

August 2013



Biddip

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 7, Issue 2



Above: Officials, guests and members gather together at Red Bank Pool for the opening of the Bilya Walk Track and the John Masters Bird Hide. Over sixty people gathered near the Bird Hide, and later at the Toodyay Community Centre for the occasion. Both the Bilya Walk Track and the John Masters were officially opened by the Shire of Toodyay President, Councillor Kevin Hogg.

Photo: Rebecca Megan-Lowe

The Walk Track was funded by Lotterywest and the Bird Hide by Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management. See Page 8 for story.

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wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Presidents Report



I recall at our end of year BBQ breakfast function at Bob and Beth's place back in November 2010 presenting some project ideas to the gathered members. At the time those ideas were just that. But now, less than 3 years later I look back with satisfaction as they have become reality. The Harper Brook Recovery Project, the Millard's Pool picnic shelter, the Nardie Cemetery make over, renewed Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) signage, the Bilya Walk Track have all actually happened. Our success in sourcing funding for these projects has, of course, been pivotal in their completion. In addition, we have seen the supply of fencing for waterway restoration on Folewood Road funded by money allocated to us from the Department of Water. We are currently working with Greening Australia to re-vegetate sites along the Bilya Walk Track with 1,000 seedlings already planted in the vicinity of the John Master's Bird Hide, an initiative of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club.

Other highlights have been the publication of the Lloyd Reserve Strategy and the signing of the management agreement with the Shire. This is of great strategic advantage to us. We have seen the formation and incorporation of the umbrella environmental group, Conserving the Avon River Environment Inc (C.A.R.E.) which is a voice for all environmental groups along the River with TFOR strongly represented. It will allow a vital regional focus for waterway projects and issues.

TFOR's long term commitment to the control of Tamarix and Bridal Creeper in the river was augmented by the Caring For Our Country funded Weeds of National Significance project; this was implemented by Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM). This project has had a major impact on these serious environmental weed species along 10kms of river in Toodyay.

There has been the awarding of three Honorary Life Memberships and the appointment of an Honorary Advisor along with the recruitment of an Environment Officer by the Shire. Vernice Pty Ltd donated a slashing machine to TFOR which is being used by member Adrian Rowland to maintain key TFOR sites along the river.

The aforementioned items are tangibles, but not so easy to define are the achievements in community engagement but there is no denying inroads have been made. This extends to our positive and productive relationships with our partners such as the Shire and Wheatbelt NRM among others like our sister group, the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. The Herald articles and other media items, the interpretation along the Bilya Walk Track and publications like our newsletter, 'Biddip' and the Bilya Walk Track guide promote our cause effectively. These mediums, together with the updated website and the 'Environment Matters' marquee at the Toodyay Agricultural Show engage hundreds of people. The 'working-bees, which are always well attended, and the people we talk to every day about TFOR strengthens us as have the new members we have recruited. TFOR's significant contribution to recent Toodyay Tidy Towns bid has been inspiring and significant.

More important however, than past achievements, is the future. As we look forward to celebrating our 20th Anniversary next year I'm confident that TFOR will continue to be a community and 'project driven' organisation whose achievements and mission is valued and admired. We all know that there is so much more to do and we will never have an excuse to get bored. For me at least the real high point of the past three years is the support from members which have maintained my strength and enthusiasm. I thank you all for your exceptional contribution and dedication. Now, at the end of my tenure as president I hope to continue helping to add value to TFOR and its cause as project officer.

Inevitably, there is always some sadness when we embark upon such friendships and personal relationships. The passing of Gavin, our great champion of the river, is a tragedy and thoughts and prayers are with his family at this time. It was gratifying to finally recognise John Pyle by naming a section of the Bilya Walk Track in memory of him as will be the dedication of the Red Banks Pool seat to Dr Richard Walkey. We value these personal associations because conservation is as much about people as it is about nature.

Society's history of pursuing economic gain has altered the natural environment so dramatically that nature is now dependant on dedicated people such as the Friends to protect and preserve it. I was given reason to be confident that this custodianship will continue when it was demonstrated so dramatically recently at the official opening of the Bilya Walk Track and John Masters Bird Hide. Here, a throng of people came from far and wide to celebrate their love of nature and their sense of community on the banks of an extraordinary river of which I think we can truly claim to be a Friend.

Greg

PASSING OF A RIVER ICON- VALE GAVEN DONEGAN

On 22nd August 2013, Honorary Life Member of the Friends of the River, Gaven Donegan, slipped away.

I first met Gaven in the mid 1980s, when he and John Dival undertook basic bush fire preparedness sessions at the Toodyay Racecourse. So began a friendship that would grow over the decades, when Gaven's love of the river also brought us closer together, along with fire brigade activities. Over this time I realised what a gem of a person I had as a mate and, particularly, mentor

Gaven joined the Friends of the River not long after it was founded. When community meetings were organised by the Avon River Management Authority to develop River Recovery Plans for Toodyay, Gaven and I both sat on the reference group that was subsequently formed. The first of the River Recovery Plans launched for the Avon River was Section three (Toodyay), and Northam. These plans were the basis on which the Avon River Management Program was later developed.

Soon after the new Toodyay Central Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade was formed (1998), Gaven became a member. Together, Gaven and I developed training activities, particularly for drivers, over the ensuing years, with Gaven becoming Training Officer. We sat on the Shire's Bush Fire Advisory Committee together.

Gaven was appointed to the Avon Nature Conservation Advisory Committee (ANCAC) representing the Toodyay Bushfire Advisory Committee - and then in his own right - until his passing. He made a valuable contribution to this committee, whose role was to advise the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) on management of their reserves. We took turns in driving to Northam to meet with DPaW.

Gaven's vision for the Avon River is one we shared. His ability to mix both natural resource and fire management was invaluable; and his yarns about the river and its older inhabitants were uniquely imparted; his knowledge and memory were unsurpassed. Those of us who had the privilege of being a mate of Gaven's must acknowledge what a great void has suddenly appeared; it certainly has for me.

My deepest sympathy to Gaven's wife, Christeen, and to Avon, Sonia, Jennifer and Gaven's beloved grandchildren.

Wayne Clarke



Left: Gaven looks at the build-up of sediment at the head of Long Pool. Sedimentation of the Avon River pools was one of Gaven's biggest aversions, and he began a crusade to have it removed.

Gaven was able to convince the Department of Water of the importance in halting this sediment before the natural sumps (the river pools) became full.

This photo was taken at 8.30am in the morning of 25th January 2007. Gaven rose early for these trips down river, always deviating to pick me up on the way. This is an indication of Gaven's devotion to the cause.

As always during these trips he would continue to impart his great knowledge of the area, and of the river and its pools. They are poignant memories.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

GAVEN DONEGAN - TRIBUTE

Gaven Donegan will be sadly missed but fondly remembered. He was a heroic ambassador and tireless leader for the Avon River. His efforts are recognised by him being conferred with Honorary Life Membership of Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) in 2010.

Gaven lived near the river from a very early age – Cobblers Pool was his backyard. He learnt early the joys of swimming, paddling and fishing (when there actually were cobblers) in the Avon. He had secret spots to share with his mates, and he loved a sense of mystery about the river.

I will never forget Gaven taking me me aside from the crowd at a meeting for a private showing of some special photos. It was with cautious expectation that I went with him to a quieter, secreted corner for the viewing. The shady photos of which he was so proud of course turned out to be ones of the river and sedimentation of pools!

Gaven was troubled by the loss of river pools and the effect this had on wildlife during his time. Perhaps he was motivated by the loss of cobblers. With a strong sense of responsibility he took action through TFOR from 1997 until his passing.

He was a planner, an organiser and a good schemer. While President for 3 years and Vice president over 4 years, he initiated what became Lloyd Reserve by the river. He created substantial interest with politicians, the Shire, community, industry and in the press about sedimentation of river pools.

Gaven was passionate about the river but he had other passions including his extensive family, big machines and his dogs Smokey, and then Stick. He was always good for a cuppa and a chat.

He will be greatly missed by the Toodyay community and all in TFOR. Our deepest sympathy is extended to Christeen, Sonia, Avon and Jennifer, Gaven's grandchildren and his extended family.

Viv Read

Patron, Toodyay Friends of the River



Above: Gaven talking to Viv at the History Book launch, Duidgee Park, on 28th November 2008

Photo: Wayne Clarke

GAVEN DONEGAN - RIP

Gaven Donegan has been a member of the Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) committee since July 1997. He assumed the three-year role of President from 2007 and was awarded Honorary Life Membership in 2010.

I first met Gaven when I moved to the Avon at the beginning of 1998 to work with the then Water and Rivers Commission (WRC). One of the priorities of WRC at that time was river rehabilitation and restoration. Thanks mainly to the efforts of WRC regional manager at the time (Viv Read) significant external funds had been provided by both State and federal governments to bring about change in how the Avon River and its tributaries were managed.

It soon became clear that the Avon community needed to be engaged and take ownership of any plans or strategies to stir local interest and to invoke on-ground activity. One such river group was TFOR and probably the most passionate Friend was Gaven Donegan. I was delighted and honoured to make the acquaintance of a man who had actually been lived adjacent to the river at Cobbler Pool. For the next thirteen years, we shared many an adventure at various sites on his beloved Avon River. I loved to hear him talk to people about his fond memories of the Avon particularly that reach downstream of Toodyay and through the national parks. It did not matter who the audience was, be they riverside landholders, politicians, government employees or journalists, Gaven could relate to all with ease his vast first-hand knowledge of and experience with the river.

I did appreciate his input into the development and release of the Avon River Recovery Plans for Section 1 (Avon Gorge – Deepdale) Section 3 (Toodyay) and Sections 4/5 (Northam – Toodyay). He was an invaluable conduit between the community and riverside landowners and the WRC, helping to facilitate meetings and workshops. In 2007, one of the outcomes in from these plans was his initiative to divide the river up into sections and muster interest from riverside landowners within those sections to assume “ownership” and responsibility for “their” reach of river, asking them to monitor condition of vegetation, sediment, rubbish and the like, and present their findings to TFOR.

In 2006, we worked together to source funding for the rehabilitation of the historic river crossings at Long Pool, Munnapin and Strahan’s Crossing. Gaven went on to project-manage this work which involved the importation of hundreds of tons of rock to build up and reinforce the crossings. Under his watchful eye, the rock was strategically placed for maximum effect.

One of the major concerns held by Gaven was the mobilisation of coarse sediments following the River Training Scheme from 1955 – 1975. Many of the beautiful river pools so dear to Gaven from his youth were in danger of being in-filled by sand being carried by the river downstream. He and I worked together to identify those pools which should be marked as a priority for immediate sand extraction works. In this way, we were able to organise contracts for the removal of sediments from Long Pool, Cobbler Pool and Jimperding Pool by mechanical means.

We also enjoyed a close relationship with the organisers of the annual Avon Descent race. Concerned at the impacts of competitor’s craft on the riparian environment, Gaven helped to lobby that organisation to produce an Environmental Management Plan designed to protect the river banks and local fauna. In 2008, as a result of that Plan, we were successful in attracting funds from Avon Descent to provide protective rockwork at Cobblers Pool, amongst other projects.

I could describe many, many more projects, workshops and meetings which I shared with Gaven over the course of thirteen years but space precludes this. I shall miss him greatly as a valued friend and colleague. His colourful personality, his warm sincerity and generosity, and his amazing capacity for hard work will ensure that he will be fondly remembered by everyone who had the privilege to cross his path during his seventy-two years.

Bernie Kelly

Vale – Gaven Donegan

VALE GAVEN DONEGAN

The Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) have suffered a very sad loss with the passing of Gaven Donegan as, indeed, has our whole community.

I first got to know Gaven years ago through TFOR and, like all who knew him, I was enamored by his personality, always positive, cheery and ready to help. His stories and recollections were as entertaining as they were informative. As I got to know him better I found him to be a man of strong convictions, commitment and values. Gaven really cared. He worked tirelessly over many years for the aims and objectives of TFOR as its President, and Project Officer and was awarded Honorary Life Member 2010.

He promoted the cause to politicians, government departments, the media and community in his engaging and distinctive style. He was a constant source of inspiration, encouragement, knowledge and ideas. Gaven's generational connection to the River and a lifetime of experience made him a unique member. He was a treasure in our midst and we will miss him greatly but we will never forget him because there are simply too many things that will remind us of him, especially when we are down at the River that he loved so much. For it is here his wonderful legacy and beautiful spirit will live on for ever.

I dedicate my report to him as I know he would be pleased and proud of TFOR's recent achievements and, he may not have realized it, but he was the inspiration for much of it.



Greg and Gaven, Duidgee Park, 2011

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Honorary Life Membership bestowed

[The following is the preamble for Greg Warburton's Honorary Life Membership nomination]

Greg joined the Toodyay Friends of the River on the 28th August 2005. Before I speak about recent contributions I will give a preamble on the extremely interesting life of this environmental enthusiast.

Greg moved with his family from suburbia to a 'hills' bush block when he was four years of age. It was obviously the interest and curiosity of the surrounding bush, together with his parent's support and encouragement, that Greg joined the WA Naturalists' Club as a youngster. As a young man he tripped about Africa, alone, and also worked with an Australian safari group.

He has had an interest in the history of our State and, together with his wife, Vicki, made a trek to Hall's Creek with a donkey team. This was followed, further afield, by the couple trekking, alone, across 500kms of the Gobi Desert with dromedaries as company.

Greg's enthusiasm for the environment and natural history has continued as he matured and settled in Toodyay thinking 'it would probably be for about ten years' - he is still here! He is a great advocate for the river that passes through the Shire of Toodyay and, to get to know it better, he decided to walk along its banks from Yenyenning Lakes to West Toodyay to experience the river and to know it better.

With gaining a position on the staff of the Department of Water Greg learned so much more especially with the extreme problems that the river has experienced since its fateful 'training' in the 1950s/70s. He learned of the degradation caused by erosion and the desecration of the riverine system with the introduction of feral plants. He also learned of the benefits of building riffles to prevent or hinder bank erosion, the planting of riverine sedges, water monitoring and revegetation.

On the closure of the Department of Water office in Northam Greg moved to become a staff member of Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management. Fortunately, he was able to continue with the work and challenge of feral plant removal, revegetation of salt-affected areas and over-grazed property and rejuvenation of riverine areas.

With the knowledge gained, and with incredible energy, Greg has assisted in the leadership of the Toodyay Friends of the River to achieve what may have been thought as 'impossible dreams'. However, dreams do come true, and with the contribution Greg has made, with the wonderful support of his wife, Vicki, I wish to nominate him as 2013 Honorary Life Member of the Toodyay Friends of the River.

Desraé Clarke



Left: Greg receives his Honorary Life Membership. From Desraé

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Bilya Walk Track Official Opening



The Bilya Walk Track, a project of the Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR), was officially opened (together with the Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC) *John Masters Bird Hide*) on Saturday 10th August 2013. The track, funded by Lotterywest through the Department of Sport and Recreation, is 5.6km in length, and connects Duidgee Park in the west and Nardie Cemetery in the east. It follows the river closely all the way, behind the township and through Lloyd Reserve, going under both Newcastle and Connor bridges.

Congratulations are extended to Greg Warburton for bringing the walk track to fruition. It has been a dream of TFOR for many years, but Greg's energy and devotion has made it at last possible. There were a number of helpers (like Andrew Carr, 'bridge-builder extraordinaire') who also need to be thanked, particularly for their efforts in completing the task on time. Lotterywest, through the Department of Sport and recreation, must also be thanked for funding the walk track.

On the day, guests arriving for the launch were greeted by a light shower of rain, followed by some lovely sunshine. In the corner of the bird hide, TFOR Patron Viv Read, accompanied by member Rebecca Megan-Lowe, sang a bracket of appropriate songs, including a beautiful rendition of 'Old Man River'. A bus ferried other guests from town to Lloyd Reserve, where they gathered for the opening.

The Shire of Toodyay President, Cr Kevin Hogg, officially opened the walk track and the bird hide. Others present were the Hon Paul Brown MLC, Shire of Toodyay CEO Stan Scott, the TNC Patron, Neville Marchant, and honorary life members, staff from the Department of Sport and Recreation and Department of Water, WWF, Wheatbelt NRM, and the Toodyay & Districts Community Bank.



Above: The three Presidents, TFOR, TNC and Shire
Below: I think it should have been over here



The crowd listens during the Shire Presidents address
The Bridge Builder adding finishing touches

Photos: Wayne Clarke



Bilya Walk Track



In the April Biddip, some of the amenities found along the Bilya Walk Track featured (the picnic table). This edition features another great new amenity - the *John Masters Bird Hide*. The walk track should draw many visitors and locals. Add a bird hide to the walk and it will really draw in the crowds.

This page features the track and the hide, and some of the visiting birdlife - photos taken from the hide.



Left: Walkers take to the track.

Right: Action in the bird hide -

TFOR Member, Cellist Rebecca Megan-Lowe and vocalist Patron, Viv Read, are applauded by Wayne Clarke

Below left: A little bit of rain was welcomed during the opening festivities

Below right: John Masters looking at the new bird information signage in the John Masters Bird Hide.



Photos: Above left and below left: Wayne Clarke

Above right: Ric Lowe Below; Desraé Clarke



Above: Black swans flying in to Red Banks Pool. Photo from the Bird Hide

Above: The swans alight. The red banks of the pool indicate where the name Red Banks came from

Photos: Wayne Clarke

Photographs, Official Opening and Gaven



Left: Greg and Desraé during the President's responses at the Official Opening



Above: Gathering for the Official Opening at the bird hide - Red Banks Pool in the background



Above: Cr Kevin Hogg, Shire of Toodyay President, provides some historical background on the two community groups involved.

All photos: Wayne Clarke

Below: Gaven at the AGM, 17th August 2008

Below: Gaven, in February 1998

Below: The cook being bribed? Bernie Kelly and Gaven, 19th June 2011



Toodyay Tidy Towns Update *by Beth Frayne*

Since I last wrote about the TTT campaign, things have reached a peak (ie Judgement Morning, 23 July) and now we are moving quietly towards the Regional Awards Event in York on 20 September. Back in April, we had 30 Signed-Up Supporters. By the time we submitted our Submission at the end of May, we had increased that number to the Tremendous Thirty-Seven.

Toodyay Friends of the River's (TFOR) Immediate Past President, Greg, (and TTT Chair) created an amazing and powerful PowerPoint presentation that impressed the Tidy Towns Judges, Peter and Rhonda Ashton. Peter is one of the 'Tidy Towns – Sustainable Communities' (TTSC) most experienced judges. He is an exploration and mining geologist with a background in environmental management. Rhonda is a volunteer in a community native plant nursery with particular expertise in propagating local provenance species. They have both travelled all over the State in the past years and Peter (who lives in Dalyellup) won one of DEC's Volunteer of the Year awards last year, for his enthusiastic volunteer work for the TTSC program. They were a very appreciative audience when we showed them the sights of Toodyay, which included a walk across the Avon River to Toodyay District High School (TDHS), and a very quick drive past the Seed Orchard shade house.

The TTT Supporters helped put up the display materials in the CWA Hall, which supported Greg's presentation. The attendees (25 of them) were so impressed they want us to do another 'Show' for the Toodyay community. This will happen after the 20 September Awards event, when TTT can have a party and celebrate all that Toodyay has achieved, TTT-wise, TFOR's Bilya Walk Track being one of them. The Warburtons, Clarkes and Fraynes will be representing TFOR at the York event.

Beth Frayne, Secretary, Toodyay Tidy Towns Committee



Above: A section of the CWA Hall with displays for each of the categories that TTT has entered.

Above right: Two of the Toodyay District High School essays on their clean-up work in Newcastle Park..

Right: The Judges, Peter & Rhonda Ashton, District High School teachers Darryl Orr & Bev Ellis and Beth Frayne, Secretary Toodyay Tidy Towns

Photos: Desraé Clarke unless otherwise noted

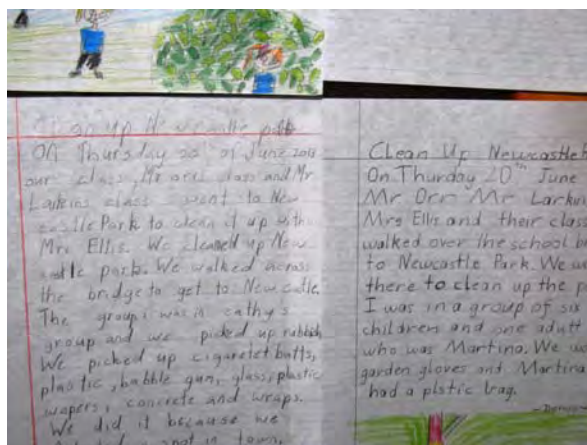


Photo below: Greg Warburton



**Newsletter of the
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The objects of the *Toodyay Friends of the River* are to *work towards the conservation and rehabilitation of the Avon River and its environs. In the bigger picture of natural resource management, we are committed to implementing the Avon River Management Program and its associated River Recovery Plans for each of the four sections of river that pass through Toodyay.*

Contact us at: info@toodyayfor.org.au

*"Make Friends with
our Avon River"*



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www.toodyayfor.org.au**

The Back Page

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Right: This is a copy of an article in the last Biddip (April 2013) of Honorary Life Member Gaven Donegan.. It was congratulating him on being named Toodyay's Citizen of the Year for 2013 .

We were so proud in having Gaven as an Honorary Life Member.

Gaven has taught us much about the river, and its many moods; he has also taught us how to be humble.

The TFOR members will miss this 'Icon of the River', his antics and his dedication. He has left big shoes to fill.



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