

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca Working bee report 2021

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca is working with PWS to care for, maintain and interpret natural and historic heritage at Melaleuca and Claytons Corner in Southwest Tasmania. Our branch was formed in 2009.

There are no roads to this area, the waterways being the local means of transport, giving the place its unique character. There is a small airstrip used for access by light aircraft. FoM carries out annual working bees each March, holds meetings during the year and has established and manages a small museum at Melaleuca. Challenges faced here are presented by the west coast weather and the relative isolation. Transport and freight by air or sea are major costs and always require rigorous forward planning and flexibility.

Working bee, March 2021

A Wildcare grant enabled FoM to run our thirteenth working bee at Melaleuca, from 10 ~ 19 March 2021. The grant funding assisted flights for volunteers to Melaleuca for the working bee and contributed to the freight-in/rubbish-out shipment. Work was carried out in collaboration with Ranger-in-Charge, Huonville-Southwest, Ian Marmion. We were pleased to welcome a highly capable new Field Officer, Steve Locke. PWS volunteer caretakers Scott and Lisa were particularly helpful and capable.

This year our goals included rubbish removal; maintenance of garden area and cottage at Claytons; continuing the roof restitution project at Kings' house; rescuing the control hut at Rallinga Mine separating plant, and other general maintenance. Our routine annual brush-cutting, weeding, draining and fish-oiling programs continued. The weather held good for most of the week, but heavy rain all day on Sat 13th restricted activities. Our usual evening meeting discussions were productive, though limited this year as not everyone attended due to Covid regulations.

Cargo arrived at Melaleuca with the PWS re-supply aboard Charles Wessing's fishing boat *Jean Nichols* on Sunday 7th. A busy couple of days unloading ensued for Janet and Geoff, Scott and Lisa, Steve Locke (PWS) and the *Jean Nichols* crew. Freight was distributed to relevant sites using



Rubbish bags for the out-bound freight shipment on *Jean Nichols*, Photos: Janet Fenton

dinghies. Other equipment for our working-bee was transported to Melaleuca by Janet and Geoff aboard *Poinduk*, by Andrew Boon on *Juliet* and Bob Cleary on *Georges Bay*. *Jean Nichols* was able to take away a large cargo of rubbish, previously re-bagged by caretakers Scott and Lisa.

We had a big group of volunteers this year. Selection was based on relevant skills which included qualified electrical engineers/electricians, coxswains, builder, construction white cards, engineer, mechanical skills, radio use, remote area nurse, safe work with brushcutter, chemicals and heights tickets, shipwright, heritage interpretation, GPS skills, photography, and a number of us held first aid certificates. Eight volunteers arrived by air and nine arrived by boat, making a big saving in air



Volunteers at the Melaleuca working bee 2021. Photo: Glenn Butterworth:

fares. Our group included four new recruits. Volunteers were Andrew Boon (electrical work), Janet (team leader) and Geoff Fenton (workshop manager, Kings), Chris Creese (works manager, Willsons), Rob Banfield (Claytons team leader), David Butler, David Mitchell, Rik Head, Duncan Maughan, Archie Donley (builder), Alison Viner, Mel Jack, Bob Cleary, Glenn Butterworth, Chris Palmer, Jenny Scott, Ken Jones and Nell Tyson. The volunteers' flight arrived mid afternoon, leaving a short time for introduction and safety briefings by Ian Marmion and Janet followed by a communal BBQ at Kings'.

Volunteers stayed in the bushwalkers hut, at Karina's and Willsons', and on board boats *Juliet*, *Sequoia* and *Georges Bay* and several in tents at the campsite. We greatly appreciate Barbara Willson's hospitality, accommodating two volunteers and hosting most of the evening meals because Kings' house was a work site for most of the week. Thanks to Andrew, Mitch and Bob who freighted equipment to Melaleuca and Bob and Sue who took more rubbish away aboard *Georges Bay* post working bee.

Routine jobs

Brush-cutting is always an important part of our program, but heavy work. Four more volunteers obtained certificates during the year. Mitch and Rob did a terrific job clearing the firebreaks around

the private leases and mine sites. Geoff cut back scrub encroaching on the museum and roadway near the Red Shed.

Fish-oiling program. In this environment rust is an ever-present problem. Duncan and Mitch got to work with billies of oil and sticky brushes. (See appendix for items treated this season). This treatment was recommended by heritage consultants to stabilize outdoor historic heritage objects and it makes a significant difference in preventing deterioration. [A proposal was sent to PWS in September 2019 outlining a potential heritage mining trail to interpret significant existing relics for the many visitors who ask to see them.]

Draining: Champion shoveller, David worked on drains around Melaleuca South.

Weeding: Reduced clump of *Watsonia* and *Montbretia*, pulled rhododendron seedlings and cleared encroaching vegetation at Claytons garden area and around paths and drains. Pulled a few rhodos and foxgloves at Kings'. Not many appearing this year. We're winning!

Paths and tracks. On the roadway to the museum, Mitch and Duncan worked up a sweat using pick, shovel and barrow to remove the long central strip of peat and vegetation that has been a difficulty for bicycles and some infirm visitors. They also checked and freed up some drains along the way.



Routine maintenance jobs. Photos: Glenn Butterworth and Janet Fenton

First Aid Kits. We forgot to take these to Hobart for refurbishment as planned last season. So Duncan, who is a remote area nurse, itemized the contents and made recommendations for an upgrade. We remembered to bring them to Hobart this time!

Electrical projects



Even the Orange-bellied parrots approve!

Photo: Andrew Boon

Andrew and team worked on the 240v wiring from the workshop to the Willsons' house. Cable catenaries and wind-generator tower guys were replaced with stainless steel to minimise the rust problem. Tested and tagged all 240v equipment in PWS quarters and airstrip tool container. Installed lamp-holders in the ceilings of the bathroom and bedroom at Claytons, replacing the 'temporary' outlets.

Mine sites

At Rallinga Mine other jobs included repairs to the old workshop. The Melaleuca South team had another heritage shed on the list this year: the control cabin, the hub of the Rallinga Mine separating plant and an important feature on the proposed heritage trail, was deteriorating and teetering perilously close to a steep bank. Preparation for a move to safer ground included photographing features inside and out, removing windows, bracing the walls and levering the shed onto greased skids. Steve positioned the heavy PWS tractor in place as an anchor for a chain-block. Long wire strops were secured around the hut and the whole thing was slid easily into its new position by one person working the chain-block.

Sundry

A surplus tank from the PWS depot was relocated and re-installed near the back steps of the Charles King Memorial Hut. This will provide a better water supply for bushwalkers in dry summers. Job finished off by caretakers.

Fishing boat *Velocity* arrived in the rain on Saturday with a cargo of timber for re-cladding the SW wall of the Troedel shelter at the airstrip, plus an extra roll of insulation for the King's house project. After trans-shipping, a gang of volunteers helped to carry the timber from Melaleuca Creek to the airstrip, ready for the cladding work done later by PWS staff.

Deny King Heritage Museum

Our two new Ikea chairs in the museum are getting a lot of use. We plan to replace the square table and also the shabby camp-chairs with comfortable stools.

An epic story in the museum features a broken propeller from a deHavilland Dragon twin engine plane that landed at Melaleuca in 1948 when the place really was remote. An emergency corduroy pole and gravel take-off runway was constructed by the locals, but little trace is visible on the surface today. Using GIS, old photos and the position of the small piece of cordwood still visible, Duncan investigated the location of the runway. He located several additional places where the cordwood could be uncovered, but decided that early aerial photos would be helpful for the survey. To be continued next year!



deHavilland Dragon, 1948 and emergency runway, overgrowing in 1963.

Photos: King collection and NE Poynter

Claytons (Rob Banfield)

Work progressed at the historic Claytons cottage, where Win and Clyde Clayton lived from 1962~1976. The team was led by Rob Banfield and transported to and fro by Steve Locke in *Leptonyx*.

These works were supported by skilled Parks' staff Steve, caretakers Lisa and Scott and the Bob Cleary 'Georges Bay marine tool shed'. Five days of work: Thursday 11th March ~ Monday 15th were allocated to Claytons. Volunteers Bob, Rob, Mel, Jen, Alison, Glenn and others pitched in enthusiastically to the works program. The number of skilled workers enabled a huge schedule of works to be completed in a short period of time.



Skipper on *Leptonyx* Photo: Rob Banfield

Summary of works completed at Claytons:

- Borocol treatment of all mould affected internal plywood lining
- Internal plywood walls and ceiling at least one coat of water based Cabothane satin sealer applied to at least 80%
- Bed legs made safe with locking timbers
- Checked inspection panels for stove flue and water systems; these are working fine with screwed fixings for easy removal to inspect
- 60% of white barge boards painted
- Extensive restoration of eastern garden precinct: tracks cleared to pond and weir.
- Broom hooks installed in laundry
- Toilet re-dug and relocated!...a huge job...thanks Steve and Scott!
- Toilet roof extended for greater client comfort

- Investigated fireplace floor under tin cover – floor found good, refitted tin and removed sharp edges
- Replaced and made good entry-way anti-skid wire
- Removed and stacked rusty iron from outdoor seating area
- Salvaged four pieces of useful steel (under building for storage)
- Cleared bedroom storage wardrobe and removed various bits of rubbish
- Fitted three door-handle assemblies
- Installed jetty handrail and replaced rotted jetty bearers (PWS- Steve and Scott)
- Installed anti-skid covering to shore end of jetty
- Installed track water-diverter and sullage-trap near western entry of building, to reduce track erosion
- Re-painted bathroom tile-style walls and laundry trough heritage ‘Rockmelon rind’ green
- Painted external chimney flue with (experimental) heat proof spray paint to reduce rust; follow up in 2022
- Fitted tap to tank for external water access by visitors
- Removed bracken and re-growth from building precinct
- Removed and bagged invasive *Montbretia* and *Watsonia* bulbs.
- Installed memorabilia in living-room: a painting reproduction, a mantel clock, ship’s model, and a serving tray – all to replicate Clayton originals
- Installed replica lounge room shelf and grown knee bracket
- Relocated various ‘collected’ rocks and metal pieces to pantry area
- Installed porthole* in pantry wall, similar to original
(* replacement was ex *Belle Brandon*, a vessel once owned by Clyde Clayton!)
- Installed kitchen cupboard door handles
- Installed two missing short skirting-boards in hallway and lounge, to retain flapping plywood lining. Tagged *Velotta* lily bulbs, to be relocated during winter to the designated garden area.



Maintenance at Claytons. Photos: Bob Cleary, Rob Banfield, Jenny Scott

Private leases

The King and Willson homes are the hubs for the volunteers: eating and meeting places, plus accommodation. Materials for private works are provided by the lessees.

At Kings' the roof and lining refurbishment project to redress the leaking roof and deteriorated lining was continued with builder Archie Donley at the helm. The team removed old curved sheets of corrugated roofing, fitted new battens where required, replaced iron with new curved galvanised sheets. Insulation blanket was installed and new plywood replaced the old lining ply that had deteriorated badly due to leaks and damp conditions. Ply was pre-painted with turps-based prep-coat and a coat of water-based top-coat. Cover-strips cut from plywood were installed. Like materials and colours were chosen for heritage considerations and metal compatibility. The living room was completed this time and part of the kitchen, pantry and a small bedroom. Finishing off jobs included reinstalling and stabilising built-in bookshelves and pantry shelves. The new lining beautifully showcases the split-timber



trusses which are a significant feature of the heritage building. Alison tackled the window frames in Karina's. One was repaired and painted and the other deemed too fragile, so just painted in situ.

Meanwhile Jenny beavered away nearby, clearing dead fronds from numerous tree-ferns, letting in refreshing light and air, and applied coats of gloss white to the N & W sides of the heritage Stevenson screen, where wind-driven rain and hail erodes the slatted timberwork.

Chris Creese was in charge of maintenance at Willsons' and directed volunteers to jobs, tools and equipment. Chris repaired the wood stove and carried out other maintenance on the house. An old OK dinghy was dismantled, useful fittings salvaged and rubbish removed. Re-decking the big trailer was another job completed by the Melaleuca South team.

Shipwright Ken Jones volunteered to repair the Willson family's classic 'Purdon' fiberglass dinghy, *Pixie*. Andrew brought the specialist materials aboard *Juliet*. Ken enlisted an apprentice: Glenn enjoyed the job, and no doubt learnt a lot from the master. They dismantled and removed deteriorated parts, ground and sanded poor surfaces, glassed in repairs and painted the floor and inside of the dinghy. Repaired, sanded, and oiled oars, and *Pixie*, looking terrific, was launched in a little ceremony one lunch break, while all hands were assembled for the annual heritage Southern Cross engine starting ritual.



Volunteers took turns as chef for the evening meals and produced some terrific feasts for the hungry hoards. Most volunteers departed on Thursday on the 10am flight. Those who stayed on an extra day enjoyed a wine and cheese sunset out on Melaleuca Lagoon in the 75+ year-old Kingbilly pine clinker dinghy *Blue Boat*.

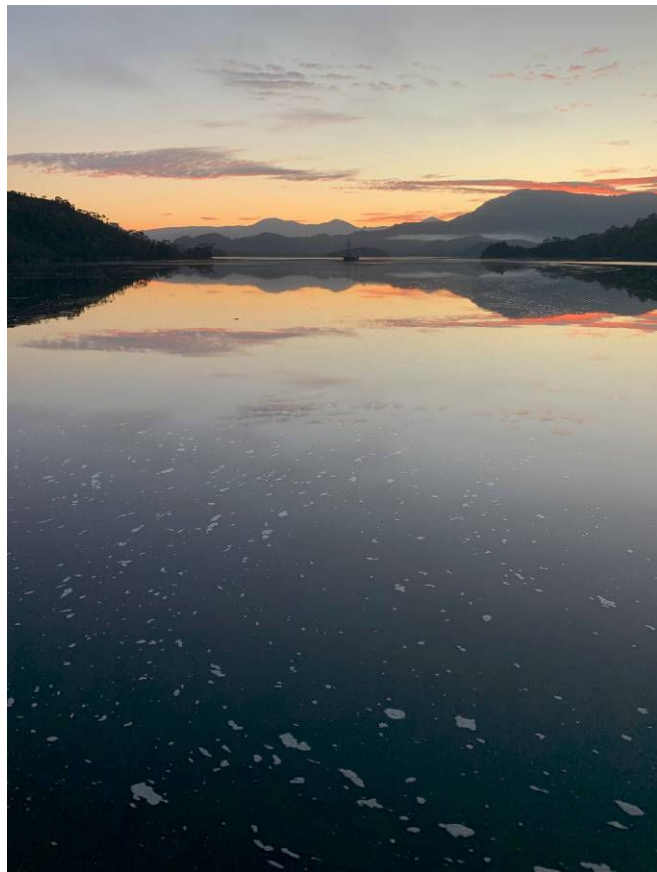
Special thanks to the enthusiastic and skilled team of volunteers who put in a combined 994 person-hours (excluding PWS staff and caretaker time) during this working-bee week. The group spent extra time most evenings reporting and planning. Many of the tasks recommended in last year's report have been completed. Janet did the routine post working-bee stocktake of FoM equipment following the working-bee. Thanks everyone for your record keeping and photographs and especially to Glenn who, as designated photographer, scurried around our scattered worksites taking photos, movie sequences and even conducting some interviews.

As tight planning is essential for work on a remote site, many extra volunteer days were involved in planning, preparation, purchasing, loading and freighting materials beforehand, unloading at Melaleuca, as well as assessing and reporting post working-bee. (These hours are difficult to document and are not included here.)

Thanks again to Wildcare, whose funding made this working bee possible. Thanks to the volunteers for funding their own return fares and to Andrew, Bob, Mitch and Rik for transporting gear and passengers and Barbara for hosting FoM volunteers for accommodation and meals in her home. Charles Wessing's assistance with freight on *Jean Nichols* is invaluable, especially as he is so familiar with the rivers and their fickle tides for the dinghy offloading. We appreciate the great working relationship we have with Ian Marmion (PWS Ranger-in-Charge, Huon and SW) and his support and guidance during the planning stage as well as with on-site work. The practical work, boat transport and tractor driving by Field Officer Steve Locke was crucial to the success of the working bee.

It was a very busy week but everyone enjoyed the team spirit. We work in a unique and lovely place. Remember Ken's sage advice: Look up every now and then from your work and drink in the beauty of this landscape. Savour the moment.

Janet Fenton
President,
Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca
April 2021



Tranquility. Photo: Rob Banfield