

HFNC Excursion to Budj Bim National Park– 21 June 2020

Rod Bird

Present: HFNC members who attended were Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme, Dave & Lyn Munro, Sarah Patterson, Daryl & Lyndal Delahoy, Peter Hocking, Janeen Samuel and Carol Pryle. Friends of HFNC, Fiona Robertson, Caroline Mill and Greg Hartigan also attended.

We left Hamilton at 9.30 am, arriving at Budj Bim at about 10 am. The weather was fine except for some patches of fog between Byaduk and Macarthur.

Mathew Flinders in 1802 first saw the ‘rounded hill’ from his ship. Major Mitchell in 1836 gave it the name Mt. Eeles, presumably after second lieutenant William Eeles from his 95th regiment in the Peninsular War. Rolf Bolderwood in 1844, from nearby ‘Squattleseamere’, knew it as Eeles and that name stuck until 1855, when Mt Eccles appeared in the Surveyor General’s map of Victoria. Someone in the office made a mistake. In March 2017 the mount was officially re-named Budj Bim, as part of the 10th Anniversary of the Gunditjmara Native Title Consent Determination. The Budj Bim World Heritage Determination, which includes Budj Bim National Park and Lake Condah, was celebrated in Sept. 2019.

National Park status was conferred in 1960 and HFNC members Lionel Elmore and others were active advocates then, a contribution by HFNC that has continued over the years, including development of the *Mt Eccles National Park and Mt Napier State Park Management Plan* in 1993. From the 1990s, geologist Ken Grimes and others surveyed the volcanic structures and produced information leaflets and maps of the features (see PV’s information panels or the Hamilton Field Naturalists website for Ken’s papers).

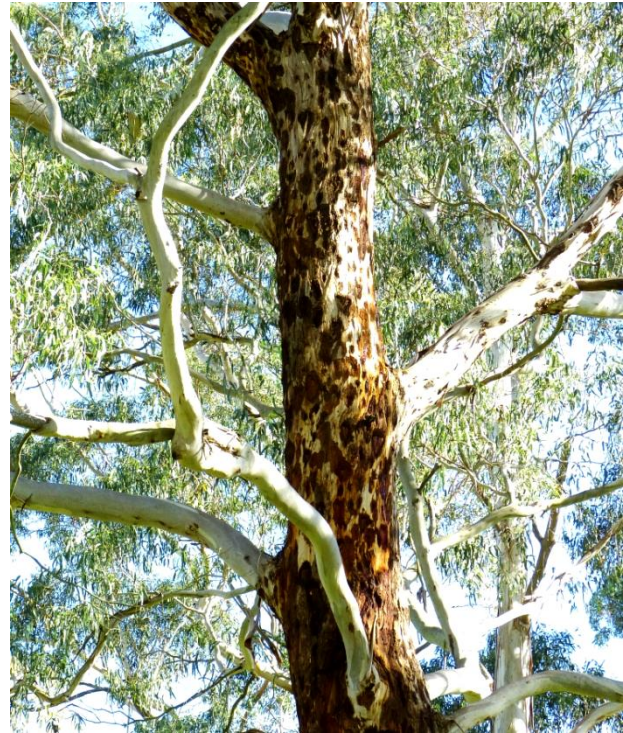
Our first stop was on the roadside beside the quarry at Budj Bim, about 400 m from the entrance to the park. A good view of the mount and the quarry face is had from that point, showing the patterns of lava deposits from many eruptions from around 40,000 years BP to perhaps 8,000 years. A huge amount of scoria was mined from this site – extending about 200 m from the top of the bank in the foreground to the top of the quarry – before operations were closed down in 1979. Dundas Shire President, Tony Wilson, resigned in protest over the secrecy that was associated with plans by his and other Shires to extend the quarry operations to cut further into the mount. Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) and Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) can be seen in this photo.



We parked at the Visitor Centre and before starting our walk. Whilst having a drink a pair of Tawny Frogmouths was seen high in a tree, basking in some early morning intervals of sun. Gouge marks on the trunk of an adjacent Mana Gum were noted too – these were the work of Yellow-bellied Gliders (*Petaurus australis*) that feed of the sap. This glider is at the western edge of its range in Victoria.



Tawny Frogmouths



Yellow-bellied Glider feed tree

We walked to the lookout on the brim of Lake Surprise. A Koala was seen sleeping in the fork of a tree. The effects of the fire of December 2019 were evident, it having burned into most of the western slope. We saw, too, that a huge Manna Gum near the lookout at the north end of the lake had been impacted and was later cut down. The fire had continued across the campground area.



Koala in a Manna Gum



Aftermath of summer 2020 fire

The access to the Tunnel Cave was barred, due to fire damage to the stairs, so we were unable to explore that interesting lava tube that is open for about 60 m (see Ken Grime’s description and maps of this cave).

The lower path around the edge of the lake was still closed and we chose to take the walk to the top of Budj Bim. On the way we stopped to view the lake and noted that the fire had revealed several overhangs or caves on the cliff that we had not previously observed. The water level in the lake was surprisingly low and a curious feature was the reddish colour of the water. This was probably due to algae but an alternative suggestion was that it may have arisen from fire retardant used to suppress the fire.

On the top were Eastern Grey Kangaroos and a Black Wallaby, all not unduly concerned by our arrival.



Western slope of Lake Surprise crater



Black Wallaby



Eastern Grey Kangaroos watching a mob of Field Naturalists arrive on top (PH photo)

The weather was fine but conditions were not clear enough to sight Lady Julia Percy Island.

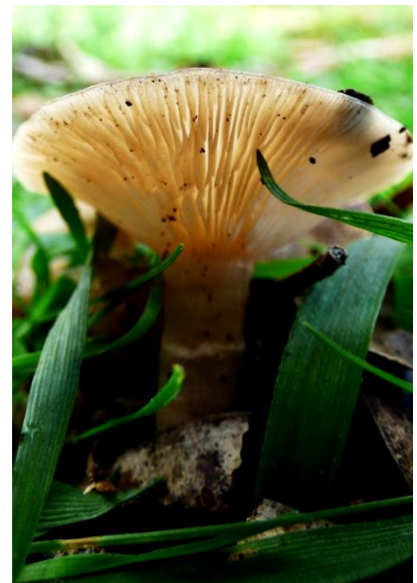
Very few plants were in flower, an exception being Drooping Mistletoe (*Amyema pendula*). This species was growing on Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) on the mount. Fungi were far more common and several photographed by DL are shown below, including Rooting Shank (*Oudemansiella gigaspora*), Trooping Crumble Caps (*Coprinus disseminatus*), Laccaria and Mushrooms (*Agaricus* sp.).



Drooping Mistletoe



Oudemansiella gigaspora (DL)



Cortinarius sp. ? (DL)



Coprinus disseminatus (DL)



Laccaria sp. (DL)



Agaricus sp. (DL)

After a picnic lunch at the parking area we drove 1.4 km along the Parks South Track to the Lava Canal and Natural Bridge parking area. A short walk along the lava canal leads to the place where the canal has a section roofed over by layers of lava that had sagged inwards to form a bridge (see Ken's diagrams).



Picnic lunch



Lava Canal (DL)

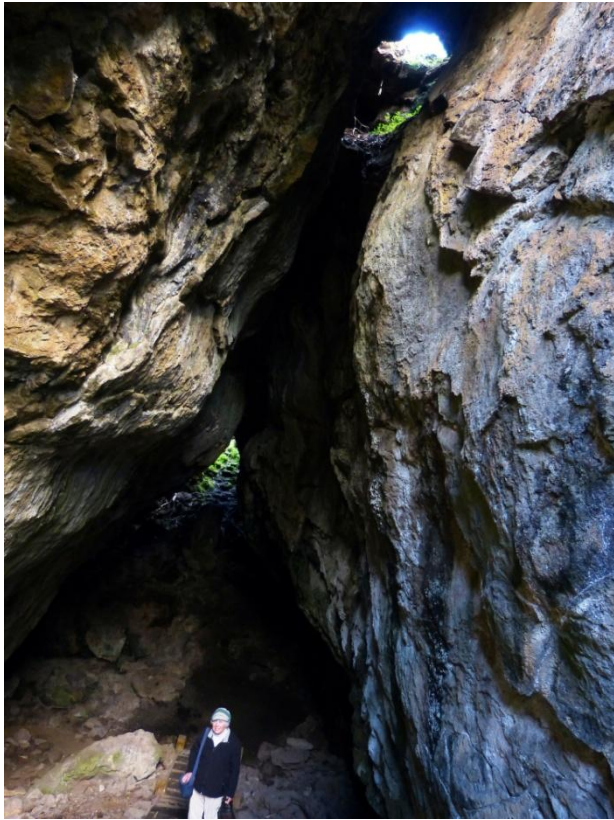
The fire had cleared away much of the vegetation from the canal and the large Blackwood at the 'cave' mouth has been cut down after, presumably, being affected by the fire in December 2019. We descended the steps to the floor of the cave and examined the geological features on the walls. These included striations caused by lava carrying jagged rocks that pressed against lava on the wall deposited by a previous flow. An 'artefiction' was also pointed to - i.e. a 'fictional artefact' that could, if one lets the imagination run wild, be seen as an artistic drawing of dancing figures.



Striations on the lava wall (DL)



The 'Artefict'



Interior and entrances of this 'Gothic Cave' (DL)

There is one opening in the roof of the Gothic Cave, seen in the photo left.

Those who had time elected to continue for 2.3 km further along the Park Sth Track to Long Paddock Tk and then 0.5 km left to the track to **Footes Cave**. We parked on the side of the Long Paddock Tk and walked the 400 m along the rough track to the cave.

The last 100 m pathway to the cave was rather indistinct and it seemed that no-one had visited this cave since the fire. However, the cave was easy to find and proved to be interesting. Peter was the first to enter and he flushed a Southern Boobook, which alighted on a nearby Manna Gum and gave everyone a view.



Entrance to Footes Cave (DL)



Southern Boobook (DL)

The cave has an entrance of about 12 m width and 2 m height. It extends some 20 m and the natural floor level at the rear is about 4 m below the outside level. The floor has areas of 'Aa-Aa' lava – rather sharp to the touch. There has been some collapse of layers of lava from the roof.

We had been looking out for leeches and those who remained above the entrance of this cave found them, but fortunately before they had attached. Elsewhere the fire had reduced the vegetation and no leeches were seen.

A Koala was seen slumbering in the fork of a Manna Gum near the cave.

Our excursion concluded at this place and the group returned to the entrance at Budj Bim National Park by retracing the 4.2 km route taken to get to Footes Cave.



Entrance to Footes Cave



Floor and back wall of Footes Cave



Rock fall and ceiling of Footes Cave



Looking out from the back of Footes Cave

Birds seen in the Budj Bim National Park

1. Southern Boobook
2. Tawny Frogmouth
3. Little Raven
4. Forest Raven
5. Australian Magpie
6. Pied Currawong
7. Laughing Kookaburra
8. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
9. Crimson Rosella
10. Red Wattlebird
11. Golden Whistler
12. White-throated Treecreeper
13. Grey Shrike-thrush
14. Spotted Pardalote
15. Superb Fairy-wren
16. Welcome Swallow
17. Whistling Kite
18. Australian Shelduck



Koala asleep in a comfortable fork (DL)