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Newsletter April 2001

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A0016319X

Welcome to the April edition of our newsletter, with some interesting items to report.

Our wishes were answered in mid March, with some excellent rain falling throughout the area. On March 15 and 16, just 2 days before our last activity, we had 75mm fall at Boolarra, with over 100mm falling in the hills behind us. According to Rob Howell, the Park had about 60mm in the gauge at Foster's Gully. Good follow-up rains later in the month were icing on the cake, with a total of 118mm at Boolarra and the valley starting to look green again. We've just heard our water restrictions have been reduced to Stage 2!

As a result, things were a bit damp at our March activity. The rain had stopped and it was pleasantly cool compared to the warm weather of February. Billy's Creek was running much higher, although from the obvious debris and water mark on the banks it had been higher still. We had a good turnout for the morning, with all the regulars (Rob, Ken, Wendy, Danny and the four of us) as well as welcoming two new members to the group, Jane and Dennis Sultana of Traralgon. Ken called it a day straight away due to his and Rob's excursion (and exertions!) the day before, when they patrolled the proposed new walking track route (see article below). I think Rob may have liked to follow suit, but duty won the argument.

We commenced where we left off last month, firstly cutting and painting willow regrowth at one of the burn sites and then heading off down the creek again. We worked diligently and uneventfully until lunchtime, finding some quite thick patches of foot high willow sprouts. Some were growing from loose offcuts washed down the creek and were easily pulled out, others couldn't be moved and had to be cut and painted. A wombat watched our labours from the mound of soil in front of his burrow, seemingly unconcerned by our presence even when we approached for a closer look. I tried a couple of photos, but I doubt they will show much with no zoom facility on the camera.

After an enjoyable lunch (Rob remembered the chairs!) and a bit of drizzle, we were back into the creek again. So far, we'd all kept dry but I couldn't let that continue too long, could I? Just after extracting a willow while standing in 8 inches of water, I took one step too many and was suddenly in 3 feet of water. It was cold, too. Needless to say, I didn't stay in too long. At least I wasn't the only one, though, with Rob deciding to wallow around in a billabong in some nice thick, smelly mud. Shortly thereafter we had a bit of a scare. We had removed a small willow from a short undercut bank and moved onto the next one about 5 feet away when we noticed a

European Wasp or two buzzing around us. Rob immediately called us away, although Nicole was stung through her pants as we moved off. Meanwhile, that short undercut bank was swarming with some rather upset wasps. We were very lucky that the weather was cool and the wasps sluggish, and that Rob was aware of a history of wasp nests in the area. While we were calming Nicole down, we noticed a second wasp nest in one of the unburnt piles of willow that Zack had been considering climbing! The rest of the day was uneventful, as we continued pulling willows until about 4pm. We still have a bit more to do, though.

Pioneering a new Track

By Ken Harris, 23/03/01

We have a grant this year to extend the network of tracks in Morwell National Park. The plan, foreshadowed in the Management Plan is for a new track heading South from the top of Blue Gum Hill to approach the East-West section further up Billys Creek, returning along the creek to connect to the outer end of the Billys Creek track.

On Saturday 17th March, Rob Howell and I met at Braniff's Rd, to plan the route for the new track. We picked the worst day of the whole year so far for the purpose. It started raining as we met and rained continuously the whole time, with quite a bit of wind as well. I of course turned up without a coat, expecting only a light shower, but fortunately Rob had an extra coat with him, which made the experience a great deal more comfortable.

We took my car down into the Park and left it by the first creek crossing, to shorten our walk a little and then drove in Rob's vehicle up to the Reidy's Road entrance to the Park.

We walked in towards Blue Gum Hill and picked up the spot where Rob had already determined that the track must cross the first creek, just south of the hill top. We found a good route that first descended parallel to the creek towards a prominent knoll and then turned south traversing the hillside and finding a spot to cross another small gully and a way between a number of large rocks. Most of this section is under Blue Gums, with an understorey dominated by the Prickly Currant-bush – *Coprosma quadrifida*.

At the end of this section we emerged onto a bare hillside, mainly covered in Tussock Grass. From this spot there are delightful views of the Billys Creek Valley, both to the South and to the West. The hillside is really a ridge running East-West, descending towards the creek. Billys Creek comes down from the East below this ridge and turns South towards the better known areas of the Park round the western end of the ridge.

The next stage was tricky, trying to find a way down to Billys Creek for the return leg. We first tried following the ridge as it descended fairly gently down to the creek. It looked perfectly possible that the track could follow this route, but we were blocked by extensive blackberries from getting far enough to find a route along the creek from the bottom.

We left markers for a possible route and returned up the ridge and tried an alternative route. This took a diagonal line of descent passing through a dense stand of Silver Wattle. This proved a very good choice. We found that we came out close to a small creek, and following this we soon found a good crossing point, which led out onto the flat beside Billys Creek itself. We quickly agreed that this was the route for the new track and abandoned the idea of following the ridge straight down to the creek.

Choosing a route beside the creek, under tall Manna Gums, we found a nice patch of Soft Tree Ferns, but beyond them the hillside descended too steeply to the creek edge, to consider a track. We therefore found a spot to wade across the creek. It only proved necessary to walk about 100 metres on the west bank of the creek, to bypass the steep hillside and we found another good spot for the track to recross the creek. We were pleased to see a Rufous Fantail in this area.

We both recognised where we were at that point, and we picked a route across the base of the next big bend of the creek, emerging very soon at the outer end of the Billys Creek Track, where the steep track going straight up Blue Gum Hill, commences.

We then completed the walk along Billys Creek, very glad to get out of the rain into my car. I finally drove Rob back up to Reidy's Rd to collect his vehicle.

We both felt that we had located a very good route for the new track. It will open up a whole new area of the park and will be an enjoyable walk through varied scenery, for those prepared to walk a bit further (and not mind getting their feet wet fording Billys Creek).

The new track will need a name and suggestions are welcome. I have two thoughts so far. One would be to name it Creek Bend Track, because its destination is the main bend in the creek, where the creek turns from its east-west route to head more or less south. The other idea, which is consistent with most of our new track names is to name it for a plant, and the most conspicuous plant apart from the Blue Gums seemed to me to be the Prickly Currant Bush, so that my second choice of name is Coprosma Track.

Alas, I have to add an addendum to the above. Rob rang me yesterday and told me that he had found that the track we have mapped out traverses a block that is still on a private lease to a farmer (we saw 35 sheep there). The department is initiating the process to get this lease terminated, but no actual works can take place on that land while the lease is in place. The track will still be created eventually, but we will have to wait, perhaps for a couple of years or more, before going ahead.

Rob has agreed to put a few more permanent markers along the route we planned, so that it will not be lost and can eventually become a real track into the outer reaches of the Park.

As Mike and Ken have kindly written most of the material for this month's newsletter, I will keep my contribution as short as possible.

Firstly I would like to apologise for not mentioning a couple of things in last month's newsletter.

First off is the wonderful article that was published in the Latrobe Valley Express on the 25th January. Wendy and Ken both took the time to meet with the reporter and to have the photos taken. My kids just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Second is that we had a committee meeting on the 6th March. There were several items discussed, the main one was deciding on what we would apply for in the 2001/2002 grant. We also needed to finalise details relating to previous grants.

Money from the 1999/2000 grant was spent on updating the Morwell National Park brochure. These will be available from all tourist information centres.

The 2000/2001 grant is for the proposed extension track work on Blue Gum Hill that Ken discussed in the previous article.

After much discussion it was decided that we would apply for \$3000 in the 2001/2002 grant, which we would spend on fencing trial plots on Blue Gum Hill for revegetation, as the existing plots have had an excellent success rate.

We also decided that the book of Flowers and Ferns of Morwell National Park is now to be sold for \$10, plus postage and any mark-up that the seller may add.

And Finally....

April's Activity.

We are again pulling out willow regrowth along Billy's Creek. We will be meeting at Braniff's Rd at 10am. Don't forget the gum boots and maybe a raincoat. A thermos with your lunch may be greatly appreciated.

