



THE KILN

Issue 20

June 2009

Caring for our Cultural Heritage and its Environment

Now Celebrating 10 Years of Creative Activities



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From the President

OUR 10TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR has had a sad start. The fiery infernos, which started on February 7 (Black Saturday) in a period of record temperatures, destroyed 2,000 homes in the State of Victoria and burned through 350,000 hectares. Entire towns have been wiped off the map, and aerial images of the region show an eerie moonscape of blackened earth and collapsed homes where fields and communities used to stand. Most of the damage was done by two massive fires – one that virtually wiped out towns northeast of Melbourne including Kinglake and Marysville with a 60-mile front – and a second inferno that raced across Gippsland. Burnt-out cars were strewn across the road outside Kinglake.

I would like to say thank you to members and friends of Kurth Kiln for the donation to the member-family in the middle of the fires, and also a very big thank you to Ralph Angelico and the team from Parks Victoria for a job well done in battling the infernos.

Alfred, Ursula and I attended a meeting by Melbourne Water. People from River Health Partnership Department came out to Kurth Kiln and encouraged us to apply for a grant to improve the picnic / camping site on the Tomahawk Creek near the Thornton Bridge. It was a great success (see page 4).

A NUMBER OF MAINTENANCE AND CONSERVATION JOBS have been carried out:

- Vandalism to the wooden bridge on the Tomahawk Creek Walking Track has been repaired.
- Most of the rotten posts, rails and pickets of the Picket Fence around the Caretakers Cottage have now been replaced.
- The four Huts were stained with a timber waterproofing mixture
- The skylight on the main hut was replaced, Denise cleaned out gutters and Maree watched
- Denise mowed the grass, a great job as always (see report on page 2).
- Maree leaned how to whippersnip along the fence lines
- Denise repaired the blocked shower plumbing to take the water further away down to the bank
- Ralph picked up the Gas Producer from Dick and Kerrie's place. Great job Dick (picture Page 5).

THE OPEN DAY IN APRIL WAS A GOOD DAY. All had fun and we did get good feed back. So, next year lets make it bigger.

Professor Paul I Boon Institute for Sustainability & Innovation St Albans Campus Victoria University and I are now setting up a water watch program with Melbourne Water, in which the Gembrook School will be involved. Some 45 Gembrook State Primary School students came to help with the Melbourne Water revegetation project at the Thornton Bridge Picnic / Camping Ground (see report on page 4). I am now working on a slide show presentation on water quality for schools.

The Queens's birthday weekend was quiet; we had only small groups of campers, but a lot of walking groups just passed through.

Well, that's about it for now. Thanks again to all the Friends of Kurth Kiln for all the tireless work you all put in, and a big thanks to Ralph Angelico and Park Victoria for your support. □

Cheers for now, Gary Pendlebury

COMING EVENTS

The Friends of Kurth Kiln meet regularly once a month on the second Saturday for a meeting and maintenance Working Bee at Kurth Kiln. Other days as required. Friends and Visitors are welcome.

July	11	(Tonimbuk)	August	8	September	12
October	10	(AGM)	November	14	December	(see not below)

For our Christmas Break-up we will this time join the Friends of Bunyip State Park and the Gembrook Fauna & Flora Group at the Egg-Rock Fire-Tower on 4 December for a friendly lunch-time Barbeque.

We welcome our new Members:

Maree McGlashan, Susan Jones, Diane Wade, Maree Anne Ramanuskas; and encourage them to participate in the running of the Friends of Kurth Kiln Group with whatever their favourite activity may be, and whenever their circumstances permit them to do so.

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This Newsletter is published by the Friends of Kurth Kiln: a group of people concerned with the preservation of the heritage in the Kurth Kiln Site.

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RANGER'S REPORT

Thank You Dave Drangsholt

Thanks to Dave Drangsholt, the Friends of Kurth Kiln was formed ten years ago by Dave talking to Ursula Klink one day, on one of her many walks through the park. Meinhard Holtz became the first president

after a committee was formed in June 1999.

The Friends of Kurth Kiln have been very active over the last ten years.

The Kiln was overhauled, and the huts and sheds were repaired and maintained to heritage specifications. The display area for cultural artefacts was created and classification of the items started. Numerous grants were achieved over the years to re-vegetate and fence off surrounding areas to help to maintain the Kurth Kiln area. The Thornton Walking Track was developed and a bridge erected over the Tomahawk Creek by the group.

The Kurth Kiln Festival became an annual event and it makes people more aware of the historic heritage of Kurth Kiln and of the Regional Park. Now the area is well served by walkers, day trippers, campers and horse riders; an achievement in no small part due to the wonderful, dedicated and enthusiastic Friends Group.

MAINTENANCE REPORT

WELL, WORK CONTINUES ON AND AROUND THE HUTS at Kurth Kiln, the sky light had to be replaced, which had buckled over the hot summer months, Ralph and Gary did a great job with that, so I was left to clean out the dirty spouting.

The drain from the shower had to be replaced as it went nowhere, which caused the shower to flood all over the floor in the hut, Gary and I did this over a weekend. Gary, Maree (who is Gary's partner) and I often stay at the Kiln over the weekend and holidays to keep an eye on things, and keep vandals at bay, with help from our new appointed security officer, Zeus, who is always by my side He is a valuable asset to our team. Our members have done a great job on the fencing around the huts, and a new gate has also been made.

I have sprayed the blackberries around the Kiln and on a few tracks, but I see there are more shooting up, so back to the spraying when it gets a bit warmer. Mowing and gardening are an ongoing thing, and it is much easier now that we have our own lawn mower and whipper-snipper that were purchased by the group through Ralph, who always gets us a great deal (we would be lost without him).

Editorial

ANNIVERSARIES PROVIDE a welcome opportunity to reflect on past activities, to analyse the effects these activities had on the organisation and on its place in society, and to evaluate the original aims and guidelines of the group for relevance in planning for the future.

In this issue, our 20th *The Kiln* Newsletter, you can find an impressive list of past achievements, of people who helped us on the road to realise these achievements and the organisations who provided the funding and the support.

None of this would of course have been possible without the members of our group. Their creative participation in our meetings, the numerous working bees and their generous contribution of time and tools for the jobs at hand is legend. It is my firm belief that people will appreciate volunteering best if they can contribute in their own way, in their own time, in a form most suitable to them in tasks they can support. That, to me, is real Volunteering. We thank all our members for supporting the aims and objectives of the Friends of Kurth Kiln. □ Alfred.

The achievements over many years of the Friends of Kurth Kiln are well **appreciated** by Parks Victoria and the consumers of the park.

Our latest project at Thornton Bridge picnic/camping ground was another success, thanks to a Melbourne Water grant. The funding was used to fence off and define the camping area. Seven hundred native plants were planted with the help of Grade 5 & 6 students of the Gembrook Primary School. It was a wonderful day and I feel privileged to be involved with a wonderful group of people.

Dorothy Kurth, daughter of Professor Kurth, was at the meeting to celebrate the ten years anniversary and spoke of how proud her dad would have been of all the work done. What a wonderful endorsement for the Friends of Kurth Kiln.

Green Core will be working for the next six months in the Bunyip State Park and Kurth Kiln Regional Park from June 29. This will enable more maintenance and development work to be carried out.

The projected fire fighting crew at Gembrook will finish on June 26, after a very long fire season. Their duties incorporated rehabilitation work from the Bunyip fires. A great effort! I certainly hope we get a lot of rain in the coming months.

Many thanks again to the Kurth Kiln Friends Group. □ Cheers and Good Health Ralph Angelico



A big thank-you to Ralph for all his help. When I need to ask him something he is always there with good advice.

Around our beautiful Kurth Kiln I can see lots of things that need doing, so we will all just soldier on and do the best we can. I would also like to thank our members for such a big input in keeping our Kiln in exceptional condition. Great work people. □ Denise Brain, Property Officer/Secretary

MEMBERSHIP FEES. Here is a little reminder: Your Annual Membership Fees for 2009 should be paid **on or before** the date of our Annual General Meeting on 10 October. The prescribed Fees are \$5.00 Individuals or \$10.00 Family.

AROUND THE KILN

The Friends of Kurth Kiln celebrate their tenth anniversary.

In retrospect it is just amazing how quickly these ten years have passed. But looking through the minutes and the activities' folder it becomes obvious that the Group has achieved much and experienced a lot in these ten years. Our membership has risen dramatically from the original twelve Founding Members, and it is with grateful awareness of all their individual contributions we reflect on the past ten years.

THERE ARE THE MANY PROJECTS, starting off with repairing the Kiln's steel structure and replacing the two missing doors, (one door was found in the bush, the other was recast), creating the three display windows at the big shed to promote the kiln's heritage and provide historic information to the casual visitors, making the water wheel and constructing its dam and the protective heritage fencing around it. Another big project was the construction of the commemorative Thornton Track and the bridge over the Tomahawk Creek.

The Kiln's history and its heritage is, and has always been, high on our agenda. Over one thousand of the many movable heritage items found on site have now been categorized and either placed on display or wrapped and stored in the shed; a computer archive was created and two Interpretation Boards have been erected, one next to the Kiln the other at the Caretaker Huts, for self-guided walks though the site's history. Solar power has been installed to provide lights in the shed and power for computer displays and small hand-tools. All these projects were funded by Parks Victoria, and the Friends of Kurth Kiln are very grateful for their generous support of our activities and their helpful and friendly assistance in bringing the projects to reality.

The Friends of Kurth Kiln were also successful in obtaining, over the years, funding from Port Phillip and Western Port CMA, Melbourne Water, the Waratah Group and the Australian Government Heritage Trust and Enviro Fund for grants for fencing off and re-vegetating overused areas throughout the Kurth Kiln Picnic and Camping Grounds. Hundreds of students and children of the local State Schools of Gembrook, Hoddles Creek and Cockatoo helped plant the many shrubs and trees. Our aim in this is to give the younger generation a feeling of ownership of the Park by helping to preserve the environment's natural beauty. We firmly believe that it is of great importance and benefit to the future to involve the community and children as much as possible in conservation projects.

From Government Community Services and Small Equipment Grants we have received such nice surprises as our Patio Heaters, the Digital Camera and the very handy Portable Display Board. It all started with a Cardinia Shire Council \$500.00 Seeding Grant

THE NATURAL BUSH ENVIRONMENT of KURTH KILN, together with its historic past, provide a popular picnic/camping venue for visitors and groups alike. Hundreds of people can be found here some weeks, together with School Groups, Heritage Groups, Church Groups, Probus Clubs, Vintage Car Clubs, Walking Groups etc. the list is endless. Many of the groups enjoy hearing a talk about the history of Kurth Kiln; some like to have a BBQ under the roof of the Big Shed, sitting comfortably on the chairs (donated by the Gembrook Market Committee) around the tables (donated by the Bendigo Bank). The Friends of Kurth Kiln are always delighted to open up for a group, give them a talk and show them around the Kiln site or take them for a short or long walk.

The annual Kurth Kiln Heritage Festival has over the years attracted huge crowds and a dedicated following, and was recognised with a "Festival of the Year" Award in 2005. Together with the numerous displays, the food and historic activities, the highlight is undoubtedly the mock Bank Robbery staged by our equestrian Highland friends, when young and old gather in the Caretaker's enclosure to watch the spectacle of bank tellers, robbers and constables getting entangled. Sadly this year the bush fire restricted this activity.

Part of the many pleasures being a member of the Friends of Kurth Kiln Group are the invitations to participate in Community Meetings by Parks Victoria (visits to other Parks), by the Shires of Cardinia and Yarra Ranges as well as other authorities, like Melbourne Water and Port Phillip and Western Port CMA. Some are social functions, others are very informative Forums and Seminars. It makes one feel both humble and proud to be part of the State-wide organisation of volunteers.

SO, LOOKING BACK OVER THE PAST TEN YEARS it becomes obvious that the Friends of Kurth Kiln Group has been extraordinarily blessed with support from their members, from Parks Victoria, the local Shires, Government Departments and by the local community. Without this support the Friends could not possibly have been able to achieve all of those objectives. □

We now look forward to the motivating challenges and projects facing us in the next ten years.



Left: Dorothy Kurth, Professor Kurth's daughter and member of the Friends of Kurth Kiln, and Alfred cutting the Anniversary Cake

Right: Celia and Ann (l-r centre) our newly elected Project Managers signing the Activity Sheet for Riet, watched by Jon



Fencing and Re-vegetation at the Thornton Bridge Picnic area

TOMAHAWK CREEK IS A TRIBUTARY stream flowing eventually into the Yarra River. The Friends of Kurth Kiln are aware that with decreasing rainfall it becomes increasingly important to keep the waterways clean and healthy.



Vivien pointing out various plant species

People prefer their picnic and camping sites near water, and a delicate balance exists between the demand of the public and the fragile nature of the bush. Picnic grounds and camping area boundaries tend to creep outward beyond the original limits. In their ongoing quest to protect the natural beauty of the bush and the quality of its waterways, and to control potential damage to sensitive creek banks, the Friends group applied in 2008 for a Melbourne Water grant to fence and re-vegetate an overused area on Tomahawk Creek near the Thornton Bridge. In September members of Melbourne Water River Health Partnership came to check out the site. The grant application for funding a 250 metres post and wire netting fence and 700 hundred suitable native seedlings, was successful.



Ralph from Parks Victoria pointing out some of the issues



On Saturday April 25 Vivien Clark from Maryknoll Indigenous Plant Nursery came to give advice which plants would be most suitable for re-vegetation in this area. Site-work began on Monday 4 May with measuring and pegging out the area to be fenced in. A crew from Parks Victoria came with their machinery to realign the track, fill in the holes and gravel it, allow for drainage, extend the pipe and clear the fence line. Post holes were measured out and drilled for the 50 poles and the poles set into place. At the May working bee the site was alive with busy members measuring, pulling wires, hammering in pickets etc. There were endless tasks to do.



After prolonged drizzly weather it was like a gift from heaven to see the sun emerge on Thursday May 21, the scheduled Gembrook Primary School student

planting day. The 40 students were brought to Kurth Kiln by their parents. At 9.30 the teachers, Rhonda and Tina, of the two composite 5/6A and 5/6T grades made the roll call before walking to the Thornton Bridge Picnic and Camping site to re-vegetate its boundaries with the 700 trees and shrubs.



The students worked diligently all morning, to make holes for the plants, plant the seedlings, water them in and cover them with the protective bamboo sticks and plastic guards. After the planting the students were given a talk about the Kiln's history and each grade received a certificate of appreciation. The students, the teachers and parents then went on a 2km walk along the Tomahawk Creek Track.

The Friends of Kurth Kiln sincerely thank Melbourne Water for the Grant, Parks Victoria (especially Ralph Angelico) for all their input to bring this project to reality, and the students, the teachers and parents from the Gembrook Primary State School for their cheerful and friendly help. □



Cultivating our Heritage

FOR SOME TIME NOW we have a set of historic Gas Producers at Kurth Kiln, donated or given on permanent loan to the group by supporters of our activities from all over Victoria. There are six units in all, all of different make and construction, together making a representative display of the industry at the time. These units have been waiting patiently in temporary storage to be housed in a suitable display for appreciation by the many visitors to Kurth Kiln.

Dick Cleary, member of the Friends of Kurth Kiln and past President of the group, has decided to make a start on restoration and conservation work on these Gas Producers and has just completed work on the first unit, the "Electrolux" donated by the Falla Family of Donald. The finished product does look almost new. Here is a picture of it. Let's hope it can soon be appropriately displayed in an enclosure befitting its heritage status. □



Ronald Clarke, also a member of the Friends of Kurth Kiln, recently obtained from Mr. Arthur Rhodes an article about Gas Producers and a set of twenty-four photos of Gas Producers fitted to cars and trucks. Documented on the back of each photo was the name of the Unit and often the make of the car. We used this information to produce a display for the display boards at Kurth Kiln and for the portable display board. The different makes and the range of models have been of great interest to many visitors and the information comes in very handy as a visual aid in talks given about the Kurth Kiln history. The article says:

WHEN FUEL WAS SHORT during World War Two the principle of the old "Suction Gas" engine, which was being used to generate electricity in many of the towns in Victoria was adapted to the motor car.

Charcoal was placed in the fuel hopper and lit, the suction of the engine drew the gas formed into the cylinders for firing. Sounds very simple, but -! The tuyeere where the air entered the firebox generated intense heat and burnt out; the gas required filtering to eliminate the abrasive dust. These gave trouble - impurities in the charcoal, clay, stone, earth, etc., formed clinker and blocked free flow and poor or damp charcoal had an adverse effect. But with of all these problems, motor cars could be used.

The cars were generally started on petrol then switched to gas, a manual or electric pump being used in the lighting-up period. As the charcoal was used, refilling the hopper became a drama. The lid was opened and you needed to look in to see how much charcoal was needed to be added at a certain period, which varied greatly; but generally when you had your head over the hopper a violent explosion took place covering you with flame, dust and charcoal.

Drivers of cars fitted with gas producers could be readily recognized by their lack of frontal hair and eyebrows!

Known makes of Gas Producers are: Jackson, Greig, Electrolux, Kent, Cheney and Pederick - they were all produced in great quantities at the time.

The Friends of Kurth Kiln thank Ronald Clarke and Mr. Arthur Rhodes for providing the pictures and the information. □

Cars with Gas Producers

When fuel was short during World War Two the principle of the old suction gas engine, which was being used to generate electricity in many of the towns in Victoria was adapted to the motor car. Charcoal was placed in the fuel hopper and lit, the suction of the engine drew the gas formed into the cylinders for firing. Sounds very simple, but -! The tuyeere where the air entered the firebox generated intense heat and burnt out; the gas required filtering to eliminate the abrasive dust. These gave trouble - impurities in the charcoal, clay, stone, earth, etc., formed clinker and blocked free flow and poor or damp charcoal had an adverse effect. But with of all these problems motor cars could be used. The cars were generally started on petrol then switched to gas, a manual or electric pump being used in the lighting up period. As the charcoal was used, refilling the hopper became a drama, the lid was opened and you needed to look in to see how much charcoal was needed to be added at a certain period, which varied greatly; but generally when you had your head over the hopper a violent explosion took place covering you with flame, dust and charcoal. Drivers of cars fitted with gas producers could be readily recognized by their lack of frontal hair and eyebrows! Known Makes of Gas Producers are: Jackson, Greig, Electrolux, Kent, Cheney and Pederick - all produced in great quantities.



Trucks with Gas Producers

The Friends of Kurth Kiln thank Mr. Arthur Rhodes and Ronald Clarke for providing the pictures and the information.



Kurth Kiln Visitors

Kurth kiln is a favourite spot for campers. Many of them tell us that they have come to camp at Kurth Kiln since childhood and are now bringing their children. Yes! we know of a couple who spend their honeymoon at Kurth Kiln and whose children are now teenagers.

During the 2009 Easter Holidays we meet Chris Le Page and her family who camped near the Thornton Bridge. Chris kindly wrote the following about their stay:

MY HUSBAND, RUSSELL AND I were camping at Kurth Kiln over the Easter public holidays with our four sons, their wives and our seven grandchildren (all under five years of age). We also took along two cousins and a friend for a couple of days, so we were quite a large group of 20. We therefore, really appreciated the large camping areas, so we could all be together. It is always so much better to be able to have the tents and caravans together, not separated by fences.

The Park is just beautiful; with the dappled light from the tall eucalypts (with their different coloured trunks), the tree ferns and the clear, clean Tomahawk Creek flowing through. The little ones even had a lovely paddle in the water on the warmer days. The walk from the little footbridge back to the Kiln was very pretty, and easy enough for all age groups, (with a little bit of carrying). It was just amazing to look up at the sky and find those leaves so far up in the air! Very peaceful and rejuvenating. The other campers nearby were all friendly and we helped each other out with firewood and a 'jumpstart' when needed. It really felt that you had escaped the city and could soak up the peace of nature at its best. Waking up with the Kookaburras is special!

After being given a talk on the history of the Kiln and being shown around the site, visitors often tell us stories of their experiences, some serious, some humorous:

One lady recalled the following:

ON A WARM AND HUMID SUNDAY, the Yarra Valley U3A walking group drove to Kurth Kiln for their fortnightly walk. It proved to be a delightful outing in lovely country. Ursula led us along a path through the bush, pointing out any outstanding features, such as the 'feed tree' stretching high towards the sun with its trunk straight and denuded of any branches by the glider possums. We finally reached a road and a tranquil pond with mother ducks and their offsprings.

We thought we had earned our lunch but the indefatigable Ursula said no, we must first walk another short loop - the Tomahawk Track. This walk was certainly interesting as it seemed to follow a stream and curved in all directions through the bush where we found a variety of attractive wildflowers, some of very bright colours. This "short walk" began to seem long as the day got warmer and more humid but we finally staggered back to the crossroads after about three quarters of an hour.

Feeling sweaty, hungry and a little tired, it was a great joy to find that Alfred was waiting for us, with comfy chairs, a barbecue should we need it, and tea and coffee. Whilst we had our lunch Alfred gave us a talk on the history of the Kurth Kiln which was nearby. This brought back memories for those of us old enough to remember the latter days of the 2nd World War when we had petrol rationing in Australia and some drivers had charcoal burners attached to their cars. My memories were that there was a lot of stoking of these burners before the cars could be driven.

We are very grateful to our gracious hosts for a happy day spent mindful of the beauty of our national heritage. □

It was great to have the flexibility of having a camp fire to sit around in a full circle and have a sing-a-long or just talk together. It is hard to find quality family time with everyone so busy with their own lives. (We have found that free-form or the fire pits work better for this than the raised fireplaces or those with a back on them – someone always gets cold then!). The Rangers who visited us were very friendly and helpful, giving us maps of the area.

The 'Friends of Kurth Kiln' have done a fantastic job in restoring, maintaining and improving the actual Kiln site! We enjoyed reading the little pamphlet you left with us. It was wonderful to learn about the Kiln and how it was used. Thank you very much for that. We wish you all the best for your future endeavours..

Kurth Kiln Park is centrally located for us, who come from Heidelberg, Greensborough, Vermont and Morwell. It is even close enough for our eldest son to be able to go back to preach on Easter Sunday morning at Donvale, then return, as well as attend talks at the Belgrave Heights Convention Centre.

Thank you all for the chance to enjoy such a beautiful place. Hoping to return again next year. □ Chris

Another lady amused everyone by telling a story about their Gas Producer experiences:

I REMEMBER DURING THE WAR we had a contraption on the car with a charcoal burner, and my father coming inside black as the Ace of Spades after putting the charcoal in. As you know, petrol was scarcer than gold nuggets, but we needed transport, and the thing got us to where we wanted to go and home again. □

Wolfstar, who is a regular camper at Kurth Kiln, wrote about the 'Wizard in the Woods':

WE CAMPED IN THE AREA near the Thornton Bridge surrounded by the forest and the creek running just behind, where we erected an octagonal yurt for shelter.

A course of study was designed to help people to connect themselves with nature and the ancient ways of our indigenous culture and spirituality. The course may lead some people on their own spiritual journey, and allow them to find connections to Mother Earth and to the Spirit in the same manner as our ancestors once did.

Kurth Kiln is a perfect forest setting for this; the energy of the area is very strong and one may easily flow into a feeling of being part of the natural world there. □



AMONGST FRIENDS

Conversations about Fire and the Environment

THE 2009 BUSHFIRES were horrific! People lost their lives, homes were destroyed and thousands of hectares of fauna and flora burnt. Thankfully Kurth Kiln Regional Park was spared. As a precaution Parks Victoria closed the tinder dry Park after the fire started in Bunyip State Park. The Gembrook Launching Place Road was also closed to all but local traffic between the Pack Track and Beenak Road.

Kurth Kiln Park remained closed until mid March. The Park was still very dry upon reopening and Parks Victoria was concerned about the fire danger and discouraged crowds visiting the Park, hence our Festival arrangements for April were cancelled and in its place an Open Day was held with limited advertisement. During the closure no activities were allowed in the Park and the monthly meeting and working bee in February was cancelled. The Park reopened just in time for the "Ringwood Clock Tower Ladies Day Club" to come on their planned March 20 visit.

Members of the Friends of Kurth Kiln were invited on May 7 by Simone Blair, from the Knowledge and Learning Team, Land and Fire Management, Department of Sustainability and Environment to a Power-Point talk by Ranger Andrew Musgrove at Jasper and Carmel Hails' home. Andy, from Parks Victoria Gembrook Office showed a Power-Point and spoke about his personal experiences of fighting the Bunyip fires. He showed pictures of the things he saw, what it was like fighting the fires, and presented data gathered after the fires.

Following the talk Simone invited everyone to take part in a "conversation about fire and the local community and environment". Many questions were asked and people like Anthony Hester, Acting Fire Operations Officer Parks Victoria Dandenong Ranges District Office were there to answer them.

It is hoped that the Power-Point informative and detailed presentation can be shown again at Kurth Kiln at some time later in the year. □



Overall damage on public land

- 26 500 Ha Wildfire, 7950 Ha burnt of the 16, 500 Ha Bunyip State Park
- On public land there are a total of approx 150km of control lines to be rehabilitated (approx 90% complete), 300km of roads and tracks impacted, 4 bridges destroyed or damaged, 12 gates destroyed or damaged, 3 toilets destroyed or damaged, 1 footbridge destroyed and 3 tables/bbqs destroyed or damaged.



REFLECTIONS

by G (Bill) Parker

Local Jobs done during the Depression of the 1930's

The Depression that started in 1929 and continued till the middle of 1930 was the worst Depression that Australia had ever known and at one stage there was up to 25% of the workers out of work. They were given what was called 'The sustenance', of 6 shillings a day, but they had to work for it. (The same should apply to workers on the dole today. They might then look for work themselves.)

At the peak of the Depression the Government decided to send about 30 unemployed men to camp down the Tonimbuk Road, by the Forestry Land, which is now the Bunyip State Park. The idea was for them to cut firewood, which was to be brought in to Gembrook to be loaded on Puffing Billy and sent to Melbourne and distributed to needy families.

EAC Russell, (commonly called Bill), the biggest mill owner in Gembrook, whose mill was closed as there were no orders for timber, along with Tom Williams (the father of the Williams boys who eventually became mill owners) were in charge of about 15 of these men each. Their job was to supervise the men cutting the firewood.

In addition these unemployed men were required to clear the 'chain' road between the private land and the forest land, for a distance of about two miles from where it started at Tonimbuk Road to where it finished in the forest. The line of the road had been surveyed, and steel pegs driven in the ground for guidance. The work of clearing the line was completely done with just axe and crosscut saw. Just imagine these men from the city, doing this job. Probably only a few had ever used an axe before, let alone a cross cut saw! I remember Bill Russell telling me once how their hands really suffered with blisters during this hard manual work. Just as well they had two competent bosses to instruct them in how to fell trees as it was no easy task to clear virgin Gembrook bush, a chain in width for two miles.

The photo I was recently shown of an old steel shed was where these men camped. I believe the same shed was used for charcoal production a decade or so later.

When I took over my present farm after I came back from the war, two Northern Italians were producing charcoal on the adjoining land. They would cut and stack the silver wattle in a pyramid style heap, then cover the outside with sods of earth. After the heap was burnt, they would bag the charcoal as a product to be sold.

These two men, who were potters in Melbourne, at the outbreak of the war were sent to the country to work. They lived in "Old Mac's" in Gembrook and brought a truck out to work on the silver wattle.

I was let out of the army early as the Government was calling for those in essential services to return to work and re-start the economy. Meeting both the requirements of having spent over three years in the army, and serving overseas, I returned to the farm and in my first year planted forty acres of spuds by hand. I dug 800 bags myself, but also needed to employ men to dig. Good workers were hard to come by and I went through 11 before these Northern Italians agreed to work for me. And what good workers they were! Remaining in Gembrook until 8 am, when the baker's was open, to get their fresh bread to eat with uncooked bacon for lunch, they would walk to 'Sambhur Park' (their truck was broken down at the time) then dig 20 bags each. They earned 3 shillings per bag.

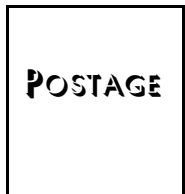
Potato production, at that stage, and for the next couple of years, was controlled by the Government. I was paid 12 pound 10/- per 15-bag ton.

As the Puffing Billy line was unserviceable to Gembrook at that time, Bill Russell would take my crop (90 bags at a time on his 6-ton truck, Op Jarred, taking 60 bags on Bill's 3-ton truck) to the weigh station at Puffing Billy station at Cockatoo.

That year I earned 500 pounds, but when we found we were slugged 145 pound in tax, I decided to put more of my energy into clearing the land (I only had 50 acres cleared at the time) and investing in livestock. □



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To