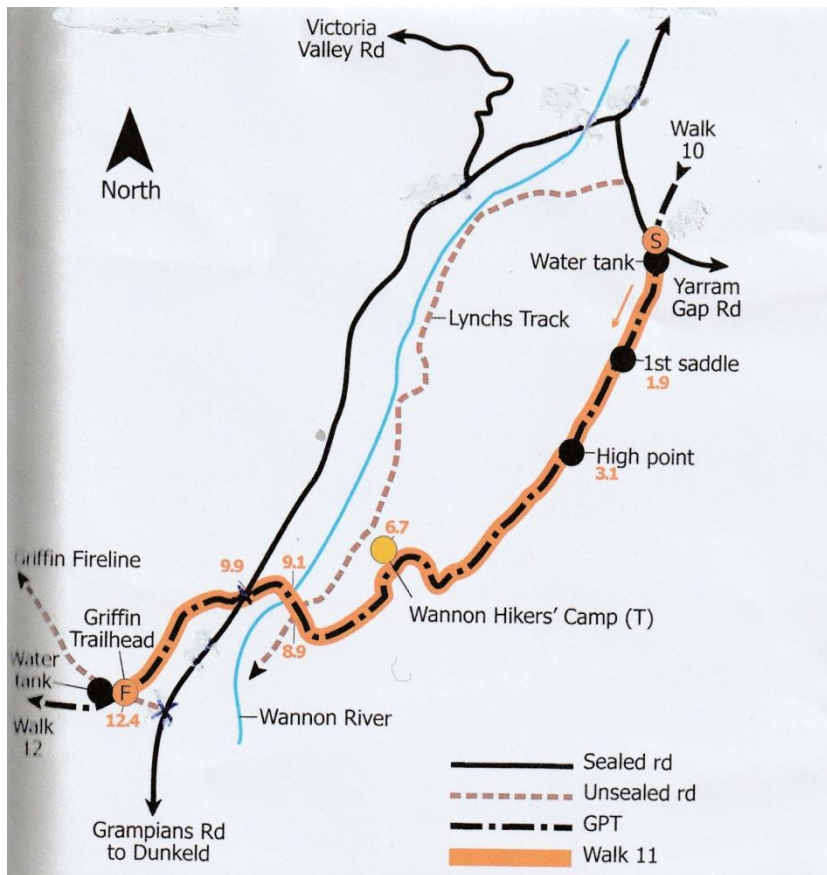


HFNC Excursion Gariwerd Yarram Gap to Griffin Track on 20 May 2023

Rod Bird

Participants: D Luhrs, J Samuel, R Bird, P Hocking, S Scott, S Patterson, P Lehmann & R Simpson.

We left Hamilton at 9.00 am, stopped briefly at Dunkeld and then drove on the Dunkeld-Halls Gap Rd to the start of the Griffin Track. Some vehicles were left there while the 4WD vehicles drove up the eroded sandy track to the Griffin trailhead and parking area. After a morning cuppa, we left a vehicle there and drove back to the main road, collecting the parked vehicles and drove along to the Peaks Trail crossing of the road. A vehicle was left there and the remaining vehicles (with all of the walkers) were driven to the Yarram Gap Rd and parked on the side of the road near the quarry, about 400 m downhill from the trailhead. Some walkers (DL, JS, RB, SP) were content to do the 10-km walk on the Peaks Trail to the crossing on the Dunkeld-Halls Gap Rd, while the others had opted to continue a further 2.5 km to the Griffin Trailhead. Vehicles from both places were then driven back to the Yarram Gap Rd to collect vehicles parked there.



There was a boot-scrubbing/spraying installation at the start of the trail – the only one that we have seen in the region. The purpose is to reduce the risk of carrying the *Phytophthora cinnamomi* pathogen into the ranges and heathland beyond.

The trail is quite narrow and rough in places, particularly on the rocky slopes of several of the 6 or 8 peaks that one walks over/around. While rated at 3.5 hours, previous experience a month earlier indicated that some of us would need at least 5 hours to hike the 10 km trail.

Apart from a shower of rain when we stopped for lunch the weather was generally kind and visibility quite good. A walking stick was quite useful on the steeper, rocky sections.



HFNC members at Yarram Gap Rd Trailhead DL

The plants with flowers included *Banksia marginata* (Silver Banksia), *Grevillea dimorpha* (Flame Grevillea – an endemic), *Epacris impressa* (Common Heath – white or pink flowers), *Correa reflexa* (Common Correa), *Styphelia humifusa* (Cranberry Heath), *Stenantha conostephioides* (Flame Heath), *Stenantha pinifolia* (Pine Heath), *Ixodia achillaeoides* (Ixodia) and *Spyridium parvifolium* (Dusty Miller).

Three orchids were spotted further along the trail: *Pterostylis striata* (Striated Greenhood), *Acianthus pusillus* (Small Mosquito Orchid) and *Pterostylis rubescens* (Red-tipped Greenhood).



Dusty Miller DL



Flame Grevillea



Ixodia



Silver Banksia



Common Heath

A couple of other interesting plants were observed along the way, including *Acacia gunnii* (Ploughshare Wattle), *A. aculeatissima* (Thin-leaf Wattle) and *Hakea decurrens* ssp. *physocarpa* (Bushy Needlewood). The wattles are very low-growing; the Thin-leaf Wattle is prostrate and has many of its sharp, warty phylodes angled back towards the stem. The Bushy Needlewood is similar to *Hakea teretifolia* (Dagger Hakea) differing mainly in the shape of the woody capsules (elongate in Dagger Hakea and not squat).



Ploughshare Wattle



Bushy Needlewood



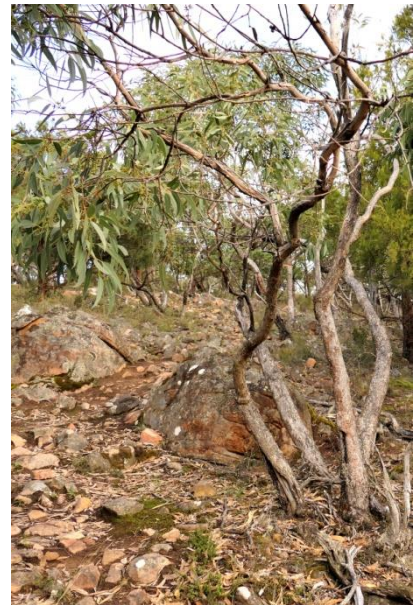
Common Heath DL



Thin-leaf Wattle DL



Rock Bundy buds & capsules DL



Rock Bundy

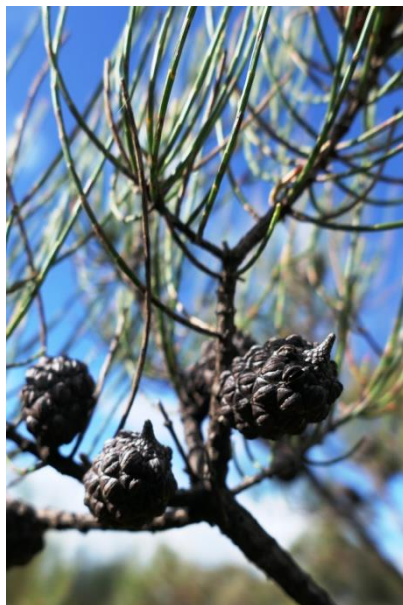
The trees we saw along the way were *Banksia marginata* (Silver Banksia), *Callitris rhomboidea* (Oyster Bay Pine), *Eucalyptus baxteri* (Brown Stringybark), *Exocarpos cupressiformis* (Cherry Ballart) and *Eucalyptus goniocalyx* ssp. *viridissima* (Rock Bundy – found also at Mt Arapiles and Burrunj/Black Ra). *Eucalyptus obliqua* (Messmate Stringybark) appears as large trees on one of the last peaks, while *Eucalyptus viminalis* (Manna Gum), *E. aromaphloia* (Scent-bark), *E. ovata* (Swamp Gum) and *E. camaldulensis* (River Red Gum) appear towards the Wannan River crossing. There is also a peppermint gum, possibly *E. falciformis* (Western Peppermint), on the wet heath west of the Wannan crossing.

Of the gums on the ridges, the Rock Bundy is distinctive in its straggly appearance, with fine grey bark and generally long leaves. The buds are 7 or less in number, sessile on a flattened peduncle. The capsules are cup-shaped, about 8 mm across, and have 2 faint ridges on the sides.

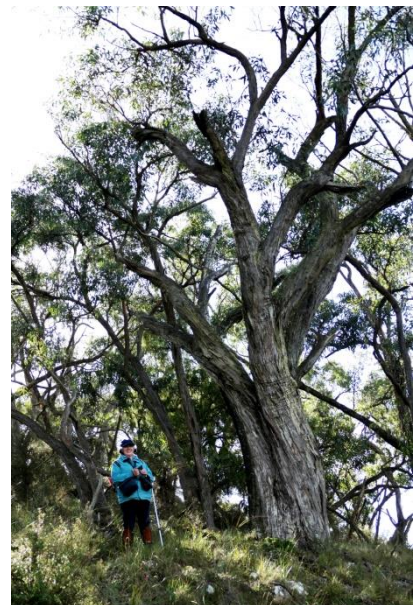
There were several *Allocasuarina* species along the way, including *Al. muelleriana* (Slaty Sheoak), *Al. paludosa* (Scrub Sheoak) and possibly *Al. grampiana* (Grampians Sheoak – an endemic) or *Al. misera* (Slender Sheoak).



Grampians Sheoak?



Slaty Sheoak



Messmate Stringybark

The trail starts fairly high on the Mt William Range and the first couple of km is easy going, then gradually increasing in elevation with views soon appearing of the Serra range to the west and north. The trail then switches to the east side of the ridge, providing views to Lake Muirhead.



View west to Serra Ra DL



View north between the ranges DL



View NE to Lake Muirhead



View N to peak at Yarram Gap

Views of the first (and highest) peak on the trail soon appear and the going is quite steep for the next 200 m. The trail then follows an easy line along the ridge, with its ups and downs, giving grand views to the west of the Serra Range and south-east.

There is one view to the south of an expanse of flooded land that has been cleared for agriculture. In the past (and perhaps now) it may have received flood water from the Wannon River that ultimately discharges into Bradys Swamp to the SE.



On the trail PL



View SE to a flood plain





View west to Serra Range PL



View west to Serra Range PL

Lunch time was spent on a peak – sunny at first then followed by a rain shower. A Black Wallaby was resting nearby on a ledge.

Lichen, moss and fungi were seen at many places during the walk but especially along the ridge.



Puff Ball DL



Fairy Stool DL



Earth Star DL



Stereum sp. DL



Coral Lichen DL



Crested Coral Fungus DL



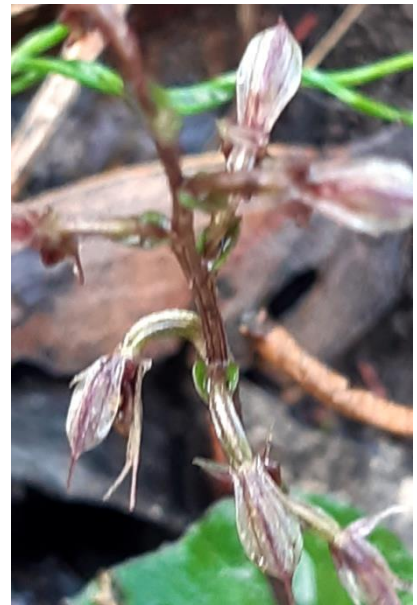
Lichen art PL



Striated Greenhood DL



Red-tipped Greenhood DL



Small Mosquito Orchid DL

The trail along the ridge was often through very open, stunted woodland of Oyster Bay Pine, Rock Bundy and brown Stringybark. There are a couple of very rough, rocky passages around peaks.



Russula DL



Trail on the ridge DL



Scar tree?

The final stages of the walk on the range provided superb vistas of the Serra Range. In passing over the last peak (perhaps the eighth?) one has a view SW of a clearing on the side of the ridge where the Wannan Hikers Camp is situated. The trail downhill eventually takes one into a clearing that was once farmland. Plough 'lands' are evident and few trees remain, except on the fringes of the open land. This was apparently cleared by the Lynch family years ago and has been acquired for the National Park.



View SW to Serra Range



View SW to a clearing



A rocky downhill section of the trail PL



View SW to Serra Range PL



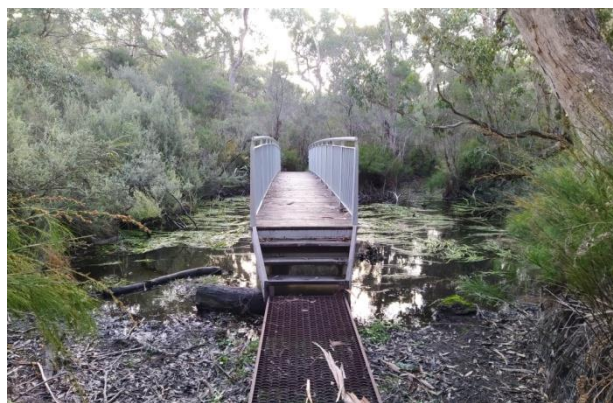
Approaching the Wannon Hikers Camp, a tree was noticed that had a shield-shaped scar that may be of Aborigine origin. A little further and the trail to the Wannon River crossing and Halls Gap Rd veered left, with the camp area to the right. Kangaroos greeted us at that point.

The Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), Red-necked Wallaby (*Macropus rufogriseus*) and Black Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) must appreciate the pasture; several dozen kangaroo were seen grazing there, unfazed by visitors. We saw only a few wallabies during the day.

The section between the camp site and the Wannon bridge was rather indifferent. It passed from easy walking on the cleared area to a rough scramble along some low rocky rises. The preparation of that trail was rather poor and there was no view or obvious purpose in the sitting. It would have been better to have made the trail around the base of the low rises, with an easier walk down to the bridge.



Near the Wannon crossing, looking back DL



Wannon River Footbridge PH

Approaching the bridge, the trees were very tall, comprising Manna Gum, Swamp Gum, Messmate and Brown Stringybark. The low bridge across the 15-20 m of deeper watercourse afforded good views of the in-stream vegetation. *Leptospermum lanigerum* (Woolly Tea-tree) and *Melaleuca squarrosa* (Scented Paperbark) are seen here, along with a tall wispy grass that appears to be *Eragrostis australasica* (Cane Grass) and *Triglochin* sp. (Water Ribbons).

The end walk to the Dunkeld-Halls Gap Rd passes over several sections of iron 'board walk'. One short section at the western end without a board walk was under water and we had to follow the footsteps of others across the adjacent vegetation to get around it. That deficiency needs urgent attention. This is the Wannon River floodplain and in winter much of it is liable to be flooded.



Cane Grass PH



Cane Grass, Water Ribbons, Woolly Tea-tree PL



Metal 'boardwalk' section PL



A slight rise in the trail PL



Boardwalk across the Wannan floodplain PL

There are small rises across this wet heathland that may not be inundated. *Xanthorrhoea minor* (Small Grass-tree), *Allocasuarina paludosa* (Scrub Sheoak) dwarf Silver Banksia and a host of other low-growing plants are present in this tightly massed heath. On the slightly higher levels are some small eucalypts, perhaps *E. falciformis* (Western Peppermint). That species has 11 or more buds in the group, most with rounded caps. The capsules are triangular-shaped, on a short stalk. A person with a good nose can smell the peppermint in a crushed leaf.

From the Dunkeld-Halls Gap Rd crossing to Griffin Trailhead the vegetation differs a little from the previous sections of this walk. In addition to plants seen earlier there were quite a few *Hibbertia* plants in flower, as well as *Phylota pleuroandroides* (Heathy Phylota – a small shrub with yellow pea-flowers) and masses of *Spyridium parvifolium* (Dusty Miller). Many plants of *Calectasia intermedia* (Blue Tinsel-lily) are along the trail but will not flower until spring.



Halls Gap Rd entry point to the trail DL

Both groups ended their walks at about 5 pm or a little earlier, in time to collect their vehicles and clear the bush road before dark. We all enjoyed the trail and no doubt benefitted from the exercise gained on what proved to be a fairly rigorous section of the Peaks Trail! Springtime would show many more species in flower.

Lists of flora (excepting trees, mainly of species flowering), fungi and birds are shown below.

Flora list for Peaks Trail Yarram Gap to Griffin Trailhead 20 May 2023 (f = flowering)

Acacia aculeatissima (Thin-leaf Wattle)
Acacia gunnii (Ploughshare Wattle) f
Acianthus pusillus (Small Gnat-orchid) f
Allocasuarina grampiana (Grampians Sheoak)
Allocasuarina muelleriana (Slaty Sheoak)
Allocasuarina paludosa (Scrub Sheoak)
Banksia marginata (Silver Banksia) f
Calectasia intermedia (Blue Tinsel-lily)
Callitris rhomboidea (Oyster Bay Pine)
Correa reflexa (Common Correa) f
Epacris impressa (Common Heath) f
Eragrostis australasica (Cane Grass)
Eucalyptus aromaphloia (Scent-bark)
Eucalyptus baxteri (Brown Stringybark)
Eucalyptus camaldulensis (River Red Gum)
Eucalyptus falciformis (Western Peppermint)
Eucalyptus goniocalyx ssp. *viridissima* (Rock Bundy)
Eucalyptus obliqua (Messmate Stringybark)

Eucalyptus ovata (Swamp Gum)
Eucalyptus viminalis (Manna Gum)
Exocarpos cupressiformis (Cherry Ballart)
Grevillea dimorpha (Flame Grevillea) f
Hakea decurrens ssp. *physocarpa* (Bushy Needlewood) f
Ixodia achillaeoides (Ixodia) f
Leptospermum lanigerum (Woolly Tea-tree)
Melaleuca squarrosa (Scented Paperbark)
Phylota pleuroandroides (Heathy Phylota) f
Pterostylis rubescens (Red-tipped Greenhood) f
Pterostylis striata (Striated Greenhood) f
Spyridium parvifolium (Dusty Miller) f
Stenanthera conostephioides (Flame Heath) f
Stenanthera pinifolia (Pine Heath) f
Styphelia humifusa (Cranberry Heath) f
Triglochin sp. (Water Ribbons)
Xanthorrhoea minor (Small Grass-tree)

Fungi and Lichen

Coltrichia cinnamomea (Fairy Stool)
Stereum hirsutum. (Hairy Stereum)
Russula sp. (Russula)
Gaestrum sp. (Earth Star)
Calvatia sp.? (Puff Ball)
Clavulina cristata (Crested Coral Fungus)
 Coral Lichen

Birdlist

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
 Buff-rumped Thornbill
 Crimson Rosella
 Eastern Spinebill
 Eastern Yellow Robin
 Grey Fantail
 Little Raven
 New Holland Honeyeater
 Spotted Pardalote
 Superb Fairy-wren
 Wedge-tailed Eagle
 White-browed Scrubwren
 Yellow-faced Honeyeater