

HFNC Excursion to Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve, 20th August 2023

Wendy McDonald

Participants: W & P McDonald, P Hocking, R Simpson, S Brumby & D Rendell

The HFNC August excursion was a walk along part of the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Trail. This was led by Peter Hocking, who is both a member of HFNC and the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee of Management (HCRRC). HFNC members met Peter at the Hamilton Visitors Centre and we headed off to the Wannan Station Ground, where our walk was to commence, and where another member of the HCRRC was waiting to join us on the excursion, the Chairperson Sue Brumby and David Rendell.



The first bird sighting for the day was a good one – Sue had sighted three brolgas along the Rail Trail just before we met her. After sorting out car-pooling, we set off a little after 10.30 am. The first section of the walk was through attractive woodland areas, although there were a number of significant weeds sighted at the start, including Gorse, Bridal Creeper and Phalaris. The HCRRC and friends have clearly done a lot of clearing, mowing and other works to get the track open. A number of birds were sighted here including Grey Shrike-thrush, New Holland Honeyeater and Red-browed Finch.



Nest of Australian Magpie

After a few hundred metres walk, we had to move to higher ground as it was too wet underfoot to walk through the railway cutting.

A Magpie's nest and some significant stands of Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) were sighted here, on the higher parts of the trail.

Near the point where we descended back into the rail bed there were some impressive Silver Banksias (*Banksia marginata*).

A little further on we passed through an attractive grove of Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), then beyond these the woodland opened up with vistas across the nearby farms on the Dundas Tableland.

A number of these farms had dams and wetlands where we spotted White-necked Herons and Australian Shelducks.



Silver Banksia

We then walked across an area where you could clearly see the marks and indents left by the railway sleepers. A number of “dog spikes” from the railway line could also be seen on the track.

Some of the mile posts also still exist and have been attractively painted, including this one pictured below indicating we were 213 miles from Melbourne.



Drooping Sheoaks along the cutting



Mile peg on the Dundas Tableland

There were some impressive trees along this section of the walk including large River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and a very attractive tree with a white trunk which we thought may have been a Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*).



River Red Gum

Throughout the walk, we crossed several culverts. In this first section one had been replaced years ago, with seven still needing work, awaiting results from testing arsenic levels.

Arsenic was used globally to protect the timber components of railways and although 136 years old, the remnants of the Red Gum culverts and trestle bridges are still evident; the sleepers were taken for landscaping and firewood.

There are promising signs of regeneration of native plants in a number of places along the trail. There were many water plants, but without our expert botanists, we couldn't identify many.

Various small bodies of water such as springs, drains and ephemeral wetlands run alongside the track where choruses of frogs could be heard.

Just south of the Glenelg Highway we stopped for lunch on some fallen logs.

Once we crossed the highway we passed an area where one of the universities has numbered house tiles laid down to monitor the endangered Legless Lizard.

Once we resumed the main rail trail the track was a lot smoother and more development has clearly taken place from there on.



Casterton Varnish Wattle or hybrid with Hedge Wattle

There were many good sized wattles along this section of the track including Casterton Varnish Wattle (*Acacia exudans*) and Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*). One beautiful specimen eluded our identification, appearing to be a Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*), Casterton Varnish Wattle, or a hybrid of the two.



Common Rice-flower

The only wildflower that was obvious was Common Rice-flower (*Pimelea humilis*). There were several areas where these were prevalent, all blooming beautifully.

As we walked along a bit further, we disturbed two owls. One flew off, but the other landed in a tree so we were able to confirm the sighting as a Southern Boobook. Photos were hard to take though, as it was cloudy and the light was very poor.

The weather was generally fine throughout, apart from two small skiffs of light rain.

As we continued the walk we passed an area where the HCRRC had previously carried out tree plantings. These are around three years old and the trees were all doing very well. They included Silver Banksia, Drooping Sheoak, Sweet Bursaria and Eucalypts.

Next, we came to a very large adjacent farm dam, - (a natural permanent waterhole now altered) where at least 60 Coots were swimming. There were also Grebe (likely Australasian), Chestnut Teal, Black Swan, Pacific Black Duck and a Silver Gull.



Revegetation area

River Red Gums have regenerated along part of the more formed walking and cycling track.



Natural regeneration of River Red Gums

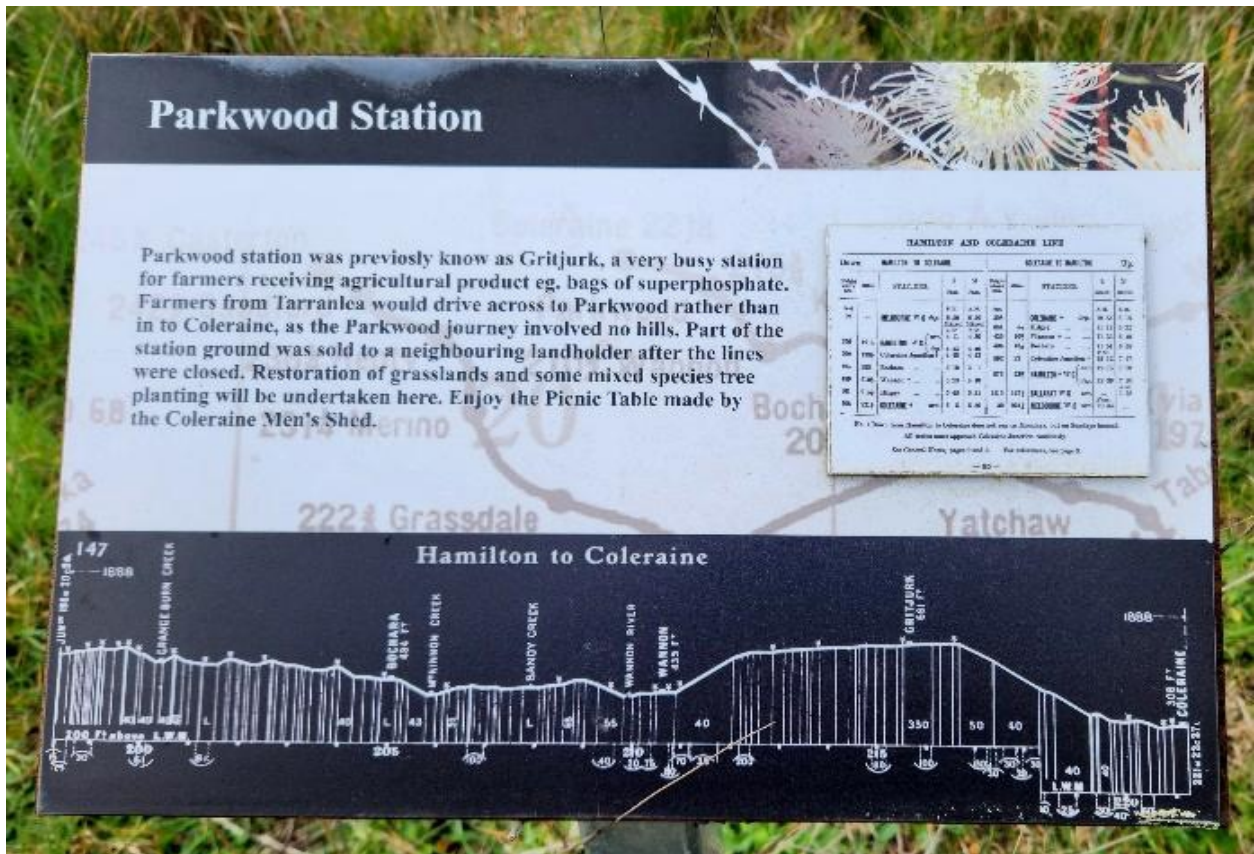
Near Parkwood Station Ground, where the walk ended, we went through another area of planted trees. These were larger than those sighted earlier having been planted by the Wannon Conservation Society and Girl Guides before the Reserve was declared in 2000.

These included Sheoak (some now self seeded), Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), Prickly Tea-tree (*Leptospermum continentale*) and eucalypts.

We had fun escorting an escaped lamb back into its paddock before we crossed over the Toolang Road to inspect the Parkwood Station Ground.

As can be seen in the photos below, there is an information sign with an extract from an old railway timetable and a picnic table nearby. The solid hardwood picnic table was built by the Coleraine Men's Shed.

This was a pleasant place to end to our walk. We had parked two vehicles there earlier, to transfer everyone back to the Wannon after the walk.



Parkwood Station Ground and elevation data for the rail line



Part of Parkwood Station Ground

The map above shows the course of the railway line from the Wannon Station Ground to the Parkwood Station. The construction of the first km rise of the track in 1887 involved an enormous effort in cutting 26,000 cubic yards of earth from the upper area and forming an embankment on the lower area.

That first section of the reserve has a good stand of Swamp Gum (*E. ovata*), Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*), Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) and Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*).



The walkers at Parkwood Station

APPENDIX

Plant List for the Wannan to Parkwood rail reserve

Common Name	Scientific Name
Casterton Varnish Wattle	<i>Acacia exudans</i>
Black Wattle	<i>Acacia mearnsii</i>
Blackwood	<i>Acacia melanoxylon</i>
Golden Wattle	<i>Acacia pycnantha</i>
Prickly Moses	<i>Acacia verticillata</i>
Drooping She-Oak	<i>Allocasuarina verticillata</i>
Silver Banksia	<i>Banksia marginata</i>
Plume Grass	<i>Dichelachne micrantha</i>
Small Sundew	<i>Drosera sp.</i>
Swamp Gum	<i>Eucalyptus ovata</i>
River Red Gum	<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>
Manna Gum	<i>Eucalyptus viminalis</i>
Cherry Ballart	<i>Exocarpos cupressiformis</i>
Prickly Tea-Tree	<i>Leptospermum continentale</i>
Spiny Mat Rush	<i>Lomandra longifolia</i>
Tree Everlasting	<i>Ozothamnus ferrugineus</i>
Common Reed (Cane Grass)	<i>Phragmites australis</i>
Common Rice Flower	<i>Pimelea humilis</i>
Austral Bracken	<i>Pteridium esculentum</i>
Kangaroo Apple	<i>Solanum laciniatum</i>
Kangaroo Grass	<i>Themeda triandra</i>
Introduced weeds:	
Cape Daisy (South Africa)	<i>Arctotheca calendula</i>
Bridal Creeper (South Africa)	<i>Asparagus asparagoides</i>
Black Nightshade	<i>Solanum nigrum</i>
African Weed Orchid (South Africa)	<i>Disa bracteata</i>
Wild Gladioli (South Africa)	<i>Gladiolus undulatus</i>
English Ivy (Europe)	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Fog Grass (Africa/Europe/Asia)	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>
Scotch Thistle (Scotland)	<i>Onoropordum acanthium</i>
Soursob	<i>Oxalis pes-caprae</i>
Phalaris (North America)	<i>Phalaris aquatica</i>
Ribwort/Soldier Grass (Europe)	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>
White Poplar (Europe/North Africa)	<i>Populus alba</i>
Bramble Rose (Asia)	<i>Rosa rubiginosa</i>
Blackberry (Europe)	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
Sparaxis (South Africa)	<i>Sparaxis bulbifera</i>
Gorse (Scotland/Europe)	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>

Bird list
Australasian Grebe
Australian Boobook
Australian Magpie
Australian Shelduck
Australian Wood Duck
Black Swan
Brolga
Crimson Rosella
Grey Fantail
Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra
Long-billed Corella
Magpie Lark
New Holland Honeyeater

Pacific Black Duck
Raven
Red Wattlebird
Red-browed Finch
Straw-necked Ibis
Striated Pardalote
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Superb Fairy-wren
Thornbill
Tree Martin
White-faced Heron
White-necked Heron
Willie Wagtail
Yellow-rumped Thornbill