President’s message

With the heat of summer behind us FOMS is now well into its 2010 program and it promises to be another busy year. Our first work trip has been undertaken, another will leave shortly and planning for self guided walks at the Peake and Strangways is well under way.

An account of the first work trip for the year appears elsewhere in this Newsletter and it was clearly both productive and enjoyable. All the scheduled tasks were completed and in spite of some early frustration as a result of rain closing the Borefield Road north from Olympic Dam the group had a thoroughly good time. It was a particularly talented and strong team and I am most grateful for the efforts of all involved. It was especially pleasing to have Bill Giles, Michael Jarvis, Brendan and Elizabeth Lay, and Anne and Bjarne Jensen with us for the first time.

Brendan and Anne are well respected ecologists and their professional input into the planning of the self guided walks is proving most useful. It was also good to be able to welcome back two of our Alice Springs members, John and Leigh Childs. John and Leigh were with us on our very first trip in 2007 and we are looking forward to seeing more of them now that retirement has given them a little more leisure time. I must place on record also my thanks to our Secretary, Simon Lewis, who took on the mantle of group leader after I had to be a late scratching for family reasons.

Since our last Newsletter was issued S Kidman & Co have erected the 2 km of fencing needed to exclude damaging vehicle access to the old Cemetery at the Peake and we are grateful to the Company for its ongoing support. The cost of the materials was covered by the SA Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, and the SA Department for Environment and Heritage, continuing the very productive partnership that FOMS has forged with the pastoral lessee and the state government.
President’s message cont.
As a further step in all of this, FOMS has just been advised that its application for NRM funding has been successful and almost $10,000 will be made available for the development of the self-guided walks at the Peake and Strangways. This is very good news and we will now be able to undertake the final stage of the works programme embarked on several years ago. Rob Marshall and Sue Barker, well known and highly respected for their work in developing walking tracks elsewhere in the State, have been engaged to carry out the work and Simon and I have met with them on site to talk through some of the detail.

To cap off quite a sustained period of work several of us have been heavily involved in the detailed planning needed for the forthcoming Friends of Parks Forum to be held in Woomera in August this year. Travis Gotch and I will deliver jointly a keynote address on mound springs to the Forum, and FOMS will host a full day tour to mound springs country on the Oodnadatta Track. The latter has proved very popular and two large charter coaches are now fully booked for the tour.

Some of us are hoping that next year will be just a little less demanding than this year, but in the way of these things that is probably wishful thinking!

Colin Harris,
President, Friends of Mound Springs

FOMS secures State NRM funding
As noted in the President’s message, FOMS has very recently been advised by the Minister for Environment and Conservation (Paul Caica) that our application to the State Natural Resources Management Program 2009 – 10 – Community Grants (Round 2) has been successful. $9,600 has been approved for the FOMS project entitled “Mound springs – enhancing community awareness”.

As noted above, this funding will be used for the installation of self-guided walks at Strangways and the Peake. These sites are extremely important because of their mound springs and associated features of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural significance. The ruins of Overland Telegraph repeater stations are particularly prominent at each site. Much of the funding will be allocated to trail markers, brochures and a brochure dispenser at each site.

This project should substantially improve the visitor experience at Strangways and the Peake and can only enhance our collective efforts to increase community awareness about the mound springs and their associated cultural features. It is expected that the self-guided walks will be fully operational by autumn 2011.
Friends of Mound Springs Trip May 2010

The annual field trip of the Friends of Mound Springs was conducted from 16 to 22 May 2010. Unfortunately, Colin Harris was a late scratching from the trip because of family reasons, leaving the following as the touring party:

• Elaine Smyth
• Bruce and Sherrie Gotch
• Anne and Bjarne Jensen
• Michael Jarvis
• Leigh and John Childs
• Elizabeth and Brendan Lay
• Bill Giles
• Simon Lewis

The main tasks for the group were:
• Reviewing proposed interpretive trails at Strangways Springs (Repeater Station) and Freeling Springs (Peake Repeater Station), with particular attention to points of botanical or natural history interest along the routes (with specific input by Anne and Brendan)
• Installing DWLBC and DEH signage along the Peake Public Access Route and DEH signage at the ruins of the Hammer and Gad Eating House.
• Re-locating an S Kidman & Co sign at the Hemicrhoa (Shrubby Pig Face) enclosure at Strangways.

With the extensive recent rains, the group found the country to be in very good heart. Logistically, this had its pros and cons, as indicated below.

**Sunday 16 May**
Several members of the group converged on Roxby Downs: John and Leigh via Coober Pedy, Brendan and Elizabeth via Bon Bon Station and Elaine, Bill and Simon from Adelaide. With rain falling, they were confronted by a “road closed” sign on the Borefield Road and so had little option other than to bunker down in the Roxby Downs Hotel / Motel for the night.

In the meantime, Anne, Bjarne and Michael were travelling up via the Flinders Ranges, with a view to meeting the group at Coward Springs on Monday.

**Monday 17 May**
A fine morning in Roxby Downs but as the group coffeed in the sun at the Dunes Café the report came through that the Borefield Road would remain closed until at least Tuesday 18th. The group made good use of the spare afternoon with a trip to Andamooka and then camped on Lake Mary (between Roxby Downs and Woomera) for the night.

Meanwhile, Anne, Bjarne and Michael made it through to Coward Springs Campground (via Marree) and waited patiently for everyone else to catch up. Bruce and Sherrie commenced their trip from Adelaide, overnighting at Mambray Creek.
Friends of Mound Springs Trip May 2010 cont.

Bill, Elizabeth, Brendan, John, Leigh & Elaine at Lake Mary

**Tuesday 18 May**
Good news at last for the Roxby contingent - the Borefield Road opened for 4wd traffic. This group and the Jensen group rendezvoused at Coward Springs for lunch, before heading for William Creek – the Jensens travelling gingerly with their conventional A-van in tow. At William Creek we were pleased to be caught up with by Bruce and Sherrie and progressed on to the Peake Public Access Route (PAR), with the Jensen van bringing up the rear. At the entrance to the PAR, there was just enough daylight left for the installation of the PAR sign provided by DWLBC – a good example of “many hands make light work”. Then on in the darkness to the camp-site near the Peake Repeater Station ruins. Anne and Bjarne (BJ) finally emerged through the range, with BJ muttering “never again!” in terms of bringing the A-van into this terrain.

**Wednesday 19 May**
A fine and enjoyable day with the signs being installed and the trail interpretive work being completed by a late lunch-time. A free afternoon for all with one group looking more closely around the ruins etc, while a second group went for a hike over to Peake Creek: lots of free-standing water and lots of interesting vegetation. A second night spent at the Peake.

Anne and Brendan compare notes at the Peake

Waterhole on Peake Creek – looking good
Friends of Mound Springs Trip May 2010 cont.

**Thursday 20 May**
A slight split in the party as Brendan and Elizabeth head north towards Dalhousie and the rest head south towards the Peake homestead. BJ and Michael decide to head straight down the Oodnadatta Track with the van and to wait for the group at William Creek. At Peake homestead the group is greeted hospitably by Karen Durbridge, with the news that a “big rain” is moving in as from Friday afternoon. This instils a little urgency into the group and we head out to inspect Outside, Twelve Mile and the Fountain springs – for some discussion with Anne about springs management and for Bruce to do some maintenance work on the bayonet gates. Later, after a quick search for Bruce’s wallet on the Douglas, the group arrives at William Creek in late afternoon and, re-united with BJ and Michael, heads down to Strangways Springs to camp for the night. That night we are somewhat reassured by news on the satellite phone from our weather guru Colin that rain is not expected the following day.

**Friday 21 May**
Another fine day dawns. The group’s first job is to relocate a sign at the Hemichroa enclosure (as requested by Greg Campbell of S Kidman & Co) and most of the group is happy to supervise the efforts of Bruce and BJ with crowbar and shovel. Then it is on to the proposed interpretive trail with Anne providing expert comment on points of natural history interest. After a late lunch at the campsite we make our farewells as the formal part of the FOMS trip comes to an end.

Bruce and Sherrie, John and Leigh and the Jensen clan head to Marree and beyond, while Elaine, Bill and Simon venture back towards Roxby Downs to retrieve their vehicles.

Michael, Bjarne, Bruce, John, Sherrie & Leigh at Strangways  
Sherrie keeps an eye on BJ, Michael and Bruce at the Hemichroa patch
Friends of Mound Springs Trip May 2010 cont.

In summary, a great trip with a very compatible group of people pitching in and adapting well to the difficulties imposed upon us by higher influences. Many thanks to all concerned – we got the jobs done and had a great time.

Hard Going for the Hardyheads

During the FOMS trip of May 2010, quite a reasonable flow was noted in the Margaret River at the new culvert structure on the Oodnadatta Track, near Curdimurka. Some of us paused at the crossing to admire this infrequent event. Closer inspection showed that hundreds if not thousands of fish (probably Lake Eyre Hardyhead) were massing on the downstream side of the culvert and were trying to make their way upstream through the culvert. The flow through the culvert was generally too strong for the fish to make the crossing.

There is a fish ladder at the site, apparently installed at the time of the culvert’s construction. However, our observations indicated that the fish ladder was not being effective. The fish were not using it and were making occasional and generally unsuccessful forays up into the main current.

FOMS will take this matter up with the Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure. There may be some design modifications that can be made to improve the effectiveness of the fish ladder.
Riding the old Ghan
Reflections and memories from Tony Latz

What has the old Ghan line got to do with mound springs? The overland telegraph line basically followed the early European explorer’s route north and this route took advantage of mound springs along the way. The old Ghan line more or less followed the telegraph line north through the springs country and then on up into the NT to the Alice.

When I first rode on the Ghan it was still the real thing – a steam train! Exciting times for a young lad from the bush, going down to the big smoke (Adelaide) on the Ghan.

Dad was head stockman on Hermannsburg station and once every three years he had three months “furlough” which meant heading down south. I was lucky as in 1948 the year after my birth, sleeping carriages were introduced.

Prior to that mum had to make do in a “sit up” carriage for three days while trying to keep my two older brothers and her sanity under some sort of control. Furlough was taken over Christmas so it was hot and there was no air conditioning.

When furlough finally came around there was much anticipation and excitement in the build up to departure day. First up it was onto the ex army Maple Leaf Chev truck and off to the Alice. No OH&S then; women in the passenger seat and the rest of us bouncing around up on top of the load wherever we could find a spot.

And then finally all aboard and ready for departure on my first train trip (the first one I was old enough to remember that is). The train started with such a jerk that from my sitting position facing the back of the train I sailed across the carriage and hit my head on the opposite bunk.

And it didn’t end there – apparently that night I fell out of the top bunk and was put back by my parents and woke up the next morning none the wiser. Dangerous business this train travel.

The best part of course was the food. Awe inspiring stuff for a young bushie, being ushered into the dining car and confronted with crispy white table cloths with flash Commonwealth Railways crockery and big heavy silver cutlery all engraved CR.

And being waited on by blokes in black pants, cummerbunds and bow ties. I can still visualize them swaying down the aisle in time with the rocking of the train balancing four bowls of soup.

The food had flash names too like compote of fruit which was good even though it only turned out to be canned fruit salad. Roast lamb was a treat for us beef eaters and sausages too – all sorts of first time good tucker on offer. They did pretty well, but not much fun in the middle of summer with only wood stoves to cook on in their tiny kitchen.

Another culinary first for me came further down the line at Quorn. The Ghan line ran through Pichi Richi until 1957 and I remember tucking into my first pastie on the platform of the Quorn railway station thinking that this was pretty good tucker as well.
Riding the old Ghan cont.

We travelled second class of course but that was still pretty flash. The cabins were all timber panelling with a chromed wash basin that folded out. There were two top bunks and the two leather seats below folded down into bunks.

I remember being impressed by the thick red velvet covered rope strung across and threaded though leather thongs that stopped (most) people from falling out of the top bunks.

So we clickedy clacked our way down south stopping regularly at sundry sidings and railway towns to drop off and pick up people and odds and sods and to refill the steam engine’s water tanks and coal tenders.

Places like Oodnadatta and Marree were busy little railway towns in those days and they like all the other stops came to life with the arrival of the Ghan. There would be much activity with just about all the local adults milling about together with the resident kids and dogs getting in on the act. Another blast of the whistle and we were off again leaving things to settle down until the arrival of the next train.

Down into the gibber country past Oodnadatta and a buzz went through the train when the conductor announced that the crossing of the Algebuckina Bridge was imminent. Heads poked out of windows and everybody oohed and ahhed as this awesome construction over the Neales River swished past.

For the record the bridge was built in 1890-91, is 1,922 feet 3 inches (or 585.9 m) long and together with the William Creek Hotel, the Oodnadatta Railway Station, Curdimurka Siding and the Coward Springs Railway Siding is State Heritage listed.

Onward then to William Creek, one of the more memorable stops. The William Creek Hotel of today is still fairly basic but back then it consisted of not much more than a small tin shed.

It was a dry train and the weather was hot and three days was a long time for many of the thirsty passengers on board. So no sooner had the conductor announced “next stop William Creek” and the train screeched to a halt than a stream of thirsty punters poured out of the carriages and disappeared into the pub.

Eventually there was a warning blast of the train whistle and a line of refreshed and slightly tipsy souls begin to trickle out of the pub and scramble aboard the train.

Another blast of the whistle produced a further trickle of bodies out of the pub. Then the train huffed and puffed itself into motion and the trickle turned into a stream of unsteady punters dashing after the moving train and scrambling onto any of the departing carriages they managed to run down.

One final chap then emerged somewhat unsteadily from within the public house clutching a long neck in each fist and set off resolutely after the departing train - but his precious cargo was proving to be a handicap.
Riding the old Ghan cont.

What to do? If he jettisoned his prized beer he might just make the last carriage. There was a moment of indecision and then he came to an inevitable shuffling halt. He hesitated, then turned and retraced his steps. After all there would be another train in a couple of days.

Still in the gibber country as we pulled in to Coward Springs for the obligatory top ups. As I looked out the window I was surprised to see the local kids splashing around in a big pond and what’s more there was running water.

Where did all this water come from out in the middle of the gibber plains? Not as I have since learned from the nearby mound springs but from the GAB via a bore sunk in 1886-87 (I didn’t think they could sink bores back then). I remember being a bit envious of those kids.

I was talking to my older brother recently and he told me that when the arrival of Coward Springs was announced he would be ready to hop off for as swim as well. If you are passing that way you can splash in water from the same source and look over the remaining old railway buildings which are currently being restored by Greg Emmett and Prue Coulls who run the adjacent camp ground.

And so down the line to Marree with the usual throng milling around and on through the Pichi Richi pass to Pt Augusta. Here we climbed aboard the broad gauge train with a big powerful steam engine up front and took off at great speed for Adelaide.

The down side was that this train was very sooty. Still no air conditioning so the windows were down but unlike the narrow gauge Ghan this train went so fast the smoke and soot didn’t have time to disperse so we were covered in it.

Only briefly however as we were in Adelaide in a flash and off to the Mission’s furlough house at Henley Beach for more first time experiences like fish and chips, Golden North ice cream and the beach.
Riding the old Ghan cont.

Friends of Parks Forum taking shape
Preparations for the annual Friends of Parks Forum, the Stony Deserts Forum at Woomera from 20 to 23 August 2010, are now entering their final stages. A small group of hard-working volunteers, including members of FOMS, Friends of the Simpson Desert and Friends of Arid Recovery plus other Adelaide-based volunteers, has organised a very interesting program of speakers and excursions.

The forum will be based at the Eldo Hotel in Woomera, an interesting venue in its own right. The forum will kick off on the evening of Friday 20 August. Keynote speakers will include:
• Iris Iwanicki: A social history of Woomera
• Lindsay Campbell: the strategic defence role of Woomera
• Tom Gara: Aboriginal pre-history and history
• Geoff Axford and Alex Clarke: natural history of the Far North (part 1)
• Reece Pedler: natural history of the Far North (part 2)
• Helen Crisp: Arid Recovery
• Colin Harris and Travis Gotch: mound springs of the Great Artesian Basin

There will be six excursions:
• Woomera township and range
• Roxby Downs and Olympic Dam
• Andamooka
• Arid Recovery
• Mound Springs (Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park and probably Strangways)
• Special partners tour of Roxby Downs including the local Saturday morning market
Friends of Parks Forum taking shape cont.

The mound springs trip will be a full day excursion, organised by FOMS, on Monday 23 August. This will be via coaches, so it will be interesting to view the countryside from the height of a bus rather than a 4WD.

The forum is now fully subscribed. Hopefully a good number of FOMS members have registered. It should be a great event.

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.

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