

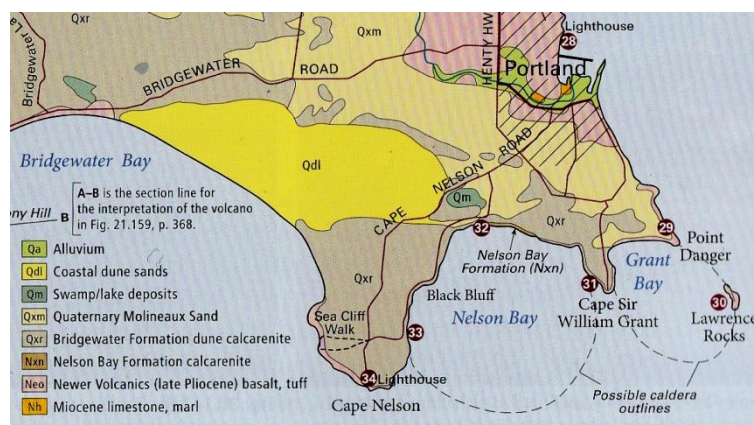
HFNC Excursion to Cape Nelson on 22 April 2023

Rod Bird

Participants: J Logan, V Keiller, D Luhrs, R Bird, P Hocking, G Cayley, R Simpson, J Samuel, R Graney & I Graney.

We left Hamilton at 9.00 am and met with Jo (our leader and organiser for this event), Virginia, Ruth & Ivor at the Cape Nelson Lighthouse at about 10.15 am.

There was painting and some other work on the lighthouse had been in process. The parking area held a lot of scaffolding and other materials for the job. The lighthouse was constructed in 1884 of basalt blocks, some from local sources.



We organised a car shuffle, leaving 2 vehicles in the parking area and drove east on the coast road for about 2 km and turned off on a side track to park at a point on the Great South West Walk. That was our morning tea stop.

Views were had from the cliff top of Lawrence Rocks and Cape Sir William Grant, across Nelson Bay. There were groups of roosting Australian Gannets at 3 levels on Lawrence Rock.



Great South West Walk DL



Seabirds on Lawrence Rock

We then walked back to the Lighthouse along the Great South West Walk. The only eucalypt here was the Coast Gum or Soap Mallee (*E. diversifolia* ssp. *megacarpa*), a species confined in Victoria to limestone cliffs at Cape Nelson. It also occurs on coastal areas of SE SA.

There were not many plants in flower, the most obvious being the yellow-green flowered variety of Common Correa (*Correa reflexa*), White Correa (*Correa alba* var. *pannosa*), Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*) and Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*).

There were a few flowers on Coast Everlasting (*Ozothamnus paralius*), Flame Heath (*Stenantha conostephioides*), Cranberry Heath (*Styphelia humifusa*), Variable Groundsel (*Senecio pinnatifolius*), Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) and Winged Spyridium (*Spyridium vexilliferum* var. *vexilliferum*). Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*) had red berries and the Coast Ballart (*Exocarpos syrticola*) also had fruit.



Eucalyptus diversifolia

The Silver Banksia here on the limestone coast struggle to exceed 2 m in height, compared with 5-15 m on other sites across Victoria. One little flowering shrub here was prostrate, a ground-cover plant.



White Correa



Sea Box



Common Correa



Common Heath



Silver Banksia



Coast Ballart



Coast Everlasting DL



Moonah



Variable Groundsel

Plants not in flower included Tiny Sundew (*Drosera pygmaea*) and Cushion Bush (*Leucophyta brownii*). Coast Ballart, Silver Banksia, Swamp Sheoak (*Allocasuarina paludosa*), Beaked Hakea (*Hakea rostrata*), Small Grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea minor*) & Coast Saw-sedge (*Lepidosperma gladiatum*) are major shrubs in the extremely dense low heath that characterises much of the vegetation along the walk. The trail passes through the odd patch of Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) and Moonah.



A prostrate Silver Banksia



Winged Spyridium



Cranberry Heath DL



Pygmy Sundew DL



Daisy..DL

Information on the geology of the Nelson Bay area is available in the new publication ‘*Stories beneath our feet: exploring the geology and landscapes of Victoria and surrounds*’ by Leon Costermans & Fons VandenBerg (2022). Nelson Bay can be considered part of an eroded wide crater, with Cape Nelson on the west and Cape Sir William Grant on the east forming part of the rim. The horizontal bedded sediments in the present cliffs represent Late Pliocene (5.3-2.6 mya) remnants of the former lake deposits in the crater. The cliff on the east side of Cape Nelson shows stratified lava and plugs as well as dipping tuffs (volcanic ash). Large dark areas in the cliff are volcanic vents into which the tuff slumped. The capping is the Bridgewater Formation dune calcarenite (a sandstone limestone), which extends into SA. The grey-black rock platforms at and above sea level are basalt layers (2.5 mya).

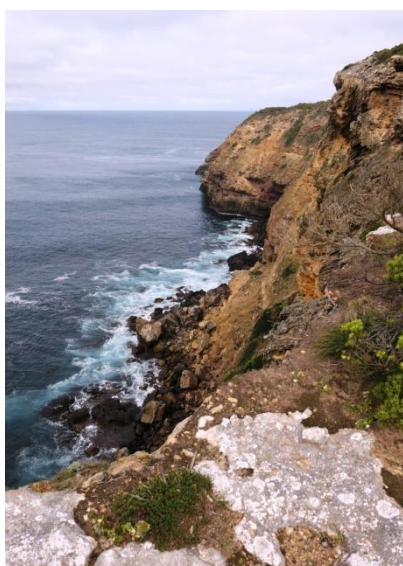


Limestone underlying the 2.5 mya basalt is the Miocene (23-5.3 mya) Port Campbell Limestone, perhaps overlain with some horizontally bedded fossiliferous clays and sandy limestones.



Cliff scenes above show some geological features of Cape Nelson

We observed several Australian Fur Seals moving around on a lava pavement below us, at the base of the cliff. The sea periodically swept across the platform and it provided an easy landing area for the seals. Another 20 seals were resting on the rock-strewn pavement further up the slope.



Cape Nelson cliff and Australian Fur Seals

Singing Honeyeater



Australian Fur Seals

Cape Nelson cliff and Lighthouse..DL

Birds seen or heard along the walk included Singing Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebird, Grey Shrike-thrush, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Welcome Swallow, Kelp Gull, Silver-eye, Willie Wagtail, Superb Fairy-wren, Crimson Rosella and Australasian Gannet.



‘Wrapped’ Cape Nelson Lighthouse

An Eastern Yellow Robin appeared while we were at lunch. Another ‘local’ was a Bulldog Ant (*Myrmecia nigricans*).



Lighthouse Keeper’s cottage & PV buildings

Back at the Cape Nelson Lighthouse, we heard a melodious Rufous Bristlebird calling from the bushes on the edge of the car park.

We retrieved the vehicles left at the start of our walk and then drove to a picnic area on the scenic drive where we had lunch.



Picnic lunch spot DL

Our last stop was the gannet colony at Point Danger. It had been many years since most of us visited – it seems that an exclusion fence has been re-positioned much further from the birds. One can now also view the birds from an elevated stand at the rear of the shooting range rampart.



Janeen, Virginia, Ruth & Jo on the lookout stand DL



View to the gannet colony and Lawrence Rock VK

We saw 4 or 5 juveniles exercising their wings. Diane noticed a bird with a black gular stripe; perhaps a vagrant Cape Gannet (see photo). A couple of Masked Lapwings and White-faced Heron prowled around the edge of the group. There were no Siler Gulls present in the flock of about 150 gannets.



View from the fence VK



Australasian Gannets & possible Cape Gannet DL



Views of the gannet colony from the fence and from the lookout

List of plants observed at Cape Nelson (fl = with flowers; fr = with fruit)

Austral Grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*)
Beaked Hakea (*Hakea rostrata*)
Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*)
Coast Ballart (*Exocarpos syrticola*) fr
Coast Everlasting (*Ozothamnus paraliium*) fl
Coast Gum or Soap Mallee (*E. diversifolia* ssp. *megacarpa*) fr
Coast Saw-sedge (*Lepidosperma gladiatum*)
Common Correa (*Correa reflexa*) fl
Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*) fl
Cranberry Heath (*Styphelia humifusa*) fl
Cushion Bush (*Leucophyta brownii*)
Daisy (*Brachyscome* sp.) fl
Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*)
Flame Heath (*Stenanthera conostephioides*) fl
Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) fl
Scented Paperbark (*Melaleuca squarrosa*)
Sea Box (*Alyxia buxifolia*) fr
Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) fl
Small Grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea minor* ssp. *lutea*)
Swamp Sheoak (*Allocasuarina paludosa*)
Tiny Sundew (*Drosera pygmaea*)
Variable Groundsel (*Senecio pinnatifolius*) fl
White Correa (*Correa alba* var. *pannosa*) fl
Winged Spyridium (*Spyridium vexilliferum* var. *vexilliferum*) fl



Singing Honeyeater on a Sea Box DL

Birdlist for Cape Nelson and Point Danger

- Singing Honeyeater
- Red Wattlebird
- Grey Shrike-thrush
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo
- Welcome Swallow
- Kelp Gull
- Silver-eye
- Willie Wagtail
- Superb Fairy-wren
- Crimson Rosella
- Eastern Yellow Robin
- Australasian Gannet
- Rufous Bristlebird
- White-faced Heron
- Masked Lapwing



Birdwatching along the great South West Walk VK

Our excursion finished at Point Danger at about 3 pm; some members stopped in Portland for a coffee before travelling home. Despite a prognosis of rain and chilly weather we had a fine day of warm sun and generally light wind. The excursion was much enjoyed by all and the efforts of Joanne in planning the outing was greatly appreciated.

The photographs provided by Diane and Virginia are indicated by DL and VK, respectively.