



FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER NEWS

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WORK PARTIES

THE PARKS AND CONSERVATION SERVICE HAS BANNED ALL WORK PARTIES UNTIL 20 SEPTEMBER 2020.



Bluebells on the steep hillside above the Skinner Street houses (above) and Yellow Burr-daisy (below)



The last two months have seen much more abundant rainfall than usual and the very heartening regreening of the landscape. There are some wonderful displays of flowers but, unfortunately, many weed species are also flourishing.

It is sad that group work has been cancelled when there is so much that needs doing to keep the areas that we target for weeding as weed-free as possible. However, we understand and support the ban in the face of the threat that COVID-19 presents.

We were surprised and puzzled that the ban also includes solo work by individuals. As individuals working alone on the wide, open spaces of Mount Painter, it is hard to see what danger we present to ourselves and to visitors to the reserve. We have written to the Manager of the Parks and Conservation Service expressing our concern about the impact of the ban on both the environment

and Parkcarers. We warned that the condition of the parts of the reserve where we regularly work will deteriorate. We also pointed out that volunteers' physical and mental wellbeing will suffer by being deprived of the opportunity to work in nature at a time when there is much else to depress us. As of 17 April, we have not received a response from the Parks and Conservation Service.

Australian Blackthorn in full flower with bees in attendance in the Old Road Reserve, south of the Community Garden.



THE AFTERMATH OF THE HAILSTORM

The wild hailstorm on 20 January left a trail of destruction in the Wildflower Triangle. John Busby, member of Friends of Mount Painter and a frequent worker in the Triangle, described what he saw when he visited the area just after the storm.

As well as the water that fell on the WFT itself, large volumes also washed down from the horse paddocks. This has, no doubt, brought in large numbers of weed seeds (especially Paterson's Curse and St John's Wort), along with the obvious substantial amounts of fertiliser.

The microtopography has changed substantially in many areas, especially on the western side. Large volumes of water washing across the surface have removed all the surface litter down to the hard-packed mineral soil. These streams were a metre or more across, several in the case of confluences. The surface material has been washed into rows, 10 cm or more high, in many places, or into the creek beds. The water level must have been quite deep in places, at least up to 15cm! There are now standing pools of water everywhere. Water is still flowing in parts of the creek beds and the dam by Bindubi Street is full. Time for frogs?



Water flow lines through the woodland (right)



The tree canopies, like everywhere else, have been shredded and the ground is covered with leaves in places.

The central track, which was an old cart track and which had been regenerating well since foot traffic was reduced, has been scoured back down to the former wheel ruts.

Most of the small guards around the recent plantings have been shredded and very few would still be effective. Interestingly, the large orange guards around the eucalypts seem to be intact.

Debris in the gully (left)



There was also some other damage, including a punctured water cube, and the fence with the horse paddock was overwhelmed by debris.

Damaged guards (left)

Fence collapsed by debris (right)



The good news is that, despite damage to the guards, the plants were unhurt, and we had a supply of old guards to replace most of the damaged ones. The grasses and wildflowers are flourishing spectacularly. The frogs responded rapidly to the rain; two species, Plains Froglets and Spotted Grass Frogs, were calling five days after the storm.

BUT, with nearly 200mm of rain in February and March, it was clear that the debris washed into the Wildflower Triangle had indeed contained many weed seeds, especially Paterson's Curse, Amaranth and Witch Grass. Some of the weeds, like Amaranth and Cobblers Pegs, had not been found in the Wildflower Triangle before and others were much more abundant than in recent years.

The most worrying weeds were the target for our March work party. We made quite a dent in them but many remained, growing strongly. Despite this, we are encouraged that the grasses and wildflowers that had been so badly affected by the drought are now looking spectacular.

COBBLERS PEGS



Last March we discovered a large patch of a new weed for Mount Painter: Cobblers Pegs. It was growing densely over the best part of a hectare near the summit and more sparsely further away. With its hooked seeds, it attaches very efficiently to clothes and animal fur and spreads readily, so we found single plants and patches of it scattered even further away across the reserve.

They were weeded and slashed, and their seeds were bagged last autumn, but they are back again this year in even greater numbers and even further afield. The hailstorm even washed some down into the Wildflower Triangle and Aranda Bushland beyond. It seems as though it has now joined the ranks of the many weed species that we regularly weed.

NOEL ATCHERLEY AND BARBARA DALY

We learned recently of the deaths of two Friends of Mount Painter who made important contributions to our work.

Noel was involved with Friends of Mount Painter for 10 years or more and came to many of our work parties during this time. One of his particular missions was controlling African Lovegrass on the Cook Memorial Block, just outside the reserve on Skinner Street. This reduced the spread of this invasive weed on to the reserve which was much appreciated.



Noel (right) woody weeding with Peter Ormay



Noel (centre) at morning tea in 2016 with Gavin and Sarah

He also supported us with gifts of tools, putting up work party notices and passing on interesting and useful information. He was great at asking curly questions and his supply of chocolate at work parties is legend. We will miss him as a long-standing supporter of Friends of Mount Painter and a good friend.

Barbara Daly was one of the founding members of Friends of Mount Painter. In 1989 she, along with some other Cook residents, became concerned at the deteriorating condition of the hillslope behind their homes and wanted to do something about it. She and Philip, our first Convenor (pictured right), were among those who got people together to form Friends of Mount Painter which was one of the first Parkcare groups in the ACT. She was described at the time as a 'get up and do it kind of lady'.



PUZZLE RESOLVED

We were surprised last August to discover that a temporary yard had been erected in the Old Road Reserve south of the Community Garden on Bindubi Street. As the Reserve is a conservation area, a yard seemed out of place. The rangers knew nothing about it but eventually discovered that it was intended as a place where horses would be fed. They also learnt that the conservation area had been included by mistake in the lease of the paddocks to the south which were destined for horse grazing. The yard will be moved but horses will traverse the conservation zone as they move from the existing to the new paddocks.



RESURRECTED!



In 2012 we planted some Blue Devils in the enclosure on the hill's western slope. A few green leaves grew in the spring of 2013 and then there was no further evidence of their survival until ... Imagine our surprise last December to see two flowering plants in the midst of one of the severest recent droughts.

Compiled by Sarah Hnatiuk, Convenor, Friends of Mount Painter