

August 2021



Biddip



ISSN 2207-9890 [Print]

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 15, Issue 2



Inside this issue:

<i>President's Message</i>	2
<i>Project Officer's Report</i>	3
<i>Riparian Restoration - Part 6</i>	4-5
<i>Avon Waterways School Excursion</i>	6
<i>Dr. Richard Walkey Memorial Seat</i>	7
<i>Working Bees</i>	8
<i>2021 Fundraiser @ IGA</i>	9
<i>Members Gallery</i>	10-11
<i>The Back Page</i>	12

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 from Dr. Robyn Taylor

MEMBERS must be welcoming the final days of what has been a very cold and wet winter. There are many hints of the burgeoning Spring with the earlier sunrise heralded by the dawn chorus. Finer, warmer weather will hopefully be on the way.

Weather-wise the year has certainly continued to be eventful with major impacts due to incessant rain and flooding of the river, especially the massive scouring at Red Banks Pool, and collapsing river banks along the Bilya Walk Track. Much activity has been expended on making the walk track safer with 'brushing' – chopping up branches of fallen trees to make a barrier between the river bank and the track. A big thank you to Greg Warburton, our Project Officer and Shire Reserves Manager, for his huge efforts in this regard, at some cost to his dignity! I leave it to Greg to explain all.

The Pelham Brook Outlet project is certainly a winner in terms of proving how this was a very necessary project to undertake. There have been some spectacular photos taken by members when water was cascading from the pipe and down the two channels to the river. These needed some extra rock work when the sheer volume of water challenged the existing structures. Needless to say, parts of the Track have been inundated. Along one section behind town during the Avon Descent the track turned into a flowing river re-entering the Avon behind the vicinity of the Victoria Hotel.

There has been a lot of work behind the scenes by members and on behalf of everyone I would like to give a big thank-you to our Secretary Bridget Leggett, Wayne Clarke and others for their input into a very substantial and professionally presented submission for the Landcare Awards. Submissions such as these take a lot of time establishing the history of our organisation, its achievements, prior grants and awards, getting referees to support us, and photos to prove what wonderful achievers we are!



Above: Collapsed bank next to the Bilya Walk Track

Photo: Greg Warburton

Cover Photo: Triple Trouble at the Supershoot - 2021 Avon Descent

Photo: Greg Warburton

Project Officers Report

by Greg Warburton

AS it is often quoted “timing is everything” and in the case of the Pelham Stormwater Project the saying rings true. Literally, as soon as the project was completed the rains began. Throughout July and August turbulent flows gushed from the outlet and cascaded over the rock pitching, through the revegetation area and into the Avon River. This was the test that we thought would not happen for a few years. The benefit of the project was clearly demonstrated with erosion prevented and the access and walk track undamaged. Soil at the headwall of one of the culverts got washed away but the Monday working group repaired it with several wheel barrow loads of rocks

Historic Pelham Brook spillway

In addition to the storm water flow Pelham Brook itself was flowing along its entire length which is an unusual occurrence these days. The upper reaches are the only part of its course that are natural as it now feeds into the town storm water pipes. At Pelham Street the water course was engineered to form the town’s water supply. The Old Gaol was sited next to Pelham Brook for a convenient water supply but the 1890’s the wells that residents of Newcastle depended on were getting low. The Municipal Council successfully lobbied the Government and Public Works Dept. for a better water supply. By 1900 a million gallon water supply reservoir had been completed to capture the flow from Pelham Brook. The concrete spillway overflow for this reservoir was also constructed at that time.

This water storage system served as Newcastle’s supply until the Goldfields water pipe spur line reached Newcastle in 1908. The Pelham Reservoir was then used mostly by locals to cool off in summer.

This winter, sightseers have been able to glimpse the climatic conditions of yesteryear with the dam overflowing down the spillway. A walk track, parking area and interpretive sign enhance a visit to this historical location.

Bilya Walk Track inundation

There are many good things about the rain of course but it has its drawbacks. The Bilya Walk Track has been inundated and badly eroded in sections. It had to be re-aligned and roped off twice for safety as the high banks at Red Banks Pool were progressively cut away by the swirling water. Many large trees have fallen across the track or into the river. One nearly took a bench seat with it into the river! Thanks to the TFOR working bee crew this problem section was tidied up. Next day I returned to the spot intending to recover a safety sign from a tree that had fallen into the river. The result though was a lost sign and a very wet and cold Project Officer!

It has been almost impossible to access the track to weed spray consequently parts are overgrown already. It could be several months before the track is ship shape once again.

2021 Avon Descent

After the Avon Descent was cancelled last year and with exceptional flows there was much anticipation and excitement about the 2021 event. However, numbers were down due to travel restrictions but our own Jessica Fox fresh from Tokyo and her Olympic Canoeing Gold medal added an international element to the field.

As usual TFOR provided volunteer parking marshals for the Avon Descent and Food Festival. They were kept busy until well after the allotted finishing time, directing traffic and providing a friendly welcome to Toodyay. Their efforts raised \$400 for the Club.

Later, I and my worthy assistant monitored the Avon Descent activity at Millard’s Pool, Extracts Weir, Red Banks Pool and Weatherall Reserve. We also braved the frigid morning at Cobbler Pool on the second day and enjoyed the turbulent spectacle at the Supershoot (Cut Throat Pool). The force of the water funnelling through the rocky “S” Bend saw many competitors taking an involuntary plunge in the icy, foaming water. One competitor lost valuable time searching for his kayak in a mountain of foam.

Post event inspection of key sites revealed minimal damage and evidence of bogged vehicles was not unexpected. Interestingly, the canoe ramp we installed at Weatherall ready for last year’s event was not required as it was at one point a metre underwater!

See images on pages 7, 10 & 11

Riparian Restoration, a long term project

Part 6: Reflecting on the success of the Pelham Brook Outlet Restoration Project

by Dr. Bridget Leggett

HEAVY rains this winter have truly tested the earthwork at the Pelham Brook Outlet and it has proved to be robust and fit for purpose. How encouraging it is for all those involved to see this success. TFOR members first photographed the erosion problem in 2001.



Left:

2001 erosion at the Pelham Brook Outlet

Photo: Wayne Clarke

The Shire and Wheatbelt NRM commissioned studies into the management of storm water from the outlet in 2009/2010, but the recommendations of the reports were not implemented. So in 2019, TFOR took up the issue again. Progress has been documented in Parts 1 to 5 of this series on *Riparian restoration, a long term project*. Now it is time to wrap up the series by identifying the key elements to success, as these will help to guide future projects.

First though, a cautionary note. The series of articles may be finished, but the work must go on. Whilst the project phase is completed, revegetation work (planting, weed control, etc) will continue to be needed for a number of years. Crucially, this will become part of the routine work undertaken by TFOR members at their working bees.

So to the elements of success. I think they can be split into two groups: one specific to project work and another which relates to all of our work.

Here's my list of project specific keys to success:

- Having an initial understanding of the issue and a clear, ambitious but realistic goal of what we wanted to achieve;
- Identifying different phases or stages of the project, which can be separately funded;
- Identifying sources of funding, applying diligently and budgeting carefully;
- Acquitting the funds in a timely fashion to maximise our chances of being successful with our next funding application;
- Including a strong planning phase which prioritised consultation with key stakeholders and the broader community;
- Selecting consultants who understand and appreciate the values that underpin the project as well as having the necessary expertise
- Growing our own plants specifically suited to the site;

... cont page 5

Riparian Restoration, a long term project ...(cont)

- Embedding ongoing consolidation and maintenance, particularly with regard to revegetation, into our normal program of working bees.

For relatively small community organisations such as TFOR, success is more than project specific elements. We can not achieve the sorts of outcomes we have with the PBOR Project on our own. Our success is dependent on our standing in the community and our long-term relationships with individuals, organisations and government agencies. Key for this project were:

- Establishing and investing in partnerships with Government organisations such as the Shire, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services;
- Nurturing mutual respect between TFOR members and local Aboriginal elders over many years;
- Undertaking collaborative ventures with other community groups including Toodyay Naturalists Club Inc, the Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation and the Toodyay Historical Society Inc;
- Capitalising on every opportunity that comes our way to communicate with our community and explain the associated environmental issues;
- Working with and learning from similar groups upstream through organisations such as CARE - Conserving the Avon River Environment Inc.

Now we have only to formally celebrate the project completion and then it will be time to look for our next project. Given the fabulous sight of water flowing down the spillway on 10 August this year (see article by Greg Warburton on Page 3 of this issue of BIDDIP), perhaps it will be a walk track following the course of the modified Pelham Brook from Pelham Reserve to the Outlet. Who knows!



Above: The Outlet and the sign interpreting the project and crediting those who supported it

Photo: Dr. Bridget Leggett

Avon Waterways School Excursion

by Dr. Robyn Taylor

It was a beautiful May morning when 20 Year 2/3 students (7-8 year olds) and staff from the Toodyay District School, including six parents, met at the Red Banks Pool bird hide for a workshop. This was the second of two workshops (run in York and Toodyay) organised by Wheatbelt NRM as part of its Avon Waterways project with the support of the Dept of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) and the National Landcare Program. The aim of the workshop was to provide 'a holistic education around the management of waterways in the Avon River Basin.'

The children evidently enjoyed being out of school and in the bush by the river, and especially the promise of warm damper and jam provided by Sharmaine Miles who gave the Welcome to Country. Others from Toodyay's Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation (NKAC) were its Chair Robert Miles and Helen Shanks. Robert provided the Aboriginal perspective and history of the Avon River while Helen captured the event on camera.

As President of TFOR, I was invited to speak about the history of European settlement along the Avon River and the impact of the River Training Scheme. However, I couldn't resist recounting the story about the pile of regurgitated fish and crustaceans I found on the school footbridge and speculations about how it got there. The 'yucks!' suggested they were suitably impressed.

As much as I would have loved the second part of the excursion, satisfying my inner-child, I wasn't able to attend the practical workshop held at Duidgee Park. Dimity Boggs of WNRM and a member of TFOR kindly provided me with the details.

With two facilitators from the Perth company 'EcoAction' the children were shown how to do a macro-invertebrate survey. Thirteen species of macroinvertebrate and one species of feral fish (gambusia) were found. They also discussed water quality and river management and learnt how to use a salinity probe.

'Back in the classroom for the afternoon the kids used the Wheatbelt NRM "Augmented Reality Sandbox" to explore themes in catchment dynamics including how runoff moves through a catchment and had a hands-on invertebrate experience handling insects brought in by the facilitators to educate on the importance of invertebrates in the web of life. Finally the kids were treated to an art lesson where they drew macroinvertebrates in preparation for writing an EnviroStory (funded by Wheatbelt NRM), based on their new knowledge about waterways management, that will be published and copies made available to the school.'

How lucky are school children today to be given such wonderful insights into our natural environment, and so early in their school years. Catch their interest while they're young is surely the way to go.

Left: Robyn showing photos in the Toodyay Herald about one of TFOR's revegetation projects with students from Toodyay's District High School.

Photo: Helen Shanks, 26 May 2021



Dr Richard Walkey Memorial Seat



Above: A large tree branch came down on the Bilya Walk Track just missing the seat.

Below: The seat in trouble again - this time narrowly avoiding a dip in the Avon River

Photos: Dr. Bridget Leggett



This seat - in a usually peaceful setting of the Avon River - was erected in memory of Toodyay's much loved and highly respected GP, Doctor Richard Walkey, who passed away prematurely in April 2013

August Working-bee



*Above: Working –bee clearing up the Bilya Walk Track near the Dr. Richard Walkey Memorial Seat
Below: Members taking a break from their hard labours*

Photos: Dr. Bridget Leggett



2021 FUNDRAISER at IGA

WHAT a fantastic result of \$740!! I am referring to the wonderful outcome of the annual TFOR fundraiser held this year on Friday and Saturday 28th and 29th of May.

To make this occasion successful there is a tremendous amount of work and coordination to be done months beforehand. First and foremost is gaining permission from the Shire office for a satisfactory date and fulfilling the Shire's requirements of the group's insurance cover to be current at the time of the event.

Following this step there are prizes to be decided upon and purchased and a roster of helpers over the two days. A financial float is organised to begin the event and, on the days of the activity, there is an early beginning to set up signage, table and chairs together with the Shire's 'certificate of permission' on show.

Although the weather forecast suggested bad weather it was, fortunately, two days of sunshine. The community was extremely generous with tickets purchased but also with the many cash donations given.

The event provides a perfect opportunity to chat with members of the community and alert them to the valuable healing of the Avon River, commenced in 1994, undertaken by the Friends. Initially the rubbish was incredible – a washing machine, concrete, lots of fencing of all different types, a fence of piping behind the Anglican Church – an assortment of trash nothing less than amazing!

Subsequently, the Friends have undertaken extensive projects including revegetation, correction of erosion, removal of weeds and rubbish and the establishment and maintenance of the beautiful and popular 5.6km Bilya Walk Track along the river and placement of picnic settings and resting benches along the Track, to name a few.

Emphasis can be made of the Indigenous value and importance of the river and its environs, the river beginnings and the immense size of the catchment, its history and the importance of wildlife corridors. The term, 'river training scheme', that took place from the late 1950s to the 1970s, is not generally understood by the community but the end result highlights the devastation of man tampering with Mother Nature. These are all valuable and meaningful topics of conversation. Volunteers are priceless and the Friends welcome new members to continue the amazing work that is being done - but needs to be continued!



Left: Caroline Downey from Makit Hardware was the winner of TFOR's 2021 major fundraising raffle, seen here posing out the front of her store.

Photo: Dr. Bridgett Leggett

Members Gallery



Above and below: Images from the Supershoot (Cut-throat Pool) during the Avon Descent

Photos: Greg Warburton



Members Gallery



Above: Pelham Brook Outlet runs under the Bilya Walk Track.

Photo: Greg Warburton



Above: Juvenile Black-shouldered Kite surveys the river vegetation.

Photo: Wayne Clarke



Above: An errant tree and sign tumbles into the river at Red Banks Pool (see story 'The Back Page')

Photo: Greg Warburton

**Newsletter of the
Toodyay Fiends of the River (Inc.)**

**WORKING FOR THE HEALTH OF THE
AVON RIVER**

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Toodyay & Districts
Community Bank Branch



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The Back Page

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Above: Allow us to share a little Bilya River Track story... in Greg's own words!

"Yesterday I set out to recover the sign [featured in the photo page 11] and reposition it. It was delicate operation involving deft balance, a rope and a cordless drill. The final screw was removed and I was in the process of flinging the sign up onto the bank. However, I lost my footing and found myself having to make a split second decision between saving the drill, myself or the sign. The sign lost out and I got embarrassingly wet and cold as I dangled waste deep in the icy water clinging to the branch, but somehow saved the drill. I'm now making a hand painted sign to replace it but perhaps we will find the sign washed up along the Swan River!"

Drawing: Greg Warburton