

## President's message

FOMS has had a reduced field program this year with only the one major trip, reported on in the pages of this Newsletter.

In large measure this reflects long-running uncertainties about funding and logistical arrangements for the fencing of Levi Springs, also reported on later in this Newsletter. A recent announcement of \$10 000 of SA Arid Lands NRM Board funding for FOMS is most welcome and should help break what has become something of an impasse.

At the same time, a reduced field program does not equate to inactivity or inaction. There is actually a lot happening at both state and national levels, particularly in relation to arrangements for the Great Artesian Basin, and members of the FOMS Executive have had many useful meetings with our Patron Lynn Brake who is particularly knowledgeable (and influential at a national level) on these matters.

On a personal note, we have been saddened by the loss of two of our foundation members this year, noted academic linguist Dr Luise Hercus and our foundation Treasurer Tony Latz. Luise Hercus was an outstanding scholar, travelling widely throughout Australia over many decades and collecting in the process an enormous amount of traditional Indigenous

knowledge from the old people. A great supporter of FOMS, she continued to send us comprehensive reports almost to the end: she will be sorely missed. Tony Latz will also be missed by those of us who travelled with him in the mound springs country. Tony was a key figure in the establishment of FOMS, a supporter who was convinced that the mound springs needed a friends group and who then quietly went about looking after our finances in the early years.

I look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible at our forthcoming AGM.

**Colin Harris**

**President, Friends of Mound Springs**

### This edition includes reports on:

- **Funding boost for FOMS;**
- **FOMS' 2018 working bee;**
- **New signage at the Peake;**
- **Progress with proposed fencing at Levi Springs;**
- **Draft Strategic Management Plan for the GAB;**
- **Some thoughts from FOMS Patron Lynn Brake about the GAB and drought relief**
- **Vale Luise Hercus and Tony Latz**

## Funding Boost for FOMS from SA Arid Lands NRM Board

We are pleased to report that the SA Arid Lands Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board has offered FOMS a grant of \$10,000 for a program of fence installation and maintenance to protect significant mound springs.

Direct negotiations between FOMS and the NRM Board commenced during 2017 and culminated in a submission to the NRM Board earlier this year. The main focus of that submission was the springs fenced on pastoral lands by the State Environment Department in the 1980s. FOMS recommended to the Board that an annual allocation of about \$10,000 should be made to the Department for the maintenance of that protective fencing (around ten springs) and for associated vegetation

monitoring. At the time the Board declined that request but subsequently has decided to offer FOMS itself \$10,000 to support mound springs protection works.

This funding will support FOMS in maintaining the fence maintenance and spring monitoring in the short term and may also be very useful for finalising the proposed fencing project at Levi Springs (see separate item in this newsletter).

FOMS is pleased to have received this offer of funding from the SA Arid Lands NRM Board and we also thank our Patron, Lynn Brake and David Leek from the Department for Environment and Water for their efforts in helping to secure this support.

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## FOMS conducts successful Working Bee, May 2018

The Friends of Mound Springs group held its main working bee for 2018 from 19 to 25 May.

Participants were Bruce and Sherrie Gotch, Alan Williams, Lynn and Kate Brake, Rick Moore, John Tagell, Ross Smith, Bernice Cohen and Simon Lewis. Colin Harris was a late withdrawal with a thumb fracture.

Conditions were fine throughout with some cloud cover on 20 May but otherwise mainly sunny. Day temperatures 22 to 25 and night temperatures around 8 to 12 degrees.

Participants travelled independently to Roxby Downs on 19 May, before heading up the Borefield Road to camp on the Gregory Creek about 100km north of Olympic Dam.



L to R: Alan Williams, Bruce Gotch, Sherrie Gotch, John Tagell, Rick Moore, Lynn Brake, Kate Brake, Ross Smith, Bernice Cohen.

Photo: Simon Lewis

## FOMS May 2018 Working Bee (Cont'd)

Over the ensuing four days the group applied itself the following tasks:

- Monitoring of three springs (Beatrice, Bopeechee and HBO004) on Finniss Springs. These springs were burnt in 2016 as a trial primarily to assess options for the management of prolific growth of reeds (*Phragmites*). In a 2017 inspection, it was noted that horses on Finniss Springs were impacting on both Bopeechee and HBO 004. The 2018 inspection showed that the *Phragmites* regrowth at Bopeechee has now been grazed to ground level by the horses. Impacts by horses have therefore compromised the effectiveness of this trial. FOMS plans to continue monitoring at these springs but the value of this exercise in monitoring the response of *Phragmites* to fire has been diminished.



Bopeechee Spring showing impacts from horses

- Maintenance of the walking trail and replenishment of brochures at Strangways Springs. The walking trails were in good condition although there are sections of the Springs Walk that would benefit from clearer definition. In addition, the temporary sign warning people not to climb the Cutting Grass Spring will need replacement in the next

year or two. The bayonet gates at Strangways remain in good order.

- Installation of new signage and walking trail maintenance at the Peake Overland Telegraph site (see separate item in this newsletter about the new signage). As at Strangways, the walking trails at the Peake were in good shape, requiring only minor attention. Some members of the group proffered the view that the Creek Walk could be improved by extending the formal trail out to the cemetery – something for further consideration.

The group also noted some recent vandalism at the Peake carpark. Three of fifteen timber bollards - installed by FOMS ten years ago to define the carpark and prevent unwanted vehicle access to the site – had been removed, apparently to be used as firewood. The FOMS group constructed a low stone wall to block the gap created but a more lasting solution will be needed. The current plan is to replace all of the timber bollards with UV stable recycled plastic bollards.



Peake carpark – bollards missing

## FOMS May 2018 Working Bee (Cont'd)

- Following the work at the Peake, the FOMS group journeyed south to Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park, to tackle two main tasks:
  - Check on cattle intrusion into the Park, particularly in the southern sections. It has been evident for some time that the Park boundary fence has weak points at one or two drainage lines, enabling cattle to access the Park from the neighbouring pastoral property. While cattle were still present at Buttercup Spring, it was evident that fencing repair work was underway to rectify the situation and FOMS has been advised that this is a result of a cooperative approach between the Department for Environment and Water and the managers of the adjoining Stuart Creek property. (During a subsequent inspection in early July 2018, no cattle were noted within the Park.)
  - An initial reconnaissance to assess the potential of establishing a walking trail from near Blanche Cup out to the extinct mound spring that is Hamilton Hill. This showed that there is potential for an interesting walk, but to make it really worthwhile the walk should venture to the top of Hamilton Hill. The difficulty is that for the most part the slopes of Hamilton Hill are steep and stony and a safe access route for public use has not yet been identified. If a preferred route is identified there will need to be a formal assessment and approvals process involving the



Bernice Cohen, Simon Lewis and John Tagell  
at the stone cairn on Hamilton Hill

Department for Environment and Water and the Arabana people.

At Wabma Kadarbu the two main interpretive signs at Blanche Cup had deteriorated and this information has since been passed on to Department for Environment and Water staff. A brief inspection of Little Bubbler spring was also undertaken. This spring is of interest in that it was free of *Phragmites* until the early 2000s. Some growth of *Phragmites* was noted at the spring vent at that time but its rate of spread since that time has been quite limited – just two or three metres around the spring vent. The factors affecting the establishment and spread of *Phragmites* are still not fully understood.



Little Bubbler showing cattle damage.  
Reeds largely restricted to the spring vent.

The FOMS working bee concluded in style, with lunch at the Curdimurka Siding on the return journey and a final night at the Eldo Hotel at Woomera. Many thanks to all.

## New Signage Installed at the Peake

Those who have visited the old Overland Telegraph sites at Strangways Springs and the Peake will be familiar with the small signs that identify the various buildings which link with both the pastoral and telecommunications history of these sites. At the Peake, the original building identifier signs were installed by FOMS members Colin Harris, Simon Lewis and Sue Black in 2008, with welcome assistance from then Peake station manager, Jim Lomas and his partner Sarah Amey. However, in the prevailing harsh conditions the signs have crazed and deteriorated to the stage of requiring replacement.

Prior to the 2018 FOMS working bee (see above report), FOMS liaised with Heritage staff of the Department for Environment and Water about replacement signage. The Department funded the new signs and these were installed as part of the working bee. FOMS stalwart Bruce Gotch led the sign installation party with assistance and guidance from Sherrie Gotch and Alan Williams. Many thanks to Bruce, Sherrie and Alan and it is expected that the new signs will achieve at least another decade of effective life.



Flashback to 2008. Then Peake manager Jim Lomas drills holes for the new signs with guidance from Colin Harris.



2018. Bruce Gotch installs a new sign under the watchful gaze of Alan Williams and Sherrie Gotch.



One of the newly installed signs

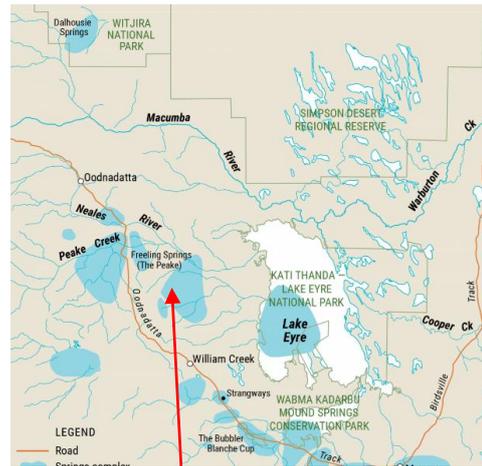
## Hopeful Signs for Fencing at Levi Springs

Readers of recent FOMS newsletters may recall the proposal to fence several mound springs at Levi Springs, on the Peake pastoral lease. This proposal originated as part of a major mound springs project (known as Desert Jewels) undertaken by the then state Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (now Department for Environment and Water). This project concluded before the Levi Springs fencing could be organised and FOMS has been trying to see this through to completion. The area proposed for protection is about 10 – 12ha, with approximately 2.3km of fencing.

Many of the steps needed to enable the fencing to proceed are now in place. The local Arabana people have approved the proposed fence alignment, as have the new pastoral lessees at the Peake – the Williams Cattle company. The Department for Environment and Water has organised the necessary fencing materials and has indicated that funding will be available for an Arabana fencing team to assist with fence erection. There has been some concern as to how the 200 or so required post-holes could be drilled but it now appears that funding approved by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board (see other item in this newsletter) will assist FOMS in hiring the equipment.

At the time of this newsletter it was unclear whether the on-ground fencing works will be completed in spring 2018 or autumn 2019.

FOMS acknowledges the ongoing support of the Department for Environment and Water – particularly Tony Magor, Manager, Parks and Co-management - in helping to progress this project.



Levi Springs – approx. location



Area to be fenced: blue line shows original alignment, red shows agreed fence extension



One of the springs at Levi to be protected

## Draft Strategic Management Plan for Great Artesian Basin out for Public Comment

The Australian Government’s Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has released for comment a draft Strategic Management Plan for the Great Artesian Basin. FOMS Executive members have reviewed the draft Strategic Management Plan and have submitted comments to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. FOMS’ main comments are summarised below:

- The draft Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan (GABSMP) is clearly a “high-level” document. As such, the broad statements relating to GAB / mound springs are strongly supported. For example:
  - The Basin is a finite and declining resource;
  - Water extraction has had a significant impact on water pressure and flow rates of springs in certain areas;
  - The need to manage water flows, pressure and quality to support groundwater-dependent ecosystems.
- While FOMS is very supportive of the above as over-arching comments, the group has a number of concerns about the document.
  - The *Strategic* Management Plan is largely devoid of *strategy*. It has a focus on general objectives and desired outcomes but very little guidance (strategy) on *how* the objectives and outcomes are to be achieved. Further, any discussion about priorities, partnerships and targets is only included in the most general terms.
  - The draft GABSMP is focused on the hydrology of the GAB. However, there is no recognition that the conservation of



Great Artesian Basin, showing recharge areas (yellow), flow direction & main spring areas (red)

groundwater-dependent ecosystems, such as GAB springs, is linked with other factors such as grazing by introduced stock and feral animals, weed invasion, introduction of non-native aquatic fauna and, in some instances, interactions with surface water flows. The vast majority of GAB springs in South Australia are on pastoral lease land and are therefore subject to ongoing grazing pressures and a similar situation applies in other states. A small number of springs on pastoral lands have been protected but most remain unprotected and a strategy is needed to address that.

- It is acknowledged that the regulation of grazing pressure on springs is a responsibility of State jurisdictions, but the risk to springs resulting from grazing and other mechanical disturbance is a Basin-wide strategic issue that needs to be addressed in this plan.

In summary, FOMS advocates that the draft GABSMP be subject to substantial revisions to address comments such as the above and to provide a more strategic and comprehensive basis for management of the GAB and its associated ecosystems with much clearer recognition of the international significance of GAB springs.

## The GAB and Drought Relief

*Some thoughts from FOMS Patron, Lynn Brake*

Over the past few months the media has been filled with information about the effect of the current drought on primary producers, especially in the drier parts of Australia. In most of the country underlain by the GAB the effect of the dry weather has been exceptionally severe. Water from the GAB is the only water to sustain life and supports all human activity in much arid and semi-arid parts of Australia. There is no alternative source. More than 120 towns, hundreds of pastoral stations, mining and petroleum industries and visitors rely all on GAB water. There are more than 34,000 water bores in the GAB. They support more than \$12bil in production and have a replacement cost of more than \$4bil. There are more than 6000 GAB springs. These and the groundwater dependent ecosystems that they support are sites of immense cultural and natural value. The GAB is one of the largest artesian Basins in the world and unquestionably Australia's most important groundwater resource.

Recent research by Geoscience Australia demonstrates that recharge rates into the GAB from rain along the dividing range is as much as

90% less than indicated by previous studies. This means that we are effectively 'mining' water from the GAB. Pressure is naturally falling; this is being accelerated by water extraction through bores. As a result, the judicious use of GAB water is essential to eliminate any waste and sustain the benefits that we value from the GAB. The springs will be affected and many even dry completely with just a small pressure drop. Pressure is not the only issue however. As islands of wet in an otherwise sea of dry springs attract animals from a great distance to water and feed on the vegetation in and around the spring vents. The impact of these animals risks the natural and cultural values that springs support.

So far the risk to overexploitation of the GAB is being quite well managed. If we are judicious and diligent and work cooperatively together to manage the risks to artesian pressure and maintain the surface structures around springs and the Ecosystems that they support the GAB will continue to provide water and benefits for people, industries and spring fed ecosystems for many years to come.



GAB spring on Finniss Springs



Bore control infrastructure

## Vale Luise Hercus and Tony Latz

We are sad to report the passing of Dr Luise Hercus and Tony Latz, long-standing members of FOMS with a deep interest in the mound springs and the associated country and communities.

### Dr Luise Hercus

Luise Hercus, a distinguished linguist and recorder of Aboriginal tradition, died in April 2018 at the age of 92. Luise was raised in Munich in pre-World War 2 Germany. At Oxford, where she excelled as a scholar, 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. From many long field trips she gathered a rich store of songs and tradition about the desert country and the adjacent mound springs.

In the early 1980s, government funding provided an opportunity for her to draw together much of her mound springs material and in 1985, with co-author Peter Sutton, she produced a major report, *The assessment of Aboriginal cultural significance of mound springs in South Australia*. This report is an astonishingly rich compendium.

From her property outside of Canberra and her academic base at the Australian National University, Luise continued to take an active interest in desert and mound springs traditions. She was in communication with FOMS until shortly before her death. Some of the reports sent by Luise to FOMS in recent times have included *The Rain History*, *The Fire History* and *The Story of the Seven Sisters*. We will publish some selected material from these reports in future editions of the FOMS' Newsletter.



Vale Luise, we will miss your expertise and support.

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### Tony Latz

Tony Latz died in late June 2018 at the age of 71. Tony had a rich and varied life, with early years at Hermannsburg Station, where his father was head stockman. In the mid-1990s, Tony joined the Native Vegetation Branch of the State Environment Department, working with landholders on management of bushland areas conserved under Heritage Agreements.

At that time, Tony's practical talents were clearly recognised and he became an integral member of the Department's mound springs monitoring team. This team conducted annual vegetation monitoring at springs fenced by the Department in the mid-1980s. Tony provided vital logistical support as part of the monitoring team until this work ceased in 2005.

With the establishment of FOMS in June 2006, Tony became a foundation member and was the group's

initial Treasurer. Tony did not participate in any of FOMS' field trips over the years but, there again, that says a lot about Tony. He was keenly interested in the springs but anything approaching a large group was not Tony's thing – and Tony's interpretation of a "large group" was quite small!

Our sympathies go to Tony's partner Joan and his family – we will miss him!

In 2010, Tony penned an article for the FOMS newsletter on his experience with the Old Ghan Railway. As a tribute to Tony, we reproduce below an abridged version of that article.



## 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. 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. And then finally all aboard the train and ready for departure.

The best part 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 visualise them swaying down the aisle in time with the rocking of the train balancing four bowls of soup.

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 through 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.

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 aahed as this awesome construction over the Neales River swished past. 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.



One of the Old Ghan steam locomotives

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. When the train huffed and puffed itself into motion 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.

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.

## FOMS Website to be Nationally Archived

In a pleasing development, FOMS has been advised that its website is to be archived nationally as part of a joint program between the State Library of South Australia and the National Library of Australia.

The program is known by the acronym PANDORA (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia) and as the title implies it is all about adding electronic publications of national importance to the more traditional collections of printed material.

Apart from the national recognition that this reflects, there are some important benefits for

FOMS. In particular, the program will take the necessary action to keep FOMS' website accessible to the community as hardware and software changes over time. Additionally, the Library will catalogue FOMS' publications and add the records to the powerful national search engine Trove, a database of catalogue records shared by over 5,200 Australian libraries.

FOMS' website is:

<https://www.friendsofmoundsprings.org.au>

and further information about PANDORA can be found at:

<http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/goto/pandora>.

## Joining Friends of Mound Springs

If you wish to become a member of Friends of Mound Springs, please contact Treasurer Hadyn Hanna – see contact details below. The membership subscription is \$20 per household per calendar year.

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