



# North-Eastern Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

## The North Eastern Naturalist

Newsletter of the NE Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club

Number 215: December 2021

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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 the year draws to a close, I would like to express my appreciation to all members for your contributions to the success of our activities during 2021.

While members' contributions vary according to their skills, knowledge and availability, it is our collective efforts and shared interests that make our club a success. Please take good care of yourselves over the festive season, and I look forward to seeing you all again in 2022.

**From the Secretary:** Some time ago we decided that it would be appropriate for members to wear name tags on club activities. However, until recently the system has been something of a shambles.

I would like to acknowledge the work done by Jill Van Den Bosch, who willingly took on the job of standardising printed name tags for all members. The new name tags look purposeful and neat. So, a big thank-you to Jill.



*Ganoderma australe* (bracket fungus) – Chris Forbes-Ewan

Members' photos of NE Tasmanian wildlife



*Xerochrysum subundulatum* (orange everlasting) – Ross Coad



*Lobelia gibbosa* (false orchid) – Claudia Bohme

# Program for Dec 21-Mar 22

## **DECEMBER 11<sup>th</sup>: Cape Portland**

Our end-of-year activity will be at Cape Portland and Petal Point, where the focus will be on the threatened species that have been recorded there. We may also have a chance to check out the shorebirds that we missed last year.

The outing will take the form of short walks and some driving.

We are lucky to have Claudia Bohme co-leading this outing, and she has advised that there are many snakes this year, so people should wear gaiters or gumboots. Also, remember to wear a hat, bring sunscreen and carry plenty of water.

We will finish the day with a Christmas barbeque, and those who would like to can stay the night in the Stone House, or camp in tents or in vans.

So, bring your own bedding, own food and drinks. There is room for ten on beds in the house and plenty of floor space if needed. Please indicate to Lou Brooker by email or phone if you intend staying—the Wind Farm Management need to know numbers.

We will meet at the Village Green at Petal Point at 10 am.

## **JANUARY 8<sup>th</sup>: Four Springs Lagoon - Dragonflies**

Follow-up to the presentation by Nigel Forteach at our 2021 AGM.

Details to be provided by email next year.

## **FEBRUARY 12<sup>th</sup>: Ben Lomond - Alpine Circuit**

Mike Douglas leader. Focus will be on alpine vegetation and geomorphology.

Details to be provided by email next year.

## **MARCH 12<sup>th</sup>: Birds of the Tamar River**

Details to be provided by email next year.

**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: a global email will be sent by 1900 (i.e. 7.00 pm) on the previous day, or by 0700 (7.00 am) at the latest on the day of the outing. A notice will also be posted on the website: [netasfieldnats.com.au](http://netasfieldnats.com.au)

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

Fungi may be crucial to storing carbon in soil as the Earth warms

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/fungi-carbon-storage-soil-earth-warm-climate>

Environmental damage caused by Tasmanian devils on Maria Island

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-22/tasmanian-devils-decimate-wildlife-on-maria-island/100234550>

Stunning colourised footage provides a glimpse of the last known Tasmanian tiger

<https://www.livescience.com/last-tasmanian-tiger-film-colored.html>

Protecting forests slows climate change more than mass-planting trees

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/planting-trees-protect-forests-climate-change>

# SEPTEMBER 2021: WALK ALONG A WATER RACE AT SOUTH MT CAMERON

Article by Mike Douglas; photos by Mike Douglas and Lou Brooker

Our September activity had a historical flavour with a walk on a long-abandoned, hand-dug water race in the Mt Cameron area near Gladstone. The walk, which involved 26 members and guests, was led by Mike Douglas.

In 1874 George Renison Bell discovered alluvial tin on a tributary of the Boobyalla River, and leases were quickly taken up in the nearby Mt Cameron area, where mining continued for the next hundred years.

Gladstone sprang up out of nowhere in the early 1880s. By 1886, 120 Europeans and 100 Chinese were engaged in mining in the area.

The problem of an irregular water supply for sluicing was solved with the construction of the accurately surveyed Mt Cameron Water Race that tapped the upper reaches of the Great Musselroe River. The main channel—53 kilometres in length—was dug in the 1880s to the east of the Ringarooma River before swinging north-westwards around Gladstone to Aberfoyle Hill.

By 1930 the Mt Cameron Water Race Board, a semi-government body, maintained 96 kilometres of channels—a considerable achievement.

Much of the walk traversed part of the 22-km Western Deviation, the longest side branch of the system, constructed during the period 1922–30.



Water was conveyed westwards from the main channel via a mile-long syphon across the Ringarooma River, then around the northern base of the Mt Cameron Range to the Echo Dam, which is now situated on the grazing property Boobyalla Park.

This part of the race, last used 87 years ago, provides an easy tree-lined ramble, winding around the contours on a gradually descending grade of 1 in 1100.

Stonework on the Western Deviation, which was constructed nearly 100 years ago  
— photo by Mike Douglas

The Western Deviation originally spanned Galloway Creek—the largest stream on these slopes—via a flume supported on a now-vanished, tall trestle bridge.

Just upstream, the walkers were agreeably surprised to see the little-known waterfall Deep Creek Falls, so-called from a previous name for Galloway Creek.

Some of the miners were obviously Irish, since another early name for this stream was Home Rule Creek—an allusion to a major issue in British Isles politics of the 1880s, with the unsuccessful bid for Irish home rule, led by the Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone.

The final part of the walk took in remnants of Ogilvie's Race, created by James Ogilvie and his son Charles in the late 1870s. This race carried water from Hardwicks Creek eastwards around the range.

Typical of the older races, it was established by miners who had no maps or sophisticated surveying equipment, and had a fall of about 1 in 600. These men must have possessed a good eye for the topography and an intuitive grasp of hydraulics.

James Ogilvie, described as a ploughman, and his wife Mary arrived in Launceston from Glasgow in 1857. Charles became a prominent mining identity at Gladstone. His son, also named James, was a member of the Mt Cameron Water Race Board from 1924 to 1926.



Activity leader Mike Douglas at the base of Deep Creek Falls  
– photo by Lou Brooker

The walk was too early for the main spring flush of wild flowers, but the following were seen in flower:

*Platylobium formosum* (handsome flat-pea);

*Acacia mucronata* var. *mucronata* (caterpillar wattle);

*Hibbertia hirticalyx* (bassian guinea flower);

*Spyridium parvifolium* (dusty miller);

*Leionema bilobum* (notched wax flower);

*Daviesia ulicifolia* (native gorse);

*Pomaderris elliptica* (yellow dogwood);

*Epacris impressa* (common heath);

*Glossodia major* (waxlip orchid); and

*Pterostylis pedunculata* (maroonhood).



On the Western Deviation water race – photo by Lou Brooker



*Platylobium formosum* (handsome flat-pea)  
– photo by Lou Brooker

## OCTOBER 2021: SCALING THE HEIGHTS OF GRANITE KNOB

Text by Chris Forbes-Ewan with Liese Fearman; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan (CFE) Ian Matthews (IM) and Ross Coad (RC)

Led by NE Field Nats members Pam Bretz (Vice President and a Scamander resident) and Liese and Paul Fearman (also from Scamander), a total of fourteen people took part in a relatively easy climb up Granite Knob, a hill that is about 20 km inland from Scamander, and topped with large outcroppings of granite.



Liese Fearman briefs the group on the natural history of Avenue River – CFE along Granite Knob Road.

A few kilometres along this road we came to a bridge over Avenue River, which has a mixture of dolerite and Mathinna Group stones in the channel, most of which have been smoothed as they travelled with the flow.

On the opposite bank were some impressive ironbark trees (*Eucalyptus seiberi*), which grow to about 35 metres in height.

Ironbarks are common in the south-east of the mainland, but occur only in a relatively small area of NE Tasmania—from St Helens to Fingal, and on the Freycinet peninsula. They thrive on steep slopes with the gravelly soils common in this region.

After taking a leisurely stroll along the stony bank beside Avenue River, and reliving our youth by skimming across the crystal-clear water some of the thousands of stones that were ideally shaped for this purpose, we continued driving until we reached Brilliant Creek. This is where we had to leave our cars (the bridge had been washed out).

This was our club's second visit to this area—the first one having taken place in November last year. We had intended to climb Granite Knob on that occasion, but ran out of time. This time, we made the climb our primary aim.

From Scamander we drove south along the Tasman Highway for a few kilometres before turning right (to the east) along Upper Scamander Road—which runs parallel to Scamander River—and then turned right



Making a precarious crossing of Brilliant Creek – CFE

Although some of us may have looked to be in severe danger of overbalancing, with appropriate levels of assistance we all successfully forded the creek without getting any more than our feet wet.

We then crossed a bridge over the Scamander River with debris strewn across the upstream side of the bridge. Liese explained that the rivers in this area are subject to 'flashy floods', whereby the local topography, combined with sudden heavy rain, causes large volumes of water to cascade down the river at high speed. The debris we observed is a clear sign that the water flow is strong enough to move large tree trunks rapidly downstream when the river floods.



**Debris beside the bridge over the Scamander River – CFE**

it, but some understory plants were reappearing.

We then continued on foot to the base of Granite Knob (about one kilometre from Brilliant Creek).

The walk up Granite Knob was about 700 m, with an increase in altitude of about 100 m (i.e. a slope of about 1 in 7). This was testing for those with 'dicky knees', but everyone completed the climb in good health and in good spirits.

A fire had been through the forest here, leaving the ironbark trees looking very black and sorry for themselves.

There is often little understory associated with ironbark, and the fire had further depleted

At the top we paused to have lunch, and to marvel at the large granite outcroppings.

The climb down Granite Knob somehow seemed much shorter than the uphill climb, and the short walk back to where the cars were parked passed quickly and uneventfully (including making another crossing of Brilliant Creek without mishap).



**Lunch was taken on the exposed granite boulders at the top of Granite Knob on a windy day – CFE**

Although we didn't see many orchids (which were plentiful during last year's walk), some interesting plants were observed, including:

- *Eucalyptus obliqua* (common name stringy bark)
- *E. Amygdalina* (black peppermint)
- *Banksia marginata* (silver banksia)
- *Micrantheum hexandrum* (river trident bush)
- *Goodia lotifolia* (small golden tip)
- *Epacris impressa* (common heath)
- *Goodenia humilis* (swamp native primrose)
- *Hibbertia procumbens* (spreading guinea flower)
- *Kennedia prostrata* (running postman) and
- *Comesperma volubile* (blue love creeper).



*Comesperma volubile* (Blue love creeper – IM)



*Epacris impressa* (common heath) – RC



*Kennedia prostrata* (running postman – RC)

While driving along Upper Scamander Road and Granite Knob Road we also saw many attractive *Prostanthera rotundifolia* (mint bush) in full flower.

Most of the walkers then adjourned to Pam Bretz's home in Scamander for a pleasant afternoon tea before heading home.

## NOVEMBER 2021: VISIT TO MT BARROW DISCOVERY TRAIL

Text by Chris Forbes-Ewan with Len Gillett; photos by Chris Forbes-Ewan (CFE), Ross Coad (RC), and Len & Alyson Gillett (L&A G)

Our November activity involved a drive/walk along the Mt Barrow Discovery Trail, which consists of a 28-km circuit that commences and finishes at the Nunamara shop.

Twenty members and guests attended the activity, which was led by Len Gillett. (Len had made three reconnaissance trips to ensure that the roads were open and that we would not be competing with log trucks for access to the often-narrow roads. Thanks to Len's conscientious approach, the day went off without a hitch.)

At 1406 m, Mt Barrow is one of the highest mountains in NE Tasmania, and has hundreds of hectares of native forest on its slopes and foothills. For well over a century, this area has been logged, with three sawmills operating in the early 1900s.

There are four main forest types:

- Dry sclerophyll, with *Eucalyptus deligatensis* (gum-top stringy bark being the common name in Tasmania), *E. amygdalina* (black peppermint) and *E. obliqua* (stringybark) predominating;
- Rainforest, which is dominated by myrtle (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) and rare ferns;
- Tea tree swamp (*Leptospermum* spp.), which occurs on flat, poorly drained sites; and
- Retention/regrowth forest (mixed eucalypt). This type of forest is rather open, with a more consistent quality of trees and a 'scrubby' understorey.

Our first stop was at Max's Lookout. Named after Scottsdale singer and former Forestry Tasmania worker Max Hodgetts, this lookout affords magnificent views over St Patricks River, Mt Arthur and beyond. Here we saw several attractive orchids, including *Caladenia alpina* (alpine caladenia, aka mountain hooded orchid), bird orchids (genus *Chiloglottis*), and Tasmanian waratahs (*Telopea truncata*) in full flower.



View from Max's Lookout – CFE



*Telopea truncata* (Tasmanian waratah) – RC



Our next stop was near Weaver's Creek Junction. A short walk took us to the remnants of the Tas Boardmills Sawmill Settlement, which was established in or around 1947. Here we saw many more waratahs and a wide variety of ferns, including *Asplenium flabellifolium* (necklace fern), *Polystichum proliferum* (mothershield fern) and *Lomaria nuda* (fishbone fern).



*Blechnum nudum* (fishbone fern) – CFE

was disappointing to see that it is starting to fall into a state of disrepair, helped by the occasional mindless vandalism.

Despite its poor state, the Discovery Centre contains a wealth of information on the natural and human history of the area. For example, we learned that Andy Padgett designed the interpretive trail to show the impact of a working forest. He also had signs erected (now mostly gone) describing harvesting methods over the past century or more—from hand-cutting trees and using horses to drag the logs out, to today's modern bulldozers, skidders, and powerful folding jinker haulage trucks.

Close by the Discovery Centre we saw many fascinating reminders that this forest was home to several families who endured harsh conditions for many decades to eke out a living on the slopes of Mt Barrow.

Then we drove along a road that was made by hand in the 1950s by Andy Padgett—a fourth-generation member of one of the original families who worked the area—with the assistance of four very talented and hard-working Ukrainian immigrants. To make this road they first cleared the trees by axe or cross-cut saw, then removed the stumps with gelignite.

The road has undergone little maintenance since it was built seven decades ago, and is now unsuitable for anything but four-wheel drive vehicles. This road took us to a turnoff which was just a short walk from the Discovery Centre.

On our way to the Discovery Centre we passed one of the friendly locals—a metre-long tiger snake, who showed little concern at our presence, but still demonstrated a reasonable degree of caution by slowly slithering into a nearby hole. Built in 2004 as a 'work for the dole' scheme (and National Winner, Best Work for the Dole Activity in that year), the Discovery Centre is an impressive building, and it



Mt Barrow Discovery Centre, completed in 2004 – CFE

These include an old hut that has been restored to something like the state it would have been in a century or so ago; stumps that still had ‘shoes’—notches carved into them so wooden planks could be placed in them for men to stand on while chopping (or sawing) the trees; old tramways (which were used to haul logs on carriages pulled by horse); and log landings.



**Exterior and interior of restored hut a short walk from the Mt Barrow Discovery Centre – CFE**

Because the methods used were so labour-intensive, the early policy was ‘take the best and leave the rest’. That is, only the trees most suitable for milling (usually those greater than 18 metres tall) were taken, so the forest was largely unaffected even after many years of selective logging.

In 1950 a fire destroyed the Mt Barrow sawmill and the site was abandoned soon afterwards.

However, logging continued on the slopes of Mt Barrow. But with trucks replacing horses, and chainsaws replacing axes and cross-cut saws, a new policy was adopted. Known as *retention harvesting*, the new policy was ‘take the rest and leave the best’, i.e. the opposite of the earlier policy of selectively harvesting the best trees. This new policy involved thinning out the poorer trees and leaving the best ones, thereby improving the overall quality of the forest.

We then stopped briefly at the attractive Weaver’s Creek waterfall, which is at an altitude of about 900 m, i.e. 500 m lower than the summit of Mt Barrow.



**Weavers Creek waterfall – CFE**



**Wooden, iron, and concrete structures that were part of the old Mt Barrow sawmill – L&G A**

As well as the large tree species (eucalypts, myrtles and so on), we saw dozens of native shrubs, with the following being among the most prominent:

- *Leptecophylla juniperina* (pink mountain berry), which was in full bloom
- *Olearia lirata* (forest daisybush)
- *Leptospermum lanigerum* (woolly tea tree)
- *Hakea lissosperma* (mountain needle bush)
- *Cyathodes glauca* (cheeseberry) and
- *Tasmannia lanceolata* (native pepperberry).



*Leptecophylla juniperina* (pink mountain berry)  
– L&G A



*Caladenia alpina* (alpine caladenia – L&A G

In addition, we saw (or in some cases only heard) many birds, including:

- *Pachycephala olivacea* (olive whistler)
- *Pardalotus striatus* (striated pardalote)
- *Phylidonyris pyrrhopterus* (crescent honeyeater)
- *Anthochaera paradoxa* (yellow wattle bird)
- *Cacatua galerita* (sulphur-crested cockatoo)
- *Platycercus caledonicus* (green rosella)
- *Colluricincla harmonica* (grey shrike thrush)
- *Lichenostomus flavicollis* (yellow-throated honeyeater).



*Hakea lissosperma* (mountain needle bush) – RC

An impressive crane fly (*Ishchnotoma eburnea*) was also observed.

A chance encounter with a member of the Nunamara Progress Association revealed that the organisation is embarking on a restoration project. We wished them well and hope their worthwhile project is well-supported.

This was a very interesting and educational outing, made even more enjoyable by the mild, sunny weather we experienced for the duration of the activity.



*Ishchnotoma eburnea* (crane fly) – RC