

Report on Wednesday Walk — Monga National Park — 15 February 2017

We travelled through the rather arid landscape to our moister and greener destination, stopping at Northangera Road to add Marina Tyndale-Biscoe's car to the convoy. Marina and Hugh live on a property there, and, in the 1980s, were amongst a group of local people (including Judith Wright) who were instrumental in having the state forest converted into Monga National Park. Timber had been harvested in the forest since the 1840s and provided building material for Canberra later on.

Our first stop was for morning tea in the Dasyurus Picnic Area — named for the Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculata*), one of our carnivorous marsupials. We sat in the shade of tall eucalypts including Ribbon Gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), Brown Barrel (*E. fastigata*) and Silvertop Ash (*E. sieberi*). After a quick drink, we walked down the short track to the Mongarlowe River through a tall understorey of the drooping-stemmed *Acacia trachyphloia*, *Tasmannia lanceolata* (Mountain Pepper), some of which were draped with the green-fruited creeper *Smilax australis*, *Lomatia myricoides*, *Prostanthera lasianthos* and some very tall and robust *Lomandra longifolia*. Close to the river's edge, on a high bank, were several large Monga Waratahs (*Telopea mungaensis*). Across the sparkling clear water on some grey boulders of conglomerate rock, we could see *Epacris calvertiana* growing, but the water was a bit too fast-flowing for us to attempt a crossing. On the moist soil beside the river, Austral Brooklime (*Gratiola peruviana*) was displaying quite a few pink flowers, and one tiny Fairy Apron (*Utricularia dichotoma*) was waving a solitary flower in the breeze. While we were stooping to observe the smaller plants, we noticed a tiny but fully-formed black frog — about a centimetre long — near our feet and moved it to a safer place.

We walked back to the cars and drove up the road to Penance Grove where we spent some time on the boardwalk experiencing the wonder of that ancient forest of Plumwood (*Eucryphia moorei*) towering over the Rough Tree-Ferns (*Cyathea australis*). The *Eucryphia* seedlings often germinate on the shaggy trunks of the Tree-ferns and grow roots down into the damp soil, eventually enveloping the whole fern. Some of the *Eucryphia moorei* in the National Park are up to four metres wide at the base and reputed to be more than a thousand years old. We had been expecting a magnificent display of nectar-laden white flowers, but, unfortunately, the trees had either flowered earlier than we'd expected or hadn't flowered well this year. Lesley did find one perfect white flower though on one of the steps. While we were unsuccessfully searching for others, we found a beautiful small snail with a lopsided but colourful shell on a fallen leaf (and returned it to the undergrowth).

Some of the tree trunks were cloaked in Rock Felt-ferns (*Pyrrosia rupestris*). This little fern often grows extensively on rocks too. It can be mistaken for two separate species as the sterile fronds are round in shape and flat and the fertile fronds have a completely different oblong appearance. The ground level there is interesting too, with extensive dark green mats of the tall and robust moss, *Dawsonia superba*.

We went back along the road to the Waratah Picnic Area for lunch, with some of us walking the short distance to experience the view of the forest framed by the bright green fronds of the Treeferns. After lunch, we did the walk down to another area of the river where the surrounding forest was mirrored perfectly in a still pool of clear water. There were more *Telopea mungaensis* along the track and wattles (*Acacia trachyphloia* and *A. melanoxylon*), along with *Tasmannia lanceolata* bearing clusters of black fruit. But this area appeared wetter than our first stop, with more lichens on the trees and bright green mosses clothing the fallen logs. Also, there were a lot more ferns — Coral Ferns (*Gleichenia dicarpa* and *G. microphylla*), *Pellaea paradoxa* and the Fishbone Waterfern (*Blechnum nudum*). And, emerging through the ferns and lining the track in places were the tall Bush Clubmosses (*Lycopodium deuterodensum*).

We had to eventually leave this lovely place to make our way home, but with the realisation of how lucky we are to be able to travel so easily from our dry sclerophyll surroundings to a magnificent ancient rainforest.

Jo Walker



Eucryphia moorei; Photo: Lesley Page



Viola hederacea (possibly);
Photo by Colin Jeffery