

Friends of Merri Creek



NEWSLETTER

August–October
2003

Freeway court decision

On 4th July the Federal Court dismissed our challenge against the Merri Creek Freeway. The decision means that we have exhausted the legal avenues to stop the freeway.

This decision will come as a great disappointment to members and supporters after many years of hard struggle to protect the Merri Creek environment and our communities from the freeway.

The Commonwealth government will have to pay its own court costs as the Judge said we were "entitled to begin this action in the belief that there was a deficiency in the decision-making process."

We believe that neither the State nor the Commonwealth Governments properly considered the sensible, cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternative to a freeway. The alternative was a package of improvements to public transport and to the existing Hume Hwy, proposed by Prof. Bill Russell in 2001.

In court, the Commonwealth hid behind the State Government's false claims that the alternative to the freeway would cost too much. They said that the alternative to the freeway would cost \$800 million—four times its true amount. The Commonwealth is providing the State with the full cost of over \$300 million for the Freeway.

Some of what the campaign has achieved:

- A higher level of State Government commitment to a regional park along the Merri, north of the Ring Road.

Continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

Friends news	2
Greenpower on Merri Path	3
Merri Country	4
Journey to the source	5
Life members: Tony Faithfull	6
Plantings...	7
Events calendar	8

Creek saved from Rock Wall

We were surprised and angry when we heard about Melbourne Water's proposal to build a rock wall 80m long on the east bank of the Merri next to the Northcote Golf Course. This is where Melbourne Water previously removed a large number of willows, leaving the bank bare.

We had heard about the rock wall via the Merri Creek Management Committee who had been invited to a site meeting with Melbourne Water by Moreland Council. Melbourne Water had not invited MCMC or the Friends or provided any written material about the rock wall. MCMC, the co-ordinating body along the Creek, and the Friends were being excluded by Melbourne Water.

Our concerns with the Melbourne Water works were that they would be an eyesore when viewed from the opposite bank; that the in-stream ecology would be damaged; and that the Creek would not be able to develop a more natural form if it was "fixed" with rocks. We were also concerned that Melbourne Water had missed opportunities to revegetate after the willow clearance.

Continued on page 3

Friends of Merri Creek News

Streamteam Group is up and testing

The Friends' Streamteam group is testing the water quality of Merri Creek on the first Sunday of every month from 2-2.30pm just upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, North Fitzroy (enter from Miller Street). Melway map 30 C10. If you are interested, contact Chris Sullivan on 0439 884 030.

New newsletter design

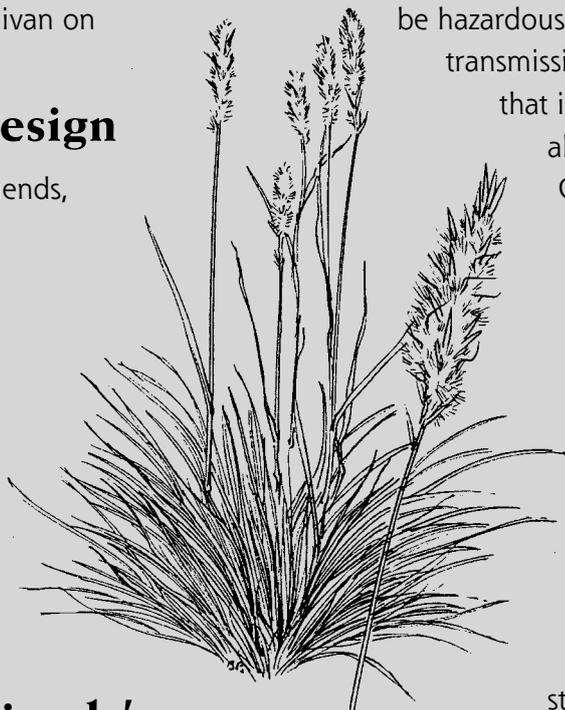
Unless you've just joined the Friends, you couldn't fail to notice the snazzy new look of the Friends' Newsletter for both this and the previous editions. This is due to the creative talents of Dean Lombard, who just joined the Friends and jumped right in to volunteer as Newsletter Coordinator. Thanks Dean for the wonderful new look that you've given our Newsletter.

Come to the Friends' Committee meeting

Members are welcome to come along and see how the Friends' Committee operates at their meetings on the first Wednesday of the month at the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, at 7.30pm. The Committee meeting dates have now been included in the events calendar (see page 8). Please call Ray Radford on 9380 8199 (BH) Monday-Thursday if you would like to know more.

Powernet Revegetation Plan

SPI PowerNet is currently consulting with the Friends about a comprehensive revegetation plan to plant more appropriate species to replace quite a number of trees that will unfortunately have to be removed as they are considered to be hazardous to the 220kV electricity transmission line. (This is the line that is carried by the big towers along the Merri and Edgars Creeks from Brunswick to Edwardes Lake.) The consultation has so far been excellent and has also involved the Merri Creek Management Committee and the councils of Darebin and Moreland. A revised draft is now being prepared for the consideration of the stakeholders, after which it will go to the PowerNet management. Thanks to Louise Hayward, Julie Mason, and Paul Prentice who assisted Ray Radford on this project.



Friends' Life Members awarded Centenary medals

Congratulations to three Friends' Life Members who were awarded Centenary medals for their service to the community: Bruce and Ann McGregor (City of Moreland) and Harold Mackrell (City of Yarra). ❀

Friends of Merri Creek Inc.

Association No. A0024645L

PO Box 93, Moreland 3058

Phone 9389 8633

Email admin@mcmc.org.au

Web www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc

Please note our new phone number

From August 14 our office
phone number is 9389 8633

Please update your records

Members' contributions to this newsletter are welcomed & encouraged

Contact Ray Radford during business
hours on 9380 8199 or send an
email to admin@mcmc.org.au

FREEWAY COURT DECISION

Continued from page 1

- Moving the freeway route further away from much of the Creek than the original route, which will reduce the immediate damage.
- Raising awareness in the community about the environmental effects of freeways.
- The development of a coherent alternative model to freeways that can be used in the future

I want to thank everyone who has helped over the years with the campaign. The result would have been much worse without your efforts. The broad support and caring of our community made the campaign possible and it is our caring community which will ultimately win over self-serving politicians and greedy developers.

In Portland Oregon the community pulled up a freeway running along the Willamette River to make a park. Maybe, one day, communities along the Merri will do the same.

Max Sargent, President



The Merri Creek south of Blyth Street, East Brunswick

Greenpower shines on Merri Path

A few years ago, when travelling on an unscenic route to Portland, I was amazed to see paddocks and paddocks full of windmills! I remembered once learning of a trial to meet the electricity needs of small townships with the use of wind energy. I have since learned that the windmills on my way to Portland were part of a scheme run by energy companies and promoted as "Greenpower."

Greenpower is derived from sources such as wind, hydro, solar and biomass methane (from landfills and other sources) and is aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. One night while walking my dog along Merri Path, I noticed a plaque on one of the light poles, saying, "Sunlight Solar Systems Australia," ie: this was a solar powered light & part of the Greenpower scheme. This excited me greatly

CREEK SAVED FROM ROCK WALL

Continued from page 1

Erosion was put as a reason for the rock work, but the bank shows little evidence of this over many years. Indeed, the instability the rocks were to combat would be created by the earthworks that Melbourne Water proposed. Also, we question the lack of input from in-stream ecologists into Melbourne Water civil engineering works like this project. Also in question is Melbourne Water's commitment to co-ordinating and consulting with other stakeholders in the catchment because of the way they have handled this project and as they have withdrawn from MCMC.

Following local media coverage, Melbourne Water contacted us and invited us to a site meeting to discuss our concerns. Our President requested a meeting with all stakeholders instead so that everyone would be informed about the proposal and we would be on a more equal footing.

As a result, Melbourne Water promised that the rock works will be limited to the very bottom of the bank and that the stability of the bank would be assessed before further rock work is considered. If they thought more rock work was necessary, Melbourne Water would consult with all stakeholders before proceeding. This was a reasonably good outcome that showed the win-win value of consultation.

Max Sargent

because, while I knew about Greenpower in people's homes, I was unaware of its use in public places.

The Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies (CERES) is situated on Merri Path and is committed to the use & demonstration of eco-sustainable practices.

Places like CERES and along Merri Creek generally have put in place various viable, eco-sustainable practices. With the addition of solar powered lights, places such as these are a beacon of a more environmentally and economically sound future!

Anthony Szasz
(Friends Planting Group member)

Merri Country...

Most of us are unacquainted with the wild and free upper reaches of the Merri Creek and know it only as an urban waterway, "tamed" as it were with paths, bridges, a dam, stormwater-drain outlets and (most important but least obvious) levee banks; so as the Friends welcome the Shire of Mitchell to the Merri Creek Management Committee, now is a good time to have a look at the Creek's earlier career.

It rises in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range near Heathcote Junction, amid River Red Gums, Narrow-leaved Peppermint, Swamp Gums, Blackwoods and Redbox trees. The local habitats are "plains riparian scrub, cliff/escarpment shrubland, stony knoll grasslands, plains grasslands and seasonal wetlands", according to the Merri Creek and Environs Strategy report. Just a small part of the fascinating diversity of our planet.

The highly significant wetland known as Hernes Swamp has unfortunately been degraded by draining and by use for cattle grazing, and can no longer support large populations of Ibis, Magpie Geese, Australian Bustards and Brolgas; and the Creek in this area is affected by salinity, erosion and loss of vegetation, and threatened by sewage runoff from Wallan.

The Bald Hill area is of national significance for its fauna such as the Grassland Earless Dragon and the Striped Legless Lizard; the Plains-wanderer, the Tawny Frogmouth and other birds. The Dragon in particular is endangered by the loss of grassland cover from sheep grazing, and an increase in fox numbers. A habitat link needs to be established between Hernes Swamp and Bald Hill, along both the Creek corridor and the railway reserve – making the trains doubly environment-friendly.

The Creek in this section contains "rock riffles, tessellated pavement, rock shelves forming small waterfalls and open water, pools and escarpments" (*Merri Creek Environment Strategy report*) – it sounds wonderful. A population of Freshwater Blackfish occurs in the reedy pools.

Downstream from Kalkallo there have been sightings of Freshwater Crayfish and Short-finned Eels; and below



The creek at Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield

Donnybrook where the stream becomes perennial, Flat-headed Gudgeon, Platypus and Fat-tailed Dunnarts. However industrial development and subdivision into farmlets must be prevented, and controls are required over foxes, stock and weeds, so as to avoid destruction of native fauna and habitat.

At Craigieburn the Merri absorbs the Malcolm and Aitken Creeks, then a rock-strewn, unnamed creek opposite Rushwood Drive. At the southern end of the grasslands, the tussock lined Curly Sedge Creek joins the Merri. Curly Sedge (*Carex tasmanica*), is the nationally significant plant which resides there.

Next come the Cooper St grasslands with their expanses of Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and some Eastern Grey Kangaroos to eat it! The ecological importance of this reserve and the Craigieburn one can hardly be overstated: they are the few remnants of the authentic original grassland vegetation of Victoria, hence the determined efforts to keep them free of weeds.

But before we hit suburbia at Mahoney's Rd and the shared pathways, sports grounds, community facilities, tramlines etc. begin, there is the grandeur of Galada Tamboore to inspire us to preserve the Merri valley for posterity, and even more for the fauna that vote with their feet and their wings that it is the place to be!

Paul Prentice
(Friends Committee Member)



Journey to the source of the Merri

Freya Mathews has written a wonderful personal account of her journey with three friends, in October 1999, to find the source of the Merri Creek. Starting where the Merri joins the Yarra River, they followed the watercourse through city, suburbs, outer industrial wastelands, farmscapes and the foothills of the Great Divide. Temples, goddesses, medieval churches, sacred birds, sanctuaries, holy waters and powerful sites manifested to the walkers along the way, until after seven days they reached the headwaters, where a final revelation awaited them.

Journey to the Source of the Merri reveals how the physical journey became partly a love quest, an adventure and an exercise in philosophical wayfaring that took the friends into uncharted metaphysical country at the heart of everyday terrain.

Her book can be obtained from the MCMC office, 2 Lee Street East Brunswick, at the discounted price of \$12.00. 🍀



Merri video on line

The Age newspaper has made a video about the Merri Creek that is accessible by those who have access to the internet and have speakers on their computer.



To see the video, go to www.domain.com.au and look for "video archive" click on this then click on "A Merri meander."

Friends' Life Members: Tony Faithfull

The fifth in a series of short histories of the Friends Life Members.

Tony Faithfull's interest in the environmental field started when he was very young. His mother was in the Native Plant Preservation Society and she used to drag him along to weeding days at a network of small wildflower sanctuaries around Melbourne, which the Society was trying to protect. Tony said, "I always enjoyed being in the bush—it gave me a huge sense of pleasure in observing and being in nature."

When he was ten, Tony went with his older brother, Ian, to join the Hawthorn Junior Field Naturalists. This group gave him a good introduction to ecology with practical hands-on participatory experience. Meetings included talks on birds, National Parks, animals, geology, etc. and there were monthly excursions to parks or other places of interest. For Tony, his experience with the Junior Naturalists, "was more important than any studies in learning about the environment."

Later, Tony went on the governing body of the Hawthorn Field Naturalists as editor and secretary. After turning 18, he joined the Mammal Survey Group of the Field Naturalists of Victoria. This group held survey trips all over the state, enabling members to learn lots about animal ecology. Tony followed these interests when he went to Monash University by studying biology and botany. However, he also followed another somewhat different interest: computer science.

While he was at Monash, Tony joined the Biology Society, which held regular field trips. Many members of this group have become significant figures in their fields and the group still holds occasional get-togethers. After an 18-month break travelling around Australia, Tony started a Masters of Environmental Science at Monash. However, halfway through the course he was employed by the Conservation Council of Victoria (now Environment Victoria) as a Project Officer for Natural Environmental Issues. While there, he wrote a letter that helped to initiate the eventually successful campaign against the Brunswick to Richmond powerline. After two years at CCV, he began a one year training program in habitat restoration at the LaTrobe University Wildlife Reserve.



Around this time, Tony joined the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association, where he volunteered to edit their journal, *Indigenotes*. During the five years that Tony was editor, *Indigenotes* became a highly respected journal within the restoration movement in Melbourne and its circulation rose from about 50 to over 500.

Tony's connection with the Merri Creek commenced at his next job, supervising an employment program to control weeds in the natural areas of Yarra Bend Park. Two and a half years later, in 1989, he became the first Revegetation Team Supervisor at Merri Creek Management Committee, where he remained for 13 years, becoming Manager for the last five years. At MCMC, Tony was able to use his experience as a naturalist and as a computer scientist to great effect.

Tony sees some of his achievements at MCMC as: the establishment of a highly-respected restoration program; the planting and on-ground achievements, such as returning wildlife and human enjoyment; maintaining participation from Councils in the MCMC; setting in train the membership of Mitchell Shire to MCMC; and his immense contribution to the campaign against the Merri Creek freeway.

In recognition of these achievements, the Friends awarded Tony a life Membership upon leaving MCMC in March 2002. Tony is now pursuing new directions, which include: consulting, live theatre, computer animation, political involvement with the Greens, and being a wizard at children's parties. Tony is married to Dimi and they live near the Creek in East Brunswick.

Ray Radford, Secretary

Wallaby, Magpie, MP and Black Cockatoo at plantings

The Friends planting group managed to break the drought with a very wet planting at Craigieburn Grasslands on 27 April, where we were watched over the whole time by a nearby Swamp Wallaby. Then, on 13 July some people felt the need for sun block at Merri Park wetland, where a real carnival atmosphere was created

Friends at the Merri Park planting on 13 July



by the sun, the marquee, a sizeable turnout and some boys kicking a football with young AFL footballer for the Collingwood Magpies, Mark McGough. Mark, who is a Friends member, also did some planting and came back for more two weeks later at Central Creek grasslands, along with the Federal Member for Wills, Kelvin Thomson. Kelvin, who is the Shadow Minister for the Environment, also attended the planting at Moomba Park Fawkner on 10 August.

Help needed

Friends of Merri Creek needs a voluntary bookkeeper for half a day per three months.

Familiarity with MYOB software would be useful

If you can help, please contact Max on 9480 5492

Friends at the Central Creek planting on 27 July



Finally, at an unscheduled MCMC planting at CERES on Friday 1 August, three Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos were seen nearby and we noted that a White-browed Scrubwren was nesting in one of the previously planted Poas.

Barbecue at Merri Park on 13 July



As you can see, the Friends planting mornings offer much more than just planting.

Come along and see for yourself by choosing one from our events calendar (see overleaf). 🌱

The Scrubwren nest found near CERES on 1 August



Friends of Merri Creek events calendar

AUGUST

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.

SEPTEMBER

Wednesday 3—Friends Committee meeting

MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, 7.30pm. All members welcome.

Sunday 7—Litter Clean-Up

Keady St Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 17 J8. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Sunday 7—Streamteam water quality testing

upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Contact Chris Sullivan 0439 884 030.

Saturday 13—Friends of Koorie Kids Planting

Sir Douglas Nicholls Reserve, Watt St Northcote, 10am-2pm. Melway map 30 E3. Help restore this remnant site and expand last year's planting (at which a number of Friends members assisted). Phone Mathew Hamilton 0412 626 697.

Sunday 14—Planting & BBQ

Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield, enter from Hatty Court (*with MCMC*), 10am-1pm. Melway map 7 K6. Contact Barb Miles 9380 8199 (w).

Sunday 21—Creekside Planting & BBQ

Rushall Reserve, end of Holden St Nth Fitzroy (*with Choppers of Rushall Reserve & MCMC*), 10am-1pm. Melway map 30 D11. Phone Robin Merrick on 0418 475 238

Sunday 28—Planting & BBQ

Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill (*with MCMC and Friends of the Quarries*), 10am-1pm. Melway map 30 G12. Phone Ruth Sheil 9489 5259 or Ben North 9486 6219.

OCTOBER

Wednesday 1—Friends Committee meeting

MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, 7.30pm. All members welcome.

Sunday 5—Litter Clean-up

St Georges Rd North Fitzroy, 10am-12noon. Melway map 30 C10. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Sunday 5—Friends site Weeding

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

Sunday 5—Streamteam water quality testing

upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Contact Chris Sullivan 0439 884 030.

Sunday 12—Handweeding

Merri Park Wetland, rear of Sumner Ave Northcote (*with MCMC*), 10am – 1pm. Melway map 30 C8. Phone Pascale Pitot 9484 5752.

Sunday 26—Walk, Talk and Gawk

Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield. Organised by the Victorian National Parks Association. Non VNPA members \$5 and bookings are essential, phone Geoff Durham on 9523 5559.

NOVEMBER

Sunday 2—Litter Clean-Up

Moreland Road Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 A5. Phone Paul Prentice 9489 5062.

Sunday 2—Streamteam water quality testing

upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Contact Chris Sullivan 0439 884 030.

Wednesday 5—Friends Committee meeting

MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, 7.30pm. All members welcome.

Saturday 16—Friends Annual General Meeting, CERES

Education Centre Lee St East Brunswick, 2.00pm.

DECEMBER

Sunday 7—Litter Clean-Up

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

Sunday 7—Friends site Weeding

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

Sunday 7—Streamteam water quality testing

upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Contact Chris Sullivan 0439 884 030.

