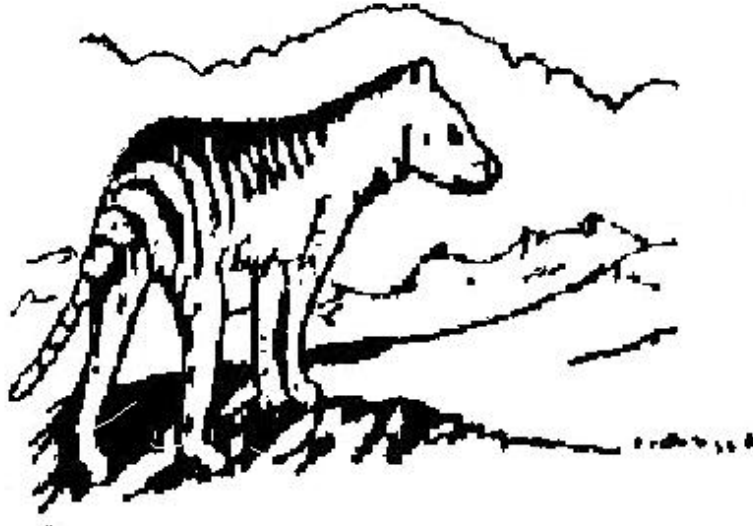


THE LAUNCESTON NATURALIST

Issued to members of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club as a contribution to club activities.



The aim of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club is to encourage the study of all aspects of natural history and to support the conservation of our natural heritage

Volume XLV No 3

February / March 2012

- Patron** : Mr Chris Tassell, AM
- President** : Mr A Pegler, 37 Maroney Rd Kings Meadows 6344 1076
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- N'letter Co-ordinator** : Ms K. Manning
- Librarian** : Ms T McGlynn
- Committee** : E Montgomery, J Handlinger, P Wright, M Clarke,
P Warren, P Ralph

Meetings 1st Tuesday of month, Feb-Dec at Scotch-Oakburn College, Penquite Rd Newstead

PROGRAM

APRIL

- Tuesday 3** **GENERAL MEETING**
Guest speaker Martin George - *Transit of Venus*
- Saturday 21 -** **SKEMP WEEKEND: Water Monitoring (Saturday)**
Sunday 22 **and Astronomy (Saturday Evening) with Peter Warren**

MAY

- Tuesday 1** **SKEMP MEMORIAL LECTURE**
Guest Speaker to be confirmed
Rockpools and Rocks
- Friday 4 -** **FEDERATION WEEKEND: Fungi related activities at**
Saturday 5 **Corinna in the Tarkine hosted by Fungimap and**
 Central North Field Naturalists (more details in newsletter)
- Sunday 13** **FIELD TRIP: Badger Head/West Head**
 Rockpools and Rocks
- Saturday 26** **SKEMP DAY: Fungi Foraging**

JUNE

- Tuesday 5** **GENERAL MEETING**
Guest Speaker to be confirmed
- Wednesday 6** **SKEMPS: View the Transit of Venus**
- Saturday 16** **FIELD TRIP: Mt Arthur track - Fungi and Ferns**
- Sunday 24** **SKEMP DAY: Fungi and Ferns**

Short notice program changes and further details on
program activities can be viewed at
<http://www.lfnc.org.au/meetings.htm>

GENERAL / COMMITTEE MEETING

Puggle

February - Alison Green presented the question "How many eyes do spiders have?" Prue Wright correctly answered eight.

March - Prue Wright asked members how many endemic birds Tasmania had. Tina McGlynn correctly answered that there are 12. Prue then continued by asking members to name all the endemic birds. With a little prompting all 12 were named.

Sightings

February - Tom Treloggen reported dead Silvereyes in his backyard and a skink swimming in a bucket of water. Prue Wright reported two Spotted Tailed Quolls which were unfortunately the victim of road kill near Gravelly Beach.

March - Maureen Johnston saw 20 Australian Pelicans at the Tailrace. Liz Bond had a Ringtail Possum enter her bedroom window. Prue Wright saw a female Scorpion-tailed spider at Swan Point. Alison Green saw Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos at Windmill Hill heading to the pine trees. Peter Ralph saw two Wedge-tailed eagles, one at Lake Augusta and the other at Liawenee. Peter Warren reported a Ringtail Possum at St Leonards, the first he has seen in 30 years. Al Pegler saw a Wedge-tailed eagle near Skemps heading in the Mt Barrow direction.

It was announced at the February General Meeting that the Committee had decided to implement a more formal approach to sightings. A book will be passed around during the meetings for members to record their sighting. Details recorded should include what the sighting was, when approximately and location.

Library Report General

Tina McGlynn reported that newsletters from other Field Naturalists clubs had been received and that she had brought in her personal copy of Sarah Lloyd's new book *The Edge: A Natural History of Tasmania's Great Western Tiers* for members to look at.

General

At the March Committee meeting the following purchases and payment were approved, purchase of a combined step/extension ladder and a socket set for Skemps and donation of \$50 to the Australian Natural Heritage Medallion Trust Fund.

OPEN DAY at Skemps for School for Seniors – Monday 6 February 2012

Twenty two members entertained six visitors from School for Seniors and a mainland visitor on a fine and mild Tasmanian day. The introduction was given by Noel and the visitors were shown around the centre and the grounds in the immediate vicinity. They also joined in the activities such as water monitoring and chatted amiably with members, asking many questions.

Thanks to Prue a track was mown up to the old homestead interpretation site while Peter R and Noel worked on the mower and supplied Prue with more fuel as she cut

through the long grass.

Prior to lunch visitors went for walks with the top pond, homestead site and forest walk proving the most popular and thanks to the volunteers in the Centre they returned to a lit BBQ and hot water for coffee and tea.

After lunch our visitors declined another walk although they chose to stay around till late asking more questions and being shown around by our eager volunteers.

Rather late in the day another member and two guests turned up. A great day was had by all and at least one visitor showed interest in membership of the club.

Noel J Manning

GENERAL MEETING - Tuesday 7 February - Guy Westmore - Insects

At the LFNC meeting on 7 February the speaker was Guy Westmore, an Entomologist based at the DPI/PWE Mt Pleasant Laboratories in Prospect, Launceston. His work there concentrates on Biosecurity involving, especially, invertebrates which are pests. His presentation comprised two parts; an account of a personal project and a display of Tasmanian insects.

(1) *'The Wild Tobacco Fly Mystery'*. Guy Westmore used this title to introduce his research project. He is investigating some questions raised by this fruit fly species.

Wild tobacco fly, *Bactrocera cacuminata*, belongs to family Tephritidae and to the same genus as the Queensland fruit fly, *Bactrocera tryoni*. These species are very similar physically but their adults can be separated because of small differences in their wings. In biological impact they differ considerably. Larvae of *B. cacuminata* live and feed in fruit of wild tobacco, *Solanum mauritianum*. They cause no economic harm. Conversely *B. tryoni* is a serious pest which infests a variety of commercial fruits.

Queensland fruit fly is present in Qld, NT., NSW and VIC, but not in WA, SA or Tasmania. Another pest species, the Mediterranean fruit fly, *Ceratitis capitata*, is in WA with occasional findings in SA. Tasmania's certified absence of fruit fly pests is worth a great deal in overseas trade. Pheromone traps which attract fruit flies maintain a check for unwanted arrivals.

The wild tobacco fly is a native Australian species while its host plant, wild tobacco, has been introduced to mainland Australia, probably from Portugal. No native host plant has been traced. How did larvae of *B. cacuminata* develop before the arrival of wild tobacco?

At present there are no official records from Tasmania for this insect or its current host. However, Guy Westmore has identified as *B. cacuminata* two Tasmanian Entomology Divisions specimens named previously as *B. tryoni*. Also new findings of wild tobacco flies have occurred during the past eleven years. Why is this happening within this time period?

Wild tobacco is widespread down the eastern seaboard of Australia. However, it seems unlikely that the recent arrival of its associated insect can be explained either by strong winds blowing across Bass Strait or by transport of fruit. A majority of the known localities for wild tobacco fly are in Southern Tasmania and it does not infest fruits eaten by people.

Now Guy Westmore has seen plants growing near Burnie, which he believes to be wild tobacco, *Solanum mauritianum*. Thus there may have been travel to Tasmania by larvae within the host plant.

Plans for further investigation of questions are as follows:-

- ◆ Set traps near previous locations to check the distribution of *B. cacuminata* now

- ◆ Look for other wild tobacco plants, especially in riverine habitats, and check the fruits of any examples found
- ◆ Try to find out if wild tobacco fly uses any other host plant here

(2) *Tasmanian Insects*. The State Government's Entomology Division, based in New Town, holds the largest and most comprehensive collection of Tasmanian insects. From this source Guy Westmore has selected duplicates to provide a reference collection in Launceston. Eight trays of labeled, pinned insects were brought to the LFNC meeting. Specimens preserved in ethanol also are held at Mt Pleasant.

After the wild tobacco fly report ended members crowded around the eight trays on display. Our visitor then answered many questions from an appreciative audience.

John Elliott thanked Guy Westmore for his varied and interesting presentation and for bringing so much for club members to examine. Alison Green

SKEMP DAY - Sunday 19 February - Insect Survey

About 17 members gathered at Skemps for this event and, after the obligatory cup of tea, we split into two groups, each group armed with jars, tins, and plastic trays; one group even had a butterfly net.

One group moved toward the Power Track, collecting grasshoppers and grass crickets from the "lawn" as we went. Once in the bush, we used two collecting methods; holding a tray under a branch of a likely looking shrub and dislodging the denizens lurking thereon by shaking the branch. This was a very effective collecting method, yielding a good variety of spiders and other arthropods. Also effective was scratching around in the litter, where the invertebrate life comprised a surprising variety of very fast-moving species including those which hopped, ran or burrowed.

Having collected what we thought was a reasonable sample; we walked back along the road to the Field Centre with our catch. Along the way a car with two visitors clutching one of the books by John Skemp and a local map, stopped and asked permission to proceed. They were interested in seeing the property so we sent them to John Simmons at the Field Centre for enlightenment (and possible recruitment.)

On our return to the Centre we found the other group had already arrived with their collection, including a number of large caterpillars.

After lunch the specimens were anaesthetized by a quick immersion in the freezer and then photographed and identified as far as possible. To name just a few: *Bobilla sp.* (Grassland pigmy cricket) and *Conocephalus semivittatus* (Longhorned "grasshopper"), Brown lacewing (possibly Family Hemerobiidae), Leaf eating beetle (Family Chrysomelidae), and *Geitoneura Klugii* (Klug's xenica butterfly - in their 1000's). A particular highlight was the sighting of *Graphium macleayanum* (MacLeay's Swallowtail). The spiders varied in size from 2mm to 15mm but are extremely difficult to identify.

A short walk, mainly for fresh air and exercise brought a further sighting of MacLeay's Swallowtails and also a sleepy Copperhead snake, which posed nicely for photographs. This completed the day, although naturally another cup of tea was brewed before we left.

Roy Skabo

GENERAL MEETING - Tuesday 6 March - Peter Ralph - Fossicking

Al Pegler introduced member Peter Ralph and his talk on gemstones and fossicking. Peter also gave further information on the upcoming weekend field trip to the Weld River to fossick for semi precious gemstones.

Peter explained the exhibits on the table which included an impressive display of rocks from his own collection and an excellent selection of books on rocks, minerals and gemstones. The display included petrified wood, valuable petrified tree ferns from southern Tasmania and polished and unpolished agate.

He then gave an excellent answer to what he found was an often asked question; how is wood turned into stone or petrified wood? His answer, as follows, gave the story of the Tasmanian experience;

Around the Jurassic era the southern parts of Tasmania were covered by a coniferous rain forest with an understory which included tree fern, similar to the *Dicksonia antarctica* we know today, but a different species. Volcanoes destroyed the forest and covered it with 100s of metres of volcanic ash and followed up with as much as 1,600 metres of basalt leaving the tree ferns preserved in a dead environment with no air, water or bacteria to cause any deterioration. At the rate of around 15 metres per million years the basalt weathered away reaching a level where silica rich waters could filter down to the preserved ferns and trees. Atom by atom the silica replaced the carbon atoms which were carried away with the water as carbonic acid. The basic cell structure is preserved so that under a microscope individual cells can still be distinguished and Peter pointed to samples on the table where the yearly rings of trees can be seen and others where the fronds of the tree ferns were visible.

Peter explained that in some places the lava flows landed on water which evaporated leaving hollows in the basalt. Over millions of years if silica rich waters filtered into the hollows the water eventually evaporated leaving a layer of silica behind. Over further millennia more layers of silica were added, sometimes of differing colours depending on the changing surface conditions from where the water originated. Eventually the covering basalt weathered away leaving the harder agate behind. He gave further information on the conditions under which agates formed with various patterns and also how onyx, an agate, can be used to make cameo jewellery.

Two small containers were passed around with samples of sapphire, topaz, chrysoberyl and quartz crystals from the Weld River where we were to go on the weekend. As well as these we could expect to find jet black iron spinel which takes a beautiful polish and was used in men's signet rings. The rarer and softer black tourmaline as well as zircon could also be found at the Weld River. Peter stated that he had a number of sets of sieves for the field trip and volunteered to get into the water to do the shovelling. He also recommended that we bring containers for the stones, tweezers to pick them up and shovels to assist with the digging.

When Peter talked about his books he recommended for the club library A *Catalogue of the Tasmanian Minerals* available from the Department of Mines, Tasmania for approximately \$100.

Peter finished the talk with a humorous story about the only piece of cut stone that he had ever sold and the complaints from the buyer and the further work he put into changing the cut.

There followed 12 minutes of question time in which a number of interesting items

were mentioned. Member Peter Warren showed us an unusual find from a quarry which was a piece of wood only partially petrified with the rest remaining wood. Peter R went on to give interesting stories about opalisation over short periods. Fence posts have been known to turn to opal and a dead pet cat buried in a felt hat had started to turn into opal. In around 70 years the felt hat had turned into common opal while the cat's bones had started to turn into precious opal.

Peter also dispelled the myth that a real diamond would not shatter if hit with a hammer. It was pointed out that the payoff for being the hardest natural occurring material is being brittle with the diamonds having planes and cleavage lines along which it will break. Peter stated that in all his fossicking the only diamond he had ever found was at Beauty Point and that was in a silver ring. His last answer to the many and varied questions was that a Killiecrankie Diamond is topaz.

After Al Pegler thanked him for his interesting talk members showed their appreciation and this was followed by a short informal session with Peter identifying items brought in by members.

Noel J Manning

FIELD TRIP - Sunday 11 March - Fossicking at Weld River

Fourteen members and four visitors (new member Jill was accompanied by her son Guy, daughter-in-law Fiona and her granddaughters Jessica and Taylor) met at the Inveresk carpark and car-pooled for the trip to the Weld River. Peter Ralph, who was leading the field trip, had visited today's destination last weekend and had found the area in flood with fast flowing water following the recent rain and was unsure how it would be today.



The trip to Frome Road where we regrouped took over an hour and a half. We then crossed a bridge and a little further up the road drove up a track leading off to the right where we were to leave most of the cars as there are only two car parks near our final destination. After gathering our gear, we walked the remaining 300 or so metres

to a track that Peter had cleared to the river edge due to the out of control blackberries which unfortunately were not ripe. This part of the river was a beautiful sandy picnic spot, except for the weeds, and thankfully the river was low with a gentle flow. We were surrounded by blackberry, including the other riverbank, not even a stone's throw away, where there were many large Himalayan Honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*) trees in flower, exotic Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) growing everywhere, even immature ones in the river gravels and more blackberry.

With everyone eager to get started Peter gave a talk and demonstration on using the sieves. He placed three or more spades of river sediment into the two sieves with the larger gauge one on top allowing the small material through to the finer filter. After a quick dip of the sieves into the water Peter removed the large rocks and again agitated them under water so that the sand and finer materials fell to the lower sieve. He then did a visual check on the courser upper sieve for larger gemstones before it was emptied and he got to work on the lower sieve. After much agitation of the sieve under water the sand and gemstones which are too small fall through the finer sieve leaving it full of material for the final check. Before this the sieve is moved up and down in the water which will move the desired, heavier gemstones to the bottom and centre of the sieve.

A patch of sand on the bank was smoothed flat in front of a seated Lois and the contents dumped on this with a tricky flip of the sieve. With a keen eye and tweezers Lois demonstrated how to sort through this material looking for treasures in the patch of black spinel which formed in the middle of the dumped material. To our untrained eye the wet spinel reflecting the blue sky looked like sapphire, quartz was mistaken for topaz and I am sure we missed many gems when our turn came.

A small number of people braved the cold river and started digging the sediment and sieving it in preparation for those waiting on the bank of the river to look through.

With Peter R giving further information to his eager audience his concentration lapsed and we witnessed some impressive manoeuvres as he tried to avoid falling in the cold water after tripping or stepping in one of the many prospecting holes.

We lunched around 12.30, after which some went exploring along the track above the river while others continued looking for gemstones. Jill and her family found lots of sapphires which the young girls were excitedly showing everyone. We all had an enjoyable day, the field trip was very interesting and as a bonus members got to take the gemstones they found home, which included blue, grey and greenish sapphires, red zircons, topaz (aka Frog's Eye), the mica, quartz with feldspar and petrified wood.

Noel & Karen Manning

SOCIAL EVENING - Monday 19 March

Twenty two members attended the social get together at Steve's Grill at Riverside. The choice of meals was extensive and the salad bar was very popular as in recent visits. The evening was very pleasant with members chatting about recent meetings and field trips. Gemstones found at the Weld River were also passed around the table. Our view out the large windows of the restaurant was across to the East Tamar and as the sun set the street and house lights came on which was a pretty sight.

SKEMP DAY - Saturday 31 March

Twelve members came to Skemps today for some much needed painting while Irmgard brought her sister from Brisbane to look at the property and enjoy a couple of walks. John, Tina, Prue, Tom and Karen painted the shipping container and outside toilet while Jeff chain sawed a few branches and whipper snipped and generally tidied along the side of the shed and toilet to aid the painting process. Marion pruned the ferns along the back of the Centre, Noel undertook some odd jobs, and Geraldine and Kath did some cleaning and sorting in the Centre.



Following a coffee and chat, the painting was commenced with the sky clouding over and the threat of imminent rain. We managed to paint for an hour and a half prior to the rain becoming too heavy and retreated into the Centre for lunch. The rain continued for some time and when the sun began to shine, out we went to finish.

By late afternoon the shipping container had received a second coat on the front, the far side had two coats and the main door one coat, and the external walls of the outdoor toilet now have one coat of paint on each wall.

Karen and Claire walked to the Top Pond and up to the Federation Corridor. They found a few areas of small brown fungus and were on their way back to the Centre when Jeff showed them a bird's nest that he found in the hollow of a tree. A yellow slime mould, *Fuligo septica*, was found on a very large log nearby.

After the clean-up of the brushes and rollers, most returned to the Centre for a last drink, while Tom finished puttying the bedroom windows and Noel poisoned some thistles at the creek crossing area. Even with the rain we had a very productive day getting a large task near finished, many smaller tasks completed and also enjoyed the usual camaraderie that goes with being at Skemps.

Karen Manning

FIELD TRIP - Sunday 1 April - Notley Fern Gorge with Central North Club

Following an invitation from Sarah Lloyd of the Central North Field Nats, members from the Launceston and North East Field Nats, Australian Plant Society and a couple who had read about the visit via the NRM Newsletter, joined their outing to visit the gorge to look for fungi and ferns.

Although the meeting time was 10.00am, we were still standing in the carpark after 10.30. The overnight change out of daylight savings time shouldn't have made people late, but anyway they were. Sarah gave a small introduction then we entered the forest which was very dry and the fungi that we saw was very dry as well.

Lower in the gorge was wet and we were finding lush *Stereum ostrea* (Golden Curtain Crust) along fallen limbs, small patches of *Hypocrea sulphurea* on rotting wood, small groups of *Mycena viscidocruenta* (Ruby Bonnets) in the leaf litter and the striking *Xerula radicata* (Rooting Shank) with its white stem and gills and glossy brown cap. Approaching the bottom of the gorge, the liverworts and mosses covered a far portion of the track and ferns and mosses covered any tree or fallen logs and branches. The area was alive with various tones of green.

This was where many ate their lunch, before the return walk up the hill, but the few who did not carry their lunch returned and ate in the carpark.

This was a short but very enjoyable walk if somewhat steep for the return to the cars and we finished the entire track while meeting new people as well as catching up with old acquaintances.

Other fungus seen include: - *Agaric sp.*, *Anthracophyllum archeri* (Orange Fan), *Mycena leaiana* (Orange-gilled Bonnet), *Marasmius chrynusequi*, *Crepidotus sp.*, *Lepiota sp.*, *Coprinus sp.*, *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*, *Trametes versicolour* (Rainbow fungus), *Hericium coralloides* (Coral Tooth), *Lycoperdon pyriforme*, *Ganoderma sp.*, *Ramaria gracilis*, and slime mould *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa*

Ferns include: - *Phymatosorus pustulatus* (Kangaroo fern), *Blechnum wattsii* (Hard water fern), *Dicksonia Antarctica* (Soft treefern), *Polyphlebium venosum* (Bristle filmy fern)

FEDERATION WEEKEND

The Federation get-together will be held Friday 4 to Saturday 5 May, in conjunction with the fungi activities being held at Corinna in the Tarkine, by Fungimap and the Central North Field Naturalists Club.

The weekend's activities will cost \$50, this however does not cover the cost of accommodation which you will need to organise yourself. If you are interested, the program for the weekend, details of accommodation and registration form can be obtained from Karen Manning.

CLUB CALENDAR 2013

At the August General Meeting members will help decide on the images for next years calendar. For members input, copies of submitted photographs with captions (but without submitter names) will be projected in several subject groups, with sheets for

member scoring. The final decision will be made by the Committee to ensure a balanced representative calendar.

Images should be submitted to a Committee member as soon as possible, but no later than the July meeting. Remember to clearly identify the sender.

Conditions of Entry:

- ◆ Print topics: subjects are to be related to Tasmanian flora and fauna, forests and Tasmanian landscapes. Images of cultivars are not acceptable.
- ◆ All images submitted must be identified and a sentence is required about the content. eg. *The Copperleaf Snowberry is endemic to Tasmania and is found in mountain rainforest and wet eucalpyt forests, from sea level to montane forest.*
- ◆ Images to be submitted on CD or USB, or by Email (as below) with accompanying Word document containing the written information required in the previous Condition of Entry.

Each email should contain no more than 2 photos as these should be submitted as high quality (large) files as required for printing. Each email to be labelled as LFN calendar entry – your name, and emailed to handlinj@gmail.com

Written information sent by email can be either as a Word attachment or clearly marked in the email text.

50TH BIRTHDAY INVITATION - KING ISLAND FIELD NATURALISTS (KIFN)

Members are invited to join the KIFN Club to celebrate their birthday, for a weekend of field trips, dinner, history, photos and reminiscing over 50 fabulous years enjoying King Island's natural treasures.

The celebration will be held on the weekend of 2 - 4 November 2012. Participants will be responsible for their own travel and accommodation arrangements. Please visit www.kingisland.org.au or Ph. 1800 645 014 toll free. Early bookings recommended to ensure flights.

RSVP October 1 to Carmen Holloway Ph. 64611548 (carmen_james@bigpond.com) or Graeme & Margaret Batey Ph. 64621698 (margiebatey@gmail.com)

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY MEETINGS

LFNC members are welcome to attend APS meetings held on a Tuesday at Max Fry Hall, Gorge Road Trevallyn at 7.30 pm. Their next meetings will be on

April 17 - Phil Collier "Rubicon Sanctuary"

May 15 - Helen Statham "The Cooper in a Tinnie"

The APS will be holding a Plant Sale at the Max Fry Hall on Saturday 28 April, between 10am and 4pm.

Additional Information

Club Outings:

1. All outings depart from Inveresk carpark (near Museum entrance) at 9 am unless otherwise specified. Internet site updated regularly to reflect short notice changes. Saturday all-day parking cost is \$3.00. Sunday parking free.
2. You need to provide your own food and drinks for the outing unless otherwise specified. Morning tea is normally provided by the bus company on bus outings.
3. When travelling by car in convoy, each driver is responsible to ensure that the vehicle behind is in sight immediately after passing each cross road or fork in the road.
4. When car pooling, petrol costs should be shared between all the passengers, including family of the driver, and based on other clubs the Committee suggested \$11 per 100 km. This is a guideline only.

Name Tags: Name tags are to be worn at meetings and on outings.

Tea/Coffee: A levy of 50c is currently charged for supper provided at meetings.

Field Centre: All members have access to the John Skemp Field Centre. Contact our booking manager, John Elliott on 6344 9303 regarding availability and keys.

Field Centre Phone Number - 6399 3361

Postal Address: PO Box 1072 Launceston 7250

Internet site : <http://www.lfnc.org.au>

E.mail : secretary@lfnc.org.au