

PO Box 19
Churchill
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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter – July 2013

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>
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Hello everyone and welcome to this month's newsletter. We have a few things to catch up with this month. At the end of the coming month we will have our Annual General Meeting. This has been brought forward so that hopefully all members can attend. Included is the membership form to complete if you are unable to come to the Annual General Meeting. Also included is a report from Peter about a New Zealand walk and an update from Mike, on recent grant applications.

Grants

Three grant applications were submitted just before Christmas;

1. Blue Gum Hill Revegetation
2. Feral Animal (Deer) Control
3. Chainsaw and associated equipment

We were never confident that we would succeed with the deer control application, due to difficulties controlling public access to the Park and associated liability concerns, and have now been informed that this application has not been successful. The Blue Gum Hill Revegetation application has also been unsuccessful, due to over-subscription of the funds available. However, another application has been submitted to Communities for Nature for this project, so fingers crossed we will succeed this time. The Chainsaw grant application has been successful and John and Craig will place the order and collect our new equipment. We will need to make some decisions on storage and usage protocols in the near future.

Friends of Morwell National Park Annual General Meeting

Sunday 28th July
1.30pm

10 Walker Parade, Churchill

A committee meeting will follow the Annual General Meeting

At the conclusion of both meetings we will have Afternoon Tea – Bring a plate

Friends of Morwell National Park Inc: PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842, <http://morwellnp.pangaeon.net>.

President: Mike Beamish

Vice-President: Ken Harris

Secretary: Beryl Nelson

Treasurer: John Barker

Publicity: Peter McDonald

Public Officer: Beryl Nelson

Newsletter Editor: Darren Hodgson, hodgson.darren.d@edumail.vic.gov.au

Other members: Mary Austin, Wendy Steenberg, Margaret Barker, Cathy Beamish, Eulalie Brewster, Reg Felmingham, Wendy McDonald, Joan Sikkema, Matt Campbell and Kerry Proud, Emma Pallett and Rod Haggith, Australian Plant Society (Latrobe Valley).

To: Treasurer, Friends of Morwell National Park, PO Box 19, Churchill, 3842

Please find enclosed the amount of \$_____ (\$10 per person, \$15 per family/group) being for membership 2013/2014.

Name:.....Telephone:.....

Address:.....

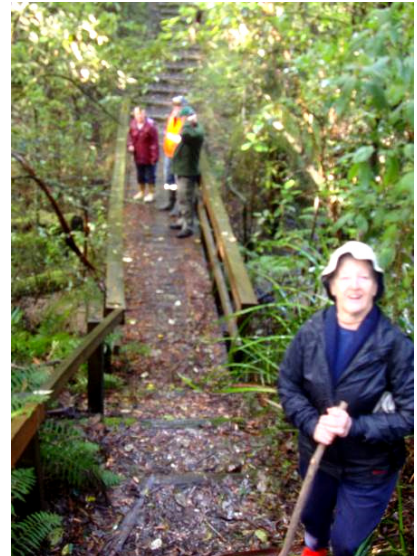
Email:

June Activity report Stringybark Ridge track maintenance

At this month's activity we had Ken, Beryl, John, Margaret, Wendy, Mike, Cathy, Matt, Darren, and Craig. The group met in the Kerry Road car park to catch up on news and plan the day ahead. The turn up was really good since the day was wet and very overcast promising more rain to come during the day. While in the car park we had our first shower of the day. Ken reported about another wet night earlier in the week when he completed a moth survey in the Kerry Road car park.

The group walked into the west boundary and moved to the first cross track across the Stringybark Ridge track. Today's task was to reclaim the cross tracks which over the years had become overgrowth and difficult to traverse. A number of trees had also fallen across the tracks and these needed Craig on the chain saw to clear them.

The first cross track required removal of undergrowth and few small trees that had fallen across the track. The second cross track was more overgrown to the extent that the track was lost in the undergrowth. The fallen trees were larger and more numerous. One large tree had fallen many years ago making it impossible for vehicles and very difficult for walkers to past.



Lunch

was taken early at the centre of the second cross track. At the end of lunch a male lyrebird was seen for the second time that day. It was an opportune sighting since they are not common in this drier part of the park. During the day a wallaby was also sighted. After lunch the second cross track was completed and then the remainder of the track was checked and found to be clear of obstructions. When starting the walk back another light shower occurred, but considering the amount of rain over the previous week, we had come out of the day relatively dry.



May Activity report
Weed Wars – Episode XXXX.....
Written by Mike

We have been doing this so long now, I've lost track of which instalment in the series we are up to! It is disheartening to think that we may not be making much headway in our battle with Tutsan, given the proliferation of this weed in the headwaters of Billy's Creek outside of the Park, but at least we are making the effort.

And it was a bit of an effort to drag ourselves out of a warm bed on a cold, blustery Sunday morning, after a good drop of rain overnight. We arrived in the Junction Road car park to be greeted by Rob, yes Rob, not Craig as expected. Apparently, there is an issue with weekend work in Parks Victoria, whereby everyone except Rob may have used up their allocated quota, leaving us a bit unsure whether we'll have a Ranger in attendance for future activities. Time will tell! Also waiting were Beryl and Matt, with Peter and Wendy Macdonald and John arriving soon after. Ken was the last to arrive with his family in tow, but he was not planning to join us, instead heading off for a stroll with his granddaughter. We knew Wendy and Marg were helping out with some catering elsewhere and Darren was having some time off, so we decided to head for the southern reaches of the Park, despite Rob's preferences for a more comfortable existence.

Just to labour Rob's point, a heavy drizzle set in as we were driving, making a couple of the creek crossings pretty interesting. To prevent further unnecessary damage to these crossings, we should probably opt for walking in to our weeding point in future. As it was, we only drove a couple of crossings beyond the Coprosma Track, before deciding to park the cars and walk the rest of the way. We decided to leave our lunches in the vehicles as the weather was not improving and we thought a couple of hours would be enough for the day. Of course, as soon as we left the cars, the rain stopped!

The weeding itself was pretty standard; some sections of creek were pretty good, others, particularly near the creek crossings, had lots of weeds, mainly thistles and teasels, but occasionally lots of tutsan seedlings. Every now and then we'd find a mature tutsan, with berries attached, and we were always on the lookout for the occasional pussy willow seedling. Water levels were a couple of inches higher than last month, but aside from making more rocks more slippery, it didn't hinder our progress. Leeches were the biggest concern; Cathy found 4, 2 of which were attached, while Wendy and Rob also provided some nourishment for the locals.

By 12.30pm Matt and John had to depart to other obligations, so the whole group decided to head back to the weir for lunch before calling it a day. Some tiny trout kept us entertained at the weir trying to jump their way upstream, but the huge tutsan plant with heaps of berries below the weir dampened our enjoyment. It will have to wait for another day!

THE TONGARIRO ALPINE CROSSING – NEW ZEALAND

During a holiday in February 2013 in New Zealand my wife Wendy and I planned a day walk in the Tongariro National Park which covers an area of 80,000 ha in the centre of the North Island just south of Lake Taupo. This national park is the oldest in New Zealand (1887) and the fourth oldest national park in the world.

The Tongariro crossing is regarded as possibly the best day walk in New Zealand. The dramatic volcanic landscape featured to great effect in the *Lord of the Rings* movies. The Park has three large volcanoes at varying stages of activity: Mt Ruapehu (2590m), Mt Ngauruhoe "Mt Doom" (2291m) and Mt Tongaririo "Mordor" (1967m). The walk starts at a bus drop off point near Mangatepopo Hut, takes walkers across a saddle between Mt Ngauruhoe and Mt Tongariro and some 19.4km later, finishes at the Ketetahi Road. It is a through walk, at least that's the theory.

When we arrived at our accommodation at the rather dated “Chateau Tongariro” at Whakapapa Village, we discovered that due to seismic activity in November 2012, the walk was only partly open and instead of a through walk it was an out and back walk. Still, that was better than no walk.

We had to take a shuttle bus to the starting point as pressure on the car parks has stopped all private vehicles being allowed, so on a cloudless, warm day of 24°C we set out on the crossing.

We started at 9.00am and followed the track along the Mangatepopo Creek up to Soda Springs, having to pass through two large school groups on a narrow path that were spread out like Hannibal’s army crossing the Alps. As we walked to Soda Springs we were in awe of the majestic volcanic landscape in front of us. At Soda Springs there is a toilet that was securely wired down with cables to concrete blocks showing that the weather must be wild on some days. At Soda Springs there were some alpine flowers, mainly buttercups that grow in the seepage.



We then started up the Mangatepopo Saddle to the South Crater through what is described as “boulder field, gravel field and stone field” and is represented by black lava flows from nearby Mt Ngauruhoe. This was a steady climb up to South Crater at 1660m where at this point walkers can choose to battle to the top of Mt Ngauruhoe if they feel inclined, but the climb is largely on steep scree slopes, providing further challenge with no defined track, just a scramble to the top. Even in this extreme environment there are ground hugging plants like species of gentians that survive the extremes of weather. Alpine plants in New Zealand are nearly always yellow or white as they are pollinated by flies, moths and beetles that don’t rely on colour for attraction, unlike bees and birds in Australia.

After a break at the South Crater rim we walked across the yellow floor of the South Crater into the next stage, the walk up to Red Crater. The walk up the Red Crater at 1886m is the hardest section of the walk with much loose rock and scree slopes to negotiate before reaching the top where you can survey the great expanse of all of the Tongariro National Park. The lack of any vegetation makes for a vast panorama of volcanic activity. Sadly, the track is closed at the Emerald Lakes just beyond the Red Crater, so we ate our sandwiches admiring the views, with the added aroma of sulphur in the air as we looked at the track beyond to Blue Lake and beyond the North Crater to where we would have liked to continue on.

After time for reflection and taking photos, it was time to return back along the track to the shuttle bus car park. The walk back seemed longer than the walk out, and we returned to Whakapapa village with a feeling of great satisfaction that we had enjoyed a spectacular walk in a remarkable volcanic landscape.

This is not a remote wilderness walk - there are lots of other people. Many overseas tourists do the walk, so you definitely won’t be alone. Permits are not required unless you plan on staying overnight in one of the huts.

On the lower slopes there was prolific growth of what appeared to be a native heath, but on checking, I discovered that the first ranger of Tongariro National Park, John Cullen, wanted to create game bird hunting at Tongariro just like in Scotland, so in 1912 he introduced Scottish heather to the park and at one stage brought in 60 bags (some 10 tonnes) of seed!! These seeds were scattered and sadly the heather is now a pest plant. Cullen also introduced English grouse to Tongariro, but luckily none of the grouse survived.

This is a walk that is best experienced in person, as words and photos can only give a narrow view of the whole experience. Best put it on the bucket list.

July Activity

Sunday 21st July

The group will meet at 10.00am at the Junction Road car park to undertake track maintenance upon the Blue Gum Hill and Blue Gum Hill spur tracks. You will need to bring your lunch and suitable clothing for the weather conditions on the day.

