



Walitj Meil Walk Trail opening – Friends of the Porongurup Range Chairpersons’ remarks – 19 Nov 2017

Welcome, I am Judy MacKinnon chairperson of the Friends and we are pleased to see so many here today to help up to celebrate the opening of the Walitj Meil Walk Trail.

I will introduce those taking part in our opening ceremony.

Traditional Owner Glen Colbung, Deputy Chair of the Aboriginal Legal Service and founder of the Southern Aboriginal Corporation founded in 1983, and it architect behind the \$1.3 billion deal between the State Government and the South West Aboriginal Lands and Sea Council.

Damian Yarran, founder of Baldja Maar Foundation, a mentoring program for disengaged youth.

Peter Hartley, District Manager, Parks and Wildlife Service, DBCA

Rick Wilson, Federal Member for O’Connor since 2013.

Glen Colbung will be joined by Damian Yarran, who is also playing the diggeridoo, to give the welcome to Country.

Chairperson’s remarks.

The idea for the Walitj Meil (eagle eye) Walk Trail began in 2015. The FOPR planned to host an eco tourism forum for the Porongurup Community to discuss possible visitor activity which would provide economic benefits without compromising the biodiversity of the Porongurup Range.

In the same time frame, by remarkable coincidence, the office of Rick Wilson suggested we apply for an Australian Government’s Community Heritage and Icons Grant which was open to community groups involved with National Heritage listed property.

As a result of the success of the submission made by then Chairperson Lorna Long, the project commenced under her guidance. Lorna was the first to suggest the Wedge-tailed Eagle theme which became a certainty after meetings with the Noongar elders who emphasised the importance of the eagle in Minang culture.

The Friends’ first met with Noongar community members when we came together for a Connecting Cultures event in November 2014 held in partnership with SCNRM’s Cultural Officers, Karen Herlihy, Chris Spurr and Graeme Simpson.

In May 2015 the Friends hosted an Aboriginal Heritage Survey with Ethno-archaeologist Paul Greenfeld commissioned by SCNRM at Twin Creeks.

When we commenced the heritage trail project, SCNRM organised Information Sessions with the Noongar communities at this national park site to plan interpretative signs for the heritage trail. Thanks to all involved including SCNRM, the Noongar community, Luke Coney and Jacki Baxter for their contribution to these sessions.

The trail signs about bush foods and medicines and the story of the Mummari Men were developed from these talks.

The first of these [signs] is the Mighty Marri, with an illustration by Margaret Pieroni, and photos by Michael Morcombe and Keith Lightbody. Michael and Keith's photos are also on several other signs.

I particularly like the signs with the local Minang interpretation of the stories of how the Blue Wren received its colour, and about the fearless Chitty-Chitty who challenges the Wardong, with photos donated by Keith Lightbody and Chris Tzaros.

Heritage trail committee, Maggie Shanklin, Loxley Fedec, Judy O'Neill, Lucia Quearry and me, and as well as other contributors, wrote or corrected drafts for the signs with what seemed like endless rewrites and quests for images.

Maggie, through persistent research, found information and photographs on the National Park declaration, the Gondwanian relic Velvet Worm, the observations by naturalist James Drummond in his 1848 visit to the Porongurup Range, and a description of the Karri as ***The Grandest Tree***, by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller in 1867.

Loxley Fedec had alerted us to the Velvet worm called *Kumbadjena Kaata*, (with Noongar translation means *big foot in the mountain*). This, together with James Drummond's observations, reflect Loxley's interest in the "*Porongurup underground*" which forms part of the Friend's Citizen Science project.

The ***Karri Flowering*** sign features a blossom photo by Alex George. The karri tree, growing in Alex's garden in Kardinya, was rescued as a seedling about 60 years ago from the Tree in the Rock carpark in the Porongurup.

Yate was the first Western Australian eucalypt collected in 1792 and is one of the world's hardest timbers. We were delighted when Malcolm French provided us with photos of blossom and local Yate trees for the **Notable Yate** sign.

The three threatened Black-cockatoos which visit the Park are featured on a sign which clearly explains the differences between the very similar Baudin's and Carnaby's Cockatoos. Also look for the Noongar story as to how the Red-tailed Black-cockatoo acquired a red tail.

Thank you to the many photographers who donated images for use along the trail.

On behalf of the Heritage Trail Committee, many thanks to Peter Hartley and Luke Coney for their help. Luke met with members of the committee on many occasions at the trail site and also designed and supervised the development of the route of the forest section.

We thank Jacki Baxter and Tamara Beers who are with us here today.

Jacki Baxter is the Interpretation, Marketing and eMedia Coordinator, Visitor Communication Branch at Parks and Wildlife. Jacki guided us at every step in the development of the signs from our first contact with her through to final proofs. Her patience was admirable.

Tamara Beers Interpretation, Marketing and eMedia Project Officer used her remarkable talent to turn words and images into the high quality walk trail signs you see in the park today.

On behalf of the heritage trail committee, we wish to thank Klaus and Lisa Braun for their valuable contributions in the development of the maps for the trail and the National Park and surrounds which are included in the Walitj Meil Walk Trail Visitor Guide.

Thank you to Garry Mulder for today's assistance. Photographer and Friends' committee member Bo Janmaat for taking today's photos. Thank you to the Porongurup Community Association for their outstanding catering.

The Friends of the Porongurup Range thank our Heritage Trail coordinator Maggie Shanklin, for her enthusiasm, energy, persistence and attention to detail throughout this long project, as it has been Maggie's amazing efforts which have resulted in a walk trail we can be very proud of. Today's Walitj Meil opening was also organised by Maggie, thanks again Maggie.

While Loxley is presenting Maggie with a small gift, will you please join me in a round of applause for Maggie.

Protecting the unique ecosystem is a priority of the DBCA and Friends of the Porongurup Range. The Porongurup National Park is now used for research, education and passive ecotourism. We hope visitors will enjoy walking along the Walitj Meil trail, learning about the heritage of the Porongurup Range and listening to the sounds of the forest.

Rick Wilson will now speak before the official ribbon cutting with Traditional Owner, Glen Colbung.

Thank you Rick and Glen, that ends formal proceedings

Thank you all for joining us in the celebration of the opening of the trail

Please join us for morning tea. The district is fortunate that the Porongurup Community Association members are a local catering group as well. They have organised their signature wattle seed biscuits, bush tomato muffins and other bush foods for morning tea in the gazebo down the hill to the right.

As the trail is now officially open, please take a walk!

Judy MacKinnon Chairperson
Nov 19 2017

