

## HFNC Excursion to Grampians Taipan Wall and Summerday Valley – 19 July 2020

Steve Martinich & Rod Bird

**Present:** HFNC members who attended were Ross Simpson (leader), Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme, Peter Hocking, Steve & Debra Martinich, Greg Hartigan, friends Steve McWhinney & Lyn Harvey from Beaufort, and Jennie Sparke, Virginia & Michael Kirwan from Hamilton.

**Background to our visit:** A major objective was to walk to Summerday Valley and to Taipan Wall, two of the most picturesque sites in the Grampians/Gariwerd National Park. Taipan Wall is also claimed by one rock climber on the internet to be an *astounding tidal wave of the best sandstone in the universe*. High praise indeed! The Mt. Stapylton-Hollow Mountain area of the Northern Grampians is considered to be the most popular climbing area in Victoria, after the Mt. Arapiles monolith further to the west.

We wanted to visit the area to understand the concern that Parks Victoria (PV) had in March 2019 when they closed some areas to prevent damage to the rocks, rock art and vegetation on or about the cliffs.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-29/grampians-national-park-bans-rock-climbers-over-rock-art-damage/11030190>.

For a current Parks Victoria perspective on rock climbing in the Grampians see <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects/rock-climbing-in-the-grampians-national-park>. The Victorian Climbing Club also has their view, see <https://vicclimb.org.au/news/>

Climbing in the Grampians is a contentious issue. The current dilemma is obvious in the 2011 publication '*Sublime Climbs*' (p. 13). The authors talk of the need for cliff hygiene and concern over trashing the environment. Contrast this to the rather casual comments (p. 261) about 'The Gallery' near the Buandik camping ground where the copious amounts of chalk have turned the rock face into a giant modern art exhibit. On our next excursion we may visit 'The Gallery' for an interpretation of this art exhibit. Sadly, the recent graffiti adorning the Buandik campground turnoff sign does not raise high expectations.

For more information on rock climbing in Victoria see *Sublime Climbs, A guide to the best rockclimbing venues in Victoria, Australia* by Kevin Lindorff *et al.* (Rockmaster Publications) 2011.

If you would like a say on any aspect on the Management of the Grampians National Park then look at <https://engage.vic.gov.au/grampians-management-plan> and consider making a contribution. The draft plan should be released for further public feedback in late 2020.

**The excursion:** We left Hamilton at 8.30 am, with the prospect of a rainy day ahead. That was true for Hamilton, however, we had a lovely day in the northern Grampians, with a moderate temperature, little wind, patches of sun to bring out the rock colours for the photographers, and just a little shower of rain as we returned in the late afternoon over Flat Rock from the Taipan Wall.

Ross took us to the Hollow Mountain car park from the northern side, onto the Mt Zero Rd., where there were great views of the mountain range.

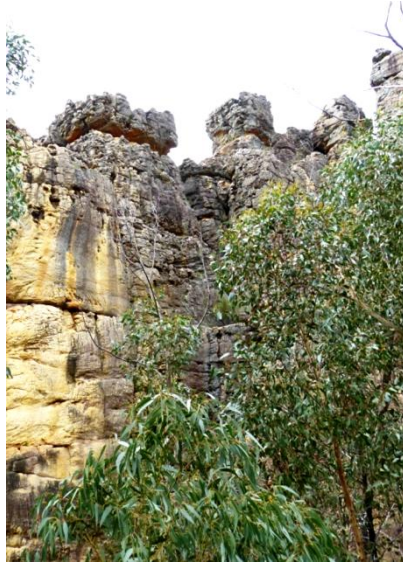


We gathered at the Hollow Mountain car park, meeting our visitors from Beaufort but none of the Friends of Grampians National Park attended on this occasion, possibly due to the forecast of bad weather and/or concerns over managing the Covid-19 issue. Our approach was to limit the group to less than 20 people, to maintain social distancing, and to refrain from sharing vehicles when travelling, or entering buildings.

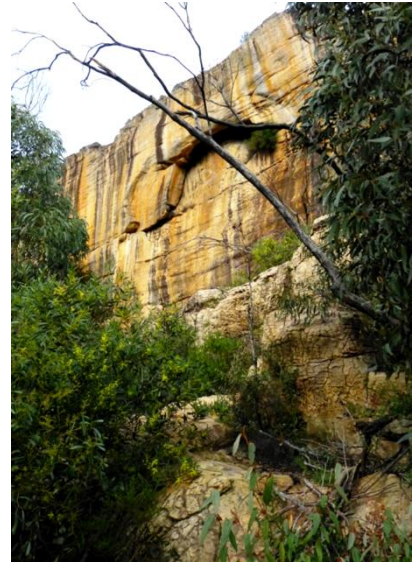
Ross took us first to **Summerday Valley** which attracts many commercial climbing operators. The valley is a short stroll along a well-trampled path from the large Hollow Mountain car and mini-bus park. Bright winter sunshine and emerging wildflowers welcomed our group.



Summerday Valley trail



Summerday Valley

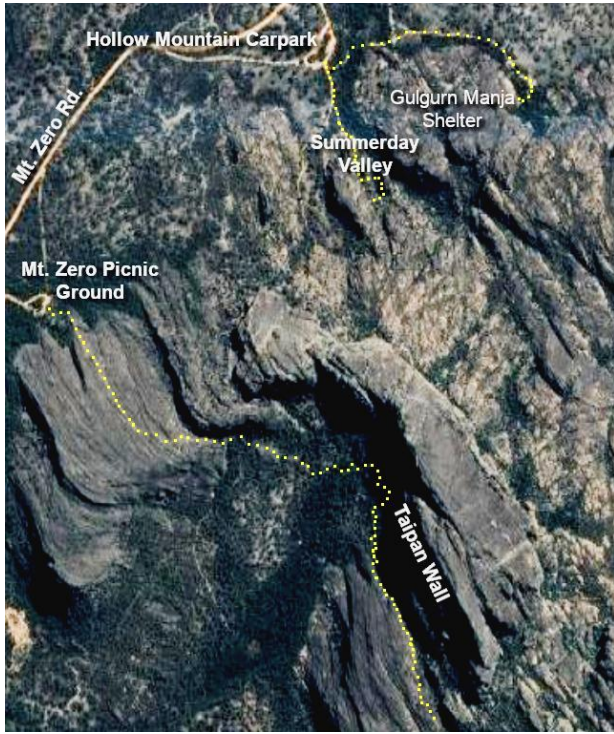


Summerday Valley Wall of Fools

A whimsical raised rock-arch ‘eyebrow’ is suggestive of a hidden eye gazing down upon us from the ‘Wall of Fools’. This cliff area with routes around the rock arch, like ‘Arch Enema’ and ‘Idiot Wind’, had been closed to rock climbers for some time. PV had subsequently diverted the track around the heath area in the approach area that had been trampled bare, but which is now recovering (as seen in the photo below).



Face of the Wall of Fools



Route map PH



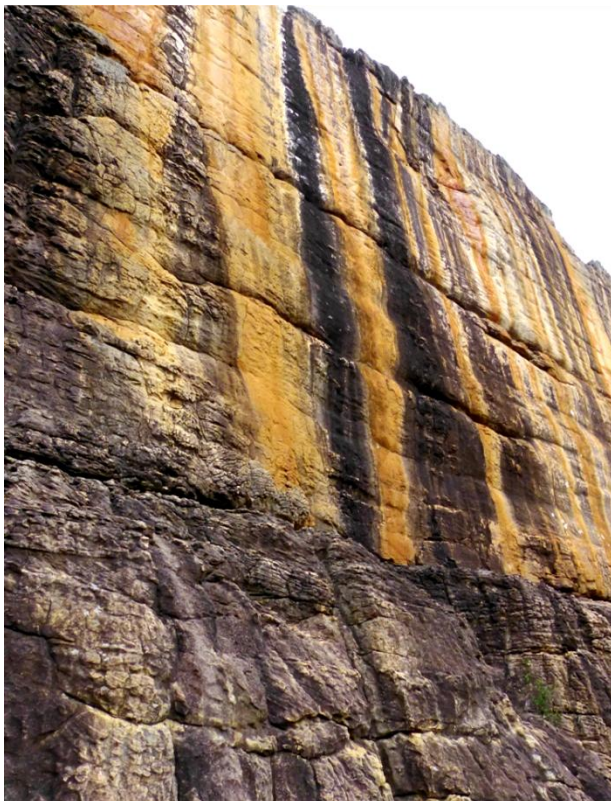
Approach to Summerday Valley cliffs



One of the bolts installed by climbers

We saw shiny metal bolt rings that climbers had installed at strategic points on the wall to belay a rope to give protection from a fall. That practice was commonplace but is damaging to the rock. Later, at Taipan Wall, we saw short trailing ropes hanging from the rings. A good climber might use chocks ('friends') that are inserted in cracks by the leader and removed by the last on the route. Modern-day climbers are most unlikely to attempt a climb that required them to drill into the rock to insert a permanent bolt.

Licenses for tour operators to take their rock-climbing clients into Summerday Valley has currently been extended until 30 June 2021, or until the Grampians Landscape Management Plan is finalised. Tour operators now work under a Voluntary Code of Conduct and must hold a Cultural Heritage Permit.



Part of the Wall of Fools



Another wall in Summerday Valley

On the walk back to the car park we diverted to the track to **Gulgurn Manja Shelter**. This trail takes one through heathland and there were displays of Grampians Thryptomene (*Thryptomene calycina*), Rosy Baeckea (*Baeckea ramosissima*), Cat's Claws (*Grevillea alpina*), Pine Heath (*Stenantha pinifolium*), Bundled Guinea-flower (*Hibbertia fasciculata* var. *prostrata*), Snow Myrtle (*Calytrix alpestris*), Desert Banksia (*Banksia ornata*) and the prized find of Large-leafed Ray-flower (*Cyphanthera anthocercidea*). Sallow Wattle (*Acacia longifolia*) and Juniper Wattle (*Acacia ulicifolia*) is found sparsely through the area.



Sallow Wattle



Juniper Wattle



Common Heath



Rosy Baeckea



Cat's Claws



Bundled Guinea-flower



Large-leaf Ray-flower



Grampians Thryptomene

The Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*) was flowering beautifully on the cliff ledges – the plants appeared to be var. *grandiflora*. Another heath species – Pine Heath (*Stenantha pinifolium*) – was also flowering and there were a few Scented Sundews (*Drosera whittakeri*) and Dagger Hakea (*Hakea teretifolium*) with flowers. Among the rocks were many Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*) in flower, as well as Rock Correa (*Correa glabra*), a few flowering Variable Prickly Grevillea (*Grevillea aquifolium*), Grampians Guinea-flower (*Hibbertia humifusa*) and a single flower of Rough Bush-pea (*Pultenea scabra*).



Hop Goodenia DL



Rock Correa DL



Desert Banksia DL



Grampians Guinea-flower DL



Pine Heath DL



Rough Bush-pea DL



Variable Prickly Grevillea DL



Snow Myrtle DL

The rock art at Gulgurn Manja is protected by a mesh screen that was installed possibly in the 1960s, to protect the hand stencils, emu tracks and other images from vandals. This shelter does not have a great number of paintings compared with those in the Wab Manja and Billimina shelters near Buandik.



Hand prints and other motifs at Gulgurn Manja



Emu tracks and hand prints DL

We drove along the Mt Zero Rd to the Mt Stapylton picnic ground and had lunch there. The weather was becoming a little more windy, with the threat of rain. Our destination here was the Taipan Wall, which is approached over Flat Rock.

Some of us found that walk up the uneven surface and unrelenting slope a little trying but we were rewarded by bursts of sun on the face of the Taipan and other walls when we reached the top of Flat Rock. The view of the cliffs in the huge amphitheatre was superb.



First stages of the Flat Rock walk at Mt Stapylton



Looking into the amphitheatre at Taipan Wall



Approaching Taipan Wall



Taipan Wall



Taipan Wall



Taipan Wall – ‘Groove Train’ climbing route

One of the dozens of climbing routes that have been published for this site is shown in the picture (left).

The trail passed some 20-30 m distant from the base of the wall, and around several large rocks. The ground around these rocks, a few of which were 5-10 m high and about 5 m wide, was devoid of vegetation. An explanation was that climbers often practiced their solo skills on such boulders, some with overhangs, protecting themselves from falls by laying old mattresses on the ground. Over time, this ‘bouldering’ activity removes the vegetation. This is one cause of the concern PV has with rock-climbing activities (see Postscript for latest bans).

We proceeded past Taipan Wall, some walking up the last steeper section of the trail to Bird Rock. Depending upon the aspect, this eroded rock appears to be an Emu or a Bactrian Camel.

A storm front appeared to be looming so we began the return walk to the car park.



Reto on the path to Bird Rock PH



Rod, Steve, Debra and Ross about to take the rocky trail down DL

Some commented on the appearance of the mallee-like eucalypt on the Flat Rock fringe – this is *Eucalyptus alaticaulis*, an endemic species confined to rocky sites in the Grampians. It can grow to 20 m and is intermediate between Mountain Grey Gum (*E. cypellocarpa*) and Bundy (*E. goniocalyx*).



We saw 2 orchid species in flower on this walk: Small Mosquito Orchid (*Acianthus pusillus*) and Dwarf greenhood (*Pterostylis nana*).



Small Mosquito Orchid DL



Small Mosquito Orchid



Dwarf Greenhood

#### List of native flora seen in flower



*Eucalyptus alaticaulis*

Botanic Name	Common Name
<i>Acacia longifolia</i>	Sallow Wattle
<i>Acacia ulicifolia</i>	Juniper Wattle
<i>Acianthus pusillus</i>	Small Mosquito Orchid
<i>Baeckea ramosissima</i>	Rosy Baeckea
<i>Banksia ornata</i>	Desert Banksia
<i>Calytrix alpestris</i>	Snow Myrtle
<i>Correa glabra</i>	Rock Correa
<i>Cyphanthera anthocercidea</i>	Large-leafed Ray-flower
<i>Drosera whittakeri</i>	Scented Sundew
<i>Epacris impressa</i> var. <i>grandiflora</i>	Common Heath
<i>Goodenia ovata</i>	Hop Goodenia
<i>Grevillea alpina</i>	Cat's Claws
<i>Grevillea aquifolium</i>	Variable Prickly Grevillea
<i>Hakea teretifolium</i>	Dagger Hakea
<i>Hibbertia fasciculata</i> var. <i>prostrata</i>	Bundled Guinea-flower
<i>Hibbertia humifusa</i>	Grampians Guinea-flower
<i>Pterostylis nana</i>	Dwarf Greenhood
<i>Pultenea scabra</i>	Rough Bush-pea
<i>Stenanthera pinifolium</i>	Pine Heath
<i>Thryptomene calycina</i>	Grampians Thryptomene

#### List of birds seen or heard

- |                       |                           |                                |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Crimson Rosella    | 6. Laughing Kookaburra    | 11. Scarlet Robin              |
| 2. Eastern Spinebill  | 7. Little Raven           | 12. Spotted Pardalote          |
| 3. Gang Gang Cockatoo | 8. New Holland Honeyeater | 13. Superb Fairy-wren          |
| 4. Grey Currawong     | 9. Peregrine Falcon       | 14. White-eared Honeyeater     |
| 5. Grey Shrike-thrush | 10. Pied Currawong        | 15. White-throated Treecreeper |

Greg, Steve & Lyn had left a little earlier and the rest of the party departed at about 4 pm, running into a few heavy showers of rain on the way home to Hamilton after a great day in the northern Grampians.

## **Postscript**

**The Age** (Saturday 15 August 2020) reported that protection zones in the Grampians/Gariwerd NP are to be extended to 3 popular rock-climbing and bushwalking sites – Taipan Wall, Spurt Wall and Bundaleer.

The aim was to prevent further destruction of cultural heritage values (stone tools, ancient quarries, art work, ochre and archaeological deposits) that extend to about 22,000 years BP. A management plan has to be agreed on that balances recreational use and essential cultural protection. That plan will be produced in late 2020 or 2021.

Signs and temporary fencing will be erected at the sites to define the areas that are closed to rock-climbers and bushwalkers.