**Friends of the GVD Field Trip Reports 2022**

Three reports on the 2022 field trips appear below. The first is an overview by Margaret Wright, the second is Lynton Huxley’s report on the Quondong Survey and the third is Peter Facy’s Vegetation Survey report.

**FGVD REPORT AUGUST 2022**

Most of our crew had met up in Ceduna on the night of the 15th August. Peter and I had booked a tour of Maralinga, so we joined the others near the Maralinga village area on the morning of Wednesday the 17th August. Roger, the manager of the area, gave us all a bit of a tour as he escorted us through the restricted area to the northern gate. Here we had a group photo taken before setting off to begin our tasks of taking photo points and drone footage.

The group was split into two. The photo group consisted of Peter Facy, Ian Jackson, Peter and Margaret Wright, Justin Jay and Margaret Donohue. The drone group included Phil Prust, Geoff Rishworth, Brian and Gill McKay.

During the day the two groups would leap frog each other from site to site. In the late afternoon we set up camped together and mostly we had morning tea and lunch in the same place.

Phil was our “fire monitor” and did an excellent job of choosing a site for digging the pit, supervising the collection of suitable wood and that it was neatly stacked, making sure it was left safely at night and ensuring that the site was covered up in the morning before we left camp. A big job well done. Ian usually managed the “plant” something on top to help with the “cover-up”.

With the exception of one night, we all gather around the camp fire in the evening. Some cooked on it others joined in for the chat or just to enjoy the companionship and location. Thank you to those who shared stories and life experiences. There is so much to learn about from others, then there are the things you find you have in common. A few of the experiences I found I shared with others were, going to the same country school, teaching, diving, caving, scouting, overseas and Australian destinations visited.

The area that we worked in looked beautiful, the plants all looked “fresh” from the rains and in patches there were wild flowers. Both the Margaret’s often got quite distracted from their allotted chores taking photos of them and needed to be dragged back to task.

The Emu Road was in quite good condition and good time was made along this section. I think we all recognised the privilege we had of being able to travel in this restricted area.

When we first arrived at our Emu airstrip campsite it was extremely windy. People spread out to find a bit of shelter and set up camp, Brian and Gill retreated to the other side of the airstrip to find a spot sheltered enough for their tent. The wind did ease off in time for a fire to be lit later though. There was only one night that it was not possible to sit outside. Every one retreated into their own little havens and some took the chance to read the books they had bought along.

Once we started to travel on the shot lines north and west of the airstrip the tracks became more interesting. It seemed that no one had been on these tracks since FGVD had been there 5 years ago and they were becoming quite overgrown in places.

1 minute video here. <https://youtu.be/U_sPB2tS4Pk>

Peter F, our intrepid leader, with his “offsider” Ian needed to stop often to clear away fallen branches. Ian eventually announced that he was “Working at the Branch office today“ to which Justin replied “I hope he can stick to that”. Margaret W declared that the joke of the day to which Peter F commented “Margaret glad you twigged to that” much laughter from all with Margaret saying she had recorded this. Apologies to all of you that were not there to appreciate how significant a moment this was.

There were times when the track just seemed to disappear and so there would be a lot of walking ahead, mostly by Ian. On the odd occasion it was necessary to create a diversion around an immovable object. Some of us enjoyed this bit of the countryside the most.

Camels were seen at the Emu airstrip and one took a close look at what was for supper in Justin and Margaret D’s camp. Another mob of camels were spotted out on the shot lines. Their locations were recorded to report back to DEW.

On one day Justin and Margaret D swapped with Geoff so they could see what the drone group task was all about. Justin also had some drone flying lessons at our second Emu airstrip camp. At this camp we seemed to have had plenty of time to relax, do some bird watching find some wild flowers and take photos.

We did check on a buffle grass location on the Anne Beadell Highway for DEW but it seems that their spraying had worked and we could not find any live specimens.

It was interesting to have Justin with us as he had been involved through his work some 30 years ago in the original setting up of some of the photo sites that the FGVD now keep up to date.

The Anne Beadell Highway was very corrugated as expected, which shook and rattled vehicles and occupants about. 1 minute video here. <https://youtu.be/_Fp0FIzyI2Y>

The OKA broke a brake line which caused some to worry about its stopping ability so it was delegated leader until Peter managed to block off the line in camp. Brian had something come loose underneath his Prado that got a temporary fix on the side of the road. These were the only obvious vehicle problems both of which did not cause any major hold ups. How we managed not to have even a single staked tyre on the shot lines is amazing. Partly this was due to the track clearing done by mostly Ian and at times others. Maybe we had exceptional, experienced drivers that knew their vehicles and had pre prepared them well? We like to think so.

There were a few little side attractions we stopped for added interest. Len Beadle’s plaque on the Emu Road is not seen by many. The automated weather stations we visited on the Emu Road and Anne Beadell Highway were both in disrepair. There is not a lot left of Emu township to see but we took a look. We also saw Tallaringa Native Well along the Anne Beadell.

Early afternoon on the 23rd just on the outskirts of Coober Pedy, we took a final group photo and said our farewells to Geoff. The rest of us headed in to town to find motels, cabins or free camp sites for the night. For some there was a super market run to do, water to be found, clothes to wash, showers to be had and hair to be washed. After regrouping for a very good pizza dinner there were more farewells to be said.

Personally, I would like to thank Peter F for his ability to jump through all the right hoops, cross all the t’s and dot all the i’s to enable this trip to happen. Also, thanks Peter F for your delegation skills so that everyone had a job to do so they felt very much part of the team. Thanks to Justin and others who were able to share their knowledge of this beautiful bit of South Australia with me, I hope I can retain some of it.

Margaret Wright

**FRIENDS OF THE GREAT VICTORIA DESERT - AUGUST 2022 QUANDONG SURVEY TRIP**

**Team members**

Mary and Glynn Bartel

Claire and Martin Forsyth

Kathryn and Phil Gaukroger

Karen and Lynton Huxley

David Inverarity

Ann and Manfred Jusaitis

Peter Wilson

Our team made their own travel plans to Ceduna, having all agreed to forgo the usual meet, greet and meal at the Foreshore Hotel to minimise any exposure to COVID because we did not want to risk a repeat of the trip cancellation in 2021. Our first team meeting was therefore when we assembled at the Ceduna office at 0900 on Tuesday 23 August to undertake and submit our individual ‘RAT’ by phone to the Oak Valley Clinic for approval to proceed. With that done we were on our way, only stopping at Nundroo to top up fuel for the vehicles and for some essential hot chips!

The trip via Colona and Ooldea to our first bush camp at Irish Well was uneventful. The next morning we visited the Oak Valley Community to collect two monitoring devices (tablets) containing all previous data history and the location of each tree for our survey. We visited the art centre where some made purchases, whilst others visited the store for ice-creams and/or pies!

After setting up our camp for the next 3 days at a convenient site along BMR6 Road (Rodinia Track North), we familiarised ourselves with the updated monitoring program and agreed to split into two teams. This allowed for the Transect 2 Quandong survey of 69 trees to be completed faster and also provided for some good natured banter/reverie ie the A team was led by me and the B team was led by Peter – I will let you decide which one thought they were best. A very enjoyable shared roast dinner was had on our first night at this site.

Whilst we had only been authorised to do Transect 2 and Transect 1 in our Permit, we contacted the Community and received approval to include the survey of trees for Transects 4 and 6 if that was able to be completed within the Permit time.

During the move to our next camp on the Voakes Hill Road we stopped to survey the 4 trees identified at Transect 4 (along the Aboriginal Business Road) before turning north to do the 100 trees of Transect 1 (Voakes Hill Corner Road South). During our stay here, Karen and I were welcomed into the ‘Ruby Wedding Club’ with a spectacular and most memorable initiation ceremony (all other couples were already members). We also enjoyed our second shared roast dinner meal, which fittingly ended with a brilliant sunset. It was from this camp that we drove to Voakes Hill Corner to see the recently installed shelter and make a quick visit to the ‘Hill’. Our main purpose though was to update the records for the 55 trees of Transect 6 (Voakes Hill Corner North). Unfortunately we could only complete the update of records for 29 trees before low light forced us to head to camp with our headlights on!

A forecast weather change convinced us to move to the endorsed camp close to the Business road intersection which would allow us to visit the Community early the next day to meet with staff and return the equipment. Our plans for the return journey to Ceduna were amended to a camp near the Ooldea rail crossing. It was here that we ventured to the site commemorating the joining of the rail track from east and west. We broke camp to head for Ceduna in dense fog.

Our time in the desert made 99% of us appreciate having trailing accommodation equipped with a heater to endure the cool nights and mornings. No one complained or even gave a second thought to the conditions being experienced by David in his tent. Well done David!

I greatly appreciated the efforts made by all to complete the 2023 Quandong survey for the Oak Valley Community and for making this another enjoyable Friends of the Great Victoria Desert trip. Let’s hope we get to do it again next year.

Lynton Huxley, Trip Leader

**PHOTOGRAPHIC FIELD TRIP REPORT - AUGUST 2022**

The Field Trip consisted of two groups.

Peter Facy, Ian Jackson, Justin Jay, Margaret Donohue, Peter & Margaret Wright carried out the surface photographing of existing vegetation sites while Phil Prust, Brian & Gill McKay and Geoff Rishworth flew the drone to photograph selected vegetation sites from the air.

We left Ceduna on Tuesday 16th after meeting with Yasmin Wolf, Ollanta Lipcer, Brett Backhouse and other staff at the Ceduna office, we carried a “Spot Checker” and a Satellite phone provided by the department for safety purposes.

Before we left Ceduna, we all submitted results of our “RAT” tests by phone to Maralinga.

There were 37 vegetation sites scheduled to be photographed on a four-year rotation basis although it has been 5 years since these sites were photographed, 2020 being missed due to COVID restrictions. These sites were along the Emu Road, around Lake Meramangye and along the Anne Beadell Highway to Coober Pedy.

Our first camp was at the intersection of the Dey-Dey Road and the Maralinga – Watson bitumen road. The next morning, we were met at the southern Maralinga gate by Roger Petersen, who along with his wife Pricilla are the Maralinga caretakers. Roger escorted us to the northern gate showing us the airfield and other sites along the way which was great for those who had not been there before.

We were due to be accompanied along the Emu Road by Jeremy LeBois, the Chairman of the Maralinga Tjarutja Trust, but unfortunately, he was unavailable at the time and he gave his permission for us to drive the Emu Road un-accompanied, such is his trust in us to avoid areas of cultural significance, which we appreciated.

We visited and photographed 15 sites before reaching Emu airstrip, the drone team could only photograph 4 sites due to restrictions and wind conditions.

The next 3 days were spent photographing 9 sites around Lake Meramangye, all were successful as both the surface and the drone teams completed all sites.

One patch of Buffel grass was asked to be inspected by Adam Wood at the following co-ordinates- 52 785224E 6837019N and was found to be sprayed and now dead.

The next 2 days were on the Anne Beadell Highway from Emu to Coober Pedy where we photographed 13 sites from the surface while the Drone Team completed 7 sites only due to windy conditions.

Another patch of Buffel grass was inspected at 53 273807E 6804041N and was found to be sprayed and dead.

We found four live Buffel grass plants on the northern side of the highway from our Vegetation site – 53 381536E 6793399N which have been reported to Adam Wood.

The Field Trip was a great success except for the windy conditions which prevented some of the Drone operations, thank you to both teams in the manner in which they carried out their work.

Peter Facy

Trip Leader