

Co-Convenors Annual Report for 2023 for Friends of the Aranda Bushland

This year has been one of considerable achievement for FoAB, with the following key accomplishments:

- Opening of the Ian Loiterton South Aranda Woodlands Walk and publishing of brochure
- Refurbishment of the interpretive signs along the Forest-to-Frost Hollow walk
- Species identification and recording on the Canberra Nature Map
- National Tree Day walk and talk in the bushland
- Weed control activities
- Maintenance of the rollovers (erosion control) on the north Aranda bushland trails
- Planting in the south Aranda bushland gully

Ian Loiterton South Aranda Woodlands Walk

After more than five years of sustained effort by FoAB, a new Aranda bushland walking trail was officially opened in October 2023, by the ACT Minister for the Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti, following a Welcome to Country by Ngunnawal Elder Wally Bell.

Beginning near the Black Mountain carpark, between William Hovell Drive and Caswell Drive, the new 2km loop trail provides a fascinating introduction to a diversity of natural environments, from swamp to stony heathland, past grassland, scrub, and forest, ending by crossing a geological fault shown by a gully that separates ancient sedimentary rocks from volcanic newcomers.

The area is home to an endangered species of plant, *Swainsona recta*, and several recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural significance. FOAB worked with ACT Parks and the ACT Heritage Council over a period of more than 3 years to ensure these important features were appropriately considered in the design and development of the walk. Approval from the ACT Heritage Council required a detailed site inspection and report from heritage consultants and two Ngunnawal elders, confirming that the walk would not disturb Aboriginal sites.

A key feature of the walk are eight interpretive signs that were developed by FoAB Committee members. The signs are beautifully illustrated by members' photographs, with text explaining the main features of the route, including the aboriginal importance of the area, the flora and fauna, and geology. The FoAB Committee also produced a printed brochure that can be obtained from a purpose-built brochure box at the beginning of the walk. Graphic design of the signs was provided by Mariana Rollgeyser, with construction of the signs by Screenmakers of Queanbeyan.

The walk was named in memory of FoAB Member Ian Loiterton, who unexpectedly died in 2019. He was actively participating in the development of the walk at the time of his death. Planning and development of the walk was led by Jenny Andrews, who together with Keith Pantlin, Kevin McCue and Ian Falconer devised the route, and identified and photographed key elements of the area.

FoAB applied for and received a grant from the ACT Environment Directorate to develop and construct the new walk.

Refurbishment of the interpretive signs along the Forest-to-Frost Hollow walk

The metal interpretive signs that line the Forest-to-Frost Hollow walk were removed and repainted with a new UV coating that should see them last for up to a decade before requiring further maintenance.

Species identification and recording on the Canberra Nature Map

Furthering our knowledge and understanding of our local flora has been progressed by FOAB Committee member Lisa Bradley, who has spent countless hours in the bushland photographing and uploading to Canberra Nature Map many unrecorded plants (and animals) in our bushland, resulting in more species being identified by Canberra Nature Map in the Aranda Bushland than in any other Canberra Nature Park.

National Tree Day “walk and talk” in the bushland

Another successful walk and talk was conducted in the Aranda bushland to celebrate National Tree Day. Led by Jenny Andrews and Ian Falconer, some 60 attendees enjoyed a sunny morning out in the middle of winter to learn about the significance of a dozen tree species that were specially marked for the day.

Weed control activities

The wet year resulted in another abundance of weeds, this time predominantly St. John's Wort. While our regular FOAB work party weeding efforts are effective in the limited areas we can cover, we have welcomed ACT Parks mechanical removal of the woody tea tree and spraying of the grassland parallel to William Hovel Drive. This avoided impacting areas of valuable native species, while reducing the overall weed cover.

Maintenance of the rollovers (erosion control) on the north Aranda bushland trails

The wet year also resulted in some significant erosion and rutting of the fire trails and walking tracks. FoAB has undertaken several work parties during the year to repair the rollovers following the more intense rainfall events.

Plantings in the south Aranda bushland gully

Thanks to ACT Parks, some new tube stocks were planted in the gully of the new Ian Loiterton South Aranda Woodlands Walk to help with erosion control and general regeneration of the area.

Gratitude

We sincerely thank our ACT Parks rangers for their great support throughout the year, with longstanding support from Marty Bajt, and most recently Julian Lolicato who has shown great enthusiasm in the completion of our new walk.

We thank our committee for 2023, Jenny Andrews (Secretary), Peter Mellor (Treasurer), Diana Brown (Minutes), Keith Pantlin (IT and webpage maintenance), Stephanie Booker, Lisa Bradley and Kevin McCue for their contributions to all our activities.

Sheridan Maher, Ian Falconer Co-Convenors 2023