



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter January 2006

Those fiery winds

Tony Fearnside recounts his memories and observations of events 3 years ago:

"Returning late to Canberra on 17 January 2003, we saw the reddish glow in the northwestern sky, marking the traditional source of disastrous bushfires that affect Canberra. In the morning our worst fears seemed about to materialise. I telephoned the ACT Emergency Services and was surprised to talk to a real person who seemed to know all about the Bendora and Stockyard fires, but referred me to the NSW Rural Fires Service web-site for the McIntyre's Hut fire: there was a reference all right, but it was tucked in amongst information about several other fires. I telephoned a friend whose property is near Mt Stromlo and told him about evacuation and that it would be a folly to rely on the ACT bushfire services to defend his property.

Then there was a rush to buy batteries for radios and flashlights and extra hose fittings before getting home for some frantic work in tidying the garden, blocking down pipes and filling gutters, taking flammable liquids out of the shed and wetting down whatever we could. We put on long sleeved tops and trousers and made the car ready to move, with enough stuff for a night away. (I forgot the credit cards, of course!)

By this time visibility was greatly reduced and there was an eerie twilight. At last I was going to experience a really big bushfire at first hand. All the "symptoms" that I had read or heard about were present, including a small bird that fell, dead from the air.

Just after 4 pm, flames appeared on the ridge (our house in Fisher has a good view to the west; to the southern part of Coolleman Ridge and Mt Arawang). These came from near the reservoir. More flames came and "spotted" over the ridge, they burnt back up the slope towards the main fire (a classic case of "erratic" fire behaviour). Then there was a whirlwind and a loud roar (others described it as being like the roar of jet engines on a F-18 fighter aircraft). The whirlwind moved rapidly to the south and Mt Arawang lit up instantly with many small fires.

Later it transpired that the wind was somewhat unusual, being caused by fire fronts that coalesced. When I looked at the Ridge and Fisher Parklands, the path of the wind was clear, with fallen trees and branches pointing down a quite narrow swathe, and trees on either side showing evidence

of winds that rushed in to fill the partial vacuum caused by the main wind.

Others tried to work out why the trees in Lincoln Place and Lincoln Close were lying in such a higgledy-piggledy pattern, but perhaps my observations explain this. There were several winds: firstly the ambient wind from the WNW, but this did not cause many trees to blow over, then the strong cyclonic wind which also came near the reservoir, near or over Lincoln Close and continued across the Fisher Parkland into Kambah and which was accompanied by the "side winds", and finally there was the "whirlwind" which was "sucked" into the main wind. Between them these stronger winds seem to explain the haphazard way in which the trees were lying.

Also, the occurrence of erratic fire behaviour as the fire burnt over the ridge demonstrates to me that burning the grass behind the houses on the southern part of the ridge in the 2004/5 summer was a sensible thing to do"

Future programme

We will continue to rotate through the three Group Areas (GA) when there is no special programme.

• On January 15th we'll meet again at Kathner St for weeding and plant ID.

Bring hat, gloves, weeder, drink, snack, raincoat if it is wet ☼

December log

- Malcolm reported sighting African lovegrass.
- Police activity on the Ridge searching for evidence relating to a suspicious death in Chapman. ☼

What's around

Family POACEAE



Austrostipa bigeniculata – Speargrass
Caespitose perennial native to 1 m cm
stipe G: tow (fibre); *geniculum* L: joint ☼



**Vulpia bromoides* – Squirrel Tail Fescue
Tufted annual to 40 cm
bromoides – resembling Brome
Native of Mediterranean region ☼

Community Linkage Team

With the amalgamation of Environment ACT and ACT Forests, revised administration arrangements are due to be implemented. A community linkages team which incorporates the community roles of Environment ACT and ACT Forests is to be introduced.

The team will be based at the Stromlo depot of ACT Forests and headed by John Freeman. The Park Care and Rural Land Care coordinator will be Rebecca Blundell. As with John Freeman, Rebecca is from Forests.

The new structure and administrative arrangements have yet to be finalised. The Stromlo group is expected to cover fire, linkages, weeds, pests and administration. The rangers will still be based at Athllon and Mitchell.

Perhaps by next month the situation will be clearer.

The Lunt report

Table 2. Traits commonly possessed by plants with high resistance to grazing pressure (after McIntyre *et al.* 1999)

Short life-span, rapid life-cycle
Short time to first reproduction
Low height
Scrambling, twining or mat-forming habit
Wide lateral spread
High degree of morphological plasticity
Dormant buds at or below ground-level
Unpalatable or toxic compounds
Plants hairy or prickly
Leaves tough, sclerophyllous
Leaves small
Inflorescence low, not prominent
Plants difficult to uproot

From *Effects of Stock Grazing on Biodiversity Values in Temperate Native Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands in SE Australia*, by Dr Ian D. Lunt. This report is mentioned frequently by CNP management when discussing grazing issues, and was prepared for the ACT Government. ☼