

JUNE 1999



Biddip

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of
the River

Inside this issue:

Presidents Message 2

Avon River Management Programme 3

New River Recovery Plans 3

Ron Waters' Avon River 4

Training the Avon River 6

The "Back Page" 8

BIDDIP VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2



Biddip

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

BIDDIP VOLUME 1

President's Message

by Wayne Clarke

Hello, and welcome to our second newsletter for 1999.

Following the publication and distribution of our first newsletter, and its success, we have decided to publish three issues a year - February, June and October.

Once again we have some very interesting stories on the history of the river - one in the form of poetry. A strategy on weed control has been developed, and we have collected a number of weeds which will form the basis of a herbarium.

One thing I omitted to do in the last issue of *Biddip* was to introduce the committee. Patron of the *Friends* is Spec Sinclair from Cobbler's Pool. Gaven Donegan is Vice President, Secretary Andrew Marsden, John Pyle Treasurer with Belle Rowe, Bob Frayne and Walter Kolb making up the committee. It is a very able and

keen team, and their continued hard work on helping to recover our river is inspiring.

Our application to the Minister for the Environment for assistance in purchasing a Chipper/Mulcher was unsuccessful, however, our other Friends, the Water and Rivers Commission, have purchased a machine which we will be able to have access to on most occasions. This will certainly lighten our workload.

An application has been submitted to the Natural Heritage Trust for part funding of a Ribbons of Blue Coordinator. We will not know the outcome of this for some months to come but are keeping our fingers crossed in the hope that we can once again get our school children involved with monitoring river health.

The River Recovery Plans for Section Three of the Avon

River were launched in February by Doug Morgan, Chairman of the Avon River Management Authority. At the same time, Water and Rivers Commission Acting District Manager, Martin Revell, officially handed over the computer to the *Friends*.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Biddip* and that we may see you at our next working-bee.

Wayne Clarke

President

June 1999



NEW RIVER RECOVERY PLANS

River Recovery plans for Northam were launched earlier this month, and Draft Recovery Plans will be launched for York in July. These will complement Toodyay's River Recovery Plans (launched in February) now being im-

plemented by the *Friends* in Toodyay.

River Recovery Plans are developed by the Water and Rivers Commission in consultation with the local community, and specify the actions that the community agree have pri-

ority in restoration of the river. The Avon River has been broken into 18 sections for the purpose of River Recovery. Sections 1 to 3 and part of section 4 (to the Northam Boundary) are in the Shire of Toodyay.

AVON RIVER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Submissions to the Draft Avon River Management Programme, launched last February, closed in May. The final Management Programme, including relevant modifications from

submissions, is now being prepared for publication. Together with the River Recovery Plans for the various sections of the Avon River, it will form the basis of river manage-

ment planning over the next few years, with a major review after five years. The final Management Programme will be available in the next couple of months.

LIVING STREAMS AND RIVERCARE AWARDS

The *Friends* have been nominated for both the Living Streams and the Rivercare Awards in the 1999 Western Austra-

lian Landcare Awards. Although a fledgling group, the *Friends* have contributed significantly to rivercare in

Toodyay, and to the health of the Avon River. Wish us luck with our nomination!

ORAL HISTORY

Desraé Clarke has commenced work on taping the history of the Avon River through the eyes of a number of identities associated with the river.

On completion, the tapes will be deposited with the Oral History Unit of the J.S. Battye Library of Western Australian History, where they will be

permanently available for future reference. Then the task of transcribing the tapes will commence, a huge task for Desraé's secretary!!

COPY SOUGHT

If you have any stories you think may be of interest to our readers, then please,

pass them on to Wayne Clarke - the *Biddip* is another major source of history.

Your story may be forgotten forever. It may help to save our Avon River.

THE AVON RIVER

by Ron Waters

When I was just a small boy
and went to Toodyay School
we were taught to swim by teachers and
went by bus to Northam and up to Burlong Pool.



We learnt to swim in the shallow end
where a rope was strung across to show where it got deep
and you went into the water between two gum trees
where the bank was not quite so steep.

There were pools on both sides of Toodyay
where the parents and children used to swim
and if you were just learning to swim
one of your friends would take you in.

The river was very clean in those days
until they cleared out all the trees
there are a lot of pools now in the summer
where the water does not come up to your knees.

There were lots of cobbler, jack fish, mullet and minnows
in nearly all those pools
and lots of water birds all along the river
when I was a boy at school

I have seen the floods that we used to have
with water up the street
and the Nunyle creek flowing into the river
was about eight feet deep

We often had a Christmas party down at Long Pool or Cobbler Pool
and went fishing there at night
or sometimes fished at Bald Hill Pool
where the wild goats were a lovely sight.

And the Bolgart Brook at Coondle
platted the railway lines like rope
and to travel the street near Toodyay Boarding House
you would have to use a boat.

I still think there are some wild pigs left
between Gidgegannup and the Swan
those days we made tin canoes
and paddled them on the river all day long.

I remember the train going over the railway bridge
while the show was on one day
now the train goes over the bridge further down
and the old bridge was burnt down and is not there today.

The old chaps caught some wild horses once
down the river in the trap yards at Trap Pool
back in those days my Gran was a girl
and lived in a house near Deep Dale Pool.

The old people swam in Barrack Pool
which is silted up today
and the names of the pools in our river
have changed a lot since those days.

It's since we have had the Avon race
that the river names were changed
you don't seem to hear the names like Gerti's Hill Pool
or Rocky Pool or Long Pool, Trap Pool, Deep Dale Pool
or Lloyd's Pool, Cobbler Pool, Emu Spring Pool or lots of their old names again.

continued on page 4

THE AVON RIVER (cont...)

by Ron Waters

It was nice in those days to see the Euro and the Grey Kangaroos
come down to drink at the river at night
and to see the emus in the day
come and drink was a pleasant sight.

Or see the cormorant catch a jilgie
or a blue crane dig out a grub
and hear the old chaps talk about the river
as they drank beer in the pub.



To hear the kookaburra laughing
when the sun had just gone down
and to see the ducks swimming close
you didn't make a sound.

I wish the Avon River
could come back like it was when I was young
and the children of tomorrow
would have lots of fun.

They tell me there are a few fish left in the river
but not like they used to be
you could hold one line in your hand
and tie the other to a tree.

And then the slow pull was a cobbler
or a fast jack fish putting up a fight
and I always remember sitting at those pools
with a kero light

And if you got a cobbler sting
you rubbed the spot with kero from your lamp
and if you got bitten by a bull ant on your bottom
on the culprit you would stamp.

And get your mate to rub some onion on the spot
and hold your kero lamp
for the river has all these insects
where the soil is very damp.

The drovers camped all along the river
when they were driving sheep
and I often think of the Avon and its high hill sides
when I lay down to sleep.

Ron Waters lived at Dewar's Pool, Toodyay, for 47 years. He often fished the Avon River with the Chitty Family of Dewar's Pool, and Herb Ferguson and his son, Peter.

"I felt very sad when they cleared the trees out of the river. It has not been the same since" says Ron.

"When I fished with the Chitty Family we would go to Deep Dale Pool [Deepdale], Long Pool and Cobbler Pool. And when I went with the Fergusons we went from their farm in the Julimar to all the pools along the right bank of the river for a long way down."

TRAINING THE AVON RIVER

by Doug Morgan

Doug Morgan has been a Councillor in the Shire of Northam for over thirty four years, and is Chairman of the Avon River Management Authority. The following article is an extract from notes and documents used by Doug to deliver a talk at Muresk in 1987.

As long ago as 1937 there were moves to begin clearing the bed of the Avon River. In a letter to the Minister for Employment (Hon. A.R.G. Hawke, MLA), the Town Clerk of Northam wrote suggesting that "men on sustenance" could be employed. "... work which might be put in hand with advantage is the cutting down of trees and undergrowth in the bed of the Avon River between Northam and Toodyay..." In fact, some men were employed in removing trees for about one mile below the town of Northam in 1937.

Floods in 1946 once again prompted talk of de-snagging the river, and in 1947 the Public Works Department (PWD) Irrigation and Drainage Engineer, RW Edwards, recommended "this river needs training." The Beverley Road Board stated "all road boards between Toodyay and Pingelly expressed their wholehearted concurrence in this action", although the Brookton Road Board later stated "unless the Government can undertake the capital and maintenance expenditure, the [Brookton] Board does not approve." RW Edwards compiled a report on training the river, and stated "it will in all probability mean treating the river down as

far as a few miles below Toodyay, a distance of approximately 123 miles [197 km]. The cost of treating this river spread over a period of four years would be, say, £28,500 ... less four years maintenance by respective Local Authorities at ... £3,800, the balance is then £24,700."

RW Edwards went on to say in his report that "the de-snagging will release a considerable amount of silt now held up by the river by thick scrub and debris in the river bed." Further, "the travelling silt mentioned above will, in all probability, fill up water holes in the river bed" and "silting troubles in all probability will occur at Northam above the existing weir unless the weir is remodelled so that a clear run may be given to the river during the flood periods. At some future date, when the river is properly trained, it will be possible to hold up the water at any desired spot and thus form an artificial frame by the construction of removable weirs as suggested at Northam."

Cabinet approved the funding for the project on February 18th 1948, but the Road Boards were not keen on paying maintenance costs, so the project did not go ahead.

In February 1955 cyclonic rains brought heavy flooding to the area. In Northam, people were sand-bagging the levee, but the water ran back through the drains, flooding Fitzgerald Street. By March calls were again being made for the Avon River to be de-snagged, and the Avon Valley Development Committee was formed. In a report to this committee in March 1956, the Director of [Public] Works advised that the "only satisfactory means of reducing the flooding problem is by training the river in such a manner as to improve the flow, which at present is seriously interfered with by the growth of trees, etc. in the river bed.

"Any work of river training must commence in the lower portion of the section of the river where interruption to flow exists, and any improvement that is sought between Toodyay and Northam, York or Beverley, must commence 5 miles downstream from Toodyay."

"The cost of the suggested work on the Toodyay-Northam section is in the order of £24,000 and, when funds can be found for the project, it is considered desirable that the work should be spread over a period of

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

about three years” (local government would be responsible for annual maintenance).

“Broadly, the Department’s proposal involves the construction of a gullet, where necessary, in the flat stream of the river by clearing out all the trees and debris over a width of approximately 3 chains. In some places silt movement by bulldozer would be necessary.

“There is a problem to be investigated at Plaimer’s factory [Extract’s Factory] near Toodyay, where condensing water is drawn from a large pool in the river bed. Training of the river upstream from this site would naturally result in the movement of silt during periods of river flow and this would affect the pondage in the pool. The powers and/or liabilities of the Public Works Department, in the event of activities in the river affecting the Plaimer factory, are being examined by the Crown Law Department.”

The following June the Shires of Northam and Toodyay supported the proposal, and in July the Town of Northam gave their support.

In 1958, with the blessing of neighbouring councils, the Avon River Training Scheme began. Bulldozers removed all the vegetation and ripped the river bed,

where necessary, to lower the level. Logs were tied to trees on the bends to divert the water into a straight path and prevent it from entering the flood plain. The trees that were ripped out were pushed into heaps and burnt.

Work continued on the scheme until 1961 when it was stopped for the effects of the scheme to be evaluated. It was resumed again in 1966.

Despite warnings of the environmental consequences of the scheme, new land had been opened up for farming, and people began to build on the flood plain. Jim Masters had been speaking against river training from its inception [Jim’s second principle of river management explains: “The energy balance of a river, as determined by nature, should never be tampered with. The energy balance of a river relates to its natural rate of discharge. The energy balance was a dominant factor in forming the river channel and flood plain, and existed long before human interference with the River Basin.”]

Doug has used the river all his life, and after being elected to the Northam Shire Council in 1965, with advice from Jim Masters, endeavoured to stop the River Training Scheme.

In 1970 the Shire of

Northam refused to pay its annual maintenance costs, and in 1972 a delegation from the Shire met with the PWD. The PWD wanted to protect its investment in the scheme, and advised it was through the insistence of the local governing bodies of the Avon River that the work had been carried out. However, the Shire wrote to the Under Secretary for [Public] Works advising as follows:

1. That this Council does not propose to continue its contribution towards the Avon River Training Scheme.

2. Your Department is requested not to carry out any further ripping of the lower end of Masters’ Pool.

3. Council request advice from your Department as to what research is to be carried out on river problems.

It was obvious that river training had created new problems in Perth waters. No consideration had been made in Town Planning Schemes for 100 year flood heights and people had built further into the flood plain. Training had lowered the flood level by a metre, and reduced the flood duration, but had destroyed most of the pools and an ecosystem which supported a unique group of crustacea and other important river fauna.

In the next issue of BIDDIP, Doug Morgan will continue his story of the Avon River Training Scheme.

Post Office Box 427
Toodyay 6566
Western Australia

Phone: (08) 9574 5574

Fax: (08) 9574 5574

Email: wcclarke@avon.net.au



Toodyay Friends of the River

"Make Friends with our Avon River"

THE BACK PAGE

DRAFT WEED STRATEGY PREPARED

At the May General Meeting of the Friends of the River, a Draft Weed Strategy was presented to members for discussion, and future endorsement.

The Strategy proposes two vegetation quadrates of 20m², and one of these was set up behind the Ambulance Depot during the May working-bee. The other will be established at West Toodyay.

Plant specimens were collected and pressed and ready for mounting and identifica-

tion. Three specimens of each plant (95% of which were weeds) were collected, with a specimen for the Water and Rivers Commission, one for the Naturalists' Club and one for our own record.

All plants will be recorded in a data base, and various control methods used on the weeds will be added. It is proposed to publish an annual report on the information we collect, and make this available to the various authorities, the Naturalists' Club and the Shire.

It is proposed to run a public education programme

simultaneously, with the hope of educating river neighbours to, not only be mindful with what they plant, but to be on the lookout for weed escapes from other sources.

An essential component of weed control is to revegetate any area that has been bared, and could be subject to erosion.

Copies of the Draft Strategy are available from Wayne Clarke. The Draft will be presented at our Annual General Meeting in August 1999 for endorsement.

TOODYAY BROOK

The Toodyay Brook is flowing well this year, the biggest flow for quite a number of years. The catchment for the Brook is quite large, and extends into the Shire of Victoria Plains, where it is known as the Bolgart Brook and pos-

sibly other names.

The Brook enters the Avon River at West Toodyay, and in normal years flows quite late in the summer. It is not all that far upstream from Barrack's Pool, and if sediment is removed from this pool, the Toodyay Brook would be an excellent

source of water to make the pool reasonably permanent. The removal of sediment from Barrack's Pool is a High Priority Strategic Action in the River Recovery Plan for Section 3—Toodyay.

This key issue must be pursued!