

REPORT FROM FRIENDS OF PARKS 26TH ANNUAL FORUM HELD AT WOOMERA

By Helen and Vince Monterola

FRIDAY afternoon 20th August, under a grey overcast sky, cold and windy, Friends of Parks arrived at Woomera for the 26th Annual Forum, Registration.

Following a Light Evening Meal, Lesley Hunkin, Forum Chairman, welcomed everyone to Woomera. Dene Cordes (Session Chairman), invited Bob Starkey to conduct the official Welcome to Country, followed by Robyn Williams, Manager Base Support for Woomera officially welcoming one and all to Woomera and the Forum. The Lord Mayor of Adelaide, the Hon. Michael Harbison added his official welcome to Friends, as a legitimate Woomerian. He was born in Woomera and lived there for a short while, many years ago.

Iris Iwanicki entertained us with an in depth look at the Social History of Woomera.

David Nash from Oz Minerals (a sponsor) gave a brief overview of their operation at Prominent Hill.

Andrew Banfield from BHP Billiton (a sponsor) also gave a brief overview of BHP's operations at Olympic Dam.

At 9.00 p.m. the night wound up for Supper and an early night.

SATURDAY morning, greeted the Friends with a beautiful blue sky and bright sunshine, although still cold, as we all assembled to listen to our first speaker, Squadron Leader Lindsay Campbell, CSM JP based at RAAF (ARES), External Relations Manager of Range at Woomera. He is also the XO Headquarters Woomera Test Range – SASO RAAF Airfield Woomera. Squadron Leader Campbell has over 40 years military service. He said that the Range is now as busy as it has ever been.

The subject of Squadron Leader Campbell's speech was "*Woomera – Our Unique Strategic National Defence Capability*". Points he covered were:

- How did we get here – cold war, etc.

- What do we do

- Capability

- Strategic Vision

- Operational Mission

- Functional Organisation

- What goes on here – Air Force takes Woomera into the 21st century

- How do we do it – Other support facilities

- Where to from here – Woomera will be a mega base by 2030

Squadron Leader Campbell's speech was very informative and exceptionally entertaining. It set the scene for a great weekend.

ABORIGINAL PRE-HISTORY AND HISTORY was the subject of our next speaker Tom Gara. Tom is a historian who works with indigenous communities. His subject covered:

- Allen's Cave on the Nullarbor

- Koonalda Cave on the Nullarbor

- Wilson's Bluff on the Nullarbor (the caves and the bluff span many station properties)

- Shell Lakes area Western Australia (these lakes are under native title claims)

GEOFF AXFORD – DENR – "Natural History of the Far North". Geoff's entertaining and informative speech gave us an overview of the landscapes of the Outback of South Australia, and the key geological events that formed the landscapes.

ALEX CLARKE – DENR – "Outback Update 2010 – Natural History of the Far North". Alex specialises in ecology of the arid landscape of South Australia. His topic covered:

- Feral pig management at Innamincka RR

- 150,000 banded stilts at Lake Torrens NP

- Date palm surveys and removal at Witjira NP.

- Fish Ladder Project at Innamincka RR

Hugely entertaining and informative. Thoroughly enjoyed by all present

The afternoon was spent touring, either Roxby Downs and the Olympic Dam site or the Woomera Rocket Range. On a beautiful sunny afternoon, this was very, very enjoyable.

SATURDAY EVENING Dinner was followed by an address from Mike Williams DENR acting Executive Director Regional Services – and the presentation of DENR – Awards. Awardees were:
BEST BIODIVERSITY PROJECT – Sporting Shooters SA (Hunting & Conservation Branch)
MOST SUPPORTIVE STAFF MEMBER – Jen Pitman (Southern Lofty)
FRIENDS GROUP ACHIEVEMENT OF THE YEAR (incorporating the McLaren Shield) – Friends of Sturt Gorge Recreation Park

Then we all settled back to listen to JOHN READ'S wonderful "Ecological Adventure in the Outback". He was a great after-dinner speaker. Full of wit and humour and very educational. He was received warmly by all present.

SUNDAY morning was overcast, windy and cold again. The rain began at 8.30 a.m. and did not stop for the rest of the day.
Inside the ELDO HOTEL, we kept warm with a great line-up of speakers.

HELEN CRISP stepped up to the podium first. Helen is the Arid Recovery Acting Manager/Ecologist. There are 187 bird species at the Arid Recovery and also many small mammals, rodents and invertebrates (the area is definitely not barren). The main threats to the Arid Zone is grazing and feral animals. Helen showed us a number of species that the Arid Recovery has successfully reintroduced to the large enclosed area. A very clear and concise presentation.

REECE PEDLER, President of Friends of Arid Recovery was the keynote speaker. His subject was, "The Waterbirds and Reptiles of the Arcoona Lakes". This was a great insight to the Arcoona Lakes area.

Friends of Parks Inc. President DAVID MITCHELL and DENR acting Executive Director Regional Services MIKE WILLIAMS spoke about the challenges of the new departmental arrangements.

Friends of Mound Springs President COLIN HARRIS addressed the meeting – "*South Australia's Mound Springs – Their Environment and Heritage Values*". Excellent presentation. Mound Springs are a natural outlet for artesian waters.

Friends of Mound Springs Vice-President TRAVIS GOTCH continued the talk about

The biology of the Springs

What is the GAB (Great Artesian Basin) – connectivity of endogenic and epigenic ground waters

What are GAB Springs

Over 5,000 have been mapped so far – pointed out locations

Why are they important – (endemic species – economically – cultural indigenous sacred sites)

Threats

How a Reserve like this is managed.

Questions were received from the floor. These mainly covered Heritage and Corporate Plans

The winner of the Poster Competition was announced – **Campground Hosts**

Friends of Kimba District Parks then gave a short presentation of their area, with an Invitation to all Friends to attend their Forum from the 2nd September to the 4th September 2011.

Afternoon excursions were then the order of the day.

The end of a great weekend.