

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca Working-bee report, 2022

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 2022

FoM organised our fourteenth working bee at Melaleuca, from 16 ~ 23 March 2022. Grant funding through Wildcare's Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund enabled volunteers to assist Parks staff with remediation work on the popular Mount Beattie track from Claytons Corner. The grant covered flights for volunteers, PPE for the volunteers plus a contribution towards materials and freight by boat and helicopter.

FoM funded the rest of the working bee. Initial planning at the Huonville Field Centre in September was finalised in February with Steve Locke and Kat Cullen. On site work was carried out in collaboration with Field Officer Steve Locke. PWS volunteer Melaleuca caretakers Jacqueline and Zelko were particularly helpful and capable.

This year our priorities included remediation work on the Mount Beattie track; maintenance of garden area and cottage at Claytons; continuing the roof restitution project at Kings' house; 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 rain on Thursday 24th left some volunteers unable to fly out when planned. Our usual evening meeting discussions were productive, though limited this year as not everyone attended due to Covid restrictions.

Cargo arrived at Melaleuca with the PWS re-supply aboard Charles Wessing's fishing boat *Jean*



Ground Parrot. Photo: Jacqueline Persic

Nicholls in November. Other equipment for our working-bee was transported to Melaleuca by Janet and Geoff aboard *Poinduk* and Bob Cleary on *Georges Bay*.

We had a big group of volunteers this year. Selection was based on relevant skills which included qualified electrical engineers/electricians, builder, construction white cards, architect, engineer, mechanical skills, radio communications, nursing, safe work with brushcutter, chemicals and heights tickets, shipwright, museum skills, photography, and a number of us held first aid certificates. Nine volunteers arrived by air and nine arrived by boat, making a big saving in air fares. Our group included five new recruits. Volunteers were Janet (team leader) and Geoff Fenton



Support vessels at Claytons. Photo: Jacqueline Persic

(workshop manager, Kings), Chris Creese (works manager, Willsons), Rob Banfield (Claytons team leader), David Butler, David Mitchell, Rik Head, Geoff Brian, Archie Donley (builder), Paul Gibson, Mel Jack, Bob Cleary, Owen Davies, Sue Beaumont, Rona Hollingsworth, Ken Jones (shipwright), Lauren Jones and Andrew Boon (electrical work). The volunteers' flight arrived mid afternoon, leaving a short time for introduction and safety briefings by Steve Locke followed by a communal BBQ at Kings'.

Volunteers stayed in the Charles King Memorial bushwalkers hut, at Willsons', Karina's, Kings' and on board boats, *Sequoia*, *Georges Bay*, *Poinduk* and *Juliet* and several in tents at the campsite. We greatly appreciate Barbara Willson's hospitality; accommodating two volunteers although unfortunately she could not be present herself. Thanks to Bob and Sue who freighted equipment to Melaleuca and who took away building scrap aboard *Georges Bay* post working bee.

Routine jobs

Brush-cutting is always an important part of our program, but heavy work. Mitch, Rob and David did a terrific job clearing the firebreaks and vegetation around the private leases, bushwalkers huts and mine sites. Rob serviced the PWS brushcutter.

Fish-oiling program. In this environment rust is an ever-present problem. Various volunteers got to work with billies of oil and sticky brushes. (See appendix for items treated this season). This treatment has been 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, and a grant from Arts Tasmania is in the pipe-line for interpretation.]

Draining: As well as his building work, champion shoveller, David was ‘back in the ditch’ clearing drains around Melaleuca North and South.

Weeding: Reduced the clumps of Watsonia and Montbretia and cleared encroaching vegetation at Claytons garden area and around paths and drains.

First Aid Kits. Were refurbished in February by Accidental Health and Safety. All up to date.

Electrical: Andrew Boon tested and tagged all 240v equipment in PWS quarters and airstrip tool container plus equipment at Melaleuca South, after the working bee.

Mt Beattie Track work

Our special project is funded by the TNCF grant of \$16,722 contributing to freight by sea, helicopter transport, volunteers’ airfares, PPE and materials. PWS staff did much preparatory planning (including expert track planning by Ben Storer) and organised materials, freight and heli-lifts. Volunteers Rob Banfield, Owen Davies and Sue Beaumont worked hard with Steve Locke on the track work, returning to Melaleuca each evening. We had a reduced crew, down one volunteer due to COVID and one PWS staff member; however the exceptionally dry conditions made work a little easier. Caretakers Jacqueline and Zelko joined the track team for a day. Gear had been heli-lifted close to the site prior to the working bee but the work still involved a lot of load carrying uphill.

Work achieved:

- 80 m of wire mesh stapled to potentially slippery boardwalk sections
- Vegetation trimmed beside track in overgrown sections
- Eight treated pine steps reinforced, boxed, solid fill installed
- Drainage water-bars renovated
- Difficult step renovated
- 5 m parallel boards installed over bog
- Peat bog holes re-bridged.

At several sites, 100x50mm treated pine reinforcing pegs were driven into the peat topsoil; some had to be driven 1 metre deep to reach a stable quartzite foundation.

Work concentrated on the lower elevations this year. Due to internal protocols and reduced number of workers, not all of the track work was completed and not all the grant funding expended.

Wildcare has kindly agreed to extend the grant period to encompass work on the higher elevations of the track next summer.



Renovated steps.
Photo: Jacqueline Persic

Bushwalkers huts

Owen inspected the bushwalkers huts. Ends of bearers protruding at both ends of both huts need attention as the end-grain is rotting. Suggest galv covers.

Second Hut: Yellow masonite finish on ceiling still in good condition. Sheets are separating a little and this could be redressed

with cover strips. Steel arches in ceiling need painting with Killrust in the central metre of each, otherwise in good condition.

CKM Hut: Owen painted the white PVC pipes green. Exterior cladding closest to the tank on wall of CKM hut is deteriorating and should be replaced with a sheet of flat galv.



Mine sites

Work around the mine sites concentrated on vegetation clearing, drainage, track and general maintenance including fish-oiling.

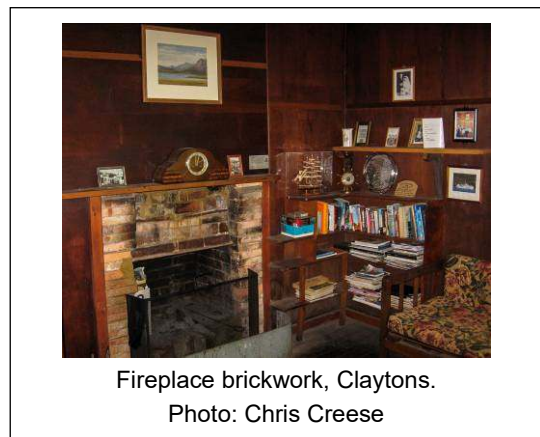
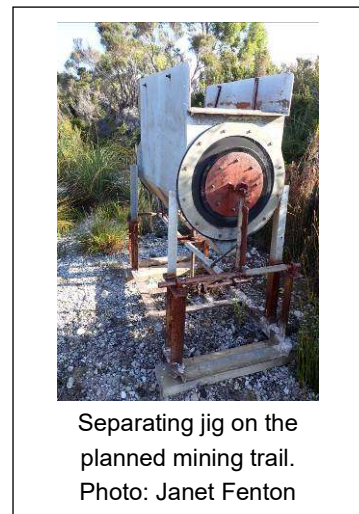
Deny King Heritage Museum

Our able museum expert, Rona Hollingsworth, tackled an update of the museum collection catalogue using Museums Victoria data sheets on paper. So far this task has been rather neglected, so a big thank you to Rona. Rona documented, measured and photographed the objects on display in the museum with a view to digitising the catalogue. This will make the objects accessible to the public online through the eHive system, a catalogue used by many small museums. Although Melaleuca does not have suitable internet access for viewing the catalogue or adding data on site, this can be done on the paper data sheets and added to the eHive catalogue later.

She also began photographing and documenting artifacts around the old mine sites and planned mining trail, where we happened to meet three groups of visitors very interested in the artifacts and keen to see the interpretation.

Claytons (by Rob Banfield)

In addition to the Mt Beattie track project, 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*.

Bob helped the team at base camp by reinforcing the Claytons homestead fireplace brickwork that will need a serious overhaul in the near future due to rust and moisture over the past 22 years.

The garden underwent its annual spruce up and event eh pond was cleared out this time, thanks Bob as well as Jacqueline and Zelko, the PWS willing caretakers. The front door and bedroom windows were repainted, bathroom paint touched up and gutters cleared. Bob also reinforced easy chair springs, Rob cleaned out the accumulated donations of food, rocks and junk mail catalogues from the last year, Rona worked hard on photographing and cataloguing the heritage items that reside at Claytons, Steve eradicated a worrisome European wasp nest in the building wall and we were all pleased to use a new long-drop toilet installed by Parks in this very busy location.

The Claytons sub team thank Steve for his planning and support of our work and look forward to more track, garden and building fun next year.

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 the old roof sheets with new curved galvanised iron. 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 (Classic Cream half). Cover-strips cut from plywood were installed. Like materials and colours were chosen for heritage considerations and metal compatibility. The kitchen, small bedrooms and bathroom were completed this time. The dormer windows with hand-made frames in the small bedrooms had rotted and were seriously leaking. During the past year, Archie

procured huon pine windows from the 1930s Police Station at Cygnet as this building was being demolished. He refurbished these, cut down sashes and made reveals to fit. These were installed in the small bedrooms, now nicely watertight. Finishing off jobs included ceiling trim, reinstalling bookshelves and fitting trim around one of the skylights. The new lining beautifully showcases the split-timber curved trusses which are a significant feature of the heritage building.

Owen and Rob tidied and did building inspection on First Camp, the most original of the 1930s miners' huts on Kings' lease. Suggest installing gutters to prevent deterioration of weatherboards due to water splash.



Roof and ceiling restitution at Kings
Photo: Janet Fenton

Chris Creese was in charge of maintenance at Willsons' and directed volunteers to jobs, tools and equipment. Chris unblocked the stove wetback (now heats the water much more effectively), investigated water supply issues and relocated garden tap. Rik, Chris and Geoff Brian lifted the floor in the dining room to investigate soundness. As replacement for a rotted bearer was not practicable, supports were improvised for each joist individually. They also worked hard with heads down in the damp and dank



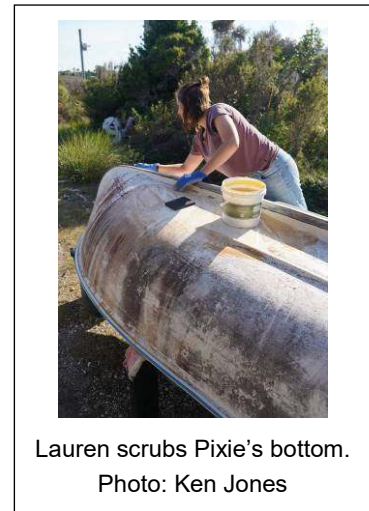
Head down, tail up. Willsons' west wing floor remediation. Photo: Chris Creese

under the living room "West Wing", installing joist supports and improving ventilation. Two vents were installed under the floor, allowing air passage through the cavity in the concrete block wall, and exiting well above ground level. Chris fabricated excellent cowling for the vent exteriors.

Shipwright Ken Jones, with his daughter Lauren as apprentice, completed the painting and finishing of the Willson family's classic 'Purdon' fiberglass dinghy, *Pixie*. The next challenge was *Blue Boat*, a 1940s heritage King-billy pine open clinker-built boat housed in Kings' boat-shed. The shipwrights identified leaks, cleaned bilges, raked out butt-block seams and caulked, puttied and painted butt joints and adjacent seams and noted results of exploratory research including fractured ribs for future remediation.

Volunteers took turns as chef for the evening meals and produced some terrific feasts for the hungry hoards. Volunteers departed by various means, by foot, by sea and air. Some were weatherbound on Thursday when no flights were possible

Special thanks to the enthusiastic and skilled team of volunteers who put in a combined 877 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 stock-take of FoM equipment following the working-bee. Thanks everyone for your record keeping and photographs.



Lauren scrubs Pixie's bottom. Photo: Ken Jones

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, who funded the first phase of track restitution on Mt Beattie. Thanks to generous donors who have directly funded work through the FoM webpage donation portal, and also those who have donated through the on site collection boxes. Thanks to the volunteers for funding their own return fares and to 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* and dinghy offloading is invaluable, especially as he is so

familiar with the rivers and their unusual tides. We appreciate the great working relationship, support and guidance we have had with Ian Marmion over the years as PWS Ranger-in-Charge, Huon and SW and wish him well in his new role at the Seven Mile Beach Field Centre.

The practical work, boat transport and tractor driving by Field Officer Steve Locke was crucial to the success of the working bee.

Thanks also to Kat Cullen, Regional Volunteer Facilitator (South) who assisted with planning and navigating our way through COVID safety and protocols.

It was a very busy week but everyone enjoyed the team spirit and working in such a unique and lovely place.

Janet Fenton

President,

Friends of Melaleuca, Wildcare Tasmania

April 2022



Still waters, Moth Creek. Photo: Chris Creese