



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter May 2015

Previous Meeting - Sunday, 19 April Group Area Central, Darrell Place, Chapman

Guess what? It didn't happen! For the second consecutive time, the Darrell Place meeting was postponed.

Last December it was torrential rain that forced the abandonment. At least we'd gathered on site when the heavens descended. This time the portents were grim. Drizzling rain with a freezing wind from the south - truly hypothermic! A quick ring-around and the consensus was to stay in and survive.

Oh well, there's always next time. So, in true déjà vu style we have:

Next Meeting

When: 1.30pm to 4.00pm

Sunday 17 May

Where: Group Area Central. (Darrell Place)

What: Plant ID and weed removal.

Bring: Hat, gloves, hacker, drink. We have a few tools you can borrow.

Contact: Doug Tinney 6288 8589

Arawang Homestead and Mt Arawang (Part 1)

This article is based on two documents loaned to us by Mr Ross Bennett, current occupant of "Arawang" and former Parks and Conservation ranger. The documents were "Arawang Homestead and its Surrounding Area" prepared in 1993 by Eleanor Hearder as part of the Cultural Heritage and Management Conservation course at the University of Canberra. The other document was a report entitled "Meet you at the R.M.B." finalised in July 2001 by Kathy Binns and Janet Heap of the Business Management Group, ACT

Housing. This report assessed the heritage values of government owned rural housing stock.

Early History

The area in which Mt Arawang and the current Arawang Homestead are located was included in an 1841 grant of land to George Weston, a former captain in the East India Company. Those of you who remember your primary school history will recall that's not long after Major Mitchell's march through this area around 1836. It's also interesting that Weston's grant bordered the existing Yarralumla Estate founded by Henry Donnison, which means that property was parcelled out even closer to the passage of Mitchell. Stoney Hill (now Mt Arawang) was located on the edge of Weston's property near land owned by a Francis Mowatt.

Frederick Campbell bought Yarralumla Estate in 1881 and over time acquired surrounding land such that his holdings expanded by 50 percent to total 39,000 acres (15,790 hectares). Land management on the Limestone Plains suffered in severe rabbit and grasshopper plagues in the 1890s. Early in the new century the destruction of old growth timber (Stringy Bark, Yellow Box, Apple Box and Forest Oak) on hill tops led to massive soil erosion in gully areas. Needless to say, this damage was exacerbated by the grazing of sheep. In 1908 the Yass/Canberra district was declared the site for the new national capital. The massive Yarralumla Estate was bought by the Federal Government in 1913 for £141,500 (100 years of inflation complicates the conversion to present day value – so you can work it out. Ed.).

From this time on the story of land occupation around Arawang was of swathes of country being divided into ever smaller parcels but still for use as rural properties. The 1,350 acres (547 hectares) known as "Arawang" extended from the Old Kambah Road to the Murrumbidgee River. It was a sheep and cattle property. Apparently the term "Arawang" means "deep water hole" and is assumed to have applied to aspects of the nearby Murrumbidgee. The term was used as a name for the property during the 1930s by the then owner, a Mr M Clothier.

Part 2 of this story will be delivered in next month's newsletter.

What's around

(Reprinted from June 2014)

Digitaria brownii, Cotton Panic Grass – Notes by Linda Spinaze



This grass has been present on Cooleman Ridge for a few years, but originally I knew of only one plant. This was right beside the main path, above Monkman St. Before the new cut-drain path was bull-dozed, I collected seed from this plant, and after the works were finished I scattered them in the spot that they had originally grown. To my disappointment, no plants emerged.

A few weeks ago I had the bright idea that I should search for this plant down-hill from the original plant, since most plants will spread their seed down-water. So I left the path and looked. Lo, there were large patches of *Digitaria brownii*! They looked a little worse for wear after the whipper-snipping and cool-burning and very dark with some fungus on the leaves but showing the distinctive inflorescence. I always think that this grass looks very similar to Red-leg grass (*Bothriochloa*) but the inflorescence is spread out (digitate) and has white cotton/fungus-hair between the florets/seeds.

I believe that it is used as a pasture grass in Queensland, but I don't see it very often around Canberra. There are 35 native species of *digitaria* (finger grasses) in Australia, with 9 introduced species. This year it flowered in April after our heavy autumn rains, but I think in previous years it flowered earlier, possibly mid-summer.

The Friday Mob (by Jenny Horsfield)

Fencepost Hill and its surroundings look in good shape at the moment. The control burn last year followed by reasonable rains have led to a resurgence of native grasses, especially *Microleana*, *Bothriochloa* and various *Stipa* grasses. All the poa grasses which we planted in the drainage line and down to the dam at Kathner Street are strong and healthy. The gully which used to be infested with waist-high *Phalaris* is now a pleasant open area with native geraniums and young seedlings from the *Euc. polyanthemus* above the gully.

Our regular Friday weeder Tatiana is away spending summer in Siberia! Pat and Arminel are holidaying in Europe. Gosta and Roger are regular workers but Roger recently spent part of two weeks serving with the SES in the Hunter Valley. Erica comes when she is free from her many other responsibilities; her patch around the dam is flourishing.

Mike Morriss and I are currently attacking the large clumps of *Paspalum* in the area around the dam. Last Friday we walked up to Pauline's Patch and noted how beautiful that area looks now. It is heartening to see such vigorous return of native grasses and forbs to our hillside.