

The

Ballarat

Naturalist

December 2015



New England & Beyond: An Ice Age Legacy

Presented by Carol Hall

In the northern hemisphere autumn of 2014, Carol visited Maine & Massachusetts to enjoy the autumn colours which are so extensive and so vivid in that region of the USA. In addition the trip visited Niagara Falls and Quebec City.

All of the areas visited had once been covered by the last (Wisconsin) advance of the Laurentian ice sheet which Carol illustrated with maps. The furthest extent of the ice, around 12,000 to 18,000 years ago, is marked by moraines and outwash deposits which form Cape Cod and the nearby islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. The material had been eroded from further north in the Appalachian Mountains.

Beginning with Niagara, Carol gave an overview of the formation and evolution of the Great Lakes as the ice retreated, and discussed the geomorphology of the Falls, pairing her own summer photos with winter images from the internet showing the frozen river and snow & ice-covered surrounds. On to Quebec City, where the group were given a guided walk and had free time to explore, Carol briefly considered the geographical location and physical features which made the cliff-bound riverside bluff an ideal place to build a city which could easily be defended – from the French and Americans!

Driving south into Maine the group encountered wilderness country with many lakes filling over-deepened glacial basins and surrounded by mixed forest, consisting of beeches, birches, oaks, maples, and conifers such as fir and spruce, depending on topography and hydrology. Much of the forest is secondary or even tertiary growth. These eastern regions, including Vermont and New Hampshire were cleared for agriculture by the first settlers and then abandoned when settlement moved west and found more fertile areas. At Lake Nahmakanta, cabins converted 20 years previously from a logging camp

provided a comfortable stay for the group to encounter the Appalachian Trail, and to observe a Bald Eagle, Moose, Squirrels, Common Mergansers and to listen to Common Loons calling at dusk.

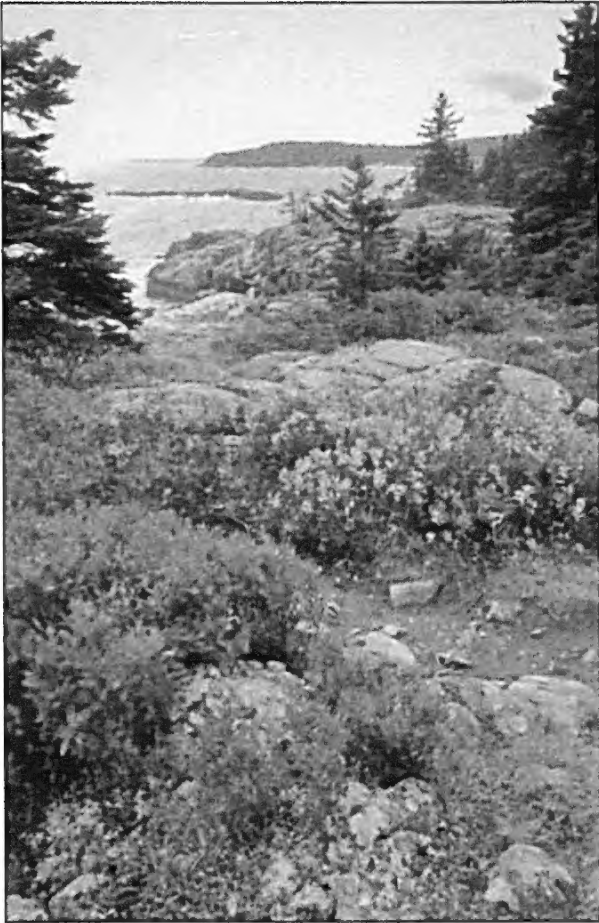


Photo: View with Huckleberries

Moving south to Acadia National Park, ice-smoothed granite provided good gripping rock for coastal walks where the vivid autumn reds of huckleberry bushes impressed everyone. A glance at the map of the Park clearly showed the north-south grain of the land modified by moving ice sheets, and in places chattermarks and striations on the rocks gave evidence of the presence of ice, as did the occasional glacial erratic. A small Botanical Garden enabled us to identify several of the plants and trees we had been regularly seeing. Getting around the Park is made easier by the “carriage roads” built by the Rockefeller family in the 19th century so that

the wealthy could experience the area without exerting themselves overmuch.

A day in Boston wasn't really long enough to get a feel for the city but the guided walk did press upon us how strongly Boston still feels about its role in rebelling against British rule!

On Cape Cod we stayed at the end of the “bended elbow” at Provincetown. Much of the “forearm” of the Cape is designated National Seashore and has visitor centres where the geomorphology of the Cape is illustrated. Where the ends of the lobes of the ice sheet were, morainic ridges were formed, and beyond them braided rivers of meltwater spread outwash deposits of gravel, sand, silt & clay. In places isolated blocks of ice, cut off from the main ice mass, were left to melt slowly and created “kettle holes”, depressions which then filled with water. In time these will silt up and become bogs (where cranberries might grow!). Some ponds were invaded by the sea as sea level rose with the melting of the ice sheets, and are therefore

saline. However, central parts of the Cape's coastline are subject to wave erosion, and the north and south ends of the Cape now end in sandspits as waves cause longshore drift. Provincetown, a fishing port and centre of alternative lifestyle living, is located on the sheltered side of the northerly spit where sand dunes have formed. These have been stabilised by planting grasses, and the native pitch pine and oak species have grown among the dunes. But these processes create a constantly shifting geography, and in thousands of years' time, it is likely that there will be no Cape Cod. Carol used several maps and aerial images to illustrate these processes, as well as her own photos.

Driving west across Massachusetts, the group spent half a day at Sturbridge Outdoor Museum which replicates rural life in the 18th century, before moving on to Lenox where more autumn colours and an easy walk to the attractive Bash Bish Falls contrasted with half a day – and an interesting evening meal – at a Shaker village museum.

Finally we crossed the Hudson River into New York state and stayed at the unique and definitely quirky Mohonk Mountain House, a hotel/resort built by twin brothers towards the end of the 19th century and still in family hands, though it has been extended several times. Located by a tiny glacially-scooped lake on which canoes and rowing boats could be taken out, the accommodation offered walks and horse-riding in summer, and cross-country skiing in winter. The surrounding countryside was desig-



Photo: Squirrel in Autumn

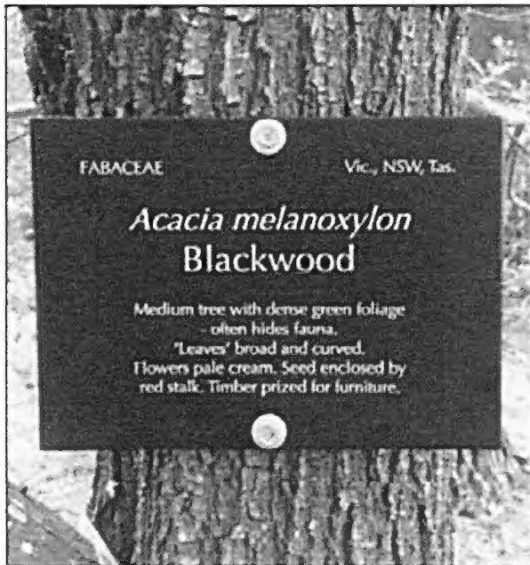
nated a nature Preserve, and ice-scraped rocks bore more chattermarks and striations, confirming ice activity around 18,000 years ago. A misty morning provided ideal moody conditions for photography, while the sunshine later in the day brought out Monarch butterflies (the ones which migrate to Mexico).

The trip provided Carol with more examples of the action of ice sheets to add to her experience and archive of illustrations, with the added delight of the expanses of autumn colours to be found in this part of the world.

Carol Hall.

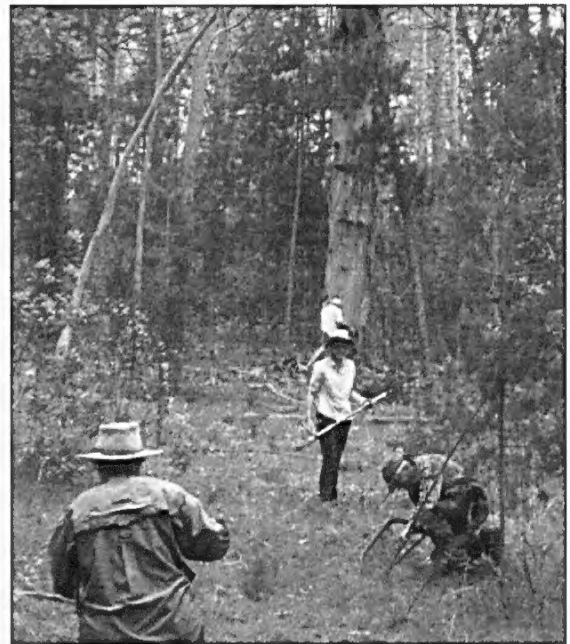
La Gerche Trail Working Bee - Sun Nov. 1

The working bee was planned to install the labels on the trees which had been identified at an earlier working bee.



The **photo** on the left is an example of one of the installations. The lettering on the signs includes the botanical and common names and a brief description of features of the trees such as size, leaves, flowers and seeds. Also any uses of the timber is given.

The **photo** to the right shows the labelling of a tree some distance from the track so that it was necessary for the clearing of grassland by sawing the trunks of the small weedy trees and dabbing the sawn sections with weed-killer.



On the day the five club members who attended labelled 58 trees. Also plants were pruned to give good views of the signs. Many woody weeds were removed from the regenerating grassland section.

Emily Noble

Christmas Get-together Sun. 6th Dec

Bill Murphy has invited us to have our FNCB Christmas party at *Rosebank*, Community Room, 19a Charlotte St. in Sebastopol. Arrive 5.30pm. Each person please bring a dessert or salad, drinks, and food for the bbq.

Enfield State Park Excursion Tues 24th Nov

From Little Hard Hills Hotel on a cool sunny morning, 11 members travelled down Orchid Track to the southern edge of the Enfield State Park. In the private land adjacent to the Park we saw a male Spotted Pardalote which dropped down to the ground behind a ledge – maybe to a nesting burrow. Red Wattlebirds were also in the area. Few plants were still flowering after the dry spring. Trailing Goodenia, Bundled Guinea-flower, St John's Wort and Common Rice-flower had few flowers remaining.

A mine shaft in the area was circular indicating it had been dug by Chinese miners.

Travelling along Spring Creek Tk we came to a patch of Common Fringe-myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*.

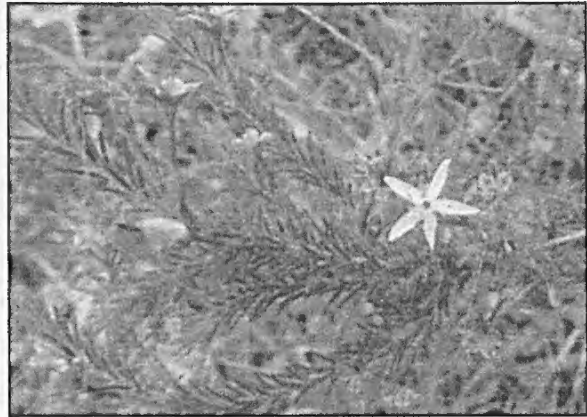


Photo: Common Fringe Myrtle

Flowers have finished but the calyx of sepals were a dull pink with long bristle-like tips. This is the only occurrence of the flower here and was last seen some years ago.

Lunch was enjoyed at Surface Point listening to many birds calling but Dusky Woodswallow and White-naped Honeyeater were the only ones clearly seen.

At Beacon Hill the Large Tongue Orchid *Cryptostylis subulata* was beginning to flower. Other plants in flower were Small Grass-tree, Dwarf Boronia, Dwarf Bush-pea *Pultenaea humilis*, Common Wedge-pea *Gompolobium huegelii*, Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*, Prickly Teatree and Bluebells. A Nankeen Kestrel was hovering and Australasian Pipit were seen along the track.



Photo: Heath Milkwort

Along Incol Road we stopped to admire the magenta flowers of Heath Milkwort *Comesperma ericinum*. In the same area was a sprawling Smooth Parrot-pea *Dillwynia glaberrima* and Grass Trigger-plant with the last of its pink flowers. Underneath the power-lines we saw Grey Everlastings and Red-anther Wallaby Grass.

John Gregurke

Mt Beckworth Excursion - 8th November 2015

Our syllabus-planned excursion for November 2015 was to Mt Beckworth. We had an unscheduled mid-month excursion on Tuesday 13th October which confirmed what we had expected - very dry conditions with poor flowering. Nevertheless we persisted but decided to include some variations. We began by visiting the pair of young Wedgetailed Eagles on the outskirts of Miners Rest which some of us have been observing for some weeks. Earlier the babies were fluffy, white chicks but now have developed markedly. Sometimes the parents are in the nearby pines, often they are elsewhere. Here a plant with leaves like Bidgee Widgee was seen. John spoke to Roger Thomas about this plant. He advised it was the introduced plant Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor subsp muricata*. Roger tasted a leaf and said it tasted like cucumber.

Next stop was to the Dowling Forest Cemetery, very close to the eagles. This cemetery contains a patch of remnant grassland, a very rare vegetation class that now has been almost destroyed for many reasons. Only about 1% of the original cover remains so this patch, being cared for by the Dowling Forest Cemetery Trust since 1859 is well-worth visiting. The trust now is aided by the Ballarat City Council and the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning. Due to poor rainfall over the past months the variety of plants flowering this spring was disappointing but on previous visits we

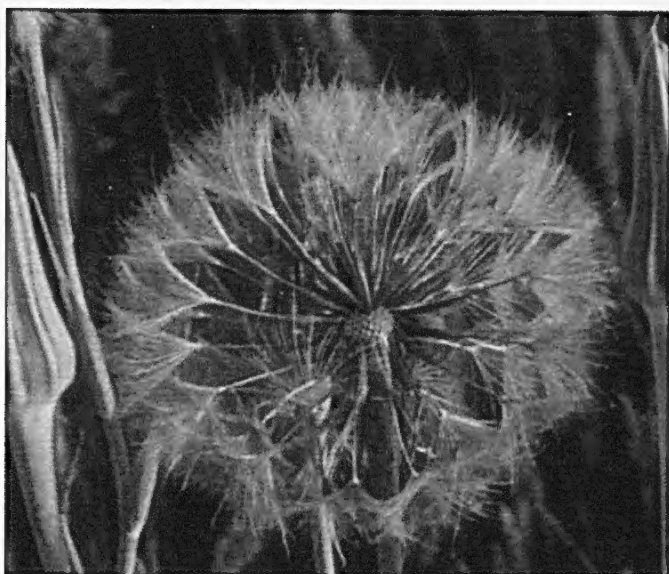


Photo: Salsify or Oyster Plant *Tragopogon porrifolius*

have found a lovely variety. However, we did find some struggling on including a couple of Chocolate Lilies *Arthropodium strictum*, a few spent Bulbine Lilies *Bulbine bulbosa*, Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *Dianella sp.*, Blue devil *Eryngium ovinum*, *Pimelea humilis*, *Pimelea caesia* and *Bosia obcordata*. There were also native grasses as might be expected including Spear Grass, Kangaroo Grass and

Wallaby Grass as well as a good collection of weeds.

From the cemetery we drove to the Miners Rest wetland. Water was not a feature at all this year so we have not had the pleasure of observing a wide variety of, and numerous individual birds but our visit was to find a rare plant - the Stiff



Groundsel *Senecio Tragopogon porrifolius behrianus*. We studied

a plant, aided by printed notes and wondered if we had found the senecio. John later concluded after consultation with Roger Thomas that, not only was our plant not the sought after one, but in fact it was just an introduced one, Cotton Fireweed *Senecio quadridentatus*. Back to the drawing board. Seed heads were present in hundreds, nicely back-lit, of the daisy seed head weed Salsify or Oyster Plant *Tragopogon porrifolius*. John looked up *Flora of Victoria* which states the fleshy-boiled or baked taproot is edible - it tastes like oysters. Although it is an introduced weed it was spectacular.

Mt Beckworth was next. We drove past a very low dam towards the top Cork Oaks and followed a side track to a beautifully-flowering Yellow box *Eucalyptus melliodora*. Here we enjoyed morning tea, saw a Black wattle *Acacia mearnsii* flowering and closely examined some flower spikes of Grass Tree *Xanthoera minor*. We have recently been told that the tiny flowers grow in a spiral pattern. We confirmed this and watched four, different insects visiting the Grass Tree including a honey bee, hover fly and wasp.

We moved to the Cork Oak car park, observing *Wahlenbergia* flowers. The Cork Oaks were in flower and providing food for hundreds of bees. Flowers of Drooping Mistletoe *Amyema pendula* were evident in several acacias and numerous birds were heard, some seen and some feeding.

We then headed down to the dam. In some years this part of the track has hundreds of bright yellow daisies, Sticky Everlasting *Xerochry-*

sum viscosum, but this year we saw just a few. Scented Groundsel *Senecio odoratus* was sighted. We stopped at the car park near the dam so that we could walk to our second patch of Cork Oaks. We visited these on the mid-month trip with Roger who believes they have overstayed their welcome. They were planted a few decades ago, presumably as a commercial possibility. They have not done well; many are spindly and some have died. Maybe the time has come to poison them (not destroy the area by physical removal) and thus allow the native species more moisture, in an area which is normally damp. Walking the short distance between the cars and the Cork Oaks, Scent-bark *E. aromaphloia*, Swamp Gum *E. ovata*, Long-leaf Box *E. goniocalyx* and Red Box *E. polyanthemos* were sighted along with Prickly Tea-tree *Leptospermum continentale*.

We next moved to lunch at the Manna Gums picnic area which is looking quite pleasant before we left this part of Mt Beckworth and drove to our third patch of Cork Oaks. These grow along Coutts Road. They are a mature group and form an interesting forest. We wandered among them noting signs of early occupation or industry - a few bricks, odd bits of machines, a few old fruit trees and a large Manna Gum *Eucalypts viminalis*. A rather messy pine plantation at the back looks neglected.

Next move was to nearby where we park when we plan to walk up to the correas. By now the feeling was that we had done enough for one day and it was a bit warm for an uphill walk. Only a couple of weeks ago we had been up to see the very straggly correas and so now decided we would revisit them in the cool months when they usually flower. A wander around the area revealed some bird nests being visited by Red-browed Finches. There were also Blue Wren, Grey Fantail, Rufous Whistler (heard), some intriguing ground patterns made by something unknown and a pair of Wedge-tails flying high overhead, possibly the parents of our baby eagles waiting for food.

For a spring outing in a very dry year we managed to find enough of interest but hope for our normal colourful displays next year.

Report: Claire and Peter Dalman

Photos: Carol Hall

Friends of Canadian Corridor (FoCC) Update, 24 Nov

The establishment of the Canadian Regional Park is progressing very well.

Legislation – The bill to establish the park was initially expected to be introduced into the parliament in early November and then this week. Due to the forthcoming Family Violence bill and an address to Parliament by Rosie Batty, the bill is now scheduled to be introduced in the sitting week of December 8,9 and 10th.

The Friends will be organising a visit to Parliament on the day scheduled for its introduction. The timetable for the bill will only be known around the Monday 7th as to on which day and time, the bill be presented. A news flash outlining the arrangement will be sent to all friends as soon as it is known.

Forest news. Recently Parks Victoria personnel have visited the forest to view the forest and ex-plantation areas. In a chance meeting with some of the Parks people, they expressed a genuine sense of excitement at Parks Victoria being able to undertake a real project in rehabilitating the forest and ex-plantation areas.

The regrowth of the forest on both sides of Recreation Rd is very strong with many different species growing well. Not so good is the growth of broom and gorse along Olympic Avenue. The removal of small pine trees has also occurred adjacent to the old pine plantations along Recreation Rd. There are also reports of weed sprayers in action in parts of the forest.

A large pile of large quarry rocks has been placed on the south side of recreation road adjacent to the area where the Sebastopol and Redan mountain bike tracks are. Does any one know what is happening with these rocks?

DWELP Video . Linda has been a participant in a DWELP video where she explained the process leading to the Parks establishment. We await the final copy.

Lal Lal planting day. A big thanks to all the friends who helped plant around 1200 trees at the "ImLal Biorich Demonstration Plantation site" Lal Lal on October 5th. Reports are that it was a very enjoyable day.

Regards

Jeff, Bob and Linda (FoCC)

Excursion Sun afternoon, Dec. 6

Leaving usual meeting place 1.30pm and visiting some Ballarat Wetlands: Nth Gardens, Redan, Yuille Station, Fed University

Map of route provided

Excerpts from Club Meeting Minutes Nov 6, 2015

Opening and Apologies

Attendance: President Peter Dalman welcomed 23 members and one visitor. Apologies: Steve Sorrell, Emily & Peter Noble, Wayne McGuire.

Business Arising from Previous Meeting:

The electronic version of Cliff Beaglehole's Ballarat Herbarium was found. Elspeth and Emily now have copies and a copy has been sent to Susan Kruss to aid her research.

Correspondence in: (since last Club Meeting on Oct. 2, 2015):

From Lisa H., author of the blog "Fifteen Acres": update on the Spring happenings at Fifteen Acres since our field trip there in Sep.

From Pina Milne, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria: information relating to the possibility of visiting the National Herbarium of Victoria, with particular interest in seeing Pat Murphy's Ballarat Herbarium.

Reports

"**You, Me and Biodiversity**" series presentation on Butterflies of the Wombat put on by Wombat Forestcare in Trentham: Five club members attended. Very detailed, informative presentation.

SWIFFT video conference: Six club members attended.

La Gerche Trail label installation working bee in Creswick: Five club members attended. 58 trees were labelled, plants pruned to give good views of the labels and many small woody weeds were removed from the regenerating grassland section.

General Business

Excursions: 8 November – Mt Beckworth; Tuesday 24 Nov – Enfield; 6 December: 1.30pm Wetlands near Ballarat.

Christmas breakup following excursion on 6 December. Rosebank Village, Charlotte St, Sebastopol, 6pm. BYO meat for barbecue and

drink, salad and sweet to share.

Club Meeting and field trip in October 2016: Many members will be absent due to ANN Get-together in Perth. Syllabus will list dates with arrangements to be decided if volunteers are available to organise events.

Gayle Osborne and Wombat Forestcare won a Community Environment Recognition Award from Environment Victoria this month.

Sad note: the Club offers its condolences to John Mildren on the loss of his sister last week.

Excursion Saturday April 2, 2016 to Mt Rothwell. Evening tour to see threatened nocturnal animals. Cost: Adults \$25, Children \$15. Many members indicated interest in attending so planning will proceed.

Show and Tell:

Carol Hall showed images taken at Wilson Promontory of Welcome Swallows building a nest and Flying ants rising from the ground in a mating flight and being eaten by Silver Gulls.

Field Reports

Les Hanrahan: Goldfinch collecting cobwebs to build nest at Bunga-ree.

Paul Norquay: Mt Egerton rain fall for October 2015 12.5mm (average 69mm); evaporation 97mm. Picked up 2.1kg of worms migrating down hill due to drying soil. Worms were put in veggie garden.

Bill Elder: Twenty Ravens chasing a young Wedge-tailed Eagle at Smythesdale accompanied by alarm calls from a variety of birds.

John Mildren: 25 Freckled Duck at Convent Corner, Lake Wendouree.

Claire Dalman: Pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles raising 2 chicks in nest in pine tree near Dowling Forest Cemetery. White fluffy down on chicks is being replaced by feathers.

John Petheram: 2 Red Wattlebird chicks in Ballarat North garden.

Mike Sorrell: Rainbow Lorikeet with 3 young in hollow 1m above ground in elm tree at Lake Wendouree.

Margaret Thomas: Raven feeding chick, Spotted Pardalote and Eastern Grey Kangaroo in Nerrina garden.

CALENDAR 2015-16

December

- Fri 4, *The biophany: birdsong, music and the evolution-of
Listening* - Andrew Skeoch, sound recordist
- Sun 6 **1.30pm** Exc: *Wetlands near Ballarat* - John Mildren & Fran
Hanrahan, club members (see p. 10)
- Sun 6 5.30pm Christmas Breakup (see p. 4)

Jan. Wed 27 6 pm Committee meeting at Les's, Bungaree

February

- Fri 5 *Ants* : Peter Muller, club member
- Sun 7 Excursion: *Ants* - Venue TBD, Peter Muller, club member

Committee

President Peter Dalman
Vice –Pres Fran Hanrahan
Secretary Emily Noble
Treasurer Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
John Gregurke
Wayne McGuire

Val Hocking
John Mildren

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Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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