

Little Desert National Park: 9–11 March

Walkers: Val, Leo, Lothar, Karen, Bronwyn, Russell, Helen and Andy

We all met at Horsham bakery late Friday morning then on to Kiata campground (about 20 km past Dimboola) briefly stopping at the pink lake for a photo. The campground covered a large area, there weren't too many other campers and we were quite spread out.

After pitching tents and a quick cuppa we met Val and Leo's friends Lindsay and Sue who own a bush block (Land for Wildlife) a few km from Kiata. They took us on a trek along the animal tracks through dense prickly scrub, pointing out the many species along the way. We spotted a couple of emus on a nearby paddock and a large orb spider waiting to spring on an unsuspecting insect. We had views of the surrounding country side and desert which is really not an accurate name for the area. Although the ground is sandy, it is covered in thick scrub and tall yellow gums and red gums.

Lindsay showed us a mallee fowl mound. There is one male keeping a nest and we could see where he had been adding leaf litter to the top of the mound to keep its temperature constant as there are still eggs in the mound. Several female mallee fowls mate with the one male and lay their eggs in his mound. The male then looks after the nest, checking its temperature with his beak and adding to it if necessary. When the chicks are born, they find their way out of the mound and are on their own from the day they are hatched.

We returned to Kiata and after another cuppa went for another stroll on the discovery trail which took us through red gum forest and sand hill scrub. It was very dry and warm and we noticed there were not many birds around. We saw a lot of ant nests and had spotted an echidna on the drive in. We gathered some red gum firewood from a pile of old railway sleepers supplied at the camp and made a fire for the night. A possum briefly visited us but seemed uninterested in our nibblies.

After a quiet night, we woke to the squawks of galahs. Today the entire group would walk the Salt Lake track to the Trigg Point lookout then separate into two groups. One group would continue on to the Salt Lake whilst the other group would take the loop around to the carpark and back to the camp ground. The ground rose steadily for 6kms through dense prickly tea tree that was a patchwork of greens and rusty reds. The scene was very autumnal. As we rose, we could get glimpses of the vastness of the Little Desert (that name really doesn't suit the landscape). We could see that this would make a great walk in spring with the various small shrubs in flower and the news from Lindsay that orchids in their thousands would carpet the area.

We stopped to take pictures and have morning tea at the Trigg Point lookout and then we were on our way to find the Salt Lake. The patchwork colours soon turned to green as we trekked downhill through low scrub. Every now and then the scrub would be broken up by islands of tall trees and we wondered if there were lots of small salt lakes hidden in these tiny forests. We spotted a couple of kangaroos in the scrub, then Helen nearly stood on a small brown and grey snake. It froze in fright and had to be coaxed off the track.

An hour and a half later (and just in time for lunch) we reached a side track taking us over the dunes to the salt lake. This area was very

picturesque. The lake was in the middle of a forest island, the salt crust a pristine sparkling white. We sat down on the sandy shore for lunch and then wandered on to the lake. Much to our surprise it was covered in the tracks of kangaroos and emus. Just under the crusty surface was thick sticky wet mud which made walking very slippery.

After a leisurely stay, we started our trek back via the vehicle track which was hard going deeply rutted and sandy. Helen found a large red back spider on the track which made Andy a bit nervous as he has only heard nasty stories about them being highly venomous. No one has told him yet that they are also very shy and non-aggressive.

We needed a few rest stops on the way back. The sky had clouded over and we were getting a light sprinkling of warm rain to refresh us. After 24kms we arrived back at camp to find Lothar and company preparing a sumptuous camp roast. Russell had set up a canopy over a picnic table to keep the light rain off.

That night we settled into various wines, beers, nibbles and a spectacular dinner prepared by Lothar. The night was very warm and we stayed up late. Val had made a fruit salad to finish off the meal, then we all waddled back to our tents for a good nights sleep.

The rain had cleared by morning and once again it warmed up quickly. We decided do the Sanctuary walk and then have a stroll around the Wimmera River at Dimboola. There are two camp grounds there, the Horseshoe Bend ground and the Ackle Bend camp ground and you can walk along the river between them as we did. The grounds were set amongst tall red gums and seemed a little less serene than Kiata.

After our walks we went our separate ways. My thanks to all the happy campers for their lovely company.

Karen

Wyperfeld National Park 11–14 March

Walkers: Mabel, Dianne, Val, Liz C., Helen, John and Glenda, Karen

Val, myself, Dianne and Liz drove up to Wyperfeld on Friday afternoon, arriving at Wonga Hut Camp Ground at about 6pm, in time for dinner. There were a lot of happy campers and it was soon discovered that Dianne's friends from the Ballarat Walking club were set up over the road. Lucky for us as they had a roaring campfire going which kept us warm till it was time for bed, and a good nights sleep – interrupted by a bit of snoring which kept us amused trying to work out who was and who wasn't snoring.

The next morning was quite crisp. We had breakfast and set off on a loop walk along the Black Flat Track through the Maiden Swamp and Black Flat. We spotted eight emus from the sand dune lookout at the camp ground. Further on near the swamps we surprised a few kangaroos. The landscape varies a lot here, red gum and black box open forest opens up to dry lake beds and swampy ground. Through the forest you could just see the sand dunes covered in porcupine grass and shrubs. It's a haven for birds although there weren't as many about as last year when we were here. We did see various parrots, emus, the usual galahs, cockatoos and corellas and could hear smaller wrens and finches in the bushes.

At the Black Flat, we decided to do the Tyakil Nature Walk and get back on the Meridian Track which led us further on to the Everard track. We didn't mean to keep adding bits to the walk but it was such a nice day we didn't want to cut it short. The Everard and Meridian Tracks led through more forest and past another dry lake - Lake Brambruk. There had been rain a few days before so there were tiny shoots of green coming up through the barren dirt. The scenery changed again on the Discovery Track which led us through the Devils Pools and lots of sand dunes. On checking the map we walked about 16km – this was our short morning walk!

When we arrived back at the camp ground, Mabel, Helen, John and Glenda were there to greet us. After a quick lunch we took another walk along the Discovery Loop to have a proper look at Lake Brambruk. It is really picturesque along this track, there are the sand dunes covered in delicate shrubs, open areas around the swamps and dry lake beds and then the light open gum forests. We saw some water on the lake and decided to take a closer look (in case it was a mirage). Yes there were a couple of pools of water. Many happy snaps were taken and then we returned via Mount Mattingley and the scenic lookout. It is a great view from here, and it is amazing just how green and healthy the landscape looks despite the lack of rainfall.

We all settled in to preparing dinner for the night. It was a lovely night too, clear, not too cold and with everyone helping, we were able to put on a camp oven roast to rival Lothar's efforts. We had the meat, vegies, nibblies, lots of wine and Val's yummy chocolate swirl cheesecake to finish off. It took a long time for everyone to leave the camp fire and take to their beds.

The next morning we awoke to rain, 3 hours of it, just enough to soak our tents and make breakfast a little damp. By the time the group returning to Warrnambool had packed the rain stopped and the sun came out. We all decided to do the Desert Walk

loop – 7km (near the park entrance). This walk takes you around the sand dunes for close ups of the plants and up to various high points for the distant views over the park. Sign boards point out the various land forms and ecosystems in the park as well as giving information on the smaller ecosystems within the park.

After a couple of hours we were back at the cars. Four of us farewelled the rest of the group who were staying another night. Mabel's groups were going to walk the Eastern Lookout track later that day. I hope they have some tales to tell.

It was a lovely weekend, with lots of great company, food and walks.

Karen