



# North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

## The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

Number 192: March, 2016

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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.

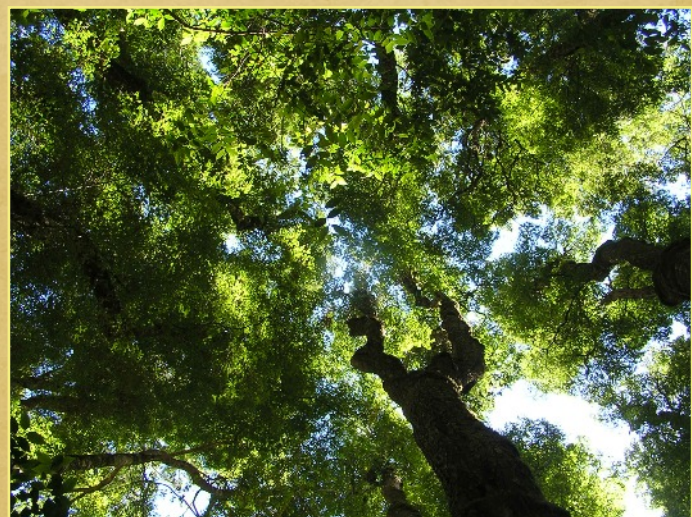
**From the President:** It has been a wonderful, long hot summer ... or a terribly dry, long hot summer, depending on your point of view. Is it a one-off, or a taste of summers to come? As citizen scientists, it would be worthwhile noting any anomalies or unusual behaviours. Are there things in our environment which are already beginning to react and perhaps adapt to a change in climate? Time and observation will tell, and we are in a prime position to notice any changes. Future issues of the newsletter will publish 'letters to the editor' on this or other relevant topics.

**From the Editor:** This issue contains articles and photos of our last two walks—along the Blue Derby Bike Trails in December with Revel Munro as our guide, and the Pearly Brook walk in February, led by Mike Douglas. These two stalwarts of our Club have a wealth of information about the history (both natural and human) of north-eastern Tasmania, and a great willingness to share their vast knowledge. Another stalwart, Lesley Nicklason, describes a lovely walking track in the Blue Tier. I hope you enjoy this issue of the North Eastern Naturalist.

**Photos of north-eastern Tasmania by Lesley Nicklason**



**Blue Tier Plateau**



***Nothofagus cunninghamii* (Myrtle beech)**

# Program for March–May 16

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

## **MARCH 11–14: FIELD NATS OF TASMANIA FEDERATION GET-TOGETHER**

This get-together happens to fall on the same weekend as our outing would be held, so we're putting it on our calendar and encouraging people to attend. It will be a weekend full of interesting outings, ideas and people. Venue: Gowrie Park. Further information, including the following, was provided in an email message sent by Lou Brooker to members on 13 Jan 16:

The Launceston Field Naturalists Club will be hosting the next Federation Weekend. This is being held early in the year (on the long weekend in March 2016 – Friday 11<sup>th</sup> to Monday 14<sup>th</sup>), to avoid clashing with ANN in spring. Given the time of year, the main theme of the weekend will be environmental interactions and drivers of diversity, but we will also delve a little more into the undergrowth, and into methodology of investigation and classification of what we find.

We will have the Gowrie Park Wilderness Village as accommodation and base, from which we can access excursions to a wide range of climatic zones containing a variety of geological features. These include open sclerophyll, rainforest, and alpine. The preliminary program includes one day comparing diverse habitats in the Mole Creek area, and one day visiting Devil's Gullet and the associated alpine flora, with stops to compare the flora and associated micro fauna as we climb.

For more information see the email message of 13 Jan 16, or phone Noel (6344 2277 or 0458 030 767)

## **APRIL 9<sup>TH</sup>: MERTHYR PARK, LILYDALE**

We will be exploring this charming little reserve and other places nearby. Walks are of moderate difficulty and no more than 2–3 km on marked tracks. Meet at 10 am at the junction of Second River Road and Lilydale Road, 1 km north of Lilydale. More info closer to the date.

Leaders: Lou (phone 0417 149 244) and Sue (0448 435 012)

## **MAY 14<sup>TH</sup>: SPRINGFIELD HATCHERY**

This day will include an extensive tour of the Springfield Hatchery, a visit to Scottsdale's water intake and a look at the Headquarters Dam. Meet at 10 am at the Hatchery, Headquarters Road, South Springfield.

Contact person: Lou Brooker, phone 6356 0381 or 0417 149 244

### **Cancellation of Field Nats Outings**

*In case 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.*



## DECEMBER 2015: BLUE DERBY MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

Article by Revel Munro; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan, Ray Van Engen and Claudia Bohme

As our final activity for 2015, Revel Munro led an excursion of 25 members and guests to Derby to experience just a small portion of the fantastic trails created as the Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trails.

This previously inaccessible Lower Cascade Valley contains possibly the richest legacy of mineral exploitation in North East Tasmania. This is a significant statement, especially considering the workings associated with the mine cliff that forms the backdrop to the town of Derby, together with its accompanying 11-ha hidden mine hole lake and the radiating basalt overburden heaps that are readily seen when entering the town from the east.

Few people appreciate the enormity and range of engineering solutions, the vast wealth from the tin extracted, and the huge waste and inefficiencies linked to the mine workings in the Lower Cascade Valley. These are now obscured by regrowth and weeds, including thousands of 'foxgloves' (genus *Digitalis*, a declared weed).

With just a handful of residents in Derby who can now remember the last stages of the tin mining era, interest in these undertakings seems minimal. Unfortunately, no 'Derbyites' were among the group on this occasion.

### THE WALK:

The Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trails are enjoying great patronage from mountain bike riders, with the weekend being by far the busiest time. Consequently, there was some concern that having such a large group walking on the trails on a Saturday might be dangerous.

Measures such as confining the trip to slow 'uphill' sections and having front and rear scouts with shrill whistles ensured that all walkers were off the tracks when the dozen or so riders needed to pass. All went well, with the riders seeming to relish a fleeting audience.



*Digitalis* ('foxglove') – an attractive but noxious weed

We walked upstream [about 1.5 km] i.e. predominantly on the Rusty Crusty / Axehead Trails [for those who know the names of the complex web of new trails] to the 'Tasty Trout Falls'. Lunch was enjoyed on the granite slopes above the falls and then we meandered back down, adjacent to the Sawtooth Trail, sticking to the Pipeline Road.



**Lunch above Tasty Trout Falls – photo by Ray Van Engen**

With several detours we were able to interpret / visit the following aspects of the legacy of mining during a 4-km walk. Briefly, these are:

- The 'lay of the land' and inefficient rivalry of the three big miners pre-1905—The Brothers Home [Kruskas]; the Briseis Co; and the Brothers Home No1. These three companies had very different methods of mining. The first was so profitable that extraction became somewhat 'lazy' as the years elapsed; the second made very good profits from super-rich ground and resourcefulness, despite using costly and inefficient methods; while the third devoted years to inefficient development work with minimal profit.



**Mining relics beside a Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trail**

- Pre-mining land surfaces, including the complete removal of a basalt capped 'sugarloaf', sometimes known as Briseis Hill, where the Cascade River now flows. The location of this missing hill is hard to comprehend in the current landscape.
- The settlement [a Derby 'suburb'] that once occupied the valley—now completely gone except for the 'Batch' (single mens quarters)—with all its cleared land, roads and telegraph lines. The whole land surface has been lowered at least 25 metres!
- The three flumes—one from each of the three big players—that once conveyed the millions of tonnes of mine waste into the Ringarooma River, the gazetted sludge channel.



**'Tourist' Derby Tunnel – photo by Claudia Bohme**

- The 'tourist' Derby Tunnel, the sole remaining part of the Briseis Co. underground network of tunnels and shafts.
- Virtually unknown 'tramway fed' basalt overburden repositories, i.e. many thousands of tonnes of stacked rock on the flanks of the open cut workings, now hidden by regrowth of vegetation.
- The site of the opening in April 1902 of the Ringarooma Race, with its huge gala gathering. Many photos of this event exist, but few people now know where in Derby the ceremony took place.
- The drastic modification of this landscape caused by the 1929 dam failure, e.g. the creation of Tasty Trout Falls with the relocation of the Cascade River.
- Artefacts—generally steel machinery—from the 1950s, when Ewart Tucker returned to mine remnant upper parts of this valley.

For most participants, inspection of just a tiny fraction of the new trails was reason enough to participate in the walk.

Having researched the Derby mining history for many years, Revel can still see avenues [albeit often obscure ones] for further enquiry.

And though full of praise for the mountain bike trails—which he likes to ride—Revel is disappointed about the plethora of dubious or incorrect interpretations of the mining history on the signage at the entrance to the bike trails. This commentary distorts history.

There is also scope for much more interpretation of the many points of mining interest encountered along the trails. However, in light of the waning importance of the *Trail of the Tin Dragon* touring route concept, and the nature of mountain bike riding, this is unlikely to happen.

Finally, it is worth repeating that the trails are designed for fast downhill riding, not as places for ambling and quiet contemplation.



Reflections on a still day – photo by Ray Van Engen



A tranquil stream at Blue Derby Mountain Bike Trails



**FEBRUARY 2016: WILLIAMS HILL AND PEARLY BROOK**  
Article by Mike Douglas, photos by Mike Douglas (MD) and Jay Wilson (JW)

Mike Douglas led a group of 13 people on the walk to Williams Hill Stringy Gum Track, which winds through part of the Mt Horror State Forest.

This delightful area contains magical places, where walkers are inclined to pause and declare they could just sit and contemplate the scene all day.

Our path began in a dry-to-mildly-damp sclerophyll forest of stringybark, black peppermint and white gum, part of which is a grey goshawk reserve.

Regeneration in gaps created by trees toppled by natural causes, or by logging and regeneration following occasional fires, has resulted in a multi-aged forest with a spectrum of trees from saplings to old stags.

The local birds, usually only heard but sometimes momentarily glimpsed, flitted about overhead.



A section of multi-aged forest – from saplings to old stags (JW)

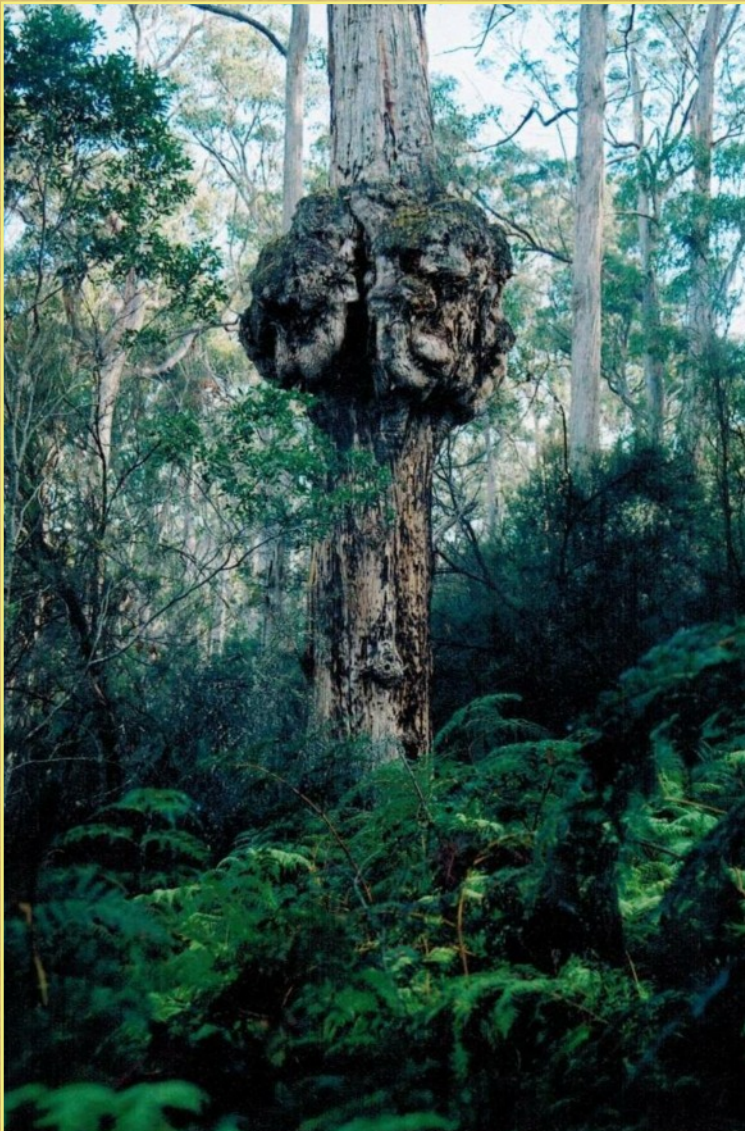
Old growth swampgum forest – *Eucalyptus ovata* (MD)

Birds observed (or at least heard) include the grey shrike-thrush, grey fantail, clinking currawong, butcher bird, yellow-throated honeyeater, black cockatoo, and possibly the Tasmanian thornbill and satin flycatcher.

The orchid spotters had a lean day, although 'parson's bands' (*Eriochilus cucullatus*) was noted, together with the hyacinth orchid, *Dipodium rosium*.

Williams Hill is a known site of Gunn's tree orchid, *Sarcophilus australis*, but it wasn't observed on this walk.

Eventually, we passed into a damper forest dominated by old stringybark, *Eucalyptus obliqua*, where there is an eagle reserve of about five hectares.



The 'Burl Tree' – an off-beat stringybark on Williams Hill (MD)

Here there is no gap regeneration due to the deep shade of blackwoods and a lower storey of prolific fern growth and shrubs such as currant-wood (*Monotoca glauca*), stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*) native pepperberry (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) and cheesewood (*Pittesporum bicolor*).

At a sheltered gully we reached our main objective—a grove of stringy gums, *Eucalyptus regnans*, with shaft-like trunks. The tallest of these trees, such as the 'Notch Tree' are about 70 metres.

This is an even-aged stand resulting from a severe fire that occurred around 1770 (the year Captain James Cook sailed up the east coast of Australia). Situated in and around the confluence of several small streams, it is unlikely to be logged.



Some stringy gums reach 70 metres in height in this area (JW)

In addition to the ubiquitous blackwoods and manferns, the understorey has rough treeferns (*Cyathea australis*, musk (*Olearia argophylla*, dogwood (*Pomadernis apetala*), pinkwood (*Beyeria viscosa*) sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*), cherry riceflower (*Pimelia drupacea*) and woody climber (*Clematis aristata*). The woody climber resembles a ship's hawser and can ascend 20 metres into the branches of surrounding trees. There are no young eucalypts in this area.

To achieve regeneration, *E. regans* requires a hot fire, after which the seed—retained in capsules on the crown branches—rains down onto a receptive, ashy seed bed. This bed has elevated levels of nitrogen and phosphorus which act as fertiliser and also suppress seed-harvesting ants.

A million or more intensely light-demanding *E. regnans* seedlings per hectare then begin a surge skywards to avoid the shade-generating under-storey species.



The Rough Tree Fern, *Cyathea australis* (MD)

In an exercise of natural selection writ large, there may be only two or three trees per hectare after 300–400 years, the usual lifespan of these eucalypts.

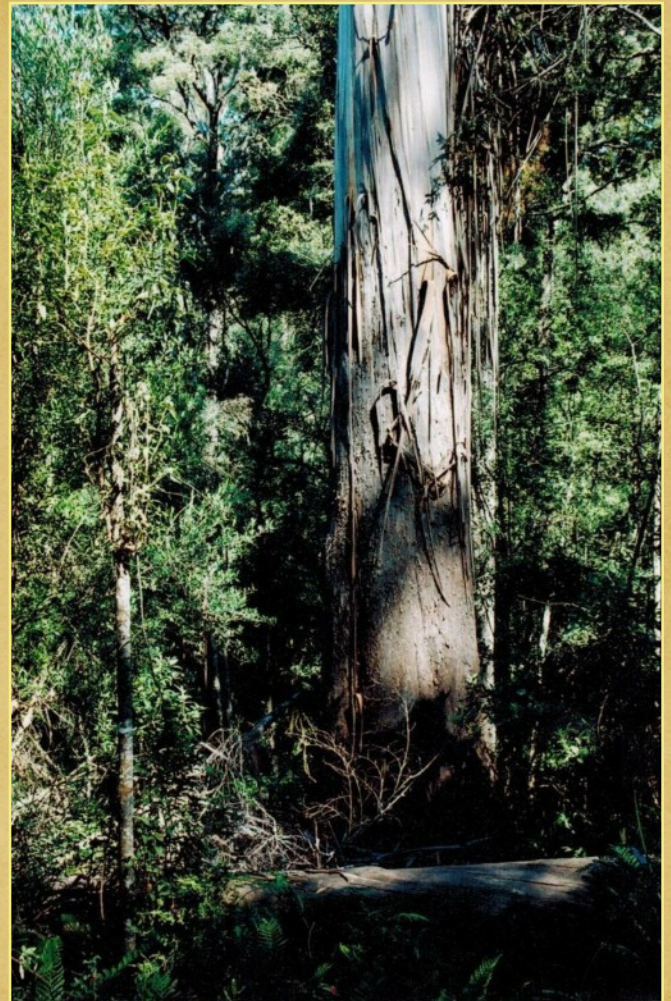
Without a fire before this deadline, the stringygums in this grove will disappear, leaving a tract of rainforest dominated by blackwood and sassafras.

Unlike most eucalypts, *E. regnans*—which is the world's tallest flowering plant—is easily killed by fire, but paradoxically, needs fire to survive.

The tallest specimen in Tasmania is the 101-metre 'Centurion Tree', discovered in 2008 near the Tahune Airwalk.

In Victoria, where it is known as the Mountain Ash, taller trees were recorded in the past. Currently, the tallest specimens in Victoria are around the 92-metre mark.

After lunch, which was eaten on the rocky bank of the Pearly Brook alongside masses of king fern (*Todea barbara*), we walked along a remnant of the Forester-to-Bridport Tramway. This took us to the confluence of Pearly Brook and the Forester River.



'Uncle Reg' – an avuncular *Eucalyptus regnans* (MD)

Steam engines hauled sawn timber for shipment to Melbourne on this 30-km, 76-cm gauge line in the period 1913–25.

A protected tract of old growth swampgum (*Eucalyptus ovata*), together with huge old blackwoods, is a feature of the damp flats fringing Pearly Brook in this area.

The final interesting observation of the day occurred here, when we heard (and caught a glimpse of) a grey goshawk rushing about in the tree tops.



## UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLUE TIER

by Lesley Nicklason, Friend of the Blue Tier

During a meeting I attended last year, the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) said a new agency is being set up in March to look at the issue of deteriorating rural roads across Tasmania (including in the Blue Tier), many of which were built and previously maintained by Forestry Tasmania.

One problem (among many others) is that vegetation is encroaching on Lottah Road. This badly needs to be slashed, but no-one is prepared to take responsibility for this.

The Break O'Day Council has an obligation as there are rate payers living on Lottah Road, but the Council claims it is a forestry road. Forestry Tasmania has left the area and has stated that it will never return to Lottah Road or Anchor Road. Finally, PWS says it has no money for this work.

We can only hope that the new agency will sort out this problem (but don't hold your breath until it does!)

## A WALK IN THE BLUE TIER – Don Mine / Boiler / Duco Adit Circuit

Text and Photos by Lesley Nicklason

The walk is approximately 4.5 km on a well-defined track with some minor obstacles. In places the track is narrow and care must be taken, but overall it is a fairly easy walk with interesting and beautiful features, including many relics from the mining era on the Blue Tier, some spectacular forests and several attractive water-courses. There are some short uphill sections.

There is much natural beauty and many lovely spots for picnics, but if you can resist the temptation to linger and soak in the wonderful atmosphere, completing the circuit should take only about 1.5 hours.

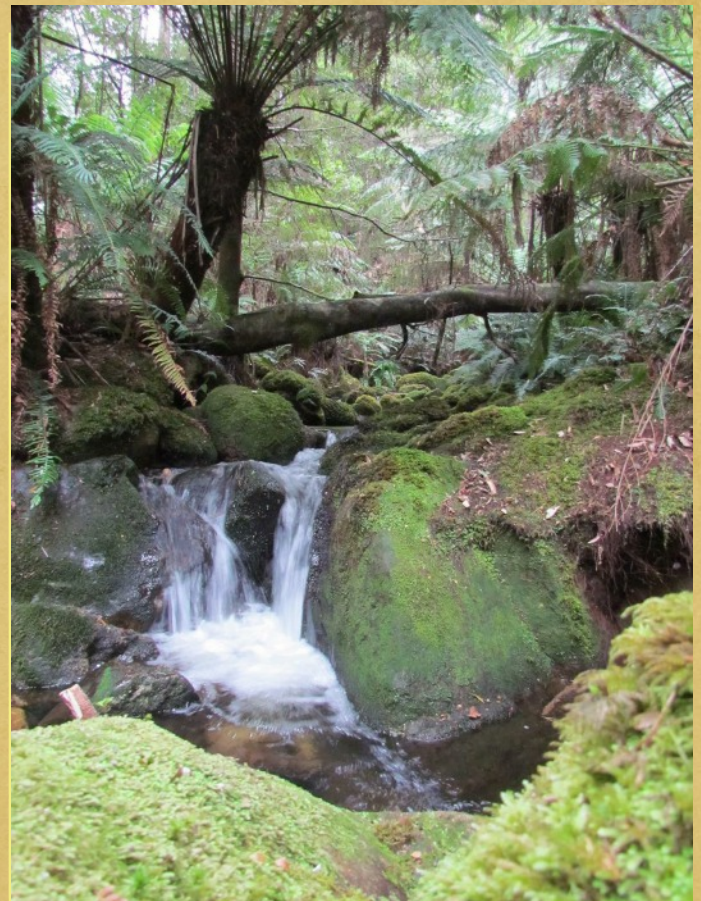
### How to get there:

Turn onto Lottah Road at the top of the Weldborough Pass and travel approximately 6 km to the start of the track, which is just past the Crystal Creek Bridge. There is a small car park on the left near the start of the track, with more parking near the bridge.

Drive carefully, as Lottah Road has some very overgrown sections as well as some short, rough areas.



Don Mine Duco Adit Circuit



Tin Dish Creek

## About the walk

The walking track passes through myrtle and sassafras forest with a ferny under-storey. It continues past the remains of an old mining camp-site before crossing Tin Dish Creek.

Shortly before the Don Mine there is an old 'food safe' dug into the rock; this safe kept the miners' food cool during hot weather.



**Food Safe – used to keep food cool in hot weather**

The Don Mine consists of many openings which were chipped into the rock face. It operated in the late 1800s, with the ore transported to the Australia

Company, west of Crystal Creek. It is a fantastic place to explore, but great care must be taken if you enter the mine.



**Crystal Creek**

More information about the mining of this area can be found in Garry Richardson's well-researched book *Tin Mountain*.

The track continues, passing more mining relics before climbing up to the Boiler, then descending and crossing Crystal Creek before climbing gradually to the Duco Adit, which is home to the ancient cave spider and also has glow worms.

From the Duco Adit it is a short climb to Lottah Road. Turn left and follow Lottah Road downhill for approximately 1.2 km to the car park.

