

HFNC Excursion to Cobboboonee National Park and Mount Clay, April 2024

Rod Bird

Participants: Joe Logan, Virginia Keiller, Rod Bird, Peter Hocking, Glenys Cayley, Pam Lehmann, Sarah Patterson & Janeen Samuel.

Members from Hamilton left the Visitor Centre at 9.00 am. This excursion was organised by Joe and planned to proceed from our meeting point at the Apex Park in Heywood. We had morning tea in the picnic ground. The weather was mild and becoming sunny.

Our destination for the first stop was the **Heathlands Nature Trail**. We travelled from the Henty HWay, just south of Heywood, along Catons Flat Rd and then S on Jackys Swamp Rd, W on Cut Out Dam Rd, N on T & W Rd and then W on Cobboboonee Rd.

The Heathland Nature Trail begins near the road, off the Great South West Walk. The signboard for this is on the roadside but is not conspicuous. The trail, for this swampy section, runs along what may have been an old mounded forestry track. Swamp Gums (*E. ovata*) appear to be the main tree species there. The trail is presently overgrown in parts by Scented Paperbark (*Melaleuca squarrosa*), Red-fruit Saw-sedge (*Gahnia sieberiana*), Scrambling Coral Fern (*Gleichenia microphylla*) and other vegetation.



Start of the Heathlands Trail



Silver Banksia & Swamp Gums

There were some flowering Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and a few Flame Heath (*Stenanthera conostephioides*) and Cranberry Heath (*Styphelia humifusa*). One greenhood was seen on the trail. This little plant had a very small flower and no-one managed a good photo of it: it may have been a Tiny Greenhood (*Pterostylis parviflora*). The ground was dry, even in the first swampy area, and we saw only one fungus – Rosy Coral Fungus (*Ramaria* sp.). However, Sarah and Peter ‘collected’ a few leeches!



Unidentified tiny greenhood



GSW Walk back to the road

The heathland section is on a sandy hillside with scattered Brown Stringybark (*E. baxteri*) and it links up with the GSW Walk on the rise. One returns to the start by following the GSW Walk back to the road. Other trees noted nearing the depression closer to the road included Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*), Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cuppressiformis*) and what appears to be Western Peppermint (*E. falciformis*).



Rosy Coral Fungus PL



The Great South West Walk PL

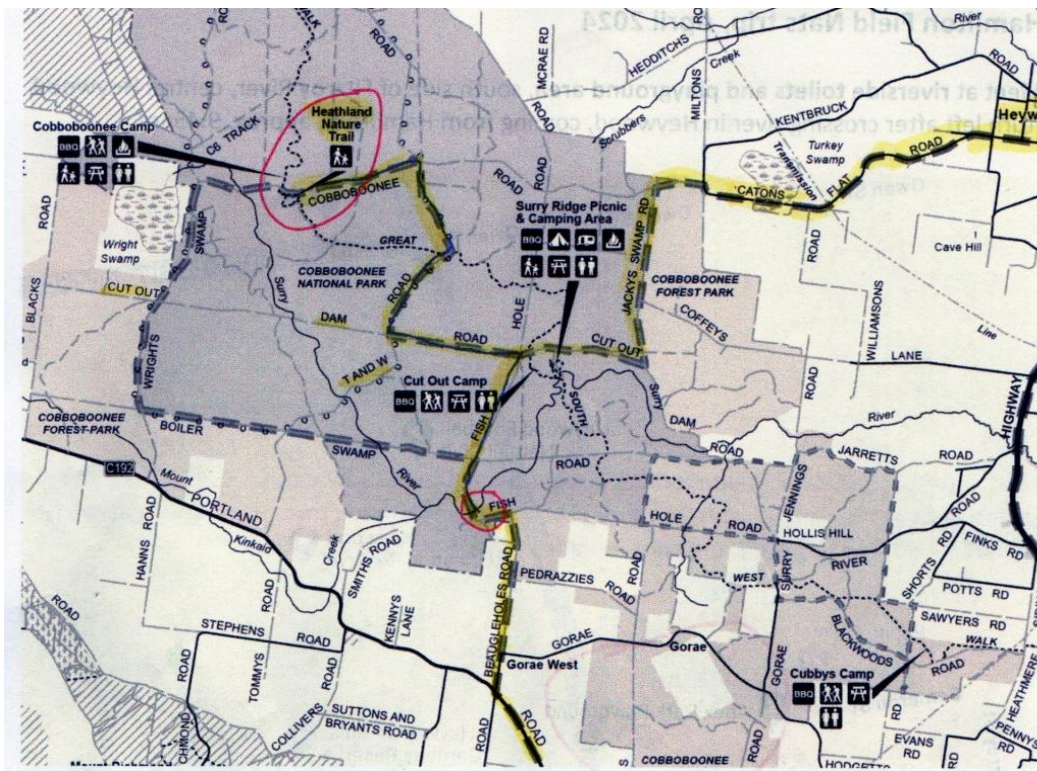


Brown Stringybark on GSW Walk PL



GSW Walk nearing the road PL

Our next stop was at the **Fish Holes**, at the bend in the Fish Holes Rd where the road crosses the bridge over the Surry River (see map below).



There was only a small puddle in the fish hole found about 40 m E from the road. A few birds were seen there: Grey Fantail, White-browed Scrubwren and Rufous Whistler, but no robins or kingfishers.



Views across and down the Surry River at Fish Holes

We continued on to Mount Clay, for lunch at Sawpit Picnic Area. Our route was via Beaglehole's Rd to the Portland-Nelson Rd, then onto the Princes HWay towards Narrawong. Just short of Narrawong, Boyers Rd takes one to the **Sawpit Picnic Area** in the **Mount Clay State Forest**.

The large cleared area also caters for many camping sites among the spaced Brown Stringybarks and grassy ground cover. The natural understorey of Austral Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*), shrubs and heath plants has been extirpated here, probably to reduce the risk of fire, snakes and leeches. One consequence of no shrub cover was that there were no Superb Fairy-wrens fossicking around the picnic area. We did see Australian Magpies and Galahs there. We saw a pair of Galahs looking for a nest hollow. Superb Fairy-wrens, Crimson Rosella, Common Bronzewing and Grey Currawong were seen at other places in the forest. The camping area was popular, with a good number of sites occupied.



Sawpit Picnic Area, Mount Clay



Galahs in the picnic area

After our picnic lunch we started on the walk to the **Whalers Lookout**. On arriving at a bend we saw a sign indicating a loop track and also a sign and arrow on that angled post suggesting that the lookout lay in that direction. Another post 10 m away (on the track to the lookout) should have had the arrow – clearly the people installing the signs made a mistake. After some discussion we decided to take the loop track, which led us back to the Picnic Area! After more discussion, and because we had plenty of time, we decided to try again – taking the straight track to the lookout!

There were very few plants in flower but the walks through the heathy woodland were pleasant and easy. At the lookout there was signage indicating some of the history of the lookout, Portland Bay whalers and their interaction with the indigenous people. Apparently there was initially co-operation between the two groups, with the Aborigines informing the whalers when whales were seen. They expected to take a share of the meat but after a while that arrangement was not honoured and the whalers murdered many of the local clan.

The lookout is on the edge of the bluff, on the boundary with farmland, with an uninterrupted view to sea. There are fine distant views of the cliffs of Portland and Lawrence Rocks. A pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles were seen high over the coast. There is an interesting leaf sculpture near the lookout platform.



Whalers Lookout PH



Leaf sculpture at Whalers Lookout PH



View to Lawrence Rocks

Sarah had left a little earlier than the Hamilton contingent that departed from the Sawpit Picnic area at about 3 pm, travelling N up Boyers Rd, W on Tower Rd, N on Woolwash Rd and W on Golf Course Rd to Henty HWay, and then N to Heywood and Hamilton.

Our thanks to the leaders for the day – Joe and Virginia – who prepared the route and guided us to places that some of us had not seen previously.

Including the birds mentioned earlier, we did not see much fauna. There were several Black Wallabies in the Cobboboonee NP and a Koala on the road near Heywood. There were many Crimson Rosella gleaning grain from the edge of the Henty HWay.

Note – Photos contributed by other members are denoted by initials in the caption box.