



# COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter  
January 2021

**Previous Meeting**  
**Sunday 20 December 2020**  
**Mt Arawang**

Despite the proximity to Christmas, nine of us (Paul Sheils, Rosie and Mike Pearson, Rob Lundie, Sally Hatton (Ranger Assist Coordinator), Jenny Horsfield, Doug Tinney, Rohan Thomas and Linda Spinaze) gathered at the southern end of Mt Arawang on a very pleasant morning (sunny and no smoke like last year). Linda took her group up the track to attack *Cassinia arcuata* (aka sifton bush or drooping cassinia). Rob, Jenny and Paul dealt with *Verbascum* on the lower eastern slope, chopping out the plants and bagging the seed heads. Doug dug and Rohan sprayed in the tall grass which no doubt will reveal many more weeds when Autumn approaches. Later, we gathered in the shade for our Christmas morning tea at which we were pleased to welcome our ranger, Chris Holder.

*Rob Lundie*

## **Cooleman Ridge Nature Park: a history, part 2**

[Part 1 can be seen in the [July 2020](#) issue -Ed]  
A remarkable woman, Bess Sledge, began the Park Care Group. Reading in April 1991 about the success of the Urambi Park Care Group, Bess decided to initiate a similar group for Cooleman Ridge and to help in the restoration of native plant communities after decades of sheep grazing. Advertisements in the local press drew a group of interested volunteers who walked the areas with officers from ACT Conservation and Wildlife to view

**Next Meeting**  
**Sunday 17 January 2021**  
**Chauvel Circle**

**Time:** 8.30 am – 11.00 am

**Meet:** Chauvel Circle

**Bring:** hat, gloves, digger, water to drink.

**Task:** Weeding of invasive, exotic plants.  
Native plant identification.

**Contact:** Linda Spinaze 6288 6916

February meeting: Sun 21, Darrell Place

the tasks awaiting them. The first meeting of the Group took place on 29 May 1991, with a membership of 27. A letterbox drop and information stalls at Cooleman Court and Weston Creek Festival swelled membership to 118, of whom 34 were very active. Membership has fluctuated since then but there has always been a core of committed and active members. An early training evening at the Parks depot and a ranger guided walk were both well supported. September 1991 saw the first large planting exercise, when 800 eucalypts and wattles were planted with help from Greening Australia and Arawang Scouts. As cattle were still grazed on parts of the Ridge as a fuel-suppression measure, plantings took place in areas that had been fenced and ripped by Parks. Further plantings took place in 1992 on various fenced sites, with help from Greening Australia, Parks and Conservation staff, the Botanic Gardens and Chapman Primary

School community. Plants were also being regularly propagated by Group members. While Bess Sledge and her husband David spent many days each week on the Ridge, a small band of enthusiasts formed regular working parties on Fridays and Mondays and concentrated their efforts on their own 'patch'. These 'caretaker patches' flourished and provided rewarding work, as members saw a great diversity of native plant and animal life return.

From early 1992 monthly Sunday work parties were also held at various sites that took in the length and breadth of the Ridge. From 2003 it was decided to restrict the monthly work parties to three major sites in order to obtain maximum benefit from these sessions.

In June 1993 the Group received a major grant - the first of many over the next decade - to stabilize an erosion gully and fence and plant a new area.

In 1994 funds were obtained to map the Ridge: it was divided into eight sections to help identify localized problems and assist with an ambitious tree mapping exercise. Bess Sledge's energies extended into the community, and together with her inaugural committee she held fund-raising stalls, spoke to and wrote for the media, lobbied politicians, engaged with local primary schools, colleges and CIT and provided work for Corrective Services personnel. Regular spraying, weed removal and plantings were supplemented by guided walks along the Ridge led by Group members or invited specialists.

Public recognition came with a Community Landcare award to the Group and an individual award to Bess in 1994.

A continuing concern for the Group was the presence of cattle. Representation was made in 1995 to Canberra Nature Park to move all cattle and a case was put up as to why the grazing practices were inconsistent with nature conservation. Grazing of cattle was discontinued that year. With the removal of cattle, fire hazard risks had to be re-evaluated by Parks and several new tracks were made and graded to assist in fire control. The Group maintained an opposition to the reintroduction of cattle, and began a vigorous program of brush cutting to help keep fuel loads down and suppress the growth of pasture weeds in areas where native vegetation was starting to recover.

In 1996 a long-standing project of the Group finally reached fruition when the Nature Trail was officially opened: the culmination of three years' planning and several months of physical labour by the Group.

Other ongoing projects included: an herbarium and plant list, a monthly newsletter, a detailed tree survey, photographic records, seed collection (permits having been obtained by several members), Waterwatch activities at the old and new dams and research into fuel loads and fire behaviour.

The enthusiasm of young children was harnessed through Chapman Primary School, and a second nature trail was developed within walking distance of the school. Sadly, this project faded away as staff and students moved on.

The year 2000 saw the launch of the 'Olympic Landcare' planting project which involved Chapman Primary School and many volunteers; the planting days attracted wide public and media interest.

Bess Sledge's involvement with the Ridge ended in late 2001, when family matters took her away from Canberra.

*Jenny Horsfield*

## Curious Cooleman: Hammock

The hammock (below) has been hanging below Cooleman Ridge Trig for many months. Does anyone know how it got there? And does anyone use it?



*Hammock underneath Trig*

*Photo: Rob Lundie*

*Rob Lundie*

**This time last year it was drought, smoke and fire. 2021 begins with full dams and clear air. May this continue. A Happy and Healthy New Year for everyone.**