

Friends of the Aranda Bushland Inc.

to conserve and rehabilitate the bush

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Convenor's Report 2001/2002

Annual General Meeting 19th February, 2002

The past year has been noteworthy for many activities, and the highlight was our winning of the Alcoa Community Landcare Award for the ACT. We submitted an account of the decade of landcare activities that we have undertaken, including the very successful 'Our Patch'. This book has proved to be a top field guide to the local native flora, and is still selling steadily. We also described the extensive and continuing woody weed removal, the steady reduction of garden escapes and other weeds, erosion control, our part in the designation of the Snow Gums Heritage Site and our ongoing work there, and our submissions to Government on landcare issues. The Award was presented by the Chief Minister, and comprised a large framed picture of woodland and a mobile phone. We are now finalists in the National Awards, in competition with all the individual State winners. The results will be announced in March this year.

The Friends of Aranda Bushland owes its success to the hard work and enthusiasm of the many volunteers who participate in our activities, to whom we owe enduring gratitude. Friends of Aranda Bushland work in the bush come cold and rain or blazing sun, and the outcome can be seen in the high quality natural environment which has emerged, over eleven years, from a formerly weed infested area of regenerating forest. Continuity and coordination of effort are the key to progress in land conservation, and this is the role of the Committee which comprises long-standing and new members who deserve a big 'thank you' for all their efforts throughout the year. Last year's members were Mary Falconer, Secretary; Robert Langdon, Treasurer; Jean Geue, Project Coordinator for the Snow Gums Heritage Site and Newsletter editor; Bill Curnow; Helen Horden; David Kelly; Peter Ormay; June Petru and myself. We welcome new members of the Committee each year and invite nominations for 2002.

Removing garden escapes and bushfire fuel from behind fences

One of the new projects which arose from discussion at the AGM last year was the very successful clearing behind fences. This involved community liaison and subsequent work carried out by FAB with great help from the adjacent residents. Large numbers of cotoneasters, firethorns, and privet, along with honeysuckle and ivy, were cut and pulled out by several successive working parties. Canberra Nature Park staff collected about four large truckloads of material. This reduced the danger of bushfires igniting houses, and the spread of garden plants into the bushland.

Erosion control on walking tracks

During the winter, Ranger Peter Mills lead an instruction morning in Aranda on erosion control, by building 'roll-overs' on the tracks. FAB members and other parkcarers attended, and subsequently individual members completed erosion control on all the tracks in the Aranda Bushland. Together with the work of the Australian Conservation Volunteers the preceding year, our walking tracks are in the best condition ever. As a result they are better able to handle the increasing numbers of walkers using the bushland. Unfortunately we still have mountain bikers skidding down walking tracks, even an organised party of them on the day Peter Mills was with us! They generate erosion badly, as well as being a hazard to walkers.

Frost Hollow to Forest Walk

During the year a sub-committee comprising Jean Geue, Peter Ormay and Mary Falconer spent a great amount of time and effort designing the ten excellent signs for the interpretive element of this walk. Illustrated by original drawings by Winifred Mumford, these signs tell the story of the flora from the grasslands, through the frost hollow, along the new access by permission of the Stuart's across their rural lease past fine old gums and into the forest of the Aranda Bushland. The signs are now made, by cooperation between Sharon Lane of the Parks and Conservation Service, Kim Tatnall the graphic designer, Tony Mostert the screen printer and ourselves, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust with graphic design funds and installation by the Parks and Conservation Service. They are permanent aluminium signs, on steel frames. We anticipate their installation in March.

Snow Gums Heritage Site

Improvement in this area, coordinated by Jean Geue, has been a priority in 2001 as our in-kind contribution to the NHT grant. The overall work for this site amounted to nearly 900 person hours over the year.

Major efforts on weed control in the snow gums and adjoining area occupied most of the autumn, spring and summer months activities. Much independent weeding has also been done.

This year we held a further blitz on hawthorn and briar rose in the rural lease land as our thanks to the Stuarts (the leaseholders) for the access between the Snow Gums and the Aranda Bushland. This helps to improve grazing and reduces seed dispersal into the bushland. Most of our effort was however aimed at St. John's Wort , phalaris and thistle removal in the snow gums area.

The area was listed for inclusion into Canberra Nature Park in 2001, and should shortly be gazetted.

Submissions

Two areas of Government activity were the focus of our attention. The first was the proposed re-development of the Aranda shops, which was before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Together with the Aranda Residents group, the Aranda Primary School and others, we successfully supported the Planning Commissioner in opposing the proposed development.

The second area was the proposed extension of the Gungahlin Drive through the edge of the Aranda Bushland and Black Mountain . The actual location and design of this dual-carriageway road and the planned flyovers is crucial, since any such roadwork will lead to clearing extensive areas of bush. We have an ongoing concern with this road, whose construction we have uniformly opposed.

Education

During the year Peter Ormay lead three well attended and successful walks. Two were from the Frost Hollow to the Forest, one for Heritage Week in April and one Orchid Walk in October. He also lead a party of Aranda Primary School students, parents and FAB members in the Marsupial Night Stalk which observed a surprising number of ringtail and brushtail possums in the Aranda Bushland

Ian Falconer, Convenor