

Report on Wednesday Walk — Lowden Park, Tallaganda Forest — 01 February 2017

As we drove out towards Hoskingstown, we could see a dense ragged cloud blanketing the hills we were headed for but, by the time we turned in to the National Park, we encountered only a faint white mist drifting through the trees and even that cleared soon afterwards.

After slowing down several times for Red-necked Wallabies, a Swamp Wallaby and a Lyrebird, we stopped entirely when Shirley spotted a Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium roseum*) some way off the road. We found quite a few more as we wandered beneath the tall trees through the understorey of Blackwood Wattles (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Blackthorns (*Bursaria spinosa* ssp. *lasiophylla*) and *Persoonia linearis*. Through the mist, we saw what looked like a cascade of *Clematis microphylla* flowers high in the undergrowth. It seemed unlikely, as in Canberra they have already flowered and distributed their seed. And, sure enough, when we investigated, it wasn't a Clematis. It was another Bursaria, a tall sparsely-leaved one with such an abundance of flowers at the top of the bush that the branches had curved down under the weight.

We had a quick stop for morning tea when we arrived at Lowden Park before setting off down the Hopkins Dams track. The first thing that caught our attention wasn't a plant, but a little Grey Fantails' nest — a narrow, wineglass-shaped construction made from finely woven webs and fur with a tail of bark fibres extending below.

We walked on through a tall forest of Brown Barrel (*Eucalyptus fastigata*), Messmate Stringybark (*E. obliqua*), Narrow-leaved Peppermint (*E. radiata*) and Ribbon Gum (*E. viminalis*) towering above us. The understorey was fairly dense. *Coprosma quadrifida* and *Leucopogon lanceolata* were bearing their small red fruits. The peas were represented by *Goodia lotifolia* and the prickly *Daviesia ulicifolia*. And we saw a few of the leafless *Choretrum candollei*, their stems covered in minute white flowers, and lots of the large-leaved *Smilax australis* scrambling amongst them all.

The damp ground was carpeted with the smaller plants — *Hydrocotyle laxiflora*, *Dichondra repens* and *Desmodium gunnii*, with some *Cotula alpina* along the edge of the path. Two little Parson's Bands Orchids (*Eriochilus cucullatus*) were there too. And, all along the track, the bright blue fruits of *Dianella tasmanica* and a scattering of pink Hyacinth Orchids (*Dipodium roseum*) added a bit of colour to the predominantly green landscape.

After lunch back at the carpark, we set off on the Fern Gully walk on a track that winds above, and finally crosses, Lowden Creek. Down towards the creek were swathes of Tree Ferns (*Cyathea australis*), their bright green feathery fronds moving gently in the breeze. On the upper side of the track were outcrops of coarse-grained granite. One of these was completely covered with spatulate fern fronds — and nearby, framed by the dark forest, was a huge Blanket Bush (*Bedfordia arborescens*). There were a few other ferns along the way, mostly Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) and Mother Shield Ferns (*Polystichum proliferum*). The latter plant probably gets its name from its production of little plantlets on the underside tips of the fronds.

A very noticeable part of the understory were the huge Musk Daisy bushes (*Olearia argophylla*), their large shiny leaves displaying their silver undersides as the breeze moved them. Some of these shrubs were the size of small trees.

As we walked along, the wind increased a bit and began to sway the trees. A tall tree that had fallen against another large tree began to groan as they moved in the wind, then gave what sounded like a human cry just as I noticed a face-like tree stump in the distance — which made those stories of eerie encounters with strange creatures in the bush suddenly quite understandable!

The track finally led us back to the carpark, past the huge water wheel which was transported to the forest from Queanbeyan in 1952 after William Hopkins and Len Donoghoe set up their second (and larger) timber mill in that town in 1950. The wheel is still gently turning, as it did in the past when it generated electricity for the loggers who camped there and (via a generator) charged to logging truck batteries.

Below the wheel was a muddy area in which some straggly Austral Brooklime (*Gratiola peruviana*) were growing along with a few *Ranunculus plebieus*. There was movement as we stooped to look at the pink flowers of the Brooklime — the plants were covered with the tiny black flies in the Sepsidae family that are attracted to wet area. Leeches, of course, also like these wetter areas — and, although we were very careful, a few of us did contribute a bit of blood to the wildlife.

It was, however, a beautiful place to spend the day, with a wide range of vegetation from tall trees swaying in the wind to soft mosses and pale lichens clinging to the rocks — with a bit of history and a touch of mystery thrown in for good measure.

Text by Jo Walker; Photos by Pamela Finger (PF), Jeanette Jeffrey (JJ) and Gail Ritchie Knight (GRK)



Acaena novae-zelandiae (JJ)



Coprosma quadrifida (GRK)



Dipodium roseum (PF)



Acaena novae-zelandiae, detail (JJ)



Bursaria spinosa ssp. *lasiophylla* (GRK)



Dianella tasmanica (GRK)



Dicksonia Antartica (GRK)



Leucopogon lanceolata (GRK)



Lomatia myricoides (GRK)



Eriochilus cucullatus (PF)



Grey Fantail nest (PF)



Lagenophora stipitata (GRK)



Pamela focussing on a bracket fungus (GRK)



Teucrium corymbosum (JJ)



Possible insect scribbles on bark (GRK)



Abandoned steam engine (GRK)



Wednesday Walkers in Lowden Park (PF)



Water wheel used to drive a generator to create electricity for logging camp (GRK)



Persoonia linearis (GRK)



Xerochrysum bracteatum (GRK)