



Friends of Stirling Linear Park Inc.



Autumn 2004

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Conservation or recreation park?

y 1995, it had been recognised by an enlightened fringe of Stirling District councillors and staff that the Woorabinda wetland was of significant environmental value and needed to be properly managed as a conservation reserve. As this was beyond the resources of a cash-strapped Council trying to reduce the huge 1980 bushfire debt, the logical move was to enlist the direct help of volunteers.

In that year the District Manager of the District Council of Stirling actively lobbied some members of the community to form a Friends Group for the newly purchased Woorabinda Reserve — possibly including the neighbouring reserves as well.

The community members were at first reluctant, having experienced difficult relations with the Council in their earlier battles to save Stirling Park from sale and development.

Nevertheless the volunteer group was eventually formed at a public meeting one wintry night at the Stirling RSL hall. Over 100 people attended, including the Mayor, District Manager, five councillors and five Council staff. The Council staff made a special point of observing that the new group (Friends of Stirling Linear Park) would prove to be a good example of Council/community partnership.

One of the first tasks requested of the new group was to liaise with Council staff in the preparation of a comprehensive Management Plan for the four reserves (Woorabinda, Stirling Park, Hender and Madurta). After considerable discussion and amendment by various Council departments and

committees, the Plan was finally approved and signed off at a meeting of the full Council in May 1996. The Plan (subsequently revised in 1998) embodies a number of principles that if observed in practice would ensure the protection and rehabilitation of the natural habitat within the reserves, while preserving the area as a community open space area for passive recreation.

Since then, our Friends group has gathered increasing membership support and is recognised as one of the leading volunteer environmental groups in the district. Our dedication to the Park over the years, and our work of restoring and caring for of its wetland and bush environments has attracted external grant funding exceeding \$100,000. We have more than matched this amount with our own labour and that of the many volunteer groups who have assisted us.

A cornerstone of the Friends' policy is to always oppose the sale, subdivision, destruction or development of any part of the Park for any reason. Although this has on a number of occasions placed us in opposition to some of the Council's plans, we have always considered ourselves in partnership with the Council.

Regrettably, this partnership is looking a little ragged. The Council apparently is now choosing to disregard the basic provisions of the Park's official Management Plan and its own zoning for conservation and passive recreation only. It is also unwilling or reluctant to enter into consultations with us over many matters affecting the Park.

At the heart of our present difference with the Council is its apparent eagerness to accommodate the special interests of various recreational groups. These interests are all exerting pressure to develop or use the Park in pursuit of their particular sporting goals — all of which will have serious negative impacts on the environment..

We now seem to be standing at a crossroads in the life of the Park, where we have to ask the question:

Can Stirling Linear Park be preserved as an environmental community asset or will it become just another recreation park?

It is up to the local residents and others, who have grown to love and enjoy the quiet pace and simple pleasures of the Park, to voice their own concerns to Council. You need to tell Council that you value the environment of the Park as it is; that you don't want to see the bushlands destroyed or any additional threat to our dwindling animal and bird species; that you value the lake and the water birds who breed there, and you don't want that precious environment trashed by boating or other water sports.

You need to reflect on the walking trails and how you would feel when twenty or so mountain bikes are rushing towards you at speed. You wouldn't want that experience, either.

All of these things are on the cards, given the attitude of the present Council.

Stirling Linear Park was established as a conservation area to preserve existing natural bush and to rehabilitate the degraded parts. If this ideal is to be realised there must be reasonable restrictions on the kind of activities permitted in the Park. To ensure its long-term future the Park needs a firm and unequivocal commitment from the present Council. It cannot achieve its vision without that commitment.

Woorabinda: a Hills playground?

Review the facts:

- March 2004: A year after being banned from Lake Woorabinda, Heathfield High School successfully lobbied Council for permission to resume kayak training on the lake.
 - Friends were invited to a meeting to discuss the issue, but found the decision to resume kayaking had already been taken.
- Kayaking will resume on the lake each Spring —
 the height of the breeding/nesting season for
 many birds. The noise and disturbance from this
 activity will almost certainly discourage birds from
 nesting.
- This sets a precedent for other boating people to bring their craft to Woorabinda for a paddle around the lake. Council will have difficulty explaining why one section of the community enjoys a privilege that is not extended to others.

Hender Reserve: headed for development?

Review the facts:

- August 2003: Councillors visit Hender Reserve as a possible site for an oval, and vote to investigate this possibility. This matter remained on the Council's table of business for five months before it was removed
- December 2003: Council in a near-unanimous vote agreed to support the development of what will be a two-lane sealed road through Hender Reserve to access the proposed Mt. Lofty Community Recreation Centre.
- Neither of the above proposals were put to the Friends for comment. No prior consultation took place.
- April 2004: Council reminds us that the Reserve was gazetted for 'Recreation' in 1985, neglecting to mention that a subsequent PAR ruled that Open Space Zoning covers the Reserve. This only permits passive recreation (no bikes, no sports).
- Council says our present Management Plan is out of date and intends to draft a new one. Obviously this new plan will be designed to allow the type of recreational activities that will inevitably destroy the conservation values of the Park.
 Community consultation is mandatory in such cases. This will be a last chance for the community to voice its objections.

Mountain bikes allowed in the Park?

Review the facts:

- September 2003: Mountain bikes from Heathfield High School on official outdoor education seen in the Park. School ceases this activity after complaints to the school and the Council.
- The next 6 months: Mountain bikes seen occasionally in the Park. Individuals or pairs only.
- April 2004: Noticeable increase in mountain bike riding in the Park. Larger groups are common.
 Five speeding riders scatter a working party of volunteers in Stirling Park.
- May 2004: Two elderly regular walkers in Woorabinda are forced off the boardwalk into the swampy area by bikers.
- A club of 20 riders reported in the Park. Several smaller groups of riders seen.
- An unpleasant incident of 'bike rage' occurs when a group of riders are confronted.
- Council's Director of Engineering dismisses a request to install 'Pedestrians Only' signs at Park entrances. He says that some tracks could be upgraded and 'Give Way' signs installed. Council now seems to be preparing the way for cycling in the Park.
- May 2004: Adelaide Hills Council could learn from the example of Mitcham Council in dealing with this problem. Unlike AHC, Mitcham Council installed signs warning off cyclists in its reserves. The law is enforced. Cyclists disregarding the order are heavily fined.

Progress?...or are we going backwards?

In 2000, a Green Corps team conducted a survey of Park users who identified a number of concerns about the Park and and suggested some improvements.

The following table lists the major items identified and reports on the progress made to achieve them in the past four years.

Concerns	Summary of action taken	Marks (0-10)
Dogs off leads	Council erected DOGS ON LEAD signs, but no policing	2
Dog scats not picked up	Council erected PICK UP AFTER YOU DOG signs, but no policing.	2
'Naturalness' of Park being compromised by environmental impact.	Perhaps visually OK? but too much water-based activity (model boat sailing, kayaking, dogs in the lake).	5
Too many environmental weeds	Volunteers have donated 4000 hours (since 2000) to woody week control and bushcare. AHC and Animal & Plant Control Commission have undertaken weed control.	8

Improvements	Summary of action taken	Marks (0-10)
Improve path conditions	Council has dolomite-surfaced 1km. Volunteers have dolomite-surfaced 2 kms. Council and volunteers built 500 metres of boardwalk.	8
Provide seating	Volunteers have funded and installed four park benches, Council has installed three benches (funded by Stirling Lions and a volunteer).	8
Install interpretive and directional signage	Council installed directional signage. Volunteers with council support installed notice boards and interpretive signage with funding obtained by volunteers.	9
Upgrade car parking area	Planned.	5
Develop the campsite buildings as an Environmental Education Centre	Main building renovated by volunteers and leased to Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network. Used by other organisations, such as Trees for Life, INRM and Onkaparinga catchment Water Management board. Lakeside building removed. Bunkhouse being renovated by volunteers for use as a training centre by Conservation Volunteers Australia. Native garden planned and funding obtained from OCWMB. Work on this has commenced. Woorabinda cottage continues to deteriorate.	7

Lake trail upgraded

Well, it happened sooner than we expected. Council's 'Pedestrians watch your step' signs around the lake had not been in place for more than a few weeks before fresh dolomite was laid on the lake trail.

And not before time, some would say — especially for the unfortunate regular walker who had stumbled rather badly on the path's rocky surface, thus prompting an enhanced level of Council concern.

So one morning early in March, the dolomite

appeared — smoothed, rolled and tucked into place like a great grey carpet. An excellent job — almost too good to walk on. Five stars to the Council workers.

But one couldn't help thinking: When will the first dog...?

It didn't take long. Fresh poo arrived the following day, to remind us responsible dog owners that skulking within our ranks are other owners who don't give a damn for anyone else.

Business volunteers give again to the Park

As the beauty and the environmental importance of Stirling Linear Park becomes more widely known, increasing numbers are visiting from outside our district.

As well as attracting more visitors we are pleased to report that the Park is also attracting more volunteers from outside the district.

Staff from the National Australia Bank Loans Centre in Adelaide who volunteered a days work in the Park in 2003, contributed two more days earlier this year. They have again volunteered to work for two days on 24 & 25 May. This time they will be helping to weed around the 2400 tubestock planted in Stirling Park last year .

Our grateful thanks to the staff for their enthusiasm to do this work — and to the Bank for releasing them (with pay) to undertake environmental support work.

Recent Working Bees

Date	No. of volunteers	Area	Work done
8 Feb 04	20	Woorabinda	Cleaned up gorse and erica from jetty to footbridge.
16 March 04	10	Woorabinda	NAB party removed gorse, broom,longifolia and boneseed at overflow, along dam wall and in the bush.
21 March 04	4	Walking trails	Cut and swabbed broom, gorse and blackberry.
18 April 04	7	Stirling Park	Mainly gorse cut and swabbed on the western side of the valley.
16 May 04	6	Madurta Reserve	Very wet weather. Rain prevented work.



Forthcoming working bees

20 June 2004	Hender Reserve
18 July 2004	Woorabinda Reserve
15 August 2004	Stirling Park
19 September 2004	Madurta Reserve

Waterwatch update

As Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network is now a fully incorporated entity, it was necessary to hold a general meeting to ratify the new Constitution and form a committee. Thus the inaugural Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network AGM was held at Woorabinda on 4th May. The new eight-member committee is Chaired by Neil Beverley, with Lorri Ragless holding the office of Deputy Chair.

Most of the meeting was taken up with procedural matters, but special mention was made of the work of Sheralee Cox, who successfully runs the extensive Onkaparinga Catchment Waterwatch activities from her Woorabinda office. This work entails the coordination of all the Waterwatch site monitoring data as well as providing environmental instruction to the many schoolchildren who visit Woorabinda.

The excellent aquarium displays and murals in the refurbished Woorabinda building also received high praise at the meeting.

In other news: OWN has received supplementary funding from the Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board, City of Onkaparinga and the Federal government for this financial year.

Next year OWN will be fully funded by Onkaparinga Catchment Water Management Board. The Board is also assisting with the cost of transporting school children by bus to the Woorabinda Environmental Education Centre.

The Environmental Protection Authority is also providing some State support for Waterwatch programs.

Friends make footbridge a reality...at last!

Friends may recall that back in 1996 Stirling District Council allocated \$7000 of its budget to build a footbridge over the creek in Stirling Park.

The project was held up because of another grander plan by the District Engineer that included building an earth embankment which could be used as both pedestrian and vehicle access over the creek. We told at the time that the money earmarked for the bridge would be carried forward and available if the embankment project did not go ahead.

As we know, the embankment project did not go ahead — and the \$7000 was never carried forward.

Over the intervening years we have received numerous complaints about the poor state of the creek crossing, especially in winter. These were all passed on to the Council, who eventually laid several railway sleepers over the wettest part of the crossing. This was a big improvement, except when Woorabinda lake overflows with heavy rain and the creek becomes a 'banker'. The crossing then becomes quite treacherous.

While we we waited in vain for some Council action, Alistair McHenry did some preliminary design work for a proper footbridge. But nothing eventuated and the design remained unbuilt.

Eight years is too long to wait for such a simple amenity, so your committee decided several months ago that we would offer to fund materials for the bridge out of our Public Donation Fund and contribute labour to its construction. The bridge would be made from timber and would be similar in design to other bridges in the Park.

However, the decision did not wholly rest with us. Council approval was necessary — the Park is after all a public asset — and a site meeting in February

was arranged.

But Council staff considered that a concrete culvert would provide a better solution because of perceived long-term maintenance problems with wooden structures. Your committee was unanimously opposed to this. A timber footbridge would be more in keeping with other boardwalks and bridges in the Park. All of these structures are built with Permapine. However much one guibbles about its environmental correctness, there can be little disagreement that Permapine is durable and visually harmonious in a natural bush setting. It is certainly low maintenance. The lake boardwalk for example has been in constant use now for some five years and shows little sign of wear and tear. Aside from repairing vandalism to the bird hide in 2002, Council has not had to spend one cent on maintenance to any of these works.

A concrete culvert (or culverts) would require a large amount of earthworks, and would be out of character with other Park amenities. This construction work would almost certainly endanger the rare Mountain Galaxias, a native fish living in the creek system, and there was also the much greater cost of the culvert proposal to consider. It was too much for our budget, and the Council was not prepared to provide any funding for it — at least not for the present.

After amicable discussion, Council agreed to accept a timber bridge, provided that we agree in turn to assist with any ongoing bridge maintenance. This we did, and we are happy to report that the new bridge is very likely to be in place before the wettest part of winter sets in...at long last!

New cat laws

At last something is being done about the problem of free-ranging domestic cats and the damage they are doing to our wildlife.

As reported in the Mt. Barker Courier (March 3), the Adelaide Hills Council will make it compulsory for cats to be micro-chipped for identification purposes. Any wandering cats found without such identification will be removed to a refuge or destroyed. Owners not keeping their cats from straying will face heavy fines.

Responsible cat owners will welcome this longoverdue move, as will conservationists and all those who seriously care about our natural environment and its biodiversity.

Friends of Stirling Linear Park will be particularly supportive of the Council in this regard. The Park is surrounded on all sides by residential properties with residential moggies. And as recent fauna surveys have shown, our patch of bush contains

several very vulnerable native animals worth preserving.

Many owners are aware of the environmental damage that cats can do, and keep their cats within bounds and locked in at night. Unfortunately others are less responsible. We hope the new legislation will encourage them to change their ways.

Bunkhouse restoration progress

Volunteer teams from the State Governmentsponsored Youth Conservation Corps have exceeded all expectations in both the amount of work finished and the quality of their renovation work.

When finished, the bunkhouse will be used by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) for environmental training.

Tribute must be paid to CVA who are managing the project and to Paul Hannon, a Friends member who is employed on the project as a technical advisor. But particular praise is due to the team participants.

At the completion of three months the first team moved on to work on the Adelaide Museum, exchanging with a team from the Museum who will continue the renovation work at Woorabinda.

The YCC teams spend one or two days per week on these projects and learn skills in general building restoration. For the remainder of the time they undergo training in a range of activities designed to build self-confidence and develop skills in understanding environmental problems and their management.

We are pleased to be associated with this program, which is geared to help young people between the ages 15 - 24 gain meaningful employment in the wider world.

The work completed to date includes about half the painting and repairs to the bunkhouse building. and the construction of a demonstration frog pond for use by the Onkaparinga Waterwatch Network as a tuition resource.

Also completed is courtyard paving between the main building and the bunkhouse. The pavers were funded by the Friends.

DOGS ON **LEAD ONLY**

This sign is a Council notice

Some people may be falsely believing that the Dogs on Lead Only signs in the Park were put there by the Friends. We are baffled by this. Although we agree 100% with the signs (and make no apology for that), we did not install

In fact, we were just as surprised as everyone else when Council erected them at the beginning of October last year.

Welcome to new committee member

New committee member, Janet Bryan, has been a strong Park supporter since moving to the district nearly eight years ago. She soon began attending our monthly working bees. Her children also did community work in the Park. From time to time, Janet has also contributed to our newsletter.

Janet trained in the sciences, obtaining her PhD in the effects of aging on people's lives. She has worked for Flinders University and the CSIRO Dept of Human Nutrition. Currently she is employed by the University of SA, assessing programs for treating violent offenders

Janet brings to our committee both youthful enthusiasm and a range of scientific and managerial

Welcome aboard, Janet.

WEED CONFUSION

Awhile ago, one of our committee reported that several young native shrubs had been pulled in Hender Reserve — most likely by someone keen to help rid the bush of weeds.

The native is known as Daviesia leptophylla, or Bitter Pea — a common member of an extensive group of Australian pea-flowers. As is the case with many indigenous plants, the untrained eye can sometimes confuse it with a weed, especially in its immature

phase (height less than 50cm).
Young *Daviesia* is very similar in appearance to immature *Acacia longifolia*, which although indigenous elsewhere is regarded as a vigorous and invasive weed species in the Mt. Lofty Ranges.

Confusing weeds with benign native species probably occurs more often than it should. Wellmeaning walkers see what they think is a weed, and promptly remove it.

Many weeds such as blackberry, boneseed, African daisy etc, are distinctive in appearance and are readily identifiable. But others do bear a close resemblance to some of our valued natives. Mistaking a Bush Pea for Broom for instance is a careless misjudgment, but it does happen.

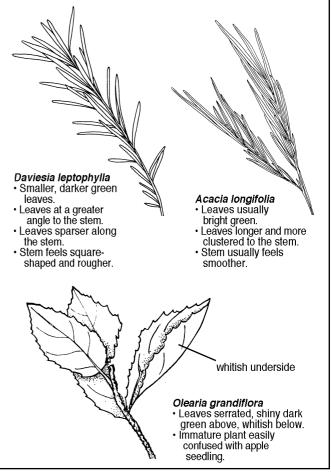
A few years ago, most of a group of rare Mt. Lofty Daisy Bush (Olearia grandiflora) were carefully removed from he verges of Evans Drive in Mark Oliphant Conservation Park. The removalist probably thought they were germinated seedlings from apple seeds that had been scattered by fruit-eating passersby. In this case the confusion is understandable. *Oleania* in its non-flowering phase does look very much like a young apple tree.

There are Olearia growing in Hender Reserve. These plants are an endangered species and only grow

in this part of the world.

The moral of this story is never remove any plant from the bush unless you are 100% certain it's a weed. And it goes without saying that the very best way

to get hands-on experience in weed identification is to come along to our monthly working bees.



No Phytophthora evidence

From time to time, people have looked at the gaunt stringybarks in Hender Reserve and wondered at the state of their health. A group of them beside Longwood Road have given special concern. Some have died, leading to the worrying possibility that the deadly tree disease *Phytophthora* might be at work

Phytophthora is the creeping subsoil fungus that slowly strangles the roots, preventing moisture and nutrients reaching the plant. There is no known cure for *Phytophthora*. Once discovered, it is necessary to quarantine the affected area to prevent it spreading and hope that eventually the disease will run its

However, Stringybarks are not susceptible to this disease. The most likely explanation for the deaths has been the long term effect of the Longwood Road construction. Possibly the resulting change in the local drainage regime proved unfavourable to some of the trees and as a result they slowly withered away. Trees further back from the road show no signs of ill health — although since Stringybarks are not always the prettiest of trees, and often prefer a gnarled and disorderly appearance, some people will remain unconvinced.

Early in April, Amelia Hurren, Anne Prescott and Renata Velzeboer toured the Park, to assess its environmental well-being. All are exceeding well-qualified to do so. Amelia is a bushcare advisor with the Dept. of Environment, Anne is the author of the popular field guide to Hills plant life: *Blue with Five Petals* and Renata is the *Phytophthora* expert with the National Parks and Wildlife Dept.

The trio was impressed with the quality of the remnant bush and the standard of revegetation and other environmental work in the Park. They found no evidence of Phytophthora attack anywhere in the Park (including Hender). None of the key indicator plants showed any symptoms of the disease.

This of course does not mean that the Park is immune from attack. With the increasing number of visitors to the Park it is essential to continue careful and regular monitoring.

Effect of Phytophthora on animals

Phytophthora kills individual plants from many species, which results in changed population densities of some species, and changed plant species diversity and vegetation structure in infested sites.

Phytophthora infested areas may therefore provide less food, less protection from predators and fewer nesting places for some fauna species. This may threaten the survival of some animal species. For example, many species of insect, lizard, bird and small mammal (including Pygmy Possums, Common Dunnart, the endangered Kangaroo Island Dunnart and the endangered Heath Rat) shelter and/or nest in the foliage of the highly susceptible Grass-Tree (Xanthorrhoea spp.). Ants, butterflies and nectar-feeding birds feed on the nectar, and many species including the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (vulnerable in SA) is known to feed on the insects found within the flowering spike.

The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo also eats the seeds and flowers of *Banksia marginata* and *B. omata*, both are susceptible plant species. Ringtail

Possums and Pygmy Possums feed on the nectar and/or pollen of *Banksia*, *Eucalyptus* and other natives. Native shrubs and trees provide nesting sites for many bird species and small mammals.

Some animal species, such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot (nationally endangered), Yellow-footed Antechinus and Bush Rat require dense vegetation cover at ground level for nest sites and to search for food. *Phytophthora* infested areas are generally less dense and their habitat may be reduced or degraded.

Numerous animal populations have already been reduced due to clearing of native vegetation and *Phytophthora* infestations will further reduce their habitat or food source.

It is therefore important to the conservation of many animal species as well as plant communities that the spread of *Phytophthora* be contained.

From Dept. of Environment & Heritage: Phytophthora Newsletter, March 2004

Hills birdlife facing extinction

Half of the 120 woodland bird species remaining in the greater Mt. Lofty Ranges are under threat of extinction. Adelaide University lecturer Dr. David Paton says the overwhelming cause is habitat loss — less than 10% of the original vegetation cover remains

The extension officer with Birds For Biodiversity, Simon Attwood, said it was important that existing Hills habitats were protected. Stirling Linear Park is an excellent habitat. 93 bird species have been

recorded in the Park (87 native species, plus 6 introduced species).

Mr. Attwood commented that 27 species listed for the Park are identified by his program as *Declining in the Mt. Lofty Ranges*. This represents 47% of Hills birds that are threatened with extinction — and this in an area that the Council appears to want to manage for recreation instead of conservation!

Trees for Life Workshops

Trees for Life conducts free one-day workshops in bush management at various centres throughout the greater Mt. Lofty Ranges.

Help ensure threatened species survival by learning how to better manage our bushlands.

For details phone: 8372 0150 or email: info@treesforlife.org.au

Disclaimer: Contributors' views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the editor, the committee, or the general membership of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park Inc.

Contributors to this issue include David Ragless, Lorri Ragless and Jack Benlow.

Visit the Friends at our website: http://users.esc.net.au/~slp/

Not a member yet?

The purpose and commitment of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park is to help restore the Park to natural bushland and to ensure its preservation as a public open space in perpetuity. If you share this vision, why not join us? Active participation in working bees etc, is entirely voluntary. Membership is open to anyone who has the best interests of the Park at heart. This newsletter is distributed quarterly to all members.



Patron Anita Aspinall

Committee 2003/2004:

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Merilyn Browne	
Janet Bryan	
Glenn Williams (Natural Resources AHC)	

Affiliations

The Friends of Stirling Linear Park is a Member of Friends of Parks Inc. We are also a Registered Landcare Group and a Member of both Greening Australia and Trees for Life.









Friends of Stirling Linear Park — Membership application/renewal

I/we would like to join/renew membership of the Friends of Stirling Linear Park (strike out word not applicable).

\$ donation is included. Donations of \$2.00
or more are tax-deductible. A separate

receipt will be issued.

\$..... membership fee is enclosed.

Membershi	ip fee for both
individuals	and family:
1 year	\$5.00
5 vears	\$20.00

Name:	
Address	
	Phone

Please return to: David Ragless, Friends of Stirling Linear Park Inc., 6 Branch Rd, STIRLING SA 5152.