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Friends of Sturt Gorge Newsletter

No. 30: January 2014

This edition: *Promotional film; Xanthorrhoea; Trails; Work reports; Reminders*

Sturt Gorge Promotional Film

Deb Shaw reports on her recently completed video:

In 2013 as part of my Film and Television course at Adelaide College of the Arts I was required to produce a major piece of work to demonstrate skills in organising, scheduling and undertaking a film shoot on behalf of a client.

Wanting my film to have a real world application I approached the Friends of Sturt Gorge to see if they were open to being my first guinea pig client. For years my partner, Amy Blaylock, has been diligently disappearing into the gorge early on Saturday mornings for working bees, and I thought it would be interesting to investigate and document the activities of this group of volunteers.

At the Friends' meeting in August I presented my idea to make a short promotional film for their website and the group were very agreeable. I then worked in consultation with several members to develop a script and plan the two day shoot.

With the assistance of two other students, Rebecca and Phil, we filmed at both the north and south working bees in late September.

I learnt a lot from this experience, especially the importance of being prepared for the one thing you can't control – the weather.

Our first shoot day was challenging as we encountered a combination of rain, blazing sun and wild winds.

On the second day the wind again played havoc with the sound, making it difficult to record interviews. We persevered, took a break and then relocated.

I was pleased with the footage and sound we were able to record.

On a couple of other occasions I returned to the gorge to pick up more shots for the film. As well as being a great opportunity to practice filming techniques, I enjoyed being in the peaceful space and there was certainly no shortage of beautiful scenery to capture. Showing the film to the group for the first time at their meeting in November was a nerve wracking experience; twenty three people attended. It was good to get their approval, and the constructive feedback enabled me to ensure the final film portrays their image and message correctly.

Thanks to all the members who took the time to be involved, especially David Beaton, Liz Barry and David Clark for being excellent talent; I'm sure you will agree when you watch the short film.

My thanks also to Chris Thomson for coordinating the south side working bee shoot, and to Billy Somerville for the awesome GoPro bike footage.

This project was a fantastic learning experience and I hope my film will serve to encourage more people to get involved with a friendly bunch of volunteers who truly work together for a common goal. I can also highly recommend the morning tea you are rewarded with at the working bees!

I'd never really understood Amy's passion for working in the Sturt Gorge but I can definitely say that I get it now. The Gorge is such a beautiful place and I appreciate the work of the Friends group. I plan to spend more time enjoying the park and pulling up some weeds - now that I have learnt to distinguish them from the natives!

Here's a link to the film:
http://youtu.be/aI1rcYTo0yw

Focus on flora

This photograph of *Xanthorrhoea quadrangulata* (Mt Lofty grass tree) was taken just after Christmas 2013 on the southern side of the Sturt River and to the east of the retention dam. *Xanthorrhoea* are members of the same family as grasses (the "monocots") and these giants start their lives much like other native grasses, ie as tough little tussocks of slender leaves. In time a central flower spike develops and seeds from the flowers on this spike, especially after fire, enable the plant to propagate. The distinctive square cross-section of the leaf accounts for the name of this species

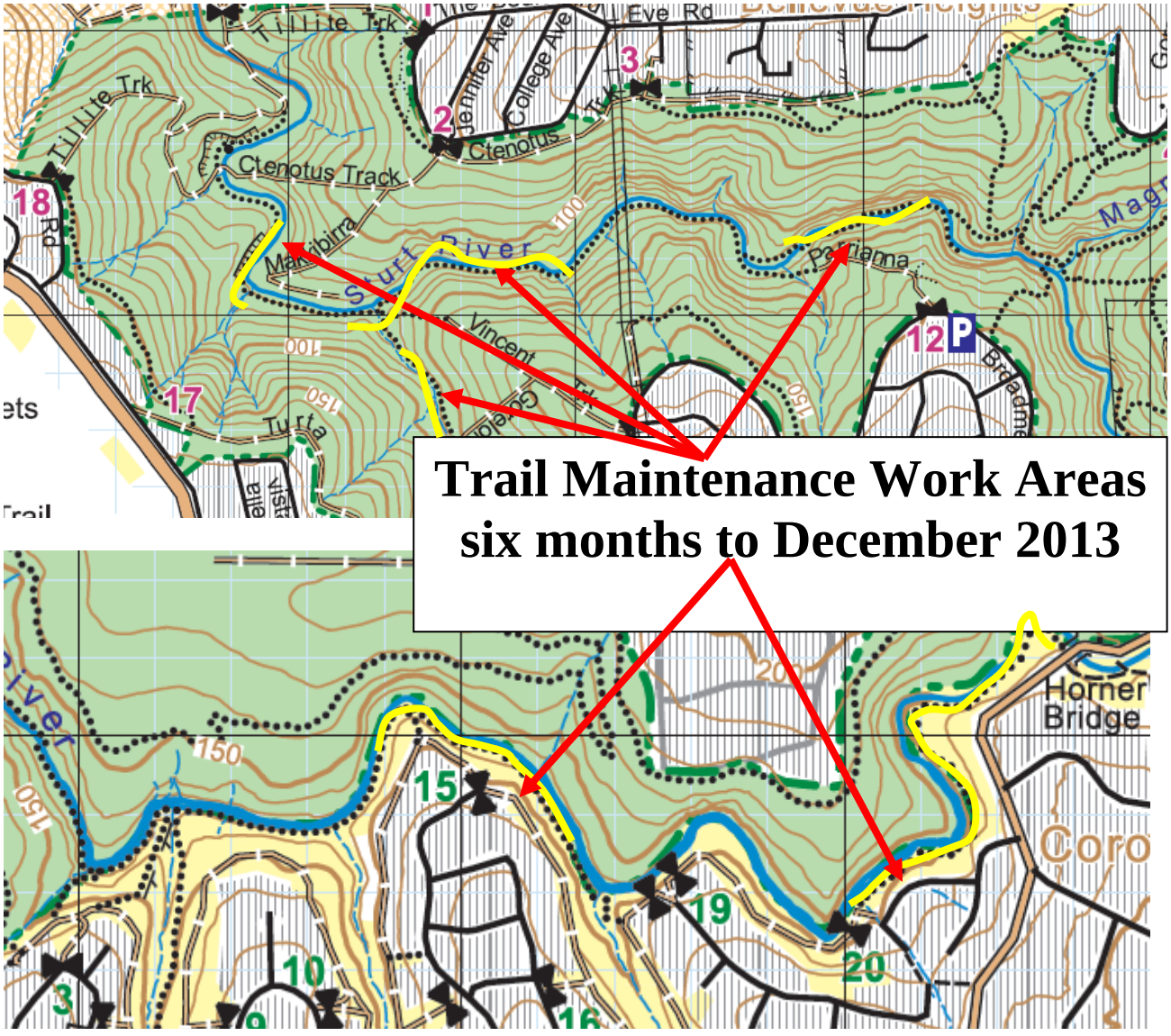
The common name of "grass tree" is understandable when the plant has grown to this size, and I'd be hard-pressed to guess the age of this particular specimen given that it can take decades for a trunk to form and several more decades for the trunk to reach this height. The plant is extremely hardy and grows in all terrains, as a stroll through the Gorge will reveal. And an interesting feature of the plant is its dependence on microbes (*mycorrhiza*) which co-exist around its roots and promote the plant's healthy growth. - AG.

Trail maintenance & development

Bob Grant reports on trails in and around the Sturt Gorge:

There are two volunteer groups maintaining trails in Sturt Gorge with one group working on occasional Sundays and the other on one or two Mondays each month.

The first mentioned group last year completed Stage Two of the Western Link Trail as detailed in our last newsletter and this completes a trail which starts at Horners Bridge and follows the Sturt River as close as possible right through to Darlington, a distance of approximately 10 kilometres.



The Monday group's endeavours have been to improve areas of this trail, and other trails in the Gorge, which have been eroded over time or have become overgrown with the encroaching olives and other unwanted grasses etc. This is an endless task of course and we can only do so much in the monthly or sometimes bi-monthly working bees.

If you have walked on any of the trails in recent times you cannot have failed to have notice that there has been an improvement since a few years ago although you may not be able to exactly put your finger on what that improvement is. Nature tries to claim back its own and without our regular efforts the trails would slowly disappear under the jungle which would otherwise be there.

Trail work during the last six months [see the maps above] has concentrated on a section adjacent to Spring Creek between Starlight Track and the Sturt River, several sections along the river between the Waterfalls and Ctenotus Track, a section of Magpie Creek below Gorge Road Bellevue Heights, and sections of the river below Ironbark Avenue and below River Glen Place along the southern side of the river to Horners Bridge, Flagstaff Hill.

With the completion last year by DEWNR of the new trails from Horners Bridge on the north side of the river connecting with those in Craigburn Farm there are now many opportunities for walkers to explore and enjoy the many circular routes that are now available.

Wouldn't it be nice if money could be found to put a bridge over the Dam Wall to make it so much easier to access and enjoy our remarkable Park.

[Editor's note: Anyone familiar with the river trails will be able to name several spots where Bob's team has improved crossing points, widened trails, improved trail alignment and civilised the worst of the clamber points. And signs of increased use by walkers along the whole length of the trail line is a clear endorsement of the valuable work being done. The river trail really does get better on each visit and I think a vote of thanks is well in order. Just remember to keep an eye open for brown snakes at this time of year! - AG]

Working bees in high conservation areas &

North Side News

Amy Blaylock reports from the north side of the Gorge:

OUR SUPPORTERS

I'd like to acknowledge the fantastic organisations that are currently supporting the work of the Friends of Sturt Gorge through a variety of grants and other contributions.

Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources
2013-2014 NRM Volunteer Support Grant
Project: *Woody weed control in Sturt Gorge Recreation Park*

Government of South Australia

This project is part of our ongoing objective to increase biodiversity within the park, and the expected outcomes are reduced pressure on, and better health and regeneration of, rare, vulnerable and uncommon plants of conservation significance. We will focus on olive, ash and blackberry control within three of the highest priority management units (MU) within the Park:

MU 28 (priority 1) - 10 species of conservation significance:

MU 9 (priority 2) – 11 rated species (and a Federal Community Action Grant 2011-2012 project site); and

MU 17 (priority 7) – the highest rated site on south side with 4 rated species.

The grant will help us to buy new equipment such as a pole hedge trimmer and 'Drill Doctor' kits (for maintaining our drills that get used heavily for poisoning olives), as well as replacement equipment such as pruning saws, drill bits and mattocks. We will contribute approximately 430 hours of volunteer labour as our contribution to the project, which aligns with project plans and funding from DEWNR.

City of Mitcham
2013 Community Development Grant
Project: *Greybox grassy woodland protection in Magpie Creek catchment*

CITY OF MITCHAM

The aim of this project is to improve the integrity of the Federally protected greybox grassy woodland vegetation in the Magpie Creek catchment by removing olive trees from within management units 15 & 17 of the Park.

These contain plant species of local and state conservation significance. Removing the olives will allow the bushland to recover and regenerate. The community will benefit

through reduced fire risk, greater visual amenity, and the ability to see and appreciate the beautiful natural bush setting as this is a popular walking and cycling area. We have been working in this catchment since 1999.

This grant complements our DEWNR NRM Grant, and we will use it to add some more small tools like loppers to our north side collection, allowing us to provide new volunteers with the right equipment to participate in our working bees.

Office for Volunteers
2013 Volunteer Support Fund
Project: *FOSG First Aid Training 2014*

Government of South Australia

These funds are to be used to provide accredited First Aid training for approximately twenty volunteers belonging to the Friends of Sturt Gorge and Friends of Shepherds Hill Recreation Parks.

As much of our work involves small groups working in relatively isolated areas with limited access, it is seen as being of utmost importance that a significant number of members have current First Aid qualifications, enabling greater safety of work groups.

This project is supported by a grant from the Government of South Australia.

Conservation Volunteers and the
Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board
Secure corporate volunteers in environmental projects
Project: *Boneseed blitz off Starlight Crescent*

Government of South Australia
Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board

Conservation Volunteers

We have been successful in our expression of interest to secure a group of corporate volunteers to help us tackle boneseed in the Park.

Initially the focus area was Management Unit 8, off Starlight Crescent at Flagstaff Hill, but in late December 2013 a prescribed burn was undertaken in this area. We will arrange instead for the group to do 2 days of work on an area off the Marri Track. This area covers management units 26 and 24, rated as number 4 and number 5 priority for the whole Park, as they contain a number of threatened species including grasses and shrubs, so it will be great to have some extra hands on deck to speed up our progress.

BROOM BLITZ
Normally the north side working bees are all about blitzing olives and boneseed, but at our December working bee we had the opportunity to blitz several hundred broom seedlings which had sprung up since winter alongside one of the drainage lines off Bushland Drive at Bellevue Heights. Fuelled by morning tea, our band of seven enthusiastic members hand-pulled the lot, bagging those with seed pods for removal from the site. Job well done!

South Side News

Chris Thomson reports from the south side of the Gorge

On the south side the working bees have been well attended and there is obvious improvement in the health of the native vegetation with the removal of competing weeds.

Outside of working bees, several members work quite tirelessly on regeneration projects which they have initiated and in recent years more volunteer hours have been spent on individual projects than the organised working bees. This is most heartening because more progress is achieved and often in areas that do not receive attention during working bees. At these times we focus primarily on areas that have the better quality native vegetation.

On the south side in 2013, we worked 372.75 hours with organised working bees and Dennis Rowe working as an individual has worked 480 hours. He is only one of several volunteers working on projects – a very impressive contribution to the environment.

Several members have continued some really good work along Starlight Crescent as the before and after photos below show.

David Beaton working on the last of the 'wall' of olives

Olives gone!

Most of the flatter areas along Starlight Crescent have been cleared of olives and boneseed. Members have now turned their attention to an area behind Flagstaff Hill

Primary School (along Black Road) where there was a burn 2 years ago and the African daisy is flowering prolifically. Anyone who has been to the site will appreciate the daunting task that they have undertaken.

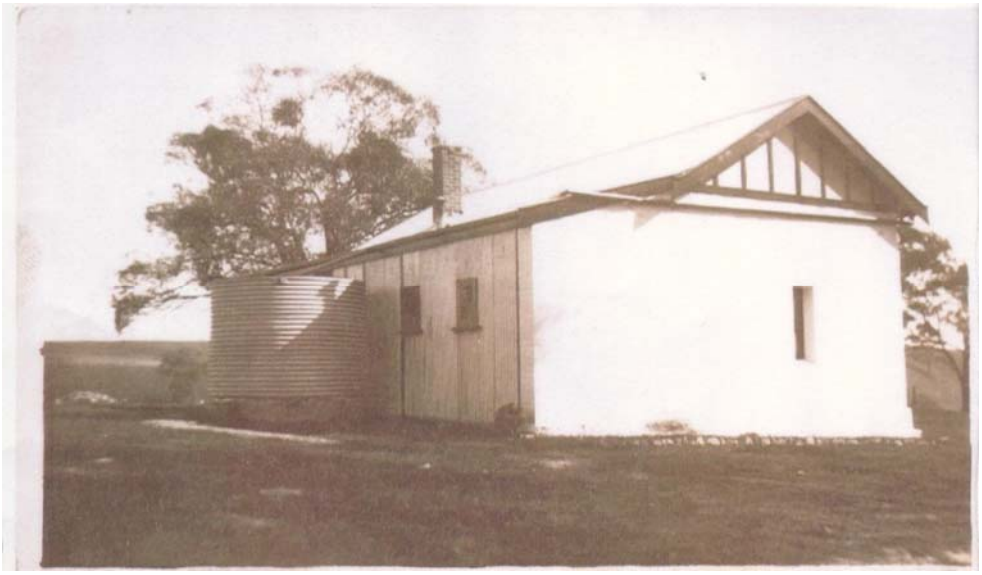
In recent months we have had 2 new members; Chris & Kay Walker join our group. They live on Gorelon Drive and when they have time, they work in the Gorge near the Gorelon Fire Gate. They have completed the 'Introduction Bush Regeneration' Course with Trees for Life and they are enthusiastic about reducing the exotic plant species at their work site and encouraging the native plant species.

Tim Fulbohm (DEWNR) has recommended revegetation with plants from the lily family in the area. This will happen in autumn. Some of the plants will be grown by Rick Coyte and hopefully others will be forthcoming through the help of our Liaison Ranger. The site has a westerly aspect, is very rocky and the grass of conservation significance*, Aristida behriana* is well represented.

Recently I delivered a Parks Pass to Gordon & Val de Rose. Gordon mentioned that he had some older photos of the Gorge which he would lend me to scan and I think they will be of interest to FOSG members.

Newer members may not be aware that Gordon's family once owned much of what is now the Sturt Gorge Recreation Park. Gordon's father took out a lease in 1920 as part of a settlement scheme for returned soldiers from WW1 [for more history of the Sturt Gorge, the 'Sturt Gorge Recreation Park Management Plan' can be borrowed from the FOSG library – contact Chris].

The de Rose family home was built in the 1920s, and it still exists today although it has been added to and modified so it is not readily recognisable. It is located along Gorelon Drive, but is set back from the road.



Gordon has a picture of his mother and a child standing in the gully behind the kindergarten at Renwick St taken in about 1925 and I have taken a photo recently in the same area to show the changes. When the de Rose family sold their land, the land ceased to be grazed and it is from then that the olives began their ‘occupation’ of the Sturt Gorge.

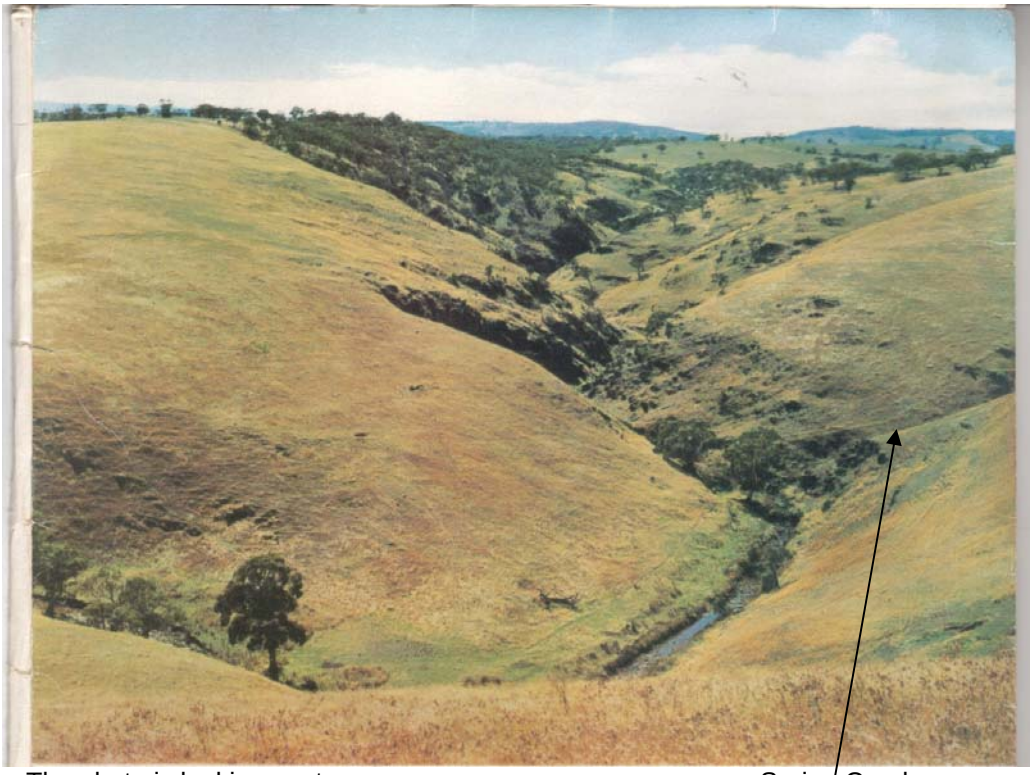
Circa 1925, looking east towards an original fence line & the kindergarten

Same viewpoint - December 2013

The shape of the red gum has altered over the decades: the shrubs in the foreground are wattles and hop bushes that have been planted by Rick Coyte.

Prior to 2007 this area was completely overgrown with olives and was impenetrable. It was only through the urging of Neil Sayers that a Trail Maintenance Working Bee cut its way through the overgrown gully, and that work enabled development of the walking trail that is enjoyed today.

When some of the Sturt Gorge land was subdivided for housing the land developers took photographs of the area to promote the land sales and below is a photo taken in the mid 1970s



The photo is looking east

Gordon is very observant and a collector of interesting objects. Below are 2 examples of items he has found in the Gorge.

Bullock shoes (ox cues)

Scissor style musket ball maker

Reminders

Don’t forget that detailed maps of the Gorge are available from Bob Grant for $10 each. They’re printed in A3 format on long-life paper and are regularly updated to show all known trails. Just the item to have when you next venture into the Gorge, especially if you take friends / visitors on a tour.

And a gentle reminder that membership renewals fall due at the start of the calendar year. Go to our website for details.

That’s all for now – please let me know of any topics you’d like to see covered in the next issue or you can send me articles and photographs which would be of interest to members (Phone: 8278 2646 or email: mgoldie@vtown.com.au).

Andrew Goldie / Editor