

**wild succession**

(Gippsland Red Gum Plains)

19 August 2011

Across Fernbank Reserve

Golden moths fly among the legs of black cattle

*Diuris lanceolata*

A muddy track through the gate to water

The department is reluctant to act with alacrity

Grazing licence re-issued over rare grassland

23 September

Last spring where purple *Diuris*

*Diuris punctata*

At Fernbank crossing

Spread along the high bank

Above the rail-line

And billy buttons, copper wire

*Craspedia variabilis*, *Podolepis jaceoides*, *Pimelea humilis*, *Diuris pardina*, *Arthropodium strictum*

Daisy, common rice-flower, leopard

Orchids and chocolate lilies

All mingled

Among the sparse

Kangaroo grass

*Themeda triandra*

There are three *Diuris* and two rice-flowers

Since V-Line slashed

The rail-side flower field

down the track

the *significant native vegetation*

sign

falls off

the post

guarding

a dead mattress

disgorging rubber

beside the side-cut

taken by four-wheel drives

through golden *Craspedia*

*Craspedia variabilis*

25 September

Maidens Rd:

Yellow haze

Rusty wire

Billy dazzles her buttons

*Craspedia variabilis*

Beside the rail-line

I step through the wire  
Into a swirling foreground:  
White & purple clouds –  
Milkmaids' pure white umbels  
& Chocolate (scented) lilies –

*Burchardia umbellata*  
*Arthropodium strictum*

Recede down the line  
Into a band of yellow distance:  
*Craspedia*, scaly buttons and button everlasting

*Craspedia variabilis*  
*Leptorhynchos squamatus*  
*Helichrysum scorpioides*

But at our feet  
sky blue sky: tiny blue squill at ground level

*Chamaescilla corymbosa*

\*

Avoiding fire?  
*Don't fence me in*  
Fragrant yellow spikes  
Edgy! - Keeping close  
To the roadside gutter dampness

*Bulbine bulbosa*

\*

September is dense with variability:  
(Dependent upon) High frequency wing speed:  
Plains Flax-lily pollinated by vibrating bees

*Dianella longifolia*

\*

Bright murnong –  
Go west along the sandy track  
Halt opposite the wooded hill:  
Rail-line east side 248 square –  
The Landcare troops have no idea

*Microseris lanceolata*

27 September  
Switchback over the rail-line at Resides Lane  
Purple *Diuris* flowers outside the reserve fence  
Elegant stems above the winter-mown grass

*Diuris punctata*

In the narrow reserve strip west along the tracks:  
Button everlasting, chocolate lilies,  
Billy buttons, rice flower,  
Yellow bulbines and milkmaids,  
Golden moths decline their ears &  
Common everlasting begin to open their buds

*Helichrysum scorpioides*, *Arthropodium strictum*  
*Craspedia variabilis*, *Pimelea humilis*  
*Bulbine bulbosa*, *Burchardia umbellata*  
*Diuris lanceolata*  
*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

Backed into the shade of a clump of drooping she-oaks  
Looks like buffalo have been trampling the low yellow Shiny buttons

*Allocasuarina verticillata*  
*Leptorhynchos nitidulus*

\*

Preferring unburnt ground  
Straps of black-anther flax-lily flap the fence  
At the edge of the road  
As cattle trucks speed past  
Shaking deep blue flowers  
And pendulous fruit

*Dianella revoluta*

\*

Further along the sandy track  
under an overcast sky:  
the murnong are sleeping

*Microseris lanceolata*

among poas on open ground  
downhill from the grove  
of black she-oaks  
pink grass trigger-plants  
austral indigo  
red woolly *Grevillea*  
tiger orchid  
and rays of pale sundew  
open in the late afternoon  
west of the white spill of slender *Pimelea*

*Poa labillardierei*

*Allocasuarina littoralis*  
*Stylidium graminifolium*  
*Indigofera australis*  
*Grevillea lanigera*  
*Diuris sulphurea*  
*Drosera peltata*

*Pimelea linifolia*

28<sup>th</sup> September

Last night I slept among wild flowers, all the colours yellow, purple, blue, white, of lilies, orchids, billy buttons, everlasting and rice flowers I'd seen during the day stood up around me

29<sup>th</sup> September

Hemmed in by limited acreage  
In MacMillan's 'Top Paddock'  
Golden *Diuris*  
Spread through the sodden grassland  
At the edge of the walking track  
In Briagalong Forest Reserve  
Purple chocolate lilies  
And golden billy buttons  
Under the red gums  
Ponds brim  
Courtesy of La Niña in Gippsland

*Diuris lanceolata*

*Arthrodepium strictum*  
*Craspedia variabilis*  
*Eucalyptus tereticornis*

30th Sept

At Buntines Lane rail-crossing TRU warn me away –  
numerous purple *Diuris* wave in the kangaroo grass  
outside the dilapidated reserve fence  
power-line truck wheel tracks loop through their edges

*Diuris punctata, Themeda triandra*

West of Lindenow South – departmental succession\_of native flora protection:

Yellow sign and fencing

Green sign and fencing

White sign and fencing

Blue sign and fencing –

Cascading state of disrepair

At Resides Lane rail-crossing abundant purple *Diuris* flower en masse outside the reserve fence

\*

Welcome reserve –

Red Gum guardians

At Sapling Morass

Shelter Heart-fruit daisy

*Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *mediana*

*Brachyscome cardiocarpa*

Wire fences repeatedly cut

By local hoons

Intent on the direct route

Through to farmland

*Toyota hilux*

2<sup>nd</sup> October

Deep pot-holed tracks

wend

through Moormurg (Forest) Reserve

– clans of determined Murnong

inhabit hard ground

thin grassland –

cattle grazed until two decades ago:

eliminated scores of understory species

*Microseris lanceolata*

6<sup>th</sup> October

Slow burn long overdue

north of the line:

in the overgrown rail reserve

west of Maidens Rd

a few murnong struggle to flower

through the thatch of dense grass

at the edge of encroaching lightwood

*Microseris lanceolata*

*Poa* sp.

*Acacia implexa*

25th Oct

Hindered by cold ground or

An untimely autumn burn

Purple *Diuris* now flowering

*Diuris punctata*

Inside the rail reserve at Resides Lane

3 weeks later

Than relatives over the fence

\*

Chettles Lane –

running across the plateau,

gnome-ish:

purple beard orchid –

*Calochilus robertsonii*

hunkers down in safety

along the shire's 'unmaintained' roadside

31<sup>st</sup> October

Up the line

East of Marriage Lane

In the fenced reserve 30 metres deep

Last weekend's rain pools on clayey ground

Startled by mauve *Diuris*:

White & lilac wash – so much paler here

*Diuris* sp. aff. *Dendrobioides*

Some cross their long sepals

Among chocolate lilies, austral crane's-bill

*Athropodium strictum*, *Geranium solanderi*

Buttercups and wiry buttons

*Ranunculus lappaceus*,

*Leptorhynchos tenuifolius*

Beyond the grove of blackwood trees

*Acacia melanoxylon*

Red winged milkmaid seed pods

*Burchardia umbellata*

\*

West of Marriage Lane

Back along the rail-line

Neither fenced nor burned –

A few isolated individuals:

Straggly chocolate lilies and yellow bulbines

Survive in the dense sward

Common everlasting persist on a stony bank:

*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

Hardy vestige of depleted grassland

\*

Hillside Lane

It's worth cheering –

Double the extent of scanty area

In the *Native Grassland Reserve*

I step it out: Blue grass-lilies unfurl

Array!

*Caesia calliantha*

Between domes of drying *Craspedia*

Yellow scaly buttons & fading

Purple *Diuris*

Striped seed head balls of chocolate lillies

Triplicates of green: Common onion orchid

*Craspedia variabilis*

*Leptorhnhos squamatos*

*Diuris punctata*

*Microtis unifolia*

\*

Rocking past Resides Lane

My departing sister

Waves from the train window

At numerous tigers

In the colony of purple *Diuris*

*Diuris sulphurea*

*Diuris punctata*

1<sup>st</sup> November

Common everlasting is even more common

along the rail-line west of Resides Lane

intensifying the density of yellow

with button everlasting & bulbine lilies

and little white stars on wiry stalks

as the chocolate lilies wrap up

before summer

*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

*Helichrysum scorpioides, Bulbine bulbosa*

*Caesia parviflora*

*Arthropodium strictum*

\*

further west down the sandy track

protected from the hot north wind

by a hill of remnant white stringybarks

the flowering continues

at the murnong site:

sprawling bluebells

and dozens of pink grass trigger-plants

roam the flat

with milkmaids, rice-flower

chocolate lilies and button everlasting

amongst the showy parrot-pea

common everlasting walks the line

and murnong straighten up in the sunlight

*Eucalyptus globoidea*

*Wahlenbergia gracilis*

*Stylidium graminifolium*

*Burchardia umbellata, Pimelea humilis*

*Arthropodium strictum, Helichrysum scorpioides*

*Dyllwynia sericea*

*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

*Microseris lanceolata*

\*

In a damp hollow below a bracken rise  
purple *Diuris* are illuminated  
by two crimson bottlebrush bushes

*Diuris punctata*  
*Callistemon citrinus*

\*

At Fernbank rail-crossing –  
In early spring  
Slashed close to ground level –  
In peak flower season  
Flower count minimal

\*

At Fernbank Reserve –  
endangered purple *Diuris*  
sparse flowers survive in a perimeter fringe  
around the heavily grazed oval

*Diuris punctata*

9<sup>th</sup> November

En route to Fernbank  
The sun shifts towards summer  
Across the rail-line switchback  
In open ground beyond drooping she-oaks  
A-pearance of pale vanilla-lilies  
And mauve slender sun-orchids

*Allocasuarina verticillata*  
*Arthropodium milleflorum*  
*Thelymitra pauciflora*

10<sup>th</sup> November

Surrounded by bare farmland  
A night heron perches at Swallow Lagoon  
Across hollow green reeds in the waterhole  
Golden everlastings host painted ladies  
Rustle papery in soft meadow grasses

*Juncus sp.*  
*Xerochrysum bracteatum*, *Vanessa kershawi*  
*Austrodanthonia spp* & *Poa spp*

11<sup>th</sup> November

Linear grassland reserve  
West of Resides Lane –  
2km shrinks to 200 metres  
In ten years  
South of the line:  
Pale vanilla lilies  
Blue grass-lilies  
Wiry buttons  
Billy buttons

*Arthropodium milleflorum*  
*Caesia calliantha*  
*Leptorhynchus tenuifolius*  
*Craspedia variabilis*

Button everlasting  
Black-anther Flax-lily  
Chocolate lilies  
Rice flowers:  
Halt!

Grassland colonised  
By burgan  
Blackwood and black sheoaks

*Helichrysum scorpioides*  
*Dianella revolta*  
*Arthropodium strictum*  
*Pimelea humilis*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Kunzea ericoides*  
*Acacia melanoxyn, Allocasurina littoralis*

\*

Munro Remnant Grassland:  
(Half)  
The astonishing flower field  
Has vanished  
Under thick grass  
The wooden sign erected 20 years ago  
Stands against a dense backdrop  
Of burgan, black wattle and immature red gums  
Declares the irrelevance  
Of being listed on the Register of the National Estate

*Kunzea ericoides, Acacia mearnsii*  
*Eucalptyus tereticornis*

The old Field Naturalist weeps  
Over the last four  
Gaping Leek Orchids in existence

*Prasophyllum correctum*

\*

Cross to the north side  
Step lightly to enter abundance:  
Attenuated between rail-line and back road  
The remnant glory of  
Grassland flora:  
Thousands of Blue Grass-lilies  
Chocolate lily,  
Fringe lily  
Yellow Rush-lily  
Pale Vanilla lily  
Common everlasting  
Wiry buttons  
Woolly grevilliea  
Ragged purple and blotched diuris  
Dusty yellow heads of drying button everlasting

*Caesia calliantha*  
*Arthropodium strictum*  
*Thysanotus tuberosus*  
*Tricoryne elatior*  
*Arthropodium milleflorum*  
*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*  
*Leptorhynchos tenuifolius*  
*Grevillea lanigera*  
*Diuris punctata, Diuris sp. aff. dendrobiodes*  
*Helichrysum scorpioides*

and two surreptitious departmental contractors looking for rarities

13<sup>th</sup> December  
Through Moormung Forest  
A hum –

Pale yellow circles  
Of fallen blossom

White cockatoos feast  
On flowering red gums

*Eucalyptus tereticornis*

\*

Bristly and common 'white top':  
Pale brown wallaby grass  
Lines the track  
Down the southwest leg  
To the canoe tree  
Pink hyacinth orchids  
And pale cream spikes  
Of small grass-trees  
Cast out over the plain

*Austrodanthonia setacea; Austrodanthonia caespitosa*

*Dipodium roseum*

*Xanthorrhoea minor*

\*

Curved under a breeze  
A swathe of  
Stiped wallaby grass  
Encounters the Tasmanian blue  
Gum plantation

*Austrodanthonia racemosa var. racemosa*

15<sup>th</sup> Dec  
– winged paradox  
By a corner fence post  
And over the fence  
A yellow cloud crosses the paddock

*Velleia paradoxa*

At the edge of Chettles Lane  
Kneel to investigate:  
Bent brown heel  
Touched to lip  
Confirmed by petal fringes

17<sup>th</sup> Dec  
*Reduce speed!*  
Another patch of spur velleia  
Approaching the Fingerboards

*Velleia paradoxa*

\*

Over at the sandy track  
Kangaroo grass a metre high  
Wallaby grass a shorter attention

*Themeda triandra*  
*Austrodanthonia sp*

\*

Along Stockdale Rd  
Hills of green pine  
And blue gum plantations –

Lone red stringy-barks  
Dying for want of company

*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*

4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012

In Moormung Forest  
Pale 'white top' turns  
Soft brown and fallen  
Red gum nuts a rusty red

*Austrodanthonia sp.*

Common hedgehog grass  
Crosses open ground  
But bushy is so rare –  
What will the White Banded  
Grass-dart caterpillar  
Eat without it?

*Echinopogon ovatus*

*Echinopogon caespitosus*

*Taractrocera papyria*

16<sup>th</sup> Jan

Hot still day in Moormung  
Blonde heads white tutu:  
Satin everlasting spins –  
Olive Cotton's  
Teacups  
Shadowless

*Helichrysum leucopsideum*

22<sup>nd</sup> Jan

The shire slashes  
Spur velleia  
Down to dirt at the Fingerboards

( )

22<sup>nd</sup> Feb

The farmer ploughs  
Spur velleia  
Alongside Chettles Lane

( )

I take refuge in Providence  
Ponds Reserve where spur velleia  
Still flourishes by Beehive Lagoon

*Velleia paradoxa*

2<sup>nd</sup> March  
An east coast low closes local roads  
I walk a dry sandy route  
In the creek bed of Providence Ponds:  
18 months of rain intercepted  
By upstream pine plantations

12<sup>th</sup> March  
In the north east quarter  
Bright new green against the black:  
Autumn burn at Munro Remnant –  
But south-side grassland left for dead

4<sup>th</sup> April  
At dusk the plains fold down  
Towards Tom's Creek Reserve  
Under a rising moon  
The white and orange wound  
Of the deeply eroded creek

Eastern rosellas flap off heavily  
From their evening roost

5<sup>th</sup> April  
North of Boundary Rd  
Travelling irrigators lurk  
Over the rise  
Towards Moormurung Forest

11<sup>th</sup> April  
Due north from the lookout  
Sandhill up Robbins Lane  
The unused road reserve descends  
To the flattened lands:  
Old red gums a stock camp –

Faint green line:  
Map-way to the foothills  
For unseen travellers

13<sup>th</sup> April

This morning I dream I'm flying down a mountain, low to the ground. When I land a woman shows me two rugs she has woven for her daughters: one is bluey-green and yellow, the other is white with a red design and trim; both are carpets of flowers.

16<sup>th</sup> April

Trampled ground up Macarthur's Lane –

Tip three teeth leaf:

White Lobe-seed daisy sprawls

*Brachyscome dentata*

Against the base of red gums

To avoid the wandering herd

A single translucent pink lily

*Arthropodium milleflorum*

Glow among the cow pats

And common everlasting

*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

As the sun goes down –

Over the plains beyond the fence

Wide paddocks in golden light

Devoid of native species

5<sup>th</sup> May

I follow the unnamed road reserve due south

towards the dune hills of Moormung

Unshorn long-tailed sheep bump off

through the abandoned blue gum plantation

Arrow head swamp violets along the drainage line

*Viola betonicifolia*

maintain the memory of Emu Creek headwaters

11th May

Walk towards the heron:

Ancient red gums reflected

In a deep still pond

In Bengworden Nature Conservation Reserve

(Beyond the eagles' nest tree

Last of the scraggly scaly buttons)

*Leptorhynchus squamatus*

Cross to a wooded rise:  
The land alive and grassy –  
Beneath the red box trees

*Eucalyptus polyanthemus*

\*

Whistle and fluttering descent  
Then rising –  
Choughs (red eyes) looking at me  
Through the green sickle leaves  
Of lightwood trees

*Acacia implexa*

17<sup>th</sup> May  
On top of the plateau  
Out Boundary Rd  
Sweet country in the fenced road reserve  
Heading due north  
Down to Emu Creek  
Under the ssshhh of trees  
Plume grass, Wallaby grass, Kangaroo  
Grass and Weeping:  
So fine and green and freshly  
Hanging seed heads

*Dichelachne crinite, Austrodanthonia spp,*  
*Themeda triandra, Microlaena stipoides*

Cattle ruination on the far bank

22<sup>nd</sup> June  
Bent by winter's wait:  
Nodding greenhood  
At Beehive Lagoon

*Pterosylis nutans*

Over the bracken dunes  
Of Providence Ponds Reserve  
Pink sea-mist of common fringe-myrtle

*Calytrix tetragona*

4<sup>th</sup> July  
First or lingering:  
After the winter solstice  
A pale yellow flowering –  
Scaly buttons, common everlasting  
And button everlasting  
North-side of the line  
West  
Of Resides Lane

*Leptorhynchos squamatus, chrysocephalum apiculatum*  
*Helichrysum scorpioides*

A long burn on the south-side

\*

Gentle avalanche of white  
along the sandy track:

white common heath  
white daphne heath  
white wedding bush

&

white slender rice flower:  
taste-a-testament  
to Yellow Spot Blue

*Epacris impressa*

*Brachyloma daphnoides*

*Ricinocarpos pinifolius*

*Pimelea linifolia*

*Candalides xanthospila*

red correa in a tangle of yellow spike wattle  
strikes a match against the bitter cold

*Correa reflexa, Acacia oxycedrus*

\*

Along the sheltered flat  
Of the murnong site  
The sun concentrates  
On the yellow wings  
Of smooth parrot-pea

*Microseris lanceolata*

*Dillwynia glaberrima*

\*

Bright red blood sawdust strip:  
Fallen trace of a giant red gum  
Across the track  
West of Fernbank  
Woodcutter's wheel tracks  
Through sloppy burnt ground  
Mud mangled last year's *Craspedia* patch

*Eucalyptus tereticornis*

12th July

Kangaroos bound over the fallen wooden gate  
Into Bengworden NCR

A cluster of tiny stripy greenhoods  
Raise their fine feelers

Either side of their head

On the rise under red box trees

Looking south across the cleared plains

To a handmade nesting box on a pole for peregrines

*Pterostylis nana*

*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*

31st July

– encouraged by bulbines  
the first *Craspedia*  
emerge from damp ground  
west of Fernbank

*Bulbine bulbosa*  
*Craspedia variabilis*

\*

feral deer spoor –  
out of the blue gum plantation  
a pad through bulbines  
to cross the rail-line

*Bulbine bulbosa*

\*

further west  
I leap to see  
the quiet pursuit:  
resolute  
in single file  
three echidnas  
scuffle through dry leaves  
under burgan

*Kunzea sp.*

\*

up the track  
over the old dune  
gnat orchids hover  
at the edge of bracken dark

*Acianthus exsertus*  
*Pteridium esculentum*

10<sup>th</sup> Aug

Late winter vulnerability: a glimpse of fragile yellow bud: first golden moth begins to open  
Outside the grassland reserve east of Resides Lane

*Diuris lanceolata*

13th August

Warm day:  
New spring  
Approaches  
A red-browed firetail  
Flies into my studio  
Then back out  
Into grassland

14<sup>th</sup> Aug

Golden *Diuris* begin to gather in the winter purple kangaroo grass east of Resides Lane

16<sup>th</sup> Aug

Two tall bright yellow murrong at the sandy track –  
The young bow to the  
Imminent spring  
Looping  
The cycle (of the year)  
Across the plains –

*Microseris lanceolata*

Anticipate  
The profusion  
In Moormurg's  
Restricted estate  
Where soon I find:  
creamy candles  
early nancies  
milkmaids  
twining fringe lilies  
tiger orchids  
bulbine lilies  
button everlasting  
billy buttons  
scaly buttons  
murrong  
blue squill  
blue grass-lilies  
chocolate lilies  
spider orchids  
salmon & plain  
sun-orchids  
widespread  
& unfolding  
throughout the open woodland

*Stackhousia monogyne*  
*Wurmbea dioica*  
*Burchardia umbellata*  
*Thysanotus patersonii*  
*Diuris sulphurea*  
*Bulbine bulbosa*  
*Helichrysum scorpioides*  
*Craspedia variabilis*  
*Leptorhynchus squamatus*  
*Microseris lanceolata*  
*Chamaescilla corymbosa*  
*Caesia calliantha*  
*Arthropodium strictum*  
*Caladenia phaeoclavia*  
*Thelymitra rubra*,  
*Thelymitra nuda*

& elsewhere  
in the isolated fragments of remnant grassland:  
rare sites like exquisite stars  
flaring intensely  
before they are extinguished  
*one by one*  
and the darkening sky of the red gum plains  
is  
emptied

## Notes

The Gippsland Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grasslands ecological community was listed as critically endangered under the national Environment Conservation and Biodiversity Protection Act (1999) in 2009. The community once covered 120,000 ha of the Gippsland Plain but land clearing has now reduced it to approximately 3% of its original extent. The Central Gippsland Plains Grassland covered an additional 60,000 ha but this is now extinct. Small areas (30-60ha) of grassland derived from the original grassy woodland as a result of tree removal and repeated fire management survive along the rail-line to Bairnsdale and in a few cemeteries. (*Commonwealth Listing Advice on Gippsland red Gum (Eucalyptus tereticornis subsp. mediana) Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grassland*, Threatened Species Scientific Committee, 2008, <http://www.environment.gov.au/sprat> accessed 24.9.2011)

The rail reserve adjacent to the V-Line rail-line between Munro and Bairnsdale in East Gippsland contains key sites of the grassland component. Sections of the rail reserve were fenced and signposted more than a decade ago to protect the remnant grassland but many fences have now fallen into disrepair and areas of grassland overgrown by woodland species and invasive weeds.

The 'department', refers to the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, subsequently (mid-2013) renamed the Department of Primary Industries and Environment.

A grid of Crown Land road reserves mapped by colonial surveyors crosses the Gippsland Plain. Some were never developed into roads but survive as bush lanes, others are leased by farmers for grazing and incorporated into private farmland. The Gippsland Plains Conservation Management Network has negotiated with farmers to protect native vegetation remnants in some unused roads by providing fencing to exclude stock and re-planting cleared or part-cleared reserves.

TRU refers to an electricity power company.