



It's that time of the year again!

Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park will be held on

Saturday March 27th at Twertup* starting at 2 pm.

Please send any items for inclusion in General Business to the Secretary [Anne Gadsby C/o PO Bremer Bay, 6338; 98374063; anngad@wn.com.au] by Saturday March 20th .

Other weekend activities:

Saturday morning GPS workshop 10 am

Saturday evening byo evening meal

Sunday morning working bee



Further details on page 6 including *alternative venue.

Farewell .. wonderful Friends.. Amelia Moir and Bert Wells

It is hard to express how saddened we were to hear of the death of Amelia at her home in Albany on February 10th. Amelia was a past President and early member of the FRNPA. We also record with sorrow the passing of Bert Wells during 2003.

The Friends extend their sympathy to Amelia's and Bert's families.

“Life on the Edge” at Bremer Bay

‘Life on the Edge’ was another very successful Friends of the Fitzgerald weekend – well organised, a great group of people, top-notch activity leaders, a first class environment, comfortable accommodation, good food and weather made to order. It also fitted in with activities of Gondwana Link and Edith Cowan University which were occurring in the area and is an example of how we can all get energy from each other and potentially produce exciting and worthwhile outcomes.

‘The life of the Wellstead Estuary and the River’ led by Paul Lavery & Pierre Horwitz from Edith Cowan University.

This was a brilliantly succinct exposition of the processes at work in this system. We started in the estuary close to the bar where we took core samples of the sediments and the life that lived in and on them and took measurements of the water itself. We then went in boats upstream and were shown how within a short distance the water was less clear, indicating a significant change in the system. The trip up the estuary was wonderful with healthy vegetation lining the banks, lush stands of samphire, and stunning orange-red headlands. Some kilometres upstream we again took core samples of the sediments and measurements in the water. The contrast between the two places was very clear – upstream being a system dependent on production from elsewhere and of low productivity compared to the highly productive system down near the bar. Paul and Pierre gave us a taste of the complexity of the estuary/river system. They described how the interplay between characteristics like light, nutrients, temperature, salinity, sediment particle size, etc., drive the processes and therefore the productivity of this system. They also emphasised its dynamic nature. No wonder it was a stimulating session. Thanks to Paul and Pierre and to the locals, Ron Pearson, Craig Lebens and Dave Treloar who provided the transport up the river, and who contributed to the session with their local knowledge and familiarity with the place.



Snorkel and Scuba dive at Little Boat Harbour Dive trail’ led by Craig Lebens and Gary Kendrick.

It is a big move for the Friends of the Fitzgerald to actually go beyond the beach into the adjacent blue stuff, and after the short foray on Sunday morning one wonders why it has taken so long to happen. Craig and Gary probably wonder that too, having been dedicated ‘Bluies’ for a long time. It is trite to say that it is a whole new world in there – but it is! We saw the sea grass growing in the sand in the bay, a dense, green meadow of long ‘grass’, all going with the flow of the water over it. Then in contrast we looked at the algae or sea weeds growing on the rocks with a diversity of types including some vivid green, some brown, and some red. The red one that Gary showed us actually produces its own calcium carbonate and feels as though it is studded with fine shell grit. We saw a variety of little, and some not so little, fish swimming either in coordinated schools or singly going with the flow. The divers also got to see some Sea Dragons. The south coast oceans are recognised for the high biodiversity which sparked a discussion as to why this is so - is it a similar story to the biodiversity on the nearby land mass? It was a terrific activity for those of us who enjoy being in the water and reminded all of us that the ocean system is out there with its own set of characteristics and processes, beauty and diversity. Thanks to Craig and Gary.



Left: examining biological soup Above : testing the water
Below: talking fish



'Surf's Up' led by Mark Jeffery

The next time we lean on a bar in a pub we can say quite honestly 'we surfed Blossoms!'

After being given the basics of wave dynamics, weather systems and swell patterns from Mark Jeffery, we felt we were able to surf with the best of them. If we did happen to become professional surfers doing the world circuit chasing pipeline with a few re entries and off the lip, then we were in good company with our highly experienced and knowledgeable teacher.

With the wide variety of boards that were offered to us and recommended, depending on our level of experience, from the Malibu plank to the triple fin thrusters, our enthusiastic group hit the waves with spectacular success (and munchers!).

Most of the group look rather bedraggled as the surf pounded and thrashed us about as the day went on. Our group had young and not so young, ranging from enthusiastic to not really sure! But in the end we all came out of the surf looking pretty damn pleased with ourselves for surfing Blossoms and surviving.



Anne and her walkers

'Beach Walk' led by Anne Gadsby

At the lower estuary, the sandbanks are often one of the best places to see waders. There was a family of Pied Oystercatchers, two adults, and a juvenile which was recognisable as not so black, and having a paler bill and legs. The Oystercatchers breed in the dunes at the North end of the river bar, and were lucky this year as the flowing river gave them the two months peace and quiet needed to incubate and raise a chick.

The biologists in the group, Garry and Paul, enthused about a species of sea grass, *Posidonia* which is uncommon, and found plenty of evidence of *Posidonia australis*, which is common. "Great" I said. "There are seed pods of that on the beach." So we all became the waders and all got wet!

The beach was bare, absolutely NO *Posidonia* seeds. All the interesting things which had been there the previous day had simply disappeared, so we looked at the dune vegetation with Gillian.

Continued on page 4

'Up the River' led by Ron Pearson

Ron is a Bremer Bay resident, ex-primary school principal and fisherman extraordinary. He is well known all over Australia as one of the best around. It was not surprising then that the trip up the river focussed on the estuary as a place where fish feed, breed and shelter. As we travelled in his flat-bottomed boat (sometimes powered by an almost silent electric motor) we gradually became accustomed to seeing bream and mullet as they sheltered or moved out from under rock ledges or submerged tree branches. We learnt something of their behaviour from looking at their habitat, and how one can predict where the fish will be as they exploit the resources that the river offers.

We were also shown how birds change their behaviour when they are feeding—for example pelicans flatten their heads to their bodies to create a smaller profile and terns drop their heads at right angles to their bodies as they follow a fish.

At one stage Ron used his small flick rod to catch a bream for us to look at. So effortless! Just when it was wondering what had happened to it back it went!

It was such an incredibly beautiful day to be on the river—warm and sunny with a breeze blowing—and a great fishing expert to share his knowledge with us. Ron is relatively optimistic about the health of the river and estuary as a fish habitat at the moment, but great care must be taken to prevent exploitation and increasing amounts of nutrient flowing in and damaging the fragile balance. We know that. The challenge is to get the message out to others who use this wonderful place.



The bream (above) and its habitat (below)



Extracts from the Twertup log book ...

May 18th 1990: Having travelled Australia fairly extensively over many years we now have found this little old house on the hill named

"TWERTUP"

To find such a lovely Field Study Centre that has been restored by truly dedicated people, in this most remarkable area, it has brought enjoyment and added knowledge to us, although our stay was only brief .

Being involved with Ornithology, we recorded 33 species of birds within the close boundaries of this Field Centre. This alone makes the area different to most others, not to mention the flora.

Being a part of a Scientific organisation with Australian National Parks our few days of rest and research at Twertup will remain in our memories forever.

Barry and Ruby Hutchins— South Australia.

October 4th 1991: We found your place an inspiration in terms of its collective achievement and potential for the human individual soul. A monument of the possible in the face of the seemingly hopeless. We spent two nights reading your literature—a small community thinking globally and acting effectively locally. Congratulations!

Spent yesterday afternoon watching whales from Pt. Anne. four adult Southern Right Whales with at least three calves. Two more whales doing acrobatics in the far distance—difficult to identify.

Rudi Spacek and Justine Reid—South Australia

PS Thanks to Kaye Vaux for suggesting this place to us.

April 4th 1992: Twertup exudes great warmth—the isolation is soul soothing.

When you are inspired by such a place all thoughts break their bonds , your consciousness expands in all directions and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world. This peaceful retreat is a treasure!

Well done to FRNPA members—great insight and unlimited enthusiasm

This is my second visit , but unfortunately the weather is not in my favour. I took 9 mm out of rain gauge today and note over the last week you have had 58 . 5 .mm.

Have enjoyed looking through your photo albums and reading the literature.

Many thanks, Julie Wann—Hillarys, Perth.

28th April 1992: What a wonderful place Twertup is after 5 days walk from Mylies Beach. Five days of spectacular and varied walking. Day 1 dominated by the dunes at Hammersly and the Heath. Day 2 the rugged grandeur of Thumb Peak and the coast west of Quoin Head. Day 3 under the shadow of Mid Mt Barren and then the beautiful beach to Fitzgerald Inlet. Day 4 up the Fitzgerald with its spongelite cliffs and rocky reaches past Echo Glen. Day 5 the expanse of the Fitzgerald valley and a bed at Twertup. We saw many animals from whales to black bream. Six banksias flowering, four orchids and a host of other flowers either is full season, or spring species either six months early or late. A very memorable five days.

Fitzgerald National Park Rangers' Wildlife Report

Hope everyone is enjoying the new year; it seems the wet weather is not going to leave in a hurry. Jacup recorded 614 mm last year and 73 mm in January. The flora and fauna have responded positively to the wet weather.

Some very interesting fauna observations have occurred over the Spring/ Summer period, I guess most people know about the Malleefowl that has created a nest mound from soil and vegetation left over from the extension of the Four Mile Beach campground. Steve has provided an interpretation panel for campers who can literally watch and learn how these birds incubate their clutch of eggs. That's what you call environmentally friendly development.

A number of Hooded Plover nests have been recorded. A clutch of three eggs was found on West Beach and runners at the mouth of Fitzgerald Inlet.

Garry was lucky enough to see a Quenda run across Pabelup Drive near the Twertup turn-off. He also noticed a large number of oceanic birds washed up on the local beaches, one was identified as Short-tailed Shearwater (Mutton bird) which flock and breed in their millions on islands in the Bass Strait. He also helped rescue a sea turtle found on the Bremer Bay beach.

I too have observed some interesting stuff, firstly a Mistletoe bird made a brief visit at the Jacup Ranger Station. This species has not been recorded in previous surveys in the park. Another exciting observation was a pod of three Gray's Beaked Whales off Point Ann. The Campground Hosts and I observed these unusual animals for about an hour before we lost sight of them. They were seen on a few other occasions in the area during the preceding week.

Two CALM researchers have just completed a preliminary cat survey. They have only just left so I don't know too much, but they caught six cats and two foxes. They will study the gut contents of these animals and if possible will determine a rough idea of population density. I will forward their results and thoughts as they come to hand. They also observed a malleefowl chick crouching near to one of their trap sites; lets hope this was one the cats don't get.

We have been fortunate this year with no fires occurring in the park to date (touch wood). We have installed two additional water tanks in the park for fire fighting purposes, and are upgrading fire access tracks.

Peter Wilkins.

Senior Ranger, FRNP.

Beach walk .. continued

We found *Cakile maritima* and *Arctotheca populifolia*, both eaten with relish by Rock parrots, which were absent. Also *Spinifex hirsutus*, valued for its use as a dune stabiliser. Gillian demonstrated the features which help these plants withstand their harsh environment.

Some small waders were identified as Red-capped plovers, Red-necked Stints, and a Greater Sand plover. They had been roosting in the litter at the foot of the dunes. The Stints and Sand Plover will be very busy in the next few weeks, building reserves to enable them to fly to Siberia to breed. Some spend the winter here.

Half buried in the sand, we found a bundle of sandy-coloured fibrous stuff. We might not have found the seeds, but this was the end product of *Posidonia*.

After breaking down into fibrous strands, these become matted together forming 'sea-rope', and are eventually cast up on a beach. Paul recalled his father using it in upholstery, and it was apparently harvested in the same way as kelp from beaches.

Most of us then went snorkelling before lunch.

PS. On Monday, there were wonderful things on the beach! *Posidonia* seeds by the dozen. The remains of several large jelly fish. *Velella velella*, a small blue coloured colony of organisms with a delicate sail, which is blown across the surface of the water, to become stranded. Plenty of *Pipis*, *Donax deltoides*, and carnivorous snails, *Polinices* sp. Many more birds, including Hooded Plovers.

This means, of course that we will have to repeat the weekend!

FFRNP merchandise is available as follows—Royal Hakea tea towels - \$12 ; pack of 6 FRNP postcards - \$6: Ken Newbey's 'Checklist of Plants of the FRNP' - \$5.00: bookmarks - 50c: Post and packaging - \$2.50. Orders to be sent to The Treasurer - FFRNP, RMB 8716, Nanarup Rd, Kalgan 6330. Cheques payable to - Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park.

AGM weekend

- **GPS workshop—getting more use out of your GPS unit:**

The weekend will start with a workshop for all those of us who own a GPS, but need to know more about how to use it. The workshop will be run by FFRNP member, Angela Sanders.

As there are many brands of GPS units you are asked to bring your instruction book and **spare batteries**. A run down battery is both an embarrassment and a learning-inhibiter!

- On Sunday morning there will be a busy bee to improve the state of the gutters and to replace guide posts on the walk trails.
- If the Twertup track is closed or rain is threatening the meeting will be held at the CWA hall in Jerramungup. Please ring or email Anne Gadsby - 9837 4063 anngad@wn.com.au , or Gillian Craig - 9838 1071 ripicasa@wn.com.au.

Bits'n Pieces ...

- Welcome to new members—the Heydenrych family, Amrit Work Kendrick, Kerryn Dodd and Mary Rogers
- Thanks to Craig Lebens who donated a snorkel and goggle set to be raffled at the “Life on the Edge” weekend. It was won by Margaret Robinson
- **TWERTUP CLEANING ROSTER** - February: Tim and Caroline. March—Robyn and Nigel
- **Reminder** - subs will be due after the AGM.

Science - in the Pub! (Food and Speakers provided!)

Friday March 26 - 7 pm at the Jerramungup Hotel

Saturday March 27 – 7 pm at the Ravensthorpe Palace Hotel

Sustainable Production in the Fitzgerald Biosphere

- What is sustainable production and how do you achieve it?
- Can it improve farm efficiency AND provide a market edge?
- Come to the pub and participate in the discussion.

An event supported by GSDC, RAIN, FBG, FBMA, CENRM (UWA) & ECU

Post Print approved pp 607742/010 Surface Mail

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The Editor – P Broadbent

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