

HFNC Excursion to Casterton-Tullich-Wilkin Areas on 27 July 1968

Margaret Corrick

Participants: Ian MacCallum (leader, Casterton), Murray Gunn, John James & family, Corrick family & Mrs Tucker.

The party travelled by Penola Rd 14 miles west of Casterton and then turned roughly north, proceeding about 3 miles to the first stop near **Cemetery Swamp**. This is so named because of the grave nearby of Hugh McEachern, an early settler of the district who died in 1863 at the age of 82. His grave & headstone are surrounded by a limestone wall, which appears to have been intended as a family cemetery.

After walking to the nearby swamp we proceeded a further 2 or 3 miles by Land Rover to **Gillis Swamp**, which is half privately owned and half crown land.

Returning to Penola Rd we continued about one mile further west & stopped for lunch on the edge of an extensive peaty area. After lunch we travelled south through the forest reserve to the Mt Gambier Rd & then down to Wilkin School Rd to **Sawpit Swamp**. This is within the area of the proposed Wilkin National Park [proposed by Casterton FNC with support from HFNC].

All of the areas visited form part of the Follett & Strathdownie Land Systems, comprising low-lying parallel dunes, trending roughly SSE-NNW. The areas between the dunes contain swamps or treeless peaty flats.

Vegetation on the dunes is mainly *Eucalyptus baxteri* (Brown Stringybark) with understorey of heath, also some *E. viminalis* (Manna Gum) and bracken. The low-lying areas carry *E. camaldulensis* (Red Gum) & *E. ovata* (Swamp Gum). *Banksia marginata* occurs in its small form on the dunes & some fine patches of the large form were seen on the margin of the peat areas. There is also an intrusion of some mallee-type flora indicated by the presence of *Banksia ornata*, seen beside both the Penola & Mt Gambier Roads.

A full census of plants was not taken but an interesting variety of species was noted, including at least 12 orchids. Also noteworthy was the large area of *Gahnia trifida* around the peat flats where we had lunch. Near here there were also attractive areas of Red Gum, Manna Gum, Swamp Gum and *Banksia marginata*.

Between Gillis Swamp & Cemetery Swamp an Emu was disturbed from a nest containing 11 eggs. Two Black Swans were nesting on Sawpit Swamp. This swamp is deep & large enough to provide a refuge for waterfowl.

[Notes

- The original report was hand-written. Changes made here (in 2024) were to capitalise the first initials of common names of species and to italicise the botanic names.
- When the Land Conservation Council (LCC) established the **South-western Area District 1 study** in 1971, Casterton FNC & HFNC proposed that a large part of the Wilkin area be set aside as a National Park. That proposal was rejected in the 1973 LCC recommendations, with pine plantations being given priority. However, much of the proposed Wilkin reserve area was set aside then as ‘unoccupied Crown Land’ and in the **1983 LCC review** a 3,600 ha **Wilkin Flora & Fauna Reserve** was granted. Some areas (e.g. Drajurk State Forest) were reserved for a future determination].