

HFNC excursion & camp at Mt Thackeray, Victoria Range, Grampians 7-8 Nov 2009

Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird

Present: John & Glenys, Rod & Diane, Reto & Yvonne, Hilary Turner & George (with Albert & Lennard)

All except Hilary, George and his young sons left Hamilton as a group at 9 am and drove up the Henty Highway to Woohlpooer and then along the Glenelg River Rd to Strachans Huts. Along the way we stopped in the State Forest at Woohlpooer to see masses of wildflowers on the floor of the woodland: Blue Sun-orchids (*Thelymitra pauciflora*), Salmon Sun-orchids (*Thelymitra rubra*), Bulbine Lilies (*Bulbine bulbosa*), Chocolate Lilies (*Arthropodium* spp.) and Fox-tail Mulga Grass (*Neurachne alopecuroides*), with the White-throated Treecreeper calling from a River Red Gum (*E. camaldulensis*).

We made another stop near a picturesque Red Gum wetland in the Grampians National Park (gps 37-20-48/142-10-27). There were masses of Blue Pincushions (*Brunonia australis*) along the roadside and Beaglehole's trigger-plant (*Utricularia beagleholei*), Fairies Aprons (*Utricularia dichotoma*), Swamp Wallaby-grass (*Amphibromus nervosus*), Marsh-flower (*Villarsia umbricola*), Lobelia spp., Swamp Isotome (*Isotoma fluviatilis*), Yellow Stars (*Hypoxis glabella*), Button Everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpioides*) and other plants in/near the wetland. Gang Gang Cockatoos and Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos screeched overhead and an Echidna and Eastern Grey Kangaroos crossed the road nearby.

Further along were flowering Fringed-myrtle (*Calytrix tetragona*), Dwarf Wedge-pea (*Gompholobium ecostatum*), Tinsel Lily (*Calectasia cyanea*), Smooth Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia glaberrima*), Purple Flag Lilies (*Patersonia longiscapa* & *P. fragilis*), Heath Tea-tree (*Leptospermum myrsinoides*) and others.

We had morning tea at Strachans Huts, where Water Skinks were active and a Rufous Whistler called from the trees. John had banged his leg on a post and time was taken to bandage up a massive bruise.

We drove a little way north to find the Victoria Range Track. This took us through a forest of Grampians Grey Gum (*E. alaticaulis*), Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*), past groves of Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*). It was quite a distance along some very steep and rocky parts of the track to our campsite near Mt Thackeray. Along the way we stopped several times to admire the flowering Blue Howittia (*Howittia trilocularis*), Holly-leaved Grevillea (*Grevillea illicifolia*), Bush-peas (*Pultenea* and *Dillwynia* spp.), Victorian Smoke Bush (*Conospermum mitchellii*), Pink Bells (*Tetratea ciliatus*), Love Creeper (*Comesperma volubile*), Desert Baeckea (*Baeckea crassifolia*), Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*) and Beard Heaths (*Leucopogon* spp.). There were masses of Grampians Bauera (*Bauera sessiliflora*) on the sides of the Victoria Range Track as we neared Mt Thackeray.

Our camp was off a little track to the left in a grove of large, tall Stringybark trees (*E. baxteri* or *E. victoriana*). This source of timber had not been exploited by sawmillers, owing to its isolation and difficulty of access.

Hilary and Co. arrived at lunch time and some of us also walked through the bush directly opposite our camp to a lookout on the ridge where a good view was had of Mt William to the east and the Fortress and the plains to the SW. There was quite a lot of smoke from prescribed burns in other parts of the National Park. The afternoon was quite warm.

At night the north wind was strong and warm, vigorously stirring the tree tops but not getting to ground.

On Sunday we awoke at 5 am to the chorus of Blackbirds (unlikely as it seems) and a few of us walked down the road to the bend and then up to a ridge for a view west. The route was through heavy scrub but tolerable if one zigzagged to walk on the rocky platform sections.

After breakfast we all walked to Mt Thackeray; the start of this trail was the NW corner of the camp. We found masses of minty, sweet-smelling Grampians Boronia (*Boronia latipinna*), Swamp Honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca squamea*), Grampians Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia oreodoxa*), Golden Everlasting (*Bracteantha bracteata*) and many other plants (mostly listed above) in flower along the narrow but well-defined walking track. We passed alongside towering rock faces before following along the rocky ledges to the top. The lads (aged 3 and 5 years) did very well on this rugged path and steep rock climb to the top. A Nankeen Kestrel soared above us and some skinks were basking on the rocks.

Several species of orchids were seen along the way, including Common Bird-orchid (*Chiloglottis gunnii*), of which only 2 or 3 were flowering, and Grampians Caladenia (*Caladenia lyalli*), also in flower.

The Fortress, Victoria Valley (SE), the western tableland and Mt Arapiles to the NW were seen, despite the smoke haze. Billywing pines from Mt Thackeray were in view – this plantation is supposed to go by 2014.

After lunch at the camp we packed up and drove back along the Victoria Range Track.

Birds seen in the Mt Thackeray area:

- Crescent Honeyeater
- New Holland Honeyeater
- Buff-rumped Thornbill
- Brown Thornbill
- White-browed Scrubwren
- Grey Fantail
- Flame Robin
- Yellow-tail Black-cockatoo
- Gang-gang Cockatoo
- Eastern Spinebills
- Grey Shrike-thrush
- Crimson Rosella
- Grey Currawong
- Little Raven
- Nankeen Kestrel
- Wedge-tailed Eagle
- Common Blackbird

We drove out of the National Park via the Goat Track, stopping to view the Cave of Fishes at the top of that area. The Aborigine art work appeared much as it was when seen by Rod 30 years earlier. We tried to locate the Fertility Cave by walking along a path directly at the top of the Goat Track (before the descent) but that path did not lead to it. However we did see Bronze Caladenia (*Caladenia iridescens*) among the shrubs, but these flowers were almost yellow.

We looked at an area burned last year where the Hakeas were sprouting from the base but no orchids were flowering. Featherheads (*Ptilotus macrocephalus*) were in bloom but Bulbine Lilies were spent.

Our last stop was at the Billywing-Henty Highway junction where the air was full of birdsong:

- White-browed Woodswallows (scores)
- Masked Woodswallows (hundreds)
- Rufous Songlark
- White-winged Triller (male & female)
- Dusky Woodswallow (a few)
- Red Wattlebird

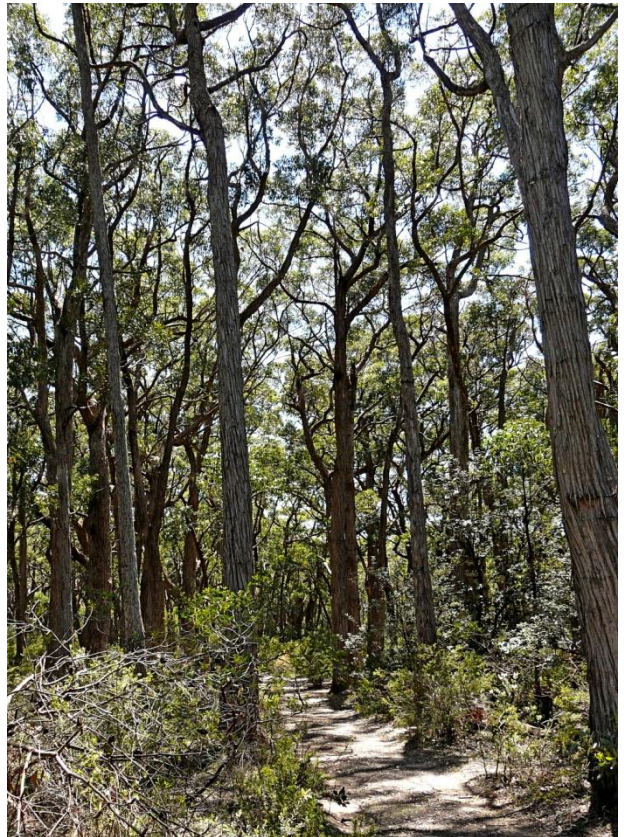
Here the Yellow Gums (*E. leucoxylon*) to the north and Yellow Box (*E. melliodora*) were flowering and there was a profuse display of late spring wildflowers. These included Bulbine Lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*), Blue Pincushions (*Brunonia australis*), Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia* spp.), Chocolate Lilies (*Arthropodium* spp.), Showy Podolepis (*Podolepis jaceoides*), Button Everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpioides*), Spider Orchids (*Caladenia* spp.), Sun-orchids (*Thelymitra* spp.), Onion Orchids (*Microtis* spp.) and Scented Leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum odoratum*) that had almost finished flowering.

We arrived back at Hamilton at 6 pm, having enjoyed a really marvellous weekend in the bush.



Photos on the Victoria Range Rd:

- Rough Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*)
- Desert Baeckea (*Baeckea crassifolia*)
- Holly-leaved Grevillea (*G. illicifolia*)
- Blue Howittia (*Howittia trilocularis*)
- Grampians Boronia (*Boronia latipinna*)
- Grampians Bauera (*Bauera sessiliflora*)
- Stringybark (*E. baxteri* or *victoriana*)
- Grampians Parrot-pea (*Dillwynia oreodoxa*)



More photos from Mt Thackeray area and later:

- Common Bird-orchid (*Chiloglottis gunnii*)
- Swamp Honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca squamea*)
- Billywing pines from Mt Thackeray
- The Fortress from near Mt Thackeray

- Mt William Range from Victoria Range
- Rock art (lizards?) at Cave of Fishes
- Skink on Mt Thackeray
- Bronze Caladenia (*Caladenia iridescens*)



Photos below are from Mt Thackeray and the last stop at the Glenisla Flat:

- Camp on Vic Range Rd, Mt Thackeray
- Our group on the hike to Mt Thackeray
- Grampians Caladenia (*Caladenia lyalli*)
- Descending from Mt Thackeray
- Scented Leek-orchid (*Prasophyllum odoratum*)
- White-browed Woodswallow

