifolia*
- Silver Wattle - *Acacia dealbata*
- Creamy candles - *Stackhousia monogyna*
- Eucalyptus species
- Silver banksia - *Banksia marginata*
- Climbing sundew - *Drosera macrantha*
- Spreading guinea flower - *Hibbertia procumbens*
- Guitar plant - *Lomatia tinctoria*
- River tridentbush - *Micrantheum hexandrum*
- Bushy bluebell - *Wahlenbergia multicaulis*