



Friends of Aranda Bushland Inc

to conserve and rehabilitate the bush

Convenor's Annual Report

AGM Thursday 24 February 2011

2010 has been a learning year for me as I returned to the FAB committee refreshed after a six year break and had to get to know a new committee, new rangers and new priorities. Fortunately, I inherited an enthusiastic, hard working team that continues to do a great job in conserving and rehabilitating our bushland. Jenny Andrews does a painstaking job as secretary and Diana Brown writes the minutes. Peter Mellor as treasurer keeps our books up to date. Ian Falconer does a great job in sorting out all the weeding issues such as getting weed control chemicals, looking after our tools and identifying opportunities to advance our cause. Kevin McCue is our guru on the erosion control project while Peter Ormay is our backstop on things botanic. Roy McAndrew does our website and also backs up Ian and Kevin. Jim Arnold represents us at Ginninderra and Molonglo Catchment meetings. There are about half a dozen other parkcarers who come to at least half our work parties and some who come once a year.

It's been great to meet old friends in Parks and Conservation and find new ones that are knowledgeable and helpful. The issues are the same – too little resources in government to maintain the conservation values of Canberra Nature Park and too many temporary rangers on the run. Parkcare is highly effective, but it can't do everything. There are activities like policing mountain bike riders on walking tracks, chain-sawing weeds and gassing rabbit burrows that are not permitted for volunteers.

Weeds, weeds, weeds

Our major concern this year has been the explosion of weeds as a result of the wet season after a decade of drought. We have not had quite enough parkcare resources to control the weeds and to meet our aims of keeping Aranda Bushland 95% weed free and removing 95% of St John's Wort seed from Aranda Snow Gums reserve each year. We should, however, achieve almost 90% due to the many additional hours contributed by dedicated individuals.

Our monthly work parties have been well attended with the committee enthusiastically retaining Bill Packard's tradition of a delicious morning tea. They were held on the third Sunday and attracted from nine to eighteen parkcarers averaging thirteen. Most were in Aranda Snow Gums, but there was one in the rural lease and the most popular was a joint event with Mount Painter on walking track maintenance. Publicity included notices, stories and pictures in *Neighbourhood Watch* bulletins and stories in the *Chronicle* and *Canberra Times*. My *Friends Talk* on *Hawthorn eradication; an Aranda Bushland story* at the Botanic Gardens in September showed how 20 years of diligent weed control has made a difference.

It's been a fantastic step forward to have parkcarers ChemCert trained and being able to use Brushoff and Starane. Our key weeds are still St John's Wort and Paterson's Curse - they can be tackled faster by spot spraying in less sensitive areas. In addition, it has made weeding easier (and more timely) to mix our own

chemicals. We had third break-through in November and are now able to use MCDA for African Cape Weed which is a target for us as infestation is still small and only on the site for five years.

Adjoining rural lease

A purple peril of Paterson's Curse exploded in the Bindubi Street paddocks of the rural lease in spring 2010. It stopped abruptly at the reserve fence. The government does not enforce weed control on rural leases and it is not always economic for the farmer to spend money on weeds. Our weeding commitment on the rural lease is for one well-advertised work party a year to tackle woody weeds and blackberry.

Friends of Aranda Bushland has long been interested in having the Box-Gum Woodland and Grassland rural blocks adjoining Aranda Bushland added to Canberra Nature Park. This would be a valuable land management solution as it would allow us to tackle the weeds in a timely fashion and remove the major source of re-infestation. It will also greatly improve the ecosystem diversity of our Aranda reserves and the Belconnen/Molonglo corridors. Our objective will be possible when the Glenloch rural lease is broken up during East Molonglo Valley Development. The major part of the lease is south of William Hovell Drive and it will not be viable without it. Both Jon Stanhope and Simon Corbell have responded reasonably positively to our 2010 submissions but we need to keep the issue alive. Negotiations for Molonglo Valley and resumption of a 99 year lease will be complex and we could easily be forgotten.

Rabbits, rabbits, rabbits

Rabbit numbers have escalated in our reserves as they have all over Canberra in the last two or three years. Ripping burrows is not appropriate for us because it would destroy diverse natural vegetation and open the land up to weeds. Our members mapped all the burrows with GPS, tagged the sites on Google Earth, emailed Parks and Conservation and followed up to ensure all burrows were tackled.

Unfortunately, we are not permitted to gas burrows despite the fact that two members have considerable experience in this activity. Last year all identified burrows were done - largely by the goodwill of a couple of rangers who have left Mitchell Depot. There have been media stories that the government has money to continue rabbit control in 2011, but we will need to ensure that it happens.

Erosion control in Aranda Snow Gums gullies

Our grant for erosion control in Aranda Snow Gums has been acquitted. This continuing project is led by Kevin McCue using landscape rehabilitation techniques developed by David Tongaway. Our sequence of aerial photos since 1945 shows that the unsightly gullies are long standing and have healed somewhat after the 1960s soil conservation work. However, there is active erosion and a widening of gullies endangering a number of Snow Gums. We are creating leaky weirs with woody weed debris from the rural lease to trap silt and provide shelter for regeneration along the gully headwalls. We have used coir logs across the gully floors to stop sediments flowing towards the dam. The wet season has showed us how the water moves through the landscape and has meant erosion control planting has been easy.

Our 20th anniversary

We celebrated our 20th anniversary in September with almost seventy people joining us for a wildflower walk, talk and cake on Sunday afternoon 12 September 2010 (ten days before the actual anniversary). The sun shone, everything had new growth and was clean washed by rain. There weren't problems with falling trees or slippery tracks. Ian led the walk and showed the group a surprising amount of flowers considering it was still early spring. The talk was highly relevant as twenty years of dedicated parkcare has resulted in Aranda Bushland being more than 95% weed free. In contrast, Black Mountain is beloved and researched by many but lacks a parkcare group devoted to weed control. The talk was given in the old hawthorn patch (with the ranger's truck providing an excellent podium) so all could see how the bush has

regenerated in great diversity. The celebratory cake with our logo was ceremoniously cut by four past convenors of Friends of Aranda Bushland including Merilyn Evans who inspired and started the group.

Rosemary Purdie (who gave the talk) walks Black Mountain regularly and that reserve has almost the same soils and vegetation mix as Aranda Bushland. She doesn't just walk, she identifies, maps and creates herbarium specimens of plant species she finds. Her entertaining talk was about her surveys of native and exotic species. She focused on 'interlopers' - both exotic plants from other countries and native ones from other parts of Australia. Many botanically incorrect native species have penetrated well into bushland gullies since 1950. Some have the potential to form thickets and choke out the natural diversity. Once Dr Purdie's work is published, we will have an excellent basis for management decisions on weed control. We were privileged to listen to this preview of her work.

Jean Geue, Convenor

21 February 2011