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Biddip



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Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 15, Issue 1



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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



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Presidents message from Robyn

THIS year has certainly been eventful with some big environmental issues relating to the widening and straightening of Toodyay Road, and the successful work on the Pelham Brook Outlet Project (PBOP).

Before discussing these, I would like to mention the very enjoyable illustrated presentation by Derek Donegan in the CWA Hall in February. This was our first event for the year. Derek talked about growing up at Cobbler Pool on the Avon River during the 1940s and 1950s with six other siblings. Conditions were hard, especially for their mother, but the memories are happy ones. Derek's older brother Gaven was a former President of TFOR and, to say he was a 'character', is an understatement. Sadly, Gaven left us far too soon in 2013. A memorial was erected by the Friends near our picnic shelter on Millards Pool. Member Sarah Dudley gave a great summary of Derek's talk illustrated with a map showing the original pools along the Avon for our March column in the monthly community newspaper, *The Toodyay Herald*.

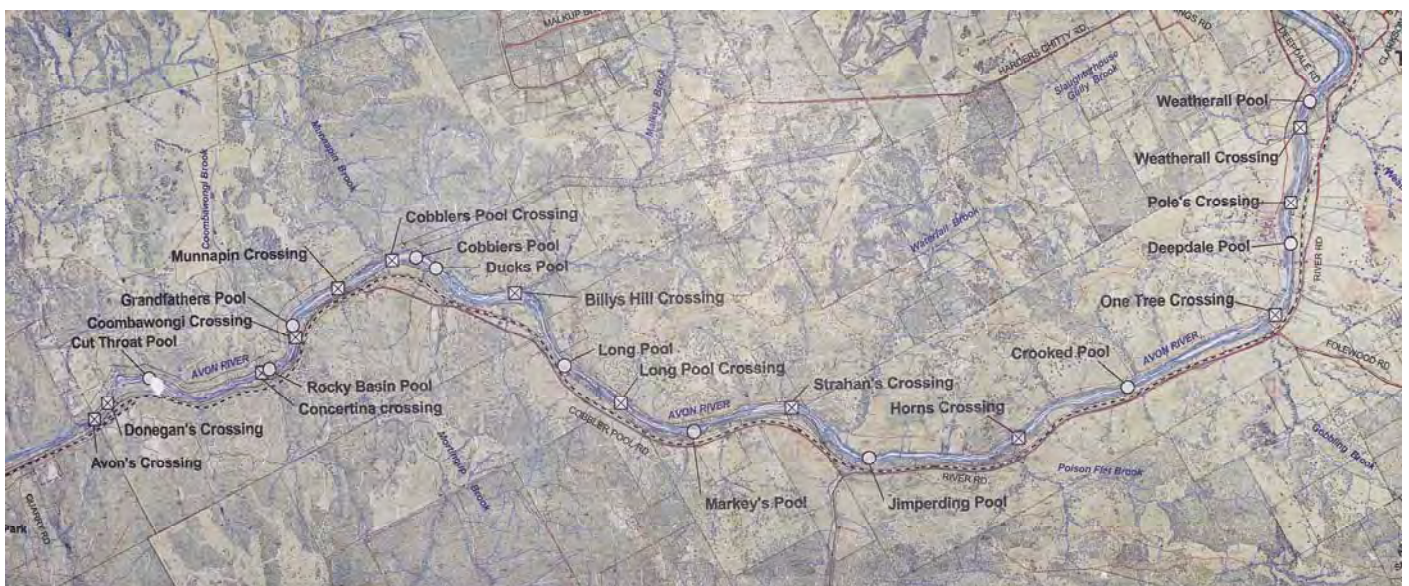
I would like to give a warm welcome to new members Bev Sviros, who has joined the Friends, and Helen Spry and Annette Bagley, who are assisting with propagation of plants with the Seed Orchard Group.

The first working bee in March was walking the Bilya Walk Track from Millard's Pool to the Bird Hide. The plan was to make a note of features that could be used for interpretation signage along the length of the Track.

However, an end was put to our note-taking when we came across the collapsing embankment at Redbanks Pool due to recent floods, and the undermining of the Track from water seeping from a massive unauthorised dumping of excess water by the Main Roads WA (MRWA) contractors. Emergency measures had to be put in place. Many thanks to the TFOR team for cordoning off the most dangerous section and creating a new route for the users of the Track.

Subsequently, MRWA used an extended pipe to pump the water into Redbanks Pool, a Registered Aboriginal Site, without obtaining a licence or permission to do so. Members of our management committee have combined their talents to write a succinct and pertinent letter to MRWA about this. Thank you to members Bridget, Wayne, Maurie and Greg for your efforts.

The first major stage of the PBOP has now been achieved and in good time before the heavy winter rains. Congratulations to all involved including the PBOP team, Urbaqua, Richard Ness, the Shire's Engineering Technical Officer, and specialist contractor Proform Civil. The next stage of the project will be revegetation.



Above: Pools of the Lower Avon, DWER sign, West Toodyay

Photo: Michael Sinclair-Jones

Cover Photo: Pelham Brook Outlet works

Photo: Bridget Leggett

Derek Donegan and the Avon River Pools

by Sarah Dudley

IN February Derek Donegan enthusiastically shared memories of his family's life living alongside a River Avon pool in the 1940s and 50s. This pool is still in existence: Cobbler Pool.

Derek is the second eldest of seven children. The family all packed into a 4 roomed mudbrick cottage despite being nine in the family. The boys slept on the verandahs in all weathers! Water was sourced from a nearby spring. Protein was sourced from cobbler and mullet (a fresh water fish) caught in fish traps, together with roo, rabbit, mutton and a delicious 'twenty-eight' soup!

Childhood pre-dated piped water, electricity, landline phones, washing machines, fridges and school buses. Derek remembers with joy the day a kerosene-run 'Ice Master fridge' joined the family as they could now enjoy ice-cream!

This was all before the River Avon was "trained" in the late 1950s. The purpose of this modification was to improve the main channels so the water could flow more quickly and thus decrease the likelihood of flooding. Unforeseen consequences have sadly eventuated in the years post-training, the major after-effects being increased salinisation and the tragic loss of most of the River Avon's deep pools due to sedimentation.

The world Derek grew up in is illustrated by the map currently found in the parking lot at West Toodyay Bridge. This original Department of Water map shows the feeder brooks, the original pools, the original crossings and the route of the Avon River as it flows from Toodyay towards the Avon National Park. This is the world the Donegan children grew up in. They were free to explore the river, swim in it, appreciate its flora and fauna and befriend it.

The pools as the locals knew them before 'training' were memorable. Long Pool was at least a mile long. Deepdale Pool had lovely sandy beaches. Markey's Pool could be crossed if need be using well-positioned ladders and fence wire! Cut Throat Pool had plenty of clear water and lots of fish. Rocky Basin was a fabulous playground as the children roamed far and wide.

Thankyou Derek for sharing such beautiful memories.



Above: Derek Donegan presenting

Photo: Linda Rooney

And the rains came...

AFTER a prolonged dry period the sky opened up on the third of March, dumping over 100mm in some places around Toodyay, and in the Wheatbelt, with some areas receiving over 50mm in an hour. As a consequence there were areas with local flooding, and a big volume of water flowed in the Avon River. Below are photographs taken during and following the deluge.



Left: Boyagerring Brook floods over the Murray Walkway during early March.

Photo: Beth Frayne

Right: Damage to Redbank Pool and the Bilya Walk Track from the flooding - compounded by de-watering operations from the Toodyay Road works by a Main Roads contractor.

Photo: Greg Warburton



ALL of us will agree that it has been an action packed couple of months along our River.

One of the big news items has been the completion of the Pelham Outlet Storm Water Project. What a privilege it was to be a part of such a collaborative and successful task. The environmental benefits along with other advantages will be appreciated by the Shire and community for a long time to come.

Other river news of note was of course the significant flow event in March. The velocity and height of the water caused major erosion at Red Banks Pool dislodging trees and a part of the walk track was lost. The high bank that gives the pool its name was dangerously undermined. As a result the walk track and bird hide were closed until safety barriers could be put in place and the path realigned back from the edge. The Shire will be working with the Toodyay Friends of the River on further safety and rehabilitation work. Close monitoring of bank stability will continue.


The fragility of the river bank here was further compromised when a de-watering operation by Main Roads contractors pumped hundreds of thousands of litres of water that pooled above the fragile river bank. Fortunately, a timely report by a Bilya Track walker alerted me to the issue and pumping was immediately stopped. A new arrangement was installed and the contractor was able to continue the work without further risk the bank. Among the disappointing aspects to this occurrence was the lack of response to our enquiries and requests from Department of Water & Environmental Regulation. This has re-enforced how vital TFOR is for river management and related issues.

Many people enjoy a walk along the Bilya Walk Track beside Millards' Pool followed by a rest at the picnic shelter. A resident of Glen Coe Estate suggested wheel chair access here would be a good idea as the concrete kerb was hard to cross. The Shire agreed and Reserve Management contracted local business, WacWil, to do the work which is now complete. If you haven't seen the improvements at Millard's Pool I'd encourage you to check them out.


On the subject of the Bilya Walk the 'unofficial' river bank track at Lloyd Reserve is now so frequently traversed that I have installed directional markers along that section.

After the completion of their project the dynamic Pelham Outlet Steering Group have been looking for the next task to tackle. It has been agreed that more interpretive signage along the walk track would enhance the experience and raise awareness about the history and environment of the Avon River. Some preliminary survey work and discussions have taken place with Extracts Weir being identified as a priority location as an interpretation point.

COBBLER POOL





This is a well-known location on the Avon River being the overnight camp for the Avon Descent white water race. This is a grueling course over 124 km from Northam through Toodyay to Bayswater. Competitors face a series of spectacular rapids with names like "Supershoot", "Emu Falls" and the "Washing Machine". Starting as a trial event in 1973 this annual sporting spectacular combines both paddle and power craft and attracts hundreds of competitors and thousands of spectators. It is held in August but seasonal conditions mean some years the river is a turbulent torrent of churning water and other times the flow can be little more than a trickle.

Illustration by Roger Hudson
www.northamwater.com.au

The pool is named after a fish species known as freshwater cobbler *Tandanus bostocki* which used to abound here. Cobbler Pool was once a permanent water hole up to 10 metres deep and 600 metres long but sadly effects caused by the "River Training Scheme" saw the pool gradually fill with sand and sediment. This 20 year government program to bulldoze the river was an attempt to mitigate the impact of flooding but instead caused permanent, disastrous environmental results. The increasing salt and nutrient levels of the river water meant the cobbler could not survive and has not been caught here in over 50 years.

Please respect this environment

- Take all rubbish with you
- Do not light fires outside the permitted period
- Shire of Toodyay Rangers patrol this site
- Report all problems to the Shire of Toodyay
Phone 9574 3600



Left: Signage proposed for Cobbler Pool

(see Page 6)

Project Officer report (cont)

by Greg Warburton

Currently, an interpretive sign for historic Nardie Cemetery is being manufactured and will be mounted in a shelter there. Nardie Cemetery is of course the start or the end of the Bilya Track Walk.

Much further downstream at Cobbler Pool a similar sign and shelter will be installed soon. Cobbler Pool is becoming popular as a “free camping” site and increased management is required. Shire Rangers and the Reserve Management Officer have needed to do rubbish clean ups and regular patrols there to check on fires and other inappropriate activities. This year Cobbler Pool will be humming with activity on the first weekend of August when the Avon Descent returns after being cancelled last year due to COVID.

The TFOR canoe ramp at Weatherall Reserve is ready for the event and the severe erosion there we have seen in the past will be minimised.



Above left: Disabled access at Millards Pool



Above right: Members christen the access

From the Archives...



Above: Removal of weeds (Tamarisk, False Bamboo, etc.) from behind Toodyay Traders, using the Water and Rivers Commission shredder. L to R: Martin Revell; Miska Madacsi (rear); Andrew and Maggie Marsden; Olivia and Fred Jones. 19 September 1999

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Avon River Takeaway

by Robyn Taylor

EARLY one morning in January while dog-walking across the school footbridge, I came across a largish pile of undigested small fish, crustaceans and what could have been tadpoles. There was also bits of river weed.

Pelicans, spoonbills, cormorants and herons feed in the river and the latter two in particular sit on the metal handrails. Given the amount, I assumed one of them had thrown up the entire contents of its stomach. A plastic doggy bag proved useful, so I scooped up what I could to take home and have a closer look. This was hard evidence of river tucker.

The following came from Dominic Heald of the Dept of Water (DWER), who did the River Health survey near the Pelham Brook outlet last year.

The photo looks like a feast of exotic mosquito fish/eastern gambusia (*Gambusia holbrooki*) and native south west glass shrimp (*Palaemon australis*), both of which are abundant in the Avon. Going by size and rostrum length none of the shrimp look like the exotic indistinct river shrimp (*Caridina indistincta*), which is good as they are a notifiable pest species, but unfortunately have already been recorded in the Avon. Why a bird has hurled it all back up who knows...unless it was a flee response?

John Dell (formerly with the WA Museum and Patron of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club) ventured: "I don't think it was produced by a bird but more likely by a fox. I presume it was a single deposit of varying stages of digestion and quite smelly! The position and space on the bridge would be an indication of whether a fox could have been crossing the river. The varied assortment of critters and different stages of decay indicate that whatever produced the pile was a sizable scavenger with no specific diet preference.

Whatever the hungry predator was has caused us to ponder on the type of scavenger and to confirm the various inhabitants of the Avon River.



Photo: Robyn Taylor

Riparian Restoration, a long term project

Part 5: Pelham Brook Outlet

by Dr. Bridget Leggett

Stage two of the Pelham Brook Outlet Restoration Project is now complete, much to the delight of those involved. The engineering work has been skilfully and carefully undertaken by ProformCivil from Chittering, and the very recent rain has ‘christened’ the new rock pitching.

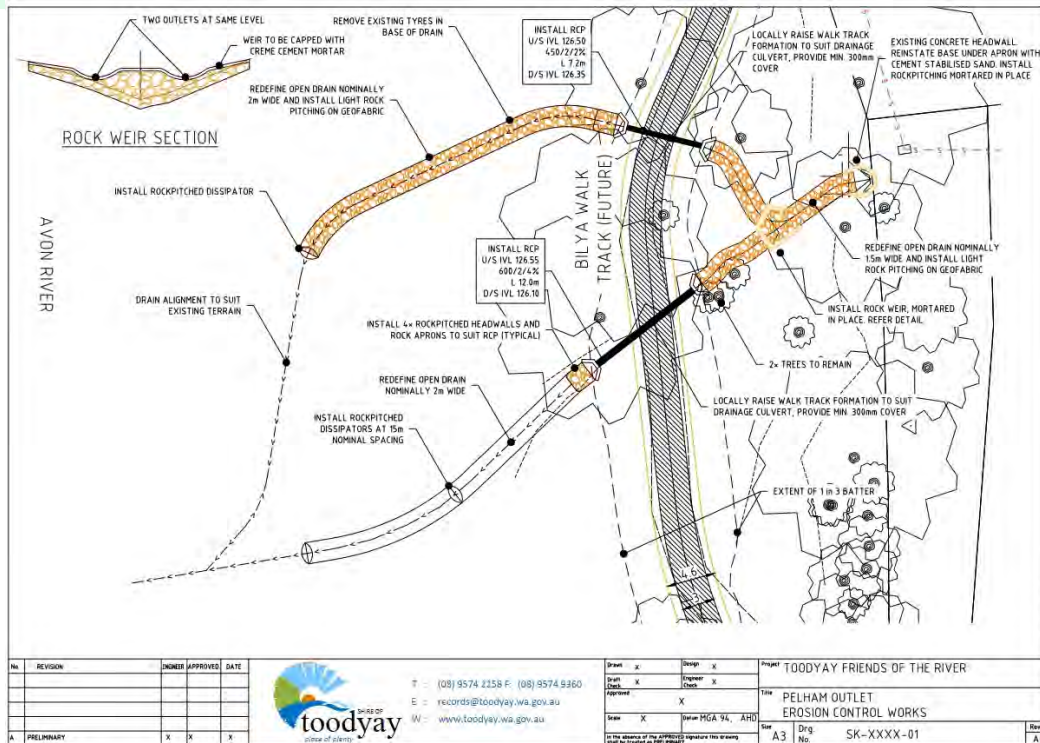


Above: The work area below the Anglican Church cordoned off.

Photo: Bridget Leggett

Stage two, the engineering phase, was always going to be the biggest challenge. Funding from the Federal Government’s *Community Environment Program* made it possible to employ a contractor to do the earth work. TFOR member and Toodyay Shire Reserves Manager, Greg Warburton, has had a pivotal role as project manager, nurturing partnerships with the Toodyay Shire and Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and bringing it all together.

Riparian Restoration, a long term project (cont.)



Engineering drawing for the work by Richard Ness, Engineering Technical Officer for the Shire of Toodyay

There was some very heavy rain just at the time when the engineering plans were being finalised. This was fortuitous, as the water cut a new channel to the river. Both the old and new channels were incorporated into the final design. This meant the rock weir needed two outlets, and two culverts were installed for the Bilya Walktrack/ fire access track.



LEFT: The Pelham Brook modified outlet, with large rocks forming a riffle to slow the velocity, allowing the water to spread across the floodplain.

Photo: Bridget Leggett

Riparian Restoration, a long term project (cont)

The idea of reducing erosion from the outlet/drain was first mooted in 2010 by the Shire of Toodyay. Two reports were presented to the Shire but were not enacted. Then, in 2019, TFOR decided to take on the project. Funding from the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management *Healthy Soils, Healthy Rivers* small grant scheme and in-kind support from Urbaqua enabled Stage One, the planning stage of the project to be undertaken. Input from the local community, including Noongar elders and the Shire increased the likelihood of something happening this time.



Above: The Bilya Walktrack and fire access track crosses over one of the newly installed culverts.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Stage Three

TFOR members are all set for Stage Three of the project, revegetating the area and installing interpretive signage. This will be one of TFOR's key planting areas for 2021, building on work started last year.

Member's Photos

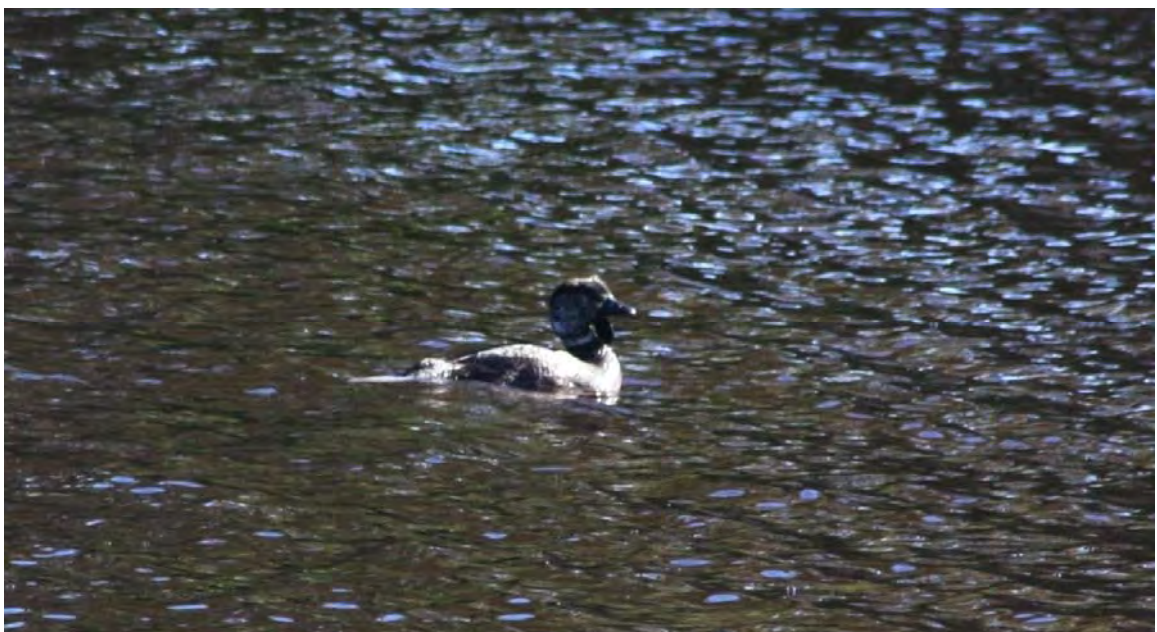


Above: Boyagerring Brook enters the Avon River, its colour indicating the sediment being transported.

Photo: Beth Frayne

Below: A Musk Duck on Millards Pool during March 2021.

Photo: Wayne Clarke



**Newsletter of the
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**WORKING FOR THE HEALTH OF THE
AVON RIVER**



**Toodyay & Districts
Community Bank Branch**



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Above: Water leaching through the soil profile into the Avon River following a de-watering operation by a Main Roads WA contractor. Following closely on the significant flow event in the river during March damage to the fragile banks of Redbank Pool - a Registered Aboriginal Heritage Site - was inevitable.

Photo: Wayne Clarke