



FriendsNET

Number 54 February 2006

From your new Network Committee Convener ...



Maelor Himbury (Friends of Maribyrnong Valley) is the new Network Committee Convener.

The committee is elected at the biennial conference, and appoints the convener and other office-bearers.

Short talks, plenty of walks and more time for discussion ...

That's a summary of what Friends want from their conferences according to the feedback from last September's conference in the Grampians.

They also want the one-day seminars to be held in the metropolitan area with ample parking facilities and access to public transport.

Respondents were generally happy with the way things were organised, and preferred the conference to be held over an ordinary weekend – definitely not a Public Holiday long weekend!

A country venue for the conference was overwhelmingly preferred and suggestions favoured the east of the state for the next one.

Most respondents seemed to accept that there needs to be a balance between cost and quality regarding food and accommodation. As one person put it, 'We got what we paid for.' Despite this, most were happy with what was provided.

Suggestions for topics ranged from botanical information and mapping to grants and publications. This has provided us with plenty of food for thought and we will follow up on your suggestions in the coming year.

We are already planning a one-day Seminar with Melbourne Water for August. Details in the May *FriendsNET*.

On a different issue, we have been approached by a local business college to allow their students to revamp our website. I will be meeting with them on a number of occasions over the semester and we want your input. Please tell us what information you would like on the website and send in your suggestions on how to improve it and make it more user-friendly.

Finally, as incoming convener I would like to express the thanks of all the committee to Sue Wright, our previous convener. It is really daunting taking over, thinking of all the work she has done and the inspiration she has provided. We can only try to live up to her exacting standards.

– Maelor Himbury

25 years of service recognised

In a ceremony at the National Gallery of Victoria on 21 February, eight groups received Parks Victoria 'Friends and Volunteer Group Long Service Awards' from The Hon. Elaine Carbines MP, Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment.

The groups were Organ Pipes, Wyperfeld, Seawinds Nursery/Nepean Parks, Sherbrooke Forest, Baw Baw, Mt St Gwinear Ski Patrol and the Lyrebird Survey Group. The Friends of the Prom received an award last year.

In presenting the awards, Ms Carbines said 'The government and business area aren't able to provide all the solutions for our changing environment and communities that we need. Community groups provide the source of many of the really innovative ways of dealing with the challenges in land management; it's where many of the good ideas reside ... Last year, Friends alone clocked up an incredible 50,384 hours of work in Victoria's parks.'

Representing their groups – Back: Allan Wood (Mt St Gwinear Ski Patrol); Terry Lane (Friends of Organ Pipes); Margaret Finger (Friends of Sherbrooke Forest); Jan Incoll (Lyrebird Survey Group). Front: Maurice Poulton (Friends of Baw Baw); Robyn Durham (Friends of Wyperfeld); The Hon. Elaine Carbines; Tricia Allen (Seawinds Nursery Volunteers/Friends of Nepean Parks); Marion Taylor (Friends of Coolart); Don Saunders (Parks Victoria Board)

Groups in action

Volunteers from the Mill Park Garden Club work in Hawkstowe Park – a metropolitan park in the Plenty River parkland system, managed by Parks Victoria. This park has historic features and environmental values, and is open to the public, with picnic facilities.

Secretary Chris Hide (9404 1554) tells us something of what the Garden Club members do in the Park.

Not all our groups work in native bush!

While most Friends Groups spend a large part of their time removing non-indigenous plants, volunteers from the Mill Park Garden Club spend their time lovingly planting and tending them, or more accurately, a careful selection of them.

The result is traditional cottage and potager gardens in harmony with and complementing the historic bluestone Le Page homestead at Hawkstowe Park, South Morang. Creating and maintaining the gardens has been their special on-going project for ten years. The results of their skilled devotion are floral displays that are a joy to behold.

Club volunteers work in the garden on the first Monday and the third Tuesday of the month, and whenever otherwise necessary. Up to 20 members attend the Tuesday work sessions.

Chris Hide has been club secretary since its inception 12 years ago. She says, 'Before we could make progress we had to create suitable soil. Rabbits, kangaroos and possums have been a problem – we now have the gardens securely rabbit-proofed. Planting, watering, weeding, mulching, pruning and fertilising keep us busy. The original old quince trees are the basis of our potager garden of herbs and

vegetables. We have various means of funding our work and we have received grants from Parks Victoria, the City of Whittlesea, and sponsorship by Flemings Nursery'.

Plenty Gorge Parklands ranger, Ross Mugavin says 'Parks Victoria are very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of like-minded people working with us to enhance Hawkstowe Park for the benefit of the wider community'.

[The Network has quite a few other affiliated groups with exotic garden involvement. – Ed.]



Anne Nestor, Chris Hide and Ayzer Tandogac with some of their beautiful floral displays

Experience Exchange (your space)

Several items have been contributed for EE this issue (see also pages 3–4). Send us your thoughts.

Friends and Fire

The 2006 Australia Day period will be remembered in Victoria for fires. Much private property was destroyed, and extensive areas in parks across the state were burnt – the Grampians National Park (48.5%), Brisbane Ranges National Park (87%), Moondarra State Park (95%) and Kinglake National Park (7%).

Of course, these events will have had major impacts on the Friends of the parks and their activities, as well as on the rangers, management, and local people.

Colin Cook of Friends of Brisbane Ranges National Park wants to hear from other Friends Groups or individuals who have had experience in fire recovery programs.

In particular, he wants to find out about:

- What problems arose that they didn't foresee.
- What worked well.
- In hindsight, what would they have done differently.
- How did they manage the Friends group.

Colin can be contacted on 5286 1252
Email: Colin.Cook@dpi.vic.gov.au

Margo Sietsma of Friends of Grampians Gariwerd reports:

'The Friends met on 25 February, 4 weeks after the fire, and these were some of our thoughts.

Be patient. Your rangers are exhausted, so are those of you who lived close to it, and it takes time to get projects ready.

Get your facts straight. Rumours are quick to circulate and soon become the accepted version.

Be supportive. There will be heaps of uninformed, hindsight-driven criticism.

Start some monitoring without getting in the way. But plan and record well. I kept a photo record for five years after the 1999 fires for FOGGs, but wish I had kept much better record of exactly where I had taken the pictures. Not just a GPS reading, but which direction etc., whether it was a hot burn or a backburn etc.'

As reported in *FriendsNET* No. 52, the Friends of Angahook-Lorne SP (now Friends of Eastern Otways-Great Otway National Park) have applied their plant knowledge and observational skills to monitor post-burn regrowth following the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. They describe the recovery of the bush as 'exciting'. Biodiversity increased dramatically.

How to deal with elm and poplar suckers in the Red-gum Triangle?

Marylou Phillips (Friends of the Red-gum Triangle) lets us know about their interesting patch surrounded by traffic and city buildings, and raises an unusual problem (for most of us).

We are helping the Albert Park Rangers keep the small indigenous area at the junction of Queens Road and Lakeside Drive free of weeds and litter. Formerly a Junction Oval car park with a few old remnant River Red-gums, the area was ripped and planted with indigenous species. Adjacent elms and poplars remain. Heavy mulching does not deter their suckers. If we cut and paint them we fear the parent tree could die, so we are just pulling and cutting.

Is there anything else we could do? Is there such a thing as a sucker suppressant?



Red-gum Triangle – an unusual combination of original and planted indigenous vegetation, exotic border trees along a busy city roadway (left) and a backdrop of multistorey buildings.

More on mulch – is it necessary?

Vivien Freshwater (Friends of Sherbrooke Forest) has written to take up the question of mulching as raised in our last issue (no. 53).

Friends groups are usually made up of enthusiastic individuals who just want to get rid of the invasive species which are threatening the biodiversity of their 'bit of bush'.

One advantage of being volunteers is that we don't have a yearly budget which constricts our actions. We don't need to do a quick removal of the offending weeds – pop in some indigenous plants – mulch around them – then forget about the area.

Restoring bushland is a long-term commitment and requires long-term planning. There is no point in removing the overstorey weeds if the understorey is also weedy. Removing the overstorey weeds will only provide more light and moisture for the smaller weeds to flourish. Although it may take a couple of years to

control the understorey weeds, it will be well worth the effort.

Using mulch to suppress or prevent weeds in bushland where there is ample seed source from indigenous vegetation in and around the area being restored will only encourage more weeds and limit natural regeneration.

Introducing foreign mulch – which will certainly contain non-indigenous micro-organisms – will result in an imbalance to the local soil organisms and will favour the weeds we are trying to control.

The bush provides its own mulch free of charge (observe the leaf-fall in your area during summer, particularly after hot, windy days). It supplies a light, varied covering of leaves, sticks and dried grasses that allow summer rain to percolate through to the soil. Heavy mulching of introduced plant material will only promote fungal activity and prevent natural moisture from reaching the soil underneath.

And a follow-up on the matter of 'being prepared' in emergencies ...

In our last *FriendsNET* Judy Douglas wrote: 'With an ageing membership the possibility of both heart-attack and stroke can not be ignored'. Here is some important information:

The Baker Medical Research Institute Sentinel Program advises that while symptoms vary, the main warning signs of a heart attack are:

- squeezing, discomfort or pain in the centre of the chest or behind the breastbone which lasts for more than 15 minutes;
- pain or discomfort spreading to other areas such as shoulders, neck, throat, jaw, arm(s) and/or upper body.

These may be accompanied by:

- shortness of breath (or a choking feeling)
- sweating
- a sick feeling in the stomach
- dizziness or light-headedness.

Some people also experience:

- increased or irregular heart rate
- paleness
- a feeling like severe heartburn or indigestion
- a sense of impending doom.

Not all these signs occur in every heart attack. Sometimes they go away and return. Even if you are not sure what's wrong, call 000 (or try 112 if out of range for 000) for an ambulance straight away.

– continued on page 4

Share your questions, experiences or ideas – contact a Committee member (see below)

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The common warning signs of a stroke are the sudden onset of one or more of the following:

- loss of normal vision
- speech difficulties
- paralysis, weakness or clumsiness
- loss of feeling or pins and needles
- violent spinning sensations, sickness and dizziness.

The Melbourne Walking Club's Circular advises: '... doctors say a bystander can recognise a stroke by asking these simple questions:

Ask the individual to smile, to raise both arms and to speak a simple sentence.

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call your emergency number 000 (or 112) immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher. Widespread use of this test could result in a prompt diagnosis and treatment of the stroke and prevent possible brain damage. Tell as many people as possible about this. It could save their lives!



Geoff Durham
is one of the Network's
Group Liaison Officers

Geoff's Group Grapevine

The Health & Safety ripples continue. **Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands** have appointed a Safety Officer Committee member, and two members have completed the two-day St Johns First Aid course provided by the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

Friends of Organ Pipes have new bright yellow volunteer vests with logo to wear 'when we have combined working bees with other groups'. The purpose appears to be identification rather than safety. The Network Committee is discussing volunteer vests with Parks Victoria.

Following the proclamation of the Great Otway National Park, the Friends of Angahook-Lorne State Park have changed their name to **Friends of Eastern Otways – Great Otway National Park**. The contact is Margaret McDonald 5289 6326. The **Friends of Otway National Park**, based at Apollo Bay, are considering a name change.

And we welcome...

Friends of Aireys Inlet Coastal Reserve

Formed about 15 years ago, this group has changed its name from 'Friends of the Coastal Reserve Aireys Inlet'. Their objective is 'to restore and maintain the indigenous heathland vegetation of the cliff-top reserve at Aireys Inlet by environmentally acceptable means'. Contact: Dennis Leavesley 5289 7152.

Friends of Gippsland Lakes

This group 'provides an avenue for interested persons to participate in projects and activities to enhance

the environment, amenity and facilities within the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park, Lakes National Park, Blond Bay Reserve, Gippsland Lakes Reserve and crown land frontages abutting the Gippsland Lakes'. Contact: Maurice Burns 5156 2008.

Friends of the Quarantine Museum

The Quarantine Museum is at Point Nepean. Since 1996 the group has maintained the Museum, conducted guided tours, and researched the Quarantine Station. Contact: Val Pepler 5982 3147

Friends of the Pines Bushland Reserve

The Pines Bushland Reserve in Frankston North (Melway map 100) is managed by Parks Victoria. The group meets on the 3rd Sunday. Contact: Christine Gawly 9750 5323

Friends of the Red-gum Triangle

The Red-gum Triangle is a the small indigenous area of Albert Park at the junction of Queens Road and Lakeside Drive next to the tennis courts. A small group of local residents is keeping it free of litter and weeds. Contact: Marylou Phillips 9521 4770.

At the 11th Friends Conference in the Grampians last September a motion was passed regarding fire. This was forwarded to Minister Thwaites who has responded. The motion and relevant correspondence are on our website: home.vicnet.net.au/~friends

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