

HFNC Mt Gambier & Mt Schank excursion 23 March 2013

Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird

This excursion was arranged and led by Ken and Janeen Grimes. Members (Ross Simpson, Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, John and Glenys Cayley) met at Hamilton VIC at 9 am to drive to Mt Gambier via Coleraine (where we picked up Hilary Turner)

We met Ken and Janeen in Mt Gambier to attend the Visitor Information Centre for a viewing of the new DVD showcasing the volcanic landscapes of western Victoria and South-eastern South Australia. This was a very informative DVD, using all the modern technology including aerial views of the volcanic landscape as well as close-up views of volcanic rocks and other features. The young presenter was very energetic in his exploration of the landscape and would hold the attention of the young.

Following the DVD we all enjoyed looking through the new touch-screen displays in the museum section showing the development of the farming around Mt Gambier and the development of Mt Gambier as a regional support centre for timber and agriculture.

The museum also featured the Kanawinka Geotrail literature and reproductions of Aborigine etchings in a simulated limestone cave. There are several such caves in the region.

A picnic lunch in the park nearby followed a short diversion into the Cave Garden sinkhole near the V.I.C. After lunch we visited the Blue Lake for a short walk up to the lookout. The volcanoes here evolved about 28,000 years ago. The water was turquoise-blue when the sun shone, apparently because fine crystals of CaCO_3 precipitate out and are held in the warmer upper layer of water at this time of the year (late Nov-March). The crystals scatter the light at the blue end of the spectrum, creating the impression of blue water. The rest of the year the waters appear steely grey because the water loses its temperature stratification.

Mt Schank was visible to the SE and we decided to visit that volcanic peak again (we had done so a few years ago). This scoria cone is about 6,000 years old (the youngest in Australia) and has a height of about 160 m above the limestone plain. We all walked to the crater rim and about a third way around to meet Ross and Diane who did the entire circuit. There are some jagged 'welded' lava ramparts on the narrow rim and some 'smoother', hard surfaces with little vegetation on the inner slopes. On the SE side is evidence of another crater, including a layer of solid basalt. Half of that crater was destroyed by the advent of the larger crater whose rim we stood upon. We noted some native grasses on the rim.

Even with the shower of rain on the downward walk, the countryside looked quite dry where no irrigation was in use. Crested Pigeons were notable in number today.

Following afternoon tea in the car park we departed for Hamilton. Some other vehicles were at the park, apparently camping.

Photos of the Blue Lake at Mt Gambier (looking SE to Mt Schank) and the inner slopes of Mt Schank (looking to the NE rampart) are shown below.

