

Melville Koppies Management Committee
Annual Report July
1st July 2009 to June 30th 2010

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This was World Cup Year. The underlying focus of the past year has been the four weeks from June 11th to July 11th. We did what we normally do, but even more so.

Conservation

The huge amount of rain over the past year, 405mm in January alone, and warm weather meant that even more effort was needed in conservation. The regular team could not cope so we employed two casual workers for most of 2010. It was an endless saga of weeding, weeding and more weeding. Areas visible from the trails were cleared and then the team went deep into all sections, including the Acacia forested parts. All the alien invasive weeds that drift into an urban reserve were encountered, including over 2 000 moth catcher pods which were removed.

Bishop Ngobeli, Conservation Manager of Johannesburg City Parks (JCP), organised a contractor for Melville Koppies. The contractor kept the grass on the trails and the pavements in good condition the whole year. Bishop also organised a truck and workers on two occasions to help us clear the mess made by one mentally disturbed homeless person who was subsequently taken to hospital.

Special thanks to Norman Baines who transported old lintels in his bakkie for steps on the trails of MK West, to George Hofmeyr who used his trailer to cart rubbish to the dumps, Pikitup who supplied 500 refuse bags, the Van der Merwes in Kloof Rd who took plenty of our rubbish from MK East away, and Susie Sangoma who seems to have stopped the debarking of the *Ziziphus mucronata* tree by muti collectors.

The pyromaniac who has targeted green spaces was active in winter last year and burnt most of MK. The fuel load was high because of the extensive rains. He has burnt much of the Koppies this winter as well.

The conservation team is headed by Wendy Carstens, with full time paid workers Lucky Mdluli and Clement Ndlovu, part-timers Dennis Nyirenda and Joseph Kasonga, with two casuals Collen and Best Ndlovu this year. Peter Johnson and Lis Jones also get down and dirty. David Hirsch works on projects on MK West. Possibly

because of the World Cup, we have had help with clean-ups from other groups viz. Miss Earth finalists, City Year volunteers and an ABSA group.

Sentech strung up fibre optic cables through the Eskom pylons on Melville Koppies. Constant coming and going of heavy duty trucks have chewed up a track on MK West. Seymour and Marlene Maloon were plagued by having to open the vehicle gate many times over the past 5 months for this Sentech cable.

Maintenance of structures.

The tatty roof over the furnace was held down with rocks, picturesquely rural but inadequate to protect the heritage furnace. Volunteer Tony Nunes not only supplied the materials, but also did the work of replacing and extending the roof.

The information panels installed in 2002 were also embarrassingly tatty and illegible. Wendy Carstens and Norman Baines worked on updating the information on the panels. Haley Sharpe was commissioned to redo the printing on Perspex which cost over R14 000. The conservation team and David Carstens repaired the frames. The information panels are now under the protection of the extended furnace roof.

JCP repaired the MK West broken fence on Beyers Naude. This had been down for 10 months.

MKMC put up a new standard information signboard at the far western entrance of MK West below the police flats. The previous one was stolen, possibly as it had not been revamped when all the others were done.

Security.

Annus horribilis of 2008 was not repeated because of the security measures taken.

- All entrances have notices advising people to walk sensibly in the open spaces.
- Clause Protection Services was contacted to supply security for groups on open days from July to December. Leo Diogni's service was very good but it became too costly for MKMC to continue with.
- Visitors on open days and the monthly MK West walk are kept in groups led by MK guides with volunteer back-up to prevent possible muggings.
- George and Heike Hofmeyr and David Dickinson lead regular group walks on MK East and West respectively.
- Four charming JMPD trainees accompanied all weekday tours during the World Cup. Brixton SAPs were available if needed. Thanks to Cynthia Rose for promoting this security initiative. WO Smal, Brixton, is always very helpful.
- David Hirsch and David Dickinson with members of the African Independent Churches do bi-monthly patrols of MK West.
- JCP supplies one outsourced security day/night guard for the lecture hut. Mabotwane Security was replaced by Freedom Fighters who provide regular guards who we now know.
- We have introduced new indemnity/registration forms for all people on organised visits. Thank you to William Berry for legal help with the wording.
- There have been reports of sporadic, possibly opportunistic, muggings of single people / couples on MK West.

Publicity.

We have no budget for publicity. The media (national, local, community and societies) is very helpful in promoting Melville Koppies, it just needs constant work to keep the public aware of what MK offers. A big thank you to Jacques Clifford of the Northcliff and Melville Times who publishes something on MK every week, including Norman Baines' delightful nature column, 'View from the Koppies'. Caxton gave Norman a 'Highly commended' award for these columns. Norman was also one of the three finalists for the European Union Annual prestigious awards for a first novel. The publicity we do includes talks, radio interviews, website links (including TJ de Klerk's WildsWalk) TV background snippets and the printed media. The website www.mk.org.za, developed and hosted by Norman, is a boon for publicity and information. It saves the 24/7 call centre, 011 482 4797, hours of explaining.

The pamphlets we give to the public are in black and white riso printing to save costs. Newsletters are emailed by Norman to the database.

Four power point CDs of the flowers, trees and shrubs, a general overview and the geology of Melville Koppies have been made by Wendy Carstens with assistance from David Carstens. These CDs are for training of future guides, publicity and fund raising.

MK took part again in The University of the Witwatersrand's annual five-day 'Yebo Gogga' exhibition.

Our biggest publicity scoop of the year was the demise of the little black hen. She had survived against all odds on the busy intersection of Beyers Naude and Judith Rd. Sadly she was lured, caught and eaten.

Guiding.

The guiding team is frustrated because of the compulsory group tours that we do for security. However, we have worked out a strategy that we generally stop guiding at the lecture hut and then just spend the rest of the time walking together. Guides are interspersed in the group and answer questions that arise. The guiding/education/helper team, in alphabetical order; *Aspoas*, Bernice. *Baines*, Norman. *Carstens*, David. *Carstens*, Wendy. *Couzens*, Katty. *Flanagan*, Colleen, *Freer*, John. *Ford*, Laetitia and Roger. *Gair*, Donald. *Hammond-Tooke*, Margaret. *Hompes*, Maggie. *Jones*, Lis. *Lamprecht*, Ann. *Nunes*, Tony.

Visitors.

Number of recorded visitors 2009/2010

	adults	children	Totals
Open days	663	88	751
Groups	1620	725	2345
totals			3096

Groups included pre-primary, primary and secondary schools, university, hiking, special interest, artists, brownies, disadvantaged, yoga, FGASA students, bird ringing every month led by Gail Schaum, the 5th Sunday Two-koppie hike and the 24th September and 1st May Three Koppies hikes.

Specialist tours were that arranged for every month to share knowledge and to raise funds;

Geology – Prof Kim Hein; Spring flowers – Wendy Carstens
 Spiders- Astri Leroy; Grasses – Norman Baines
 Succulents- Judd Kinkel; Insects – Bernice Aspoas
 Trees – Walter Barker; Photography – Don Gair
 June/July World cup tours every weekday

The Association of African Independent Churches (AIC) on Melville Koppies West Report by David Hirsch.

There are less than twenty congregations belonging to the association, meeting regularly on Sunday afternoons. Their membership is stable, and probably number less than 500. Most congregations are small, with only a few large congregations whose environmental impact presents problems.

Following the more than 50 muggings (typically using a pump action shotgun) in late 2008 and early 2009 and the successful arrests, co-ordinated by a group of Melville (and Westdene) residents (MRA), assisted in one instance by men belonging to the AIC, the AIC and MRA agreed to conduct joint patrols.

By agreement the patrols have two primary functions. First, to deter and apprehend criminals, and, second, to regulate the activities of worshippers, many of whom have appeared in recent years, who do not belong to the AIC and typically do not come there on Sunday afternoons. Environmental damage could escalate so that open access and the use of the nature area by worshippers could be called into question. The original agreement with the churches and the city council in 1991 was predicated on their worshipping only on circles.

In order to have a shared set of principles on which joint patrols could operate it was decided to elide the issue of fires and night services. Accordingly, it was agreed that the joint patrols would encourage the following basic rules for all users of the koppies:

- No cutting trees and digging plants
- No killing animals
- No littering
- No gatherings except on the concrete circles marked “Visitors Circles”
- Churches regularly using this area must send a representative to the meetings of the Association of African Independent Churches of Melville Koppies

Beginning in July 2009, 14 patrols were held in 2009 and 11 so far in 2010. 10 abandoned circles have now been cleaned and signposted as “Visitors circles” and the rules posted at entrances, in English, Zulu and Southern Sotho. Pamphlets and written warnings are issued to visitors and left at places which have been damaged. Knowledge of the rules is high amongst visitors but use of the circles, most of which were only recently properly set on foot, is still limited. Patrols disrupt gatherings which are not taking place on visitors circles, and compliance is expected to grow.

R4000 has been donated by Prof Dickinson and Mr Hirsch to cover small payments for patrol members' transport, refreshments and incidentals.

We believe that an effective and appropriate self-policing structure is being built for MKW. However, its powers, appropriately, remain limited to that of law-abiding citizens rather than that of law-enforcement officials. Continued cooperation with law enforcement agencies is necessary.

Finance.

Income did not cover expenses this year. Although the security costs were reduced after December, this was offset again by the need to employ two extra casual workers to help with the heavy conservation work load. An additional once-off expense was the refurbishment of 5 information panels at the Lecture Hut at an outlay of R14 000. Details of the finances will be available at the AGM, courtesy of our accountant Vaughan Russell.

Donations from visitors do not cover expenses. The balance of expenses is mostly covered by corporate and private donations. This year, corporate donations were the Droste Trust R10 000, Nedbank Local hero R10 000, Bankenveld Botanical Society R5 000 and Cuckoo Bird Club R2 000. Private donations from regular/occasional donors in alphabetical order; *Berry, W. Dickinson, D. Friend. Freer, J. Godsell, G. Hall, R. Hammond-Tooke, M. Hirsch, D. M. Hewlett, C. Gibbon, T. Johnston, G. Jones, A. Ludlow, A. Meeuwis, J. Nunes, T. De Wet, S.*

Obituaries

Richard Hall passed away in May 2010. Earlier in the month he had received fond tributes from his beloved granddaughters and daughter at his 90th birthday celebrations. I spoke about his long-serving role as 'Mr Melville Koppies'. Richard joined me for tea at the Koppies the following week – a visit which turned out to be his farewell to the Koppies which he had cared for with passion and dedication. Our deepest sympathy to his wife Barbara and family.

Melville Koppies guide Gus Broekmeyer passed away suddenly. Gus loved to bring her grandchildren to the Koppies which they regarded as 'Granny's Mountain'. She was also chairman of the Breast Cancer Association and counselled many women. Our deepest sympathy to the family of the loss of such a vibrant woman.

Conclusion

It is amazing what a small group of dedicated volunteers can do. Thank you to each and every committee member (Norman Baines, David Hirsch, George Hofmeyr, Bernice Aspoas, Lucky Mdluli, John Freer, Clement Ndlovu, Vaughan Russell, Cllr Pat Richards) for your input, support and encouragement over the past year. However, we could not have achieved what we did without the help of Bishop Ngobeli and supervisor Moses Raimune of JCP, the guiding team, neighbours and friends in the community who assist in so many ways without being on the 'committee'. A special thanks to my husband David for his constant support and help. To all friends of Melville Koppies, thank you.

Wendy Carstens Chairman

