

COASTAL TRAIL-RICKETTS POINT (Walk Script Component)

This article kindly produced by Rosemary McLean

COASTAL TRAIL RICKETTS POINT

This trail is designed as an audio trail for teachers and students who visit the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary and / or Marine Education Centre. It provides an overview of some of the common species of plants found at Ricketts Point. It focuses on the adaptations of plants for survival on the coast. Information is included on the indigenous use of local plants as food sources. It is best used in conjunction with the photo page "MCRP Coastal Plants Trail" which includes photographs of all the plant species in order of their appearance on the trail.

The trail starts at the picnic table closest to the shore, in front of the Beaumaris Life Saving Club (BLSC). After completing a circuit along the sand and along the cliff top path, it finishes in front of the BLSC. The trail takes 30 minutes approximately to finish. Children should wear comfortable walking shoes.

NB Throughout the year, the appearance of the plants listed on the trail will vary depending on the season. Flowers, fruit or seed cases may not be visible at a given time. Many factors can affect the plant's growth including damage by storms, trampling etc. Consequently, this trail may need to be modified in the future if listed plants have not survived.

Teacher Tip: The narrator will direct you to certain sites along the trail. The cue to start walking to each station is given by the sound of walking steps on the sand. Time has been allowed to reach the next station before the narration resumes.

Ricketts Point Audio Trail

Marine Care Ricketts Point acknowledges the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of Victoria including its coast and marine sanctuaries. Through their cultural traditions, Aboriginal people maintain their connection to their ancestral lands and waters. Ricketts Point is part of the traditional country of the Boonewrung people of the Ngaruk Willum clan.

Welcome to the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary and Ricketts Point Marine Education Centre.

Ricketts Point is home to some amazing plants and animals. Plants are an important part of the coastal environment as they provide shelter, food and nesting sites for many species or types of animals. The coastal biodiversity has changed over time. Some of these changes are natural and some are caused by man.

On this coastal trail you will find many different types of trees, shrubs and grasses that have adapted to the harsh conditions on the coast. These plants have developed special features which help them to survive on the coast. Like all living things, the plants that grow here need shelter, food and water. To stay cool and not lose water, many plants have leaves that are greyish-green or silver in colour so they can reflect more sunlight and not absorb so much heat. If the leaves lost too much water, they would eventually dry up and the plant would probably die.

Some plants have small leaves or needle-shaped leaves so their surface area is reduced and some of the grasses have rolled stems. Some plants have leaves that hang vertically (up and down) so they don't fully face the sun.

Another group of plants called succulents can actually store water in their large fleshy leaves so if it doesn't rain or the soil is dry, it's OK, they have a store.

Some plants have furry or hairy leaves or thick cuticles or coverings which can protect the leaf surface from direct sunlight, drying winds and salt. Too much salt will kill a plant so some plants have shiny salt resistant surfaces or special salt glands that excrete the salt.

Let's start our walk at the picnic table in front of the BLSC (the one closest to the shore).

One of the larger plants growing near the picnic table is the coastal wattle. It's very common along our coastline. You can see it growing as a medium sized shrub on the edge of a sandy beach, as here, but it can grow up to 8m in more protected areas. The wattle flower is the symbol of Australia. There are over 1,000 types of wattle. The yellow fluffy flowers are seen in winter. To help conserve water, most wattles do not have leaves but they have leaf look-alikes called phyllodes. Seeds, (when green and cooked), were an important source of food for the traditional owners or Boonerwung people. Wattle seeds could also be ground and made into flour and the gum from many types of wattles was collected to eat.

From the picnic table, take the closest path and walk straight down onto the sand (Be careful not to step on any plants). Stop just before the high tide mark where the seaweed has been washed up. ***Walking steps***

Turn around and face the nearby shrubs. You'll notice that many of the plants are a silvery-green or grey colour. The plants that usually grow here are called pioneer plants. Just like our early pioneers that settled in our country, these plants are the first to settle or put down roots here on the sandy dune. They really have it tough living so close to the sea. They are the first plants to catch the windblown sand and after time, more and more sand is deposited and this helps to build the sandy dune. The plants behind the dune will be more protected from the onshore winds and salt spray.

On your right you will see a large silvery-grey shrub called the **saltbush**. Depending on the time of year, you may see the purple-red flowers which are clustered at the end of the stems. The male and female plants have different flowers. Male plants are usually found closest to the sea so the purple/red pollen is carried by the onshore winds to the female plants which have small silver green, scale-like flowers that are hard to see. This plant is probably the tallest plant found on the sandy dunes. It can put up with all the salt spray and wind and sun. Have a close look at a leaf. Can you see that the leaf seems to shine in the sunlight? The salt bush has special plant cells in the leaves which are able to remove the salt. This makes the surface of the leaf appear almost white.

Next to the salt bush you will also see another grey-leaved plant which is part of the daisy family. This is the coastal daisy bush and in spring and summer you may see cream flowers located at the base of the narrow leaves on the stems. The leaves produce a strong smell when crushed.

There are many grasses growing in the sand too. Look down on the sand near the edge of the saltbush. Some of these grasses have creeping stems which can trap the windblown sand and keep them rooted there. One of these is called **hairy Spinifex**. It has clumps of greyish furry stems but it also sends out runners in the sand. The male flowers are small but the female plants have very strange, spiky round flowers which break off and are blown around by the wind. As it is blown around the sand, the seeds are spread.

On the sand near the Spinifex is another small grass with very spiky leaves that look a

bit like pine needles. This is **salt grass** and as its name suggests, it grows well on the dunes and can tolerate lots of salt.

On the left hand side on the sand you may be able to see some clumps of small creeping plants. Often they are hidden by the windblown sand. This succulent plant, with thick leaves, holds the sand in place. It's not going very far, although it's called **Sea Rocket**. When the seed pods form you can see they're shaped like rocket ships. The wasps, bees, and birds like to feed on the seeds. It has small pink/purple flowers in summertime.

Walk along the sand towards the life saving club. Stop at the first garden bed on the left where there is a tall coastal banksia. **Walking steps**

Banksias were named after the botanist Sir Joseph Banks who voyaged with Captain Cook. Some of the banksias at Ricketts Point are thought to be over 150 years old. Although some have died, the hollowed trunks are great nesting sites for parrots and other birds. The indigenous people of this area, the Boonerwung, soaked the yellow brush-like flowers of the banksia in water to provide a sweet drink- a bit like drinking cordial. The flowers could also be used as strainers. What colour are the leaves on each side? Why do you think they are different? We'll see more of these trees on our trail.

Underneath the banksias there are **Sticky Daisy Bushes** with narrow, dark-green leaves. In summer the bushes are covered in pretty white daisy flowers. They were planted here as the banksia tree is very fragile and it's not a good idea for people to sit under it. If you're lucky, you may hear the blue wrens or see them flying in and out of these bushes.

Watch out for the **spear grass** growing near the old trunk of the banksia. It has sharp pointy leaves which are rolled inwards to prevent water loss. If we walk along the sand past the front of the life saving club, you will see a garden of low growing shrubs and grasses.

Walking steps

This garden has been created by many volunteers who have spent much time removing weeds and planting indigenous plants obtained from the local nursery.

Let's stop and see how many different species are growing here. (LOUDLY) **Pigface!** Sorry. I'm not being rude. Can you see the creeping plant called Pigface or Ross's Noon flower with its big green 3 sided leaves. It is often found on dunes, cliffs or in coastal areas as it's very tough. It is a succulent so it stores water in its leaves. Flowers can be pink, purple or white with a white or yellow centre. Red fruits when ripe were eaten by the Boonerwung and the juicy leaves could be eaten raw or cooked.

Teacher tip: Break open **one** of the pigface leaves to show the stored water. You can taste the salty juicy leaf.

The small rounded shrubs with silvery-white branches are called **cushion bushes**. Please don't sit on them. This plant looks like it has no leaves but in fact the branches are modified leaves. The colour and the furry surface help to protect it from the elements. In summer you may see it covered in small, round cream flowers that look like little balls on the tips of the branches.

You'll see some more of the silvery Salt bush, some spinifex grass and another grass called **Knobby Club rush**. It has dark green rolled stems with flowers that look like brown balls at the end. It has underground runners which make it another good plant for holding the sand.

Another plant that grows here and around the coast is the **Seaberry saltbush**. Unlike the other saltbush this shrub has small green leaves that are paler underneath. The leaves are quite thick and can store water. The round green-white flowers clustered at the end of stems are followed by small, dark red berry-like fruit. Closest

to the shore, you will see some more clumps of spinifex spreading through the sand. Let's walk along the beach towards the wooden shed and stop at the Prohibited Sign.

Walking steps

This sign reminds us that it is against the law to light fires, drop litter or destroy any of the plants at the beach. On the left you'll see some more coastal wattle growing and to the right of the sign, **coastal tea tree** is growing.

The tea tree has small tough grey leaves, bark like paper and pretty white flowers that start to bloom around September. They make excellent windbreaks and can grow in very poor soil. If you crush a leaf, you will get a smell of eucalyptus oil. Blue wrens, fantails and flycatchers like to nest in tea trees. Some of the early settlers thought the leaves would make a nice cup of tea but I wouldn't recommend it.

Keep walking until you come to the Coastal Trail sign. ***Walking steps***

The sign shows a painting by Charles Condor of Ricketts Point on a sunny day in 1890. You can see that it was popular here, even then. The little girl in the blue dress has her red bucket. I wonder if she found any crabs.

Walk on as far as the rubbish bin station. (You will see some green wheelie bins soon) ***Walking steps***

You can see a nearby building too. Can you imagine what it was used for? It was a place where visitors to the beach could change in privacy and store their belongings. The first bathing boxes were built around 1860. Once upon a time, it was against the law to sunbake on the sand in your bathing costume. If you wanted to swim, you had to change and walk directly into the water for your swim. There are not many bathing boxes left today as many have been damaged by storms.

We're on the move again. Just past the bin station, turn left and follow the sandy path past the salt bush and up to the concrete steps and ramp. Stop after about 3 metres (along the ramp). ***Walking steps***

There are many different species or types of plants that are growing on either side of the ramp. As we go further away from the sea, the plant species change and the adaptations to the coast decrease. About 3 metres up on the left side there are two small **correa** plants. Correas don't grow much bigger than one metre. They have grey-green roundish leaves with lighter undersides. The furry surface helps to protect the leaves from salt spray. It has pretty white star-like flowers that may be seen throughout the year, mostly in spring and summer. It is often planted in seaside gardens as it is an attractive plant and so tough.

Take a few more steps along the ramp. ***Walking steps***

On the right hand side, further up the cliff, you'll see that some trees have died. Perhaps there was too much wind or salt or not enough water for them to survive. The colour of the soil is darker up here. That's because there are many different plants growing here and when they drop their leaves, they eventually rot away and add nutrients to the soil. The leaves can also act as a mulch and help to prevent the soil from drying out.

Walk another metre or so along the ramp and on the left you'll see a small tree with a

dark, rough trunk. ***Walking steps***

This tree is the **Boobialla**. The shiny waxy surface of the leaf protects it from salt spray. The leaves are thick and fleshy and can hold water. This plant produces white and purple flowers in Spring which then become purple edible berries. So it's sometimes called the blueberry bush. You'll see it growing in many places here and along the coast. Closer to the sea, it will grow as a low hedge or bush. Continue walking another 5 metres.

Walking steps

On the right there is a low growing shrub with light green serrated leaves. **Hop Goodenia** grows in many areas including mountain forests. When exposed to salt spray, the leaves swell to 3x thickness. Yellow flowers with 5 petals bloom mostly in Spring and Summer. Behind the Hop Goodenia, you may see the shiny-leafed Coprosma. It is not a native plant as it was brought here from NZ. Birds like the fruit and seeds and soon it spread and became a pest.

About halfway up the ramp, on the left, you will come to some steps. ***Walking steps***

Climb up the 11 steps to the sandy path. Stop just at the top of the steps. ***Walking steps***

You get a great view from here all the way along Mornington Peninsula to Point Nepean. If you're lucky, you may spot some dolphins swimming in the water.

One of the first plants you will see on the left at the top of the steps is a creeping trailing plant that is growing over a tea tree. Who likes spinach? The Boonerwung did. This is a succulent with fleshy leaves that can store water. It creeps and climbs over cliffs and dunes. It has tiny yellow flowers which become yellow then red fruit. The leaves are thick and can store water in special water cells that glisten in the sun. It's called **NZ or Bower Spinach**. The Boonerwung used to eat the leaves, just like we eat fresh leaves in a salad.

Teacher tip: This is another plant that you can demonstrate is edible.

On the right hand side at the top of the steps is a clump of **Dianella or flax lily** with its long strap like leaves and pretty blue flowers in spring.

Walk a few more steps along the path and you will see that there are some different plants that can grow up here. Some of the plants on the cliff top are exposed to lots of wind and salt spray.

The plants' roots hold the soil in place so they have an important job to protect the cliffs from wearing away or eroding. Without the plants growing here, the cliffs could soon be washed or blown away.

Be careful to stay on the path so we don't trample any of these special plants. Let's move on until we come to another path. ***Walking steps***

Stop at the place where another path goes off to the right towards the road. Look at the colour of the soil. It doesn't look like the sand on the beach, does it?

The soil here has more nutrients for the plants. Nutrients are like vitamins and minerals for plants. They help plants to grow. That means there are some species of plants that can grow here but not on the seaward dune.

Let's continue on our trail. Stay on the path that leads us back towards the life saving club and education centre. A little further on, on the left hand side stop at one of the new planting areas (only two metres past the path junction) **Walking steps**

It looks a little bare here now as the weeds which have been removed were taking over the area. Can you recognise some of the plants that have been put here to keep the sandy soil in place? Grasses, pigface and seaberry salt bush have been planted by volunteers who want to protect this area.

In the past **River Red Gums and Manna Gums** would have grown here too. Both of these trees were used by the Boonerwung. The sap from the Red Gum was used as an ointment for burns and other skin problems.

Insects made holes in the branches of the manna gum and the sap that was left behind dried as a sugary lump. The Boonerwung collected this and ate it. One tree could provide 9kg of manna. Also, the gum leaves, bruised and warmed were used to treat snake bites, boils and headaches. When you crush a gum leaf you can smell the eucalyptus oil.

Have you ever noticed how the leaves of the eucalypts or gums hang down? This helps the rain to fall on the ground beneath and also protects the leaf from the hot sun. The bark of the different gum trees was used for shelter, canoes and shields and plates.

We have nearly finished our trail. Follow the path to the wooden steps leading down to the life saving club. You will pass many tea trees and Boobialla and some young banksias. Stop at the top of the steps. **Walking steps**

Turn and look at the huge **coastal banksia**, on the right side of the path. The size of this amazing tree tells us it is very old, even older than your grandma's grandma. Rainbow lorikeets are often seen flying through the trees up here. The parrots love the nectar when the banksias are flowering. Keep a lookout!

In the understorey of the banksia, it's like a dense jungle with wattle, tea tree, seaberry saltbush, grasses and other species.

Somewhere in this coastal woodland, is some Old man's beard, a **climbing native clematis**, which creeps over trees in the more sheltered scrub. The plant's fruit has long 'woolly' tails that look just like an old man's beard. The Boonerwung cooked its tough, starchy roots and made it into dough. Chocolate lilies, bulbine lilies and others used to grow here and they also had edible roots.

Let's go down the steps now. Take care, don't run. There are 23 steps in total. At the bottom of the steps, turn to your right and walk behind the life saving club. Stop when you are about half way along the wall of the building. **Walking steps.**

What can you see growing against the wall? It's a small **kangaroo apple**. I wonder how it grew here. Perhaps a bird dropped the seed and so it grew. Look at the feet, oops, I mean leaves of this plant. They look just like the pawprint of a kangaroo. In Spring there are purple flowers, followed by fruit which is green then turns yellow and then orange. The fruit is very poisonous when unripe but the Boonerwung knew when to pick it and eat it safely. The Kangaroo Apple is part of the solanum family and is related to tomatoes.

Walk over towards the closest picnic table. **Walking steps**

Can you see a tree nearby which looks like a pine tree with lots of little cones? They may

have fallen on the ground. Walk over and pick one up and have a close look. ***Walking steps***

These hard cones contain and protect the winged seeds. The tree is called a **Drooping She-oak**. Can you see why? The branches hang down so the leaves are not fully exposed to the sun. This helps the tree to stay cool and prevent water loss. Also it does not have proper leaves but tiny rings along its branches. The tiny leaves are really hard to see unless you have super sight.. There are separate male and female flowers, found on different plants. The bark is dark, rough and very tough to protect the trunk from salt, wind and changes of temperature. The Boonerwung used the wood from she-oaks to make boomerangs and other useful things.

From here, there is another path which leads away from the BLSC towards the car park. Volunteer groups have cleared many of the weeds and revegetated the area with suitable plants. Banksias, wattles, boobiallas and native grasses are thriving. You may like to explore this area another time.

We have looked at some of the plants that are adapted and suited to this coastal environment. Sadly, some of these plants won't survive because of trampling, removal or the invasion of weeds. Fortunately, there are many environmental groups that are working to restore our coastal foreshore reserves. How can you help?

Stay on the paths, take your rubbish home and tell someone else about this special place. And please don't take or remove any living or non living thing from the sanctuary or the reserve.

Thank you for coming to Ricketts Point. We hope you have enjoyed your visit.

End of audio trail 30 mins approx (including pauses for walking)

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