

Friends of Merri Creek



NEWSLETTER

May–July
2003

Freeway update

We are still awaiting the result of our Federal Court case on 5–6 December 2002 which challenged the Commonwealth's decision to fund the Merri Creek freeway.

Since February, we've been expecting a result any day, so this newsletter was delayed until May in the hope that we could bring you the news. The tragedy is that while we wait, the freeway is being built! Over the Easter school holidays there was a ten day shutdown of road building and thanks to the rain and our sticky volcanic clay soil, work was delayed because the earthmovers were getting bogged.

Scoresby freeway win

A finding by Justice Gray in the Federal Court on 8 April has re-ignited concerns that VicRoads intends to eventually extend the Merri Creek Freeway south of the Ring Road to the inner city.

The Federal Court has found that VicRoads and the State Government misled the Commonwealth Government over the Scoresby Freeway.

Justice Gray found that the Victorian Government did not mention that construction of the Scoresby Freeway made the building of the last link in the Ring Road "highly likely", across the Yarra, and through Bulleen, Heidelberg and Viewbank.

In his judgement, Justice Gray said: "VicRoads (and the Victorian Government) took the risk that a failure to reveal the full picture would render the document misleading. In my view, it did so."

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Friends Vice President honoured

The Vice President of Friends of Merri Creek, Ann McGregor, was presented with an award for "Improving Built and Natural Environments" at the Honouring Women in Moreland Awards 2003 on Thursday 6 March.

The citation was: "Ann has been actively involved in the restoration of the Merri Creek for over 25 years in a voluntary capacity. Her longstanding commitment to this project and her professional skills as an environmental planner have been crucial for establishing and preserving community and government support for the Merri Creek."

Congratulations to Ann, who was nominated by the Friends and the MCMC. ❀

Ann McGregor (left) is presented with her "Honouring Women in Moreland" award by Councillor, Stella Kariofyllidis. ▶



MELBOURNE 2030

In late February FoMC made a written submission on the Department of Infrastructure's Melbourne 2030 plan. We welcomed the emphasis on sustainability, and initiatives such as the urban growth boundary, green wedge protection, a 'chain of parks' along the Merri Creek, activity centres as the focus for development, environmental management and improved public transport services. However we have a number of concerns that relate specifically to the Merri Creek and its catchment.

1. Proposed Hume (Craigieburn) urban growth area

The 2030 plan proposes moving the proposed Hume (Craigieburn) urban growth area from west of the Hume Highway to one centering on Merri Creek between Craigieburn Road East north to Donnybrook (refer to the map, right). **This area is quite inappropriate for future urban growth.**

This area has very high conservation values of national and State significance, proposed by FoMC and VNPA to be protected in a major new park. (See document on FoMC web Site). Urban development straddling the Merri Creek would have significant detrimental impacts on the Merri Creek system and be counterproductive to the major investment in restoring Merri Creek that has been made.

2. Urban growth boundary

The approval of the new suburb of Epping North is a major incursion into the green wedge in the Merri–Darebin catchments. Proposals for major industrial and residential developments on Cooper Street Epping, immediately east of Merri Creek, would be a further incursion of similar size. The Friends are opposed to further loss of open land in the vicinity of the Merri Creek, and strongly recommend that the urban growth boundary should be redrawn to extend down the Merri Creek to Campbellfield, then across to the proposed Merri Creek freeway alignment. In other words, the land between the Creek and the freeway should not be inside the urban growth boundary. Much of this land should become part of the new Merri Creek Park being planned by Parks Victoria; the remainder should continue as green wedge, open/rural land.

3. Name of green wedge

We suggest that the Hume/Whittlesea green wedge should be renamed the Merri–Darebin green wedge, to reflect the main catchments that it covers.

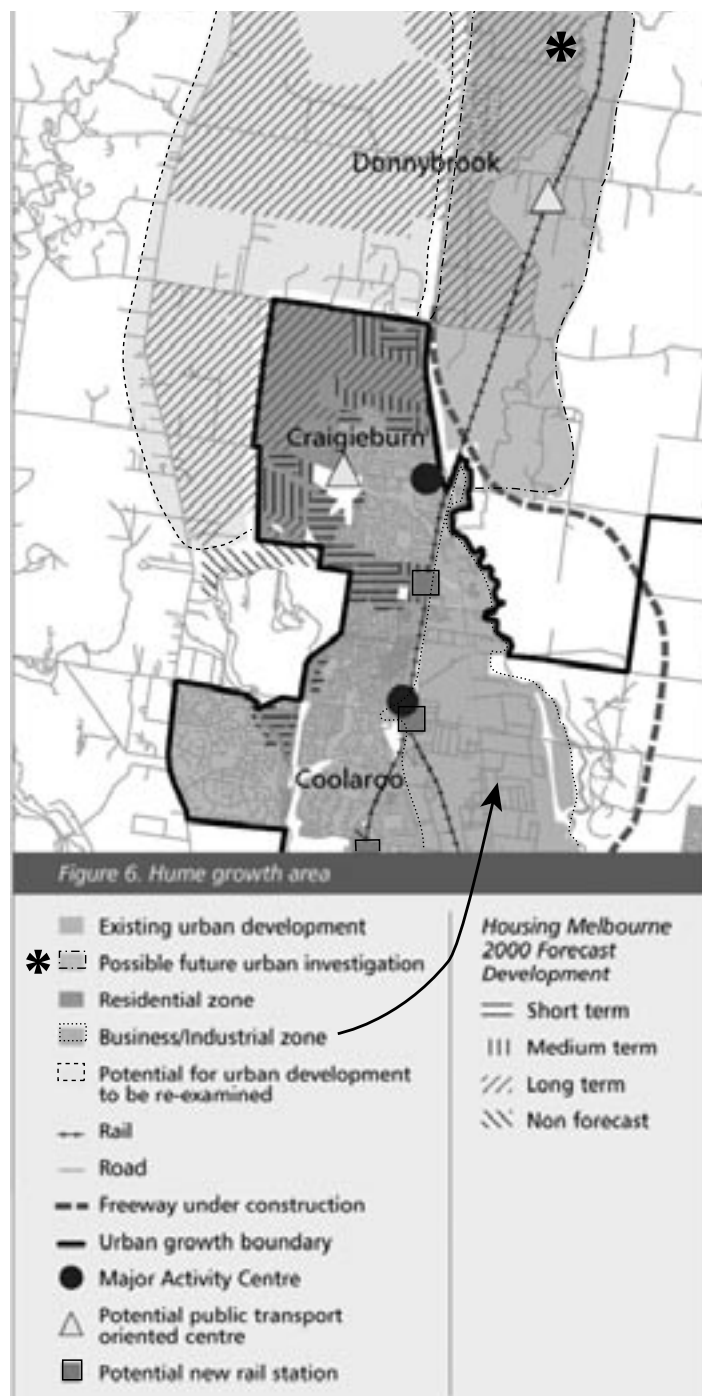
4. Freeways—driving unsustainable growth

The proposed Merri Creek freeway will have major environmental impacts, including destruction of endangered vegetation communities, barriers to fauna movement and noise. It bisects the green wedge, but is incompatible with the purposes of green wedges.

This and the other freeways currently being planned or constructed around Melbourne will also have another effect that is completely contrary to many of the directions of Melbourne 2030. These freeways facilitate and give rise to dispersed car-

dependent suburban development and outward sprawl—the opposite of the “more compact city”, “better management of urban growth”, “a greener city” and “better (*public*) transport links” the government says it wants.

We submitted that if the Victorian Government is serious about achieving the desired results identified for *Melbourne 2030*, it must terminate the current freeway construction program. The



Map of Hume growth area from http://www.the-silo.com/melbourne2030/content/popups/fig_ip03_06.html

Submission

enormous, ongoing investment in construction and maintenance of the freeway network could then be diverted into initiatives such as better public transport and rail freight infrastructure and services, activity centres, the open space network, and public housing.

In this way, the vision for a more sustainable city could be realised. But if freeway building continues as planned by VicRoads around the metropolitan area, the 2030 strategy will remain just words on paper.

5. Planning protection for future open space

The document refers to long-term planning protection for future open space until land can be acquired and developed in five listed areas. This long-term planning protection will also be required for land along the Merri Creek corridor extending north from the urban fringe. Land with very significant scenic, ecological, historical and cultural heritage values between Campbellfield and Wallan must be identified and given long-term planning

protection now, or the values will be degraded and destroyed through land speculation, development and other threatening processes.

6. Need for State Government leadership in environment protection and sustainable development

Implementation of much of the metropolitan strategy will be the responsibility of local governments. The State Government must provide strong policy frameworks, codes, performance standards and technical advice to all councils to ensure consistent, high quality outcomes in relation to environmental issues such as water sensitive urban design and stormwater management, net gain in native vegetation extent/condition, recycling, and energy efficiency of urban development. These matters are too important to be left to the vagaries of local politics, developers and local planning.

Ann M'Gregor

Friends of Merri Creek News

Drought affects planting

Unfortunately, the Friends had to cancel the planting that was scheduled for the Friends site near Strettle Lagoon Thornbury on Sunday 13 April. This is the first time that the Friends have had to cancel a planting — and it wasn't because of rain, but because of the lack of it. The ground was simply too hard!

A number of the Planting regulars were contacted by phone (thanks to Dick Harcourt), a notice was put in an obvious spot at the site and the Secretary, Ray Radford, remained there for over an hour to let others know what was happening. A couple of members (Robyn and Martin) turned up and together, with Ray they pulled out some weeds. Apologies to anyone else who may have turned up later on. The Friends site planting has now been re-scheduled for Sunday 15 June.

New life members

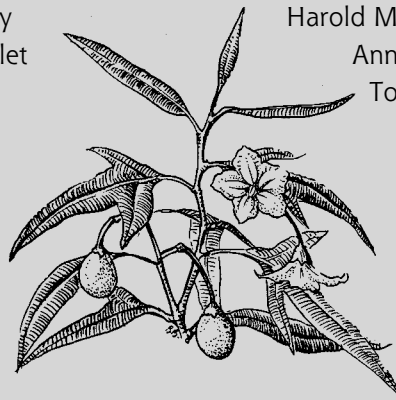
In February, the Friends Committee awarded two new Honorary Life Memberships to Max Sargent and Linda Parlane.

Max's award is very much overdue as he has been our very hard-working President since 1999 and before that he was Membership Secretary and Campaigns Co-ordinator from 1995-98. Max has participated to some degree in almost all the various Friends activities but, in particular, he led and was completely involved in the huge campaign

against the Merri Creek freeway. His constant flow of media releases ensured that the campaign received a high profile over a long time.

Linda Parlane has also given huge amounts of her time and energy to the freeway campaign. Without her wisdom, campaign experience, media savvy and hard work, this campaign would not have received anywhere near the attention that it did.

Max and Linda join the other Honorary Life Members: Harold Mackrell, David Redfearn, Bruce M'Gregor, Ann M'Gregor, Paul Prentice, Ray Radford and Tony Faithfull.



Friends have input into Plans

The Friends Committee and some other interested members are currently having input into various management plans including: Melbourne Water's Merri Creek Waterway Activity Plan; the Metropolitan Strategy – Melbourne 2030 and the proposed Merri Park north of Mahoneys Rd. There is also consultation on a study commissioned by SPI Powernet to map trees within the transmission lines easement, with a view to preparing an action plan for pruning or removal and replacement with a suitable species. If you have a particular interest in any of these plans please contact the Secretary Ray Radford on 0422 989 166.

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The Great Merri Creek



*Fat and docile, big and dumb
They look so stupid, they aren't much fun
Cows aren't fun**

Friends of Merri Creek, MCMC, Parks Victoria and all the other organisations concerned about Merri Creek definitely will concur—cows aren't fun!!! Especially when there are four to five hundred of them being illegally grazed in parks, reserves and other sections of Merri Creek!

This unbelievable saga began in November 2002 when a group of people from the various groups were on a walking tour of sections of the creek proposed for inclusion in the new park. Near O'Herns Rd in Somerton they encountered the cows, their human companions (a whole family of six or so), their horses, camp and pack of dogs. As this section of the creek is currently privately owned, and the people said they had permission to be there, there was not a huge amount that could be done.

However, since that time they have driven their stock up and down the creek. They moved south as far as Galada Tamboore, and north to the boundary of Craigieburn Grassland Reserve. They have removed management locks and chains from gates, cut fences, modified management tracks, driven and ridden all over existing and future park and reserve areas, and who knows what else.

They have been ordered off Melbourne Water, Vic Roads, Parks Victoria and other land and served with several eviction notices by the councils. A RSPCA inspector was called in to check the condition of some of the stock!

Rangers have had to drive straying stock from Craigieburn Grassland Reserve on a number of occasions.

Finally, just prior to Easter, thanks to the encouragement and investigations of Friends and MCMC, a joint eviction notice from the Cities of Whittlesea and Hume, Parks Victoria and Vic Roads was served. For reasons I can't fathom, Melbourne Water chose not to support the eviction notice! Over Easter, to our enormous relief, the cows, horses, dogs and people appear to have departed Merri Creek... 'though I shudder to think where they will pop up next!!

SO WHY WAS THIS A PROBLEM?

*They crashed the gate in a great stampede
Tipped over a milk truck, torched all the feed
Cows have fun**

Well not quite, but...

Cows are incredibly damaging to native grasslands. They cause pugging and soil erosion, they rip plants out of the ground when feeding, they eat and break shrubs and small trees. They enjoy wet areas and these were watered in the creek so they devastated streamside vegetation, polluted the water, and seriously damaged the creek banks and escarpments.

Scientific surveys of the Merri Creek Growling Grass Frog population were being undertaken in the area at the same time. These frogs, and all the other wildlife, use the streamside



Photo by Wendy Moore of some of the cows and their human companions (at left) on the west bank of the Merri Creek, north of Cooper Street, Somerton

Cow Invasion!!

vegetation for hunting, breeding, and shelter. To the horror of the researchers, the cows totally denuded the vegetation in areas of the creek where very good populations of the frogs had been found. We aren't sure what long term effect this had on the frogs.

*Sixty police cars were piled in a heap
Covered in cow pies, covered up deep
Much cow dung**

Yes...

Cows produce huge amounts of very large cow pats, up to a foot or more across. These completely smother the tiny wildflowers and other plants that grow between the grasses. Some were big enough to smother whole grass tussocks. In comparison the largest local native herbivore, the Eastern Grey Kangaroo, produces poo in pellets, the size of large marbles. These roll off the plants and spread about, not smothering growth. In the native grassland these pats also take ages to break down because native dung beetles can't cope with cow manure. (Dung beetles had to be imported to Australia to quickly break down moo poo in dairy and cattle grazing areas!!!)

Cow dung also contains huge amounts of weed seed. With the native plants smothered by the pat and a large reserve of fertiliser supplied these weeds would have an excellent chance of establishing, then spreading, in the native grasslands. These cows were grazed in seriously weedy sections of the creek valley and then on native grassland reserves, like Cooper St Grassland. For many years Parks Victoria and MCMC have been undertaking weed control and replanting of this reserve—all their good work could have been undone.

THE GREAT MOO POO SCOOPS

Fearing this outcome, after Parks Victoria had evicted the cows from Cooper Street Grassland, MCMC quickly organised a Cowpat Pickup day on Wed. 9th April. It was a lovely day and the event was well attended—thanks to the Friends, VINC, local council, Parks Victoria, and others who attended. A massive thanks to MCMC staff, in particular Barb Miles, who did such a great job organising the day.

Six ute-fulls and two trailer-loads—an estimated 3,000 cowpats were removed. These were smothering at least 9,000 native plants. A survey of the density and extent of coverage of cowpats on the grassland was undertaken by MCMC technical staff. This estimated that despite the fantastic effort, we had only removed about 20% of the cowpats.

MCMC organised a second Cowpat Pickup day for Sat 3rd May. It was an amazing sight—forty-five volunteers spread across Cooper Street Grassland, picking up cow (and horse) poo, putting it into buckets and bags, then emptying these into wheelbarrows to be ferried across to the vehicles on the track. A huge three trailer loads and six ute loads were collected!!!

At one point it was funny to look across to the other side of the creek to find a group of ten or so Eastern Grey Kangaroos intently watching us. They were probably wondering "What in the world are all those crazy people doing?!"

A MIGHTY THANKYOU to all the Friends and other friends of the creek and native grasslands who put in such a sterling effort on both days. Let's hope we never have to do such a thing again!!!

Wendy Moore

(* extracts from *Cows with Guns* by Dana Lyons
<http://www.cowswithguns.com/homepage.html>)



Deep Green Voices

WANTED FOR

Victoria's only

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT CHOIR

The Green Singers

We are recruiting basses & tenors
to join our mixed voice choir

Sing funny & serious songs about the environment.

We rehearse on Mondays 7–9pm in Northcote
Call Dudleigh on 9495 6905 (H) or 9637 3017 (W)
or Linda on 9416 7184

The Poetry of Weeds

*Baron von Mueller's passion,
While 'round the countryside dashin',
Was to spread blackberry seed
To give explorers a feed.
Such activities are quite out of fashion.*

Neil Tucker

Friends' Life Members: Paul Prentice

The fourth in a series of short histories of the Friends Life members.

Over the years Paul Prentice has found many things to do for the environment: revegetation, promoting cycling, writing letters to politicians and papers; protesting against freeways, uranium mining, logging of old-growth forests, etc. He reckons the greatest bonus of trying to solve the world's problems is the wonderful people with similar ideals that one meets in the process.

With his never-ending clean-ups, recycling, planting, weeding, etc., he seeks to express his gratitude to the Almighty for the lovely creatures, plants, rivers, landscapes, seascapes, skies that adorn our lives; but he feels he owes more than he can ever repay...

A childhood spent in East Africa where his parents were missionaries, and several months in the beautiful English countryside at age eight, made a lasting impression on him; and his appointment to Fitzroy High School in 1966 was a pivotal moment, leading to eight happy years there, buying a house in the next street, and an ongoing fascination with the nearby creek and the grand Edinburgh Gardens.

(He's delighted that the school will reopen next year following the razing of various eyesores – hence lots more playing space, which he unsuccessfully campaigned for when he was there – and the thorough refurbishment of the fine old World War I brick building and the best of the later additions.)

It was in May 1981 that Robert Humphries of Collingwood Council told him about the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee, predecessor to the MCMC – after explaining that the fence he'd encountered while bushwhacking along the Abbotsford bank of the Yarra behind Victoria Crescent was actually on private property, so the bikepath wouldn't go through there in the foreseeable future: to this day it still hasn't.

In October 1985 he organised a bike ride to coincide with the official opening of the Merri Path by local member Bob Hawke; it wasn't easy, cyclists had to struggle up and down steep tracks below the Knott and Coulson Reserves in Clifton Hill as the footbridges hadn't yet been built. He had the honour of handing the P.M. a submission calling for a national bicycle authority, which duly disappeared into a black hole: the idea eventually came to fruition in 1996.

Since 1981 he has been involved almost continuously with the MCCC, the MCMC and the Friends, of which he was President from 1996 to 1998. He coordinates the monthly cleaning of the creek in which huge amounts of rubbish get collected by half a dozen enthusiasts beaver away for a few hours, for whom the simple, normal look of a tidied section is all the reward they need. The people passing by, the murmur of the stream, perhaps a few inquisitive ducks all add to their enjoyment; on the other hand rubbish that's extra hard to remove – heavy, tightly-wedged or almost inaccessible – makes the job more like a game, and ropes, gumboots, waders, Harold Mackrell's hooked poles, canoes etc. really come in handy.

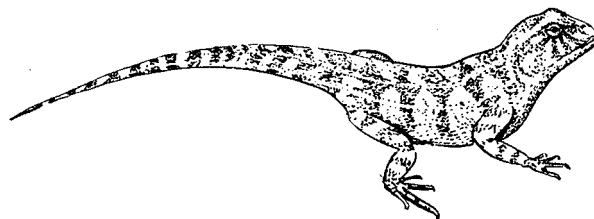
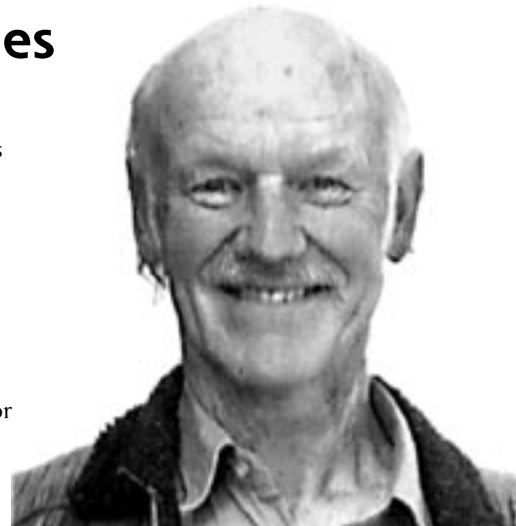
The grubbier recyclables from the creek get washed; the ones from streets are usually cleaner. Since 1998 he's been putting

them out in sacks each holding 18 pounds or about 8 kg, making a tally that's gone from 2.2 tonnes in 1999 to 9.1 tonnes in 2002, or 25 kg a day.

He is glad that there is still a market garden near the Harding Street suspension bridge; he loves the rusty, rustic tin sheds and fences, and the artworks from the Clifton Hill bird to the Galada Tamboore mural. He appreciates the variety of bridges, the many tramlines passing over or near the creek, and of course the shared path, essential to keeping the Merri in people's hearts and minds; however he is concerned about some steep gradients (expensive to remedy, unfortunately) that hinder access by elderly or wheelchair-bound folk.

"The rehabilitation of the creek is a quality of life issue". he says, "and when you see how the planet is being ruined in other places, you feel pleased that at least in your corner you're doing something to redress the balance".

Retired from teaching, he drives taxis a couple of nights a week, which leaves him time and energy for the rubbish/recycling effort; his other main obsession is unusual cycles, since he believes cycling should be not only healthy and useful but diverse and entertaining as well. And with the richness and complexity of our beloved Merri Creek, there's always something new to write about for the Friends' newsletter. 🍀



SCORESBY FREEWAY WIN

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Dr Mees, a lecturer in transport planning and metropolitan planning in the Urban Planning Program at Melbourne University, said: "The implications of today's judgement are clear... the State Government must explain to the people of Victoria how and why they have concealed their intentions to build a full Ring Road across the Yarra."

Congratulations to Paul Mees and to those working to stop the Scoresby freeway. Let's hope that the result of the Friends court case can make it two Federal Court decisions against freeways. 🍀

Welcome to Choppers of Rushall Reserve

A group of active volunteers, who regularly do weeding, rubbish clean-up and planting near their homes in North Fitzroy, have formed into a FOMC local area group called "Choppers of Rushall Reserve." Already, the group has been successful in gaining some funding (with help from FOMC and MCMC) from Melbourne Water for a planting on Sunday 24 August.

Employer funds planting

Keen new Friends member, Robin Merrick, has gained funding from her employer, Lend Lease Corporation, to fund a Creekside Planting to help improve the water quality in the

Creek. Robin has only recently moved into the North Fitzroy area and was excited by the discovery of her waterway namesake—the Merri Ck. The Creekside Planting will be held on Sunday 21 September at Holden St North Fitzroy—close to the above planting at Rushall Reserve.

Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands group formed

The inaugural meeting of the Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands took place in the car park at Craigieburn Grasslands after a very wet planting on Sunday 27 April. A sizeable number of the people at the planting decided that these grasslands warranted their own Friends group, so it was formed there and then. Any other people who would like to be part of this new group, which is a sub-group of FOMC, please contact Ray Radford on 0422 989 166. 🌱

Twelve years on the Merri Creek

I need you so much now

Need the smooth basalt rocks
that caress your flow
as you pass

Need the way you weave your response
to the gray and moss rock

My life needs you as a metaphor

Need you here near me

I need to sit
on this large comfortable cold rock
and watch you
and listen to your voice
that soothes my ears
softens my heart
and relaxes my body

You are nature
you have strength
you live amongst the urban people
and yet your memory
carries echoes of the dreaming
and your strength
defies
the coloured urban plastic
decorations
that adorn the trees
litter your banks
and rest in the crevices
amongst the rocks
that carry your weaving

The decoration that tells me
not many people
will sit on this rock today

And I
can only accept the decorations
because
you do

I am here with you
your depth and beauty

For 12 years
You have sustained me
you have been my reference point
at the end of O'Grady St.
there's the Merri Creek

But I couldn't come

All these years
you called
my heart was deaf
busy grieving

It could not bring me to this rock
till now

But you have always been there
and my heart glows when I see you
and the green grass
vibrates in the light of day
and the sun makes white patterns
in your deep purple gray with moss

And I weep for the years
I did not come
and I weep for joy
that you are here
and always were

And I will do what I can to keep you here
but those decorations have to go

Like the pain that kept me from you
A weight that burdens my chest
burdens the memory of your flow

For since we've been together
there are birds again
and today is the first day of
spring

It took me twelve years to make you mine
when you were there for me
all along
you just waited

Is that the message
you carry for me
in the weaving
sound I hear

© *Maria Sangiorgi*
(resident of Clifton Hill)
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Bookkeeper needed

*Friends of Merri Creek requires
the services of a bookkeeper
to prepare BAS statements.*

*The workload is not large but
familiarity with MYOB is needed*

*If you can help, please
contact Max on 9480 5492*

Friends of Merri Creek events calendar

MAY

Sunday 25 — Planting & BBQ

Jukes Rd Grassland, Jukes Rd Fawkner (with MCMC – funded by Parks Vic Grant), 10am–1pm. Melway map 18 B1. Phone Brian Bainbridge 9380 8199 (w)

Saturday 31 — Moreland Planting Festival & Community Day

Moomba Park Fawkner 11am–2pm. Multicultural planting event and festival—organised by MCMC. Enter off McBryde St. Melway map 8 A12.

JUNE

Sunday 1 — Litter Clean-Up

Rushall Station North Fitzroy, 10am–12 noon. Melway map 30 D11. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Saturday 7 — Fawkner Community House Indigenous Garden Group kick-off meeting

CB Smith Reserve, Fawkner (next to Leisure Centre), 2pm. With Brian Bainbridge, MCMC Technical officer. Contact: Neil Huybregts 9432 7005.

Sunday 15 — Planting & Weeding

Friends site near Strettle Lagoon Thornbury (with Darebin Bushcrew), 10am–1pm. Melway map 30 B3. Phone Gail Brammar 9484 1703.

Planning for a new Merri Creek Park continues.

We've made both written and verbal presentations to Parks Victoria on our vision for the park.

THANKYOU to all the Friends who made submissions to Parks Victoria.

Discussions continue.

Indigenous garden for Fawkner community house

Yes! We (the Fawkner Community House Indigenous Garden Group) are going to plant an indigenous garden! And you're invited to our kick-off meeting on Saturday 7 June at 2pm!

Fawkner Community House is a relatively new neighbourhood house that used to be the caretaker's house for the CB Smith Reserve, not far from Merri Creek. There is now a steady and friendly stream of people using the place, and some of us think it would be lovely to design and plant an indigenous garden around it.

We had a working bee shortly after the House opened in 2001 (great turnout, loved the chainsaw) and cleaned out most of the nasty hedge and associated ivy, but it still needs a lot of work. Since then, Moreland City Council has kindly provided us with some funding through their Sustainable Moreland Environment Grants Program.



Sunday 29 — Wetlands Bike Tour

Meet at Edgars Creek wetlands, Leamington St Reservoir at 10am. Melway map 18E4. Ride to Hall Reserve Clifton Hill via Strettle lagoon and Merri Park wetlands. This is a one-way ride so suggest train between Clifton Hill and Reservoir before or after the ride. Contact Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

JULY

Sunday 6 — Litter Clean-Up

Harding St Coburg, 10am–12 noon. Melway map 30 A1. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Sunday 13 — Planting & BBQ

Merri Wetland, rear of Sumner Ave Northcote (with MCMC), 10am–1pm. Melway map 30 C8. Phone Leslie Fraser 9481 7365. Attending will be young Collingwood AFL football star (and Friends member), Mark McGough.

Sunday 27 — Planting & BBQ

Central Creek Grassland Davidson St Reservoir (with MCMC), 10am–1pm. Melway map 8 B12. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

AUGUST

Sunday 3 — Litter Clean-Up

Walker St East, Northcote and downstream, 10am–12 noon. Melway map 30 F12. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Sunday 3 — Friends site Weeding

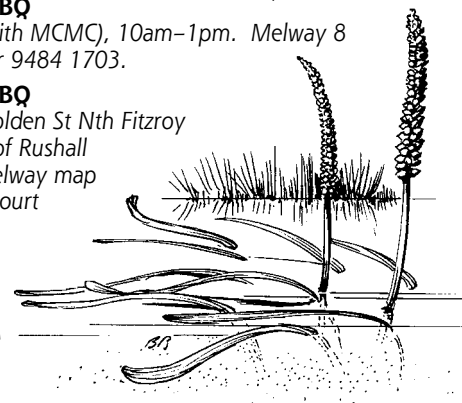
Near Strettle Lagoon Thornbury, 10am–11.30am. Melway map 30 B3. Phone Ray Radford 0422 989 166.

Sunday 10 — Planting & BBQ

Moomba Park Fawkner (with MCMC), 10am–1pm. Melway 8 A12. Phone Gail Brammar 9484 1703.

Sunday 24 — Planting & BBQ

Rushall Reserve, end of Holden St Nth Fitzroy (with MCMC & Choppers of Rushall Reserve), 10am–1pm. Melway map 30 D11. Phone Dick Harcourt 9853 3162.



Brian Bainbridge, MCMC Technical Officer and a recent resident of Fawkner, will be there on June 7 to help us get started. We are seriously considering a formal design (in keeping with many gardens in Fawkner) as a way of making indigenous plants more culturally accessible and because it's likely to be bloody interesting, challenging and fun.

If you're interested in helping out (there's lots to do — organising, designing, planting, maybe even more chainsawing) then please contact me. Phone: 9416 9068 or email neilhuy@alphalink.com.au

Neil Huybregts