



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

Number 61 November 2007



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Committee Convener
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From your Network Committee Convener

Welcome to the final *FriendsNET* for 2007.

Once again the Victorian Environment Friends Network had a successful conference. Dr Barrie Pittock gave us a very sobering talk about the impacts of climate change on Australia while John Sampson challenged us with his presentation on the Victoria Naturally project. The workshops were stimulating and informative as usual and the local groups gave us a fascinating introduction to the area both through their talks and their excursions. Finally, Professor Nancy Millis gave us a fascinating talk on water issues, peppered with her witty (and often wicked) asides.

Make sure you keep the second weekend in September 2009 free for the next VEFN conference. At the April 2007 Friends Seminar the Committee agreed to prepare a paper on Constitutions and Incorporation. The paper is a supplement to this issue of *FriendsNET*.

The Committee is planning next year's program, and welcomes suggestions. We have decided to have a regular program – Seminar on first Saturday in April (depending on Easter) and Conference (or Seminar in alternate year) on 2nd weekend in September. So note the first of next year's Seminars now – Saturday 5 April. Details in the February *FriendsNET*.

As we currently have vacancies on the Committee, we are calling for expressions of interest from any member of an affiliated group interested in joining. While we would like co-opted members to commit for at least a year, there is no need to fear you will be trapped in an ongoing situation. The committee usually meets monthly in Melbourne.

The Committee would like to wish all Friends a very Happy Christmas and all the best for your work programs in 2008.

Groups in action

Friends erecting the
Nyerimilang entrance
building and shop



Nyerimilang's success with major projects

Nyerimilang Heritage Park, of 200 ha, overlooks the Gippsland Lakes at Nungurner, near Lakes Entrance. Alan Trevorrow, a 2007 Best Friend Award recipient, reports on its Friends Group.

The Friends of Nyerimilang regard the planning, construction, and continuing development of the East Gippsland Species Garden as our most significant project. It was undertaken with outstanding support from members of the local area Australian Plant Society (SGAP), and specialist Parks Victoria staff, and is designed to showcase the variety of East Gippsland vegetation species, within a 2-hectare area containing a dam, creek and waterfall system, a network of walking tracks and an Interpretation Pavilion of unique and outstanding quality. This is our 'signature' contribution to a 'Gem of East Gippsland' – Nyerimilang Heritage Park.

The group has also made substantial contributions in refurbishing and upgrading the homestead experience, provision of equipment and work vehicles, financing numerous maintenance and repair needs on an on-going basis, the complete refurbishment of the main rose garden, and construction of two

pavilions and the entry facility and shop. The shop is staffed by volunteers 90% of each week and is now our major source of funds. We have raised through grants and our own efforts in excess of \$350,000 to benefit the park.

The current group was formed in 1986 with the aim of maintaining and improving Nyerimilang in association with the responsible government department. The committee meets two or three times per year with local Parks Victoria senior staff as an 'Advisory Committee', which keeps working relationships and information sharing in a healthy state.

Financial membership ranges between 170 and 200 with members widely distributed. Local area membership is approximately 60–70, with 'hands-on' workers limited to around 20–25. It must be said that as time passes, core worker numbers decrease, and it seems very difficult to recruit new, active people (or is the notion of

voluntary work disappearing in the corporate, pressure-packed economic rationalist world?)

For ten years we sponsored a 'Garden and Fair' day which was very effective in bringing people to the park and in raising funds. Regrettably, lack of support workers has seen this day discontinued. Over the same period, and still held, our July 'Rose Day' continues to be a delightful day of rose and fruit tree pruning demonstrations, with craft work and devonshire teas in the homestead.

A major project was to commission an up-date of the history of Nyerimilang Park by the author of the previous work (now out of print). We arranged a substantial print-run, with copies available at the entry shop.

It should be said also that we engaged in hard-fought battles over budget reductions and staffing issues, with some small measure of success.

Experience Exchange (your space)

Children and Friends groups

In *FriendsNET 60*, we opened up the subject of involving children in Friends group activities, and called for further thoughts on related issues. There has been a good response giving some positive and practical suggestions and experiences – but also revealing some unexpected complications.

Claire Thomas of Friends of Heathfield Creek Reserve in Montrose writes:

We have 50% kids and the group wouldn't be the same without them. They bring a vital energy and an inspiration of hope for the future of our planet. Their calls of excitement when they discover some wonder, their laughter and their honest efforts to help, along with the thriving bushland and a plethora of

birds gives great reassurance that all our endeavours to save this little bit of paradise is worth it.

Alison Kuitert of Kananook Creek Association agrees that working with children can be fun and invigorating, as long as you prepare your activity well and all your Friends members know what the day will entail.

Alison says: A school group of 25 children accompanied by teachers and parents, with half a dozen Friends doing a planting is a nice ratio. The activity should be about two hours duration as kids tend to get restless and some of us oldies can't keep up the pace. Make sure you have enough equipment, set out plants prior to arrival of students, take time and patience to show how to plant correctly, work from one area outwards, and if working with disabled people pick a suitable, easy location. Most of all encourage people to come back to see their plants growing.

On a walk with students, its always nice to keep the numbers to about 15 as most walking tracks are long and narrow and you need to have little ears within a reasonable distance. Try to impart knowledge in a fun way, pick the most bizarre examples you can think of. On a recent long walk I took each student aside and told them a secret that no-one else knew – they tend to remember this better than the big lecture.

Most kids come with a supervisor who will be responsible for them. Make sure the working

Family involvement in Friends groups can bring benefits all round!



– continued on page 3

environment is safe for everybody involved, make everyone feel special and at the end of the day, give the kids a hug as they are our future.

Carol Clarke of Friends of Loughie's Bushland, North Ringwood, wrote letters to six schools and received two responses.

One primary school had an environmentally minded teacher who ran an environmental club of 40–60 children. The club has come to the reserve once a year for planting, mulching, weeding etc. and for walks through the bush.

Carol says: The energetic teacher answers a million questions, and a few parents hover around looking amazed at the action and the noise! The event has become valuable to all concerned including me, and I am very saddened to hear that the involved teacher has recently left the school. A high school came along once but the students showed far less enthusiasm and did not come again. The Council's listing of groups resulted in phone calls from cubs and scouts who have come along at various times, but their visits have been irregular. A group of Brownies was a success for a few years until the group folded with no new leader being found.

We have also welcomed occasional interest from local children who have usually been in the 6–10 years age group. Their enthusiasm has been strong at first for short periods, perhaps half an hour or more. Then they drag along for a while before they go home. Unfortunately they only come a few times. These children *must* to live close to the reserve to give them freedom to come and go as they choose, and more importantly they *must* have parents who trust both them and me to keep them safe. The dangers of the world as perceived by parents are a hindrance to children just pottering along and enjoying the bush as they did in days gone by.

Sue Wright of Friends of Woodlands Historic Park continues the theme:

Often there is the opportunity to link with other organisations like local schools and Scout groups etc. Bringing our conservation work and the community together is a big part of what we do. Celebrating a terrific planting day with a photo of a couple of enthusiastic smiling children makes a great advertisement for the Friends group, and the activity, and acknowledges the contribution of the children. So what could be wrong with that?

The answer lies in the various Federal and State Privacy Acts. Anyone who photographs members of the public and prints or circulates the images needs to be aware of this legislation. When the imagery or information concerns a child you need to be extra vigilant. The Office

of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner has several easy-to-read guides on this subject, as does the Federal Privacy Commission. Essentially you need to observe the following when taking an identifiable image of an individual: obtain the informed and voluntary consent of the people involved, and in the case of children the informed consent of a parent or guardian. If the photo is for your newsletter then say so, and if you post the newsletter electronically make sure this is revealed. In the case of working with an official school group be aware that the school's privacy policy must be observed. If it is their policy not to have their students' images published then you must seek the school's permission to approach the parents.

Photos of the cub scouts weeding the creek bed are certainly a great advertisement for your work. If their parents are present, approach them for permission. If not, manoeuvre yourself so the individuals aren't recognisable, or forgo distributing the photo altogether. Retaining photos for your own records is perhaps acceptable, but safe storage becomes an issue too.

A final word from the editor:

And now there is the complication of the Working with Children Act which applies to volunteers. Parks Victoria have drafted a Working With Children Policy (see *FriendsNET* 59, May 2007). The policy will cover procedures should a volunteer be likely to have regular direct contact with children, where the contact is not directly supervised by another adult. A Working with Children Check may be applicable to some volunteers who engage in child-related work. An information sheet and relevant details will be circulated to each Parks Victoria work centre and through the Friends Network. To find out more, Google 'Victoria Working with Children Check.' The relevant State Government Agency is the Department of Justice and the Working with Children Information line is 1300 652 879. Remember, a child is anyone under 18 years! There are some legal questions to be resolved. If a parent is present, is the child 'directly supervised' by the parent and not the event organiser?

Share your questions, experiences or ideas – contact a Committee member (see page 4)

Important communication questions

Snail mail, telephone call, fax, email, text messaging, web sites, chat rooms, bloggs, wikis – what next? Very small groups can communicate successfully in the old-fashioned way of face-to-face word-of-mouth or with a few phone calls, but the rest of us take advantage of the many other available options.

Our VEFN web site lists 270 affiliated groups and has links to 55 group web sites. The last two issues of *FriendsNET* with the 12th Conference information were either posted or emailed to the contact person of each

– Important communication questions (continued from page 3)

affiliated group. The Network Committee relies on contact persons to pass on relevant messages to members. *FriendsNET* also appeared on our web site and was emailed to approximately 3000 individuals.

The Friends of Tower Hill and the Friends of Morwell NP forwarded a copy of the Conference Registration Form with their Newsletters, but, of over 100 group Newsletters received by the Network in the relevant period, only 9 made reference to the Conference! How can the Network Committee get its message to members of Friends Groups?

Perhaps we are all overwhelmed with too many messages coming from too many directions? There are ways to cut the clutter. **Friends of Campbells Croft** distribute their newsletter by

informing members by email that the latest edition is on the Group's web site www.vicnet.net.au/~camcroft. It has a minimum of text but multiple full-colour captioned pictures.

Many groups, and this Network, also offer the option of electronic newsletters. Melbourne Water with 'The Source' and Parks Victoria with 'Canopy' are now doing this.

Do 50¢ mail-posted newsletters get opened and read? Do emails and text messages get swamped and trashed? Do people look at web sites? Many questions – what are the answers? How to get the message across in this electronic age – share your experience in our next issue.

How to contact us ...

By post:
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Group Grapevine

Friends are going full colour! Friends of Grampians Gariwerd have an attractive new membership brochure and Friends of Westgate Park have produced an impressive eight page 'Annual Activity Report'. Volunteer hours in the park averaged 800 over a three month period. They say that, based on the latest data available, this represents over 5 per cent of the total hours worked by all volunteer groups within Parks Victoria. Many groups are including colour photos in their newsletters.

A surprise dinner was organised by Friends of Tarra Bulga NP to celebrate Ranger Craig Campbell's 20 years in the park. Highlights were a Powerpoint presentation of some of Craig's achievements, and the presentation of a framed photograph.

Kananook Creek Association have inducted four 'New Legends' into their 'Hall of Fame': Charlie Davenport, Olwen Bawden, Allan Sisson and Yvonne Sisson.

The Parks Victoria Biennial Kookaburra Awards were announced on 18 November, and included Chris & Doug Woods of the Friends of Kings Billabong Wildlife Reserve (Individual Environmental Award) and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group (Group Environment Award). We congratulate them.

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

A plea to all Group Newsletter editors – please have contact names and details in each issue. It greatly assists those who wish to contact the group.

Vale Doris Bevan

Doris Bevan, a recipient of the 2006 Best Friend Award, died on 3rd October 2007. Doris was a tireless worker with the Friends of Sassafras Creek and was also involved with the Friends of Sherbrooke Forest and the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater.

And we welcome

Friends of Cassilis Historic Area

Between the Swifts Creek and Omeo, the area contains many gold relics. Aims are protection, rehabilitation, preservation, educating, informing and community involvement. Charlie Schroeder 5159 4460

Friends of Point Addis Marine National Park

This is something of a change of name from Friends of Point Addis. The group is dedicated to the preservation of the Marine National Park and adjoining land from Bells Beach to Ingoldsby Reef, Ironbark Basin to Pixie Caves. Bronwyn Spark 3263 2224

Friends of Traralgon South Flora and Fauna Reserve

Among the group's purposes is 'To foster a collaborative and helpful relationship with Parks Victoria, the Shire and other stakeholders'. Bernadette Cropper 5195 5320

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.

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