

President's Working Bee Report 2019

This year's working bee was scheduled to commence on Monday 20th at Dalhousie Springs.

We had 10 vehicles registered to attend and some of the tasks to be undertaken included construction of a new storage shed for FOS equipment and removal of juvenile date palms from some of the springs.

We need to construct a storage shed for FOS equipment because previously our equipment had been stored in a section of one of the DEW sheds which have now been demolished. A new workshop compound has been constructed and all DEW equipment moved there but unfortunately no space is available for the FOS equipment.

In addition, we were to undertake the usual maintenance and improvements in the campground at Dalhousie and surrounds.

However, rain intervened on Saturday the 18th and the forecast for scattered thunderstorms in the NW pastoral area eventuated. In particular, the area north of Oodnadatta as far as Alice Springs received steady rain of around 20mm during Saturday making the road to Hamilton and on to Dalhousie impassable.

Frank Lyman, our DEW Ranger, left Port Augusta Saturday AM and after reaching Coober Pedy he turned back. On Sunday morning Frank officially cancelled the working bee because of the rain making the roads impassable.

I and 3 other vehicles left Adelaide on Friday the 17th. We overnighted at Glendambo and then proceeded north via Coober Pedy to Oodnadatta on Saturday, with the intention of proceeding to Dalhousie on Sunday the 19th. That's as far as we got when the rain started. We knew there was at least 2 of the party already at Dalhousie, another was at Arkaringa and another who left Adelaide on Saturday, was on the way to Coober Pedy. We had 2 vehicles joining us from NSW. We did not have full details of where everyone was when the rain started, and the working bee was cancelled.

On Sunday morning we had the challenge of trying to notify all 10 participants that the working bee was cancelled but I had no Telstra phone signal in Oodnadatta. Eventually through a combination of a coin operated pay phone and a borrowed Optus mobile (that is the only mobile service available in Oodnadatta) we were able to speak to/or leave messages for all 10 participants.

As it turned out 4 vehicles were in Dalhousie before the rain started so they were trapped as the roads were officially closed on Monday. There were other campers there and we gained a new member because of socialising that happened. Whilst it was not an official working bee they did assist the camp host with rubbish collection and looking after anxious campers who were worried about being trapped by the rain.

They also were instrumental in locating a lost pearl earring in the spring making the earring owner very happy. (See our web site/Facebook page for the full story).

They were also able to report that whilst the majority of the 500 Old Man Saltbush we planted last year have been eaten by the corellas, there were about 30 plants that were thriving.

As it turns out the section of the campground they occupied was the boggiest of all when the rain come. They could not walk around without growing taller with attached mud until Wednesday, whereas other campers in less boggy parts of the campground could move by Monday. They finally managed to "escape" to the south on the following Thursday.

My thanks to them for their work and PR efforts while they were “trapped” at Dalhousie.

See photo below which illustrates why we don't want to be in Dalhousie in a rain event.



Not much fun!

Whilst it was frustrating to have the working bee cancelled after all the time, effort and cost that goes into staging a working bee, it did highlight communication issues that we need to address for the future.

In the meantime, all the jobs that did not get done in 2019 will have to wait until 2020.

Communication before and during working bees

Here are some of the initiatives the committee will implement next year.

- Working bee leader will have a Sat phone
- All participants will be asked to communicate travel plans with the leader before leaving home
- We will set up a sked time so everyone can check in daily and especially when leaving the last area where phone reception is available before Dalhousie.
- For those with HF radio we will implement a sked procedure
- We will formalize UHF procedures

The committee feels that this is essential not only in the event of a weather event but in the event of someone having an accident.

Barry Barber - President