

PO Box  
19  
Churchill  
3842



President:  
5122 3137

# Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

## *Newsletter March 2003*

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>

A0016319X

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter.

### March Activity

We are pencilled in for a tree guard removal session on Sunday, March 16, meeting at the Junction Road gate at 10am. As always, suitable clothing and footwear is recommended, refreshments need to be brought along and some tools for cutting away recalcitrant tree guards may come in handy. Hope to see you all there.

### The Weir Walk

Despite all my good intentions, I was unable to attend on the day due to succumbing to a very undesirable pestilence that required me to remain within emergency sprinting distance of a lavatory at all times. To use the vernacular, through the eye of a needle at 40 paces is an apt description. I was so looking forward to being bitten, scratched and having soggy wet feet all day, too. Not to worry, Cathy left me to it, having decided that all the joys of creek walking and weed pulling far outweighed listening to me moan and groan all day. Here is her story.....

We got off to a dubious start. At 10am there were only 3 of us at the Braniff Road carpark; Ken, Reg and myself. By 5 past 10 Danny had arrived. By 10.15 there were still only four of us. Where were the rest of the team? Especially Rob? In the absence of our ranger, we elected Ken leader for the day and eagerly awaited instructions!

As we didn't have any Parks Victoria tools, we were a bit limited as to what we could do. A stocktake of personal belongings showed that Reg and Danny had a pair of gloves each and Danny had also brought along his secateurs. Luckily for us Ken had a key to the lock on the gate so that we could get a vehicle in to drive to the end of the track. At 10.20 we piled into Reg's 4WD and drove to the bottom of Blue Gum hill. We all donned our gummies and then headed for the creek. Ken started at the furthest point and the rest of us met him a short way down stream. The aim of the day was to pull out any regrowth of willows that we could find. As we were unable to find any willow, Ken decided that we might as well tackle the clumps of tutsan and teasel that were starting to make a nuisance of themselves. The tutsan wasn't too much of a hassle close to the water, but proved to be a challenge higher up the embankment where the dirt was extremely hard. The teasel on the other hand seemed to pull out easily enough but the challenge was finding a grip that wasn't covered in prickles. (Teasel, for those ignoramuses like myself, is a tall - 6 foot?? - extremely prickly

thistle used in dried flower arrangements). There proved to be quite a lot of both the tutsan and the teasel and I am pleased to report that we left quite a few big piles of weeds for someone to pick up at a later date.

Soon after we had started on our weed-pulling mission, a lone walker appeared from the base of Blue Gum Hill. Wendy had arrived – late! She was excused when she explained that she had been waylaid by a phone call from her grand daughter in New Zealand. Wendy had actually walked half way up Blue Gum hill looking for Rob's 4WD after finding Reg's at the base of the hill. She must have walked past us during the only time that the 4 of us had been in the creek together. The timing of it all! We were very glad though of the extra pair of hands. By the time we reached the weir soon after 12 noon we were more than ready for lunch. Once recharged, we commenced work again. We continued pulling out all of the tutsan and teasel we could find. The only variation was a foxglove, small amounts of twiggy mullein and some spear thistle. Ken was very pleased to report that no willow was seen all day and that a very healthy growth of Austral Mulberries was also found.

Around 2pm we started running out of puff. Those that had been using more muscle power than myself by pulling out the weeds were certainly feeling weary. I had done lot of legwork carting the weeds from the sides of the creek to the stockpiles but didn't think that I should feel as tired as I did. Maybe I was coming down with something? Speaking of which, you will have noticed by now that this report on our monthly activity isn't up to its usual witty standard. This is because our beloved editor and usual hard worker is flat on his back in bed feeling very sorry for himself. The gastric bug that is keeping him company isn't proving to be very entertaining – especially from his point of view!

In conclusion, the five of us managed to pull weeds from the base of Blue Gum hill to about half way to the Braniff Road crossing. Ken and Wendy then walked along the edges of the creek back to the crossing looking for any signs of willow and are very pleased to report that they didn't find any. Congratulations to all those people who have previously walked the creek, pulling out the willows. It looks like the job has been very well done.

## **What's Been Going On**

On Saturday, February 8, Cathy and I joined the Australian Plant Society (Latrobe Valley) group for a stroll through the Billy Creek section of the park. After organising a car shuttle at the Junction Road gate, we commenced our walk on Jumbuk Road at the top of the Zig Zag Track. The weather was perfect after weeks of hot and dry, with a pleasantly cool, southerly breeze keeping the temperature down and the smoke from the fires to the north away. The prolonged dry was having noticeable effect, with many plants showing signs of stress, some with thinning crowns as they dropped leaves to conserve moisture (the Eucalypts), some with drooping leaves (Hazel Pomaderris, Victorian Christmas Bush) and some turning brown as they succumbed (many small wattles and understorey plants). Two Koalas were spotted at the bottom end of the Zig Zag Track, both camped in Blackwood Wattles instead of gums, perhaps for the greater shade they offered. A detour back to the weir resulted in the sighting of a rather large tiger snake, sunning himself on the top of the concrete wall.

A pity he only made his presence known by diving off the wall after half a dozen of us had walked past within a couple of feet. Next stop was the Potato Flat footbridge, where we amused ourselves watching the small trout dash about in panic in the shallow pool beneath. The pace then picked up, only pausing to nibble on some Prickly Currant Bush offerings as we made our way down to Junction Road.

Incoming correspondence includes:

- a letter from the Parks Victoria Grants Coordinator again apologising for the delay in getting the 2003-04 Grants Program under way. Progress is expected in early March.
- Friends of Coolart newsletter 1/03.

While on the subject of correspondence, Ken Harris and Eulalie Brewster have been coordinating their efforts to get the last of the historical newsletters accessible on the website. Following is a transcript of an email sent to me from Ken:

Mike,

With thanks to Eulalie Brewster, I have now been able to complete the set of back numbers of our newsletter and the web site now contains every newsletter from our start in May 10th 1986.

The only item I am still missing is the letter, which invited people to the first meeting that started the group.

In crosschecking my list of newsletters with Eulalie's, I noticed a few that were missing from her set and sent her copies of these.

This led to her re-reading the October 1995 issue and in writing to me, she provided some additional information on the gold-mining venture in the park.

The October 1995 newsletter reported:

“The Brewsters lived in Yinnar South for many years and were instrumental in having the land declared a Park in 1967. In the 1930's Ossie (with two others) toiled for three months digging just off the present Fosters Gully Track in search for gold. After three months the gold mine was abandoned but the diggings remain.”

In her letter to me, Eulalie says:

“The October 1995 copy mentions the search for gold in the 1930s.\* The shaft was actually dug during June, July and August of 1946 but then abandoned when the sides starting falling in. George Edwards, the licensed prospector, had spent time over quite a few years searching for gold (and the orchids) from his camp up near the Jumbuck Road.

\* As I remember the Brewsters mentioned Leviston's timber milling (Stringybark Track) as having been in 1930s. (1934?)”

Ken

Also from Ken, via email and the wonders of modern science, is the following:

An Exciting New Bird Sighting in Morwell National Park. On Sunday 2nd March, I went for a walk along Billys Creek, planning to explore some of the small animals living in the creek. I parked at Junction Road and walked in as far as the first ford (leading up to Braniff's Road). At the ford, I entered the creek, intending to work my way downstream, back to Junction Road.

I had only walked about 10 metres, when a bird flew up from in or near the creek about 20 metres ahead of me. It flew to the left, across the Billys Creek track and appeared to land in a tree somewhere the other side of the track. My first impression was of a large bird of prey, but the colour of the back and wings was a bright chestnut and I very quickly thought, "Could that have been a night heron?"

I quickly got out of the creek, deposited all my gear, except binoculars and started to scan all the trees on the far side of the track. I searched very carefully from the track and found nothing. I had almost given up, but made a last search by leaving the track and circling back under the trees. Suddenly I heard a very unfamiliar fairly high-pitched call from a large old silver wattle. I looked into that tree and quickly spotted the bird, an adult Nankeen Night Heron - *Nycticorax caledonicus*.

I had a magnificent view of the bird and was even able to take a few photographs, although finding a clear angle through all the twigs and branches was almost impossible.

The night heron as its name implies is mainly nocturnal in its feeding and apparently usually roosts during the day in a tree with fairly thick foliage. It is not a bird I ever expected to see in the Park, maybe it has been displaced by all the fires in the North-East of the state.