

Wednesday Walk – Lyrebird Trail and Cascade Trail, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve – 12 April 2017

On a sunny still day, we set off from the Mountain Creek carpark to walk the Lyrebird Trail and the side loop Cascade Trail. Tidbinbilla has known human footsteps for more than 20,000 years. It was home to the Ngunnawal people, and the original name was Jedbinbilla meaning 'where boys become men'. Initiation rites were held on the mountains and the many artefacts found there are reminders of the first inhabitants. Later, in the 1800s, settlers moved into the area to farm, fell timber and distil eucalyptus oil.

At the carpark we were greeted by a giant Ribbon Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*), one of three species of eucalypts growing along these trails. The other two are *E. fastigata* (Brown Barrel) and *E. radiata* ssp. *radiata* (Narrow-leaved Peppermint). These three species were much easier to differentiate than some other associations of eucalypts we've encountered because the buds are very different. *E. viminalis* has three longish buds and the other two trees both have clusters of multiple small buds — but those of *E. fastigata* are sharply pointed while those of *E. radiata* are rounded at the tips.

Our path wound up and down, quite steeply in places, between steep banks and coarse-grained grey granite boulders. At one point, we crossed a gently flowing little creek and made our way down to the Cascades, a rather exaggerated description of the slight volume of water trickling over the rocks at present but a beautiful place anyway.

The vegetation didn't vary much along the whole walk. In many places, the narrow sunlit paths were sheltered on both sides by an almost impenetrable growth of tall *Pomaderris aspera*, interspersed in places with *Bursaria spinosa* ssp. *lasiophylla* and *Acacia falciformis*. Because we were in an area of moist forest and gullies, we encountered some of the tall daisy bushes that favour that habitat. *Olearia argophylla* (Native Musk), its species name describing the silvery under-surface of its large leaves, was growing quite densely in places. There were fewer Blanket Bushes (*Bedfordia arborescens*), but their tall, robust stature made them noticeable in the understorey.

There were even one or two Tree Ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) in the deeper gullies. And, in a grassy open area amongst the trees, two Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea glauca* ssp. *angustifolia*) pointed their narrow leaves to the sky.

Because of the damp atmosphere in the forest, many of the rocks were cloaked in bright green mosses and fungi of various colours and shapes were growing on fallen logs and in the moist carpet of decaying leaves. One large moss-covered boulder had an additional covering of orchid leaves. There were similar signs of orchids along the paths. There were no flowers to aid in identifying them, but *Acianthus exsertus* was included on a previous plant list as the only orchid seen.

There were lots of scrapings and scratchings in the leaf litter along the way, indicating the presence of Lyrebirds — and we did hear one at some distance away. And, while one of the group was giving a dissertation on Rosenberg's Monitors after we came across a large termite mound (where the Monitors lay their eggs), we noticed a rather less significant little lizard, a tiny Grass Skink, trying desperately to escape between eight pairs of human feet and several walking sticks and guided it to safety.

After our strenuous walk, we sat at one of the tables near the Visitors' Centre for a while, watching the kangaroos and emus on the tranquil lower slopes of Tidbinbilla.

Text: Jo Walker; Photos: Brigitta Wimmer



Acacia falciformis seed



Bedfordia arborescens



Exocarpus strictus



Olearia argophylla



Pimelea treyvaudii



Pomaderris aspera