



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

Number 67 May 2009

Special post-fires issue

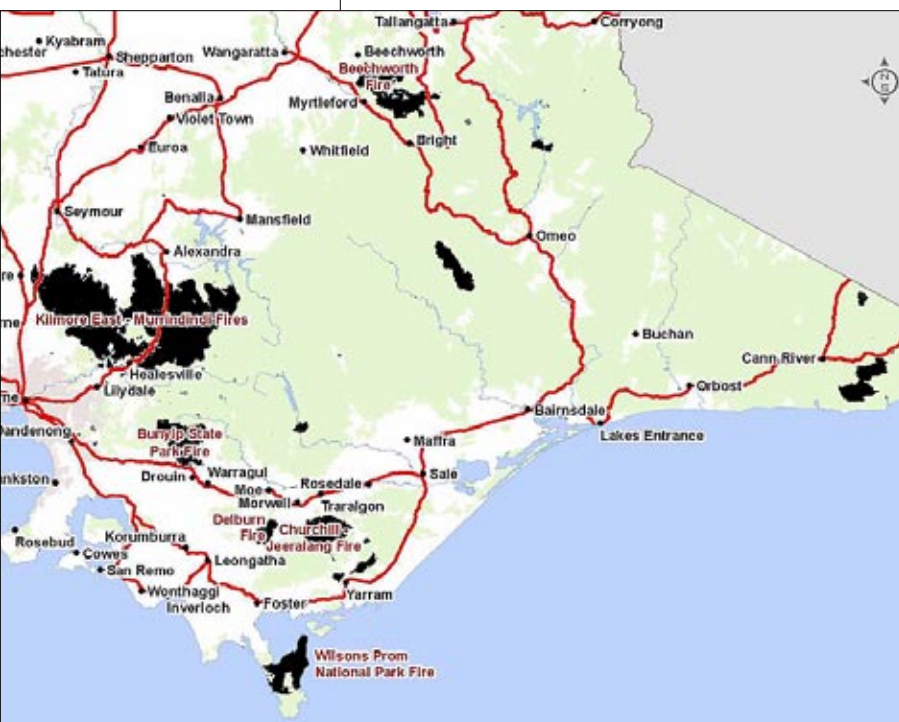
Photo at right: Epicormic shoots on forest trees in the Kinglake area, 22 May 2009. Note that most initial sprouting is on the sunny north to northwest side, due to greater warmth. – photo L Costermans

Many Friends groups have been affected by the February fires, particularly those associated with National Parks and State Parks. In this issue we feature reports from some of them.

There are common elements to all the reports – profound sadness at the loss of human life and property, and at the loss of wildlife and its habitat – but at the same time recognition that recovery from such catastrophic events is an amazing characteristic of the Australian bush. While some Friends groups have seen many years of work literally go up in flames, they show a determination to get back to the task of working with nature, and with their management authorities, to re-establish their reserves as places of important natural values.

For anyone interested in learning about the ways in which the bush and its inhabitants recover from severe burning, there is also an excellent opportunity to systematically study, record and photograph particular areas over an extended period of time. Such study can be of great value in guiding the most appropriate management strategies for the future.

Below: Map of the eastern half of Victoria, showing areas burnt by the major fires, February 2009 – source DSE website



A message from the Chief Executive of Parks Victoria

Dear Friends of Parks Victoria,

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your ongoing and greatly appreciated support. It has been a difficult few months with the state experiencing the worst bushfires on record. I thank you and your families for your letters, emails and offers of support during this time. We will be in a better position to accept your many kind offers of assistance with recovery work after the initial assessments, which will take some time. There is much work to do and we are extremely grateful for all your offers of help.

A number of Victoria's parks, including Kinglake National Park, Wilsons Promontory National Park and Bunyip State Park were severely affected by the fires. With your ongoing help, we have been re-opening these parks as soon as it has been safe to do so. For some parks, recovery will take some time; for others, we are enjoying seeing the magnificent green shoots of regeneration.

The contributions and support of volunteers is essential to Victoria's parks. I thank you all for your inspiration and commitment.

Mark Stone

From your Network Committee Convener



Maelor Himbury
(Friends of Maribyrnong
Valley) Network
Committee Convener
9374 1902 (h)

A little while ago a couple of us from the Committee attended a get-together of Friends Groups in the Maribyrnong River area. It was an excellent day (organised by the Living Museum of the West) and each group seemed to gain a lot from being able to share problems and successes with other groups. We have been encouraging Parks Victoria to organise similar meetings around the state in regions so that Friends groups can have peer support. Some Councils already do this. I urge you to contact

your land manager (whether it be Parks Victoria, a Council or other body) to organise a meeting of local Friends groups – you will find it very encouraging and useful.

Talking about Friends groups meeting, you will notice a flyer in this *FriendsNET* for our September Conference. Bring this to the attention of your members and try to get as many along as you can. Every Friends Conference gets rave reviews from its participants but you will never ever know if you never ever go.

In these two pages, we have featured just four stories of groups who have had to face the devastation of the February fires. We know there are others, but unfortunately our space is limited. Some interesting responses to last issue's 'Experience Exchange' have had to be held over for the next issue. We will welcome further contributions about group websites, succession in groups, and fire follow-up.

Groups in action



Messmate (*E. obliqua*)



Narrow-leaf Peppermint
(*E. radiata*)



Long-leaf Box
(*E. goniocalyx*)

This is a good time to distinguish eucalypts – the epicormic shoots show the characteristics of juvenile leaves
(Photos in Kinglake area – Leon Costermans)

Friends of Kinglake National Park

The first activity of 2009 for The Friends of Kinglake National Park was held on the morning of Saturday 7th February – the day now known as 'Black Saturday'. Due to the extreme weather conditions our planned outdoor activity was cancelled and replaced with an indoor meeting at the Park office.

The morning began with a presentation from local ranger Natalie Brida about her experiences working in Canadian National Parks along the St Lawrence River during the southern winter. Natalie's presentation was followed by a general discussion about our plans for the coming year. It was a really good meeting in which everyone participated. We had a number of new Friends, some with children, the meeting was lively, constructive, and positive and the spirit within the group was high. The meeting wound up around midday – the Friends left to go about their normal business, while the Park staff stayed in the office on fire watch. I had my lunch and drove home feeling very encouraged about the start to 2009. Not one of us had an inkling of what was to come.

The horror of the wildfires of 'Black Saturday' is well known, as is the devastation to communities across Victoria including those in the vicinity of Kinglake National Park. Thankfully all the 21 people in the Park office on that morning survived the fires. A number lost their homes, we all lost friends, neighbours and tragically one lost family members. There are 21 stories to tell but this is not the place to tell them. The Park office was destroyed.

What is not as well known is the extent of the damage to the Kinglake National Park. Over ninety-five percent of the 22600 hectares of the park was burnt in the fires. Each of the four main blocks: Sugarloaf, Mt Everard,

Wombelano and Wallaby Creek were affected. Popular and well-known areas – Mason's Falls, Jehosaphat Gully, The Gums, Wombelano Falls, and all the tracks in the park – are closed to the public. Those areas not affected were some of the very southern parts of the Everard Block and northern parts of The Wombelano Block burnt in the 2006 fires. The Sugarloaf and Mt Everard blocks that span the southern escarpment were severely affected as were the magnificent Mountain Ash forests in Wallaby Creek. The intensity of the fires was so great in some areas that there was no ground layer, no middle storey and no canopy. All that remained was bare ground, ash and blackened trunks. The 'nuclear' effect spoken of in much of the media is very accurate.

The good news is the bush began to regenerate within weeks of the fires. Grass-trees sprouted early, tree-ferns, eucalypts and grasses all followed. The natural process of renewal has begun, as is the way of the Australian bush.

The Friends Group also bounced back quickly after the fires. We held our second and third Friends days as scheduled though the planned activities did change. Most of the Friends at our meeting on the morning of the fires have come along. The park staff is, as to be expected, fully occupied with assessing the impact of the fires, making areas of public access safe and replacing park assets. All of Kinglake National Park is currently closed to the public, so the Friends are unable to gain access to conduct their normal activities. However the spirit within the Friends remains high and as a group we are determined to enjoy being part of the park and to ensuring its future. Our next meeting is on Saturday 6 June.

– Lawrie Rigg (Coordinator) 9434 6685

Friends of the Prom

Ignited by lightning on the eastern or sea side of 'The Cathedral' (the steep sided mountain separating Sealers Cove from Five Mile Beach), this fire started in dense bush, less than a hundred metres from the water's edge.

Fires in remote bush country such as this are natural events. The question is not if there will be another wildfire at the Prom, but when. No-one was injured and little infrastructure damaged – some signboards and foot bridges, soon replaced.

Almost half the area of the park was burnt – fortunately in a mosaic pattern of burnt, unburnt and partly burnt areas, ideal for plant and animal regeneration. Fire has always been a factor in the evolution of the Australian bush, in this driest of continents. Whilst we are saddened at individual animal deaths, if our plants and animals could not survive fire, they would have become extinct long ago.

In imitation of nature, and in the interests of biodiversity, park staff have conducted a series of 'ecological burns' – particularly to control the invasive Coast Tea-tree (*Leptospermum laevigatum*) which would otherwise dominate the heathland and grassland areas.

Within weeks after the recent fire, the first plant regrowth had appeared. The Friends of the Prom look forward to observing this renewal – especially the wildflower enthusiasts, who will enjoy an outstanding display in the spring, with the normal tree canopy removed and the ground cleared. Our next weekend at the Prom is on July 4–5.

– Don Jewell (President) 5998 7734



The fire came close to Tidal River (photo-Parks Victoria)

Friends of Bunyip State Park

On Black Saturday (7th Feb.), the Friends of Bunyip State Park (FoBSP) had scheduled the first working bee of 2009! We had planned to meet at Mortimer's Picnic Ground and undertake some walking track maintenance around the Mortimer circuit, but once that fateful weather forecast was confirmed we did a phone around and cancelled! With a number of members living around the perimeter of the park, we still had to face a day from hell but fortunately none of us lost houses or loved ones as did so many across the state.

Due to the fires, Bunyip State Park (BSP) was completely closed up to end of March – in fact, a lot of the park still is. BSP is over 16,000 hectares and the fire burnt almost half of the park in the official 26,500 hectare Bunyip Track Fire area. As a group, FoBSP hasn't been into the burnt area since the fires. We are waiting for a formal invitation once the access tracks have been declared safe. In the last few years we had focused on two walking track projects at the north east end (within the burnt area) – the Lawson Falls circuit and the Freeman Mills walking track (through to

Bunyip Weir) in association with VicWalk. Both of these areas are believed to have been subject to very severe fire conditions during Black Saturday and will take considerable time to re-establish as viable walking trails. With Parks Victoria support we hope to become involved later in the year with the remarking of the track routes and re-establishing signage. Monitoring the impact on the unique flora at the Labertouche end of the Park is another area of support we have volunteered for in association with the Gembrook Flora and Fauna Group.

The majority of FoBSP's track projects are in the southwest corner of BSP and were not affected by the fires. The Button Grass Track continues to recover from the 2008 wildfire (500 hectares) and highlights the remarkable recovery abilities of our native flora. FoBSP had started a new walking track project off the north face of Mt Towt late last year (Dingo Ridge Track), and this will require lots of focused effort to establish approximately 6 km of new track to link the top of the Weatherhead Range with the Diamond Creek. Overall we still have a lot of viable projects to pursue outside of the burnt area and hopefully we'll continue to make a positive contribution to the passive park visitor's experience.

FoBSP were enormously saddened by the impact to the park and surrounding areas of these devastating fires. The wildlife would have suffered horribly. However, we know it can recover. The key to the future of the park is to ensure that the burn cycles aren't accelerated (with more and more prescribed burning to appease an element on our suburban fringe who see BSP as a threat not an asset) causing irreversible damage to the diverse and potentially fragile vegetation communities in BSP. Our group meets on the first Saturday of each month.

– Ian Vaskess (President) 5968 1813

Friends of Yarra Flats Billabongs

Black Saturday saw the destruction of a decade of work by the Friends of the Yarra Flats Billabongs (near Yarra Glen). On Sunday 5 April, about 100 volunteers turned up to work on the fire ravaged area. In a matter of hours 840 metres of fencing was removed, a small truckload of rubbish uncovered by the fires was collected, emerging weeds were sprayed, and 25 large pizzas as well as countless party-pies, sausages, salads, cakes and drinks had been consumed. The day was co-ordinated by the Shire of Yarra Ranges' Gaye Gadsden and Katie Jacobsen. The Friends' working bees are held on the third Saturday of every second month, with the next scheduled for June. (From 'The Understorey')

– Kevin Heeley (President) 9730 1704



Removal of burnt fencing (photo-Friends of YFB)

FriendsNET may be downloaded from the Network web site (home.vicnet.net.au/~friends) and emailed to group members. Articles in FriendsNET may be used in Group newsletters with acknowledgement.

Group Grapevine

This is a big year for 25th anniversary celebrations of Parks Victoria groups who each receive a special \$5000 grant.

The Friends of the Werribee Gorge & Long Forest Mallee held their celebration at Bacchus Hill Winery with a gourmet picnic on 18 April. Speaking on behalf of Parks Victoria, Ranger-in-charge Mark Urquart said 'This group is known throughout the state for what they do.'

The Friends of Grampians-Gariwerd celebrated with Parks Victoria at a dinner at The Wander Inn, Wartook, on 9 May. They are using their grant for interpretative signs and to establish a Friends Room at the Grampians Information Centre.

The Friends of French Island propose using their grant to erect signs at sensitive environment sites in the park.

The Friends of Chiltern will be erecting a bird hide.

The Friends of Bogong have postponed their celebration until November due to the fires. They would like to hear from all who have participated in their activities in the past. Contact Rod Novak 9561 2407.

Other groups celebrating 25 years are the **Friends of the State Coal Mine** and **Friends of Mallacoota**.

Friends of Braeside Park have had some unusual activities – a bird-observing cruise on Westernport Bay, and a star-gazing night at the observatory at The Briars, Mount Martha.

The Friends of Ruffey Lake Park are conducting a survey of dog faeces on 14 June – the results will be presented to the Ruffey Lake Advisory Committee.

Friends of Leadbeaters Possum have an unusual recruiting offer – a donation of \$150 will fund one nest box and you will receive a year's membership! Contact Emma Campbell 0419 384 782.

The Friends of Warrandyte State Park have available on DVD 'a revealing expose' on the Imperial Blue Butterfly for \$9.50 including postage – contact Linda Rogan 9435 5806.

In FriendsNET No. 55 (May 2006) we reported on the **Friends of Dandenong Valley Parklands** planting rust-infested blackberry plants to control blackberry. The trial has been unsuccessful with no traces of the rust found on a recent inspection. However, Parks Victoria report that in the Otways a similar program has been successful with the rust quickly and easily being spread over a wide area.

In the newsletter of the **Victorian High Country Huts Association**, Paula Tomsett says: Our Association was born out of the 2003 fires when 65 huts were destroyed in the Victorian high country, again in 2006-07 another 15 huts were lost to the Great Divide Bush Fires, and now in 2009 an unknown number have been lost. In time we will assess the hut losses and there will be a great many opportunities for us to help with the rebuilding of our hut heritage. If interested, contact the VHCHA Secretary Bruce Dodson 9315 7423.

The **Friends of Blackburn Lake Sanctuary** are planning an 'Analammatic Sundial' – an alternative name is 'Human Body Clock'. It is a human sundial. The Friends explain that most Solar Time (as measured by a conventional sundial) is slightly different from Standard Time (up to 16 min fast or 14 min slow) – a difference known as 'Equation of Time'. Analammatic sundials can also tell daylight saving time and are designed to work only for a specific geographic location. Want to know more? Google www.sunlocks.com

And we welcome ...

Frankston Beach Association Inc.

The focus of this long-established group with about 100 members is the protection of the Frankston foreshore and the provision of appropriate recreation facilities. Graeme Lyell 9783 7445

Friends of Ulupna

Ulupna Island is part of Barmah State Park. The group was formed in March this year. Tony Clarkson 9408 6419

Friends of Bald Hill & King's Flat

This group is concerned with the restoration, protection and preservation of two reserves at Tarwin Lower, and to enlarge the protected areas and link with a corridor. Ian Gunn 5663 5577

Awards

Two Friends Groups have received 2009 Victorian Coastal Awards: **Friends of Chinamans Creek** in the 'Biodiversity and conservation category', and **Friends of Venus Bay** in the 'Raising Community Awareness of coastal issues' category.

The 2009 Kookaburra Awards were announced at a special function at Sky High Restaurant, Mt Dandenong on 16 May. Details in the accompanying insert.

Nominations for the 2009 Landcare Awards close on 1 July. You don't have to be a Landcare group to enter. Details on www.dse.vic.gov.au/landcareawards

How to contact us ...

By post:
Vic. Envir. Friends Network
c/- VNPA, 60 Leicester St
CARLTON 3053

By e-mail:
friendsvic@hotmail.com

Convener:
Maelor Himbury
9374 1902
maelor@melbpc.org.au

Group address database:
Bernie Fox
9741 9859
hayburn@bigpond.com

Newsletter contributions:
Geoff Durham
9523 5559
gadurham@bigpond.com

website:
home.vicnet.net.au/~friends

**Deadline for
August issue:
15 July 2009**

If undelivered, return to:
Victorian Environment Friends Network
c/- VNPA, 60 Leicester Street
CARLTON 3053



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MAY 2009

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