

A Profile of your Secretary

I was born in suburban south-east Melbourne in the middle of last Century, so close to the hospital that I was wheeled home in a pram. Fortunately, because my parents never owned a car.

My earliest aspiration was to work in the Wheaties factory so I could get the toys they put into the boxes in those days. When Wheaties stopped doing that, I was forced to look for another career. After a brief stint as a bass guitarist in a mediocre rock group and a longer gig as a surveyor's assistant in a tunnel of Melbourne's new sewerage scheme, I found myself at university studying physics. In my academic pursuits, I share much with Jawaharlal Nehru: we both switched from physics to botany early in our degrees – he went on to become India's first Prime Minister and I went on to become ...the Secretary of Friends of the Prom, two positions equally at the pinnacle of a working life.

On my way to becoming Secretary I had a long career in Ecological Science and, despite retirement, it is ongoing – I just don't get paid any more.

That could have been very different had I chosen a more sensible pathway in biochemistry after university – the prospects of a job were far better in biochemistry than in ecology, and they still are.

However, I was greatly influenced at university by an outstanding ecologist by the name of Bob Parsons. Bob did some of his earliest work at the Prom in the 1960s. He had a very relaxed attitude to life and teaching, and only owned two pairs of shoes: thongs and something else (which he would wear only when not allowed to wear thongs –

he was such a good customer of Dunlop Rubber that when they stopped making thongs, they sent him their entire supply in his size). Thongs are still an essential part of the kit of any respectable ecologist. But I digress.

I like to think that my passion for nature, the outdoors and the Prom came from camping trips to the Prom in late summers of the mid-70s (after the hordes had left), during university years. But I don't remember much of that. I blame sun exposure, but alcohol may have had something to do with it.

Other important influences were weekly trips in Grade 6 to the horticultural school in Hughesdale, and my mum, who was an avid gardener, growing almost all our vegetables in a backyard the size of a postage stamp.

In my career I have worked in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales on vegetation mapping, threatened

species conservation, plant pathology, weed management and dendroclimatology (a good word to get in Scrabble). I have also dabbled in taxonomy, giving names to about a dozen plants and three children, the latter being my crowning achievement.

I joined Friends of the Prom after moving back to Victoria in 2021, after 24 years in New South Wales. It is such a privilege to be working at the Prom,

which has so many challenges (from tourist pressure, past management and an uncertain future climate). To think that we may be helping the rangers even just a little, is very satisfying.

I look forward to passing the baton of Secretary to the next person ... hint, hint.



Above: An early (hairier) incarnation during a field trip to the Stirling Ranges in WA. The cap is not making implausible claims about my intelligence – it came from the Café Einstein in Vienna, which I can highly recommend.

***Editor's note: This autobiographical note came at the editor's suggestion.**

The series on FOTP legends including Mary Walker, Jim Whelan and Keith McDougall is designed to provide an insight on the folk you will work with on your next activity.



FRIENDS
— OF THE —
PROM

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NEWSLETTER
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MAY 2026

Grassland Restoration

A keen group of 20 volunteers, including five new to this activity, enjoyed a beautiful autumn day on the Isthmus – with, miraculously, no wind. Brooke issued dire warnings of steep sand dunes, as our new Site 27 was further along the Sou'West Track than our previous sites, so we all managed to board the 4 best all-terrain vehicles. Our task was to plant a variety of seeds that Brooke had collected, e.g. Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), Billy-buttons (*Craspedia variabilis*), Sticky Long-heads (*Podotheca angustifolia*), Wallaby-grass (*Rytidosperma setaceum*) and Kangaroo

Grass (*Themeda triandra*), in the 5 prepared exclusion plots, which we first cleared.

We then planted further seeds in cubbies we built with fallen tea-tree branches – always a favourite activity. Brooke's team had prepared the site for this activity by removing unsafe overhead branches and chain sawing them into suitable lengths for cubby building. We were lucky to have no wind, as even the slightest breeze blew the tiny, light seeds away, and so we prepared furrows and while one person sprinkled in seeds, a second immediately lightly covered them with soil.

Weeding of coastal tea tree and coastal wattle seedlings sprouting after the controlled burn was completed after lunch and soon we drove back a short way to a previously planted site for weeding and checking on survival rates of our plantings – only moderately encouraging after a dry late summer and autumn. Old friendships and connections were renewed as a few of the newbies recognised each other – it was a very lovely day.

Karin Ruff



Top: inspecting cubbies; Brooke Addresses the troop

Bottom: Anastasia, Jenny and Peter proud of their completed Cubby; Lynne, Jenny and Karin in front of a successfully weeded patch

Beach Clean-up News

Twenty-four Friends of the Prom volunteers this year joined the Australia's annual beach clean-up. The good news is there was less rubbish to pick up, which Ranger Maggie Brown suggested was partly due to visitors taking care of their own rubbish. Rangers report more people bringing back rubbish for disposal.

FOTP data of rubbish collected is sent to Tangaroa Blue Foundation, co-founded in 2004 by Margaret River dive instructor Heidi Tait, who was

alarmed at the level of plastic found in the water.

She established the Australian Marine Debris Initiative to inspire behaviour change, innovation and communities to make data-driven decisions that improve ocean health. In Maori and Polynesian mythology Tangaroa is the god of the ocean and sea creatures, who said "if you look after me, I will look after you". The work is based on a national data base, which is a large citizen science-based

initiative. It is the largest marine data base in the Southern hemisphere used by Government and industry to inform policy and environmental decisions. Tangaroa's work has ranged from advocating for banning single use plastic to container deposit schemes.

FOTP's data report was carefully co-ordinated by Nursery co-ordinator Mary Walker and the data uploaded by Ranger Maggie.

*Top left: The Count with Judy, Mary, Michelle and Jen; right: Darby Beach crew
Below: Karin addresses the clean-up crew*



Beach Clean-up Reports

Olga's Hourigans Beach crew

Olga, Pat, Bob and Michalina chose Hourigans Beach and when we arrived, the tide was completely out and the mud flats were covered with tiny, crawling crabs. It was very difficult to avoid them! We walked about 6kms overall. Bob and Pat headed towards the southern end of the beach while Olga and Michalina walked in the opposite direction. At first glance, there did not seem to be much rubbish, but it was not long before Pat and Bob struck a "mother lode". Olga and Michalina found most of their rubbish caught up amongst the fallen tea trees or tangled in the seaweed.

Together we collected four bags of rubbish with a total weight of 30kgs.

The most interesting find for the day was a large fishing net connected to a pole which was around 3 metres long. It was too large to drag back to the car. Pat also found a beautiful, fully intact nautilus shell which was definitely not rubbish! When we left the beach, the tide was coming in at a surprisingly rapid rate. Our walk back to the car was interrupted by a defiant tiger snake. It was keeping a close eye on us and took a while to move away from the track.

Michelle's Darby Beach Crew

Our crew set off along a picturesque track to the unheralded beauty of Darby Beach. After confronting a discarded plastic something lodged in the sand, as we hit the beach, the job

ahead looked easy with no rubbish in sight. That was before Judy and Quentin wandered over to the creek below the enormous sand dune to start collecting abandoned fishing nets and host of assorted rubbish.

In the end, with Jen, John and Michelle, our group returned with 26.5 kilograms of assorted rubbish. We left behind the plastic at the track entrance and a section of a walking track washed ashore on the northern side of the beach.

Karin's Cotters Beach crew

A beautiful sunny windless day – magic at Cotters Beach for our group. Two went north and two south, with very little rubbish found compared to past years.

Top: Hourigan's Beach crew before and after the haul; bottom left: Glenn and Quintan's haul at Darby beach, right: Cotters Beach haul



Beach Clean-up Reports cont.

Keith's Squeaky Beach crew

Squeaky Beach was almost Squeaky Clean as Lisa, Sigrid, Charlie, Geoff and Keith did their best to find what little rubbish was present. There were plenty of tissues along the track, one disposable nappy, three socks and endless fragments of green plastic rope. The largest items were a wooden post

full of nails (in the sand) and 9 m of cable; all amounting to 7 kg.

Anastasia's Picnic and Whisky Beaches crew

The two Peters, Wilson and Ritesh found that Picnic and Whisky beaches were surprisingly clean. Picnic blessedly had almost no rubbish. As a reward for all this hard work, the Two Peters had a

swim (not together). Whisky, too, was mostly pristine, with notable rubbish being two large pieces of timber that were too big to carry. The poor creek was home to a large cube of rubber and 230 tiny pieces of plastic. With a lack of rubbish to collect, a few sea spurge were weeded on the way. The two beaches only yielded a combined 5 kilograms of plastic.



From top left: Whisky beach crew, sorting and recording at Stockyard camp; the Two Peters, John's prize haul

Nursery News—the Hardening-off Shed



Our project to replace the nursery's new hardening-off shed was formally completed on Thursday 19th March, when a gathering of Park staff and our volunteers watched nursery co-ordinator Mary Walker cut the ribbon and declare it officially open.

The hardening-off shed is an important part of the nursery team's work. Historically, the Prom trees are all grown and collected under team leader Mary Walker's careful guidance. The volunteers work on the 850 plus seedlings placed on the tables and watered, well-protected from the external elements and wildlife. The old shed was rusting badly and the only thing preventing it from collapsing was the wire netting. The new timber rectangular portal framed shed covers the same footprint as the old one.

At the opening, there was no champagne, however we put on morning tea for attendees, who included Parks Vic District Manager Andy Davies and Area Chief Brett Mitchell, Campground Maintenance Team Leader Marcus Grubb and two of his team, Cam Downing and Shaun Causer, and of course eight volunteer members of the nursery crew.

This project was a successful collaboration between Parks staff and Friends of the Prom. The arrangement

was that FOTP pay for all materials and Parks Vic build the shed using their skilled workforce. Friends of the Prom were fortunate to receive a 2025 Coastcare Victoria Community Grant for the project. As our Gippsland Coastcare co-ordinator, Laura Town-Hopkinson, thankfully encouraged us to apply for a grant, Park managers gave in-principal support to the project right from the start, supplying letters of support for our grant application and making their skilled staff available to build the shed. Our gathering was an opportunity to thank all contributors to the project.

Cam Downing managed the project on-site, including developing the project through discussions with nursery volunteers and park staff, demolishing the original shed, working with Shaun on the structural building work, installing the shed's wire netting cladding and shade cloth and installing the watering system.

Shaun Causer, as a qualified carpenter, prepared the initial structural design sketches and list of materials, set out the building site ready for construction, built the timber shed structure, assisted by Cam, and worked with Cam to install the wire netting cladding.

Cam and Shaun (assisted by

Daniel Gunn from time to time) were the principal players who translated an idea into reality. Glen Trevorrow, a semi-retired professional builder of sheds and one of our members, confirmed Shaun's structural design and suggested a few practical design improvements.

The nursery volunteers temporarily relocated the plants that were inside the old hardening-off shed and then returned them to the new one once it was completed. Luckily there was frequent rain and no very hot spells while the plants were outdoors and so very few seedlings were lost. The volunteers also lent a hand doing small jobs during construction.

The final cost of the project for Friends of the Prom was \$7,050, of which \$5,880 were covered by the Coastcare grant, and the balance came from our accumulated savings. Parks Victoria's in-kind contribution is estimated to be at least that amount again, considering their labour, plant and tools. The 18-month project came in on time and under budget because we were able to recycle the shade cloth on the old shed.

By Bill Hansen (modest Project co-Manager with Park Vic's Cam Downing)

Sea Spurge at Squeaky Beach

With the Rangers' advice on timing, FOTP was back in action weeding at Squeaky Beach in late April. Team Leader Peter Wilson compiled the following report:

The activity was over two days from Friday 17 to Saturday 18 April.

On Friday morning a small team of six gathered at the Squeaky car park. At the end of the Squeaky track we split into two groups, with one covering Mary's patch and above the rocks, where the Scouts once weeded around 2019. The other group covered the area just south of the track next to the creek.

Once around the corner and onto the main dunes, good progress was made, with the weed now only about one per metre up to the first blowout (180M south of the track).

Over the back of the dunes near the blowout some of the largest plants were growing amongst some of the best-looking cushion bushes I've ever seen.

Lunch was taken at a high point on the dunes overlooking the bay and Norman Island. Work continued

after lunch, when we got to halfway between the two blowouts and called it a day at 1:30pm. The strong wind and occasional light shower made for tiring work and all were happy to finish when we did.

Saturday

A larger team of 17 gathered at the car park with a few new to the activity — the Hunt family and Luke who was once a ranger at the Park. Continuing from where we left on Friday, weeding slowed as we came into areas not weeded as frequently as the northern half of the dunes. Lunch was taken on the beach near the fragile dunes sign.

Working further south we came to the area that was only weeded once six months ago and not weeded for some years before that. The large plants we had pulled out last time had dumped a lot of seed, resulting in dense regrowth at about a plant every 10cm.

Slow progress was made until 2:30 and about 170M short of the end of the dunes before we quit for the day. Peter Mac and helpers spent an hour at the far end weeding above the rocks, where we have kept sea spurge at very

low levels for some years now.

While walking off the beach, four Hooded Plovers (one a chick) were spotted near the corner as we approached the end on the dunes. Katrin took a few photos to upload to Birdlife Australia.

Sunday

We had an optional session listed for Sunday in case any wished to continue weeding. As the weather was good, I took a walk down to Picnic and weeded along the first 120M of the dunes. The plan with Picnic, while we focus on Squeaky, is to hold our own and not allow the weed to seed. Picnic remains in reasonable condition, but further small weeding activities are needed to stop the weed regaining dense regrowth.

With the fire restrictions over, we put up the shelter walls at night and lit the fire on both Friday and Saturday evenings. With Paul, Judy, Trevor, Peter and Peter there on Friday it was good to sit back in the warmth of the fire and chat about education and hearing that Preps were the most difficult age to teach.

Left: Hooded Plovers at Squeaky—our efforts to clear habitat are working (Photos: Katrin McMahon and Peter Wilson.)



Sea Spurge control at Cotters Beach

Another step in reducing sea spurge was taken in April, with Friends of the Prom members Karin and Thomas helping Ranger Team Leader, Nature Conservation, Maggie Brown, and her team to release a new fungus to control the plant in two areas at Cotters Beach. Monitoring occurs up to 6 months after release and then possibly a few more times.

The CSIRO delivered the biocontrol agent to Tidal River on April 20th and the next day it was released at Cotters Beach. Ranger Maggie will be back at Cotters Beach in July to check the progress of the fungus to record the presence or absence of characteristic dark brown to black leaf and stem lesions caused by the biocontrol agent. The CSIRO said in a statement “this national-scale initiative aims to deploy the foliar blight fungus *Venturia paralias* as a biocontrol agent against sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*).”

The good news is that the fungus will slow plant growth, but Ranger Maggie stressed it will take time and is seen as a complement rather than replacement for existing control measures like manual weeding and spraying. The CSIRO noted: “Biocontrol is not a quick fix. Evidence from Victoria and Tasmania shows that visible impacts on sea spurge, such as reduced

plant health and cover, may take at least three years to emerge.” Biocontrol represents a long-term, sustainable approach to weed management, with benefits accumulating gradually over years to decades.

The broader project to control sea spurge is funded by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Landcare Victoria is also involved in the project, which project seeks to overcome the limited natural dispersal of the fungus by establishing a mass-culturing pipeline at CSIRO’s plant pathogen laboratory in Canberra and the subsequent supply of the agent to community participants for environmental release.

The ultimate goals of the project are to:

- Achieve widespread distribution and establishment of the fungus across Australia’s southern coastline.
- Reduce sea spurge infestations.
- Protect biodiversity and culturally significant sites.
- Build community capacity for long-term weed management.

The fungus was originally isolated from diseased sea spurge plants in their native range of France. Through extensive host-specificity studies

undertaken by the CSIRO, the fungus was shown to be highly specific to sea spurge and poses no danger to Australian flora. It was approved for release into the Australian environment for the biocontrol of sea spurge in 2020 by the Australian regulator.

The fungus infects the leaves of sea spurge, causing characteristic brown leaf lesions. From infected leaves it moves to the stem, where it causes dark brown to black lesions that progressively elongate along the stem. Under humid and mild conditions, the fungus produces many spores that spread to nearby sea spurge plants by wind and rain to begin new infections.

If the fungus establishes widely and causes severe disease symptoms, it can decrease the reproductive output of sea spurge plants and become an important addition to existing sea spurge management practices in Australia.

Over time, widespread establishment of the fungus is expected to reduce the vigour and reproductive capacity of sea spurge populations, which should in turn reduce the frequency and intensity of other control efforts required.

John Durie

Left: spraying in the middle of a patch and tagging; right: refilling the spray bottles



Sea Spurge control cont.



Above: spraying with one metre gaps (Photos by John Durie)

School Visits in March and April

FOTP members including Bill Hansen, Paul Stampton, Keith McDougall (Secretary) and Karin Ruff (President) hosted three school visits in March and April.

Students from Drouin Secondary, Geelong Lutheran College and Wangaratta Cathedral received on site

introductions to the Prom, the work of FOTP, how to work with iNaturalist and a broad overview of the biodiversity of the region.

FOTP receives numerous emails during the year from schools asking to help with planting or weeding.

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a very warm welcome to the following new members:

Glenda Shomaly and Neil Tucker
Mollie Long
Ritesh Mittal
Jimmy Carr

DONATIONS

Friends of the Prom has benefited from generous donations by well-wishers over the past few years. We have been using these donations to encourage scientific research at the Prom through our program of an annual grant to a tertiary student to help with expenses. We have now made the process of donating easier by registering our organisation with Landcare Victoria's Deductible Gift Recipient Fund.

You can make a tax-deductible donation via Landcare Victoria's fundraising page <https://landcarevictoria.org.au/donate>; alternatively, scan the QR-code below using your smartphone.

Please make sure you nominate 'Friends of the Prom' under 'I would like to support a particular group' on the first page of the online donation form. This will ensure that Landcare passes on your donation to us.



MEMBERSHIP FEES

You don't have to be a financial member to participate in our activities. But if you have been to some activities and want to continue volunteering with us, we urge you to become a financial member.

Your membership fees keep us afloat, as without them we cease to exist. The fees we levy are set as low as we can make them, and they only just cover our basic running costs, such as public liability insurance and unavoidable IT expenses.

To renew your membership, please contact our Treasurer, Peter McDowell at ***membership@friendsoftheprom.org.au***

You can pay via Direct Deposit to our Westpac account:
Account Name: Friends of the Prom Inc.
BSB: 033 152
Account Number: 188795

Single: \$15,
Couples and families : \$20,

Please remember to provide your full name as a reference so we can identify you on the bank statement.

FEEDBACK FROM YOU

If you have any thoughts on what we do, our activities, or matters raised in this newsletter, we would love to hear from you – please put your comments in an email to the Secretary:

info@friendsoftheprom.org.au

Photos: Please note that all effort has been made to attribute photos throughout

EVENTS CALENDAR MAY TO JULY 2026

Except for the nursery, a reminder with more detail about these weekend and weekday activities will be emailed to members closer to the date.

May: Sat 16	Tree Planting at Airbase
June: Fri 12	Grassland Restoration
June: Sat 13	Cultural Heritage Workshop
July: Fri 10	Grassland Restoration
July: Sat 25	AGM (venue to be advised)
July: Sun 26	National Tree Day planting at Tidal River

WEEKDAY ACTIVITIES

Every second Thursday, rain, hail or shine –
meet 9:30 am at the nursery compound in Tidal River –
check website for dates

REGISTERING WITH PARKCONNECT

Please remember to register for all activities on *ParkConnect* and make sure you have a **Working with Children Check** loaded on to *ParkConnect*. WWCCs are now compulsory (unless you are volunteering with us for the first time).

If you need assistance with navigating your way through *ParkConnect* or the WWCC process, you can contact *Friends of the Prom's* Peter McDowell on membership@friendsoftheprom.org.au.

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