HFNC Excursion to Baileys Rocks – 18 July 2015

Diane Luhrs, Rod Bird and Jane Hayes

Present: Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, John & Glenys Cayley, Jane Hayes, Karen & Christopher Simpson

Our group departed the Hamilton Visitor Centre shortly after 9 am. We travelled via Coleraine and Casterton, turned north onto the Naracoorte Rd continuing through DunRobin and Dergholm then turned east into Dergholm State Park and into the picnic ground of Baileys Rocks. It was a fine day, but very cool, 6˚C. On the drive from Casterton to Baileys Rock, Rod and Diane noticed many Willie Wagtails darting across the road. They estimated there must have been at least 30 in that short distance. Diane and Rod also counted the number of magpies seen between Casterton and Baileys Rocks on their return journey (see Appendix), following recent reports from Birdlife Australia of a decline of Australian Magpie populations in some areas.

Baileys Rocks are a coarse-grained granite (a monozite) with pink potassium-rich feldspar and green sodium and calcium-rich plagioclase feldspars. These granites are apparently unrelated to the major Lachlan Ford Belt of granites in Victoria and are about 500 million years old (late Cambrian/early Ordovician) and therefore among the oldest in Victoria.

Some background to this fascinating place may be of interest to readers. The area was under occupational licence (to 'Roseneath Station') when it was surveyed in 1875. A reserve of 379 ha was declared a Crown Reserve but that seems to have had little effect on subsequent usage. John Bailey leased 1,200 acres in 1888 and built a 4-roomed bush-timber hut with slab walls and galvanized iron roof near the present picnic area.

Bailey ran 150 sheep on the lease and found other income selling kangaroo skins, possum skins and wattle-bark stripped from Black Wattles. He was also employed as a blade-shearer and worker on the district roads.

Mrs Bailey stored eggs, butter, meat and other products in a large hollow under the rocks in the summer – a 'natural cool-room'. In those days picnics were held at the site and dances were held in the Bailey home.

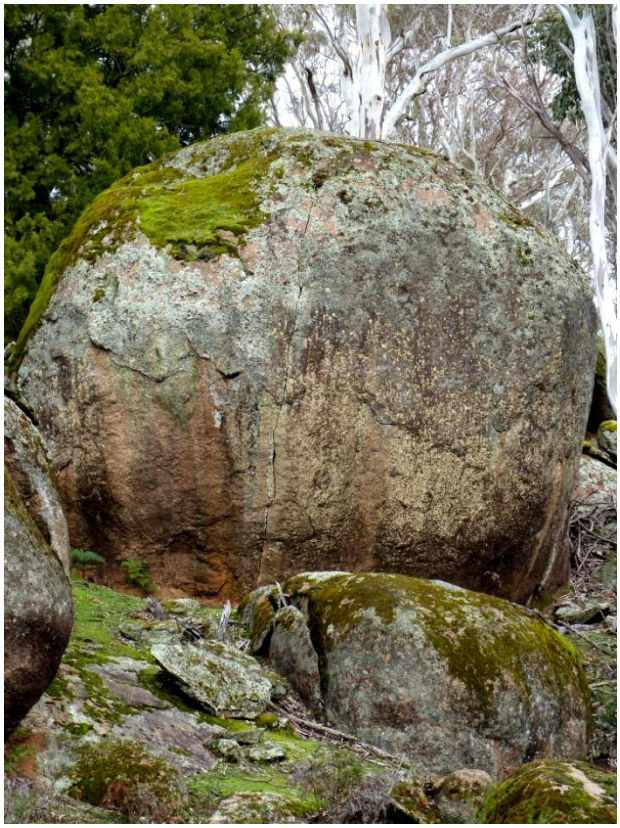
Bailey's neighbours were John Shaw ('Greenhill') to the NW and Hezekiah Howlett ('Rockdale') to the SE of the rocks. Alistair Roper occupied the Shaw property in the 1970's and his great-great grandfather was John Shaw; Jessie Shaw was the grandmother of the poet John Shaw Nielsen. Howlett took over Bailey's lease in 1907 when that family moved to Penola. The rocks were known as Howlett's Rocks until the 1970s.

In 1970 the rocks were pegged by a mining company for the purpose of extracting the granite rock. Apparently the Mines Department approved the process, despite its status and popular usage as a reserve. Alistair Roper heard the explosions from his farm and went to investigate. He found that the company had drilled holes in 13 or more rocks and were intent on blasting them all and carting the pebbles to Melbourne, where the material would be used for ornamental purposes. Some tors had been ruined but further demolition was stopped. The locals formed a committee to oppose the mining permit in Aug. 1970 but Casterton residents were inclined to support an industry that would bring business to them.

On 25 Nov. 1975 Lionel Elmore and Rod Bird from HFNC and Hilary Turner from Wannon Conservation Society met with Reg Johnson (Conservation Council of Victoria), Alistair Roper and Shire officials at Baileys Rocks. Apart from our concern about the rocks, HFNC opposed the application by Glenelg Shire to strip 55 ha of gravel in the reserve and had written to the Minister for Lands (W. Borthwick) on that issue.

The conflict at Baileys Rocks was not resolved until 1979, after the Land Conservation Council recommended in 1978 that the area be reserved for public purposes. We think HFNC had some part in preserving this area. Baileys Rocks was included in the 10,400 ha Dergholm State Park in 1989. The park comprises the Bogalara Block west of the Glenelg River and the Youpayang Block east of the Glenelg River.

We spent the first part of the day walking around the enormous granite rocks on Rocky Creek. We noted the various drill channels in the rocks where the rocks had been exploded. There was at least one other huge rock where a drill had been inserted 2 m into the centre but no charge had been laid. That rock is shown below. One photo (left) shows the rock on the south bank of Rocky Creek. The other photo shows the 30-mm diameter hole on the vertical crack at the centre of the rock, about 1 m from the base.



The photo below (left) shows one of the great tors that was split by a charge put in a hole drilled into the top of the dome. John, Rod, Glenys and Chris are standing among the slabs that were cast off by the blast. The other rock shown (right) displays natural weathering and erosion.

We walked along the 2.5 km track to the NE of the car park and enjoyed seeing the flowers of Slaty Helmet Orchid (*Corybas incurva*), the Veined Helmet Orchid (*C. dilatatus*), Trim Greenhood (*Pterostylis concinna*), Dwarf Greenhood (*P. nana*), and many orchid leaves, with the promise of flowers in a few weeks' time.

We were disappointed to see a number of African Weed Orchids. Diane and Jane removed those they found along the walking track, but expect they may now be established in the park.

A number of different species of fungi were also seen in the moist soil and on rotting timber. Those identified include: red-staining polypore, rooting shank, *Omphalina* sp., bracket fungus on fallen logs, orange bracket fungus, and a large white polypore high on one of the eucalypts.


Shown above are White Punk (*Laetiporus portentosis*), a Red-staining Stalked Polypore (*Amauroderma rude*) together with a Rooting Shank (*Exerula radicata*). Two gilled fungi (*Amanita* sp. ?) are shown below, one with an infestation of insect larvae).



To conclude the visit we drove off Sharams Rd, north along Red-tail Rd to the boundary (4 km). The landscape varies from sand to clay and trees from Stringybark to Yellow Gum; orchid leaves in thousands.

Jane recorded the birds identified on the day:

Long-billed Corella	Striated Thornbill	Red Wattlebird
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Buff-rumped Thornbill	New Holland Honeyeater
Eastern Rosella	Brown Thornbill	White-naped Honeyeater
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Spotted Pardalote	Australian Magpie
Laughing Kookaburra	Striated Pardalote	Grey Fantail
White-throated Treecreeper	White-eared Honeyeater	Forest Raven
Superb Fairy-wren	Fuscous Honeyeater	Scarlet Robin
Weebill	White-plumed Honeyeater	Silvereye

Appendix. Magpie count through the countryside in the late afternoon (3-5 pm).
Rod and Diane counted the number of Magpies and Willie Wagtails on the return journey to Casterton. Many magpies were seen but not one wagtail, compared with 30 or more in the morning (10-11 am). To investigate further, they counted magpies for 53 km from Casterton to Hamilton, mostly grazing country.

	Baileys Rocks-Casterton (53 km)	Casterton-Hamilton (53 km)
Magpies	246	202
Willie Wagtails	0	0

Magpies seemed more abundant on pasture that had a good stand of trees nearby but not in blue-gum plantation or State Forest areas. There were few on the open treeless paddocks. Magpies were seen as singles or in groups; in one area there were 20 magpies in a very close group. Overall, 4.2 magpies/km!