

Wednesday Walk – Nursery Swamp, Namadgi National Park – 19 April 2017

Walks with 'swamp' in their names usually bring to mind open flat countryside accessed by gentle slopes, but that expectation can be put aside for Nursery Swamp. It lies at an elevation of 1150 metres and when we left the carpark on Orroral Road, we began a steep climb over smooth granite boulders and up flights of grassy steps.

The vegetation there was mostly tall shrubs, predominantly *Bursaria spinosa* ssp. *lasiophylla* and *Banksia marginata*. Sadly, many of the Banksias were dead or dying, although others looked perfectly healthy. There was enough open space for grasses to flourish – mostly Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*), a species we tend to associate mainly with grasslands but which we've come across in many high and rocky places.

Higher up, the walk became a little less steep but continued on a steadily upward trajectory along a hillside. The lower side was a moist gully with Candlebarks (*Eucalyptus rubida*) and Ribbon Gums (*E. viminalis*) sheltering Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*), daisy bushes – mostly *Cassinia longifolia* but also a few *Ozothamnus stirlingii* – and several species of heath plants. These included *Brachyloma daphnoides* and several Beard Heaths (*Leucopogon fletcheri*, *L. microphylla* var. *pilibundus* and *L. virgatus*) as well as a few small carpets of *Acrotriche serrulata* and some *Monotoca scoparia* just beginning to flower.

Most of these understorey plants were also growing on the higher side of the path, a drier slope shaded by Broad-leaved Peppermint (*Eucalyptus dives*) and Brown Barrel (*E. fastigata*) and a few Blackwood Wattles (*Acacia melanoxylon*). Scattered through the understorey were a few robust *Persoonia rigida* and one or two *Persoonia chamaepeuce* formed green carpets on the gritty ground. Tall coarse-grained grey granite boulders, eroded into smooth shapes, loomed in the forest on the hillside. Some had tumbled aeons ago to form rock shelters and in one place, a huge ball-shaped boulder was balanced delicately on a much smaller mossy rock. On a rock at the side of the track, two *Brachyscome rigidula* had managed to grow in a deep crack and were bearing blue flowers. Nearby one solitary Hyacinth Orchid (*Dipodium roseum*) stood tall with about a dozen glossy dark maroon seed-pods adorning its stem.

We finally reached the highest point of the walk and began a gentle descent to the swamp. The tree cover changed to mostly Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) and Black Sallee (*E. stellulata*). There were more pea plants growing along this part of the track, *Daviesia ulicifolia* and *Oxylobium ellipticum* mostly but also a few rather small-leaved *Gomphlobium huegelii*. And, at one point, we passed through a shady avenue of prickly-leaved Dagger Wattle (*Acacia siculiformis*).

And finally there before us was Nursery Swamp, a wide expanse of sedges and rushes bordered by thickets of Grey Tea-tree (*Leptospermum myrtifolium*), *Oxylobium ellipticum* and the soft-leaved *Grevillea lanigera* merging again into a woodland of *Eucalyptus stellata* and *E. pauciflora*. Nursery Swamp is a fen formed over thousands of years of decaying vegetation and is the largest sedge deposit in the ACT. We had lunch in those peaceful surroundings, watching a Grey Fantail and listening to the chatter of a White-browed Scrub-wren whose territory we had obviously invaded. We didn't see any of the probably nocturnal Broad-toothed Rats that have been found to inhabit Nursery Swamp. These little native rodents once had a wide distribution during the cooler Pleistocene Period but are now confined to high country swamps.

The return journey was much easier and faster, but the morning's exertions were worth the reward of a diversity of landscapes and a few restful moments in a beautiful place.

Text: Jo Walker; Photos: Brigitta Wimmer (GW) and Gail Ritchie Knight (GRK)



Climbing up granite steps (GRK)



Acacia dealbata young shoots/buds (BW)



Vittadinia muelleri (BW)



Acacia siculiformis buds forming (BW)



Banksia marginata fl (BW)



Banksia marginata (GRK)



Banksia marginata (GRK)



Banksia marginata (GRK)



Banksia marginata (GRK)

The changing forms of banksia flowers



Exocarpos cupressiformis (back) and *exocarpos strictus* (foreground) (GRK)



Monotoca scoparia (GRK)



Oxylobium ellipticum, hairy legumes (BW)



Eucalyptus rubida juvenile leaves (GRK)



Hydrocotyle tripartita (BW)



Negotiating a path through granite boulders (GRK)



Grevillea lanigera (BW)



Laccocephalum (Bracket Fungus) (GRK)



Olearia lirata (BW)



Walking past *Cassinia* and *Exocarpus* (GRK)



Pteridium esculentum (GRK)



Pteridium esculentum (GRK)