

# HFNC Planting of Silver Banksia at Yatchaw in October 2020

Rod Bird

## Background

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club has long been interested in the original trees of the basalt plains and the remnants of the once wide-spread Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) were noted at a few places on road and rail reserves and at the Old Reservoir in Hamilton. The historical background to the presence and abundance of this species, and *Allocasuarina verticillata* and *Bursaria spinosa*, can be found in a report by Rod Bird (May 2020) entitled '*Silver Banksia, Sweet Bursaria and Drooping Sheoak on the basalt plains and junctions with other land systems*' (see HFNC website).

The first planting of Silver Banksia (about 30 trees) on the disused Yatchaw Rail Reserve were made by Keith Cumming and Rod Bird in 1982, after raising seedlings from seed collected from remnant trees on that site. A later planting (30-40 plants) in Oct. 2005 was made by Liz Fenton, John Cayley and Rod Bird, all grown from seeds collected there.

In 1985 the club persuaded the then Dundas Shire Council to erect a *Roadside Preservation Area* sign at the site to signify its importance for conservation. The sign still stands but on 22 May 2020 a very large Silver Banksia 10 m away was found to have been recently removed by a power line crew. All that remained was the 35-cm solid stump cut at ground level and a small block of wood. The tree would not have touched the adjacent power line, had it fallen; taller pines 100 m further along the road – and closer to it – were not cut down. The removal of this grand old, healthy tree was an act of vandalism.

In Feb. 2018 there were 72 trees alive in 2 patches (11 in a group 0.6 km from Yatchaw Rd and 61 in a group starting 0.7 km further east) but only 10-20 were large or old 'original' trees. Several old trees further east that were alive in 1982 have disappeared (see photo). A few young trees can be found on the S<sup>th</sup> side of the road.

In 2016 a group of concerned environmentally aware landholders and others formed the *Friends of the Forgotten Woodlands*. Their aim was to re-establish on the volcanic plains viable populations of the 3 species mentioned above. On rough estimates, remnant sources were 1350 Banksia, 1000 Bursaria and 200 Sheoaks (the latter count probably does not include areas around Hamilton). This involved searching for remnant trees, growing seedlings, finding places to plant them and then planting. More than that, a record was kept of all the seedlots used and a genetics study was included. Bill Weatherly was foremost in driving this huge community project and it was well supported by GHCMA, Corangamite CMA, Arthur Rylah Institute and other organizations.

The AGM report for 2020 states that some 9,350 banksias have been planted on experimental sites (34 seed production areas), with another 10,250 on other sites.

In 2020, HFNC had produced a surplus of seedlings from collections of seed from Yatchaw and the Pierrepont Rail Reserve (the main purpose had been to grow seedlings for Kanawalla Rail Reserve). We decided to plant these – and others from FoFW – on the Yatchaw site. That was done, with the great assistance of FoFW, GHCMA and 2 local Landcare groups (Pierrepont and Gazette).

On 12 Oct., FoFW volunteers and a work team from GHCMA planted 720 trees along the 1.5 km reserve, with Yatchaw and Pierrepont seedlings at each end of where HFNC planted on 14 October. Most of the banksias planted elsewhere on the reserve came from seedlots from other areas on the volcanic plains. The aim of that was to add to the gene pool, preventing in-breeding depression. Still, we aimed to keep intact the local genotype by excluding other genotypes in their immediate area.

On 14 Oct. 2020 Rod Bird, Peter Hocking & Bill Weatherly planted 153 Silver Banksia in the area of main remnant (near the Dundas Sign). These comprised 90 seedlings from Yatchaw (30 from RB and 60 from Arborline) and 63 from Pierrepont (42 from RB and 21 from Arborline). All the trees came from seed collected by RB (each of the two collections comprised mixed seed from at least 10 trees).

This planting is on the boundary between 2 Landcare groups and we are hopeful that members will watch their progress. The removal of large *Pinus radiata* from the reserve remains to be done – and the area occupied by them will then also be planted. The Landcare groups are also keen to plant other local trees in the gaps. There are a few remnant Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*) present towards the western end.

**Planting area for Yatchaw and Pierrepont Silver Banksia in October 2020**



Yatchaw looking west along road



Yatchaw looking west near fence



Yatchaw looking east along fence



Yatchaw looking east along fence



**Old Yatchaw Rail Reserve Silver Banksias in Feb. 1982 – looking west along the rail reserve.**

Some, at least, have disappeared.

Where were they on that reserve?

