



# Friends of Aranda Bushland Inc

*to conserve and rehabilitate the bush*

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## Convenor's Annual Report

AGM Tuesday 20 February 2013

Highlights of the year have been a more strategic approach to recalcitrant St John's wort, launching our renewed *Frost Hollow to Forest Walk* signage, removing the last chainsaw-sized hawthorns in the rural lease and enjoying a great spring flowering in Aranda Bushland. We continued erosion control in unsightly gullies, maintained our steep walking tracks, mapped the rabbit burrows, guided wildflower and eucalypt walks and gave a joint parkcare display in Jamison Plaza. Bill Packard's tradition of a delicious morning tea has been strongly supported. Our monthly work parties averaged seventeen parkcarers and are enlivened by young people from Radford College thanks to teacher George Huitker.

Your committee meets monthly and does a magnificent job in planning and also the guts of the on-ground work. Many thanks to Jenny Andrews (Secretary), Peter Mellor (Treasurer), Ian Falconer (Con Council, tools & chemicals), Diana Brown (minutes & Con Council), Kevin McCue (erosion), Peter Ormay (interpretation), Mary Falconer (monitoring) and Jim Arnold (catchment groups). Our heroes this year have been ChemCert trained Ian, Jim and Roy McAndrew who used Starane, the highly effective broad-leaved herbicide for timely and careful spraying of St John's wort in Aranda Snow Gums.

### **Eucalypt walk – from Frost Hollow to Forest**

I was privileged to revitalise our self-guided walk. I've been involved since 1990 when Peter Ormay showed us his vision and for our first guided walk in 1996. Peter and I were key players for the NHT funded signs ten years ago. Our renewal project was finalised with a new, full colour edition of my walk brochure, a guided walk with the sparkling new signs for the ACT Heritage Festival, and the launch.

As *Caring for our Country* was a federal grant, we were delighted to have our *Frost Hollow to Forest Walk* launched in March by federal member, Dr Andrew Leigh supported by territory member, Dr Chris Bourke. This complemented a project that featured parkcare community volunteers getting a federal grant on ACT managed land that is 'designated' as of national importance. When I crunched the numbers, the final project total was \$27,227 made up of \$4,021 grant funds, \$3,440 cash/kind Parks & Conservation, \$400 Aranda Primary School children and \$19,366 (mostly kind) ourselves.

### **Aranda blocks of Glenloch rural lease**

Removing the last of the chainsaw-sized hawthorns in the adjoining Glenloch rural lease paddocks was a big achievement. Scattered hawthorn and challenging blackberry remain, but we no longer need a chainsawing ranger each year. We started on the rural lease with a Weedbusters event in 1998, six years after we demolished massive thickets in Aranda Bushland. We committed to annual well-advertised work parties in 2000 in thanks for the public corridor for our self-guided walk then aimed to work slowly to allow regeneration of wildlife habitat. This story with pictures is now on our website.

The rural blocks are mostly high conservation value Yellow Box-Red Gum grassy woodland with beautiful, diverse understorey complementing Aranda ecosystems already in reserve. As rural blocks they form a barrier between our reserves with explosions of St John's wort and Paterson's curse a major worry. Our FOI (Freedom of Information) enquiry requested at last AGM provided more

information on biodiversity values, the Conservator's Directions and the research unit's recommendations on weed control and stocking rates. We did not get copies of the 'commercial in confidence' agreement on these issues signed by lessee and government for 45 and 99 year leases.

Over the last three years we have written to Ministers Jon Stanhope, Simon Corbell, Andrew Barr and Katy Gallagher and the Conservator for Flora and Fauna about our desire to add these blocks to Canberra Nature Park and our concerns about exploding weeds. It would be a great conservation solution strengthening corridors between Black Mountain and Kama/Molonglo - the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It would also be a neat land management solution to achieve *nature reserve* status for all the natural bushland area south of Aranda and ringed by roads.

Resumption of Glenloch lease for Molonglo urban development was finalised before the caretaker period, with tenure up to the new ACT Government. We wrote to TAMS Minister, Shane Rattenbury in January about making the Aranda blocks *nature reserve* and would appreciate member's support.

### **Weed control**

Our passion has always been weeding rather than planting as our reserves are very special with a fascinatingly diverse flora. We must always go back to Aranda Bushland to keep those pesky weeds at bay to ensure the reserve is kept 95% or more weed free.

Tackling St John's wort in Aranda Snow Gums has consumed more than half our work party resources. With ChemCert trained parkcarers, we have been more strategic this season. Ian, Jim and Roy slipped down when the weather was right and hit the wort with Starane. We continue to dig/pull in the forb rich areas and under our heritage listed Snow Gums to protect diverse flora and conservation values. This season the government found funds to spot and boom spray the vast St John's wort explosion in the adjoining rural lease and in our endangered grasslands. Hopefully this will continue.

### **Gully erosion**

Erosion control of the unsightly gullies in Aranda Snow Gums is another focus. The gullies are long-standing as evidenced by the 1945 aerial photos in our new interpretative sign. We use Dr David Tongway's low-tech landscape restoration techniques to discourage kangaroos from making multiple paths over the gully edges, create a haven for regeneration of native plants that will hold the soil and use small twigs to build up silt and stop water gushing over the gully edge. We used debris from hawthorns removed from the rural lease - it is prickly and lasts for about four years. We were privileged to have David's expertise in positioning logs during our joint work party with Friends of Mount Painter.

### **Other issues**

The Centenary Trail is a vexed issue as Aranda Bushland came in at late stages to save Black Mountain orchid rich grasslands by routing the cyclist/walker trail under Caswell Drive and via fire trails to the lower Bindubi Street exit. We also agreed to walkers using the self-guided walk through our heritage listed Snow Gums and endangered frost hollow grasslands. The walking component could be a can of worms if the Centenary Trail upgrades walking tracks to replace our deliberate low-tech ambience.

We would love to remove the small stand of Radiata Pine in south-west Aranda Bushland and raised this issue with Parks & Conservation a couple of years ago. Now our reserve is over 95% weed free, it makes sense to remove this gazetted environmental weed. We've not been able to find any heritage or economic value and hope the thirty pines can be felled as a training exercise and the logs be used for morning tea sites and erosion control. Ian and Mary are nurturing local callitris seedlings for the site.

We have asked for a proper fence at the Araba/Wangara entry to prevent unauthorised vehicle access.

Jean Geue, Convenor, Friends of Aranda Bushland