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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – March 2004

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. This month we'll start off with a couple of items that appeared in the mailbox: a Friends of Tarra-Bulga NP newsletter for Summer 2003-2004 and a flyer from the Rotary Club of Hazelwood advertising the Churchill Community Market, which will run on the third Saturday every month in the old shopping centre, starting on February 21. Anybody who would like a read, let me know and I will forward them on to you.

In other news, Ranger Rob Howell has attended a meeting at Monash University on February 25, with regard to planning for the Churchill Festival on May 15. No doubt Rob will fill us in at our next gathering. Rob also informs us that Peter Merrigan from the GEST Nursery in Moe has expressed interest in receiving any seedlings excess to our requirements. Hopefully, this means that as you read this, Peter has already received hundreds of Blue Gum seedlings, as well as the leftovers from the other trays! Rob also informs us that some progress may be forthcoming on the addition to the NP of the Crown Land blocks behind Blue Gum Hill. Apparently, the required legislation is due to be presented before State Parliament at their next session, the process of vacating the lease has begun, and the lessee has proposed a land swap of the cleared block at the Reidy's Road entrance for an uncleared block of similar size in the Side Creek gully between Moran's Road and Reidy's Road. We await more news with anticipation!

March Activity

This month we are scheduled to spread the remaining clayballs that were manufactured last year. This will probably be done somewhere up on Blue Gum Hill, so we will meet at the Junction Road gate at 10am on Sunday, March 21, to organise how we are going to get there. As usual, you will need lunch and refreshments, clothing and footwear suitable for the prevailing conditions on the day, which may include heat, dust, snakes, wasps, sunstroke, dehydration, sweating, freezing, rain, mud, thunderstorms, mad four-wheel drivers, blackberries, thistles and many more unimaginable horrors, so just come prepared for a good time. Oh, and Ken suggests some rakes and hoes might come in handy, too.

Those Darned Willows.....!

We were the first ones to arrive at the Braniff's Road gate, an event so unusual we thought we must be at the wrong place. A quick check of the time, yep 10 o'clock, a quick check of the calendar, yep Feb. 15 at Braniff's Rd; where is everybody? It was damned hot, not a cloud in the sky, a perfect day for jumping in the creek. Rob was next to appear, soon followed by Wendy and daughter Karen, then Ken arrived to drop off some books for me, have a quick chat and then depart again to celebrate his wife's birthday. We waited a while, but no-one else was forthcoming.

Down to the ford we went, I donned the gumboots and the overalls, gathered the loppers and the weedkiller and into the water we splashed. Initially we looked for anything and everything that shouldn't be there and hadn't been sprayed, finding the odd thistle, teasel and ragwort, but mainly tutsan in big clumps. After a short time of fighting these, Karen came down with the itches and scratchies, obviously reacting with something in the vicinity regardless of the gloves and protective gear. There was no option but to send her home, while the rest of us continued to sweat and stumble our way down the creek. An hour or so later, after a short break, we decided to revise our game plan, as we were not getting very far with the amount of tutsan along the banks. Our speed downstream increased dramatically when we decided to concentrate on those darned willows.

Rob already knew the location of a couple of the blighters, but to our disgust we still found more than we would have liked, mainly small shoots coming from buried sticks and roots in the silt jetties, but occasionally finding tall, single stemmed individuals that may have regenerated from seed. Both Crack and Pussy Willows were found in about an equal ratio, but dealt with in the same lethal manner.

The expected cool change blew through while we were having our lunch, but it was not so much cool as blowing from a different direction. The Grey Thrush and the Grey Fantails serenaded us while we ate and the big black march flies hovered around us, hoping our attention would waver enough to allow them time for a snack. Back into the fray, we continued to splash downstream, scattering the odd trout, a couple of eels and a nice sized crayfish. Wendy even spied the tail end of a small snake disappearing into the grass, probably a little tiger from her description of slate grey back fading to greenish yellow on the sides with faint stripes. Enough to make us all a little more wary.

We were still a fair way from Junction Road when Rob decided we had done enough for the day. Nobody was going to disagree with him, so we dispatched the last willow we could see, packed up the gear, changed into some dry clobber and headed for the hills. Although we can see the progress we are making over time, it is still disheartening to find more willows every year, not to mention all the other rubbish that we just don't have the time and resources to tackle. Particularly when you consider we are only looking after a tiny patch of countryside and most of the rest of the country gets even less attention.