

26. Old Sydney Road Wildflower Area



Old Sydney Road, west of Wallan, runs along a dry north south ridge of remnant dry bushland. The 2.6 ha Wildflower Area is on Old Sydney Road 0.9 to 1.5 km south of the intersection with Darraweit Rd where the road reserve widens and the road swings around a hill on the ridgeline. The Wildflower Area is an open forest of small often ancient trees and masses of wildflowers. Mitchell Shire Council and local groups are working to protect and gazette the area as a Flora Reserve.

This reserve is on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. We acknowledge their Elders past and present and emerging, and their care of Country over many millennia. We ask that all people respect this ancient heritage and care for the land we now share.

Directions

In Wallan, turn west off the Northern Highway/High Street (at the traffic lights) into William Street/Darraweit Road and continue west out of Wallan and up to Old Sydney Road. Turn south down Old Sydney Road. The Wildflower Area is 0.9 to 1.5 km heading south down Old Sydney Road. Small parking areas are available at either end of the hill. Bollards and rails are a barrier to prevent vehicle access.



Walking Tracks

Rough and eroded vehicle tracks run over the hill but there are no formalised walking tracks.



The tracks are rough and overgrown and not accessible to all abilities.



The Reserve has no toilets.

Landform and Geology

Old Sydney Road runs along a north-south ridgeline of *Humevale Siltstone* that formed in deep seas around 440 to 400 million years ago, was uplifted 380 million years ago and has been eroding ever since. To the east, the steep slopes run down into Strathaird Creek which enters Taylors Creek and Merri Creek. To the west, a series of gullies run through more undulating country into Deep Creek and the upper Maribyrnong Catchment.

Most of the Wildflower Area is on a high part of the ridgeline, facing west. In this dry location, the weathering of rock to soil is slow but the movement of the soil off the ridge by wind and water can be more rapid, leaving shallow soils and exposed rocks. Soils become deeper where the slope is less steep and water flowing from the ridge slows down to deposit soil particles.

The ridgeline with its tree cover forms an important background view when seen from Wallan and the Hume Freeway

Vegetation

The vegetation along the ridgeline is typical [Grassy Dry Forest](#). This changes to moister [Herb-rich Foothill Forest](#) at the more shaded southern end of the Wildflower Area.

The western facing slopes have a diversity of very old and younger eucalypts, mostly Long-leaved Box, Red Stringy-bark and Broad-leaved Peppermint. The trees are short and irregular, and many of the older trees have hollows. Some are dead but remain as valuable habitat. Many of the trees have seedlings and there is a grove of tall young Red Stringybarks. The understorey has a few scattered small trees (Blackwood and Black Wattle, a few Cherry Ballarts). Many areas have no understorey trees. Understorey shrubs including wattles, peas, heaths and Sifton Bush are scattered through the reserve in small patches.



The ground cover is very diverse. The northern and western slopes have a high cover of tussocks dominated by Red-anthered Wallaby Grass and Black-anther Flax-lily. Gaps between the tussocks are filled with orchids, lilies, daisies, trigger-plants, goodenias, creepers such as Running Postman, and many other native wildflowers. The south-westerly slopes are greener but still have a high cover of tussock grasses and smaller native species. There are a few logs on the ground.

The small south-eastern section is different. The trees (particularly lower down the slope) are very large and include Messmate. The understorey is like the other areas, but the ground cover has fewer tussock grasses and areas of Weeping Grass but with introduced Sweet Vernal Grass dominant in many places.

Over 80 species of native plants have been recorded in the Wildflower Area. Plant lists are in preparation.

Wildlife

The Old Sydney Road Wildflower Area has a diversity of plants and many old trees with tree hollows providing rich habitat for wildlife. This habitat extends north and south along the road as a valuable corridor for wildlife. This corridor is part of a wider landscape to the west that has many large patches of trees and at least some healthy understorey.

Overall, this landscape should attract good numbers of wildlife. Databases have listed 11 amphibians, 8 reptiles, more than 90 birds and 8 mammals. However, few of these have been recorded along Old Sydney Road.

Ringtail and Brushtail Possums and Sugar Gliders occur locally. An active Wombat burrow was recorded in the south-east part of the site and there are signs of Echidnas. Kangaroos include the area in their home ranges. Many of the listed bush birds would also use the Wildflower Area as part of their range. Golden Sun-moths (status: Threatened) have been frequently seen near in the Wildflower Area

Species lists are in preparation.

Aboriginal history

The Reserve is on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people.

History after colonisation

Old Sydney Road was established in 1839 as the mail route from Melbourne to Sydney. The Cobb & Co Coaches also used this route. Old Sydney Road was probably used because the alternative more direct routes through Wallan Swamp were often impassable. Once the Northern Highway was formed as an embankment through the swamp, Old Sydney Road reverted to a road mostly used for access to local farms and remains as a winding dirt road. Because of the narrow road, hilly terrain, poor soils and trees of little value, the road reserve has remained largely untouched since Europeans arrived 180 years ago.

David Laurie, a local botanist in his *Report on Conservation Values of Roadsides within the Shire of Kilmore* (1995), identified this 600-metre section of Old Sydney Road as containing the finest section of roadside remnant vegetation of all the roadsides in the then Shire of Kilmore. David recommended, that "...consideration should be given to gazetting as a flora reserve".



From 1996, recognition of the conservation significance of the road reserve on Old Sydney Road gathered momentum. The Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group and Friends of Wallan Creek (later Wallan Environment Group) lobbied the Council in the face of threats from fuel reduction, timber removal, litter dumping and road widening. In 2008, the Mitchell Shire Council's Environment Strategy supported the gazettal of the site as a Flora Reserve. The Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group has organised many Spring wildflower walks at the

Old Sydney Road wildflower area, to increase awareness of this relatively intact, diverse and rich remnant of local flora. The group also produced a colour brochure on the flora of the proposed flora reserve.

The site has still not been gazetted and the threats have not abated.

Management

The Wildflower Area on Old Sydney Road is part of the road reserve managed by Mitchell Shire Council. A utility easement runs through the area. Wallan Environment Group and the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group have a strong interest in the area.

Further information

David Laurie, *Report on Conservation Values of Roadsides within the Shire of Kilmore* (1995).

Commissioned by the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group using funding from the National Landcare Program

John Robinson, [*The value of roadside remnant vegetation*](#). *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine, Spring 2020, issue 79.

Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group: contact upper.maribyrnong.landcare@gmail.com.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation at <https://www.wurundjeri.com.au>

Acknowledgements

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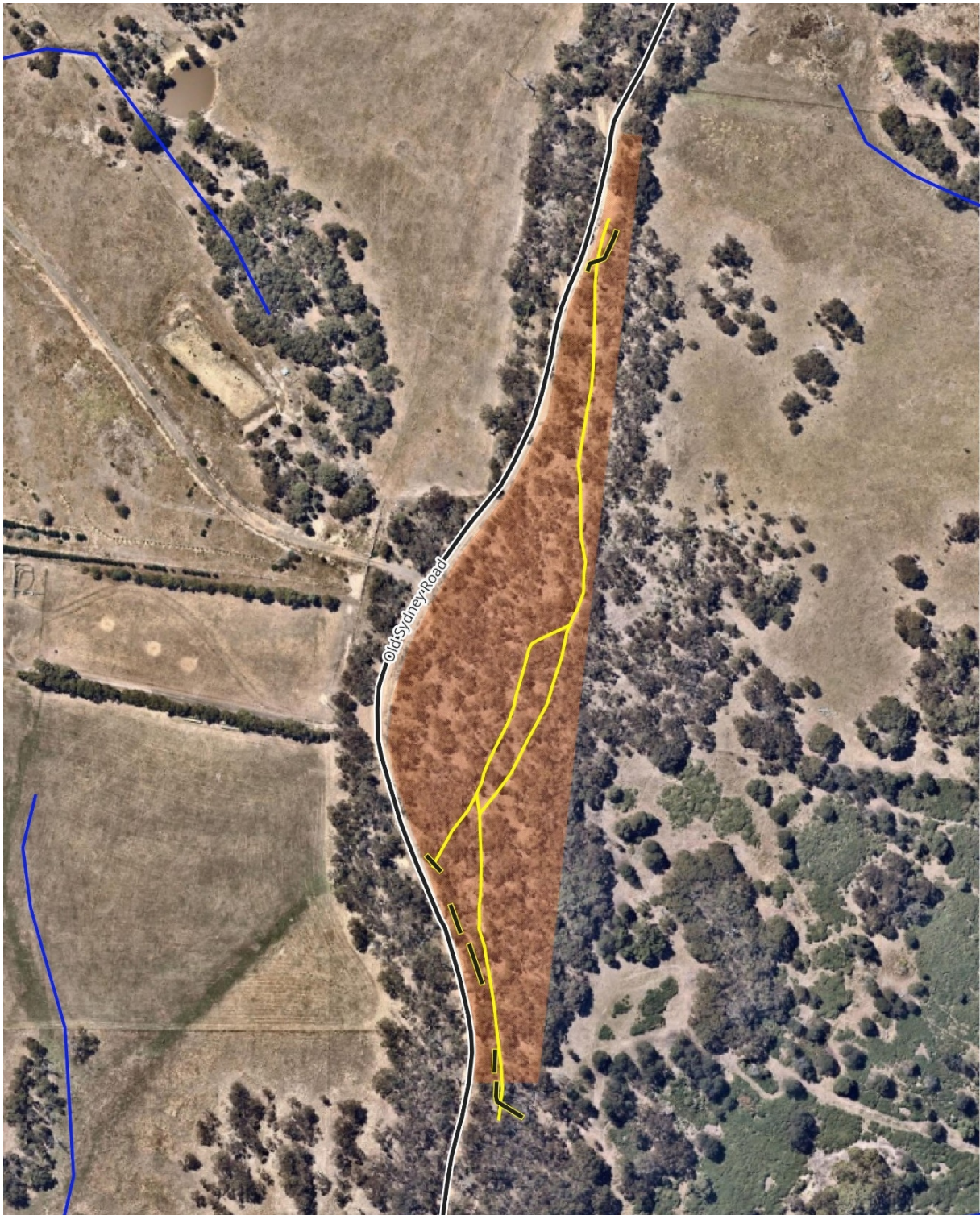
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These notes are a work in progress. If you have any comments or additional information on the nature and ecological history of Old Sydney Road and the Wildflower Area, please contact us at <https://www.beam.org.au/contact>



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 Old Sydney Road Wildflower Area	 Roads	 Barriers
 Creeks and gullies	 Walking Track	