

# HFNC Excursion to Serra Range south trail to Mud-dadjug (Mt Abrupt) on 20 March 2021

Rod Bird

**Participants:** Ross Simpson, Diane Luhrs & Rod Bird, Wendy & Peter McDonald, Sonya & Sam Duke, Yvonne Ingeme & Reto Zollinger, Janeen Samuel, Peter Hocking and Roger Thompson.

We left Hamilton at 9.30 am, a later starting time that we will try this year for most of our excursions. Dunkeld was our first stop on this mild morning, to meet Ross, our leader for the day. Ross led us to the Gariwerd NP car park near the old Dunkeld water storage dam, off the Dunkeld Halls Gap Rd. The track to the car park was very rugged and a test for vehicles with low clearance. From this point one can take a trail SW to *Bainggug* (The Piccaninny) or another NE off that trail to *Mud-dadjug* (Mt Abrupt).

The first part of the walk from the car park to the base of Mt Abrupt was an easy stroll through a woodland of Brown Stringybark (*E. baxteri*), Oyster Bay Pine (*Callitris rhomboidea*) and Austral Grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*). Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*) was evident near the beginning. Heath shrubs, Common Fringed-myrtle (*Calytrix tetragona*), Manuka Tea-tree (*Leptospermum scoparium*), Wedge-leaved Hop-bush (*Dodonaea cuneata*), Dagger Hakea (*Hakea teretifolia*), Variable Prickly Grevillea (*Grevillea aquifolium*) and Silver Banksia (*B. marginata*), were prominent, along with the usual understorey species such as Common Flat-pea (*Platylobium obtusangulum*), Horny Conebush (*Isopogon ceratophyllus*), Flame Heath (*Stenantha conostephioides*) and Golden Heath (*Styphelia adscendens*).



Peaks Trail through woodland/heath



Silver Banksia



Flame Heath



Ixodia



Common Heath in white and pink



Plants in flower were rare (only a few flowers were seen on any species) – they included Ixodia (*Ixodia archillaeoides*), Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*), Beard Heath (*Leucopogon* sp.), Button Everlasting (*Coronidium scorpioides*), Flame Heath and Silver Banksia. In places there were white-flowered and pink-flowered specimens of Common Heath.



Austral Grass-tree, Black Wattle & Oyster-bay Pine



Trail through stunted Brown Stringybark



Trail rise at a ridge



View S<sup>th</sup> to Wurgarri (Mt Sturgeon)

After about 1.5 km the first rocky ascent was reached. There were many sections where stone steps had been constructed and the difficulty increased, rising to ‘moderate’ and then ‘hard’ as we neared the ‘Waterfall Cliffs’ area.



Trail up the ridge, aided by rock steps, between boulders and along a cliff edge

Along the way up the mountain were good vistas across to the south and west. On this morning the smoke from prescribed burns in the Gariwerd NP (and possibly from stubble burns) partly obscured the scene. The remnant of the drained Marneys Swamp was visible but not so Bryans Swamp.



Panorama S<sup>th</sup> to Wurgarri (Mt Sturgeon) and bend in the Wannan River (centre, left)



Views west towards Bryans Swamp and Billawin (Victoria Range)

The trail followed a ridge line and we noted the appearance of stunted eucalypts, some with flowers, that appeared to be Grampians Stringybark (*E. serraensis*). However, it is possible that these were stunted Brown Stringybark because the capsules lacked the large warts of *E. serraensis*. According to information in VicFlora, it is more likely that the trees are Mt. Abrupt Stringybark (*E. verrucata*), a ‘morphologically extreme taxon of the baxteri group’ related to *E. serraensis*.

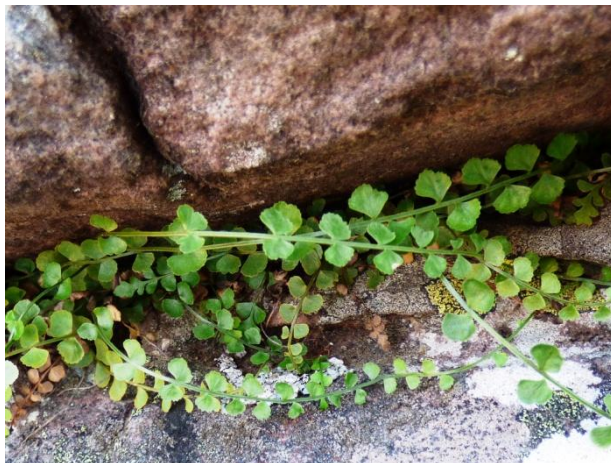


Leaves, flowers and seed capsules of Mt. Abrupt Stringybark

At this level on the rocky mountain side the first sheoaks were seen. These appeared to be Slaty Sheoak (*Allocasuarina muelleriana*) but another candidate may be Grampians Sheoak (*Allocasuarina grampiana*) which grows among sandstone at that level. Shiny Tea-tree (*Leptospermum turbinatum*) was also seen at this level. Grampians Trigger-plant (*Stylidium soboliferum*) and Necklace Fern (*Asplenium flabellifolium*) were seen at the base of some boulders or on damp ledges.



Slaty Sheoak on the sandstone ridge



Necklace Fern on the sandstone ridge

While most of the party had pushed ahead, I was trailing behind and Ross came back to check progress. In doing so he spied a large brown skink sun-bathing under a sandstone overhang. Diane and I photographed the lizard and this was identified by Nick Petropoulos as the Black Rock Skink (*Egernia saxatilis intermedia*). The only other skink of that length (20-25 cm) in Victoria is Cunningham’s Skink (*Egernia cunninghami*) but that has apparently not been reported in the Grampians. A point to watch – Wilson & Swan’s *A complete guide to Reptiles of Australia* (2017) – and possibly other authorities – cite length as snout to vent, excluding the tail. That is done because skinks often shed part of the tail. OK if you have the reptile in hand but not much use for a photographer wishing to identify the species!



Black Rock Skink basking in the sun under a ledge

Diane observed what appear to be fossil ‘prints’ of leaves in some sandstone slabs that had been used to make steps. We could not determine whether the stone slabs had been sourced nearby or had been brought in by helicopter. Other rocks on the path showed evidence of dunal development.



‘Fossil leaves’ in sandstone blocks



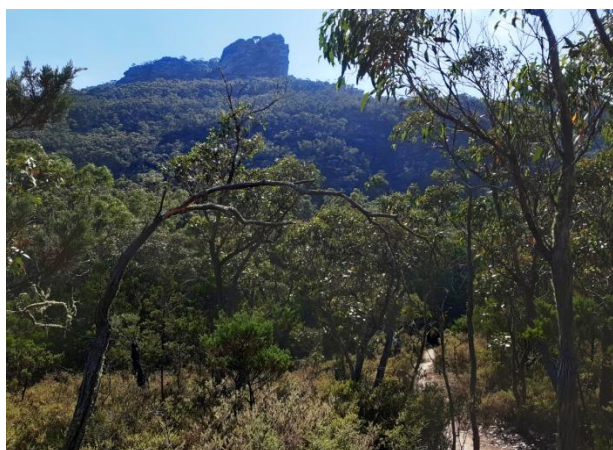
Dunal sediments in sandstone

As we climbed the colour of the sandstone changed to pink and ochre hues. We observed that the opposite (eastern) ridge/cliff (and the ridge we were on) seemed to be a place where Rock Wallabies might once have lived. On 'our' trail there was one narrow ledge that we had to pass along.

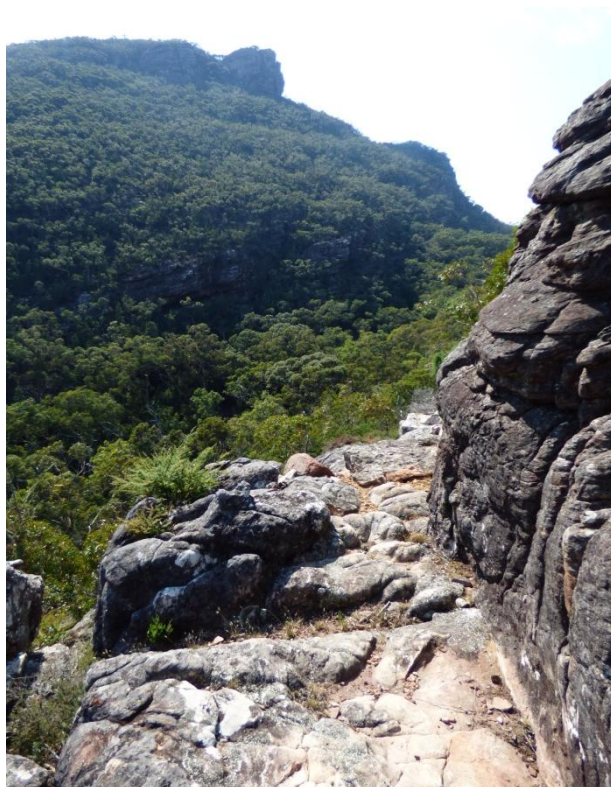


Vibrant colours in wind-eroded sandstone

Along the way, after the top of the ridge had been reached, were various views of the summit of *Mur-dadjug* (Mt Abrupt) and other peaks.



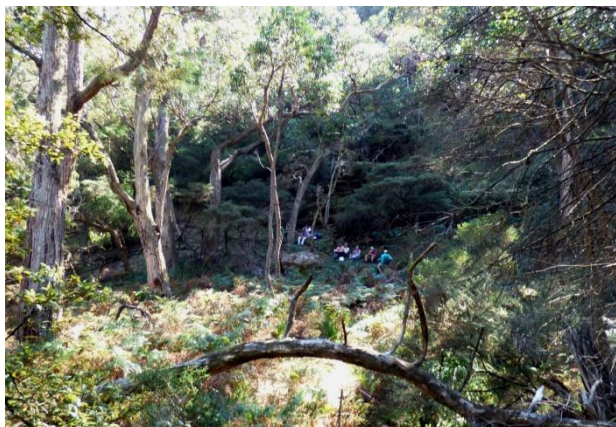
Trail approaching Waterfall Cliff



Trail along the edge of the ridge

Taller Stringybark (Messmate?), some very old, are seen on approaching the impressive sandstone Waterfall Cliffs. This is a damp, sheltered area.

Near the cliff is a stand of Scented Paperbark (*Melaleuca squarrosa*). There were no flowers and few capsules on these tall, straggly shrubs.



First arrivals for lunch near Waterfall Cliff



Scented Paperbark near Waterfall Cliff

Near and under the cliff overhang were many ferns, including what appeared to be Hard Water-fern (*Blechnum wattsii*) and Tender Brake (*Pteris Tremula*). Austral Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*), which looks rather similar, is present nearby in a drier situation. Common Maidenhair (*Adiantum aethiopicum*) and Necklace Fern were found on the walls of the overhang and other rocks. Bladder-worts, possibly the Tiny Bladder-wort (*Utricularia laterifolia*), were also present on ledges.



Tender Brake



Hard Water-fern



Mountain Clematis



Waterfall Cliff

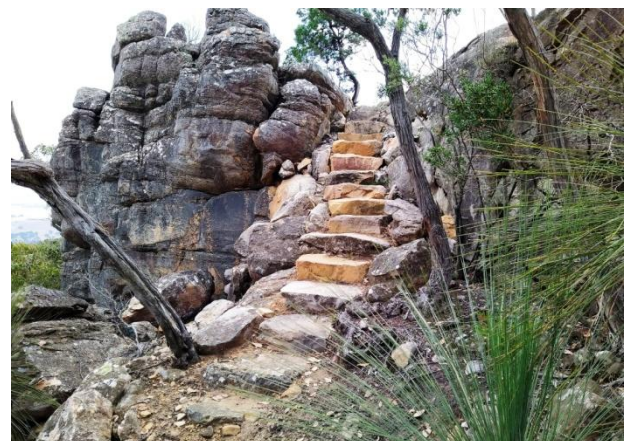


Hyacinth Orchid

We had lunch near the Waterfall Cliff. Plants there included Mountain Clematis (*Clematis aristata*), conspicuous by its variegated green leaf, and a Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia* sp.). Most of the group decided that the path ahead was too taxing but Ross, Reto and Peter continued to the summit. They saw the spectacular Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium roseum*) about 20 m along the trail above the lunch stop. Ross provided the photo.



Steep, rocky staircases near the summit



Reto provided a photo of a huge Brown Stringybark or possibly a Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*) in the tall forest patch in a saddle towards the summit.



Giant Stringybark high on *Mud-dadjug*



Stringybark forest high on *Mud-dadjug*

The report from our most active members was that the upper trail to the top of Mt Abrupt was ‘hard’ due to the slope and number of stone steps involved. In wet weather it would be ‘very hard’.

Peter provided photos of the sandstone staircases and view to Bradys and Walker Swamps. Despite the smoke haze it was possible to see that the swamps still carried water, sufficient perhaps to last through to winter.



Descent on the ridge



View east from *Mud-dadjug* to Bradys & Walker Swamps

On the return walk some of us were happy that we had not gone further, the steep, rocky sections of the trail seeming to be a little harder to negotiate. Back at the car park, members had afternoon tea at the picnic table and some were entertained by the play of 2 small children of other visitors who had just finished the *Bainggug* (Piccaninny) walk. We gave the visitors directions to find Walkers Swamp.

The party of 3 returned from *Mud-dadjug* (Mt Abrupt) by 4 pm and we departed shortly after, having had a good walk on a really pleasant day.



Common Brown Butterfly

Common Brown Butterfly were seen on the return walk as well as a cleverly disguised caterpillar on a *Hakea*.



Caterpillar on a Hakea



Some of the members after the walk

We did not spend much time searching for birds, so our list is not extensive. The most interesting sighting was by the 3 climbers who saw a Bassian Thrush high on the mountain. They also saw Scarlet Robin, Eastern Spinebill and a Wedge-tailed Eagle.

**Bird list for the *Mud-dadjug* area:**

- |                               |                            |                           |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Forest Raven               | 7. New Holland Honeyeater  | 13. Eastern Spinebill     |
| 2. Australian Magpie          | 8. White-eared Honeyeater  | 14. Bassian Thrush        |
| 3. White-throated Treecreeper | 9. Spotted Pardalote       | 15. Wedge-tailed Eagle    |
| 4. Pied Currawong             | 10. Grey Fantail           | 16. Rufous Whistler       |
| 5. Grey Shrike-thrush         | 11. White-browed Scrubwren | 17. Buff-rumped Thornbill |
| 6. Brown-headed Honeyeater    | 12. Scarlet Robin          | 18. Crimson Rosella       |

**Flora noted on the *Mud-dadjug* walk** (# denotes flowering):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Austral Bracken ( <i>Pteridium esculentum</i> )          | Horny Conebush ( <i>Isopogon ceratophyllus</i> )           |
| Austral Grass-tree ( <i>Xanthorrhoea australis</i> )     | Hyacinth Orchid ( <i>Dipodium roseum</i> ) #               |
| Beard Heath ( <i>Leucopogon</i> sp.) #                   | Ixodia ( <i>Ixodia archillaeoides</i> ) #                  |
| Black Wattle ( <i>A. mearnsii</i> )                      | Manuka Tea-tree ( <i>Leptospermum scoparium</i> )          |
| Bluebell ( <i>Wahlenbergia</i> sp.) #                    | Mountain Clematis ( <i>Clematis aristata</i> )             |
| Brown Stringybark ( <i>E. baxteri</i> )                  | Mt. Abrupt Stringybark ( <i>E. verrucata</i> ) #           |
| Button Everlasting ( <i>Coronidium scorpioides</i> ) #   | Necklace Fern ( <i>Asplenium flabellifolium</i> )          |
| Common Flat-pea ( <i>Platylobium obtusangulum</i> )      | Oyster Bay Pine ( <i>Callitris rhomboidea</i> )            |
| Common Fringed-myrtle ( <i>Calytrix tetragona</i> )      | Scented Paperbark ( <i>Melaleuca squarrosa</i> )           |
| Common Heath ( <i>Epacris impressa</i> ) #               | Shiny Tea-tree ( <i>Leptospermum turbinatum</i> )          |
| Common Maidenhair ( <i>Adiantum aethiopicum</i> )        | Silver Banksia ( <i>B. marginata</i> ) #                   |
| Dagger Hakea ( <i>Hakea teretifolia</i> )                | Slaty Sheoak ( <i>Allocasuarina muelleriana</i> )          |
| Flame Heath ( <i>Stenanthera conostephioides</i> ) #     | Tender Brake ( <i>Pteris tremula</i> )                     |
| Golden Heath ( <i>Styphelia adscendens</i> )             | Tiny Bladder-wort ( <i>Utricularia laterifolia</i> ) #     |
| Grampians Trigger-plant ( <i>Stylidium soboliferum</i> ) | Variable Prickly Grevillea ( <i>Grevillea aquifolium</i> ) |
| Hard Water-fern ( <i>Blechnum watsii</i> )               | Wedge-leaved Hop-bush ( <i>Dodonaea cuneata</i> )          |

**Mammals**

The only native mammal seen was a Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*).

**Photos:**

Diane provided most of the photos, with some from Rod, Reto, Peter and Ross.

**Jardwadjali/Djab wurrung names** (Koori Tourism Unit, 1990):

Grampians is *Gariwerd* (pronounced Gariwerd) – ‘the mountain range’  
 Mt Abrupt is *Mud-dadjug* (pronounced Murd-dajook) – ‘a blunt or useless arm’  
 Mt Sturgeon is *Wurgarri* (pronounced Wurkarri) – ‘black’  
 The Piccaninny is *Bainggug* (pronounced Baingook) – ‘the child’