



President's Report 2009

Good evening Mayor Simon Brewer, Councillor Margaret Nicol, Senior Ranger Tammy Leggett and Friends. On behalf of the committee I warmly welcome you to the 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Black Hill and Morialta Incorporated. We celebrate 23 years in the Parks.

Another big year for us and it isn't practical for me to mention all the things we have done this year, so once again I apologise in advance if I have missed anything close to your heart.

To begin with I would like to thank all the Department for Environment and Heritage Rangers for their support and encouragement over the last 12 months. And thanks too, to our members and supporters for their help, both on the ground, and financial. Our strength is in our members.

I would like to make special mention of a couple of our projects, and provide you with my perspective on some highlights this year.

The Horsnell Gully project has been very rewarding to be involved with.

The project coordinators, Joy and Bruce Stewart, and Caroline and Denis Slade have been instrumental in engaging the community by including the Pembroke Cubs in on site education activities and working bees.



Connecting people with the natural environment is multidimensional. With benefits for the Friends Group in meeting our objectives on the ground, but also in helping the community to relate to the natural world in all its diversity which supports us all.

One of the highlights has been finding spontaneous regeneration of *Spyridium parvifolium* and *Clematis microphylla* where heavy infestation of weed species has been removed.

Some would have thought this would not happen in such a degraded area. But people coming to these working bees have been rewarded by this kind of surprise throughout the life of the project. There is much work remaining to bring this site to a state where it will be sustainable. Unfortunately the way this project has evolved has created an enormous challenge to maintain and extend the area being rehabilitated. We shall continue with enthusiasm!



Wildflower Garden



The 5 year rehabilitation plan started in August 1990. So we are rapidly approaching the 20th anniversary of the 5 year plan! Despite the desperate weather conditions and water restrictions over the last few years, the garden is continuing to improve. Thanks to our small but dedicated team of volunteers who have worked in this project site over the last year, especially members of the Athelstone Kiwanis club, who have a long association with this project.

We continue to find outbreaks of *Sollya heterophylla* (now known as *Billaderia heterophylla*) the Western Australian bluebell creeper. This hardy garden plant has taken a liking to the conditions in the foothills, and is a very



problematic pest plant in areas of the South East of this state. It germinates readily and twines around out native species, only really becoming evident when it flowers.

Other ongoing weed species are *Monadenia brateata*, wild gladiolus, wild freesias and *Kunzea baxteri* (another escaped garden plant, originally from Western Australia.)

Although further work needs to be done to replace dangerous tables and seats in the Wildflower Garden, the ones which have been replaced by the Dept. are much appreciated by the Friends and the Community. Special thanks to ranger Peter Wyatt for performing a small miracle here!



But we all continue to miss the seats that have been removed and are not intended to be replaced.

Russell Dahms under the guidance Lola Both has further enhanced the visitor experience to the Wildflower Garden by revising, refreshing and replacing the interpretive signs.

Lola Both has resigned from the committee and as Project coordinator of the Wildflower Garden project due to poor health. This leaves us with cause to reflect on what she has achieved in this site.

Constant diligence marks Lola's approach, and she has been challenged by relentless regrowth of weeds, dreadful soil, (if one can refer to it as soil, more like rubble), the suspicion of *Phytophthora*, and a constant redirection of focus due to the size of the

project area, the nature of the introduced species on the site, and small workforce to tackle the issues.

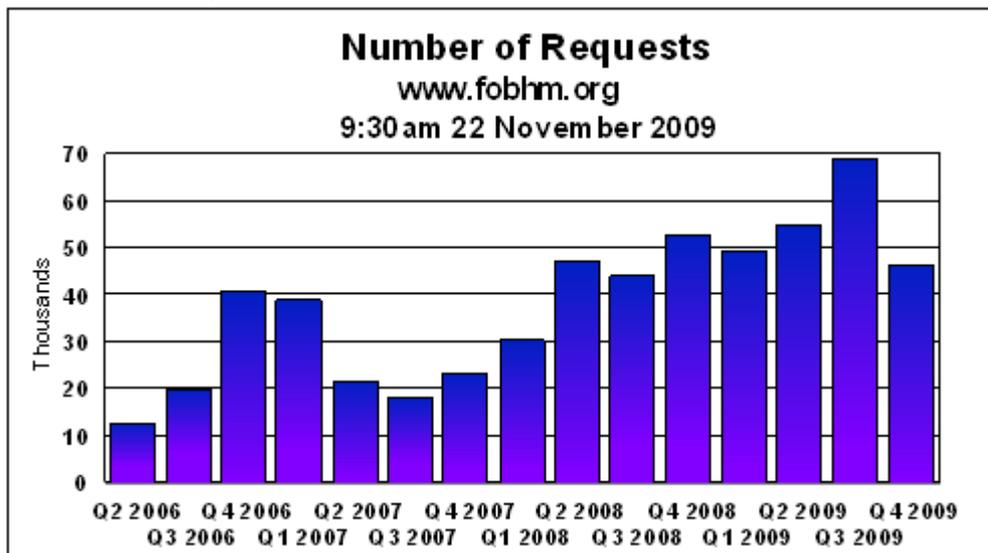
Despite this, there has been a significant and ongoing improvement that even the casual observation of members of the public notice and comment upon.

Young Friends is a unique aspect of our group, to my knowledge, no other Friends Group has a vehicle specifically designed for young people aged 8 to 11. Young Friends engages with young people at many levels, including visits to Moorunde, education sessions and activities in the Wildflower Garden Building, to night walks in the Conservation Parks.



It is with sadness that I announce our intention to end Young Friends in 2010. The leaders have maintained a quality programme for over 20 years, and other commitments mean it is now time for them to move on. Congratulations to Raelene and Graham Churchett and Joy and Bruce Stewart for doing such a wonderful job over the life of this programmes.

It is appropriate to make special mention of our Secretary, Colin Sparrow. Colin has brought with him a wealth of experience from the work he has done with other environmental groups. It is with sadness we accept his decision not to stand for re-election this year.

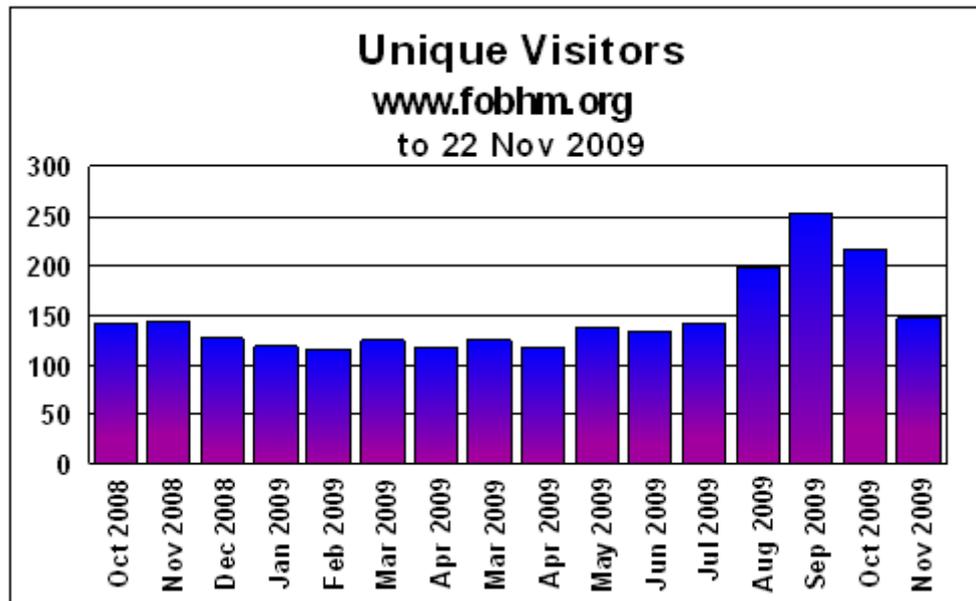


Traffic on our website continues to build. The third quarter in 2009 had the greatest number of page requests since it was set up. 68,984 page requests were made for that quarter, and this

indicates a greater amount of information retrieved by visitors.

This could be due to an increase in visitor numbers, or an increase in the amount of information being accessed during a visit, or both.

The number of unique visitors to the site shows also reflects the increase in activity we enjoy. We have added short videos to the site this year, and enhanced information and photos of our native plants.



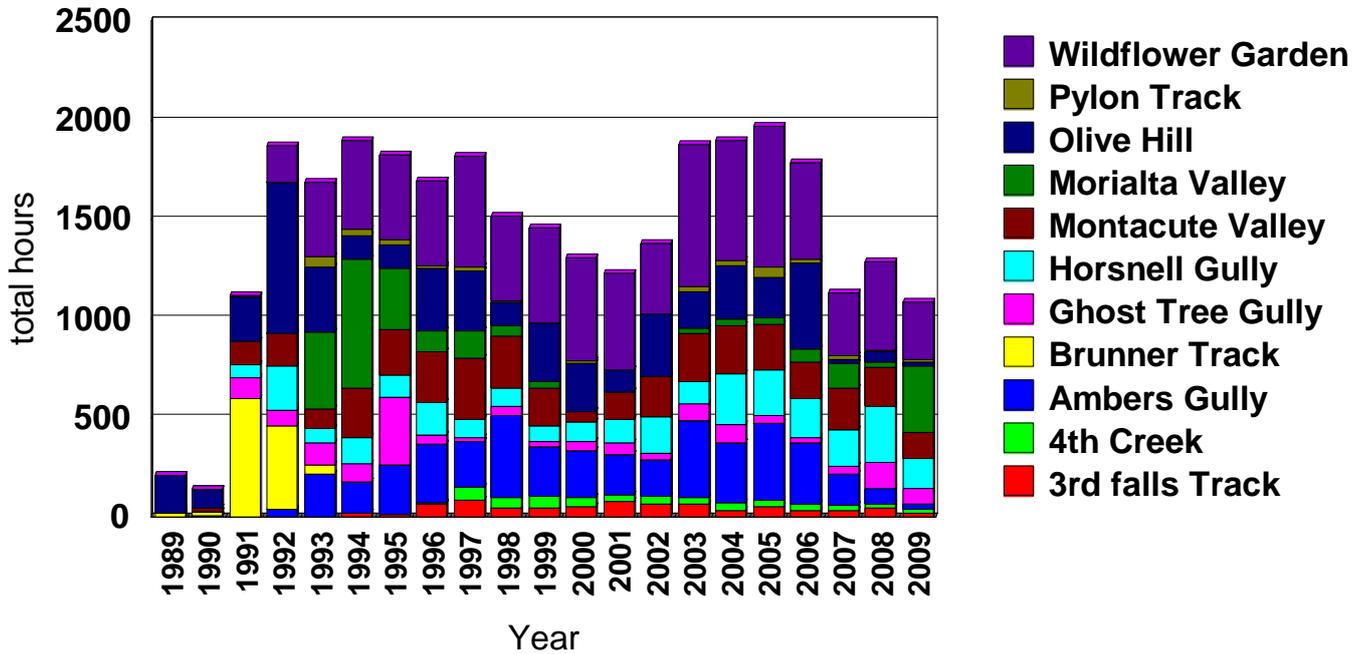
If you have ideas for further enhancement or any material you would like to contribute to our web content please let me know, and we can discuss how it can include your input to further meet the group's objectives.

It would be remiss of me not to at least mention the challenges the changes to the Department's Occupational Health and Safety Requirements have brought us. Much time has been occupied by the committee over the last 18 months trying to clarify exactly what we need to do, and how we are going to do it. Time that could have been much better spent in more productive activity.

The primary difficulty has been working out what is required, in what format, when and by whom.

I am sure we can continue to work towards a satisfactory outcome in the coming year.

Volunteer hours per project site



This information was displayed at the AGM last year, when 2008 looked very disappointing, but more work reports have come in since then. I am expecting a similar small increase for the work recorded in 2009.

So far this year, the data in shows in excess of 1087 volunteer hours in the Parks. This does not include Young Friends, our committee activities, administrative work or outreach activities. That is more than \$30,000 dollars in value. Nonetheless it is apparent that activity has declined over the last three years.

It is no secret that our core membership continues to attract life experience points each year. However along with this comes a loss of physical capacity. It is time we need to turn our attention to the community again to attract new members. A higher membership in turn increases our influence, and gives us greater capacity for on the ground activity.

We have an efficient way of increasing our profile by a refocused effort at the Fourth Creek project site.



A greater and more regular presence of the Friends in this high traffic location may spark interest from the community.
Your ideas to recruit new members and build the group's capacity are welcome.

Sincere thanks to all members who support the group, whether this be through participation in working bees, serving on the committee, as office holders or through financial contributions.

We are our members.

I leave you with an image of our Christmas Tree, on display at the Athelstone Uniting Church from 28 to 30 November 2009. Thanks to Bruce and Joy Stewart for their imagination and creativity and setting up the display.



On behalf of the committee, I wish you a merry Christmas, safe travels if you are holidaying anywhere, and a productive and biodiverse New Year.

John Fleming