

Friends of Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens



Photo Rustic Cascade Panorama by Simon Thomson

Governor opens restored Rustic Cascade

The Friends celebrated the sesquicentenary of the Gardens with the completion of the first stage of the full restoration of Sangster's Fern Gully. This was a wonderful event but we have no intention of resting on our *Prunus laurocerasus* at this point as the challenge of effective and discreet irrigation, judicious and sumptuous planting of ferns, the completion of the Collection Plan and the systematic replacement of important trees to take the Gardens into its next 150 years all loom.

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Celebrating 150 years - President's Address

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Your Excellency, Mrs Chernov, Cr McLenaghan, Councillors and Friends of the Gardens. It is a great pleasure to be here celebrating the 150th year of the beautiful and important Wombat Hill Botanic gardens.

Unlike the gardens, the friends of the WHBG are not yet 20 years old. The group was formed in 1995. Noted horticultural historian, Dr Gwen Pascoe, recently remarked that 'Friends groups are THE key to the renewal and the future of 19th public gardens many of which have disappeared elsewhere'. The Friends have played an important role in the life of the gardens.



We support the ongoing historical importance of the gardens, we ensure the gardens remain a central and pivotal part of the Daylesford community and we fundraise in order to restore and contribute to projects that will see future members of our community here celebrating these lovely gardens.

The past 18 months have seen extraordinary efforts and tremendous successes in all of this, due in large part to the generosity and hard work of our members.

During this time we have focused on raising the outstanding sum of \$120,000.

We have had a series of spectacular open garden weekends showcasing local private gardens some of which are widely celebrated.

Governor cuts ribbon.

Funds raised have enabled the restoration of the Rustic cascade and the fernery. We hope that the replanting of the Fernery will be an opportunity to add further depth to the botanic interest of the Gardens and a fitting extension of the original vision that underpinned their beginnings in 1863.

Celebrating 150 years - President's Address

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Although this current project is still a work in progress, we are thrilled that the cascade again spills down into the ponds as envisaged by **William Sangster** in his original concept for the Gardens.

Most recently our achievements have included:

- The purchase and installation of the wombat sculpture by local artist, Miriam Porter that now greets visitors to the Gardens.
- The funding of the completion of the Collections Plan to take the gardens through the 21st century and beyond.
- Planning for the future needs of an aging collection of special and significant trees.

All of this requires a great deal of commitment. As part of this process, we have drawn an increasing number of people into the community of the Friends group and our membership has grown five-fold.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the friends and volunteers who have contributed to this effort.

They have parked cars in the mud and rain, manned stalls, potted plants, minded dogs, pulled weeds, sold raffle tickets and braved temperatures high and low to realize what an seemed an unlikely dream 18 month ago.

It is a great honour for me to be standing here representing such a vibrant and successful friends group. I hope that we continue to have even greater achievements in maintaining the Gardens as a dynamic social and cultural entity. We hope also that the partnership that we have developed with the Shire continues to grow and prosper.

Andrew Lowth

At work in the Gardens

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Thursday mornings from 9.30 have been the regular meeting times for the Growing Friends. Plants have been potted for sale, the Friends' Bed and other parts of the Gardens have been weeded, watered and planted and massive clean ups undertaken prior to the 11th May.



(left to right)
1. Sally struggling with pith helmets.
2. Annie potting
3. Rob rakes the gully.



(left to right)
1. Persuing plants.
2. Stuart gives advice.
3. Charles in the cascade.

A ute load of pots went off to the Glenlyon CFA in March for the garden at their new shed site.

Our Shed has been the centre of our activities, storing the growing stock of tools that Ray has been building up, acting as the venue for the monthly morning teas and most recently, for the 150th celebratory “knees up”, and providing space for all manner of Friends’ “merch” – hats, jam, seeds and bulbs.

We have had plant sales at Kaye’s and Rob and Marj’s open gardens, at Easter and at the cascade opening but we very happy to sell plants on any Thursday morning. We have good varieties of perennials, groundcovers, irises, hellebores, buddlejas, and conifers – and many, many more.

Thanks to stalwarts, Annie Pyers, Lindsay Smith, Rob and Marj Fennell, Anthony O’Toole, Stephen Bowie, Susie Morris, Sally Malcher and Annie Bognar. And to all who have left us pots, dug us up clumps of excellent plants or just dropped in for a chat.

Fundraising Remembered

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What great efforts have underpinned our considerable support of the Gardens?
And what a revolution we've wrought on Wombat Hill – renewed optimism, activity and the recreation of a great community asset.



Photos by Lindsay Smith

(from top left) After lunch!:

1. Sally, Judy, Kaye and Marilyn (Kaye, Sally and the Keanes) 2. Ellis serving drinks, 3. Exhausted, 4. Frank and Ellis at work, 5. Jill and Ginny, let them eat cake, 6. Michael and the buses, 7. Noni and Annie, 8. Stacking boxes, 9. Sue Ebury and Isabel Mackenzie, 10. Too many cooks, 11. Well earned respite.

Port Augusta

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In the rain, two days ahead of the conference, Isabel Mackenzie and Gael Shannon set off for South Australia, reaching the pretty township of Crystal Brook first night, and driving on to Woomera the next. We wanted to see that tidy bustling township and its museum. Driving back to Port Augusta, we got our first overview of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Gardens at sunset, when it looked just as you see above — slanting afternoon sun on the ranges, the scruffy saltbush plain, and the landscaped plantings around the smart visitor centre. We read every panel in the inviting little lookout pavilion. The pre-conference bus tour of the Southern Flinders Ranges started at Sundrop Farm's seawater greenhouse! Tomatoes, cucumber and capsicum are grown where desalination both waters plants and warms the night air. The bus climbed through the ranges at Horrocks Pass, through sugar gums looking heftier than Western Victoria's firewood/shelter belts, to Hancock's Lookout with a view back to Whyalla and Spencer Gulf. Melrose, the oldest town in the north of SA, marks the edge of the arid Willochra Plain. We had morning tea at Bluey Blundstone's 1865 Blacksmith's Shop and walked across to a most interesting Courthouse Heritage Centre. The police station was established in 1840 when copper was discovered, and its 16 men covered the whole of northern SA to Darwin. Maybe they were the reason for the very fine stone brewery about to undergo restoration.

At Wirrabara Forest the Ranger briefed us on forestry practices - in a high rainfall pocket they grow *Pinus radiata*. But he took us to the old nursery hedged in clipped olive (1877 test plantings of forest trees from around the world — Gael fell in love with the smooth green-barked food tree *Pinus gerardiana* Chilgoza Pine from Nepal and Afghanistan, and, as it is the only one in Australia, the forester suggested he might get us seeds). Nearby, in a biodynamic orchard, the whole busload jammed into Taralee Stonefruit Orchard kitchen for lunch (foods sourced from the farm and nearby). After the recent rain, the drive to the coast through Germein Gorge delivered nearly 30 'river' crossings. We made a quick pass along the waterfront at Port Germein to wonder at its LONG jetty and hear how dependent early SA settlement was on boats, many towns trading directly with England and India. We went straight to the Conference Welcome Reception at Port Augusta's Wadlata Outback Centre, a wonderful council resource and interpretative centre.

Saturday morning saw a great buzz at the Golf Club as Friends Groups met old friends from around Australia; the Committee for instance, has reps from RBG Melb & Cranbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Canberra, Warrnambool and Port Augusta. Mrs Mackenzie and I put up our presentation on the WHBG then sat to hear Prof Chris Daniels on backyard gardens, Geoff Reid who loves mangroves, Dr Carolyn Ireland on myall, and Dr Peter Hayman on Goyder's Line, the contested border of agricultural and pastoral land. After a splendid lunch we heard Dr Nita Lester describe the ecosystem of mature brigalow colonies, Dr Dean Nicolle 'the eucalyptologist' and Prof Don Bursill on SA's use of Murray R water.

Port Augusta

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On Sunday, the conference tradition is an early bird walk (true birders with their giant scopes for close- up viewing) with lots to see (honeyeaters, pigeons, swallows, wren, magpie, magpielark, sparrow, cuckoo shrike, redthroat, and wattlebuds which sounded as though they were caught underwater). A quick breakfast was followed by walks led by their knowledgeable Gardens Guides. This is the only botanic garden in the world to specialise in the conservation and display of flora from the southern arid zone of Australia (where the annual rainfall is less than 250mm). With an area of approximately 250 hectares, the garden has four designated zones — developed areas, undeveloped areas, research area and conservation zones (sand dune, chenopod/saltbush plain and marine). Their special interest collections are the Eremophila Garden (200 species of emu bush ALL in flower!), Robert Brown Collection (the botanist who hopped ashore here in 1802 while Flinders went on up the Gulf looking for the inland sea), the Rare and Threatened Plants and the AridSmart Garden (with plants for sale that are changing the face of gardening in Port Augusta and surrounds).

Back at the Golf Club Peter Langdon described birds seen in the Gardens (the AALBG has just published a splendid bird book), and Valmai Hankel on Explorers (one was murdered by his camel!). We had the AGM, then, in a final presentation, Sale, Maroochydore and Melton BGs showed us how their planting is coming along, and Gold Coast invited us to the next conference in 2014. The golf club women stunned us not only with lunch but the most elaborate high tea!!

The post-conference tour of the Central Flinders Ranges took us north, at first following the old Ghan Railway (now the Pichi Richi steam train line) to Quorn, with its beautiful heritage buildings as the town was a very big railway crossroad. Morning tea showed us Powell Gardens, the inspiration of one man and the work of a team of volunteers who wanted to show plants happy to grow in that arid environment and which are lovely enough for gardens. Nearby we saw a quandong plantation, the bushes growing on saltbush hosts. Well out on the Wilochra Plain we passed beyond Goyder's line and saw many 1880s settlements now ghost towns, as the settlers unwisely clamoured for land that proved unsuitable as the splendid Kanyacka Station ruins demonstrated). In Hawker we looked at Jeff Morgan's circular panoramic painting of the Wilpena Pound, and lunch at the community centre included a quandong/apple crumble. The Moralana Scenic Drive took us through marvellous river red gums, and mountains and ranges ideal for photography. Our final stop was the Wilpena Pound interpretive centre and shop, to which we travelled through a wonderful callitris forest, some with a carpet of lilies below. We returned on the same track, grateful to John Zwar for his marvellous tour and commentary.

Was it worthwhile going all that way? Very definitely To be in the company of others who love botanic gardens and trees. To see how well Friends and volunteers are appreciated by their botanic gardens staff and management. This has been a long process. To hear that the Friends national body is interacting well with BGANZ. To catch up with other Friends' committee members. To learn to enjoy the saltbush plain To see 1000-y-o river red gums, a callitris forest and to meet P.gerardiana. The Association of Friends of BGs is keen for us to renew our submission to host a FBG Conference

The Wombat

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The charming wombat sculpture that greets visitors to the Gardens was installed by the Growing Friends, headed by **John O'Shea**, on a Thursday morning in early May. The plan was that it would be in place for the 150th birthday celebration.

The work of Daylesford artist, **Miriam Porter**, the burly but engagingly animated wooden wombat was swung onto a ute and, with the help of Shire gardener, **Jock Chase**, **Anthony O'Toole**, **Rob Fennell** and **Ray Robinson**, it was lowered onto an even heavier mudstone base.

Thanks to **Jo Ruchel** who encouraged us to acquire him (?) and to John especially, for masterminding the challenging logistics of the project.



(from top left)

1. Miriam farewells the wombat.

2. John and Jock swing him off the ute.

3. Rob, Anthony and Ray. 4. Wombat on rock.

Save the date!

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Musk Farm will open on:

Saturday and Sunday, 23rd and 24th November 2013.

Please email Patrice at patriceoshea68@gmail.com if you will be available on either or both days to support us. This will be THE MAJOR FUNDRAISER for the year and we will need folk for a myriad of jobs.

Excitingly, we are working with Paul Bangay and the Stephanie Alexander Foundation who are also having an open garden on that weekend. This should ensure huge crowds.

How is your jam or relish making going? It will all be sold on this weekend.

Can you make a few cakes – remember the wonderful ones at Wombat Park?

We are looking for willing workers – they have transformed the role we have been able to play in supporting the Gardens in the last 18 months



(left to right) 1. Nick and Lindsay. 2. Joy and Susie. 3. John and Eleanor and Michael.