

# Friends of Mound Springs

**Issue 10 December 2009**

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## **President's message**

This is a special edition of the Friends of Mound Springs Newsletter. As you can see below, FOMS' efforts in on-ground conservation and interpretation work at the Peake Overland Telegraph Repeater Station have been recognised and rewarded by the SA Department for Environment and Heritage.

2009 has been another good year for FOMS and we have appreciated your input, company and support. 2010 is shaping up to be equally interesting and we wish you all the best for an enjoyable and safe Christmas and New Year.

Colin Harris,

President, Friends of Mound Springs

## FOMS wins Major Award

At the 2009 South Australian Friends of Parks Forum held recently FOMS was presented with one of three prestigious awards from the Department for Environment and Heritage.

The award presented to FOMS, for outstanding achievement by a Friends group, was in recognition of the on-ground conservation and interpretation work that FOMS has been carrying out at the Peake Overland Telegraph Repeater Station near Oodnadatta in the Far North of the State. When FOMS first visited the site in 2007 it was concerned about the impact of an ever-increasing number of visitors on what is a nationally significant heritage site, the Peake being listed on both the South Australian and Australian heritage registers.

In 2008 FOMS commenced on-ground conservation works aimed at more effectively managing visitor impacts at the site, whilst at the same time explaining more effectively to visitors why the site is nationally significant. The work continued this year and the erection of two kilometres of fencing in the next few weeks will mark completion of the physical protection works. Subject to funding, self-guided walking tracks will be marked next year and interpretative information provided to identify and explain features of interest along the walks.

A feature of the work has been that it involves a broadly based partnership between FOMS, the Heritage Branch of DEH, S Kidman & Co as pastoral lessees of the land, the Pastoral Programme of the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation and the Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board. It is believed that the strength of this partnership was one of the key factors in the decision to present FOMS with this award, the citation accompanying the award noting:

*The most productive aspect of the project has been the partnership model. Without engaging partners from within and outside of government it would have been impossible for the Friends to undertake the work. At the same time, without the Friends undertaking its role of consulting with key parties, encouraging involvement and developing a programme of works acceptable to all interests, the work would not have been undertaken and the nationally significant heritage values of the site would have been further compromised.*

The award was presented to FOMS President Colin Harris by the Hon Jay Weatherill, South Australian Minister of Environment and Conservation, at the Forum Dinner on 31 October 2009. It is intended that \$1250 accompanying the award will be used for further work at the Peake and also at Strangways Springs Overland Telegraph Repeater Station.



Minister Jay Weatherill presents the DEH Award to FOMS President Colin Harris

## FOMS wins Major Award cont.

It is pleasing that FOMS has gained this recognition only a few years after its formation and we look forward to developing further work programmes that contribute to the better management of the mound springs of our Far North.

The two other recipients of DEH awards were Friends of Scott Creek Conservation Park and Friends of Parks KI, Western Districts.

## Hazards of the Mound Springs

A short working visit to the Oodnadatta Track region of the Mound Springs of South Australia had been arranged for the second last week of September, 2009. Bobby Harris, Dean Harris and Colin Harris (no; they are not related) met at William Creek along with Simon Lewis, Jim Mesnil and Rick Moore.

Two nights were duly spent at The Peake Overland Telegraph Repeater Station ruins. It was warm, trending to hot but the work Colin and Simon had arranged was not too onerous, and the men had some light evening refreshments, so all was well. Prior to departing from Adelaide there had been some discussion about the strong possibility of hot days so late in the "season". In due course, after the men had much pre-dinner grazing and re-hydrating, Colin got onto the satellite phone and gathered a number of weather reports, subsequently advising that storms were impending right across the state. Some of the men were inclined to be quietly sceptical – experience suggested that winter westerly weather patterns are not strong local influences this far north.

However, when one travels in the bush with Harris, C, it pays to listen and stand to attention. Colin took these forecasts seriously, and he was soon to be proven of sound judgement.

By noon the next day all the men were at Francis Swamp, watching and experiencing storms all around. Francis Swamp is a large mass of springs, vents and salty ground south of Anna Creek homestead. Colin decided to call a halt to planned activities. It was pretty unpleasant with strong winds and cutting sand in faces and shirt fronts. Simon & Colin headed south to the safety and comfort of a deserted fettlers cottage at Beresford siding.

The rest of the men had a plan to visit Kekwick Springs, Kekwick Hill and Kekwick Pile. (Poor Kekwick; he must have been uncomfortable with piles in all those saddle bound miles, bringing up the rear of John McDouall Stuart's party.....). That direction lay north, and to the west of the Track, on the northern boundary of Nilpinna Station. Stopping to rest legs which had been folded into vehicle footwells, the men stepped out into heat and, surprisingly, calm environment – with the flies, of course. This was a signal of things to come which was at that moment not recognised. Eventually that signal was noted as the quiet moment before all hell breaks loose.

The men arrived at The Peake homestead, and Bobby Hunter looked glad they had arrived. He told the men that he was scared of electrical storms. Straight away a bolt of lightning threw itself down a few meters away, followed immediately by loud thunder. All the men started, but none more than Bobby. He was not enjoying the event. From the corrugated iron fence of The Peake homestead the men watched a violent dark purple mass of clouds race over the airstrip, about a kilometre to the west. The cloud mass picked up incredible amounts of dirt and sand, rolling along in a high wave before the storm front. The men decided it was exciting to watch raw nature.

## Hazards of the Mound Springs cont.

But without warning the storm turned 180 degrees and engulfed the homestead in gritty red dirt. It penetrated everything; closed doors and windows only meant that the deposit left after a vicious hour was one centimetre less than unprotected areas. Bobby's curry on the stove did not, unfortunately, have a lid on it, so tea later that evening was also slightly gritty.

The men wondered out loud about Simon and Colin's safety. This was one of those legendary outback dust storms, and days later the Oodnadatta mob said it was as bad as they had seen in 30 to 40 years. Trevor Williams, next door at Nilpinna station, recorded even more spectacular scenes than those seen at The Peake homestead. Later the men discovered that the savvy Colin & Simon had scarpered to Roxby Downs, thence to Woomera, and hunkered down in an hotel.

Morning brought clear skies, and the pelting rain which followed the wind, dirt and storm had delivered 9 mm into the rain gauge. However, the station tracks the men were driving on became too difficult for safe travel, so before more mess was made to the Nilpinna roads, the men turned and camped amongst gidgee in Bungadillina Creek. They did not see those Kekwick features.

Returning to Adelaide, the men discussed and appreciated their experience. A few days later, so did the eastern seaboard of Australia. The press delivered strong visuals of what had begun around the men and was later deposited along the coastline. It was the talk of the nation and of on-line chat rooms, where increasingly horrendous pictures were posted.

Such are the hazards of life in the Mound Springs country.

By Rick Moore



Looking west, from the fence at The Peake homestead.



Nilpinna dust storm front – courtesy T Williams.

## SA Arid Lands NRM Plan released for Community Consultation

FOMS members may recall an earlier newsletter item regarding the development of a Natural Resources Management (NRM) plan by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board. The SA Arid Lands Board is one of eight NRM Boards across South Australia. Each board is developing, or has developed, a comprehensive NRM plan setting out priorities and programs for natural resources management. This covers such aspects as management of water resources, soils, native plants and animals and geological features. The draft regional NRM plan includes a general management strategy covering the next decade and a more detailed business plan covering actions, budgets etc for the next three years.

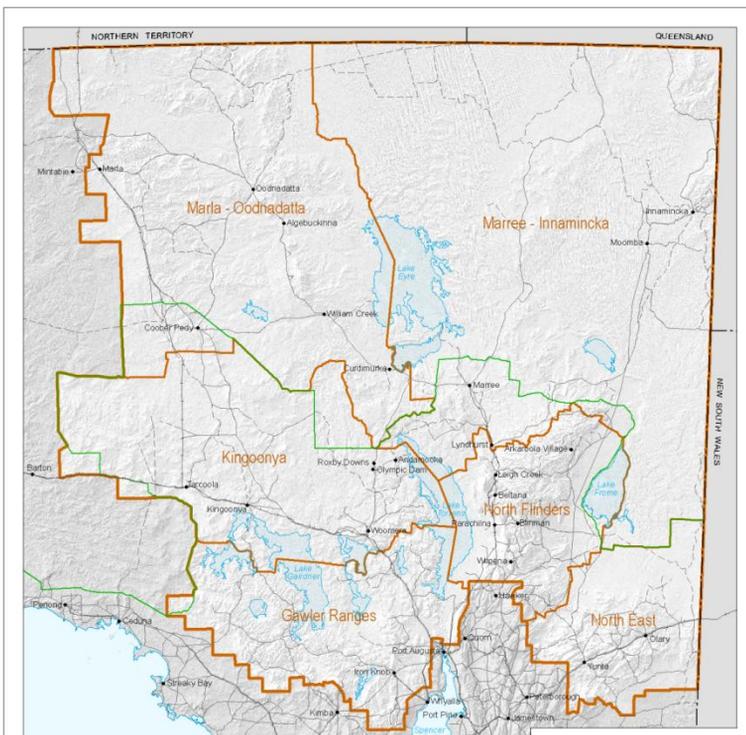
An important part of the plan development stage is a period of public consultation when anyone interested can comment on the draft version of the plan before it is finalised. The draft SA Arid Lands NRM plan was released for public consultation on 26 October 2009.

The SA Arid Lands NRM Board has been proactive in promoting discussion and feedback about the draft plan and has held community forums at Lyndhurst, Roxby Downs, Coober Pedy, Nonning, Yunta and Adelaide.

The draft plan is of direct interest to FOMS as it cites the maintenance of the Great Artesian Basin and, more specifically, the maintenance and improvement of mound springs, as an important priority.

The draft regional NRM plan and feedback form are available on the Board's website – [www.saalnrm.sa.gov.au](http://www.saalnrm.sa.gov.au) – or by calling the Board's Port Augusta office on (08) 8648 5977.

Written submissions must be received by the Board by 29 January 2010. FOMS intends to prepare a group submission but all are invited to have a look through the draft NRM plan and provide individual comment.



The SA Arid Lands NRM Region, showing sub-regional Group areas

## SA Arid Lands NRM Board to look at Grazing Management of Wetlands

The SA Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board has initiated a project to investigate past and present grazing practices affecting GAB springs and the riparian wetlands of the Neales catchment in Far North South Australia. This project aims to further develop the management strategy being developed for the Algebuckina Waterhole and the Neales catchment. It will also assist in management strategies relating to the GAB springs (mound springs).

This is a multi-faceted project including the following:

1. A literature review relating to the stock grazing of riparian wetlands and GAB springs
2. A targeted review of *Phragmites australis* and its ecology in SA mound springs with particular focus on the management of Phragmites where it is impacting on other spring features or biodiversity values
3. A stakeholder survey relating to the features and values of GAB springs and riparian wetlands, with particular focus on developing guidelines and strategies for optimum grazing management

Many FOMS members will be aware of the proliferation of reeds (*Phragmites*) and, to a lesser extent, bulrushes (*Typha*) at a number of mound springs where grazing by stock has been excluded. Several springs fenced in the 1980s by DEH (e.g. Coward, Outside, Twelve Mile, the Fountain and Big Perry) have exhibited this trend, as well as other unfenced springs, such as at Finniss Springs / Hermit Hill, where de-stocking has occurred. There are signs that this proliferation of reeds is having an impact upon other native plants and animals, including the endangered *Eriocaulon carsonii* at Hermit Hill.

The SA Arid Lands NRM Board's project should provide useful information to assist the future management of mound springs and other arid zone wetlands.

## 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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