



Friends of Aranda Bushland (FoAB)

2022 Annual Report

Membership & Committee

Co-convenors: Ian Falconer and Sheridan Maher

Secretary: Jenny Andrews

Treasurer: Peter Mellor

Minutes: Diana Brown/Sheridan Maher

General Committee: Kevin McCue, Stephanie Booker

Members: approx. 125

Background

The Friends of Aranda Bushland (FoAB) was established in 1990, with the aim of enhancing the natural ambience and ecology of the Aranda Bushland, a 100 ha reserve of eucalypt forest and woodland on the southern slopes of Aranda Hill.

FoAB is an incorporated body operating as part of the ParkCare organisation. ParkCare ACT is a community volunteer program hosted by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service since 1989.

Significant achievements and activities in 2022

New walk through south Aranda woodlands – the Ian Loiterton walk

The most significant activity of the Friends of Aranda Bushland in 2022 has been the development of the Ian Loiterton walk, looping through the south Aranda woodlands. This area is a fascinating and diverse region of grassland, forest, heathland and swamp, dominated by a steep ridge of chert rock rising from the creek. The walk route initiated by Jenny Andrews has been approved by Parks after a biological survey, looking for any possible impacts on the small purple pea, which is an endangered species occurring in this area. It has also met the approval of the Heritage Unit of the ACT Government, as the whole area has in the past been used extensively by the Aboriginal inhabitants over a long period. There are several protected Aboriginal sites in these woodlands and our walk has been designed to avoid these sites. The route has been verified in a survey by the Heritage Unit with Aboriginal group representatives to ensure that no disturbance of cultural heritage occurs, and we thank them for their care.

Community grant

We have received a grant from the ACT Government to pay for the signage and walkway improvement across wet areas. A group of FAB members are working on the design of a set of interpretative signs for the walk route with text and photos of interesting elements, so that walkers can understand and appreciate the varied flora, fauna, geology and Aboriginal heritage of the woodlands. We hope to complete this during 2023 with the help of graphic designer Mariana Rollgesjser

Weed control

The efforts of the Friends of Aranda Bushland in weed control last year have been dominated by two separate issues. The first was the proliferation of the omicron strain of Covid in the ACT which caused the ACT Government and ACT Parks to greatly restrict activities in Canberra nature parks, including working parties, in the earlier part of the year. The second was the very wet year in 2022, in which Aranda received about 1,050 mm of rain. It was the third year of high rainfall, averaging one metre of rain each year over the three years, compared to an average of about 600-mm annually.

The outcome of these two factors is that the lower pasture area of Aranda Bushland looks like a golden flower meadow of St. John's Wort, completely unmanageable by our Parkcare group. During the dry years before 2020 we were able to control most of the pasture weeds, and Phalaris, the coarse introduced grass for grazing. Now our area is dominated by this grass growing among the other introduced weeds. Broadacre control is being done by Parks contractors using mowing and herbicides, which need very careful application due to valuable native plants that are still present.

The Friends are now beginning again from the best remaining areas for native flora, using hand pulling and careful spot spraying for the removal of weeds. Prior to the wet years the weed population was under control, but the rain germinated the seedbank, which for St. John's Wort can last over ten years. It will take concerted effort for many years to get back to quality pasture. We wish to thank those members who have participated in our working parties during the year, all the many people enjoying out bushland owe a huge thanks to their work

Partnership with ACT Parks

During 2022 we have enjoyed close support from the park rangers for this area Kelzang Tshering and Martin Bajt, and most recently Chris Evans who coordinates the Ranger Assist program. Two groups of Ranger Assist volunteers, together with our local rangers, have joined our members carrying out control of encroaching ti-tree and St. John's Wort. 2023 will see further Ranger Assist help in weed control and other activities. We thank the rangers for their energy and collaboration in our activities and look forward to working with them in 2023.

Communication

FAB website - <https://www.friendsofarandabushland.org.au/>

FAB established its very own Facebook Page – currently has 19 followers.

Challenge for 2023 and beyond

The biggest long-term challenge for FoAB is to enthuse younger people in caring for bushland and encouraging them to understand and participate. Caring for our bush is an opportunity to connect with a basic part of our human experience that diminishes with advancing technology, as we spend more and more time using smartphones and computers.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank Pam and Colin Macdonald for their hospitality and generous “donation” of their living room for FoAB meetings in 2022.

Co-convenors

Ian & Sheridan

Jan 2023