

# Friends of Mound Springs

Issue 8 February 2009

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## President's message

Welcome to our new look FOMS Newsletter, No. 8 in the series, sporting for the first time a purpose designed FOMS logo. The new look is the main reason for the delay in appearance of this edition, but it also reflects the change over of editorial duties from Anne Pye to new joint Publicity Officers Simon Lewis and Sarah Lewis.

I mentioned in our last Newsletter (July 2008) that Anne was handing over the role of Editor, having produced the first seven issues following the establishment of FOMS in 2006. I also thanked Anne for the excellence of her work: we will miss the energy and commitment she has applied to the task.

In taking over the role of joint Editor, formalised at our most recent AGM in September 2007, Simon has added to his work load because for the time being he continues as Secretary. If anyone in our FOMS ranks is willing to take on the role of Secretary we would be most grateful. It is not an onerous position, there being relatively little formal correspondence: please get in touch with me if you think you can help. Because of our inability at the AGM to find a successor to Simon as Secretary I am continuing for the time being as President, but as I have indicated previously there is much to be gained by turning over our key office holder positions. I hope that at our next AGM we will be able to secure some desirable changes – please give this some careful thought. Most other positions remained unchanged, with Barbara Hardy continuing as our Patron, Travis Gotch as Vice President, Bruce Gotch as our Safety Officer and Tony Latz as Treasurer. I am grateful for the continuing help of these people. We do have a new Auditor, Elaine Smyth, and I thank David Hanna for his previous work in this role.

We hope you like our logo, based on a stylised mound spring flanked by the bulrush, *Typha*. Since the inception of FOMS we have looked at quite a range of possibilities for a logo and we believe that this one is both attractive and appropriate. It has been designed by Elliott Burford and we are most grateful for his patient and good-humoured help – he prepared many drafts before we finally settled on the one you now see in this Newsletter: thank you Elliott!

You will see from more detailed articles elsewhere in this Newsletter that the past six months have been quite busy for FOMS. Among other things, we have returned to the Peake for additional on-ground conservation works (with more to be carried out shortly), we have prepared a submission on the draft Witjira National Park Management Plan and we have started planning for a field trip to look at the mound springs of north west New South Wales and central western Queensland. We have also corresponded with Bush Heritage Australia about their recent purchase of Edgbaston Springs in Queensland (see separate article within) and we have taken custody of an important set of mound spring files, compiled some years ago by Mr Vladimar Potezny when he was working with the (then) South Australian Department of Environment and Planning. At that time Vladimar worked closely with linguist and FOMS member Luise Hercus and we have profiled Luise and her work elsewhere in this Newsletter.

We look forward to another busy and interesting year and I hope that we will see many FOMS members involved in our activities.

Colin Harris, President, Friends of Mound Springs

## Signage Installed at the Peake

The ruins of the Peake Repeater Station and their surrounds have been a particular focus of attention for FOMS during 2008. In our July newsletter we reported on the work of FOMS members in installing bollards around the car-parking area during the trip in June. Elsewhere in this newsletter, Colin Harris reports on a FOMS initiative to erect protective fencing alongside the access track into the ruins.

In August 2008, FOMS members Sue Black, Colin Harris and Simon Lewis returned to the Peake to install signage at the ruins. The signage has been organised by the State Heritage Branch, Department for Environment and Heritage, and comprises small signs identifying each ruin (repeater station, police station etc) – consistent with similar signage installed previously at the Strangways ruins.

While the bollard-installation trip of June may be remembered by some for its crowbar blisters and sore backs, the installation of the signs was made easier through the generous assistance of S. Kidman's then managers at the (new) Peake, Jim Lomas and Sarah Amey. Jim dug the holes with a tractor-mounted post-hole digger (following a slow trip up on the tractor from the new Peake) while Sarah proved a dab hand on the end of a shovel. Many thanks to Jim and Sarah for their welcome assistance.

The combination of the bollards, signage and soon-to-be-completed fencing comprises a significant step forward in efforts to conserve the Peake ruins, while also enhancing the experience for visitors.



Colin Harris directs traffic while Jim Lomas lines up for another post-hole



Job done. Sue Black and Colin Harris alongside one of the new signs

Photos and text by Simon Lewis

### Mike Hinsliff

FOMS notes with sadness the death of Mike Hinsliff early in the New Year. Mike had a long and illustrious career with the DEH National Parks and Wildlife Service and was a DEH support person for FOMS during 2006 and 2007. In that role, Mike showed a keen interest in FOMS activities and provided welcome assistance. Mike will be sadly missed.

## The Peake – fencing works

Our most recent Newsletter, July 2008, carried a report detailing the on-ground conservation works carried out by FOMS members at the Peake in the course of our June 2008 field trip, and elsewhere in this Newsletter Simon Lewis has reported on the follow up trip of August 2008 to install State Heritage Branch interpretative signage at the site.

The third and final stage of the works will be carried out shortly with the installation of fencing adjacent to the final two kilometres of the Public Access Route (PAR) to the Peake heritage site. The fencing will prevent uncontrolled vehicle access and camping along the gidgee creek line immediately east of the site. It will also eliminate damaging vehicle access to the nearby cemetery. FOMS has initiated this final stage through the co-operation of two South Australian government agencies – the Department for Environment & Heritage and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation – and S Kidman & Co, the pastoral lessees of the Peake. The Government agencies have funded the materials for the fencing and Kidman & Co. will carry out the on-site installation. Up-dated signage provided by the Heritage Branch of DEH will also be installed.

The three stage program of works was developed by FOMS in consultation with the relevant government agencies and Kidman & Co. following the FOMS field trip of 2007. FOMS members on that trip were concerned at the increasing impact of largely uncontrolled visitation on the heritage site and adjacent Freeling Springs and in the wake of that visit FOMS took on a facilitating role to improve the situation, as well as providing voluntary labour for on-site works.

Some visitors familiar with the Peake will regret that camping will no longer be available along the gidgee creek line, but at such a remote site the fencing is the only feasible management option. Alternative camp sites can be found on several drainage lines crossing the Peake PAR and good camping is also available adjacent to the Oodnadatta track near the Peake PAR turn-off.

Colin Harris

## A Traditional Story of Mangkapiljinha, Edith Springs

Arabana people talk with awe of two springs near Mt Margaret, one bright green, the other red like blood. The red spring is associated with a deadly curse that belongs to the Fish and Crane history and nothing will grow around it.

Nearby are said to be rocks that look like girls, a locality known as Thita-puntakanha, 'Bushes Broken'. The crane had become so distracted by his obscenities with his daughters in law that he let go of the bushes with which they were sweeping the water for the two giant Yellow-bellies and the fish escaped. As a result of this a curse is uttered which belongs to the Mangkapilji spring: it makes people swell up and die.

Some say that the curse can be turned back by means of the right incantations, but no Arabana person will go anywhere near the Mangkapilji spring. They say the water is undrinkable in any case.

[From *Heritage of the Mound Springs: the Assessment of Aboriginal Cultural Significance*. Dr Luise Hercus & Dr Peter Sutton in association with Kinhill Stearns, South Australian Department of Environment & Planning, 1986. See also FOMS Newsletter No. 4 August 2007 for additional information on the Fish and Crane history]

## Mount Margaret

Those familiar with the mound springs on the Peake north of William Creek (eg Tarlton, Outside, Twelve Mile, the Fountain etc) have often admired the Peake and Denison range to the west and have particularly singled out the highest peak in the range, Mount Margaret, with its tell-tale cairn (or “cone of stones”) just discernible on the summit.

Following the installation of signage at the Peake Repeater Station ruins (see article elsewhere in this newsletter), Colin Harris, Sue Black and Simon Lewis met up with fellow FOMS members Bruce and Sherrie Gotch, who were looking after the station at (new) Peake while managers Jim Lomas and Sarah Amey were away for a few days.

After an evening of careful planning and (for some) a breakfast of Bruce’s celebrated toad-in-the-hole, the group set off on a sunny August morning, initially following well-trodden paths established by the local euros and donkeys. This proved to be an undulating and circuitous choice of routes but, after a final steep pitch over stony ground, the group reached the summit. A fine achievement, rewarded with excellent views in all sectors. Included in the view was a much simpler access route to and from the summit via the headwaters of George’s Creek.

As part of this trip, the group also ventured into the range following the headwaters of Hawker Creek to view Edith Spring.

Edith Spring is almost certainly a local seepage area at the base of the range rather than a mound spring and comprises small wetland areas in a delightful gorge setting. However, it is also a trap for the unwary. There were many Euro skeletons around the spring: clearly the Euros had come in for a drink at this semi-enclosed location and had fallen prey to the local dingo population: a situation exacerbated by the drought conditions which had prevailed in recent years. It is believed that similar predation pressures contributed to the recent extinction of the remnant black-footed rock wallaby colony in this locality.



Mt Margaret, highest peak in the Peake and Denison Range



At the summit. Colin, Sue, Simon, Sherrie and Bruce



The group at Edith Spring

Photos and text by Simon Lewis

## Draft Management Plan, Witjira National Park

In late 2008, the SA Department for Environment and Heritage released, for public comment, the Draft Management Plan for Witjira National Park. A feature of the park is the internationally recognised Dalhousie Mound Springs. With the current arrangements with Friends groups, Dalhousie Springs are primarily of interest to the Friends of the Simpson Desert. However, FOMS also has a clear interest and, following an invitation to FOMS members to provide comment, has forwarded a brief submission to DEH.

## Draft Management Plan – Witjira (cont'd)

The FOMS submission commended DEH on a very comprehensive and detailed planning document and also included specific comment on the following.

**Section 6.3 Living on the Park – Homelands.** While acknowledging the importance of the homelands within Witjira, there may be associated issues with introduced animals and plants that need to be carefully managed.

**Section 7. Management Zones.** FOMS would like to see some clearer statements about the use of designated tracks (and any new track development) in the Conservation Zone

**Section 8. Managing Natural Heritage.** The draft management plan contains relatively little detail regarding strategies for protecting the land systems of the park as part of regional natural resource management initiatives

**Section 12. Managing Exploration and Mining.** This is often a contentious matter and it is noted that all on-ground prospecting and exploration activities are prohibited in the Dalhousie Springs Zone. One further strategy that could be included is to ensure that any disturbance associated with exploration and mining in the park is accompanied by actions to achieve a net environmental gain.

Following consideration of submissions by DEH and the Witjira National Park Co-management Board, all submissions and relevant advice will be forwarded to the Minister for Environment and Heritage through the SA National Parks and Wildlife Council. The Minister will eventually adopt the management plan, with or without alteration.

Simon Lewis

## Celebration of a Mound Spring

In the 1850's, the route to the far northern areas of the state was not well defined. Government surveyor Samuel Parry had penetrated as far north as today's Dulkaninna Station on the Birdsville Track. Police Commissioner Warburton and explorers Babbage and Stuart had journeyed extensively to the north-west of Lake Torrens. The route to the north was partly opened up when the myth of the Horseshoe Lake had been dispelled in 1858.

The finding of a mound spring on 13th April 1859 was the next significant event in opening up the north. Joseph Albert Franz David Herrgott was a member of John McDouall Stuart's second expedition when he discovered a spring complex, which was subsequently named after him. One could be forgiven for some fascination with name of the discoverer – he has variously been known as Herggott, Herrgolt, and Hergott, but I'll settle for David Hergott.

The discovery of the springs established a new route, which is still in use today. From the Lyndhurst/Mt Serle region travellers now could proceed north to Hergott Springs, and then turn west towards William Creek and Oodnadatta – the route taken by Stuart and his party following the finding of Hergott Springs.



## Celebration of a Mound Spring (cont'd)

The waters of the spring were immediately used by graziers but when Governor MacDonnell visited the spring later in 1859, he was disgusted by its poor state and suggested it be fenced.

The township later established to the south also assumed the name of Hergott Springs. Following a government insistence that names of Germanic influence be altered in the First World War, the township became Marree in 1918.

In a collaborative project, the John McDouall Stuart Society and the Marree Progress Association plan to erect an interpretative cairn at the springs. This will enable a better understanding of the relevance of the springs for visitors, and will mark the 150th anniversary of Hergott's discovery.

Photo and text by Rick Moore

## Luise Hercus – linguist and FOMS member

A regular and popular feature of the first seven Newsletters compiled by former Newsletter editor Anne Pye has been cameo accounts of Aboriginal cultural tradition and stories associated with the mound springs.

Anne compiled the cameos from the seminal work of Luise Hercus, a distinguished linguist and recorder of Aboriginal tradition. Now in her 80s, Luise was raised in Munich in pre-World War 2 Germany. At Oxford, where she excelled as a scholar and became a specialist in Sanskrit, she met her husband and migration to Melbourne followed. In the 1960s she commenced research into the remaining knowledge of Victorian languages. From there her work took her to Port Augusta and beyond, working with some of the last great custodians of traditional language and lore. One of the most notable of these was Mick McLean, Irinjili, a former head stockman on Stuart Creek Station and the last song-man of the southern Simpson Desert.

From many long field trips with McLean and other custodians she gathered a rich store of songs and tradition about the desert country and the adjacent mound springs. In the early 1980s, funding from the South Australian and Commonwealth governments provided an opportunity for her to draw together much of her mound springs material and in 1985, with co-author Peter Sutton, it appeared as a major report, *The assessment of Aboriginal cultural significance of mound springs in South Australia*. For those fortunate enough to have access to this report it is an astonishingly rich compendium, but appearing as it did as part of a larger (and largely internal) South Australian government assessment of the heritage of the mound springs (*Heritage of the Mound Springs*, SA Department of Environment & Planning, 1985) it has never been widely available.



Luise Hercus talking with the late Binge Lowe, near Mt Dare Station, about Dalhousie Springs

## Luise Hercus – linguist and FOMS member (cont'd)

From her property outside of Canberra and her academic base at the Australian National University, Luise continues to take an active interest in desert and mound springs traditions, taking part as recently as last year in an archaeological and ethnographic expedition to the Simpson Desert. Luise also takes an active interest in FOMS and has corresponded with us about material in our Newsletter. She was particularly interested in the account of our 2007 visit to Tarlton Spring and a nearby spring that we suspect is Stuart's Spring of Hope (see article by Rick Moore in FOMS Newsletter No. 4 August 2007). She wrote:

*I do not know whether that Spring outside the [Tarlton] enclosure is Stuart's Spring of Hope or not ....[but what] ....I do know with absolute certainty is that this spring is the **proper Yatyaparranha**, the spring that Mick McLean led us to in September 1976. It is a very special place – it is the place where the Fish and Crane story starts, it is the place where the Fish came out of the ground. I have since been back there with senior Arabana people .... all now deceased.*

More recently (August, 2008) Luise has forwarded to FOMS for safekeeping an important set of resource documents put together by Vladimar Potezny, a former senior technical officer in the (then) South Australian Department of Environment and Planning and a field colleague who travelled extensively with Luise in the Simpson Desert and mound springs country. The Potezny material contains a great deal of archival and technical information on many of the South Australian springs and FOMS will be pleased to give it the security requested by Vladimar and Luise.

Colin Harris

*The biographical detail above is taken from an article by Nicolas Rothwell "Living Ark" in the Weekend Australian 17-17 August 2008.*

## Edgbaston Station Queensland – important conservation purchase

Like South Australia, Queensland has many mound springs of biodiversity significance. Some of the most important of these occur on *Edgbaston Station* in central western Queensland and in a far-reaching move the station has been purchased recently by Bush Heritage Australia.

Dr Rod Fensham of the Queensland Herbarium, who has been active in documenting Queensland's mound springs over the past decade, considers the Edgbaston springs to be supremely important, describing them recently 'as the most important conservation site in arid Australia'. In acknowledging that this may be seen as an audacious claim, he has pointed to the extraordinarily high number of endemic plants and animals present. Included in the endemic listings are four plant species, two fish species, twelve freshwater snail species and a number of currently undescribed invertebrates. One of the endemic fish species, the redfin blue-eye, is restricted to only four pools and is considered to be one of, if not *the* most endangered species of fish in Australia.

## Edgbaston Station Queensland (cont'd)

Located 140 km north east of Longreach, the 8100 ha property was purchased by Bush Heritage Australia with the assistance of Australian Government funding. Bush Heritage Australia itself is a not for profit private organisation established to purchase and manage areas of high biodiversity significance throughout Australia. Based in Melbourne, it currently owns and manages 31 reserves with a total area of just under one million hectares. In South Australia it has two reserves, *Boolcoomatta* and *Bon Bon* in the north east and north west pastoral districts respectively.

Bush Heritage Australia is now setting about the management of Edgbaston and one of the issues to be faced, declining flow rates because of a reduction in aquifer pressure, will be thoroughly familiar to those of us involved with South Australia's mound springs. Other pressures, including the presence of feral pigs and the invasive spread of exotic plants such as mesquite and parkinsonia, are more distinctively Queensland in their character. One of the most worrying problems is the threat posed to the endemic fish populations by the introduced plague minnow.

In recognition of the importance of Edgbaston, FOMS members present at our Annual General Meeting held in October 2008 resolved to congratulate Bush Heritage Australia on the purchase and to donate \$100 towards acquisition and management costs: several FOMS members have also made private donations.

For more information on Bush Heritage Australia and the Edgbaston purchase see <http://www.bushheritage.org.au>

Colin Harris

## Proposed FOMS Trip, 2009 – Interstate

Since its establishment in 2006 FOMS has organised several field trips, all to the mound springs between Marree and Oodnadatta. This geographical focus is consistent with the aims and objectives of FOMS, but FOMS also has a national interest in mound springs and quite a number of its members are located interstate.

With this broader national interest in mind, consideration is being given to making the principal FOMS field trip for 2009 a visit to the springs of north western New South Wales and central western Queensland.

Of necessity, such a trip will be rather different to those that been undertaken to the Far North of South Australia in recent years. The distances to be travelled are considerable and although an itinerary has not yet been put together it is likely that at least two weeks will be needed. It is also likely to be a little earlier than FOMS trips to date – some time in May is most likely.

## Proposed FOMS Trip, 2009 (cont'd)

This promises to be an exciting opportunity to visit springs unfamiliar to most South Australian FOMS members. A number of the sites likely to be visited in Queensland are of national conservation significance and although similar in many ways to our own springs they also have important differences. As reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, one of the most important groupings of springs in Queensland, Edgbaston, has been purchased recently by the private conservation company *Bush Heritage Australia*.

With field contacts in both New South Wales and Queensland available to provide local expertise, this proposed trip offers something different for FOMS members. It will also provide an opportunity for some of our interstate members to more readily join us on our annual field trip.

***To help gauge the likely level of participation we ask that interested FOMS members get in touch with either Colin Harris or Simon Lewis (contact details at the rear of this Newsletter) by 20 March 2009.***

## Friends of Mound Springs

If you wish to become a member, please send \$10 together with your name, phone number, postal and email addresses to Tony Latz, Treasurer of FOMS, 10 Waratah Way, Stonyfell SA 5066. Membership runs with the financial year.

### OFFICE-BEARERS and RELEVANT CONTACT DETAILS

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