

Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park

NEWSLETTER No. 6 - FEBRUARY 2018



This newsletter brings Friends and Supporters of the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park up to date with some developments which have occurred since the last newsletter was published in December 2017. These developments, which are described in more detail below, are:

- Outcomes of the General Meeting held on 23 February 2018
- Meeting with DEWNR staff in Pt Augusta, 6 February 2018
- Scheduled working visits to the Park in 2018

General Meeting 23 February 2018

1. There were thirteen members in attendance at this meeting the primary purpose of which was to consider adoption of a constitution for the group. The draft constitution had been made available to members and the original draft modified to take account of suggestions received for improvement.

The proposal for adoption of the constitution was carried unanimously

2. Another agenda item was possible uses for the Bonython bequest. The original bequest of \$10,000 has earned interest of about \$800 none of which has been used thus far. Committee member Roger Mathers outlined discussions that had occurred at meetings of the Committee and invited comments/suggestions from those present. Suggestions made were:

- Promotion of activities involving interaction between young people at Nepabunna, Iga Warta and Leigh Creek with other young people from Adelaide and elsewhere. These activities to encourage appreciation of the significance of the park. The possibility of involving Operation Flinders was also raised.
- Support for development of a long distance walking trail that included the Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges and some of the route taken by Warren Bonython on his crossing of the Ranges in 1947.

A question was asked about contacts made with Arkaroola. Thus far there have been no formal approaches made to Arkaroola or to pastoralists, Operation Flinders or Beverley Uranium mine

which all operate adjacent to the park and might well be interested in our Friends Group. Contacts will be made in the near future.

Meeting with DEWNR staff

On 6 February committee members Graeme Oats, Roger Mathers and Ray Hickman attended a meeting in Pt Augusta with DEWNR staff Alan Harbour, Arthur Coulthard and Robert Brandle.

Most of the discussion was related to the Weetootla monitoring project and re-furbishment of Oocaboolina outstation. Graeme Oats reported that the set of people who have committed to Oocaboolina have as their priority for 2018 some work external to the building. In particular:

- (1) water tank installation including clearing of gutters and installation of gutter guard
- (2) removal of live athel pine and clearing of dead pine from adjacent to the building
- (3) fence repairs

In the event of us being able to commence work on the building itself Alan advised that DEWNR would be able to meet costs up to \$5000 for work on Oocaboolina completed before July 2018 and also provided a list of tasks that he thought our group would be able to carry out.

The first working visit to the Oocaboolina site will occur 18-23 April and people will stay near the building over this period rather than at Balcanoona which is 30 km away.

There was also some discussion of the logistics of park visits. Arthur intends to make arrangements for us to securely store our equipment at Balcanoona and to have a means of accessing accommodation at Balcanoona if, on arrival, there is no DEWNR staff member on site.

Graeme, Roger and Ray returned from this meeting buoyed by the mixture of friendly encouragement and practical support offered to our Friends group by the DEWNR staff.

Activities in the Park April-September, 2018

Environmental monitoring in Weetootla Gorge

The dates for this year's monitoring trips are:

April 10-15 and

August 23-27

The group will be accommodated at Balcanoona in the shearing quarters. The monitoring requires participants to be in the field, on foot, for up to 8 hours on three days. The walking involved is quite gentle and largely on, or near, marked walking trails that follow creek lines. Much of the 8 hours will involve people spending the time at monitoring points.

The monitoring involves:

- Observation on fish numbers and sizes in spring-fed pools
- Measurements of water quality in pools
- Weed assessment and containment

- Assessment of the impact on vegetation of browsing by goats and other animals
- Recording of sightings and signs of yellow-footed rock wallabies and other animals

During the April trip the group will be talking with members of the Nepabunna community about the cultural significance of the park for aboriginal people and about the possibility of their being involved in our group's activities.

At the time of preparing this newsletter there were five definite participants in the April trip and this will be sufficient to ensure its success. But there is accommodation available for more people who might be interested in coming.

In the long run the viability of this project is going to depend on there being more than one person able to take the lead with each aspect of the project and so all members and interested people are encouraged to consider getting involved. **Do not think that it is a project for scientists only.** Most of the work, while scientifically based, is quite capable of being done effectively by anyone with a bit of on-the-job training and practice. The five people going on the April trip are keen to provide this training for interested people.

An alternative to environmental monitoring for people coming on the April 10-15 trip (or any later trip) is for them to remain at Balcanoona and do some maintenance work there or nearby. At the meeting in Pt. Augusta a number of tasks were identified that could be done in this way. These included:

- a) repair of irrigation systems at Balcanoona
- b) replanting of trees and shrubs
- c) campsite delineation near existing fire pits at Weetootla campground (located a few km from Balcanoona)
- d) sanding and oiling of seats and tables at rest stops.

Pre-trip get-together

There is going to be a pre-trip get-together for the April trip and it will be held at Fullarton Park Community Centre, corner of Fullarton Road and Fisher Street, 10 a.m-12 noon, Sunday 11 March.

The purposes of the pre-trip meeting include:

1. people meeting each other for the first time
2. making arrangements for transport, food
3. forming of pairs/groups to work on different aspects of the project
4. first time participants complete forms required by DEWNR
5. opportunity to learn more about what is involved in the monitoring project and the Balcanoona-based tasks listed above.
6. exchange of ideas about keeping the Friends's group and its projects viable over the longer term.

Whether or not you are a possibility for being involved in the April 10-15 trip you are invited to the pre-trip get-together to be held on 11 March. But if he does not already know that you intend to come please advise Ray Hickman of your intention to do so. Ray's e-mail address is raywen@bigpond.net.au

Oocaboolina Update – February 2018

1 **Funding** - DEWNR has approved an expenditure of up to \$5000.00 before 30 June 2018 on materials for doors and windows on the outstation.

2 **Planned visit - 18 – 23 April**, to commence work on the grounds surrounding the building which include:

- a. Start on fencing repairs,
- b. Installation of galvanised rainwater tank and connecting to downpipes
- c. Commence cleaning of all roof gutters and installing gutter guard
- d. Permanent removal and poisoning of live feral Athel Pines – store on premises.
- e. Clearing up dead Athel Pine for future use or to be burnt during winter visit
- f. General clearing and cleaning of grounds
- g. Take measurements of windows and doors to be replaced
- h. Investigate repair of hot water donkey
- i. Investigate repair of outside toilet
- j. Investigate removal of shed



Above – Repairs to fencing

3 **Accommodation at Oocaboolina** – camping near the building – either tenting or providing your own camper trailer etc. Other accommodation possibly available at Nepabunna



Above - Dead & live Athel Pine

4 Community Centre (5 kilometres from Oocaboolina) – bunks, kitchen facilities, showers and toilet. BYO food and water for duration of trip.

5 **Future 2018 Oocaboolina visits**

- a. Possible dates
 - i. 14-20 July
 - ii. Late August – early September – TBC
- b. Possible work schedules



Above - Tank Stand

- i. July
 1. Commence installing door and window frames
 2. Continue with fencing repairs
 3. Burn dead Athel Pine
- ii. August/September
 1. Continue installation of doors and windows
 2. Continue fencing repairs
 3. Burn dead Athel Pine

4. Look at work on removal of shed, repair toilet and hot water donkey

This project aims to restore a structurally sound building, which currently has no working internal facilities, to a condition where it will be suitable for use by a variety of groups including our own friends group.

Some of the work involved will require trade skills in order to ensure that the building is safe for people to occupy. But there is other work that can be done by experienced people without formal trade qualifications, and then there is work that any enthusiastic person will be able to do. The contribution that Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park makes to this project is going to depend on the mix of skills, experience and enthusiasm that its members possess and are willing to devote to the project.

If you are interested in getting involved with the Oocaboolina project in 2018 you should contact Graeme Oats by e-mail at gdoats@bigpond.net.au If you have skills and experience that you think would be relevant to the project let Graeme know.

WHERE IS OOCABOOLINA?

About 5 kilometres heading east after passing through Nepabunna on the road from Copley to Balcanoona and Arkaroola there is a small interpretative sign about indigenous life (The Mistletoe Bird). The hut is hidden behind a small knoll and about 200 metres north off the road nestled in a small valley and adjacent to a tributary of Mt McKinlay Creek. The photo below was taken from that knoll looking north – Mt McKinlay (Wayanha) in the distant far right. The entry road after rising slightly crosses a very small creek twice before entering through a gate into the curtilage of the hut.



The Mistletoe Bird:- How the Mistletoe Bird Got Its Red Breast.



Awi-irtanha, the Mistletoe Bird loved to eat juicy berries of the mistletoe (vartapi). One day he was busily feeding on some berries near Italowie Creek when storm clouds appeared over Mt. McKinlay (Wayanha). Awi-irtanha's mate saw the approaching storm and called out to him. Awi-irtanha was so intent upon eating the mistletoe that he ignored her.



This enraged his mate and she picked up her waddy (munguwirri) and cracked him on the head. She hit him so hard that blood poured down his chest. Today you can see the male Mistletoe Bird has a bright red breast while his mate is plain.

(Information from a Park Interpretation Board near Oocaboolina).