

December 2017



Biddip



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Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 11, Issue 3



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The Toodyay Friends of the River are grateful to the Wheatbelt NRM for their on-going support in producing the Biddip newsletter



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Presidents message by Sarah Dudley

December is a very special month for all volunteers. Firstly, December 5th is celebrated worldwide as International Volunteering Day when the collective action of so many active members of the community is acknowledged and publicised. Just 20 days later, on the 25th, a special time of giving - in recognition of the unique gifts of the individual brings to the whole family - is celebrated. At this very special time I wish each family member of TFOR a healthy and harmonious time of celebration - and thank you for your valued contributions in 2017.

TFOR continues to develop the cultural, environmental and historical aspects of the Avon River and continues to encourage community appreciation of this unique area. The Bilya Walk Track is hopefully just the beginning of the development of further walking tracks which aim to improve visitors' connection to the river. Our planned activities for 2018 can be viewed in the TFOR window outside Drummond House (next to Bendigo Bank) and on our webpage www.toodyayfor.org.au.

Our intention for 2018 is to continue to develop more diverse and regular volunteering opportunities, to partner the Shire more closely as it develops aspects of its Local Planning Strategy, particularly the need to promote sustainable development and encourage ecotourism opportunities. We also aim to develop more efficient data collection through our newly established monitoring points and proposed adventures into the world of drone photography!

May 2018 bring you happiness flowing from our combined effort as volunteers to ensure the Avon's unique wildlife and ecosystems prosper into the future.

SOUTH WESTERN FROG CALLS - CD

Sponsored by the WA Museum, ALCOA, the University of WA and the West Australian Government a wonderful CD is available, 'Frog Calls of Southwest Australia', at the WA Museum Book Shop.



The CD has the calls of 31 species. The information on the cover insert contains the common and scientific name, the calling season and a descriptive calling site of each frog.

J. Dale Roberts, University of Western Australia, has made the recordings and the narration. The first section of the CD has the common and scientific name given then the calls are repeated

without the name. It is a wonderful CD and, at the price of **\$14.95**, a really great buy.

THE RECYCLED REGATTA

by Greg Warburton

The inaugural Recycled Regatta that was held Saturday 6th September was a highlight of the month!

Hoping our paddles, made from old garden stakes and a cut-up 20 litre drum, would stand up to the task Grahame and I, Polystyrene Team, steered across the finish line first.

The event highlighted the creativity and ingenuity of the entrants with a wonderful range of decorated boats made from all manner of waste materials and, of course, there were creative costumes.

Julimar Fire Brigade's fire truck raft with its fire pump, flashing lights and a crew of pirate fire fighters made a real splash and certainly won 'the most heavy' category.

Congratulations to the organisers and officials for such a successful and entertaining event and we look forward to it happening again next year

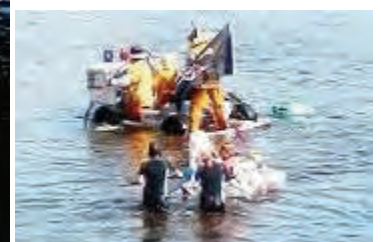


Left: Participants in the 2017 inaugural Recycled Regatta begin to space out along the Avon River.

Perhaps not the fastest of craft, the Julimar Fire Brigade was certainly the most creative.

TFOR Members Greg and Grahame were the first over the line

Photos: Beth Frayne



CANAL du MIDI, FRANCE

The Boggs Family

While in France we did a three nights, self-drive boat cruise along Canal du Midi in the Bordeaux region. Canal du Midi stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea originally built to transport goods across France instead of having to take the long way around the coast.

The picturesque canal lined with deciduous trees traverses some beautiful horticultural country with small towns and pubs along the way to stop at and eat, shop and drink. I'll



admit we stole a few apples from the bordering apple orchards and drank some good local reds.

There are long, flat pathways that line the banks so you can jump off and walk, run or ride beside your boat if you need to stretch your legs. A highlight of this type of adventure was using the locks used to control water levels and our kids really enjoyed tripping the gates and helping to anchor the boat ropes while the locks filled and emptied.

The canals really are an engineering wonder with parts actually crossing bridges over top of intersecting rivers. With a speed limit of 8 knots and no boating experience necessary it really is delightfully relaxing way to spend a weekend and enjoy a tame "river" experience - something those of us into rivers can really appreciate.



By the Avon River

by Rev Peggy Ludlow

First, I pronounced it the Avon, like the river that runs through Stratford-on-Avon! Then I thought it must have water! Wrong on both counts.

But it is a river of seasons none the less. Atmospheric on an Autumn day and, this year, the flooding in February was a sight to behold. A daily walk along the Bilya track or over the bridge, gives a sense of the birds that inhabit it. Pelicans and Spoon-bills in the summer wait patiently on the still shallow waters and are often seen near Newcastle Bridge. The White-faced Heron likes a little more life and is mostly seen when the waters are moving and deeper. If we walk early enough, the flash of blue of the Sacred Kingfisher fishing from a post next to the river is captured. Close by, the Red-legged Stilts again, only turning up when the waters are moving.

The river near us in Stroud, Gloucestershire, was also full of small birds seen easily at the beginning of the day; washing, preening and grabbing a drink. A healthy river with fish and signs of water rats, grass snakes and slow worms. The Stroudwater Canal, built to take goods from the Cotswolds to the Thames and out to the Sharpness - Bristol link, is being restored to its former glory. Mallard, white swan and grebe abound. I miss the deep green of England - its crowded, but utterly beautiful, backwaters.

Hidden gems of industrial history and past. The feltmaking industry marks the story of the water rich valleys, for centuries. Uniforms were the product until recently and now Snooker table felt and tennis balls, for Wimbledon, of course! Crisp winter days with the frost and ice about and hot, still summer days with the haze of heat rising from the waters.

Back to the Avon: the swallows stay all year which is a surprise to those who expect them to fly south to the sun for the winter. The nesting times are long and various, when in Europe the shorter breeding season is a time of manic activity for all creatures – Spring is sprung.

But it seems Toodyay has its own rhythm. The summer sounds of the frogs, especially when there has been rain, is full on! Boobook passes-by but I think does not like the town lighting and stays further away down river. We have a war on caltrop, so we take the spade and collect it, maybe if we continue we may get a hold of it? The poor dogs hate it.

Neither is better nor worse than the other location. We are content to think tis the same - but different.

THE RIVERS OUSE and AVON

by Wayne Clarke

THERE ARE similarities between the River Ouse in Yorkshire with the Avon River, and its Training Scheme . The ‘*Fifth Principle*’ in the ‘*Principles of River Management*’ by foundation member Jim Masters OAM, is ‘*Respect the forces of nature. Look at the rivers as a universal example which shows the forces of nature working together. A river is many interrelated forces of nature working together. This pre-existing natural balance of time and energy must be retained for effective river management. Time and energy working through the speed of wind and water are the factors in river, land and catchment management. Change this, and everything will be changed*’.

It is obvious the National Rivers Authority (NRA) in England had not researched the outcome of changes that they proposed to make in the late 1990s. This is the story of the River Ouse.

“They are treating the Ouse like a cross between a canal and a water main”, says Roger Flude, angler and Chairman of the preservation group ‘*Save the Ouse System*’ (SOS). He is raged in a battle to defend the Yorkshire River Ouse and its tributaries from the National Rivers Authority (NRA). He says the NRA wants to turn the river into a water supply conduit that could destroy fisheries, erode river banks and drain priceless wetlands in the Vale of York. The battle, due to go to a public inquiry later this year, is rapidly turning into a trial of strength for the future of the nation’s rivers. Should they remain natural water courses or must they become mere extensions of the pipes and reservoirs run by the water companies?

The inquiry also seems set to test to the limit whether the NRA, the nation’s main water watchdog, can combine two contradictory functions as guardian of natural rivers and guarantor that our taps never run dry.

The dispute is over the NRA’s Ouse Augmentation Scheme. The NRA wants to pump underground water out of the sandstone rocks beneath the Vale of York and into tiny tributaries of the River Ouse, such as the River Kyle and Cundall Beck. From these, the water will flow into the main river before Yorkshire Water, the region’s privatised water company, sucks it out again downstream and sends it by pipeline across the country to Leeds.

The **scientists** promoting the project for the NRA formerly worked for Yorkshire Water before the company was privatised and its river management functions were given to the Yorkshire region of the newly created NRA. Yorkshire Water says that it needs the extra water that the scheme will provide during the summer, when the rivers run low, to meet the 11 per cent increase in demand for water that it expects between now and the year 2012. At first, seven pumps will extract up to 43,000 cubic metres (43,000,000 litres) a day from the sandstone for up to five months each summer. Stages two and three of the scheme will increase the extraction to 200,000 cubic metres (200,000,000 litres) a day.

The “*augmentation*” threatens to damage both the sandstone hills (by lowering the water table) and the river. Last summer, in a clear sign of things to come, test pumping caused local wetlands to dry up. The first to suffer was a private nature reserve created by local landowner Gerry Kemp, with ponds, bluebells, wild garlic and a resident falcon, at Alne in the heart of the Vale. Its spring failed within 14 days of the start of pumping.

Less than one kilometre from another borehole is Upper Dunsford Carrs, an SSSI run by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. Its wet meadows, flooded woodland and fenland habitats depend on a high water table. A test pump in 1981 lowered the levels by two metres.

Biologists say that fish throughout the Ouse basin could also be hit by pumping ground water into rivers. The main problem, says Ian Cowx of the University of Hull’s Humberside International Fisheries Institute, will be the temperature of the water pumped into the streams. Underground water stays at 10 degrees Celsius all year round. In summer, when it’s pumped into the tiny streams of the Vale of York, it will be up to 10 degrees colder than the stream water.

The shock could destroy much of the natural life of the streams. According to recent studies, they are important spawning areas and nurseries for the entire Ouse catchment. “Fewer fry may survive in the colder waters,” Cowx says. “In many species depressed early summer temperatures may delay or even prevent spawning.”

THE RIVER OUSE and THE AVON... cont.

There may be also more complex effects – on feeding for instance. The larvae of fish such as carp, tench and roach must eat plankton immediately after hatching. But, Cowx says, colder water will kill off summer plankton growth. The fish will weaken and starve, and become more susceptible to predation.”

NRA scientists admit that during the past test pumping, stream temperatures fell by eight degrees, causing a “substantial loss of invertebrates.” But they claim that there are few fish in the becks. This is disputed by Cowx, who says there are trout, dace, gudgeon, chub, bleak and roach. The NRA did not find them because the streams they investigated had just been dredged by water engineers.

Curiously, Cowx suffered a similar mishap himself, when he came to assess fisheries in the River Kyle. A large diesel tank mysteriously leaked its contents into the river. And a few days later, there was a major fish kill when somebody poured disinfectant into the water. These unexplained incidents are the subject of dark conspiracy theories among some campaigners for the Ouse.

The truth, Cowx says, is that there is little data on the effects of pouring huge amounts of cold water into these small springs at the height of summer. But what evidence there is hardly backs up the NRA’s sanguine stance, which will be sorely tested at the public inquiry, due to begin in September.

At the inquiry, local opponents, including Roger Flude, Friends of the Earth and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, will demand that Yorkshire Water plugs the leaks in its water mains before beginning new assaults on its rivers. And they will state that if water is needed it should come first from the giant reservoir on the River Tyne at Kielder, built to provide water for heavy industries in the north-east that have since shut down.

“We are at the crossroads,” says Mike Childs of Friends of the Earth in York. “We have to decide whether to carry on building reservoirs and pumping out water, or whether to go down the conservation road.”

Since a series of major planning disputes over schemes to flood large areas of land for large reservoirs, water engineers in lowland England have concentrated on tapping underground waters. In many regions, including the Vale of York and the chalk and limestone hills of southeast England, far more water is pumped out than percolates down after rainfall. That, as much as the recent drought, has been the origin of the recent crisis in England’s underground water reserves. And it is also creating a crisis for rivers, as the streams that depend on natural springs dry up.

All over the country, hundreds of licenses to extract underground water have been handed out by the government over the past two decades – to farmers, water supply companies and industrialists. In theory, the NRA, which inherited control of these licenses, has the power to revoke them. In practice, it has to provide compensation to people whose licenses have been revoked – and cannot afford to do it on the scale necessary. “The NRA”, Childs says, “must go to the Government to argue that it must have the power to control the nation’s rivers effectively.”

Instead, the NRA is attempting to do deals with the water companies. Currently, its engineers are considering emergency programmes to revive 20 or more dwindling river flows by pumping out groundwater to increase their flows. In the largest river rehabilitation scheme, announced in January, the NRA and Thames Water are to spend £12 million keeping water in the River Darent in Kent, a chalk stream that has dried up entirely during recent summers. The water will be pumped from chalk pits and taken from boreholes deemed “less sensitive” than those drying out the river in the first place.

Nobody can be sure how effective all this juggling with diminishing water resources will be, nor its impact on stream wildlife. What is clear is that throughout England, increasing numbers of rivers will no longer have natural springs as their sources. They will instead flow from petrol-driven pumps forcing water up from deep underground. Like water mains, they will dry up when the pump is turned off.

Engineers fiddling with water flow pose as great a threat today to the ecology of most of British [and Australian] rivers as does pollution.

“Base management on long-term observations”.

Jim Masters OAM

Members Gallery



Above and left:

Birds in the riparian zone of the river. Above is a female and below a male Splendid fairy-wren.

Photos by Rebecca Meegan-Lowe

Members Gallery



Left: a Barn Owl poses for the camera.

Photo: Rebecca Meegan-Lowe

PROJECT OFFICER'S REPORT

by Greg Warburton

Inspection of the various sites used in the August Avon Descent did not reveal any significant problems with participants and competitors alike respecting our precious and fragile river environment.

On the last Sunday of August members began the placement of ten permanent and strategically placed monitoring points along the river. When all ten are completed these will stretch from Wetherall to Dumbarton Bridge. Being in the flood zone, the posts need to be solidly constructed and concreted in place.

These monitoring stations will be focal points for members to gather data and make observations of a range of environmental conditions including plant species present, weed invasion, bird life, river flows, erosion, sediment movement and water quality.

The Environment Matters marquee at the Toodyay Agriculture Show struggled to accommodate the steady stream of visitors that came through to learn about everything from waterways management, wildlife care, native plant species cultivation to waste management and recycling.

I recently attended the Wheatbelt Trails Forum in York at which a range of inspiring and informative presenters highlighted the increasingly important and popular Trails Industry.

Many towns are seeking to promote themselves as Trail Towns or Trail Hubs. With Toodyay's existing popular river walks and potential for many other trails we are well positioned to keep building on the good work already begun with a number of current and future funding opportunities to be taken advantage of.

Recent work along the river has included the slashing of high-fire-hazard areas such as Lloyd Reserve and Millard's Pool re-vegetated sites. Other work completed includes grading of river fire access tracks, maintenance of the Bilya Track and replacement of vandalised track markers.

Many thanks to the volunteers who have adopted their special sections and undertaken valuable up-keep work. A special 'thank you' to our vice-president and works manager, Grahame Malone, for coordinating the working bees so effectively in the second half of the year and managing the Toodyay Friends of the River trailer and tools supply so conscientiously.



HAZARD REDUCTION, MILLARDS POOL

Photos by Greg Warburton



Top: Machinery taking off the weeds in the reserve opposite Millards Pool.

Bottom: A job well done, with hazards greatly reduced.

Post Office Box 1266
(108b Stirling Terrace)
Toodyay 6566
Western Australia

President: Sarah Dudley (08) 9574 2118
Secretary: Robyn Taylor (08) 9574 2578
Treasurer: Wayne Clarke (08) 9574 5574
Editor: Desraé Clarke (08) 9574 5574
Editorial to : editor@toodyayfor.org.au

Contact us at: info@toodyayfor.org.au



Toodyay & Districts
Community Bank Branch



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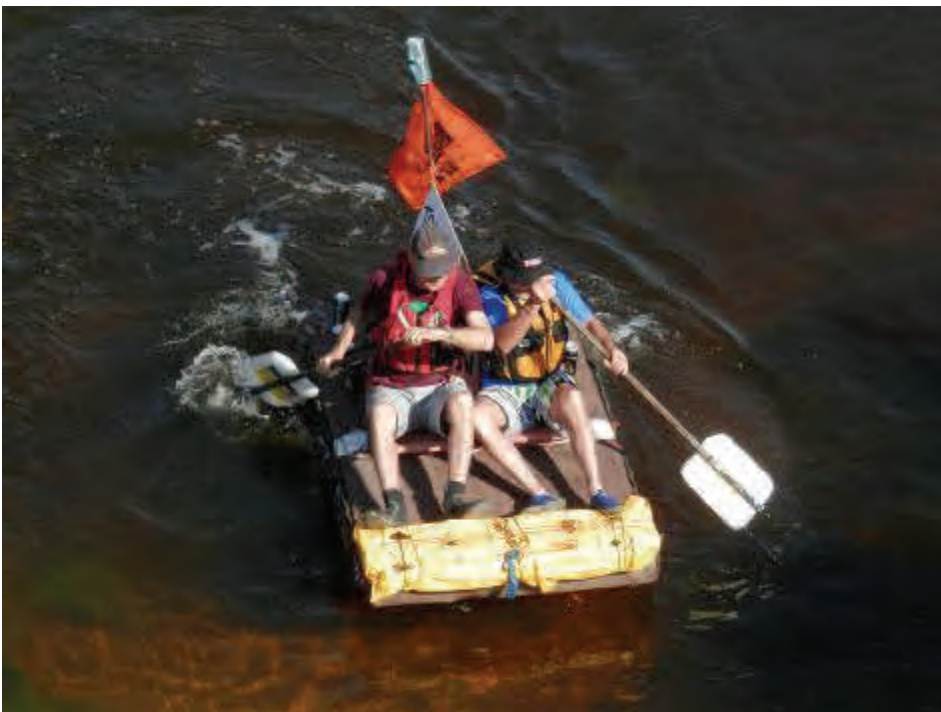
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The first over the line in the inaugural 'Recycled Regatta' was the entry of Greg Warburton and Grahame Malone - the Polystyrene Team.

Congratulations to both - there will be many more challengers next year to take off the coveted award.

Photo: Beth Frayne