



Friends of Ferguson Park



Newsletter No. 128 – June 2020

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Park Working Bees
First Sunday of
month 10am, Main
Gate, Hallett Road
Stonyfell

Park Working Bee
Dates 2020

5 January
2 February
1 March
5 April
3 May
7 June
5 July
2 August
6 September
4 October
1 November
6 December

Working Bees Update

In mid-March 2020 the Friends of Parks SA (FOP) made the decision that, due to the COVID-19 virus, all organised activities in South Australian parks would cease until further notice. On 14th May, in line with the South Australian Government's first step in easing COVID-19 restrictions, FOP put out a general notice encouraging all park volunteers to recommence activities in partnership with National Parks and Wildlife Service staff.

And so, on the first weekend in June, the Ferguson group was able to re-commence its activities for the first time since February. This included hand-pulling of Sparaxis in the Triangle, a general tidy up of the hay bales which have been used to control erosion on the St Peter's builder's access track, and cleaning out of diversion drains along the sides of walking tracks.

Geoffrey has had two requests for installation of memorial plaques within the Park – one from the Verco family and the other from Margaret Preiss to remember her husband Ken who was a founding member of the Friends group and instrumental in getting Ferguson formally protected as a Conservation Park. The group agreed that both these plaques could be placed in the Park.

Geoffrey has also been approached by the captain of the St Peters Girls' School Environment Group. They are looking for potential projects to undertake on Wednesdays from mid-July to the end of September. There are certainly a number of activities which we could get the girls to do, including weeding and litter pick up.

So, life goes on and we are back in action at Ferguson!

Sarah Telfer, Editor

President's report for 2019

During the past year our group carried out a variety of projects and I'm always pleased (amazed, in fact) how much we manage to achieve. We held 12 Sunday working bees with an average attendance of 9.4 people.

Much of our work has been targeted weed control which is achieving some good results. Projects included:

- Control of Desert Ash (and other species) on Stonyfell Creek where the water coming from the SA Water reservoir remains a problem
- Hand weeding of Plantain, Pentaschistis, Cape Tulip, Sparaxis, Soursob, Rice Millet. The various bulb species were pulled whilst in flower or pre-flowering to weaken the bulb as well as digging up the bulbs
- Poisoning of Kikuyu in Ferguson Creek

Other projects were:

- Watering of plantings at lower (west) end of the Park during summer
- Spraying of Pittosporum to control Pittosporum Bug (the patch of Pittosporum continues to expand)
- Sowing of Cereal Oats on The St Peter's track to reduce soil erosion (the season was too dry to attempt)

- Direct seeding or planting of seedlings
- Rebuilding of the wooden steps at the Ferguson Creek crossing (June-July)
- Maintenance of water drains on the walking tracks
- Installation of interpretive signage on The Triangle project area (October-November).

We thank Joseph Gallasch for his input and support during his time as our ranger (he moved job in November) and welcomed our new ranger Allira Taylor-Wilkins. DEW kindly funded the spraying of weeds in the Stonyfell Road section of the Park which was carried out by Trees for Life contractors and the procurement of a new A-frame promotional sign for the group (first used in May). Our thanks go to Stephanie Cole for coordinating these works.

Our social events during the year included attending Margaret Preiss' 90th birthday celebration in August (as a surprise!). Margaret is a foundation member and supported her late husband, Ken, in founding the group in 1982. A much valued member!

Thank you to all our dedicated members who enjoy coming along to work in the Park and contribute in other ways.

Geoffrey Bishop, President FFCP

Gone missing

'Gone missing' in this instance is a euphemism for 'stolen'. Between approximately 8th and 10th May the memorial bronze plaque on the Hallett Road gates was stolen. The plaque has been on the stone pillar at the entrance since 1949 and commemorates the donation of the land which later became Ferguson Conservation Park to the people of South Australia. The donor was Alice Effie Ferguson whose family owned *Chiverton*, the large house which forms the centre building of St Peter's Girls School.

The theft has been reported to DEW and to the police. Sadly, the likelihood of it being recovered is slim. One really wonders about the selfish, uncaring people in our community. Geoffrey is exploring options for its replacement, the cost of which may or may not be covered by insurance.

New faces

We extend a warm welcome to our new contact ranger Natalie Lewis who attended our June meeting. Natalie has been a member of Friends of Belair since her student days and has worked with DEW in the Riverland and with its Fire Service based at Cleland. We look forward to working with you in coming months.

We also extend a warm welcome to Snir Aharon who joined us in June and a belated welcome to Andre and Michelle Biganovsky who have been members since last December.

News from interstate members

Geoffrey recently received an email from Sarah Machado and Tobias Scheidt who have been interstate for around 6 years, having gone to New South Wales to continue their studies. Sarah says they still love reading about what the group is doing in the Park, in fact she says receiving our emails is a highlight of her week!

Sarah also reported that they now have a little 'Wondergirl' called Amari Moss who turned one in May. They hope to move back home to Adelaide before she starts her schooling, so in the next 2 years or thereabouts. 'We'll be returning to Sunday Ferguson days as a three when we get home!' And, the group will look forward to welcoming you all back with us!

Panic Grass – an historic view

It is interesting to see how our views on what plants we regard as 'weeds' changes over time. One of our more recent grassy weeds at Ferguson is Panic Grass (*Ehrharta erecta*). It is a millet-type seed grass from southern Africa; the genus contains both annual and perennial species, its close relatives being the Veldt-grasses of which we have two in the Park. All have robust, spreading root systems. Panic Grass is a perennial species and is quite invasive on disturbed sites, but less so in intact bushland.

In 1875 the pastoralist John Crozier of *Oaklands* wrote of his experiences with a new grass which he considered

had potential as a summer pasture species. The grass was known as Phillip’s Grass or Panic Grass. The Crozier family had a large pastoral empire at this time but John’s family lived at *Oaklands*, a 300 acre property on the Sturt River at Marion. (The suburbs of Warradale and Oaklands Park occupy the property today).



(L) The plant grows fairly flat to the ground except for flower/seed spikes.
 (R) Immature seed heads which look like millet



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Apart from areas cleared for vineyards and orchards, the property comprised a very picturesque Red Gum Open Woodland which was subject to flooding by the river.

This is part of what John Crozier related regarding this new grass. A plant appeared on a path in his house garden about five years ago. ‘I took little notice of it for some two years, but observed during that time that it grew only in the hot season. I then had four of the roots transplanted, and the roots grew and increased much in the same manner as bamboo. A friend of mine sent me some of Phillip’s grass-seed which I found to be the same kind of grass that I had. This season I had the roots of the plants I had previously

transplanted taken up and planted in three-quarters of an acre of ground. They have all grown, and are now in seed. I have planted the roots four feet apart each way, and from experience consider that the grass is much easier propagated from roots than seed. I can testify to the excellence of the grass. It grows only in very hot weather, and must be invaluable for a hot dry climate. It dies away in the cold wet winter.’

John Crozier noted that Dr Schomburgk had found the grass growing on a pathway at the Botanic Gardens and it occurred at Mr Phillip’s property at Glen Osmond and at Mr Blackler’s at Reedbeds. (John Randall Phillip’s held the original *Kanyaka* run, north-east of Port Augusta, and William Allen Blackler owned *Fulham Park*, a 296-acre estate where he successfully bred race horses). Crozier adds, ‘Now, I would like to know what brought the grass to these isolated places, having no connection with each other, and at the same time. Another thing I may mention is that where I dug up the first roots to transplant it still continues to grow nearly as well as before the roots were disturbed; therefore if it is once in the ground it will not easily be got rid of.’

Crozier’s final comment is very apt. He was obviously perceptive and may have had previous experiences with invasive plants. His description of the biology of the plant rings all sorts of alarm bells as its characteristics are perfect for an invasive plant. As to its spread, the seed is harvested and eaten by birds so it is likely they had a role in its spread.