

Wednesday Walk – Monga Forest Drive – 28 February 2018

Monga National Park, Dasyurus and Waratah Roads and Penance Grove Circuit and Boardwalk

Wednesday Walkers have been visiting Monga National Park for over 15 years since the establishment of the Park in 2001, as a result of the regional forests agreement. It still contains patches of old growth forest dominated by brown barrel, *E. fastigata*, messmate, *E. obliqua*, and manna gum, *E. viminalis*, as well as the ancient plumwood, *Eucryphia moorei* (Cunoniaceae, coachwoods), that is confined to wet gullies. Other parts of the park are regenerating from past logging that fed a timber mill at Monga.

Access to the eastern part of the park on the escarpment is via the Corn Trail that is one of our favourite walks, because of its floriferous heathland understory. Further west a network of old logging trails dissect the park around the catchment of the Mongarlowe River. Our regular haunts here are the Dasyurus Road and picnic ground that leads to the Corn Trail Link across the river, the Waratah Road and Picnic Area, where a riverside track has been constructed to view the waratahs, and the Penance Grove loop track that provides a different access to the boardwalk through groves of massive tree ferns and a plumwood gully.

Our first stop was the Dasyurus picnic ground for morning tea and a walk along the roadside. With each visit, the trees are getting taller and some must be getting to the 50m mark. I should borrow a clinometer to measure their true height. Three species dominate: messmate, *E. obliqua*, brown barrel, *E. fastigata*, and manna gum, *E. viminalis*. *E. sieberi*, silver-top ash, is also listed here but I think this was confused with messmate and it is also not the habitat for this ash. I always wonder what is going to be the fate of these giant trees that seem to be so evenly aged. Will individuals eventually die from old age or lightning strike and fall and decay or will they be consumed by a giant conflagration resulting in a new succession?

The understory is dominated by *Acacia trachyphloia*, with its attractive weeping foliage and by *Acacia falcata*, *Tasmannia lanceolata* and *Coprosma quadrifida*. The herb layer was dominated by pinnate ferns, *Blechnum* spp. and the club moss, *Lycopodium deuterodensum*. At ground level, there were prostrate *Viola hederacea*, *Gonocarpus teucroides* and *Hydrocotyle* sp. Few plants were seen in flower on this walk, possibly because of the dry preceding months. We did note a single, out of season, waratah flower, *Telopea mongaensis*, a flowering *Persoonia mollis* subsp. *budawangensis* and, in the herb layer, some *Lagenophora stipitata*. Among non-flowering plants of interest were a juvenile *Eucryphia* and a single *Epacris impressa*.

Next stop was the Waratah picnic ground where there is a short loop track to see the Waratahs on the banks of the Mongarlowe. Here we also saw *Prostanthera lasianthos* and *Pomaderris aspera* among the giant eucalypts. Clumps of giant *Gahnia* sp., *Lepidosperma ?laterale* and *Lomandra longifolia* line parts of the track.

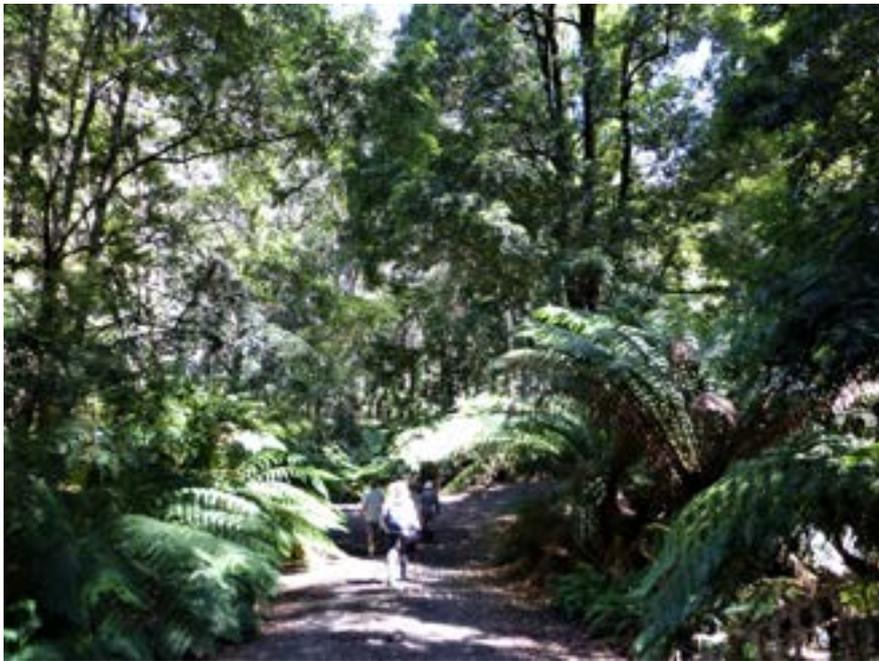
From there we returned to the main road and took the Penance Grove access loop. This passes through an ancient grove of intact Antarctic tree ferns, *Dicksonia antarctica*, as well as some rough tree fern, *Cyathea australis*. Of particular interest is *Fieldia australis* (no common name) growing on the *Dicksonia* trunks. Its flowers are bell-like, resembling those of *Billardiera*, and its fruit is a purple drupe, however, it belongs to the family Gesneriaceae, the African violet family, with only one species in NSW. We also saw another epiphyte in flower, *Hydrocotyle geraniifolia*, growing on rotting tree trunks. In the understory, the bootlace bush, *Pimelea axiflora*, with its tough stems, was quite common. The bloodroot, *Lobelia purpurascens*, was in flower along damp parts of the track.

The decapitated trunks of the tree ferns in Penance Grove are a stark reminder of the unfortunate plunder of these ferns over 30 years ago and destined for sale to people's gardens. Many intact tree ferns remain but the grove is unlikely to ever return to its former glory because of the extremely slow growth of any juveniles and lack of regeneration.

Another feature of the grove is the stand of ancient plumwoods, *Eucryphia moorei*, festooned with mosses, filmy ferns, *Hymenophyllum* sp, and *Pyrrhosia* ferns. Some of these trees are over 1000 years old. Seeds often germinate on the trunks of tree ferns, which are finally engulfed by the plumwood trunk. The plumwoods at the grove were just coming into flower. *Eucryphia* is currently assigned to the coachwood family Cunoniaceae. There are the five species in Australia and two in Chile and these trees are a good example of the Gondwana connection. At ground level in the Grove there are some clumps of the giant moss, *Dawsonia superba*, the tallest-growing moss in the world, with the stems attaining up to 50 cm in PNG.

However, my most interesting find, and the smallest, was a tiny white-palped male cricket found in the litter at the Dasyurus Picnic spot. It was identified as *Bobilla illawarra* and was described as recently as 2000 by my colleagues Younging Su and David Rentz from a specimen found at nearby Wyanbene. Also shown is another litter inhabitant, a pygmy grasshopper, that feeds on moss and algae in the litter.

Text: Roger Farrow; Photos: Brigitta Wimmer (BW), Roger Farrow (RF) and Jeanette Jeffery (JJ)



Walking in the rainforest (BW)



Telopea mungaensis (JJ)



Blechnum nudum — fertile fronds (BW)



Hydrocotyle geraniifolia (JJ)



Hydrocotyle geraniifolia fruits (RF)



Hydrocotyle geraniifolia (RF)



Eucryphia moorei (BW)



Persoonia mollis subsp. *budawangensis* (RF)



Fieldia australis festooning *Dicksonia* (RF)



Hymenophyllum sp. on a *Dicksonia* trunk (RF)



Smilax australis fruit (BW)



Lobelia purpurascens (RF)



Pygmy field cricket, *Bobilla illawarra* (Gryllidae), male (RF)



Pygmy grasshopper, *Coptotettix* sp. (Tetrigidae) (RF)



Among the confetti at Penance Grove (JJ)

Plant List

? indicates that those present were unsure of the plant name

Acacia falcata	Euchiton involucratus	Pimelea axiflora
Acacia obliquinervia	Eucryphia moorei	Plantago sp
Acacia trachyphloia	Fieldia australis	Polystichum proliferum
Atherosperma moschatum	Gahnia sp.	Pomaderris aspera
Blechnum nudum	Geranium sp.	Pomaderris elliptica
Blechnum sp.	Gleichenia dicarpa	Poranthera microphylla
Bursaria spinosa	Gleichenia microphylla	Prostanthera lasianthos
Carex sp	Gonocarpus teucroides	Pteridium esculentum
Clematis aristata	Hydrocotyle geraniifolia	Pteris sp
Coprosma quadrifida	Hydrocotyle laxiflora	Pyrrhosia rupestris
Cyathea australis	Hymenophyllum flabellatum	Ranunculus sp.
Daviesia ulicifolia	Lagenophora stipitata	Rubus parvifolia
Dawsonia superba	Lepidosperma laterale	Smilax australis
Dianella tasmanica	Leucopogon lanceolata	Stellaria pungens
Dichondra repens	Lobelia purpurascens	Tasmania lanceolata
Dicksonia antarctica	Lomandra longifolia	Telopea mongaensis
Epacris impressa	Lomatia myricoides	Veronica plebeia
Eucalyptus fastigata	Lycopodium deuterodensum	Viola hederacea
Eucalyptus obliqua	Microlaena stipoides	Xerochrysum bracteatum
Eucalyptus sieberi?	Persoonia mollis ssp.	
Eucalyptus viminalis	budawangensis	