

A walk in the Park

The Clarence Environment Centre is a great supporter of our national parks and the staff responsible for maintaining them. Unfortunately, recent right wing State and Federal Governments in Australia have seemingly waged war on the environment, and groups such as ours who are dedicated to conservation of our unique biodiversity.

In NSW the Parks Service has seen successive downgrading and budget cutting, to the point where a service that was never adequately resourced, is now struggling just to keep grass mowed in camping grounds. Science divisions have been slashed, and services cut; with higher quotas for mandatory hazard reduction burning across large expanses of bushland, the only thing seemingly receiving attention. That usually coincides with birds' spring nesting season.

My wife and I recently had occasion to hike through one of the Clarence Valley's sandstone national parks, Fortis Creek, some 20km west of Grafton in the Northern Rivers District of New South Wales, our destination - Morgan's Camp, some 6km north of the Coaldale Road.

Being spring time we intended to take advantage of that flowering season to indulge my passion for botany, but were initially dismayed by the blackened landscape that confronted us. Whether or not the fire was part of the mandatory burning that Parks' staff are forced to reluctantly undertake, is not known, it could have been started by an arsonist, a lightening strike (unlikely), or by a carelessly discarded cigarette.

Imagine our relief therefore when we arrived at the Morgan Camp Trail to find the fire had been stopped at that point, and the bush beyond was blooming as expected.



Morgans Camp Trail – blooming one side.



Blackened by fire on the other.

It was ablaze with colour despite the less than perfect weather - “scattered showers”. The diversity, and significance of the flora was outstanding, and basically by observing little more than the road verges, we were able to identify more than 200 plant species, including 5 listed as threatened, and 4 others that have been identified as meeting the criteria for listing, along with 20 species that are protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.



Fortis Creek National Park in spring, Boronias, Acacias, Wedding Bush, Guinea Flower and Bush Peas contributing to the blaze of colour.

We actually met up with the responsible Park Ranger who was looking at ways to clean up the untidy mess left following track work undertaken in haste to give easier access to the fire-fighting teams. We stopped and chatted briefly and she made the comment that it was wonderful to see people walking in and enjoying the park; apparently this was unusual.

I can really recommend that others take the opportunity, particularly during the late winter – early spring flowering season, to visit our national parks, and pause to appreciate the beauty that surrounds you. So if you haven't already done so, these are just some of what you missed.



Acacia Ruppia - Endangered



Grevillea banyabba. Vulnerable



Prostanthera sejuncta. Endangered



Diuris sulphurea. A Donkey Orchid



Lyperanthus suaveolens.
Brown Beaks Orchid



Caleana major. Large Duck Orchid



Calochilus campestris.
Copper Beard Orchid



Dodonaea crucifolia. A Hop Bush
Rare.



Isopogon petiolaris. A Drum Stick



Allocasuarina torulosa -
Forest Oak



Ricinocarpus pinifolius -
Wedding Bush

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Unfortunately, an internet search reveals little about Fortis Creek National Park other than:

“Fortis Creek National Park covers an area of around 20,000 hectares and is located in the east of Australia. Fortis Creek National Park is in NSW.

Towns, villages or cities in and around Fortis Creek National Park include the village of Copmanhurst ([show me](#)), the village of Lawrence ([show me](#)) and the village of Ulmarra ([show me](#)).

Fortis Creek National Park borders the following other reserves: Fortis Creek State Forest and Banyabba Nature Reserve.

The Department's website tells us little more, and in fact their Pocket Guide to Parks on the North Coast of NSW, which lists 81 parks and reserves, makes no mention of Fortis Creek at all. Nor is there mention of the adjoining 15,210 hectare Banyabba Nature Reserve. Perhaps that is because there are no visitor facilities, parking areas, toilets etc. Who knows.

However, should you wish to enjoy the wondrous floral delights follow the Summerland Way north from Grafton for about 10km to the Copmanhurst turn off left onto the Clarence Way, then turn right onto the Coaldale Road which will take you along the southern boundary of the park, just keep your eyes open for the National Parks signs. And remember, be responsible, leave your pets at home, do not drive off road, and take your rubbish with you.



**Compiled by John Edwards
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