



FRIEND'S ACTIVITIES IN THE PARK

BALCANOONA TRIP: AUGUST 2019

Trip Leader's Report

Ten members participated in activities over six days on-site supporting two projects – Balcanoona Re-Vegetation and Weetootla Environmental Monitoring. The longer time was appreciated by members in terms of achievements and making better use of the time and cost of travel.

While we enjoyed a very productive and enjoyable time, further incidents of tyre failure and a case of engine failure were experienced which can impact the safety and wellbeing of participants. While such incidents can unexpectedly occur while on travels, we are reminded that vehicle owners should be confident that their vehicle is able to handle the demands of the long and rough conditions before leaving home. It also highlights the risks and costs associated with generosity of a participant who brings their personal vehicle to the Park.

The Friends group has been keen to meet and engage with local communities. On this trip we visited Iga Warta where Terrance Coulthard shared his activities, challenges and visions. Working through Arthur Coulthard, we look forward to building partnerships with both Nepabunna and Iga Warta.

Roger Mathers was trip leader for this visit and his full report can be read by clicking [here](#).

Balcanoona re-vegetation

The re-veg project is supported by funds from a successful grant application made earlier this year. The bulk of the funds are allocated to infrastructure items including irrigation, plant guards and fertilizer. It is a multi-year project to improve the vegetation around the somewhat degraded site around the Balcanoona HQ and Historic Precinct. On our May trip, we commenced the roll out on the revised irrigation system which supported both new plantings and existing plants (Area 1). In August, we found the new system had held up very well.

Together with Sian and Joeulla's on-ground checking and watering between trips, the re-veg team is confident to continue with their re-veg program as planned.

In August we worked in two other areas (Area 3 and the office/car park area) which included new irrigation and plant support for 35 new plants and supporting about 60 existing plants.

Sian now has a permit issued through DEW to collect plant materials that will enable us to collect seeds and propagate plants. We expect over time more of our plants to be sourced this way. Based on our earlier success in growing Manduwarra seedlings, during August we collected seed from nine species. Details of the locations where these seeds were collected and approximate quantities were recorded on a form for Sian, as a requirement of the Plant Collection permit.



"Copse of Volunteers" Standing L-R: Marg Easson, Martin Caon, Bill Jeffrey, Lynne Jeffrey, Ray Hickman, Jill Tugwell, Arthur Coulthard, Roger Mathers, Kneeling: Nicki De Preu, Rob Gabb, and front Richard Smith.

The team is keen to have many more plants planted out on each trip. While the new irrigation roll-out will help productivity, the compacted ground is very hard to break up, and getting water to the seedlings when working away from the HQ is hard work and time consuming. After discussing these concerns with Arthur, he allocated a large water tank and trailer, and access to their

trench digger while we are at Balcanoona. This is in addition to his supply of additional hand tools and wheel barrow, collecting a pallet of re-veg items from Port Augusta, and digging a trench and laying a pipe under the entrance road so we can commence work in Area 2. The re-veg work is a genuine partnership between the Rangers and the Friends group.

A more detailed account of the work done on this latest trip, the current state of the project and future plans can be read by clicking [here](#)

Weetootla Environmental Monitoring

The work done on the latest visit to the Park was a continuation of earlier work done on

- Fish observations
- Water quality measurements
- Weed containment

In addition to these things Nicki de Preu conducted, for the first time, an assessment of spring condition at several of the locations where fish observations and water quality measurements are being made.

The links below will open accounts, for August 2019, of these different aspects of the monitoring project. For water quality measurements the link connects to a spread-sheet that contains the August 2019 measurements along with the corresponding measurements collected on previous trips.

[Fish observations](#)

[Water quality measurements](#)

[Spring condition and weed containment](#)

GRANT SUCCESS

Just before the August park visit we were advised that a grant application made to the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board had been successful. This provided \$2,362.00 for purchases of water quality equipment including meters for the accurate measurement of dissolved oxygen and water hardness. Other purchases made with the funds were for chemical kits to measure other water properties and small nets for use in the monitoring of purple-spotted gudgeon numbers. All equipment was obtained in time for its use on the August visit.

This sees the Weetootla and Nepouie Springs monitoring project well set up for the next couple of years.

REFURBISHMENT OF OOCABOOLINA OUTSTATION

The second visit to Oocaboolina did not take place, notwithstanding that there was plenty of work to be continued. Most of the members who had visited Oocaboolina earlier in the year and in 2018 had made other personal plans to visit other parts of Australia.

Currently the Committee have submitted grant applications to both the Federal and State Governments. The outcome of these will not be known for several months. If we are successful in either or both grants then there will be plenty of work for us next year.



Department of Environment & Water (DEW) have been busy in firstly obtaining consultant reports on the presence of asbestos in the floor tiles of the lounge and kitchen and the presence of lead paint on the kitchen walls and other painted surfaces. DEW has had linoleum laid over the lounge and kitchen floors which is a vast improvement. (photo left)

The Friends have purchased second-hand timber windows using funds provided by a donation from the Lions Club of Blackwood. Hopefully next year we will be able to replace the existing rotten timber window frames and replacing existing steel bars with steel mesh security panels, grant funding permitting.

Freckled Duck Plant Found in the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges

(*Xerothamnella parviflora*)

The discovery of several large populations of the regionally critically endangered Freckled Duck (*Xerothamnella parvifolia*) in South Australia's Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges is great news for the plant species. The finding, by SA Arid Land Community Ecologist Ben McCallum and DEW Principal Rangelands Ecologist Rob Brandle, comprises a population of about 1500 plants at 10 different sites, stretching over a kilometre at a site east of the town of Copley.

"We don't know a lot about this plant, but it is believed they grow in colonies in a specific soil type," Mr McCallum said.

"The significance of this find is that occurs at a site that is very localised in South Australia, with the closest known population some 700km away in Queensland."





Many of the plants found were showing moderate to heavy signs of being impacted by herbivores such as goats, sheep and kangaroos. However, inside a 900-square-metre enclosure built by Nantawarrina Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) staff, plants were found to be more structurally intact with a better chance of reproducing.

“Overall, the plants are hanging on despite the extended dry period and the pressures from herbivores,” Mr McCallum said “I suspect it is not the most palatable

plant out there, but because there is nothing else on the ground right now, they’re being impacted by grazing.”

Freckled Duck is a target species in the Bounceback and Beyond program, which is supported by SA Arid Lands through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare program.

Motion cameras that form part of the Bounceback and Beyond monitoring program have been able to provide some insight into the herbivore threats faced by the plants. A continued partnership with Nantawarrina IPA Rangers will ensure these populations will be kept under close check in the future.

The plants are expected to flower in the next two months and at that time specimens will be collected and lodged with the State Herbarium. The new location may also be important for the South Australian Seed Conservation Centre, if more viable seed is required for germination trials.

NOTE: *Xerothamnella parviflora* is critically endangered in the Flinders Ranges block (sub IBRA region, listed as endangered in South Australia and New South Wales and is vulnerable in Australia on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) database. Text provided by SAAL NRM Board and Ben McCallum – Community Ecologist, photos by NR SAAL.

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Scientific Expedition Group – Rainfall Monitoring in the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges



In 1988 members of the Scientific Expedition Group (SEG) were hiking through the then names Gammon Ranges National Park in the area known as the Plateau. They noticed that the vegetation was quite significant and thought that it must rain up here sometime. That was the catalyst that what has since become a 30 year plus rainfall monitoring project – **Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges Scientific Project (V-GRaSP)**. The project initially set up a rainfall measuring device (pluviometer) on the Plateau along with a series of photo points to record changes to the vegetation over the years.



31 years later the project is still very much alive and has expanded to include nine pluviometers within the Park and nearby pastoral properties, several vegetation sites in differing vegetation types and opportunistic sightings of indigenous and feral animals.

Rainfall is recorded in near real time and is available to the public on WaterConnect and the Bureau of Meteorology websites.

The effects of the current drought being experienced in the Northern Flinders is emphasised in the two photos above. These two photos were taken at a campsite used by SEG for many years. SEG adopted a low impact camping policy, no camp fires, and no removal of rock/stones. The upper photo was taken in April 2011 the lower in September 2019 from the same position.

If you are interested in learning more about SEG's V-GRaSP activities – click on this link.

<http://www.communitywebs.org/ScientificExpeditionGroup/main.php?pid=14>

FRIEND'S BADGES AND SHIRTS



BADGE: - Members can purchase the group's badge to sew onto your shirt hat or other garment at the cost of \$12.00 each. It is approximately 8 cm in diameter.

If you wish to purchase a badge/s please pay online to the Friend's bank account at Bank SA Acc BSB 105 078 Acc. No. 053 063 140 and use your last name as a reference. Please also advise our Treasurer, Graeme at gdoats@bigpond.net.au who will arrange to get the badge/s to you.

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the talents and efforts of member Hanna Jones in the design and production of the badge. Thank you Hannah.



SHIRT: - Bisley brand shirt (blue or green) with long sleeves, 2 pleated pockets. With embroidered badge - \$55 incl. GST.

Please signify whether you want green or blue and the size from

XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL, 3XL

There is a minimum order of 10 shirts. Payment for the shirt to be invoiced to you once we have enough orders for shirts.

There is about a 2-3 week turnaround for the shirt.

Shirt orders can be placed through Graeme – gdoats@bigpond.net.au – please advise quantity shirts, shirt size & colour.

NEW WESTERN ENTRY AT OOCABOOLINA



During the May visit to Oocaboolina the Friends replaced the steel framed galvanised iron doors with stone sourced from a nearby creek, installed second hand windows purchased by the group from funds donated by the Lions Club of Blackwood and also installed aluminium screens located at the nearby Nepabunna recycling facility.



60 SQUARE MILES OF GAMMON RANGES AWAIT EXPLORATION

• Here is a short but interesting account of a visit to the legendary home of the Arkuroo.

A PARTY of the 1st Kensington Gardens Rover crew, comprising Frank Oakeshott (R.S.L.), Dick Wayte (Rover Mate), David Oakeshott, Bruce Thomson, had a most successful hike in the Gammon Ranges during the latter part of August. We worked with Mr. Bonython, who generously shared his facilities and information with us, which included his jeep, tanks of water, and maps prepared from aerial photographs.

We walked and climbed about 80 miles, visiting Mt. McKinley, the western side of the McKinley Basin, and examined creeks which flowed from this area into the Little John Creek. Two of our party were in Mr. Bonython's south-north crossing of the unexplored areas of the ranges. Meanwhile, the other two went around the ranges in the jeep, with the intention of meeting them on the north side. The last part of this journey was made easy when Mr. Lillecrapp, of Yankaninna Station supplied pack-horses to carry the stores over the Yankaninna Range into Main Water Pound, where we set up camp near the Yacki Pool, which was found by Gordon Lillecrapp and his sister. The pool is so named because it is thought that it is the legendary home of the Arkuroo.

Fog and rain forced Mr. Bonython's party to rely entirely on their compasses, which caused considerable anxiety to the jeep party, who were expected to meet them. Mr. Bonython's party had only three days' rations and water with them, and it was not until late on the third day that the jeep party found their tracks. We discovered afterwards that they had only taken two days to cross, and had gone straight to Yankaninna Station.

We then followed the Main Water Pound down to the Gap, climbed Mt. Ben. Bonyathe, following the ridges to Mt. John Roberts and on to Loch Ness Well. We examined the Gorge of Ferns, the entrance to which was so narrow one could touch either side by holding out both arms. We came down the ranges by going through Wetootla Gorge to Balcanoona.

We noticed a large variety of birds, including Finches, Bell-birds, Pt. Lincoln Ring Neck, White Cockatoo and Eagles; also a large variety of flowers not seen in the Adelaide Hills.

Unusual items of interest included Scorpions Opaque (colourless) 1½ in. to 2 in. long; Spiders 1 in. long, grey, with long red legs and very strong webs. We also found Bats in dead pine.

Our objects in going to Gammons were:—

1. To go somewhere out of ordinary.
2. Ascertain whether it would be a worthy place for a Chalet along the lines of Bogong (minus snow).
3. Whether there was a permanent water supply which could support a Chalet.
4. Investigate the various mysteries and legends that are attributed to this area.
5. To study the country rather than race across it. However, when it was necessary to step it out we covered 12 miles in an afternoon with full packs.

Some of the area covered had probably never seen man before. The natives won't go near it because the Legendary Arkuroo forbids it, and the white man has never bothered. There are miles and miles of ridges and valleys still waiting to be explored—beckoning to any Rovers with sufficient training and curiosity.

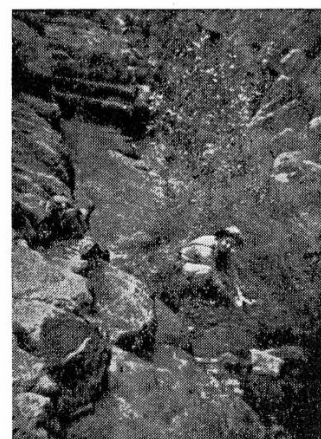
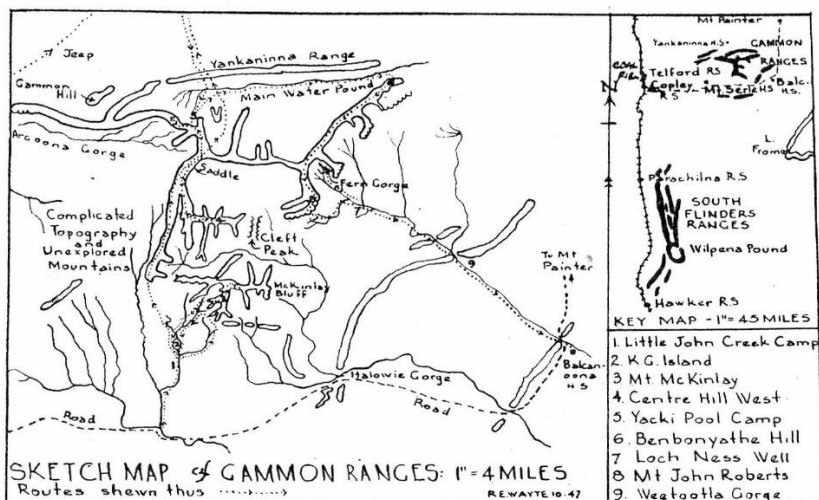
The Yacki Pool in Main Water Pound would supply parties with fresh drinking water. This pool is about 1½ hours climb from the only saddle which connects the Gammon Divide to the unexplored ranges to the South-West.

We found no explanation for the rumblings, even though we drank the Arkuroo's water and slept in a cave in the Yacki Gorge.

We examined one of the black streaks which appear on the aerial photos. The explanation seems to be this. There are long North-South fissures in the rock. These are full of good soil, often quite free of stone—most unusual condition up there. The growth on these strips is both dense and tall compared with the stunted growth on the rocks on either side of the fissure.

We hope to submit a detailed report with an accurate map in a few weeks' time. Meanwhile, here are observations:

1. Studded boots are absolutely essential. Soft iron sprigs in good leather wear best.
2. Long pants are necessary in the vicious undergrowth.
3. Light packs are essential, as minimum water to be carried weighs 10-12 lbs.
4. August appears to be a good time of year, because on this trip flies, mosquitoes, snakes and dust were conspicuous by their absence. Water can be conserved by drinking and washing in rock pools after rains.



In the Gorge of Ferns