



Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca Working-bee report, 2023

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. 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 2023

FoM organised our fifteenth working bee at Melaleuca, from 14 ~ 21 March 2023. Grant funding carried forward from last year through Wildcare's Tasmanian Nature Conservation Fund enabled continuation of the remediation work on the track up Mount Beattie from Claytons Corner. The grant covered inward flights for 4 volunteers, plus a substantial contribution towards helicopter time and freight by boat.

FoM funded the rest of the working bee. Acting Ranger Steve Locke was the PWS manager for the working bee in general, while experienced PWS track staff Dan Rowe and Andy Condous oversaw the Mt Beattie track project.

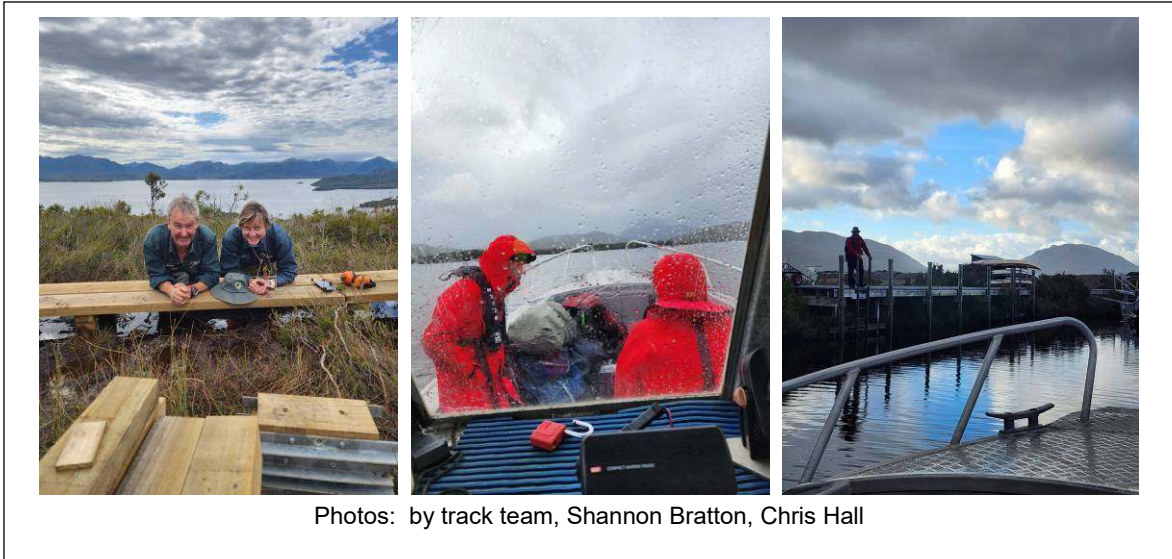
As well as the Mt Beattie track work, our priorities included maintenance of the cottage at Claytons; restitution of the ceiling at Kings' house and maintenance at Willsons' lease. Our routine annual brush-cutting, weeding, draining continued but the weather was unsuitable for fish-oiling the heritage tin-mine objects. Although weather conditions were patchy, main work was not significantly disrupted. The Wildcare wet weather gear for the volunteer track workers was appreciated!

Cargo had arrived at Melaleuca with the PWS re-supply aboard Charles Wessing's fishing boat *Jean Nicholls* back in October. Other equipment for our working-bee was transported to Melaleuca by Janet and Geoff aboard *Poinduk* and by Bob Cleary on *Georges Bay*.



Photo: Melissa Jack

Selection of volunteers was based on relevant skills: two builders; construction white card holders; architect; engineer; mechanical skills; radio communications engineer; safe work with brushcutter and heights; photography; first aid including remote area first aid. Eleven volunteers arrived by air and six by boat. Our group included four new recruits—Richard Tatnell (builder), Lesley Ashburn, Stephen Mattingley and Jannie Chin. Other volunteers were 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, Archie Donley (builder/architect), Alison Viner, Mel Jack, Bob Cleary, Shannon Bratton and Chris Hall. The volunteers' flight arrived



midday and after settling in, we gathered at Kings for an introduction and safety briefing by Ranger, Steve Locke followed by a convivial communal BBQ by the river 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 several in tents in the campground. We greatly appreciate Barbara Willson's hospitality, accommodating two volunteers. Thanks to Bob who freighted equipment to Melaleuca and who transported gear and passengers aboard *Georges Bay* after the working bee.

Routine jobs

Brush-cutting is always an important part of our program, but heavy work. Mitch did a terrific job clearing the firebreaks and vegetation around bushwalkers huts, tracks, mine sites and private leases, aided by Jannie as spotter, raker and drain clearer. Mitch identified issues with the PWS equipment. Need a new blade for the brushcutter; a pair of chaps dedicated to the brushcutter; the visor and helmet need replacing. Steve Locke is addressing these issues.

Fish-oiling program was 'on hold' this working bee due to inclement weather. We are reasonably up-to-date with this thanks to the diligence of volunteers over the past couple of years. (The oil is best applied on a warm sunny day.)

Draining: The big pond on the road south of the airstrip gets quite deep in wet weather due to an overgrown drain. David, with his trusty spade, set to work and cleared the outflow drain to great effect. He also cleared the main drain into the canal near the Engine Shed (Red Shed) and cleared drains at Willsons.

Mt Beattie Track work

This special project is funded by the TNCF grant of \$16,722 contributing to freight by sea, helicopter transport, volunteers' airfares, PPE and materials and final clean-up. We expended part of the grant last summer but due to logistics, had to carry the rest forward to this year. Thanks to Wildcare for your understanding. PWS staff did much preparatory planning and organised materials, freight and heli-lifts. Volunteers Chris Hall, Shannon Bratton, Lesley Ashburn and Stephen Mattingley worked hard on the track work with PWS track staff Dan and Andy. Volunteers were transported to and fro daily by Steve Locke in *Leptomys*. This year, steps, drains and 80m of parallel planking (wire-netted), were constructed on the higher elevations of the mountain. After seeing what is involved, we all gain a much greater respect for the work that goes into making a good track. A great achievement, team. (See separate report for details.)



Hard work with a great view, Mt Beattie.
Photo: Chris Hall

Claytons

In addition to the Mt Beattie track project, work progressed at the historic Claytons cottage, where Win and Clyde Clayton lived from 1962~1976. Rob Banfield, Richard Tatnell and Bob Cleary investigated the bouncy floor and installed stumping where necessary, accessing via cut-outs in the floor. The Claytons team also reinforced the couch supports, cleaned gutters; tidied the garden; assessed the chimney. Some damaged plywood needs replacing next time. Rob and Richard also assisted with pruning the Mt Beattie track.



Richard and Bob delving under the floor at Claytons. Photo: Rob Banfield

Bushwalkers huts

Builder Richard Tatnell addressed issues on the bushwalkers huts as outlined at last summer's working bee by Owen Davies. Deteriorated exterior cladding closest to the tank on the wall of Charles King Memorial Hut was replaced with a sheet of flat galv. Rotted ends of bearers were trimmed and timber grease applied. Exterior skirting was also installed for protection at the base of the end wall of the Second Hut.

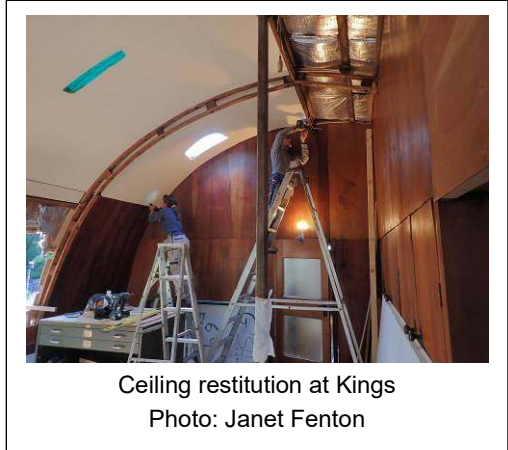


Lesley working on the bushwalkers huts.
Photos: Richard Tatnell

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 refurbishment project to redress the leaking roof and deteriorated lining was continued with builder Archie Donley at the helm. The team had a special working bee in January to remove deteriorated roofing iron and old mouldy and cracked plywood lining in the west section of the house. New battens were fitted where required, and new curved galvanised iron was installed over insulation blanket. In March, new plywood replaced the old lining ply, pre-painted with turps-based prep-coat and a coat of water-based top-coat (Classic Cream half). A vent was installed in the living area (not completed). All this involves dealing with old fabrication that is not square, level or solid, therefore many problems were encountered along the way, all ably dealt with after some deep thought and discussion.



Ceiling restitution at Kings
Photo: Janet Fenton

A large dormer window with hand-made frames had rotted and was seriously fragile. During February, Archie repurposed old window sashes recycled from the Cygnet Police residence, and made a double awning window frame to suit. This was taken to Melaleuca aboard *Poinduk* and installed in the house during the March working bee. Cable trays and skylight trim was painted with Precision Surface Preparation. Finishing off jobs included ceiling trim and fitting trim around the skylights. The new lining beautifully showcases the curve of the roofline.

Archie brought in and replaced a window-pane that had broken in First Camp.

Chris Creese was in charge of maintenance at Willsons' and directed volunteers to jobs, tools and equipment. The temporary water connection to the house was made permanent. With comms engineer Rik, the team installed a mast, erected the antenna and completed installation of a Starlink connection for Friends of the Orange Bellied Parrot. The living and dining room ceilings were washed with sugar-soap and painted. Chris, with the help of other enthusiasts, started the famous Southern Cross diesel by way of pre-dinner entertainment one evening.



Photos: Janet Fenton, Chris Hall, Chris Creese

Volunteers took turns as chef for the evening meals and produced some terrific feasts for the hungry hoards at Kings and Willsons. Having achieved most of our goals early in spite of the weather, many of the volunteers were able to sign out and enjoy a pleasant day out on the water aboard *Georges Bay*. Thanks Bob!

Special thanks to the enthusiastic and skilled team of volunteers who put in a combined 824 person-hours (excluding PWS staff) during this working-bee week. Rob and Mel did an excellent job of the routine end-of-work stock-take and tidy-up of FoM equipment. Thanks everyone for your record keeping and photographs.

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, more cleaning-up 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 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.

The practical work and boat transport by Acting Ranger Steve Locke was crucial to the success of the working bee, and the Mt Beattie team enjoyed working with experienced track staff, Dan and Andy. Thanks also to Melaleuca PWS caretakers Ian and Joy who lent support. It was a very busy week but everyone enjoyed the team spirit and work in the place we all love.



Looking towards Melaleuca from Mt Beattie. Photo: Chris Hall