

Brataualung Nature Trail and Kaffir Hill Walk

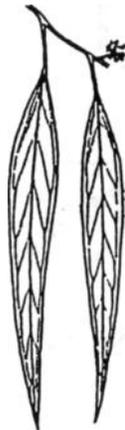
These two walks almost in the centre of the township of Foster give visitors a glimpse of the history, both natural and man made, of this part of South Gippsland.

The Brataualung Nature Trail is named for the Koori tribe which originally occupied South Gippsland. Their lifestyle had a low impact on the native flora and fauna. They lived in small family groups, moving from the coast to the hills, eating from a very varied menu of birds and animals, fish and shellfish, and roots, stems, leaves and fruit of plants.

There were a few early settlers in the area in the 1850s and then gold was found in the 1870s. Kaffir Hill is named from a gold mining claim of seven miners who had spent some time in South Africa. The 'Kaffirs' were cheerful, hardworking and well organised. Their shafts encountered gold-bearing quartz reefs and a tunnel they began close to the summit drove through soft granite, striking a few leads about 10 cm in thickness. They brought their clay down on a tramway to be stirred on a horse powered puddling machine.

Kaffir Hill Walk starts from the carpark behind the hotel. It is a short uphill walk across the top of the hill and takes less than 30 minutes to return to the steps at the beginning. There are views over the township and surrounding countryside.

The Kaffir Hill Walk emerges on McDonald Street and from there it is a short walk across the road to the beginning of the



Brataualung Nature Trail. The sign can be seen from Kaffir Hill.

The bush on both the walks has not always been there. Historical photographs of Foster show remnants of enormous trees, suggesting tall forests once covered the area. Reminders of the gold-mining history are buried in the soil of the town. Massive logs were dug out when Foster's sewers were built in the 1970s and mines run beneath the shopping centre. Commercial mining ceased in Foster early this century, however, individuals continued the search for many years. Their exploratory diggings pockmark this bushland area - not mines, just trenches of variable depth that were dug by old men hoping to strike it rich. Remnants of these diggings can be seen on both walks.

Today the bush is all regrowth, the biggest trees might be thirty to forty years old. It is home to a surprising diversity of plants and animals, reflecting the resilience of our native species.

The vegetation changes as you walk along the trail, according to aspect, water, disturbance and/or fire. At the beginning the hill faces south, protected from the dehydrating effects of the sun and northerly winds. This is a wet Peppermint forest with Stink woods and Mint Bushes in the understorey and ferns and the Blue Flax Lily in the ground layer.

As you walk round to the west and up the hill it is drier and, although the Peppermints remain, the understorey has changed to Tea-tree and Haiipin Banksias. One of the most interesting trees here is the Cherry Ballart, a semi-parasitic plant, whose red berries were eaten by Koorie people. There are more ferns

here than elsewhere, mosses and in the right season Bird Orchids.

At the top of the hill near the highway the vegetation changes to Messmate forest with Mountain Grey Gums and Peppermints. The understorey here has Hop Goodenia and Daisy Bushes.

Back towards the town the trail goes through a scrub of Tea-tree and Scented Paperbark with Sword Sedge and Coral Fern underneath. This area needs burning occasionally to allow regeneration of the rich heathy understorey. The heath has many species including Prickly Tea-tree, paperbarks, banksias, Smooth Parrot Pea, Blue Tufted Lilies, Trigger Plants and Common Heath.

The vegetation on Kaffir Hill has many of the same species, but because of its closeness to the town and gardens, also has many garden escapes such as brooms, blackberries, cotoneaster, pines and mirror bushes growing through it.

From both walks there are views of the surrounding rural countryside. The combined walk takes less than 2 hours to complete.

A acknowledgements:

*South Gippsland Conservation Society Inc.
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