



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP Newsletter February

2008

Previous Sunday Meeting January 20th

This was another of our summer beat-the-heat early morning starts. Both ends of the new, final section of the Nature Trail were made more conspicuous as they deviate from the unstable descent to Kathner Street. The widening of the track from the lower end progressed up the hill, and whipper-snipping was delayed till well after 9 a.m. out of consideration for near-by residents.

The up-hill side of the track merges with Malcolm's area, together reverting to a nice piece of bushland. This is marred by ankle-high tangles of fallen fencing in the form of barbed- and chicken wire. On the other hand, it is graced by a mat of aromatic *Mentha diemenica*. ☼

Future programme

Next meeting, Sunday February 17th

- GAN/Chauvel for clearing of exotic growth and plant ID
- 8 am or later, until 10.30 am
- meet at Kathner St or GAN/Chauvel
- bring hat, gloves, hacker, drink, snack, raincoat if it is wet. ☼

Grazing

There is a notice on the Kathner Street gate advising of the presence of cattle – what's going on?

On Thursday 24th January Malcolm reported that ACT TAMS (Environment ACT) was planning to introduce cattle along the horse trail again. As far as he knew they are not planning to have cattle in the trial area again at this stage.

On the same morning, David (Lincoln Close) was walking on the eastern end of the horse trail and saw recent cattle droppings and tracks but no stock and assumed that they must have been at the other end.

February 2nd David walked the track up to the small reservoir, down to the Bicentennial Horse Trail, back along it to the east and up to the Lincoln Pl. saddle. Cattle had been active in that part of the trail, with a camp under some trees at one place but not much grazing going on. They did not appear to have gone on to the trough at the eastern end in any numbers at all. ☼

Report on the Old Dam

The physical chemistry of the old dam has now been collected every month since mid-2003. The pH level, turbidity, temperature, electrical conductivity (a measure of salinity), dissolved oxygen and orthophosphates are recorded and sent off to the Southern ACT Catchment Group's Waterwatch Coordinator, currently Stephen Skinner and before him, Tanya Noakes.

The dam was severely affected by the 2003 fires. In October/November 2006 and 2007 it was further impacted by cattle introduced to graze the "long paddock", as a fire fuel reduction measure, on the western side of Cooleman Ridge. Both periods of grazing were relatively short (average three weeks) but the numbers of beasts were such that the vegetation was heavily eaten and where unpalatable, trampled. It didn't help that the class of 2007 used the dam as their favoured campsite leading to even greater trampling than the previous year.

Despite these travails the biggest impact on the dam in the last five years has been the drought. In fact, it dried up in 2006. And it took some time for the turtles usually resident in the dam to return once rain came and it filled again.

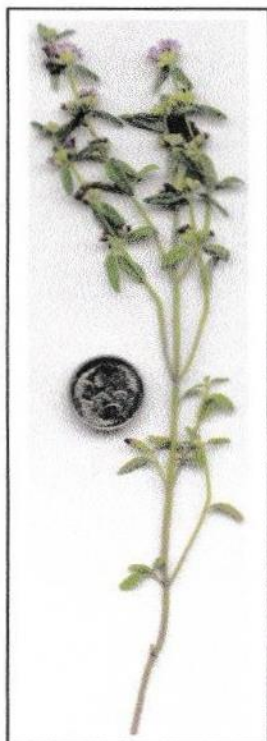
Even before the cattle the orthophosphate count was consistently high. Whereas the other measures are broadly within parameters, the orthophosphate level resembles a spike. Certainly these results are understandable when cow pats are plastered in and near the water body, but the figure was high even before the cattle appeared.

In the years three and four report of the Community Assessment Monitoring Program for Fire Impacted River Ecology (a tortured title invented to come up with the catchy acronym, CAMPFIRE), the following comment appeared about the low levels of dissolved oxygen in the dam:

"Cooleman Ridge Pond's dissolved oxygen levels indicate its increasingly eutrophic nature. As an ageing, shallow farm dam without an outlet, high nutrient levels and prolific aquatic plant growth low dissolved oxygen levels are not unexpected. The dam's low dissolved oxygen is further exacerbated by the lack of any meaningful canopy vegetation in the area to shade and cool it. Increasingly, this site is functioning like a wetland and as a wetland may be an increasingly important frog breeding area."

The dam already is a registered frogwatch site, but I'm unaware of any formal frog watching being done for a few years. A Perron's tree frog used to live in the large eucalypt located about forty metres from the dam, but that's about all. Maybe the resident black snake got him. Turtles and snakes, it's a reptile world down by the dam. From Doug ☼

What's around



Family: LAMIACEAE
Mentha diemenica
Slender Mint
Mat-forming native herb, often producing ascending to prostrate branches.
Height to 15 cm.
Mentha – the Latin name for mint.
diemenica – of Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land)

Safe storage

Arminel has deposited our old paper newsletters with the ACT Heritage Library upstairs in the Woden Library. They will be added to the catalogue and made accessible to the public, while remaining accessible to our members. The Library wishes to receive our electronic newsletter as it comes out. They will print it out themselves and make it available to the public in paper form.

The staff were reportedly delighted with the donation of these records. ☺

Caretaker areas

Thanks to those who responded with confirmation of their areas. An up-to-date map will be prepared for the web site. ☺

Arawang

Early last month our dynamic president and I embarked on a plant survey of Mt. Arawang, starting at 6 a.m. on a morning that stayed blessedly overcast. Arminel had decided that we should breakfast at the summit and then traverse the wedge between two well-worn tracks in ever-lengthening arcs. Establishing clear boundaries was a master-stroke. We

- met a runner who'd recently been tempted to the northern end of the Ridge to follow the restored Nature Trail. She found the new pamphlet very helpful and value-adding;
- listed 102 species including 63 natives;
- recorded our 41st pine seedling;
- rediscovered the rock shelter where *the Dicksonia antarctica* and *Polystichum proliferum* used to be;
- were delighted to find several pockets of the fern *Asplenium flabellifolium* ;
- learned a lot; and
- returned to Arminel's in time for the lunch that Pat had prepared. ☺

Family: POACEAE
**Setaria gracilis*
Slender Pigeon Grass
Tufted exotic perennial to 1.2 m high.
seta L: bristle,
gracilis L: slender
Native of America
This grass has a strong presence low down the slope of Fence Post Hill towards Kathner Street. It is a weed of disturbed areas.



DRAFT: TOWARDS A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR COOLEMAN RIDGE CANBERRA NATURE PARK(cont) FIRE MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Fire has an ambiguous image. On the one hand it is seen as a menace to life and property; it is seen to be frightening. On the other hand it is seen as integral part of nature being an ecological agent for the maintenance of biodiversity; it is seen to be necessary. In both cases, the properties of the fires are important as to how their impact can be assessed more accurately. For the persistence of the biota, not only the properties of the fires but also the intervals at which they occur and their seasons of occurrence can be important (Gill 1975). [Fire type is neglected here because it lacks relevance in this context.]

Aborigines burned the landscape in this area (Flood 1980) but there are few details. Alan Cunningham was burning the vegetation at Tuggeranong in 1824 (Flood 1980) while Schumack (1967) refers to another bushfire in the early days of white settlement, in 1858. Today there are hundreds of fires per year in the region but most of them are small. McRae (1995) estimated that the number of fires per square km per year at the Park interface with the suburbs was 0.8. For Cooleman Ridge this would suggest that there would be an average of 3 fires per year. In the period from July 1 1977 to June 30 1994, 89 ha has been burnt (Park Care source??) implying that, on average, the fire cycle (the time to burn an area equivalent to the whole Ridge) is about 36 years. Some parts of the Ridge seem not to have been burnt for at least 45 years because they were not burnt in the extensive Stromlo fires of 1952 (Ben Champion, personal communication to the Park Care Group) and have not been burnt since (e.g. the area to the south of the Kathner St entrance).

Note: the whole draft, submitted in 1998, can be read on our web site. ☺