

A VISIT TO THE GRAMPIANS, VICTORIA

Alice Dumbleton

You won't find them marked on many tourist maps of Australia, but if you go to Stawell from Ballarat (approximately 200 km inland from Melbourne) on the Western Highway, and continue for 30 km after turning off to Hall's Gap, you will be in the centre of a most fascinating area, rich in wild life and geological formations.

This unique region, known as the Grampians, consists of four parallel ranges of tilted sedimentary rock, thick layers of hard quartzose sandstone interbedded by thin layers of siltstone and softer sandstone laid down within the last 350 million years. Precipitous bluffs along the eastern face of each range rises to 1167 m at Mt. William, sloping gently to the west. They are found at the western extremity of the Great Dividing Range and classified as a State Forest under the control of the Forests Commission of Victoria.

Throughout this area there is a most diverse range of flora. Major plants such as trees, shrubs and wildflowers total some 1000 species, 23 of which are not known to occur naturally outside the boundaries of these mountains. This is one of Australia's richest flora areas. It also provides habitats for a wide range of native fauna including kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas, emus and koalas, the latter could be seen in the Eucalypts around the guest house.

Accompanying our party of Phyllis and John Thompson and Isobel Morice was Mary Doery of the Victorian Field Naturalists Club, who joined us for part of the Society's Tasmanian tour in 1977. Without her help and advice in planning for three weeks of visiting National Parks covering nearly 2500 km in Victoria in October 1977 the tour would not have been nearly so comprehensive and enjoyable. Mary introduced us to a Guide to the Grampians, a paperback of 96 pages which gave detailed sketch-maps of the roads and tracks in 4 zones and an excellent Plant Identification Guide.

This was planned on the basis of first determining the colour of the flower and then selecting from four categories of structure :

Tubular (epacris with other genera in this family and Correa, Prostanthera etc.)

Open-petalled - petals spread flatly open (Boronia, Leptospermum etc.)

Clusters - flowers which are densely packed together (Acacia, Banksia, Eucalyptus, Melaleuca, Grevillea (of which several species are indigenous to the Grampians) and

Pea-flowers (15 genera in this family - Pultenea, Dillwynia etc.).

After checking the flowering period and location - from ten listed sites - a table is consulted and the species ascertained by referring to the alphabetical list of plant descriptions, helped by more than seventy drawings and photographs. (Orchids were given in a separate list as were ferns).

Distinctive plant communities can be found occupying at least six different kinds of habitat. On the highest tops some of the plants found growing in association are a variety of Prostantheros lasianthos (the Victorian Christmas bush), the mountain Correa, and low growing forms of Eucalyptus alpina and a variety of Banksia integrifolia. This is the coastal banksia which is here believed to be a relic of a former sea-level; part of the evidence that seems to affirm that twenty million years ago the Grampians formed a promontory jutting out into the sea which at that time covered the surrounding countryside.

Lower down in moist sheltered gullies and on the eastern slopes, wet sclerophyll forests include messmate Eucalyptus obliqua, Acacia melanoxylon - blackwood, the hairy Correa C. aemula, Pomaderris apetala, Cyathea australis and many ground ferns. In the dry sclerophyll forests on the middle and lower slopes of the ranges are found species of Leptospermum, Melaleuca and Hakea.

In heathlands and heath woodlands the ground is dotted and splashed with colour in spring - with pinks, blues and yellows of orchids, white and creamy yellows of pimeleas and goodenias, golden yellows of hibbertias to the orange of bush-peas, deeper orange to reds of the grevilleas, and whites, pale pinks, reds and yellows of the common heath, bearded heath, flame heath and pine heath.

If you plan to visit Victoria in the spring, a couple of weeks will not be too long to spend in the fascinating and colourful Grampians.

Acknowledgements:

Rodger Elliot: An Introduction to the Grampians Flora
1975 (with plant identification guide).
J.H. Willis, B.A. Fuhrer, Fieldguide to the flowers and plants of
E.R. Rotherham: Victoria 1975.

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GENTIANA ACAULIS AND PULSATILLA VULGARIS NEAR CASTLE HILL

Joe Cartman

On the way back from the Botanical Society Show weekend trip to the University Field Station at Cass - 12th November, 1978 - Janet Moss remarked that there was a patch of Gentiana acaulis growing on the site of the old Enys homestead and suggested we visit it. This was interesting as I have often wondered how an introduced alpine species would react in the New Zealand alpine situation.

I would have expected the G. acaulis to have firmly established itself in the vicinity of the original plants, however this was not the case.

The site is at present occupied by a holiday bach and the occupier, Mr. Brittan was at home to give me some information concerning the plants.