



February Outing

On the first Saturday in February a small group of our members visited the Australian National Botanic Gardens. After weeks of rainy days the weather was perfect for wandering around such a lovely environment.

Kaye - My eye was caught by some flowering trees before we had left the carpark - *Corymbia ficifolia* in vibrant tones of orange alongside a brilliant pink. This wouldn't be everyone's idea of a perfect colour scheme, but to me they were outstanding. Further on in the gardens the *C. ficifolia* were flowering also. They possibly stood out because not a lot of other natives were in flower.

As you would imagine the insect and birdlife on the *C. ficifolia* was amazing with a lot of birds attempting to protect their pot of "gold" even though there seemed enough flowers for sharing. From my observation birds don't like sharing.



Our group tended to pause every few steps to contemplate the beauty around us, consequently, we have left a good part of the Gardens for a future visit.

Trish - The visit to the Australian National Botanic Gardens consisted of a select group of 4. This was our first visit and we were excited by the pre-reading - a heritage-listed botanical garden, established in 1949 by Ben Chifley and Sir Edward Salisbury, the world's largest collection of Australian native plants of more than 78,000 plants from all parts of the country - one third of all Australian species!

Needless to say, we did not see them all and focused on the Rainforest gully and Banksia Garden. The contrast in ambient temperature between the two microclimates was stark, a reminder of the research being done on the significant effect of shady trees in keeping cities liveable.

Of interest to me was the *Agathis robusta*. This was because I was in the mistaken habit of telling people that New Zealand had Kauri and Australia had Karri trees. Our bed is made of swamp kauri - prehistoric trees buried and preserved in peat up to 50,000 years ago. We are familiar with the majestic Kauri growing in the north of NZ. Curiously these are *Agathis australis*. I now know that the Family Araucariaceae are found in South America, Australasia and S.E. Asia. In fact, the name Araucariaceae is derived from the Spanish name for the Mapuche people, who inhabited a region of Chile the Spanish called Araucania.





Agathis robusta canopy

At this time of the year, not many of the Banksia were in bloom. In the distance there appeared to be a “failed” garden with blackened bushes as shown below.



Closer inspection revealed that it was a lesson in how banksias regenerate after a fire. About half of the Banksia species are killed by fire but their follicles open in the heat and release seed. Others are not killed and resprout through lignotubers.



Plant Name Changes

Desmodium varians has been transferred to Grona varians. The genus Dichopogon has been transferred to Arthropodium. The genus Plectranthus has been transferred to Coleus.

Shaun McIntyre, a member from Crookwell, now relates to us his battle with Prickly Pear:-

The Problems with Prickly Pear (*Opuntia monacantha*)

Prickly Pear was introduced to Australia by the colonists of the First Fleet in 1788. On board one of Captain Arthur Phillip's ships was a collection of Opuntia plants, infested with cochineal insects (*Dactylopius coccus*), that had originated in Brazil. It was first used for the production of red dye that was produced by the cochineal insects that fed on the plant and also as a garden hedge but like many introduced plants in Australia, its future prospects were not considered. The rest, as they say, is history. The noxious and highly invasive weed has now spread right across our nation and taken root anywhere it can get a foot hold.

When I bought a little battle-axe block of land in the Southern Tablelands town of Crookwell 4 years ago it was largely covered in very established, towering trunks of Prickly Pear in full fruit. At the time it was home to a catastrophe of Currawongs feasting on the over-ripe fruit and absolutely swarming with European wasps nesting in amongst its weighty petals covered in long protective needles.

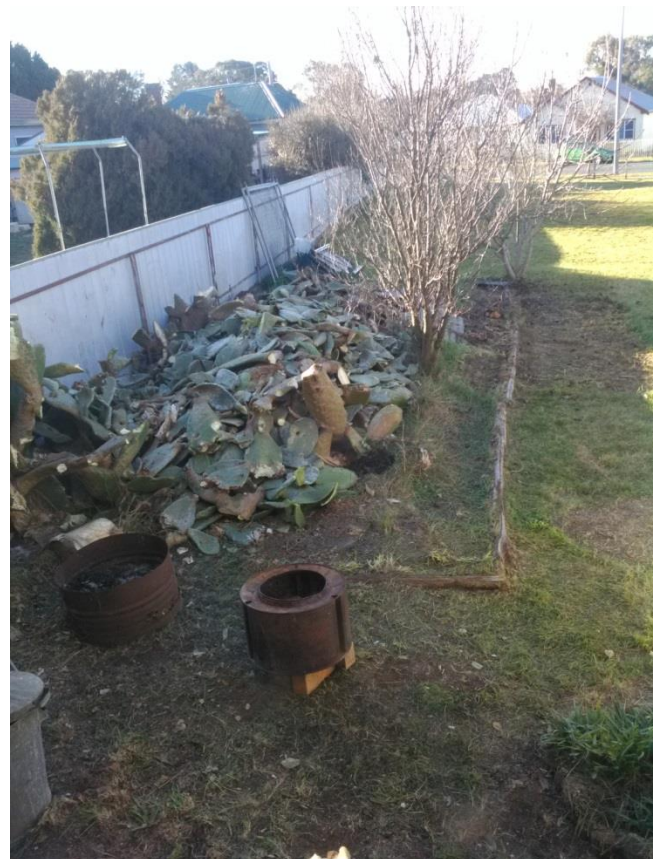
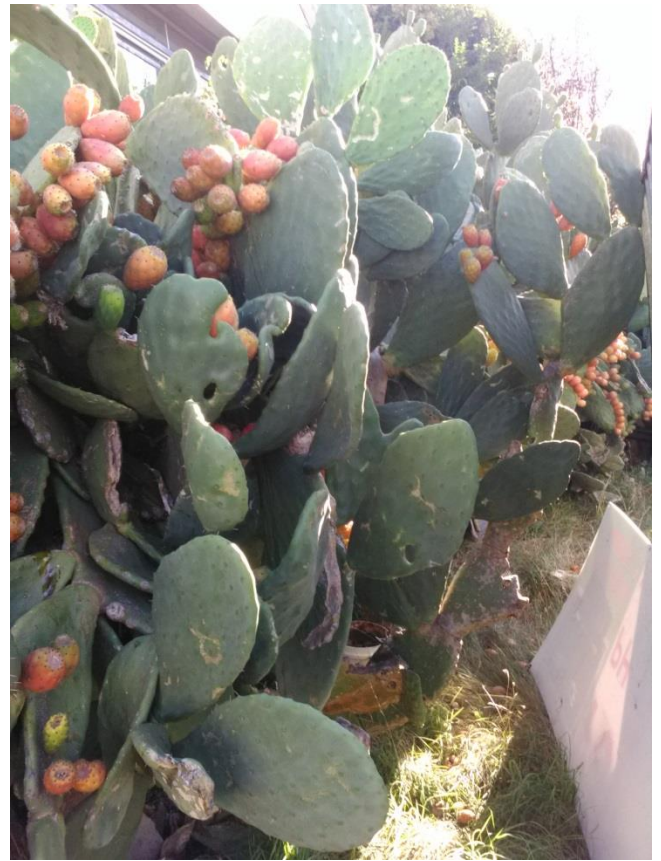
My eradication research led me to discover there were very few non-manual methods for removal of this weed short of the kind of army artillery used in serious warfare which clearly wasn't an option in a little suburban neighbourhood. Not one to be a fan of chemical warfare either I investigated what biological controls might be available and research and trials in

north-eastern Australia have shown that the cactus moth (*cactoblastis cactorum*) can be quite successful in eradicating these monster weeds although that success was limited to the more sub-tropical regions that were mostly frost free. That counts Crookwell out.

So manual removal it was! With double gloves, hard hat and dogged determination I methodically cut down every single piece of the pear on my block over a period of weeks. No easy task, I endured many a night trying to remove the long, almost invisible prickles from all parts of my being. The added challenge with this task was knowing that I couldn't just transport the cuttings to the local tip as their classification as a noxious weed of significance meant they would not be accepted as green waste.

So, I removed all the weighty petals first then systematically cut down all the trucks to stump before digging out the roots as best I could. The root systems I couldn't dig out were covered in black pots with no exposure to sunlight. In order to ensure these cuttings never took hold again my only option was to pile the cuttings up in the yard on top of builders' plastic and then cover the whole lot in another layer of builders' plastic, weighted down with old lengths of timber and solarise it until it all turned to mush, then water and disintegrated. This whole process took almost 2 years and involved a lot of policing to remove new and emerging shoots.

I'm pleased to report there is no evidence of prickly pear, currawongs or European wasps left on this little block and what was once an impenetrable thicket of the stuff is now a much more accessible and appealing herb garden buzzing with more beneficial insects. Looking back, I realise what an arduous task it was to eradicate this insidious weed and if I was to offer a little advice to any of our readers who have it growing; get rid of it sooner rather than later and be very mindful of where and how you get rid of it as the smallest piece can take root very quickly.



GER Event

On 18 February 2022, 5 members of our Southern Tablelands group (Tim - team leader, Jen, Bob, Celia and Ash) took part in a plant identification talk for the Great Eastern Ranges corridor expansion project coordinated by Mary Bonet.. Tim gave a short talk about how to identify plants in the Laggan TSR (Travelling Stock Reserve) at the Laggan Hall firstly. We then travelled by car to the Laggan TSR where those skills learned earlier were executed in the field with the handout provided and with question and answer sessions along the way around the reserve. The Local Land Services kindly gave permission for some seed to be collected from the TSR. Ruth Aveyard, who is the Upper Lachlan Landcare Coordinator, ran the event and we thank her for her great organizational skills. The second stage of these workshops will be held on 19 March 2022 at Fullerton where we will teach the attendees how to propagate their own plants from the seed collected in February. Our group has committed to propagate and grow on 3000 plants for landholders in the GER area to link national parks and TSR's with green corridors on private land. If there are any other members willing to help with this project besides the five listed above, please contact our Secretary via email. Below are some photos from the day kindly supplied by Ruth.



Calendar of Events

- 5 Mar Bangadilly NP, Canyonleigh
- 2 Apr Oallen Ford Walk
- 7 May Bulli Grevillea Park, Illawarra \$7/person entrance fee
- 4 Jun Bywong Nursery, off Federal Highway
- 9 Jul Forum at Goulburn Workers Club
- 6 Aug Mt Penang Loop, Bowral
- 2-4 Sep Weekend trip to Cowra
- 1 Oct Mt Gray Goulburn
- 5 Nov STEP Garden Canberra Arboretum
- 3 Dec AGM

More information regarding the outing to Bangadilly NP will be sent to you by Kaye this week.