

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Southern Highlands Group

...your local native garden club

President

Kay Fintan

kaynbrian@bigpond.com

Vice President

Louise Egerton

louise.egerton0@gmail.com

Secretary

Kim Zegenhagen

zegenhagenkim@gmail.com

Treasurer

Bill Mullard

bfmullard@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor

Trisha Arbib

trisharbib@gmail.com

Communications

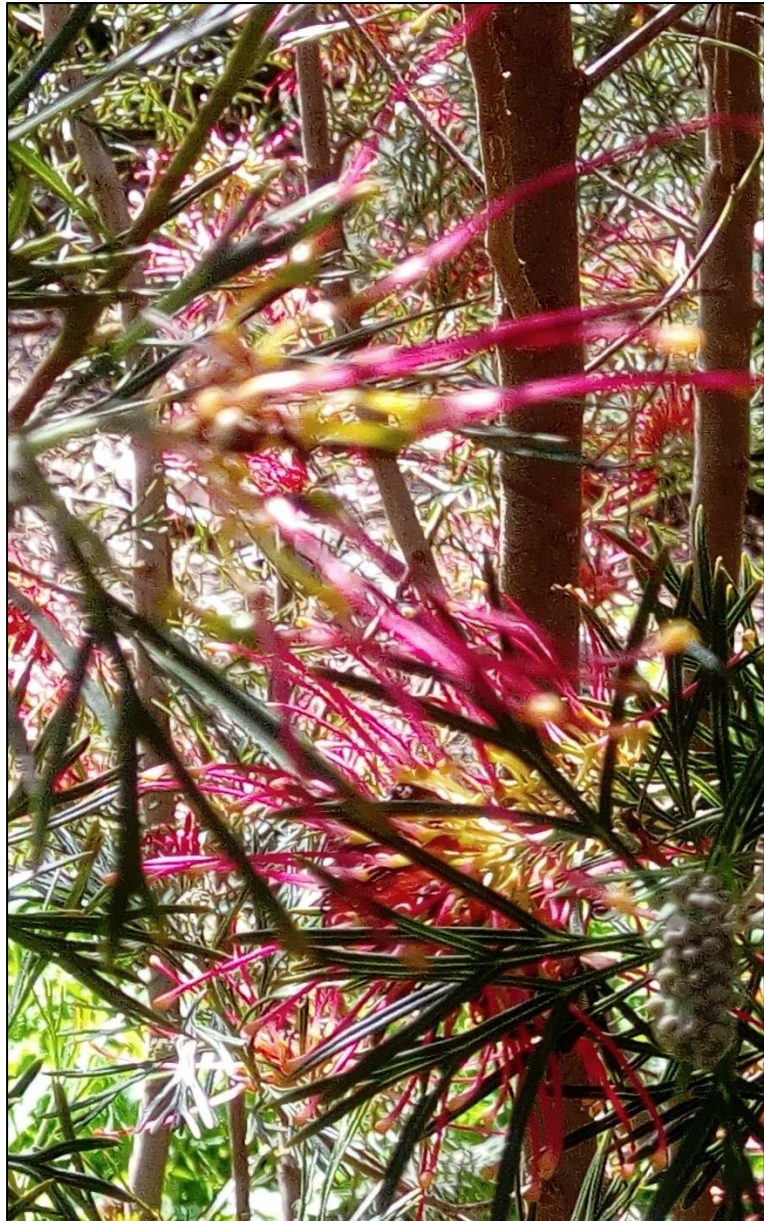
Erica Rink

ear2703@icloud.com

Committee Member

John Desmond

john@desmonds.com.au



It's really good to be communicating with you again. I hope that all are well and that your gardens are giving you pleasure. Members have again been generous in their contributions to the newsletter. And there are many items of interest in the Snippets.

This study in pinkish red and green looks to me like something exotic growing in a rainforest, not in an open paddock in Bundanoon. They could almost be orchids

nestled in among slender tree trunks. A moment before taking the photo I saw a honeyeater, somewhat like a large humming bird, sucking nectar from the flowers.



Fully open flower and buds.
Colour is actually red.

It is in fact a grevillea, *Grevillea 'Winpara Gem'*. I love its brilliance and form, with the flowers starting at the bottom of the bush and new buds constantly appearing. It was first bought to use its decorative foliage in flower arrangements. Now in its third winter, the abundance of flowers is showing just how beautiful they are. Rich red in real life, starting off as tight balls and opening fully into large paler red, open staminate balls on the bush at the same time. Frost hardy and sun loving, this upright bush will grow in some shade.

In this issue . . .

- P.2 Message from our President, Kay Fintan
- P.3 Update on Program for 2020
- Snippets
- P.3 Playing our Part for Climate Action – Louise Egerton
- P.4 Report of SHAPS Zoom General Meeting on 2nd July
- P.4 Proposed Planting of *Eucalyptus macarthurii*
- P.5 Where to See Australian Wildflowers Around Sydney
- P.5 Exciting Plans for a New Native Garden
- P.5 APS Pea Flower Study Group
- P.6 Coles Boxes Update – Sarah Cains
- P.7 *Eucalyptus gregsoniana* – Kris Gow
- P.8 To Be a Happy Gardener – Kim Zegenhagen
- P.9 For the Walker Who Seeks – Sarah Cains

Message from our President, Kay Fintan

Dear members, I hope you are managing to keep well and active with some garden activities that bring joy to your day.

The committee were a little curtailed in their event planning with the re-emergence of the virus in our area. To err on the side of caution it was decided to abandon our August meeting and hope that this newsletter will

provide a link to our staying in touch. With renewed hope we are planning to go ahead with the visit to Grow Wild, a native cut flower garden, in September.

Please be alert to information that will come to you closer to the date. A number of groups are issuing invitations to Zoom meetings so do log on to hear how other groups are coping in these strange times.

Above all keep safe and get joy and inspiration with our wonderful plants that seem to enjoy this time of the year. My own *Hardenbergia*, both white and purple have never looked happier!

Kay

Update on Program for 2020

Unfortunately everything is CANCELLED OR POSTPONED DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS until further notice. If you wish to know what was planned for the remainder of 2020 please consult the March 2020 newsletter. We will let you know as soon as things are back on track.

Sadly it has been decided to cancel the August meeting. Plans are in hand for September.

The November 2020 NSW APS weekend in the Southern Highlands has been reduced to one day, because of the uncertainties of planning. More information as we get closer to the date.



Snippets

Playing Our Part for Climate Action – Louise Egerton

APS Southern Highlands has joined, with other small local groups, to form an 'alliance' with WinZero. This community organisation has been formed to lead the Wingecarribee Shire in an effort to achieve net zero carbon emissions no later than 2050.

On 12 February 2020 Wingecarribee Shire Council announced a Climate Emergency Declaration for the Shire. WinZero will be working with Council, business and agriculture to assist with the transitions that will become necessary to reach zero carbon emissions by 2050.

As emission-reduction projects get underway APS Southern Highlands may be invited to play a role, given our expertise in the choosing and growing of native plants.

We encourage our members to become members of WinZero. To learn more, visit <https://winzero.com.au>

Sarah Cains who is a member of both SHAPS and WinZero is our liaison person. You know her as your newsletter editor of many years and as a valued contributor to it now. Editor

Report of SHAPS Zoom General Meeting on 2nd July

Thirteen members signed in to the Zoom meeting. Our President Kay shared news on the status of the Coles' planter boxes (see story in this issue of the newsletter), and on the NSW APS meeting planned for the Southern Highlands in November. NSW APS agreed to our suggestion of 1 day rather than a weekend get together, because of the difficulty of planning when things are uncertain. We will provide an extra list of places to visit for those who wish to stay longer in the Southern Highlands.

Then several of us held up and spoke about a favourite flower until, all too quickly, the 40 minutes allowed by Zoom for a free meeting was up. It's been a long time since our last "proper" meeting and I'm sure many have been missing the monthly contact with other members as have I. This was an opportunity to meet up at least virtually To say hi and share a flower.

Proposed Planting of *Eucalyptus macarthurii*

Many of us will have seen this sign under an old *Eucalyptus macarthurii* tree near the corner of Eridge Park Road and Moss Vale Road.

A future project planned for SHAPS is to surround the old tree with a group of young *Eucalyptus macarthurii* in order to make a grove, and protect the tree from exposure to strong winds in that very open area. Council is supportive of planting and permission will be formally pursued. It might be possible to also suggest a new planting out beneath all the trees of grasses and perennials typical of this community. This area will become more often visited if the proposed bicycle path eventuates.



Describing an example of endangered Southern Highlands shale woodland

Where to See Australian Wildflowers Around Sydney

It was pleasing to see this item in “ellaslist”, a website with information on activities for young children. We are not far from Sydney and would probably appreciate an outing, with or without children, and several of the suggestions were unknown to me.

<https://www.ellaslist.com.au/articles/where-to-see-australian-wildflowers-near-sydney?>

The closest to us is Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve at Kareela in the Sutherland Shire. There are also write-ups on Muogamarra Native Reserve in the Hawkesbury, Kuringai Wildflower Garden at St Ives, The Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, Wendy’s Secret Garden at Lavender Bay, and the Sydney Harbour National Park and the Royal National Park just south of Sydney.

I have been to Wendy Whitely’s secret garden on Sydney Harbour near Luna Park and it is a joy affirming experience.

Ellaslist write up below is inviting.



Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve, Kareela

“With over two hectares of landscaped gardens and four kilometres of walking paths in the Sutherland Shire, Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve is a unique haven devoted entirely to Australian native plants. It boasts displays of banksias, grevilleas, lilly-pillies, rainforest, cycads, ferns, and acacia and silver foliage gardens plus indigenous bush tucker and medicinal plants. The expansive array also provides a habitat for native birds and fauna.”

Exciting Plans for a New Native Garden

The Southern Highlands Botanic Garden has been given a grant of \$20,000 for a new native garden, to be established at the eastern end along the cycle path, with work commencing during the latter part of 2020. The funds were given by the Federal Government under its Community Environment Program.

The plantings will occupy over one acre and include many species from the endangered ecological community, Southern Highlands Shale Woodlands. Many of the seeds and plants for the project have been supplied by Wingecarribee Shire Council.

We have offered to assist in any way that is considered helpful.

APS Pea Flowers Study Group

A study group has been reactivated to study plants with pea flowers and has been renamed Australian Pea Flower Study Group. In the past, a study group for this purpose has operated

under the name Fabaceae Study Group, as pea flowers were previously recognised as a separate family. If you are interested in the identification, classification, cultivation, propagation or conservation of Australia's pea flowers, consider joining the Australian Pea Flower Study Group. The study group webpage can be found here: <http://anpsa.org.au/pea-flowerSG/index.html>. If you would like to join the group, there is a section on the webpage that can be completed and submitted on-line. Membership for emailed newsletters is free.

Coles Boxes Update. May 2020

Sarah Cains



It is now about two years since SHAPS took over planting and maintenance of the planter boxes outside Coles in Bowral. The idea of looking after the boxes came when three Bowral SHAPS members became tired of looking at the dusty, dying lavender plants, one plonked in the centre of each of the three boxes. The north-facing aspect and busy plaza atmosphere offered a great opportunity to show off Australian plants.

The manager of Coles at the time was happy for us to take over, so Kay, Kris and Sarah, bought bags of potting mix to top up the sunken soil level, disposed of the lavenders and planted up with some native bits and pieces. As with all plantings, some survived and others failed to thrive, but now we we're 'getting to know the territory', and, by trial and error, becoming more successful.

The 'soil' originally filled into the boxes appears to be an inferior quality mix.

It would be a job beyond us to dig the whole lot out and start again – and I'm not sure Coles would be enthusiastic about such activity on their high-traffic frontage. In light of this, we've topped up with a quality native mix, added a layer of bagged cow manure and mulched with a pea straw/wheat straw layer to slow the process of breaking down the media in the intense, northern sun that floods the area. When my worm farm population becomes excessive, as it does from time to time, I put handfuls of the little critters into the boxes, hoping they will somehow survive and work their magic.

Watering is an ongoing, hefty job as there is no tap on the Coles frontage. Watering cans are filled from a tap behind the public toilets, put into a shopping trolley then pushed up to the boxes in a weekly watering routine. It's hard to imagine how someone could design multiple planter boxes without including provision for watering! There are plenty more messy boxes around the street fronts of the store and in the car park. Our fingers itch to weed them and plant them up but watering any more than the original three would be too much to take on.

I'm told there is a new manager – a woman – so I'll go and talk to her and try to persuade her to ask Coles/W S Council to install a tap!



Kay Fintan enjoying her efforts

After topping up the level of the mix, we undertook a restoration of the planting. The hardy and obliging saltbush, *Rhagodia spinescens*, was trimmed to stop it taking over. It seems that everyone loves ‘pruning’, because after we had pruned the saltbush, some other gardener (Council?) came after us and clipped off all the lovely trailing bits we have been training to spill over the harsh edges of the boxes where there is no seating. Now it has straight edges and neat corners – something like a cut loaf of bread!

Myoporum sp – the fine leaf one – has been cut right back (by us) to make space for the inclusion of a couple of small, neat growing *Westringia* cultivars and a *Baeckia sp. Correa glabra* is romping along in the western box and three *Correa ‘Lemon Twist’*

plants were dug out, pruned roots and tops, soaked in Seasol and replanted – they needed to be lifted in order to accommodate the augmented soil level. So far so good! They are looking ok a week after the shock.

Eucalyptus gregsoniana

Kris Gow

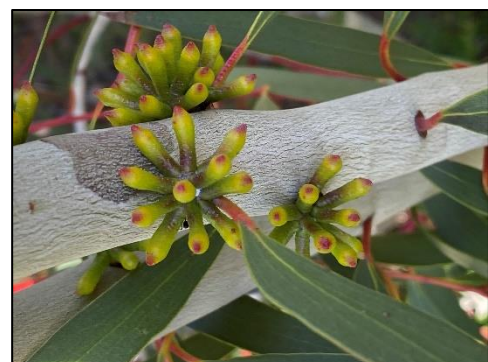


One of my favourite plants in my garden is *Eucalyptus gregsoniana* commonly known as the “mallee snow gum”, as the name suggests very tolerant of cold windy conditions, will also adapt to sandy conditions and soils of limited drainage. An excellent plant for the smaller garden typically growing to a height of about 4 metres. It provides dappled shade, nectar for the birds and bees, height and structure. It has smooth, light grey

to white bark, creamy white flowers and doesn’t produce an excessive amount of bark.

The main trunk can be coppiced to create a multi-stemmed effect.

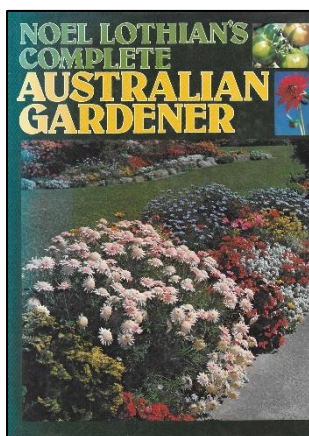
Flowering mostly occurs in spring and summer, but with our recent weather patterns some of my trees are presently in flower. Sarah and Geoff Cains have created a mini “forest” in their back



garden using this species, even though the plantings are only about 2 years old they already give the garden great style and the WOW factor. I believe every garden should have at least one eucalyptus tree, for me this species ticks every box.

To Be a Happy Gardener

Kim Zegenhagen



Gardening with Noel part 2.

All happy gardeners are alike, each unhappy gardener is unhappy in their own way.

I referred once again to “Noel Lothian’s Complete Australian Gardener”.

To be a happy gardener one must make sure plants are suited to the environment in which they are planted. This also makes your plants happy.

With the future climate being unpredictable in many ways I thought it a good idea to discuss native plants *which are suitable for low rainfall regions*. Those water guzzlers just have no future in your garden!

So here are some native plants that Noel recommended in 1977. I am sure he would still recommend them in 2020.

Botanical name	Common name	Size
Acacia longifolia	Sydney Golden or Sallow wattle	2.4- 3 meters
Acacia notabilis	Flinders wattle	1.2-1.8 meters
Araucaria bidwilli	Bunya pine	12-15 meters
Araucaria heterophylla (excelsa)	Norfolk Island pine	15-21 meters
Casuarina cristata	Belah, Black Oak	6-9 meters
Casuarina cunninghamiana	River sheoak	6-10.5 meters
Eucalyptus crucis	Southern Cross mallee	1.2-2.5 meters
Eucalyptus gillii	Curly mallee	3.7-4.5 meters
Eucalyptus macrocarpa	Rose-of-the-west	1.2-2.5 meters
Grevillea rosmarinifolia	Rosemary grevillea	1.8-2.5 meters
Hakea francisa francisiana	Sth Aust grassland hakea	1.8-3 meters
Syzygium (Eugenia) coolminianum	Blue lilly-pilly	6-9 meters
Syzygium floribundum (E. ventenatii)	Weeping myrtle	7.5-9 meters

For the Walker Who Seeks

Sarah Cains

This article by Sarah Cains first appeared in WinZero's Blog. Go to winzero.com.au to find out more about the local Wingecarribee group. To quote from their website: "WinZero has been formed to inspire and lead the Wingecarribee Shire in an "All-In" effort to achieve net zero emissions no later than 2050. With everyone working together – Government, Business, Agriculture and Individuals, we can do this." Editor

Surprisingly close to Bowral town is a hidden bush track with a story...

The Steps can hardly be called a secret, being hidden, as they are, in plain sight. They snake up the south-western flank of the mountain, zig-zagging through the bush to moderate the steepness of the climb. They're a shortcut to the top, or nearly to the top of Mount Gibraltar, The Gib, as it's locally known. At 860m, it's the highest point in the Southern Highlands and the site of a nationally listed and protected nature reserve.



Photo by Andy Lemann

There's a feeling amongst those who climb The Steps that this is a route for insiders, a place for the few. As you slip quietly into the sheltering forest, it's easy to feel yourself to be part of a group of custodians. Walkers pull out weeds, pick up rubbish and look crossly at dogs off the lead, concerned for the little and Swamp Wallabies and Eastern Grey kangaroos occasionally to be glimpsed as they thump through the bush. Gliders and microbats are known to live there too, but they're harder to see. Sometimes, at night, if you're walking in town, you'll see flashlights of 'spotters' as they go out searching for forest life at night; souls tuned to the natural world who are hoping to record and protect these all-too-rare and precious creatures.

In Covidtime, (2020) more walkers are finding their way to The Steps to discover for themselves this challenging and picturesque track.

Built in the 1930s as result of a depression relief programme, workers skilled in quarrying trachyte rock from the mountain turned their hands to construction works in the towns. This resulted in some handsome 'public works' stonework still to be seen around Bowral and on The Gib. There are workers' cottages, too; there's one in Cliff St, and others in Park Road, Victoria St, and Clearview St.

But the steps were not a handsome piece of work. Until recent renovations set them right, they wiggled and rocked their way up from the town, forming an erratic and ankle-turning pathway, with no regard for the safety and rhythm that can be achieved by steps built to a given formula for risers and treads. After rain, the tilted surfaces were treacherous and

slippery. Mighty hunks of trachyte seemed to have been hauled roughly into place. They would move under a boot and toss the incautious walker off the path at a misplaced footfall. Where the steps bring the walker close to the cliff edge that descends into the quarry, a frail-looking handrail is the guide to set you straight again. The route suffered badly from erosion caused by storm water that cascades down its way in downpours.

A recent renovation has been skillfully executed, and it doesn't seem far-fetched to say that the job was done with love. Funded by grant money raised by Mt Gibraltar Bushcare and Landcare volunteers and supervised by locals working in coordination with a sympathetic construction company, the work was performed using stone already cut on the mountain and in line with NSW Heritage Council guidelines.

The result is a well-graded climb on stable steps.

Likely the steps were originally built as a short-cut to the top of the mountain for quarry workers living on the 'flatlands' of the town below, creating a situation something like the reverse of an Italian hill town. Pictures of these charmed places are lodged in the imagination of every Italophile; the town built of ancient stone and terracotta perched atop its hill, the buildings clustered, close and warm and dribbling down the hillside like runny icing from a cake. Workers would descend from the town into terraced fields, farming the lower hill slopes with their olives and grapes, then ascend in the evenings to inhabit towns of churches, tiny shops and tall houses that step straight out onto shared communal squares. In the evenings, 'passeggiata' still happens in Italy's hill towns. Locals of all ages come out to walk their town squares, the older people dressed in their Sunday best. This traditional stroll is an opportunity for communal gathering and exchange.

A worthy model for local living?

For many decades The Gib was used by townspeople as a dump for garden rubbish. This resulted in the extensive swathes of ivy and other 'garden escapes' racing away to blanket natural forest plants and block habitat crevices. The area around the steps was no exception. Over twenty-seven years, Bushcare team members have clambered and crawled through this mass of weed, digging, pulling, winding and cutting to achieve a huge reduction in the weed burden on the mountain.

Always shaded, it is often cold on the south side where the steps ascend. Many photos show the Thursday weeders in soil-stained jumpers and an odd assortment of headwear, strapped with tool belts and grouped around the tried and true, oft-mended picnic basket that bears coffee and biscuits for morning tea. Occasionally a home-made cake appears to be shared with enthusiasm. Once, as the morning tea party sat chatting, an echidna waddled into the circle, its woofly snout testing the air cautiously as, with rolling gait, it wandered in and out of the picnic space. It seemed unafraid.

Near the top of the track is a stone seat comprising two hefty uprights topped with a slab. It's a welcome spot to rest if you don't mind a cold backside. Being still for a while, regaining an even heartbeat after the climb, the walker might be fortunate to see and hear small birds, though there are fewer these days. Sometimes there's a quick lizard, too. Lace Monitors have vanished, and even Bluetongues are not often seen in this, their natural

habitat. They're more commonly sighted in town parks and gardens. There's one that lives at Bowral Railway Station. But, together with a few of its other skink relations, the shining, bronze-skinned Eastern Water Skink can be seen on The Gib as it darts amongst the rocks. A sighting of the Coppertail Skink in its smart, black and white striped livery would be a treat.

The little birds of the forest are the ones to look for; Blue Wrens, Shrike Thrushes, Eastern Spinebills, Tree Creepers, Thornbills and the like. Hopefully some of their number have escaped the ravages of drought and a seriously over-heated summer to revitalise this place.

Just off the track, below the seat, a fresh-dug wombat hole gapes beneath a fallen wattle. Soil unearthed during construction of this creature's complex burrow has lumped into a pile beside the hole, displaying the marvellously rich, ochre-coloured basalt soil from inside this ancient volcano.

On the second last bend, where the pathway levels out and you are done with the steps, you will pass an old *Persoonia linearis*; the Geebung. The catchy name for this tree has been imprinted on our national consciousness by Banjo Patterson with his poem, The Geebung Polo Club. The attractive little tree has thick, black bark that peels off in layers and in wet weather, the cherry-red underlayer displays an almost luminescent glow. Sadly, the most recent prolonged drought has killed off this particular old tree, though there are others of its family growing in more sheltered sites, back from the exposed area of the Bowral Lookout where the track spits you out. These days, the black carcass of the old Geebung is a reminder that it used to feed pairs of seed-eating Gang Gangs. In their scarlet and slate-grey plumage, these unusually quiet cockatoos would flicker through the tall forest, revealing their presence by the sound of their strong beaks cracking seeds. There are few breeding sites left for these ghostly creatures since few large, old nesting trees escaped the axe and the saw of earlier days. But a new generation of trees is slowly maturing due to protection of the area.

Gang Gangs are another of the many native species now struggling to find habitat on the mountain. Described around 2000 by Richard Jordan in the book, The Gib, as 'uncommon', Gang Gangs have now largely vanished from the reserve.

When you arrive, puffed and triumphant amongst the tall, drought-ravaged wattles that surround the Bowral Lookout, you will count yourself lucky to have found The Steps. You will hear the wattles before you raise your head to see them. Rising like masts on rocking sailing boats, they clack gently in the wind.

Beside the picnic shelter stands a trachyte plinth that was topped with a brass plaque directing the viewer to local landmarks. This plaque was stolen, then found again on a farm, remounted, then stolen again.



Photo by Andy Lemann

A new plaque has been designed and is soon to be mounted with what will hopefully be seriously theft-proof method. The wording reflects the thoughts of the Mount Gibraltar Bushcarers whose ongoing work honours and preserves this precious place.

Title words: Philippa Nikulinsky/Botanic Artist, WA

MANY THANKS
to all
contributors to
this newsletter.



I'd like to thank Kay Fintan, Louise Egerton, Sarah Cains, Kris Gow and Kim Zegenhagen all of whom contributed to this newsletter. Contributions are always welcome. Please write to me at trisharbib@gmail.com with suggestions.