

## 2023 Working Bee Report

All but 2 of the 10 FOS volunteer vehicles arrived in Oodnadatta on Saturday 20 May. Dave and Marg joined us on Sunday morning as we all headed to Dalhousie, past the entrance to Mount Sarah station where they had been holidaying/working for a few days. Peter and Margaret had been travelling up north and opted to meet us at Dalhousie Springs.

The full volunteer group of 10 vehicles included – Barry & Lesley, Lynton & Karen, Bill & Helen, Phil and Kathryn, Andrew and Sandy, Dave and Margaret, John and Ros, Al and Marlene, Peter Wilson and Peter & Margaret Wright.

We are indeed fortunate to have a wide range of skills available, with Dave and Margaret being involved for more than 20 years, and others ranging from 5 years down to those coming for the first time.



Our first task is to set up our camp area at Dalhousie Springs and for this we base ourselves around one of the Shelters

The working bee officially started on the Monday (22<sup>nd</sup> May) with an induction to the site from Frank Lyman (Ranger). This year we were fortunate to have John Schutz (CEO of DEW and a FOS member) who was travelling with his family as well as several other DEW personnel including Travis Gotch who stopped by before doing their own trip into the Desert.

Travis gave us an interesting talk on the hydrology of the Great Artesian Basin and the part the Witjira Springs plays in it and John as CEO of DEW told us about the big picture plans for National Parks in general.

It was satisfying for John Newland who had helped Bruce Smith propagate the locally collected Coolabah seeds and those of us who were involved in the planting of the seedlings 2 years ago, to see healthy growth. It was estimated that 80% of the trees had survived.



This year we had a number of projects to complete at Purni Bore and so 9 of the 10 vehicles departed after breakfast on the Tuesday to meet the Rangers (Frank Lyman and Tyson Gibb) on site. This left Barry (President) and Lesley back at Dalhousie Springs to do some general maintenance and other jobs.



While we were at the working bee we saw lots of tourists, many wanting to cross the desert but being restricted to a trip out and back because of flooding in Eyre Creek and therefore no access to Birdsville

## **Purni Bore activities.**

Teams were formed to complete 3 main jobs.

### **1. Concreting under and around the park bench and table beneath the shelter.**



No pre-mixed concrete here! Al is hard at work to get the recipe right.



Dave stretching for that final trowel off.

You work with what you have got. There is no Bunnings nearby to get last minute bits and pieces.





Admiring the finished concreting job



Sign off by concreting team

## 2. Fencing to control vehicle movement at Purni



The Rangers assisted with the fencing by boring the post holes with the tractor mounted auger and the FOS team inserted recycled plastic bollard posts into the holes, aligned and barred them tight. 70 posts spaced approx. 1.5 m apart were installed.

### 3. Interpretive Signs



Outdated signs were replaced at Purni.

### General maintenance

- The non filling toilet cistern from Purnie was returned to Dalhousie for repair and it was discovered that organic material in the shape of seeds and flakes of white PVC plastic had created an 80% blockage of the float valve. No wonder it did not work.
- In addition, some repairs to wire fencing near the toilet/showers at Purni were completed.

### Eradication of Buffel Grass

The Ranger provided information on how to identify and remove buffel grass which is being carried into the park by tourists on their tyres, as well as the seeds being carried by water/wind. Buffel grass has spread in Qld and Northern Territory as it is a popular cattle feed, but is destructive in a National Park environment due to its ability to spread, choking out native grasses and other vegetation, and in time of bush fires it burns fiercely.

The team pulled and bagged the buffel grass for the Rangers to dispose of.



## Birds, Insects and Feral Animals



Wolf Spider



Australian Emperor Dragonfly

At both Purni, Dalhousie and Dalhouse Ruins motion sensitive cameras were installed at various locations to see if we could identify any feral cats close to water sources. No feral cats were positively identified but we did photograph dingos, foxes and rabbits.

This was our first time using these cameras and we learnt a lot. It will be useful on future working bees to take the cameras and deploy them to collect more data, so an eradication program for the pest species can be planned.

Informal surveys of birds and other fauna were conducted at Purni Bore and Dalhousie Springs. About 20 species of birds were sighted, with the highlights being seen on Hamilton Station on the way home: a flock of about 80 Inland Dotterels accompanied by a pair of Orange Chats. Lights were also set up at night to attract moths, with about 26 species identified. Other night-time sightings included a range of spider species, 3 species of scorpion and a house mouse at Purni. Another notable find was an Interior Blind Snake, which we “saved” from a swarm of ants only to realise later when viewing video of it, that we actually interrupted it’s breakfast! All sightings with photographic evidence were uploaded to iNaturalist as an official record of their occurrence (located at:

[https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/observations/happywonderer?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=&search\\_on=&quality\\_grade=any&reviewed=&identifications=any&captive=&geoprivacy=&taxon\\_geoprivacy=&place\\_id=&swlat=-27.325184014660532&swlng=134.8967996962502&nelat=-26.098487902866896&nelng=136.49805702046896&not\\_in\\_place=&taxon\\_name=&taxon\\_id=&day=&month=&year=&order\\_by=observations.id&order=desc&rank=&hrank=&lrnk=&taxon\\_ids%5B%5D=&d1=&d2=&created\\_on=&site=&tdate=&list\\_id=&filters\\_open=false&view=map](https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/observations/happywonderer?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=&search_on=&quality_grade=any&reviewed=&identifications=any&captive=&geoprivacy=&taxon_geoprivacy=&place_id=&swlat=-27.325184014660532&swlng=134.8967996962502&nelat=-26.098487902866896&nelng=136.49805702046896&not_in_place=&taxon_name=&taxon_id=&day=&month=&year=&order_by=observations.id&order=desc&rank=&hrank=&lrnk=&taxon_ids%5B%5D=&d1=&d2=&created_on=&site=&tdate=&list_id=&filters_open=false&view=map)).

This long link will take you directly to the 70 plus observations made on the trip.

Our thanks to Andrew and Sandy for conducting the survey with other interested members participating,

### **Moving on from Purni**

After 3 days at Purni the group returned to Dalhousie Springs to continue the working bee – this was a day of relocation and sightseeing and a relaxing swim in the Springs.







### **Dalhousie Springs activities**

- Concreting of the floor of the recycling shed by the “Purni” concreting team.





- A team of sign erectors went to Dalhousie Ruins, 3'OClock Creek, Federal, and Bloods Creek, as well as the walking tracks around Dalhousie Springs main pool and Kingfisher pool which involved removing weather-beaten interpretive signs and replacing them with new ones.



- Installation of steel pipe end-assemblies for fencing, painted white, at a deviation in the walking track to Kingfisher Pools.
- As always there are a multitude of general maintenance jobs to keep the toilets/amenities block in order and tidying of the general campground by removing overgrown vegetation.
- Rubbish was collected in and around the campground.
- Dave and Bill replaced and repaired some of the broken fencing around the paths in the campground.
- Dalhousie Ruins were tidied up by removing weeds around and in the buildings and generally tidying up including some fencing repairs.
- Broken toilet and shower door locks were repaired.
- The FOS rainwater tank was empty when we were last there in 2021 and we could not work out why when there had been rain. Again, it was empty when we arrived this time. It has now been discovered that there is a second bottom outlet on the tank which was never sealed when it was installed, so all the good rainwater that was collected simply flowed out. That issue has now been fixed.

- The FOS storage shed was emptied, cleaned and all gear stored neatly and updated on our inventory spreadsheet.



- We installed posts to support pipes to collect more rainwater from the main workshop roof into additional tanks.



Volunteers and Rangers at Purni Bore

## Summary

Feedback during and since the working bee from participants has been positive. We all enjoyed the work and comradarie both at Purni and Dalhousie Springs. It's always appreciated when at Dalhousie to relax in the magnificent warm pool to discuss the days activities and to cleanse the dirty and tired bodies and then follow up with a drink/nibbles early evening followed by a meal.