

## Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca Working-bee report, 2024

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca is working with PWS to care for, maintain and interpret natural and historic heritage at Melaleuca and Claytons Corner in Southwest Tasmania. Our branch was formed in 2009.

There are no roads to this area, the waterways being the local means of transport, giving the place its unique character. Challenges faced here are presented by the west coast weather and the relative isolation. Transport and freight by air or sea are major costs and always require rigorous forward planning and flexibility.

### ***Working bee, March 2024***

Fourteen FoM volunteers gathered at Melaleuca for our annual working bee, this year held from 13 ~ 20 March, funded by FoM. Ten volunteers arrived by air and four by boat. After settling in and preparing for the jobs to come, we gathered on the banks of Moth Creek while Ranger Steve Locke delivered the induction and safety briefing with Regional Volunteer Facilitator, Emmalene Maher, followed by a barbeque at the waterside. We enjoyed working with PWS volunteer caretakers, Debra and Russell Brown, who enthusiastically joined the teamwork. It was also great to welcome our retired past Ranger for the SW, Ian Marmion, returning to Melaleuca as a volunteer.

The team was joined by Dan Rowe, recently appointed ranger for this area. Melaleuca will be his patch now that Steve has taken on Bruny Island. Dan is a proficient coxswain, so he was in charge of boat transport to Claytons.



Briefing and Barbeque at Moth Creek. Photo: Chris Creese

FoM's main jobs this year were restitution of the fireplace at Claytons; painting the roof at Kings; shed repairs; repair and repaint the Stevenson Screen; maintenance at Willsons' lease; routine annual brush-cutting, weeding, draining as well as fish-oiling of heritage tin-mine objects.

Bricks and mortar were delivered to Claytons by Bob Cleary on *Georges Bay* and other equipment for our working-bee was transported to Melaleuca by Janet and Geoff aboard *Poinduk* and Andrew Boon aboard *Juliet*.

Selection of volunteers was based on relevant skills: builder; bricklayer, painter; construction white card holders; engineer; mechanical skills; radio communications engineer; safe work with brushcutter and heights; photography; first aid and remote area first aid. Our group included two new recruits—Mark Devine (brickie), and Justin Marshall (biologist and roof painter). Other volunteers were Janet (team leader) and Geoff Fenton (workshop manager, Kings), Chris Creese (works manager, Willsons), Rob Banfield (Claytons team leader), Richard Tatnell (builder), David Butler, Rik Head, Mel Jack, Andrew Boon (electrical), Ian Marmion and shipwrights Ken and Lauren Jones.

Volunteers stayed in the Charles King Memorial bushwalkers hut, at Willsons', Karina's, Kings' and on board boats, *Juliet*, *Poinduk* and several in tents in the campground. We greatly appreciate Barbara Willson's hospitality, accommodating two volunteers. Thanks to Bob and Sue who freighted equipment to Melaleuca and donated some excess food to the crew.

### ***Routine jobs***

Brush-cutting is always an important part of our program, but heavy work. Ian did a terrific job clearing the firebreaks and vegetation around bushwalkers huts, tracks, mine sites and private leases.



Brushcutting, and clearing 'Panama Canal'. Photos: Janet Fenton, Chris Creese

Draining: David, the drainer-in-chief, quietly set about clearing drains that needed attention. His main achievement this year was the large and very overgrown drain east of Willsons. The 'Panama Canal' emerged after a day of hard hacking through the jungle and soggy digging in the drain.



Fish-oiling program: At our working bee last year, the program of oiling heritage machinery around the mine sites was ‘on hold’ due to inclement weather. Debra and Russell set to, all dressed in white protective coveralls and armed with wire brushes and fish-oil. The program is now back on track, thanks Deb and Russell for a splendid job.



Electrical: Late in 2023

Andrew drew up a comprehensive proposal for re-organising the (currently marginal) PWS Quarters electrical system. This offer is still being considered by PWS.

On site, Andrew and Rik surveyed the wind-generator cable and conduit for possible future use – verdict: no good. Tested the two second-hand solar panels under the CKM Hut, rated at 260W (38V o/c, 8.8A s/c). These measured better than spec, so are very usable, but will need a separate regulator. Another option would be to use one panel for each bushwalkers' hut and provide USB charging outlets in each hut. Tested and tagged 240V power tools and cables.

### ***Claytons***

Work progressed at the historic Claytons cottage, where Win and Clyde Clayton lived from 1962~1976. Thanks to Rangers Steve and Dan for transport aboard *Leptonyx*.



Repairs to the fireplace and external chimney were a major job this year. Bricklayer Mark Devine and team took apart the unsound portions of the existing fireplace, removing loose bricks and corroded lintels. Replaced deteriorated bricks with like. The old rusted lintels had expanded,

causing problems, so these were replaced. For this work the heavy welded steel chimney was temporarily raised off the fireplace. Chris made up stainless flashings to properly drain rainwater away from the valleys between the house-walls and the base of the chimney, the past cause of the fireplace's problems. Fitting was an awkward job. Andrew saved the situation by ordering, via Barbara's internet, a right-angle drill attachment which miraculously arrived the next day via Par Avion! Thanks Boon brothers.



Other tasks achieved:

- Cleared Mt Beattie track.
- Claytons garden, general tidying, dug and removed a large bag of *Watsonia* bulbs. Emm pulled a number of small foxgloves.
- Checked plywood lining and cleaned where necessary; measured up and replaced a deteriorated ply lining sheet below the bedroom window, including staining and varnishing to match.
- Replaced the curtain over the wardrobe, using bespoke brass rings.
- Cleared external gully trap.
- Spray-painted chimney and roof screws.

### ***Mine sites***

- Fish-oiled heritage machinery.
- Replaced roof gutter at the front of the smelter.
- Cleared vegetation around Red Shed and inspected structure. Some rust appearing and rot in bearers.

### ***Bushwalkers huts***

Surveyed roofs of bushwalkers huts. Rotting beam on S side of CKM hut. Replaced loose roofing nails on Second Hut with roof screws. The galvanized roof screws at bottom edge of roofing are corroding where they pass through s/s guttering.

## *Private leases*

The King and Willson homes are the hubs for the volunteers: eating and meeting places, plus accommodation. Materials for private works are provided by the lessees. Kings is listed on the State Heritage Register and an application has been made to list Willsons.

### At Kings':

- Painted the galvanized iron roof: Brushed down, primed using turps-based Haymes grey Ultra-prime for metal, 3x 4L cans. Then water-based 2 top-coats, Haymes Solashield Ultra-premium exterior satin, Manor Red, used 20L. Very soft brooms were useful for applying paint to the hard-to-reach regions. Brushes attached to broom handles using duct tape were also deployed. Justin used pressure-washer to clean off porch roof, later painted red.



New roof paint at Kings, and shed restitution. Photos: Justin Marshall, Janet Fenton,

- Completed interior trim along central beam.
- Lean-to shed: Jacked up to level, installed new bearer and new piers, replaced rotted floorboards and rotted weatherboards. Used old-style weatherboards obtained from Torenus Timber.
- Karina's: Added a support beam under bunk-bed and a support block on the window side; widened some bunk ladder treads and trimmed safety-rail to allow easier access; added sliding shutter over fly-wire section of bunk bed window; one verandah post replaced, one re-bottomed tabernacle style; re-nailed several weatherboards; replaced supports for outdoor bench seat, re-purposing Jones&Co cast-iron bearing brackets (the things you find under trees at Melaleuca!).
- Stevenson Screen, minor repairs and painting: Made a new huon pine top cover-strip to replace a badly deteriorated original; excavated a large section of rot and filled it with builders-bog; scraped down, primed (oil based primer) and painted (2 coats water-based white top-coat, lo-sheen).
- Boatyard: Blue Boat was hauled out onto the slipway with much



Repairing *Blue Boat*, and newly painted Stevenson Screen.  
Photos: Janet Fenton, D&R Brown



careful blocking for stability and access. Cleaned and caulked badly leaking transom seam; cleaned and caulked garboard seams port and starboard; removed, trimmed and replaced cavitation plate; steamed and laminated new sister-ribs to fit beside existing broken ones, and fitted one; painted raw surfaces.

- Replaced 2 rotting steps into studio.
- Re-stumped a second post on the Tractor-port.

Chris Creese was in charge of maintenance at Willsons' and directed volunteers to jobs, tools and equipment.

- Fitted new glass in store-room bottom window sash.
- Maintenance – wood stove, washing machine and dump truck.

Volunteers took turns as chef for the evening meals and produced some terrific feasts for the hungry hoards at Kings and Willsons. Having achieved most of our goals many of the volunteers signed out and enjoyed a pleasant day out on the water aboard *Juliet*. Thanks Andrew!



### ***A Celebration!***

2024 marks 50 years since Peter and Barbara Willson called Melaleuca home. They purchased the mining lease from Win Clayton, built the house and began Rallinga Mine early in 1974. On the last evening of our working bee we marked the anniversary with a special celebration.

After his annual Southern Cross diesel starting ritual cheered on by enthusiasts, Chris then gave a grand tour over the Rallinga Mine separating plant and smelter.

Then we assembled for a group photo at Melaleuca South before dinner. Janet made a speech paying tribute to the Willsons' long and special association with Melaleuca and we all enjoyed a slice of the celebration cakes made by Debra.



Special thanks to the enthusiastic and skilled team of volunteers who put in a combined 702 person-hours (excluding PWS staff and caretakers) during this working-bee week. Rob and Mel did an excellent job of the routine end-of-work stock-take and tidy-up of FoM equipment. Thanks everyone for your record keeping and photographs.

Many extra volunteer days were involved in planning, purchasing, preparation and freighting materials beforehand, unloading at Melaleuca, more cleaning-up, assessing and then reporting post working-bee. (These hours are not included here.)

Thanks to generous donors who have directly funded work through the FoM webpage donation portal, and also those who have donated through the on-site collection boxes. Thanks to the volunteers for funding their own return fares and to Bob and Andrew for transporting gear and passengers and Barbara for hosting FoM volunteers for accommodation and meals in her home.

The practical work and boat transport by Rangers Dan Rowe and Steve Locke was crucial to the success of the working bee. Thanks also to Melaleuca PWS caretakers Debra and Russell for their outstanding support, and Volunteer Facilitator Emmalene for pitching in on site. It was a very busy week but everyone enjoyed the team spirit and work in the place we all love.



Volunteers, last evening at Melaleuca South  
(all except Ken and Lauren). Photo: Geoff Fenton