

# HFNC Excursion to Mt Napier State Park and Elmore's Cone and Lava Bridge, 24 June 2018

Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs

**Participants:** Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Sarah Patterson, Anne Simpson & Peter Hocking.

We left the Hamilton Visitor Centre at 9.30 am and proceeded to the Mt Napier State Park via Port Fairy Rd and Harmans Rd. We paused at the Harmans Valley Lookout to admire the view to Mt Napier beyond the valley. We were fortunate that the forecast rain held off during the day.

HFNC and others made submissions to the Planning Panel Hearing in March 2018 where the Southern Grampians Shire Council's presented a Planning Scheme Amendment C36 to adopt a Permanent Significant Planning Overlay to the Harmans Valley. The aim was to protect the volcanic features of the lava flow down this former river valley. Substantial damage was done in the early days when a stone crusher operated for over 50 years in the valley, producing material for road making, and since 2002 when volcanic rocks were cleared from a part of the flow east from the lookout. The volcanic features include caves, lava ridges, surface stone and tumuli in the flow west from the Pt Fairy Rd.



View of Harmans Valley lava flow & Mt Napier



An old Black Wattle

Three km along Harmans Rd we turned north onto Cole Track. We needed to clear the trail of several fallen branches and trunks before we reached the east-west stone wall. We parked our vehicles there and then walked east for about 1 km along the old trail adjacent to the stone wall.

We then walked south from the stone fence from a point near the only Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*) [gps AGD84 37-53-40.0/142-02-08.5] that occurs in this area, one of very few in the park.



East-West stone fence

The sole eucalypt is Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*), with Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*).

After a short search Sarah saw Elmore's Crater through the trees, about 250 m from the fence and almost directly south of the Black Wattle tree. The way to the cone was, in part, through tall bracken and rough stone. There was a short section of fairly low vegetation which was accentuated when we reached the base of the cone and began the walk up to the rim. Evidence of feral goats was everywhere and, no doubt, they were the main cause of the rather bare slope (apart from some low Bracken) and rim. (gps 37-53-49.0/142-02-07.6)



North face of Elmore's Cone





East and west rims of Elmore's Cone



Manna Gums in the crater of Elmore's Cone



View from Elmore's Cone to Mt Napier



Rampart on western rim



Lava canal and cave



Lava canal and Natural Bridge



Lava cave



Natural Bridge viewed from west



After walking around the crater rim (a distance of perhaps 200 m), and noting the lava rampart on the western edge, we descended on the NW side and looked for the lava canal, cave and natural bridge. It has been at least 15 years since our last visit and it took a while to reconcile memory with the actual geography! What might have been the cave, on the eastern end of the lava canal turned out to be a shallow declivity. However, some 150 m SW from the lower flank of the cone we found the lava cave [gps 37-53-50.6/142-02-01.9]. Peter ventured into it and noted that it extended about 7 m, with a height up to 2 m. The skull and bones of a feral goat were found inside.

Rod had used a 'harp trap' to survey bats at the entrance to this cave and at the Natural Bridge in Dec. 1980 and Nov. 1986, finding Chocolate Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus morio*), Lesser Long-eared Bat (*Nyctophilus geoffroyi*), Gould's Long-eared Bat (*N. gouldi*), Large Forest Bat (*Vespadelus darlingtoni*) and Little Forest Bat (*V. vulturnus*). The most common species caught were Chocolate Wattled, Lesser-long-eared and Little Forest Bats. Before about 1985 there were no goats in the park and bat droppings were prominent on the floor and ferns were present around the entrance. That has now changed.

Of interest now is the current population of macropods. Locals did not see Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*) in the 1960s (they had allegedly been exterminated in the area by 1933) but they are present now in considerable numbers. Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) was first seen here in 1987 and Red-necked Wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*) in 2011. We saw Black Wallabies and Grey Kangaroos on this excursion, but no Red-necked Wallaby (they were present during our fauna survey in 2015-16).

Leeches were not encountered when conducting surveys from 1974-1995. They appear to have arrived with the influx of these marsupials and feral goats. Three of us each 'caught' one on this excursion but detached them before they settled. No Koala were seen, although they were common in 2015-16.

The Natural Bridge [gps 37-53-50.1/142-02-01.2] over the lava canal was evident some 40 m west of the cave. A rather sickly old Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) was growing on the bridge.

We returned to the stone fence track and back to our vehicles, where we had our picnic lunch.

Following lunch we returned to Harmans Rd where Sarah left to return to Melbourne while we continued east to the Menzels Track around the base of Mt Napier. We parked at Menzels Pit and walked about three quarters of the way to the summit of Mt Napier. Had the sun been out and visibility good we would have gone to the top for the view. We met 2 groups of people coming up the trail as we walked down, late in the afternoon.



Lava ridge on the Mt Napier summit trail

We drove back to Hamilton via Menzels Track, Murroa Lane and Pt Fairy Rd.

**Birds** were not much in evidence: our list included only Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Forest Raven, White-eared Honeyeater, Superb Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Common Bronzewing, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-throated Treecreeper and Grey Currawong.

**Fungi** were much in evidence: those that were tentatively identified (with Dave Munro's help) are listed.

*Agaricus* sp. (A Mushroom)  
*Amanita* sp. 1 (An Amanita)  
*Amanita* sp. 2 (An Amanita) ?  
*Armarilla hinnulea* (An Armillaria) ?  
*Calocera* sp. (A Pretty Horn)  
*Clavulina cristata* (Crested Coral Fungus)  
*Coprinus* sp. ?  
*Cortinarius austroventa* (Green Skinhead)  
*Crepidotus* sp. 1 (A Crep) ?

*Crepidotus* sp. 2 (A Crep)  
*Crepidotus* sp. 3 (A Crep) ?  
*Entoloma* sp. 1 (An Entoloma)  
*Entoloma* sp. 2 (An Entoloma)  
*Entoloma* sp. 3 (An Entoloma) ?  
*Geastrum* sp. (an Earthstar)  
*Gymnopilus* sp. ?  
*Hypholoma aurantiaca* (Reddish Sulphur Gills)  
*Laetiporus portentosus* (White Punk)



*Mycena* sp. ?  
*Mycena* sp. ?  
*Omphalotus nidiformis*  
*Omphalina* sp. 2 (An *Omphalina*) #  
*Oudemansiella radicata* (Rooting Shank)  
*Phellodon* sp. (A *Phellodon*) ? #  
*Peziza* sp. (A *Peziza*)

*Phylloporus* sp.  
*Rhodcollybia* sp. 1 ?  
*Rhodcollybia* sp. 2 ?  
*Schleroderma* sp. 1 ?  
*Schleroderma* sp. 2 ?  
*Schizophyllum commune* (Split-gill)  
*Trametes versicolor* (Rainbow Fungus)



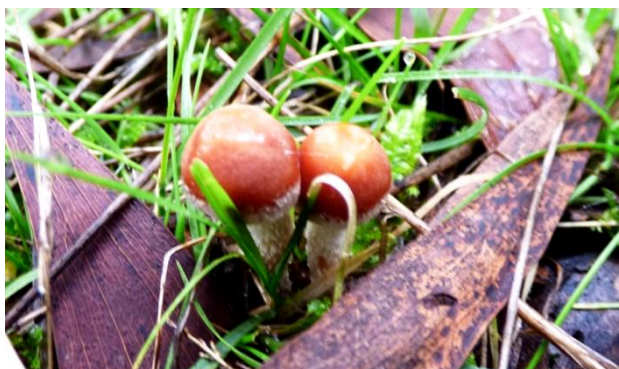
*Agaricus* sp.



*Amanita* sp. 1



*Armarilla hinnulea*



*Amanita* sp. 2



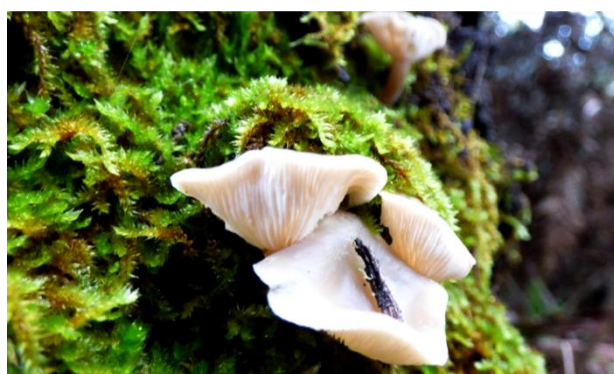
*Calocera* sp.



*Coprinus* sp.



*Crepidotus* sp. 1



*Crepidotus* sp. 2





*Clavulina cristata*



*Cortinarius austroventa*



*Entoloma* sp.



*Crepidotus* sp. 3



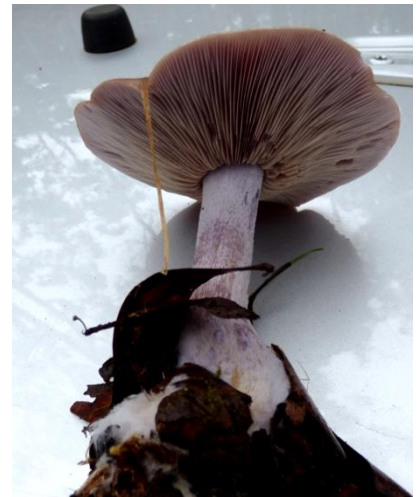
*Geastrum* sp.



*Entoloma* sp. 2



*Entoloma* sp. 3



*Hypholoma aurantiaca*



*Gymnopilus* sp.



*Mycena* sp. 2





*Hygrocybe* sp.



*Mycena* sp. 1



*Omphalotus nidiformis*



*Oudemansiella radicata*



*Rhodcollybia* sp.



*Phylloporus* sp.



*Rhodcollybia* sp.



*Peziza* sp.



*Trametes* sp.



*Trametes versicolor*