

Friends of the Simpson Desert

Working bee report May 2021

This year's working bee had been in the diary as starting on the 24th May for several months and we were about to start to promote it to members in late March, when we received a phone call from Frank Lyman, the Head Ranger, telling us that heavy rain had hit the area and that they had been unable to access the Park for 3 weeks. The area had received well over 100mm of rain.

All access roads were closed and at that stage, the 7th April, Frank was leaving Port Augusta to try to access the park from the north to assess the damage.

He was away for nearly 2 weeks and whilst the road to Hamilton Station was reopened the Pedirka PAR was badly damaged and closed until further notice and the road north to Mount Dare was also badly damaged but was being worked on.

In late April Witjira was reopened to the public but access, especially towing, was not recommended so we decided to put the working bee on hold. We thought that maybe a few of us could get in without camper trailers to simply plant the Coolabah trees that had been propagated by Bruce Smith and John Newland and were at the stage where they needed to go in the ground.

By the 13th May access had improved so we decided to go ahead and leave Adelaide on Friday the 21st May to start the working bee on Monday the 24th May.

We had 5 groups going and 3 of the group Barry Barber and Lesley Colley, Lynton and Karen Huxley and Bill and Helen Bainger decided to stay on the bitumen as long as possible, so they went via Kulgera, Finke and Mount Dare. The other two David and Margaret Moseley and Bruce Smith and Ron Battista went via Oodnadatta, Hamilton Station and Mount Dare.

As at writing this report the Pedirka PAR was still closed and the track from Blood Creek through Federal to the Mount Dare Road is still under water too deep to drive through Even the shortest way to Dalhousie added about 140km to the return trip from Adelaide.



Washaways and track corrugations

Green to the horizon and water everywhere

The extra effort to get there was rewarded to see so much greenery and water in many of the creeks and low-lying areas. There were birds everywhere around the water with even swans nesting.



Desert transformed after rain

We camped like last year in our designated area of the campground made comfortable by erecting tarpaulins around the shelter to keep the wind out.



The working bee activities

The Coolabah trees

A high priority job this year was to plant the coolabah trees that had been propagated by Bruce Smith and John Newland. They were to be planted adjacent to the 2 Ranger's houses and the workshop compound.

The area where we planted the trees adjacent to the workshop compound define an area that will eventually become an area for us to camp in during working bees and other volunteers/trade people to use to camp/stay in whilst working, thus freeing up the campground for tourists.

We firstly set up irrigation, suspended above the ground on a wire and connected to a dedicated tank and pump.

We planted about 100 trees.



Irrigation line and team planting trees propagated by Bruce and John.



Bill Bainger supplied a decalcification system as a trial run and with the assistance of Ron Battista this system was installed to try to reduce the amount of deposits in the drippers that block them after a while.

Decalcification system – thanks Bill & Ron

Seed collection

Bruce has continued to collect Coolabah and other seeds that will be used in the new campground when it is redeveloped in the next 2 to 3 years.



May our 'babies' grow as big!

Erosion control at the Kestrels

This area close to Dalhousie on the old road to Mount Dare has been eroded because vehicles have driven where they are not supposed to.

The area is fenced but when this road was open there have even been situations where the fence has been cut to gain access to the slopes.

Now the area has been isolated it was time to repair the damage. We laid erosion matting and made pegs from reo rod to fasten the mats in place.



Erosion mat on site and laid out

FOS shed shelving

The shelving was installed but we need more. This will be completed next year

FOS trailer

While on a working bee we need to transport equipment, tools, raw materials etc to the various work sites. Many thanks to David and Dean Moseley for sourcing a second-hand trailer and modifying and restoring it so that it can be stored in our shed.

It proved to be handy on this its first working bee.

Restoration of old mining camp shed (Caboose) at Alka Seltza bore

Frank had found an old caboose out in the desert and it looked like an old railway carriage hence the name Caboose, but it was mounted on skids rather than wheels. We can only assume it was a leftover from past mining exploration. He towed it to Alka Seltza bore to be used for accommodation and storage while working out there.

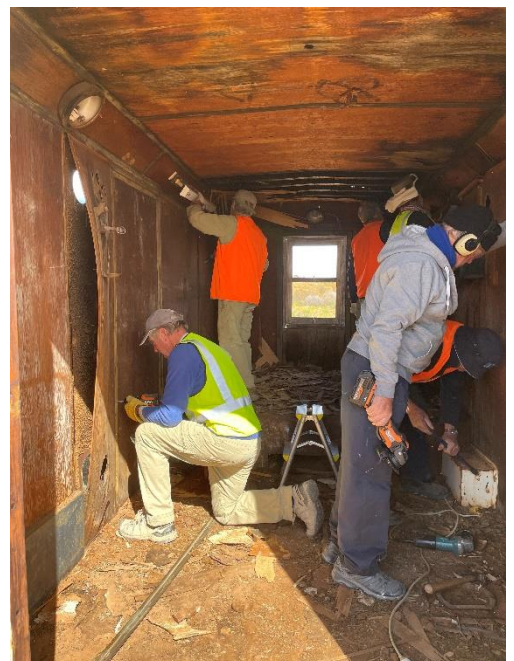
We did a day trip out to Alka Seltza and saw lots of water in creeks and greenery as a result of the rains

The Caboose needs renovation to make it habitable so as a first step on this working bee we removed all the interior lining.

We will now work out what to do with the interior to make it “fit for purpose”.



Caboose on site at Alka Seltzer



Stripping inside in progress

UHF handheld radios

The 3 new radios were used for the first time and they proved to be invaluable for the various work groups in different locations to stay in touch. They are a proven time saver.

Repairs to FOS shelter in campground

The shade cloth covering the roof looked a bit tattered, so it has now been repaired. It needs new shade cloth but there is no point in doing that now when the campground is going to be redeveloped.

FOS water tank

The tank we installed last year was empty even after all the rain. There was some water in the bottom so we can only assume that the tap had been left open. The system has been cleaned out and the tap secured so hopefully by next year we have potable water to use, if it rains again before then.

Other photos from the trip



On way to Alka Seltzer - water in background



Purnie Bore