

APST MAYDENA GET-TOGETHER – NOVEMBER 27-29, 2020



**All of us from the North West, North and Hobart Groups at Twisted Sister walk.
(Photo, Philip Sumner)**

Who in the whole world except the Corbetts, Sib and Keith, could have taken a group of about 65 botanists, geologists, bushwalkers, flora and fauna enthusiasts, gardeners and so on, no longer in the full flush of exuberant youth, on such an excursion into Tasmania's wild south west. Who else could have left them feeling, at the end of a mere two and a half days, that they'd somehow gained an overall, and at times intimate, feel for the place – its history, harshness, beauty, magic and mystery.

The Corbetts could do it because they have strong personal connections to the SW going back to the working days of their vigorous youth. Both of them have made epic walks here. Sib mapped the World Heritage Area using helicopters, legs and camps, often working alone in the wilderness. Keith did his Honours time in the Florentine Valley, staying in the original Australian Newsprint Mills Single Men's Quarters, single-handedly cutting a track on Tim Shea. His PhD was on the Denisons. You could say they know the Florentine Valley like the backs of their hands.

Their expertise in organizing walks for the Hobart Group made them able to manage the mind-bogglingly difficult task of organizing the minimum number of cars, who'd fit in them, how to get to unfamiliar places, and where to park on the narrowest of tracks where turning seemed near to impossible. They managed this almost without a hitch, thanks to several earlier planning visits and meticulous preparation, though there were nervous moments. "Is anyone following us" Keith would ask as he drove at a crawl along the highway. Or Christine Corbett would be asked to count cars before we turned off onto an almost invisible track.

But whether from the north west, north or south, the group of delightful, good-natured, like-minded APST members all arrived where they should be, and we had a marvelous time together. First walk on Friday afternoon was Growling Swallet.

GROWLING SWALLET



First group for Growling Swallett – Keith’s talk before we drive in. (Photo, M. Honey) Cars were organized at Maydena and once again in the Florentine Valley, parking being practically non-existent along the extremely narrow, overgrown track, where leatherwoods (*Eucryphia lucida*) and myrtle beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) crowded up against the car windows. Once we’d arrived and manoeuvred, we walked out into cool rainforest with the familiar, evocative smells of sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*) in particular, and damp moss, wood and earth. The track was soft and springy – easy going. Enormous old moss-covered logs and stumps from the logging period grabbed our attention as did the very tall living trees, myrtles and even bigger *Eucalyptus delegatensis* and *E. regnans*.



Dwarfing its human admirers this ‘burly’ *Eucalyptus delegatensis* (?) towered above the forest. (Photo M. Honey)

At this time of year manferns are eye catching with their bright upright new growth above gracefully drooping dark green skirts and they were a feature of the landscape almost everywhere we went. Light was muted in the callidendrous forest but, forewarned by Sib about its presence, photographers found a little treasure, the beech orchid (*Townsonia viridis*) growing on mossy logs.



Townsonia viridis. (Photo, Christine Howells)

We reached the swallet – (“Obscure formation on ‘swallow’... the opening through which a stream disappears underground” says the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) – after scrambling down a steep slope using a handy rope.

The Junee River wasn’t in full spate so the old surface channel of the river before capture was visible. Tumbled logs and branches meant it wasn’t easy to get close and most of us perched on the bank to get a look at the ominous black opening in the tall rocks into which the river has been disappearing since time immemorial.

Evidently some of the members of Sib’s group actually waded down to the cave’s entrance, some even into the cave, but the earlier group was either more timid or, possibly, sensible.



The Junee River disappears into darkness. (Photo, Keith Corbett or Maria Honey)

Keith's group drove the 10 or so kilometres back to Maydena and walked in to see the Junee Cave resurgence. There, from a smaller, dark group of caves the water re-emerges into the cool air after its underground journey, fresh and clear, with small fishing swimming in it.

FRIDAY NIGHT MEET-AND-GREET DINNER

No need to search for the venue, formerly the kitchen and dining room of the ANM single men's quarters. The sound of 60 or so voices talking and laughing led the way. We bought drinks and selected the ingredients to make up our own burgers and the evening began with a welcome from State President, Jenny Boyer. Once the food was gone but the drinks still flowed Sib gave a most moving and vivid account of her involvement with the south west, starting in the early days when she was the only woman in the Tasmanian University's geology faculty and wasn't exactly welcome as a member of field work groups. Keith produced maps and talked of the work he undertook in gaining his PhD. And it wasn't easy going. For example we heard of the fearsome Mrs. Priest, cook at the ANM quarters and provider of cut lunches for the working men, often beetroot sandwiches. These delicacies were invariably found that day scattered throughout the Florentine Valley. Unsurprisingly in this place, talk turned to the inundated Lake Pedder and a lively discussion followed.

SATURDAY ROAD TRIP GORDON & SCOTTS PEAK ROADS

A perfect day though an 80% chance of rain was forecast. Our convoy stopped at Humbolt Saddle where we had our first view of The Thumbs, with the badly scorched Needles behind us, Tim Shea in front. It was an inspired idea of the Corbetts to leave everyone a free 20 minutes to fossick around in the buttongrass burnt in early 2019 by the terrifying Gell River fire. Small herbs and flowers were coming back giving hope for the future.



Keith had to resort to his trusty loudspeaker to corral us all back into the cars. People had wandered some distance from the road, excited by what they were finding. *Banksia marginata* seedlings were appearing, and even bigger scorched banksias were making a strong recovery. Deceptively delicate-looking pink and blue sun orchids were in flower.

Snow daisy (*Celmisia asteliifolia*) Photo, M. Honey



Needles. Recovering burnt SW vegetation with buttongrass (Photo, Christine Corbett)

Heading west to Twisted Sister reserve, we passed an extraordinary flowering of plants along the highway, including *Blandfordia*, *Clematis aristata*, and *Bauera rubioides*. It was tempting to wonder if the Corbetts had paid minions to place impressive plants beside the verges to amaze our north western and northern visitors.

The Twisted Sister track took us on a short walk through lovely old growth mixed forest, with *Eucalyptus delegatensis* and a few *E. regnans*, myrtle, sassafras and celery top pine (*Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*) over manferns.



Ancient Myrtle beech – *Nothofagus cunninghamii*

Before the walk we had the usual brief talks – from Keith about the history of this area. We'd passed the Timbs track connected to the Adamsfield Track from Gordon Road. And, of course he mentioned the epic 30-year battle by conservationists to save this place, now thankfully included in the Western Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. From Sib - an outline of the vegetation in the thamnian rainforest understorey.



Section of fallen giant, 60m long. (Photo, M. Honey)

There were still signs of the most recent guerilla tactics in the long-running war - ropes dangling from high up in the tall trees where protesters lived on small platforms for months - a log across the road with steel pipes drilled through it where courageous people chained themselves to stop the bulldozers. It may have been these visible reminders of their hard-won triumph, apart from the fact the forest still exists, that brought a tear to the eye and a lump to the throat, adding significantly to the feelings of awe and peace one always experiences when walking in any majestic ancient forest.

Twisted Sister herself is a huge old *Eucalyptus delegatensis* with a spiral growth pattern, evident as twists in her bark. Keith was asked ‘why?’ many times, but said he didn’t know, and added ‘we need to have *some* mysteries’.

Onwards down Scotts Peak Road where we were allowed out of the cars, this time to explore unburnt buttongrass moorland on quartzite country. Keith pointed out Mt Anne ahead. The old Port Davey Track came over Mt Bowes and down these slopes but isn’t apparent now. Sib described the vegetation, including *Hakea epiglottis*, *Baeckea leptocaulis*, *Leptospermum nitidum* and ...



Boronia pilosa



Sprengelia incarnata (Photo M. Honey)

After lunch at Edgar Camp, we went on to Red Knoll Lookout at the road’s end, where there were sweeping views across the lake to many mountains. From Thumbs to Mt Anne and Schnells Ridge, then south to Mt Bobs, Eastern and Western Arthurs with that great jagged skyline with its dozens of cirques and moraines, around to the Frankland and Wilmot Ranges.



View from Red Knoll

(Photo, M. Honey)

Keith's old SW map was pored over and admired. There were earnest discussions during attempts to pinpoint the exact location of the original small Lake Pedder hidden from view from here, but known to so many of the group.

Next stop at Lake Edgar Lookout for the great view over the scarp of the Lake Edgar Fault, which Keith described as a 'recent' active fault which has displaced outwash gravels. He also mentioned the tremors related to the filling of the new lake. There were some nice flowering plants, *Cenharrenes nitida* and *Agastachys odorata*.

Final stop at Creepy Crawly Walk. What would we see here? Bugs? Insects? surely not snakes? But no, the name described the short walk itself, which meandered eccentrically through our third forest type, a superb example of implicate rainforest. We encountered a structureless tangle of old growth Horizontal (*Anodopetalum biglandulosum*) which had been allowed to make its way over, through and across the solid walkway, meaning we had to bend low or lean or stretch to get the end. Tales were told of the disappearance of people who fell metres down through this treacherous tangle, some never to be seen again.



Anodopetalum biglandulosum

(Photo: M. Honey)

SATURDAY NIGHT DINNER AT SUMMIT RESTAURANT

Shuttle buses leave from the bike park and we have a bumpy ride to the top at Abbotts Lookout. Flowering waratahs (*Telopea truncata*) add to the enjoyment of the trip. It's cool outside the restaurant but the view of the great circle of mountains that's been ours on all our trips is too good and we shiver outside on the boardwalks. Inside it is warm, the food and company is excellent, the enormous room buzzes with conversation. A long and glorious sunset drags almost everyone outside again. A terrifically good night in an impressive venue.



Sunset arranged by the Summit Restaurant (Photo, Christine Howells)

SUNDAY MORNING AT MT FIELD

Driving up to meet at Lake Dobson we find our native flora welcoming us with a gorgeous display. Magnificent manferns line each side of the road. *Olearia argophylla* flaunts its myriad white powder puffs, and towards the top *Bauera rubioides* froths, pure white, over rocks, a perfect foil for the showy red waratahs. Drizzle and a cool wind send us to the shelter shed to add layers and raincoats. From the beginning of the walk it's beautiful. The flowers are perfect.



Caladenia alpina?



Richea scoparia



Telopea truncata (Waratah)

(Photos, M. Honey)

The front walkers don't want to stop because of the cold, but the plant hunters discuss species *ad infinitum* and lag behind. Keith hopes to keep us as one group and tries to slow down the cold sufferers with fascinating stories of the big dolerite glacial erratics we're passing. At the sound of the word 'glacial' the cold ones shudder and beg to be allowed to keep moving. We

wait for a while in the beautifully tranquil Pandani Grove forest. Keith tells us it's unique, an ancient Pandani and Pencil pine forest that may never have been burnt.



Richea pandanifolia (Photo, M. Honey)

The plant hunters don't appear, so we move on. We see a tiny scrub wren building its nest beside the track. But the plant hunters are in heaven and have seen an array of species, and here I believe I may be using Sib's, though they could be Keith's words ... "Several slower groups admire the array of species, from tiny violas, *Rubus* and *Oxalis* to the overhanging snowgums and yellow gums (*Euc. subcrenulata*). Pandani are impressive, scoparia is flowering in many colours and their lovechild, *Richea x curtisiae* is just budding up. *Richea sprengelioides* looks on modestly. The ever-impressive *Trochocarpa thymifolia* has its first pink flower trusses. This is Epacridaceae heaven." Back to the car park and then to the shelter shed for early lunch. Some people leave – but not many.

This being an event with Keith sharing the lead what could we expect but that there must be a dissertation on, and a display of ... wait for it ... **dolerite!** So the final stop is beside the road below Lake Fenton, on the old pack track along the rock river through a grove of ancient fire-scarred snowgums, with King Billy pines and fagus. Keith talks about the rocks – boulders formed by ice action through the last Ice Age, freeze-and-thaw, Nature's best weapon of mass destruction, particularly on dolerite – but was there ice in the river, to make the clean straight wall? We sit on dolerite slabs and boulders and look across at the enormous wall you'd swear was made by superhuman giants. Another mystery in this powerful place. We say goodbyes and thank yous. Some walk back up, some walk down to view the fagus and pandanis on the old track. Finally, off home, cups full.

Maria Honey.
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And
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