

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

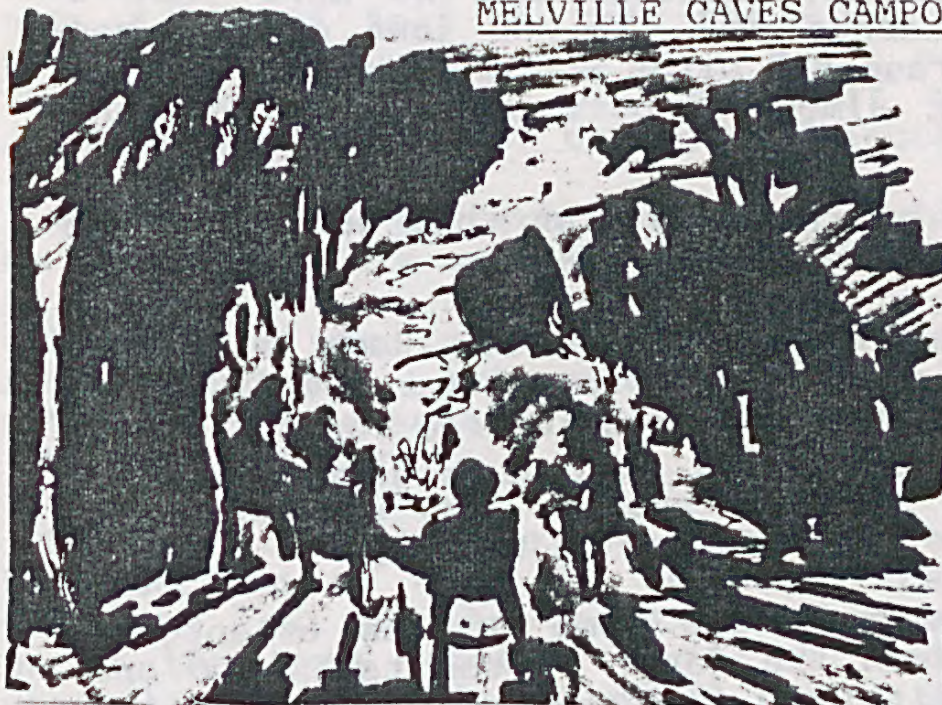
JUNE 1988

#135



AUTUMN GREENHOOD

MELVILLE CAVES CAMPOUT



A group of only four left Castlemaine for Melville Caves State Park to camp on the first weekend in May, but four others followed later to spend the afternoon there, and another group went up again on Sunday, though they didn't join the walkers but spent a most enjoyable time, sitting

on a rock in the scrub, with the company of a number of Hooded Robins, amongst other birds.

We arrived at the main Picnic Area in time to have lunch, which we were eating when the others arrived. A group from an Orienteering Club and a group of teenage boys were already installed in the Picnic Area, which cut down the camping spot somewhat and suggested a not-too-quiet evening!

After lunch our two groups split up again, Kay and Co. going up to the top for the view, and to birdwatch, the rest of us heading off on the 8 km walking track. Soon after leaving the picnic area we found a small amount of Halequin mistletoe still in flower, and some Grey mistletoe just starting to flower. The Wirey mistletoe had masses of delicate pink fruit, which we tried out, as we did the Fruit of the Grey mistletoe, the fruit of which tasted rather like a rather thin vanilla custard.

Not far on from this spot we came across an ideal spot for us to camp for the night, on a side track, with fire-

places, and quiet! We were soon on the way again, past great boulders, sprouting ground ferns and refreshed mosses and lichens. About half way along the walk we came across a small waterhole in the large rock slab called the "Big Rock". It is believed that the hole is an aboriginal gnamma hole. This was quite an impressive place where we lost the track for a while - mainly because we ignored the signs (flat pieces of rock to mark the path) and the map!

We had taken the track in an anti-clockwise direction, and found ourselves having a quite stiff climb up the Long Slab. Views from here were marvellous. We stood and watched the rain approaching, but no more than a light shower ever reached us. It was just clouded and wet enough to discourage the birds and make identification, when we did see them, almost impossible against the light grey sky.

It was at the top of the Long Slab that we saw Autumn Greenhoods.

Because of the time spent at the Big Rock we missed meeting up with the others again, but, after a well earned afternoon tea, we left the main picnic area for our chosen campsite. With the fire-place against a large rock it proved to be a very pleasant spot. Camp was soon set up, with a cheery fire lit, and tea on the way.

The only night visitors were some of the orienteers who were doing a run in the dark! After talking to one of them we were able to get an orienteering map of the area the next morning. It came in very handy on our walk.

We were disappointed that there was not much of a dawn chorus - mostly cockatoos and kookaburras - but while we were washing up several Little Cuckoo-shrikes landed in the tree opposite. Quite a few birds were around by that time, and the new morning was really lovely.

No one else had turned up by 10.30 so we set off from one of the top carparks leaving a note to say where we had gone, taking our lunch on our backs. We took the 5 km walk, which became 7km because we walked down to the starting point.

Again we decided to take an anti-clockwise direction, and soon after setting off down the track we saw



a Swamp Wallaby feeding amongs the scrub, barely 30 feet away. It was quite unperturbed, until Gunter tried for a photo, when it moved back a few feet into the scrub.

We wound down over rock slabs, through scrub, and over little creeks, accompanied by screeching cockatoos, which made it a bit hard to hear anything else! A bit later on the men, who were well ahead, were calling for us to come and see something they had found. I was a bit slow as I was trying to identify a bird, which turned out to be a Little Thornbill. They tried hurrying me up with the promise of the sight of all sorts of marvellous things, but if they'd told me that there was a whole family of Geckoes under a rock slab they might have hurried me up! There they all were, in their soft grey velvet suits, all big eyes and huffs, trying to frighten us off.

A bit further on from this spot - which has good views to the south - are some more good views to the north.

Everything was fresh because of the good rain the week before, and the lunch spot, which was another rock-slab, was a very pleasant place, with a number of rock holes filled with water.

When we got back to the start of the trail Jack and Elma decided to head for home, and happened to meet up with the rest of the group, who had eventually arrived, up at the top. Gunther and I decided to head down the other track to see for we could locate the Orchid Terraces, which, by my calculations, should have been another kilometer or so down there. We overshot the spot by about another kilometre, because, as we realized on the way back, we were too busy admiring an echidna which had been digging for ants along the side of the track, to think checking if this might be the spot we were looking for!

Although the weather wasn't ideal for birdwatching, and it was a bit early for flowers, it was excellent walking weather, and we thoroughly enjoyed the weekend. It was a pity more couldn't have been there.

I'd like to go again in Spring, and if anyone would like to join me for a couple of days or so during the first week of the school holidays in September (26th-30th) please let me know.

If anyone is interested I'll contact the Ranger, and get some advise from him.

Rita Mills

If You can't beat them, eat them. A series.

SPEAR THISTLE (*Cirsium vulgare*)

Spear Thistle, on first sight, must be one of the least likely candidates for a list of edible plants. It is extremely spiny, with almost all parts of the plant - stems, leaves and flowers are covered in extremely sharp spines. Plants generally have ways to reduce the likelihood of being eaten. Some, like the cabbage family or the gum trees, have strong tasting chemicals to make them unpalatable to most animals. Thistles rely on the formidable prickles. However, once the prickles are removed it becomes quite edible.

Spear Thistle is probably the most common thistle in the district. It is an erect plant with green leaves. The leaves are lobed and each lobe ends in a sharp spine. The stalks are covered with spines also. Flowers are purple on spiny bases about 3 cm wide.

The stalks are most commonly eaten. They should be harvested in early summer when flowering has just begun. Use stout gloves for this! The stalks are peeled to remove the prickles and tough outer peel, and may be steamed or boiled.

Spear Thistles have thick tap-roots, and these may be eaten raw or cooked. Like many vegetables, the roots should be harvested before flowering begins, as older roots become very stringy.

If the Thistle is already in flower, then the base of the flower (again after removing the prickles) can be eaten as an artichoke.

It is rather a pity that Thistles are not used as a vegetable more often. It is certainly plentiful, and many farmers would, I am sure, be quite happy to allow people to harvest thistles at very low cost indeed.

Or you could grow them in your vegetable garden.



SALINITY AT AXE CREEK

[This is a condensed version of an extract from 'The Axe Creek Salinity Study', 1985 (CF & L)]

SOIL SALINITY. Surface soil salinity was first noticed [at Axe Creek] by landholders in the mid to late 1940's. This was in the main valley floor in the lower central catchment. Prior to 1946, this area had been considered prime grazing land, but it deteriorated rapidly with stock concentrating on it. At least one waterhole in the immediate area was known to become saline at about the same time. Spiny Rush appeared soon after near the head of that valley, and rapidly spread downstream.

It appears that, in some instances, dam construction has contributed to surface salinity by inducing groundwater mounds immediately downstream.

Erosion is almost exclusively confined to gullying of the valley floors. Through Ordovician country, these are cut out to base material, generally at around one metre depth and further serious deterioration is unlikely. Deep gully erosion also occurs in the granite outwash material.

AXE CREEK. Axe Creek is an ephemeral stream. In 1980 and 1981 it flowed for 8 months at Sedgewick. Records at Longlea, 6 km downstream from the project area, suggest that there is normally about 9 months flow under the bridge on the Lake Eppalock road.

Surface water salinity measurements were taken at 30 locations at monthly intervals for 1980 and 1981. Flow volumes were not measured, (except by SR&WSC at Sedgewick) so that the salt load for individual tributaries and the lower reaches of Axe Creek could not be calculated.

According to the Victorian Irrigation Research Advisory Committee standards, at no time during the 17 months of the project was Axe Creek water at the Lake Eppalock road bridge suitable for off-stream storage for irrigation of salt sensitive crops. However, in practice, many plants would suffer no short-term ill effects if irrigated by water of similar quality to that of the Axe Creek main flow. As little flow occurs in summer, off-stream winter storage would be required for summer irrigation.

Axe Creek was suitable for stock at all times of recording and also permissible for human consumption for 11 months of the 15. However, it did exceed the desirable salinity limit set by the World Health Organisation, for most of the sampling period.

Melville Caves Bird List

Honeyeaters-	White Plumed,	New Holland,
White-eared,	Fuscous,	Yellow-tufted,
Brown Headed,	Red Wattlebird.	
Robins- Flame,	Scarlet,	Hooded.
Galahs;	White Cockatoos;	Correllas;
Eastern Rosellas	Quail sp	Magpie
Pardelotes-	Spotted,	Striated.
Grey Shrike-thrush;	Superb Blue wren;	
Willy Wagtail;	Grey Fantail;	Kookaburra;
White-throated Treecreeper;		Mistletoe Bird;
Little Cuckoo-shrike;		Welcome Swallows;
Thornbills-	Yellow Rumped,	Buff Tailed,
Yellow (Little).		Weebill;
Wedgetailed Eagle.		

A Note From Barkers Creek

Why, do you suppose, when we woke to 30mm of rain in the gauge and still raining, did we find a pair of our resident sugar-gliders sound asleep on the outside of their log, one spread-eagled under the opening, the other half way out, draped head-first over the top of him!

Were they enjoying the welcome rain, or trying to dry out before going to bed? Either way, at 8 am they scrambled inside.

We had noticed one looking out occasionally when we used a hose nearby over recent weeks.

Wyn Palmer

FROM THE COMMITTEE

TOUR OF TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS. Run by Council of Adult Education. Date is 12-22 November. Leader is Jane Calder. Brochure from the secretary.

NAME THAT FLOWER - Identification of Native Plants by I. Clarke and H. Lee. A copy of this book is held by the Castlemaine Library.

COLIBAN FALLS WALK. Bendigo Alpine Club is walking along Granite Creek and Coliban River on June 19th. Choice of 8.5 km or 19.5 km walk. Leaflets available from E. Perkins, R. Mills or G. Broadway.

KANYAPELLA BASIN is a wildlife management project near Echuca. It is the first time that such a large area has been developed as an artificially controlled wildlife habitat. Maryborough F.N.C. is planning a joint excursion with C.F.N.C in 1989.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

- Fri 10th June. SALINITY IN NORTH CENTRAL VICTORIA with Roger Standen. 8.00 p.m. at the High School.
- Sat 11th June. SALINITY IN THE AXEDALE AREA. An excursion to some salt affected areas. Meet S.E.C. Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp.
- Sun 12th June. MUCKLEFORD, NUGGETTY. Excursion with Geelong F.N.C. Meet Caravan Park entrance, Welshman's Reef at 9.30 a.m. Morning - Muckleford and ironbarks; lunch - Gower School (12.30); afternoon - Nuggetty.
- Sun 12th June. Evening meeting with Geelong F.N.C. at 7.30 p.m. in the Newstead Hall. Speaker is A. Hartup.
- Mon 13th June. CLYDESDALE AREA with Geelong F.N.C. Meet at Newstead P.O. at 9.30 p.m. Leader is A. Hartup.
- Fri 8th July. FUNGI. Talk by Hilary Weatherhead.
- Sat 9th July. FIRTH PARK (Wombat Forest). Fungi. Leader is R Mills. Meet S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp.
- Sat 13 Aug. FRYERSTOWN AND VAUGHAN TOUR
- Fri-Sun 26-28 Aug. BALLARAT CAMPOUT with W.V.F.N.C.A., at Pax Hill Scout camp. Accommodation available at \$5 per night. Corner Fussell St and Spencer St. Fri 26: Registration from 4.00 p.m. Evening talk by Helen Burgess - "South of Cape Horn". Supper.
- Sat 27: 9.00 Depart for Lal Lal, Bungai, Mt Doran
- Sat 27: 12.00 BYD lunch at Lal Lal Iron Mine site
- Sat 27: 7.15 Meeting of W.V.F.N.C.A.
- Sat 27: 8.15 Greg Parker "Reptiles in Western Victoria" followed by supper.
- Sun 28: 9.00 Excursion to Lake Wendouree to observe water birds, vegetation and surrounds. Ferryboat trip.
- Sun 28: 12.00 Lunch at Pax Hill. BBQ.
- Fri 9th Sept. THE GRAMPIANS with Jane Calder.
- Sat 10 Sept. BLACK HILL, KYNETON
- Sat 17th Sept. TARNAGULLA. Combined excursion with Maryborough and St Arnaud F.N.C..
- Sat 1st Oct. BICENTENARY WALK THROUGH KALIMNA
2.00 pm; meet outside high school (Lawson Pde)
- Fri 14th Oct. KAKADU with John Zwar

Fri 21st Oct. WARBY RANGES. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout
8.00 p.m. Fri: Orchids with Roger Briggs.
9.00 a.m. Sat: Excursion to Warby Ranges
6.30 p.m. Sat: Annual meeting of W.V.F.N.C.A.
8.00 p.m. Sat: Booklaunching - Plants of NE Vic.
9.00 a.m. Sun: Excursion to Reef Hills, Benalla

SUPPER ROSTER

June: B. and T. Collins July: G. and P. Broadway

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. Inc. P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450.

Committee: George Broadway (Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec),
Maggie Oliver (VP), Rita Mills (Newsletter), Kaye Turner
(Program Sec), Ern Perkins (Treas), Margaret Dunne,
Geoff Sitch, Robyn Holden, Gunter Liebl, Elma Kelly.
Librarian: Lesley Perkins.

NOTES FOR MAY

LEADEN FLYCATCHER AT TARADALE. ""At least one and possibly two pair of Leaden Flycatchers were present and nesting in a sheltered gully of Messmate and Candlebark in the forest to the east of Taradale. The nest located was 7 Or 8 metres up, on a dead branch." "The nest of this species is particularly easy to locate because of its conspicuous position and active, non-secretive behaviour of the adults" (from Whirrakee, March 1988; sighting was on 17/1/88)

WHIRRAKEE BIRD NOTES

Blue-billed Duck (Barkers Creek Reservoir, 7/2/88)
Chestnut Teal, 6 immatures (Lake Eppalock 14/2/88)

OTHER BIRD OBSERVATIONS.

Bronze Cuckoo at Campbell St (K. Turner).
White-necked Heron at Guildford (B. Perry).
Speckled Warbler at Castlemaine North (R. Mills)
Mistletoe Bird at Campbell St (K. Turner)
Grey Fantail at Campbell St (B. Maund)

ECHIDNA AT Mt TARRENGOWER. The echidna was seen at the very base of the tower by B. Maund.

BELLS SWAMP is now full, after the recent rains.

MUCKLEFORD IRONBARKS are now in flower.

BLUE GUMS AT CHEWTON. The gums behind the Chewton sports ground have been burned. Most trees have all leaves dead.