

April 2022



Biddip



ISSN 2207-9890 [Print]

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 16, Issue 1



Inside this issue:

<i>President's Message</i>	2
<i>Toodyay Walk Tracks Forum</i>	3
<i>Julimar Conservation Park</i>	4
<i>Australia Day Award for TFOR</i>	5
<i>Looking Back - Looking Forward</i>	6 - 7
<i>Recalling a River Walk</i>	8 - 9
<i>Millard's Mistletoe</i>	10
<i>Book Review - The Peel Harvey</i>	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



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Presidents message by Robyn Taylor

WELCOME Friends to our first issue of *Biddip* for 2022.

This year promises to be just as exciting as 2021, with opportunities always on the horizon to add to our action-packed programme.

We certainly started this year with a BANG!

On Australia Day (26 January) we were the proud recipients of the Active Citizenship Award. The event was held at the Shire's new Recreation Centre with the awards being presented by Darren West. A very big thank you to our Secretary Bridget who pulled together our superb Award-winning nomination.

For our first meeting in February, held in the Anglican Church Hall, we invited Dr Dimity Boggs, a TFOR volunteer and Project Officer with Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management, to be our guest speaker.

For a number of years Dimity has been compiling the river monitoring data we provide from eight Monitoring Points located along the Avon River and gave us an update and analysis of our findings. Admittedly some of us have been a bit slack with our seasonal reporting so we are most grateful to members Lorraine Brindle and John Zawada for undertaking independent surveys of all the MPs.

Our big and very successful public event was the Walk Track Forum held on Sunday 13 March at the CWA Hall. This was a joint initiative with the Shire of Toodyay. The presenters were Greg Warburton, TFOR member and Shire Reserve Manager, Peter Weatherly of the Avon Valley Environment Society and Helen Shanks speaking on behalf of the Noongar Kaardijin Aboriginal Corporation.

We had an excellent audience with a range of interests and suggestions on how to make the most of our existing tracks, planned extensions to the Bilya Walk Track, and other potential tracks in the Shire including the proposed Noongar Trail that is being supported by the Shire's Reconciliation Action Plan. Peter talked about the incredible wide-ranging work of his group and how the Shire of Northam is planning a Trails Master Plan. A similar plan will no doubt be needed for Toodyay.

With such a good start, 2022 promises to be another exciting year.



Cover Photo: Walk Track Forum - Greg Warburton, Peter Weatherly & Helen Shanks, with some of the participants.

Photo: Wayne Clarke 2022-03-13

Toodyay Walk Tracks Forum

by Desraé Clarke

A decade ago a plan was suggested to build a walk track from the town along the river front up-stream to the extent of crown land at historic Nardie Cemetery.

It was later discovered that the track could also be extended downstream as caravan park residents used the river walkway into the town centre. Since that time the entire 6.5km track, from the caravan park to Nardie Cemetery, has been built and maintained by members of the Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR).

The Toodyay Walk Tracks Forum held on Sunday 13th March 2022 was organised by TFOR to further the 'tracks and trails' concept in Toodyay and beyond. It was envisaged to discuss the requirements of those who use, or those who would use, these facilities. The presenters were Greg Warburton, (TFOR), Peter Weatherly, Avon Valley Environment Society (AVES) and Helen Shanks, Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation (KNAC).

To begin the community input it was unanimously agreed to investigate the formation of a comprehensive Master Plan for Toodyay Walk Tracks and to request shire input. An initial requirement of the Plan would be to decide on the most appropriate 'meeting point' or 'hub' for walkers, with information as to the varying distances, terrain type, resting stops, points of interest, cultural knowledge, bird life, flora and fauna and first aid. It was noted that the 'hub' would need to be in the vicinity of a junction of interest and general knowledge of the town, the Visitors Centre.

Tracks already in existence around the Toodyay Shire begin with the town walk. Toodyay was designated an historic town 5th May 1980 with its Old Newcastle Gaol, Police Stables and buildings by the well-known Government architect 1885-1897, George Temple-Poole, that include the Duke Street School 1886, Old Toodyay Hospital 1892, Post Office 1897, Court House 1896-97 (present day the Shire Offices) together with hotels of the 1860's and a number of privately-owned historic homes.

Further afield the existing trails take in a variety of landscapes especially the spectacular photographic high points around the Shire! Pelham Reserve, overlooking the town, has tracks and trails classified as both easy and others more challenging, Aboriginal Culture art works, home of the Euro or Wallaroo, 36 bird species and spectacular springtime flower shows. An area of special interest is that of WW2 bunkers, still visible, with a written history to peruse.

Further existing tracks are those off Sandplain Road on to Drummond Drive, Majestic Heights and Acacia Place with unbelievable high vistas, magnificent Powderbark Wandooos, birds, wildlife and native plants. On the opposing side of the wide basin of hills sits the challenging Rugged Hills Reserve and the magnificent Julimar Conservation Park.

Forum attendees were asked as to what was envisaged as being necessary on a walk track with safe parking important followed by relevant signage to the area and on the walk track.

On several occasions the issue was raised on 'multiple use' of the tracks such as that of mountain bikes, conveyances for babies or young children and appliances for those less agile. These activities would require tracks with a firm surface.

As the bulk of general information would tend to be at the 'hub' the specific information required for a particular area such as status, flora and fauna would be required at the commencement of the track. Appropriately-placed seating or shelters along the way would be most welcome.

Mention was made of the tracks being 'dog friendly'. This request would be acceptable in some particular areas but would not be satisfactory in the vicinity of wildlife reserves.

Looking into the future! Could a track follow the river downstream to the Walyunga National Park? The scenery and landscape is superb. Why not look to furthering the track upstream to meet with the tracks already in place within the Northam Shire? These dreams are not impossible but would require finite planning. The suggestions and discussion by the Toodyay community identified many sound ideas generated by the forum participants.

The Report undertaken by the Toodyay Friends of the River will be presented to the Shire CEO and Councillors and to the local officer at the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries for support of the concept.

Gratitude is extended to those members of TFOR who worked towards a most successful day of community consultation, the three presenters and to those people who have contributed their thoughts and ideas.

The organisers look forward to the next step in a decade-long project to enhance the walk tracks experience of locals and visitors to Toodyay.

(Photos on Pages 1 and 12)

Julimar Conservation Park - an environmental case study

by Dr Robyn Taylor

THE proposed mining in the Julimar State Forest, also known as the Julimar Conservation Park, is a hot issue in Toodyay. In order to become familiar with the place and its history of use over time, the Toodyay Historical Society recently organized an excursion into the forest.

As the future of the Julimar and its natural assets is of concern to members of our environmental and historical societies, I have extracted the following from the Toodyay Historical Society's article that I wrote for the April edition of the *Toodyay Herald*.

The forest's recognition as a state forest, where industries such as mining can operate, and signage proclaiming it a conservation park has puzzled members of our groups as contradictory. So what is its real status?

CALM (former Department of Conservation and Land Management) intended to create the Julimar Conservation Park in 2000, and signage to this effect is still in place.

In September that year, both tiers of WA government resolved 'When mineral prospectivity issues have been resolved, the Julimar interim forest conservation area will become a conservation park.'

Twenty-two years later, articles in the March 2022 edition of the *Toodyay Herald* highlight the present-day conflict between the world's need during this time of climate change for the 'green treasure' of platinum, palladium, nickel, cobalt and copper, all found in the Julimar, and the forest's high natural values as a conservation 'island' and habitat for endangered species.

Environmental history is an increasingly important area of study in order to understand long term impacts of introduced changes to an ecosystem. This is a case study on our very own doorstep.

The Toodyay Historical Society felt it was timely to delve into this branch of history, to look at the forest, its flora and fauna and the industries that have operated there since the latter half of the 19th century.

Armed with as much information as our member Beth Frayne could gather, we invited members of Toodyay's Naturalists' Club and Friends of the River, and others, to share their knowledge including the forest's waterways that feed into the Avon River.

There was an excellent turn up with knowledge and experiences being shared during an introductory talk and ramble in the forest. Morning tea was held at the home of two members, also members of the Naturalists Club, whose property backs onto the Conservation Park. Don and Eva entertained us with stories about the antics of local fauna and observations of the decline in orchid numbers due to a drying climate. This was followed by another walk along what could have been one of the many dirt roads created by the early bee-keepers to transport their hives.

An excellent article on Julimar's natural and industrial history can be found in the Winter 2006 edition of *Landscape*. Titled 'Julimar, turning full circle', the researchers who were attached to CALM, explore the historic uses of this 28,000 hectare forest including farming, timber cutting, fire wood collecting, bee-keeping, wildflower picking, and training by the armed forces. The article is invaluable as a 2006 snapshot of the authors' research findings, and their optimism for the future.

'The Julimar Conservation Park stands today as an excellent example of a mixed age, multi-species woodland. It has survived the many battles waged for its attributes and uses. It now offers nature lovers a relaxing and interesting forest experience ... with a diversity of habitats, interesting wildflowers and abundant refuges, the native animals that were once so common have returned to inhabit this unique "island".'

Sixteen years later, this optimism may be difficult to sustain in the face of the global demand for the precious metals that are being detected beneath the forest floor.

It can only be hoped modern technology will enable the co-existence of both mining and the preservation of Julimar's priceless non-mineral 'green treasures'.

An addendum to the above is the formation of the Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance Committee, a sub-committee of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. One of the aims of this committee is to provide substantial research to support the forest's elevation from State Forest to National Park status thus giving the 'Julimar Conservation Park' the protection that was intended sixteen years ago, where both Houses of Parliament are needed to approve removal of that protection. A National Park would give Julimar national recognition.

Australia Day Community Group Award Toodyay 2022 - Toodyay Friends of the River the recipient

by Desraé Clarke

ALTHOUGH an award for giving time and effort to a community group is not sought it is always very special to receive appreciation.

Toodyay's section of river running through the Shire, was a sad spectacle. It had been a happy and beautiful waterway with billabongs, swimming areas and a safe haven for fish and birds *but* in the 1950's, through to the 1970's, the river was assaulted with the removal of protective rocks, large old trees and the dense forests of the moisture-loving Tea Tree that protected the river banks from erosion.

In 1994 a 'friends' group was endeavoring to come together to rectify the damage and in 1998 the first busy-bee came together.

Members commenced with the cleaning and removing trailer loads of rubbish from motor parts, washing machines, concrete, galvanised piping, building materials, etc.

The next challenge was that of cleaning up the vast array of weed species - castor oil, nasturtion, bridal creeper, tamerisk, giant reed (false bamboo) and babboon flower and to discourage the tipping of lawn cuttings and the trimmings of woody garden plants on the flood plain.

Articles were written in the Toodyay Herald to educate the community of the worth and appreciation of the river.

In October 2009 the Friends were recipients of the "River Rats Living Streams Award" at the State Natural Resource Management (NRM) Conference in Geraldton, presented by the Chair of the State NRM Council, Rex Edmondson.

January 2021 saw the Toodyay Australia Day Community Group Award as finalists with the group encouraged to nominate for the 2021 Western Australian State Landcare Awards for Community Groups.

The Friends were delighted to receive the following correspondence: "I am pleased to advise that you have been selected as a finalist in the 2021 WA Landcare Awards in the ACM Community Group Award category." What a thrill it was to read those words in late October and to learn that we were one of only three finalists in our category. Although the Friends did not win the State Award it is so encouraging to hear how much dedication is given by volunteers across our state in caring for the environment.

The Toodyay 2022 Australia Day Community Group Award Committee gave acknowledgement to the winner, the Toodyay Friends of the River, for its commitment given to the river and environs and to be announced the recipient.



Left: Dr. Robyn Taylor, President of the Toodyay Friends of the River, receiving congratulations from Shire President, Cr. Rosemary Madacsi, on being the recipient of the 2022 Australia Day Community Group Award.

Photo: Gary Walton, Colour Splash Media

Looking back, looking forward

Bridget Leggett...with Wayne Clarke

There are only a handful of current members of the Toodyay Friends of the River Inc (TFOR) who have been involved since its inception, and one of those is Wayne Clarke. So I asked Wayne to reflect on the changes over the years, the most noteworthy achievements of the Friends and on the challenges ahead.

Early in the conversation we got talking about the *Prisoners' Work Camps*. Here are Wayne's words on the subject.

In 2000 the Shire's Community Development Officer found funding available for prisoners' work camps and suggested we apply. They were set up around the State and they were all prisoners who were low risk, due for release. So together with the Shire we applied for this work camp, and we had to find a place for them to stay, so at that time Wandoo Hills was a retreat, so we approached the owners and they said yes.

We were successful and we got a women's team. They were from Nyandi Prison. Eight or nine prisoners came up, they had their guard and we worked out a program where they could work, and the biggest area was behind the Anglican Church. So, they came in and virtually cleared it of all weeds. It was marvellous. Three main plant types were targeted: tamarisk, castor oil plant and false bamboo.

I had to go down and – not supervise them, because they had their own supervisor – just let them know the areas we wanted done, and what were weeds and what weren't weeds. They were great to work with. And it was interesting. On one occasion I came across this particular prisoner who was up a tree with a chain saw, hanging by her legs on a branch. She wasn't stuck, she just wanted to cut off a higher branch. She was quite skilled, but it was a bit frightening. I think if the supervisor had seen her, she would have been sent straight back.

BL: So what did you do?

I just said 'that's not the way to do it, you have to come down here'. She said 'I don't mind'. So delicate persuasion was required.

They were very easy to deal with – most of them were there for driving offences, not paying fines, that sort of thing. These girls also had family.

They came up to Toodyay on the Monday afternoon and stayed until Thursday and went back Thursday afternoon. They were here for a couple of months because they were doing other work around the Shire after they were doing our work. We were first priority. We had a sub-committee with the Department of Justice to work out the program. They loved coming out into the country.



Left: Giant reed (Arundo donax). Behind Toodyay Traders Hardware, mixed with other weeds

This was one of TFOR's first major weed removal projects.

A. donax is the principal source material of reed makers for clarinets, saxophones, oboes, bassoons, bagpipes, and other woodwind instruments.

Photo: Wayne Clarke, 1998-08-16

Looking back, looking forward (cont)

When TFOR formed, the threat to the river that the Friends were able to tackle was the weed control and the degradation of the riparian zone. Replanting was done as a follow up to weed removal, mainly behind Traders. We did go a little bit along the river. We went as far as the back of the Victoria Hotel. We had to stop at the Victoria because the boundary of the hotel goes out almost to the river, whereas everywhere else the boundary is back thirty meters or more.

BL: So, let's fast forward, so what are the threats to the river now?

I'd say the biggest threat now is flooding, but it's a hidden threat, it's one that people are not really aware of, inasmuch as the catchment has been so heavily cleared. Even though they 'trained' the river so that they could make a channel, which was basically a drain – that's what they tried to do, that's what the River Training Scheme was all about. Since the River Training Scheme the velocity has doubled and that's well documented by people like Jim Masters.

Jim Masters was one of our early members - he's been called 'the old man of the river'. He developed the principles of river management and I think there are things in that that might be worth reprinting.

But with the climate change now, we are expecting heavier rain – maybe not as much, but when it does come, we are expecting heavier rain and we're expecting more cyclones and more severe cyclones and I think we are also expecting that cyclones will come down closer.

Because so much has been cleared, there are no trees to take up the water, there are no trees to stop the water eroding the soil the way they used to do. The canopy used to stop the very heavy rain hitting the soil and eroding it. Farmers and the Main Roads Department have removed all the trees that would have assisted with the take-up of ground water - and broken the impact of rain falling on farmland and cleared road verges. Now we've also filled it up with carparks and bituminised roads, so whereas before the water soaked into the ground it's now going into the river through pipes and culverts. A good example is the Pelham Brook Outlet which picks up the carpark water which is not only putting water into the river, it's picking up the pollutants from cars – the oils and such like. So I think that's probably one of the major threats that we've got.

Now, if we got another Cyclone Alby – I use Cyclone Alby as a precedent – it would go right through the catchment. Then York, Northam and Toodyay (plus towns like Beverley and Brookton) are in for it! I'd like to be optimistic about how the RTS has helped those towns mentioned but somehow I just can't get past the words of warning by some of our scientists.

When Cyclone Alby came through Toodyay, the river had a very high level. There was a lot of flooding from that – I don't think it was one of the biggest floods because Cyclone Alby hit more to the south of us. The effects also of the wind were huge and that was when one of the founding members of the Naturalists Club, Alby North, was killed. He was fixing the roof of a stock area and he was blown off the roof and killed.

BL: Where would you see the most vulnerable bits of the river?

It would be the townsite because people are building close to the 100 year flood plain. I don't think there are any houses in there but there are structures in there that would go into the water and maybe go down the river.

We keep talking about the 100 year flood, but Katherine [N.T.] had a thousand year flood two years in a row. And they've had that sort of thing in the eastern states. We are now facing an even greater challenge with Climate Change exacerbating our weather systems. Are we about to cross the crisis line in river recovery? Do we need to prepare our local community/ies for the big flood?

Footnote: Wayne was Foundation President of TFOR for three years beginning in 1998, Secretary, then predominantly as its Treasurer.

Recalling a River Walk

by Greg Warburton

AS I learned more about the history of the Avon River I was shocked and almost disbelieving that during the 50's and 60's the then state government undertook a program to bulldoze nearly the entire length of the river! Despite vehement opposition from such prominent conservationists as Jim Masters OAM and many other experts the River Training Scheme (RTS) as it was named, went ahead. This ill-conceived flood mitigation measure ran over a twenty year period destroying fringing vegetation, stands of huge flooded gums, removing islands and bends. To add to the devastation the bed of the river was deep ripped.

Not surprisingly, the environmental disaster that opponents had predicted unfolded on a cataclysmic scale. Severe erosion, introduction of invasive weeds, loss of habitat and increased fire frequency and intensity resulted. Perhaps the most lamentable effect was the loss of the chain of permanent water holes. These precious refuges quickly became choked with sand and silt previously held back by the naturally braided and vegetated riparian zone. No longer were there deep swimming holes and cobbler to be fished: instead, sand filled these long pools and water birds sought refuge elsewhere.

In 2008, in an attempt to understand this RTS and the effects of it I decided to walk the length of the river. I planned to start at Yenyening Lakes, a major source of the Avon's flow and follow it through to West Toodyay, a distance of 170 kilometres. To determine the various land tenures along the way and work out where I could or couldn't go I went to the Department of Water Office in Northam. This agency was charged with the responsibility of "looking after" the River and its vast catchment. I already knew a couple of the staff there particularly Terry Brooks who lived down the road from us in Toodyay. "Brooksy" as everyone called him produced detailed maps for me and supplied other useful information. I could see that 90% of the river was unallocated crown land (UCL) and it looked feasible to do the walk with hardly ever having to encroach on private land.



Above: Greg and Rafi poised for a start at Qualandary Crossing.

Photo: Vicki Warburton

Recalling a River Walk ... cont

Vicki drove me and Rafi our Basenji dog out to Qualandary Crossing where water from the extensive salt lake system to the east, in times of flood, emptied from the lake system into the Avon River. Here, I donned my rucksack and the dog and I headed off along the river bank. Over the next ten days I passed by and camped in places of great beauty and tranquillity. It was May and the river had a moderate flow however, the water was undrinkable, salty as the sea and I had to rely on farm dams. The bull dozer rip lines in the exposed river bed were still clearly visible after 50 years and piles of spoil stood along the banks. I came across mountains of rubbish where farmers had used the river bank as a dump for generations of household waste, spent machinery and fencing material.



Above: River Bank Camp, Lloyd Pool

Photo: Greg Warburton 2008-05-11

Vicki supplied some logistical and moral support at York then Rafi and I continued on to arrive at home to a banner reading “Welcome River Walkers”.

The trek had really connected me to the river and certainly made me known to the Department of Water in Northam.

Anxious to learn more about waterway conservation I asked if they had a work experience position. Bernie Kelly, the face of the Department throughout the catchment said, “No we don’t Greg, but we do have a job if you are interested”. Of course I said YES! I was ecstatic, here was my first ever opportunity to work in the environmental field. I began as a casual, Natural Resource Management Officer with my own desk and computer, both a first for me in my working life. Duties were at this stage a little ill-defined but my role would become a lot more focused as time went on. That year was the highest flow for the Avon Descent in 20 years. There was also a river art project conducted by the Northam Arts Society.

In the office I found a photograph of Jim Masters, the man that had warned against the RTS. From it I painted a portrait of this legendary conservationist and ornithologist. Later that year the painting won the Northam Art Prize! Sadly, I never got to meet Jim as he had passed away in 2001. Although 14 years have passed since that hike I often contemplate how it set me on an amazing path of community and conservation.

Millard's Mistletoe



Photos top: Mistletoe on plants, Millard's Pool, Avon River

Photos: Wayne Clarke 2022-01-25

Below: Mistletoebird, one of the plants pollinators Courtesy Georgina Steytler - <https://www.wildandendangered.com.au>



Book Review: *by Desrae Clarke*

The Peel-Harvey
The Decline and Rescue of an Ecosystem
By Keith Bradby

This publication is a 'must read' for those who wish to assist in conserving valuable age-old natural history. Keith's publication emphasises what unforeseen disasters can occur in the altering of the natural landscape.

The book describes the severe problems resultant in the Peel-Harvey region, an original significant wetland in the south west of Western Australia. Following land clearing, removal of vast areas of protective waterways vegetation, damming, de-snagging and straightening of major rivers and tributaries and the digging of monstrous drains resulted in a landscape change that had far-reaching, dire effects not ever dreamed of by our society of scientists, economists, agriculturists and community.

At a cost of \$35, postage included, this publication can be obtained by contacting:

web@peel-harvey.org.au

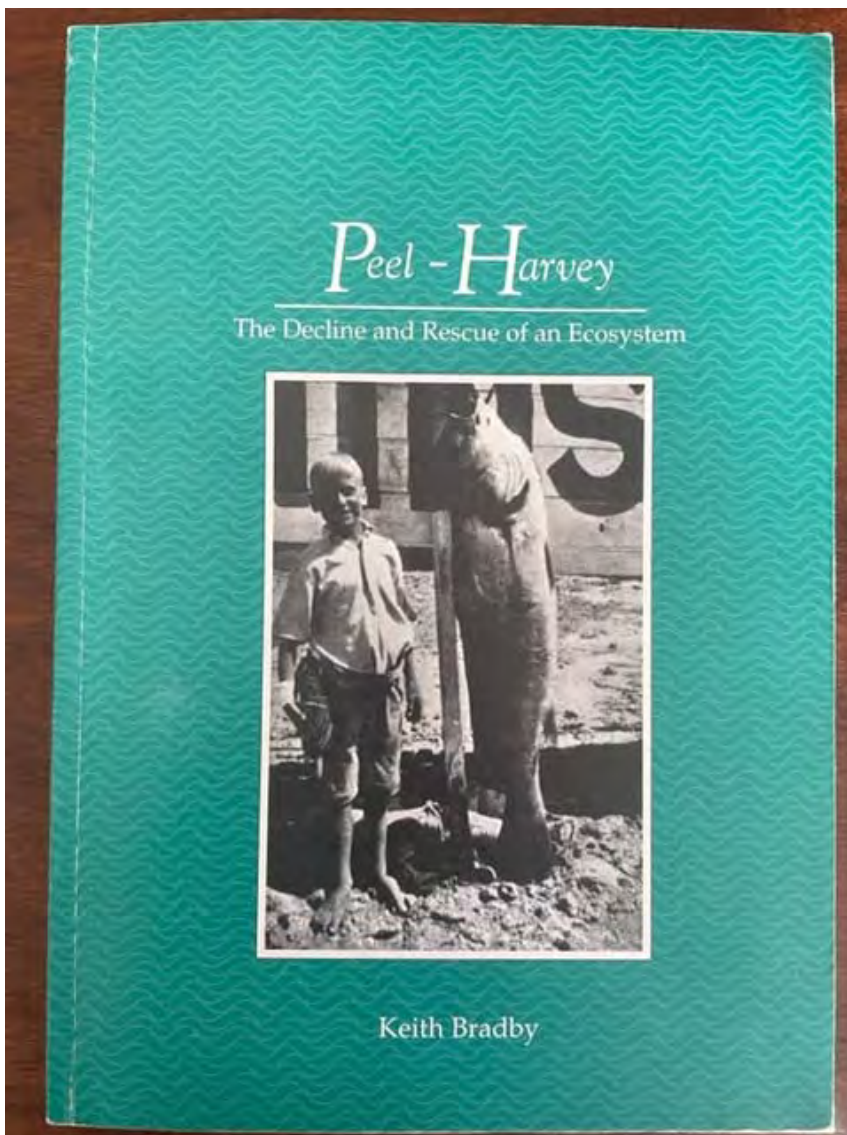


Photo of Cover by Rob Boase

[Keith collaborated with Frank Rijavek and Noelene Harrison on the 2002 Award Winning Documentary 'A Million Acres a Year' - Ronan Films - on the destruction of native vegetation in southwest Western Australia. He co-wrote and narrated the film].

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

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AVON RIVER**

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Toodyay & Districts
Community Bank Branch



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The Back Page

Volume 16, Issue 1

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Above: Over thirty members of the Toodyay community attended the Toodyay Walk Tracks Forum, held in the CWA Hall on 13 March 2022.

Photo: Bridget Leggett