ASHTON PARK

ASHTON PARK

SYDNEY N.S.W.

In 1908, when Ashton Park was dedicated, Sydney received a rare gift. What other big city has in its centre a whole headland of almost untouched natural bushland? We have fortifications over a century old; two picnic areas, one with a hall for hire; a reef and sand-spit and three small beaches; quiet spots for fishermen, along the rocky shore; and best of all we have the bush: over sixty acres of forest and heath, with two miles of graded tracks for you to walk on and enjoy it all.

This booklet shows only a very small sample of the park's native plants, and along the tracks you will find many wildflowers which we have not illustrated. There should be more, but thoughtless hands have picked and are still picking them. Value them, and the wild creatures they shelter. Enjoy them, and leave them to give pleasure to the many who will walk the tracks after you.

All the money which is paid in by visitors to the park is used for park maintenance. Thank you for the contribution which you have made by buying this booklet.

The Trust records its grateful thanks to those who made this publication possible:

BETTY MALONEY, for drawing the plants;
PAUL HORNE, for the cover photograph;
MOSMAN PARKLANDS & ASHTON PARK ASSOCIATION,
for mapping and historical research.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

Angophora costata
Ashton Park.

PUBLISHED BY THE ASHTON PARK TRUST

HISTORICAL NOTES

When the First Fleet settled its tiny defenceless colony at Sydney Cove on 26th January, 1788, and the survey of the main harbour of Port Jackson was completed eleven days later, fortifications were essential. That part of Ashton Park which we know as Bradley's Head became strategically important. It was then named Bradley Point, in compliment to William Bradley, R.N., First Lieutenant of Sirius, the Man of War which convoyed the Fleet to New South Wales.

It was so strategically important that Governor Gipps in 1840 was pleading with the English Government for money to fortify Bradley's Head and the island called Pinchgut. After all, convicts had to be maintained, and this work was "in its nature peculiarly fitted for convicts". Gipps felt it would be a dereliction of his public duty not to proceed with the work.

The startling arrival of Commander Wilkes of the Peacock in the previous September must have stressed the need for defence. Wilkes had sailed his American Squadron into the harbour one dark evening, and "could have taken Sydney without a shot being fired". Gipps risked his career and without permission spent £300 on building a gunpit and firing wall at Bradley's and turning Pinchgut into respectable Fort Denison.

Gradually timbercutters and fishermen (Taylor's Bay was named after one of them) settled sparsely in small clearings round the Harbour. Land in the area was beginning to be sold, when again there was fear of invasion. It was 1871, the year of "The Russian Scare". Guns were rolled through the bush from a wharf at North Sydney to Bradley's Head. Tree stumps were dug out by willing locals at ten shillings a stump, and a road, Military Road, developed along the ridge of the hills.

Bradley's Head was ready to defy invaders, with three new gunpits, a magazine, and later a stone gallery for riflemen with firestep and parados and more works to the north. But the invaders who came were only sometimes violent; more often they were amorous, and always they were gay. Athol acquired a dance hall to which ferries ran. Nice girls didn't go there and when a naughty one called Bonny Black Bess was at the top of her form, the police didn't either. Athol looks so safe and still now, in the sunlight, and the Old Hall is used for children's parties.

Athol was disreputable and Bradley's in danger of becoming a coalmine. A mining lease was granted, as Sydney was surprised to hear when questions were asked in Parliament about the cutting and quarrying. But mining was prevented and the dance hall closed, and with Federation in 1901 the military land at Bradley's Head passed to the Commonwealth. In 1908 this and other land was dedicated as Ashton Park. It was 142 acres in area, and was named after the Honorable James Ashton, M.L.A., who as Minister for Lands had pressed for this park.

But the Zoo was in a restricted area at Moore Park, and in 1912 Taronga was declared the site of the new Zoological Gardens; thus Ashton Park was eventually reduced to 88 acres. Even before this move the Zoo animals had been quarantined at Bradley's, and the stone wharf was the landing place for them. Quite close to the Quarantine Wharf is a solitary stone pillar on the shore. It is from the old Sydney Post Office, and marks a measured sea mile from Fort Denison.

In 1914, H.M.A.S. Sydney sank the destructive and elusive German raider Emden, and Sydney's mast stands astride the old stone firing wall in memory of the ship and her crew. Nearby, young trees commemorate Australian warships lost in Second World War actions -- H.M. Australian Ships Perth, Canberra and another Sydney.

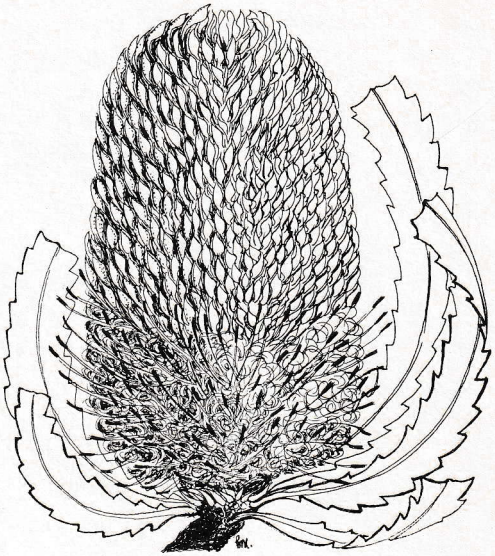
From the first days of our settlement, the headland which now is Ashton Park has been part of Sydney's history.

IT BELONGS TO US ALL. PLEASE DO IT NO HARM.

DON'T LEAVE THE TRACKS, OR PICK THE FLOWERS, OR DISTURB THE ANIMALS.

RED HONEYSUCKLE
BANKSIA SERRATA

Red Honeysuckles are gnarled trees with thick, rough bark, best told from White Honeysuckles by their leaves, which are evenly and sharply saw-toothed round the edges, shiny dark green on top and duller light-green underneath. The Banksia "flower", like that of the Waratah, is not one flower, but many. Separate small blooms are close-packed into smooth-looking cylinders, held upright like candles on the trees. They are rich in nectar, and attract honeyeating birds: hence the common name Honeysuckle, with Red referring to the timber. The smooth spikes of soft dove-grey flowers fade slowly through yellow and brown to form the dark grey whiskery "Bad Banksia Man" Cones which contrast so strikingly with the next Summer's new flowers. Red Banksias are not common in the park. They can be best seen along the Main Track from forty yards north of the Lookout, and near the St.Elmo Street entrance.



WHITE HONEYSUCKLE
BANKSIA INTEGRIFOLIA

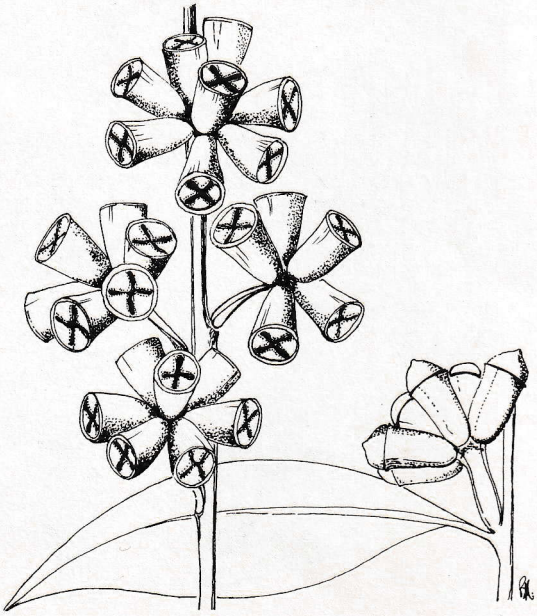
White Honeysuckles (also known as Coast Banksias) are much more common in the Park than Red Banksias. The trees grow tall and straight if sheltered, but are wind-moulded into fantastic shapes in exposed positions. The leaves are dark green on top and white underneath, changing colour prettily when tossed by the wind. Particularly in young plants, the leaf - edges are often irregularly toothed, but on big trees they are mostly smooth, and never saw-cut straight and sharp like the Red Banksia's. The flowers are creamy-yellow, fading to grey and dropping off when fully withered, leaving a long woody cone, not at all like a Bad Banksia Man. The trees flower all the year round, with the biggest flushes in Spring and Autumn. White Banksias are widespread in the Park, particularly where they get the sea winds, and can conveniently be seen at both the picnic areas.

RUSTY GUM
ANGOPHORA COSTATA

From the ridge to the waterline, wherever you go in the park you will see these handsome trees: strangely curved and twisted, moulded to the sandstone rocks; tall and straight in deeper soils; delicate, yet tough in their native environment, shooting again when their leaves are torn off by salt gales. The bark is dimpled, smooth and pleasantly cool, ranging in subtle colour from grey through pinkish grey to tan; sometimes almost orange when the old bark peels in Summer. They are not true gumtrees - the leaves grow in pairs on the stems and do not smell of eucalyptus, and the ribbed fruits are quite distinctive. Scattered trees flower throughout Spring and early Summer; very rarely, a spectacular blooming seems to cover the treetops with snow. For strange shapes, go to the Cliff Track and the waterline,and for tall trunks, go to the Main Track near Taylor's Gully.

BANGALAY
EUCALYPTUS BOTRYOIDES

There are three species of gumtree along the Cliff and Main tracks. You can recognize them by their bark, but the surest way is by the ripe fruits (gumnuts) or buds. If you can't see any on the trees, look on the ground underneath, but please don't leave the track and tread on plants or even leaves in the process: we MUST keep the ground cover to protect the park from soil erosion. Think of the next visitor, and don't take gumnuts home with you. Bangalays are big trees. The bark on the trunks and main limbs is rough, sometimes deeply grooved, sometimes scaly like the Bloodwood's. When dry it is brown, sometimes greying on the surface, but it turns almost black in the rain. The smooth bark on the smaller limbs peels in ribbons; this and the tightly clustered fruits about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch long distinguish it from the Red Bloodwood Bangalays are widespread in the park, and can be best seen along the Main Track and at the picnic areas.

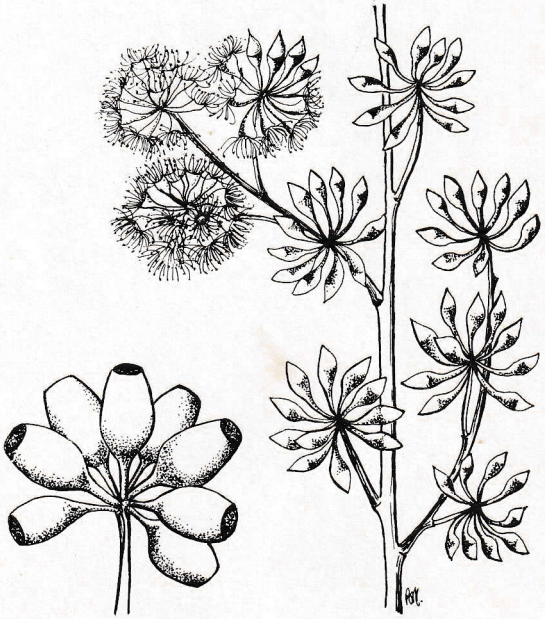


RED BLOODWOOD
EUCALYPTUS GUMMIFERA

Red Bloodwoods are medium-sized trees, with rough bark on the trunks and all but the smallest branches. The bark is red-brown or grey-brown, rather dark, with many lengthwise and crosswise cracks. These are sometimes shallow, forming fine flakes, and sometimes broad and deep, forming rounded scales up to an inch thick and quite separated. Both flakes and scales are generally more regular in shape than those sometimes seen on Bangalays. The rough bark covers all but the very small branches, and when it peels, it comes off in irregular short pieces, never in ribbons like the Bangalay's. If the big fruits, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long, are still on the trees, they can easily be picked out, silhouetted against the sky; their size distinguishes them from those of any other gumtree in the park. Red Bloodwoods, like Sydney Peppermints, are plentiful along the Cliff Track and the Ridge Road.

SYDNEY PEPPERMINT
EUCALYPTUS PIPERITA

Sydney Peppermints are big trees, with fibrous bark on the trunks and main limbs. The bark is pale grey, finely stringy, and usually grows slightly spirally on the trunks. The fruits may be hard to find, but in this case the bark is a good guide: no other tree in the park has bark with such long, fine fibres. The fruits are shaped rather like those of the Bloodwood, but are much smaller: under $\frac{3}{8}$ inch long. The leaves are rich in eucalyptus oils, and even when dry are strongly scented. Growing in thick bush, the crown is small for the size of the trunk, and looks a little unbalanced; but almost any forest tree grows differently in open ground, and there is a fine spreading Peppermint with a big canopy on the left side of the Ridge Road, about 260 yards from Athol. Sydney Peppermints are numerous along the Ridge Road and the Cliff Track.



SUNSHINE WATTLE
ACACIA ~~BOTRYCEPHALA~~ terminalis

SYDNEY GOLDEN WATTLE
ACACIA LONGIFOLIA

WATTLES

Wattles play a most important part in the Australian bush. Like peas and clovers they are legumes, most of which, with the help of bacterial nodules on their roots, take nitrogen from the air and yield it to the soil. Don't worry if you see a wattle looking sick: it is just playing its normal part in the balance of nature. Their average life is only twelve to sixteen years; when they die, the nitrogen in the nodules is released for other plants to use, and when they rot, the soil is enriched again.

Their fruits are pods (correctly called legumes), which split lengthwise when ripe, and you can see how the seeds, like the green peas you eat, have grown in a neat row down the middle. They vary in size, shape and the way they split, and as well as being interesting and good to look at, are a very good guide to identification. The seeds, too, are all different and repay a good close look. They are very hard, and keep the succession going over the years by germinating a few at a time; but after fire they really come into their own, coming up in their hundreds to cover the soil and give shelter and nourishment to all the other sorts of plants.

There is wattle in bloom every month of the year. The flowers are small, and cluster tightly together to form rods or balls of cream or yellow. A close look when they are in bud will give you an idea of how many flowers go to make up those golden trusses which light up the bush.

The foliage is rather tricky. All very young wattles have true leaves, and these are compound: that is, each leaf is divided into separate stalks and leaflets. Some species keep these compound leaves for the plant's whole life, but most of them undergo a strange change: the leaflets stop growing, and the leaf stalk alters to take over their functions. These changed leaf stalks are called phyllodes (pronounced FILL-odes), and look very much like leaves. If you have good sight (or a magnifying glass), you can identify wattle phyllodes by the fine ridges running across their bases where they join the stem, and by finding the small swellings, called glands, which are nearly always visible somewhere along

WATTLES

the margins. You will sometimes come across odd-looking plants carrying both leaves and phyllodes in different stages of development; look for them fairly near the ground, on young plants or regrowth after damage.

Eight local native species of wattle have been found in the park, and a number of others have been planted.

SUNSHINE WATTLE

The Sunshine is the only compound-leaved wattle growing naturally in the park, and it is easily recognized from the drawing. The leaflets are a little over ¼ inch long, glossy dark green on top, much paler underneath, and stiffer than they look. The legumes (pods) are a handsome bright brown, broad and fairly flat. It is well named, with flowers to brighten all the colder months. It is best seen along the Main Track, and near the St. Elmo Street entrance.

SYDNEY GOLDEN WATTLE

The Sydney Golden doesn't flower most of the year like the Sunshine Wattle, but makes up for this with a tremendous burst in Spring. It grows to 12 feet high, with broad, fairly straight phyllodes ("leaves") ½ inch or more wide, and up to more than six inches long, with at least three well marked lengthwise veins. The legumes are light brown, long and narrow, and curve back into twin semicircles when they split. It is widespread in many soils and situations, short-lived and consequently varied in distribution.

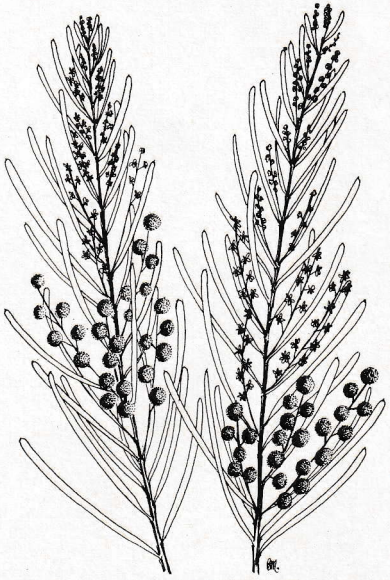
PRICKLY MOSES

Common use over the years changed "Prickly Mimosa" to "Prickly Moses" It is a spiky little shrub growing to 5 or 6 feet, with sharp-pointed phyllodes about ½ inch long. The legumes (pods) are long and narrow, bulging out at each seed, sometimes almost like a necklace. You will nearly always find some in flower along the Main Track.

FLAX WATTLE

Long slender stems bowed with pale yellow flowers make this one of our most graceful wattles. Its phyllodes are dark green, about ⅛ inch wide and 1½ inches long. Its legumes are dark brown outside and light brown inside. It flowers for most of the Spring and Autumn, sometimes partway up the twigs, and sometimes on their ends. It is best seen along the Main Track and near St. Elmo Street.

PRICKLY MOSES
ACACIA ULICIFOLIA



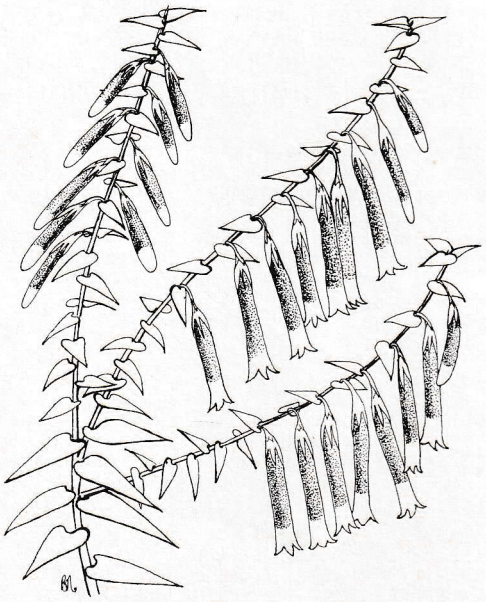
FLAX WATTLE
ACACIA LINIFOLIA

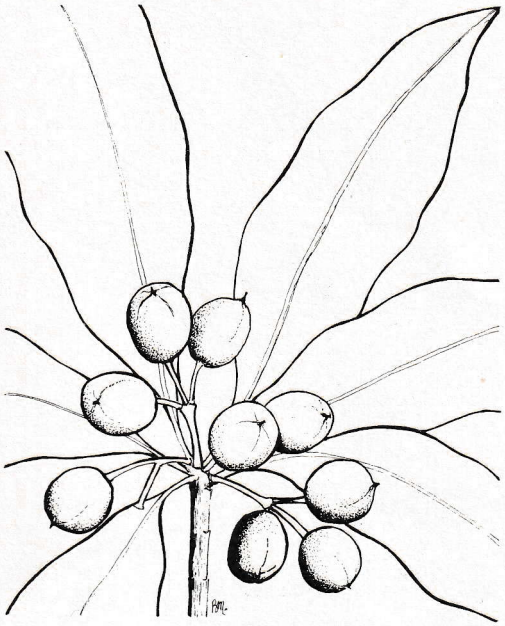
KANGAROO GRASS
THEMEDA AUSTRALIS

There are many attractive native grasses growing in the park. We have chosen Kangaroo Grass partly because it is one of the prettiest, and partly because it is one of the easiest to recognize. Look for the flowering stems; they stay on the plants long after the seeds have fallen. The specimen in the drawing is a dry, spent head collected in late Autumn, and is little different in shape from a freshly opened new one. If you see enough of these, you will gradually learn to identify the plant from its leaves alone. The long narrow leaf blades droop gracefully from the stems; there are tinges of brown and purple, but the general effect is of fresh green, with some clumps bluish green. Most clumps are about 2 feet high, but some, doing extra well, may exceed 3 feet. Kangaroo Grass grows in the better patches of soil along the Cliff and Main tracks, and does well on the verges of the Ridge Road.

FUCHSIA HEATH
EPACRIS LONGIFLORA

The Fuchsia Heath is one of our most delightful wildflowers. It is a rather angular plant, not very tidy in shape, usually two or three feet high, but sometimes growing as tall as six feet. The stiff and prickly leaves are about ½ inch long, heart-shaped and stalkless, growing close along the stems. The flowers are slender tubes of crimson, tipped with white; and as each may be over an inch long and there can be a double row covering more than six inches of stem, a Fuchsia Heath doing well is a sight worth seeing. There is scattered bloom all the year round, with the main flush in Winter and early Spring. It is found wherever moss holds seeping water on the sandstone rocks, and is at its best on the damp heath near St Elmo Street. There are nearly always some in bloom along the Main Track, where even a six-inch plant clinging to a rock-face will produce a few small flowers.



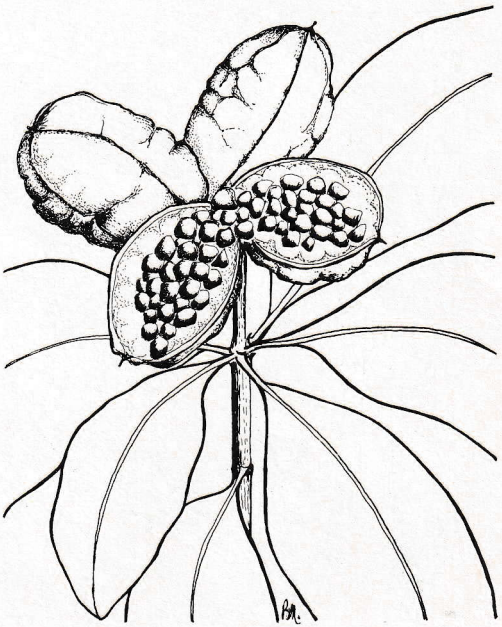


PITTOSPORUM
PITTOSPORUM UNDULATUM

This Pittosporum is a small tree with smooth grey bark. Its leaves are glossy green, slightly paler underneath, averaging about 4 inches in length. The whole tree tends to grow in layers of foliage, because the branches, and the leaves which cluster fanlike to the twigs, are mostly held fairly level. The flowers are off-white, trumpet-shaped, about half an inch long, and very fragrant. They make up in number what they lack in size, clustering together on the ends of the twigs, each cluster surrounded by a fan of leaves. When Pittosporum flowers scent the bush, Spring has come to Sydney. All through the Summer the rounded fruits, about ½ inch across, ripen slowly from yellow to orange, and in autumn split into two halves, which turn back to reveal a shining mass of sticky, red-brown seeds. This Pittosporum is a hardy tree, numerous and widespread in all conditions throughout the park.

YELLOW PITTOSPORUM
PITTOSPORUM REVOLUTUM

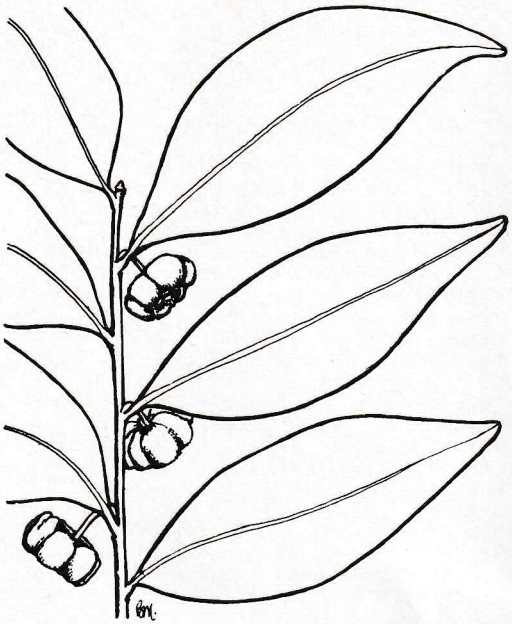
In Ashton Park, Yellow Pittosporum seldom grows higher than three feet. Very variable leaves, about 3½ inches in average length, grow in circlets widely spaced on slender stems, and there is rusty fur on young twigs and the undersides of leaves. (You would hardly expect it to be closely related to the big one, but if you look closely at the flowers and fruits you will find more likenesses than differences, and young plants are very much alike). Its flowers are ½-inch yellow trumpets with the ends of the petals rolled back, and open in late Spring. The handsome orange fruits are easy to find: up to two inches long, and really showy in Autumn when they open and display their crests of bright scarlet seeds. Yellow Pittosporum has no common name, and Pittosporum has confusing ones. Nobody will get really muddled if you use the names we've suggested, pronounced with the accent on the second syllable: "p-TOSS-prm".



Asterotricha floccosa (tobacco)
Astrotricha floccosa

CHEESE TREE
GLOCHIDION FERDINANDI

Cheese Trees are of medium size, with grey bark roughened by many fine cracks, which cut the surface into scales about ¼ to ½ an inch wide and longer than their breadth. They shed all their leaves in late Winter, and for a short time are completely bare and rather untidy, with knobbly branches and a lot of dead-looking twigs. The new leaves darken to different extents on different trees, and some develop reddish brown markings. You will have to search hard to find the very small flowers, and you will probably not find it easy to see the fruits which give the tree its common name, but once you have found one you will find dozens, even on quite small saplings: about half an inch across and just like little creamy-coloured cheeses. Most twigs are held almost horizontally, and the one shown was drawn from above. Cheese Trees are widespread in the park, and grow right beside the paths at Athol.

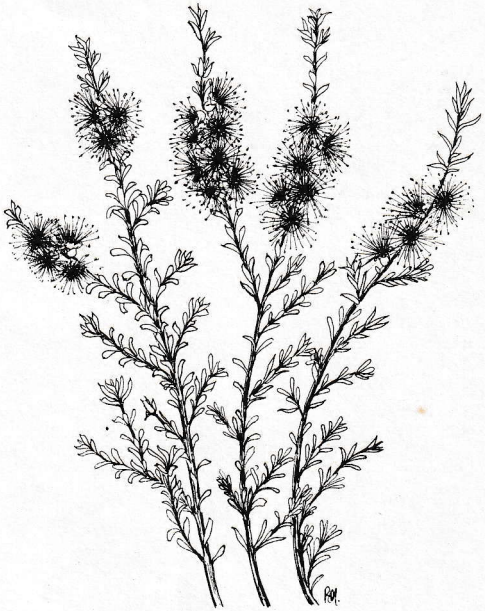


HAKEA
HAKEA DACTYLOIDES

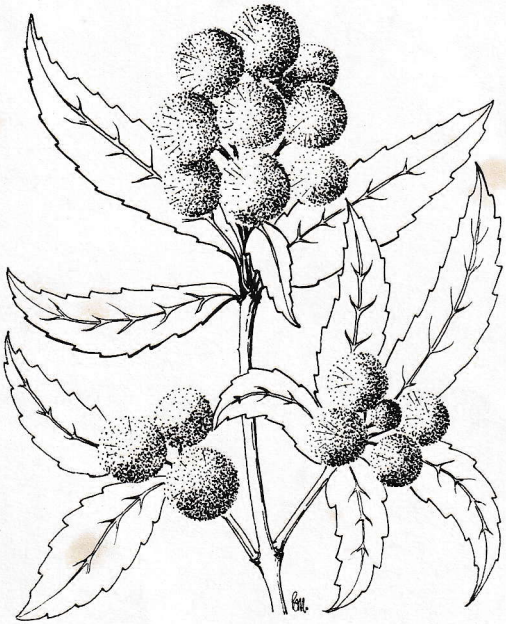
This Hakea is a graceful shrub, which sometimes in the best conditions grows to over twenty feet high and really qualifies as a small tree. At first glance, its leaves are very wattle-like, but a closer look will show you the distinctive netted veining between the three main ribs which run the length of each leaf. All but the youngest plants carry a very sure guide to identification in the hard woody fruits attached by short stems to the branches. These will remain for years, each keeping safe two beautiful black winged seeds; but if a branch breaks or an old plant dies, they open and the seeds drop to breed a new generation. In Spring, small white flowers are massed along the ends of the twigs. Leaves, fruit and a seed are illustrated. These Hakeas are numerous along the Cliff Track, and there are some very big ones near the northern end of the Main Track.

KUNZEA

KUNZEA AMBIGUA



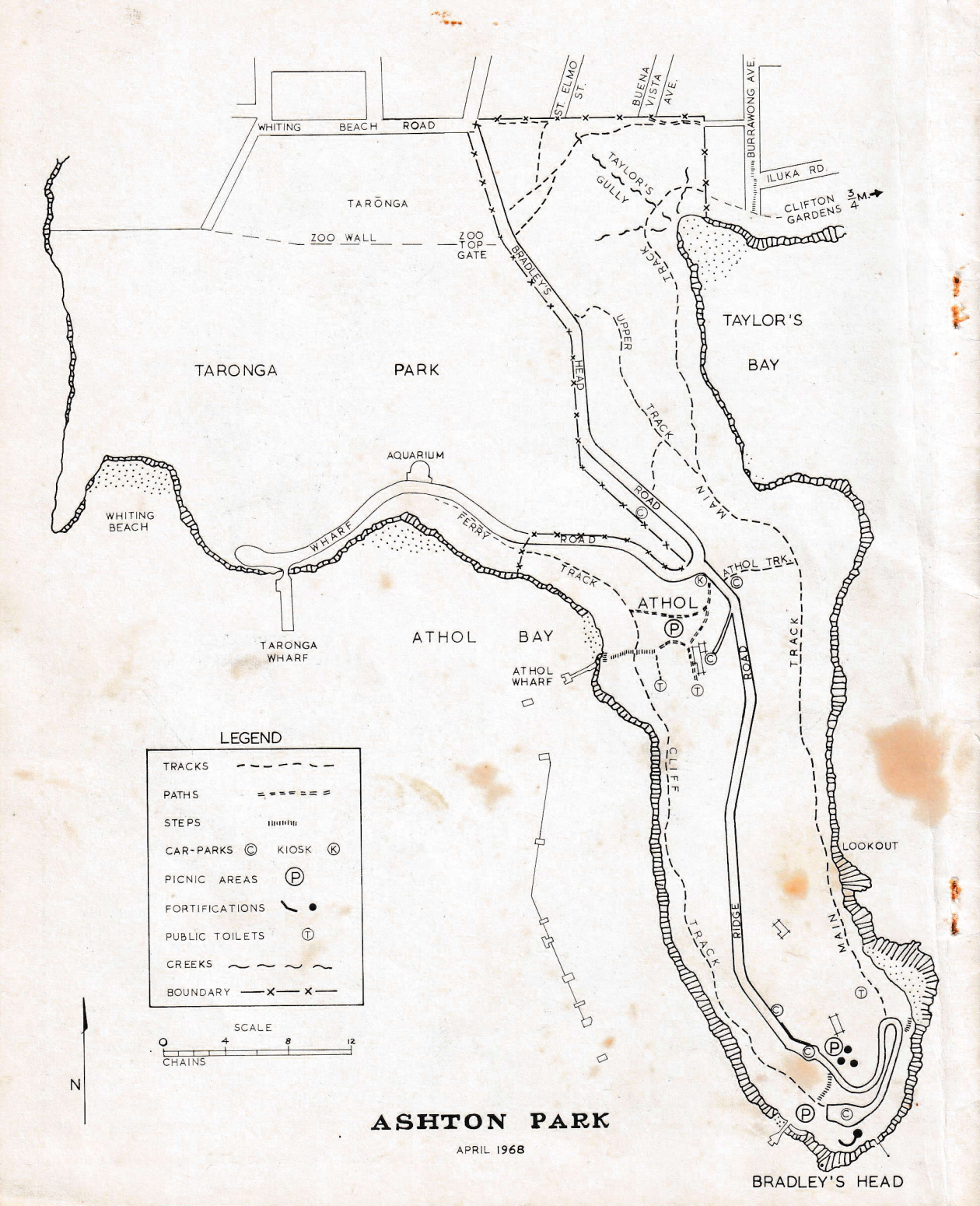
Kunzeas are shrubs with dark fibrous bark, their trunks and limbs seldom straight. Young plants are quite bushy, but with age they grow into miniature trees: trunks like ropes loosely stranded; crowns of fine branches and dense leaves; dark twisted stems weaving fantastic patterns; old, and the wood like iron. Ringtailed Possums build football-sized, twiggy nests in their upper branches, and you can pick them out against the sky. The leaves are very narrow, about ½ inch long, and mostly growing in small tufts on the twigs. Kunzeas are related to Eucalypts; the white flowers, like gum blossoms, are made fluffy by many stamens, and strongly honey-scented when fresh. They bloom mainly in Spring, but you will often find a few flowers in Autumn. They are common in the park, and there is an old "ropy" one at the start of the bush track opposite the Athol Kiosk.



BLACKWATTLE.

CALLICOMA SERRATIFOLIA

Blackwattles are shrubs or small trees, with smooth dark grey trunks patterned by light grey lichens, and are not really wattles (Acacias) at all. The early settlers wove their pliant branches into frameworks, and plastered them with mud to make "wattle-and-daub" huts; and as their flowers in late Spring form creamy-yellow fluffy balls like those of many Acacias, the name "Wattle" carried over to Australian Acacias in general. Blackwattle leaves are quite distinctive: up to 7 inches in length, strongly veined, dark on top and light underneath, tapering neatly to either end, each tooth along their edges ending in a little point. If you folded one down the middle the two sides would match almost exactly. This plant loves shade and moisture, and can be found in many natural drainage lines; it is at its best in Taylor's Gully, where three creeks cross the track.


WHITING BEACH ROAD
ST. ELMO ST.
BUENA VISTA AVE.
BURRAWONG AVE.
ILUKA RD.
CLIFTON GARDENS
¾M.
TARONGA
ZOO WALL
ZOO TOP GATE
BRADLEYS HEAD
TAYLOR'S GULLY
TRACK
UPPER
TRACK
TAYLOR'S BAY
TARONGA PARK
AQUARIUM
WHITING BEACH
WHARF
FERRY
ROAD
TRACK
MAIN
ROAD
ATHOL TRK.
ATHOL
TARONGA WHARF
ATHOL BAY
ATHOL WHARF
CLIFF
ROAD
TRACK
RIDGE
TRACK
MAIN
LOOKOUT
LEGEND
TRACKS
PATHS
STEPS
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0 4 8 12
CHAINS
N
ASHTON PARK
APRIL 1968
BRADLEY'S HEAD