

**Annual report
Of the Melville Koppies Management Committee
July 2010 to June 2011**

'The primary aim of a nature reserve is to conserve a natural area, against the effects of man's activities.....A certain amount of knowledge is needed for the intelligent enjoyment of a nature reserve. A good interpretive service is therefore essential. This may take the form of guided tours for groups, a visitors' centre with exhibits and literature, or small outdoor exhibits on nature trails.' S.S Du Plessis, Director of Nature Conservation, Transvaal Provincial Administration 7th Oct, 1971.

This recommendation, written 40 years ago, is what we aim for at Melville Koppies. The two foci of our activities are the conservation of Melville Koppies and the guiding service for visitors.

Conservation

Conservation of the reserve absorbs most of our financial resources as well as a great deal of time. The Conservation Team of full-time workers Lucky Mdluli and Clement Ndlovu are helped once a week by part-timers Dennis Nyirenda, sponsored by Gillian Godsell, and Joseph Kasonga. The amount of weeding this past year has been overwhelming so Best Ndlovu has been employed in a temporary capacity. Volunteers Wendy Carstens, Lis Jones and Peter Johnson put in regular stints of weeding.

Two creepers which needed controlling were the *Sarcostemma viminalis* (Milky Rope) and *Senecio tamoides* (Canary creeper) as they had become rampant.

David Hirsch with helper Nkosinathi Ngwenya and church members tackle stone bars on the badly eroded paths of Melville Koppies West. The good condition of all three sections of the reserve is a result of this continued effort.

The removal of refuse bags is always a problem. Pikitup is very helpful in that they remove our yellow bags from the Beyers Naude Drive and Judith Road pavements. Ivan Parkes, chairman of Gauteng Conservancy Association, has sourced a large supply of bags for Melville Koppies for several years. George Hofmeyr removes our bags from the Melville pavements in his trailer.

Miss Earth finalists did another annual clean-up of the Arboretum area. This was good for publicity. It has encouraged school children to want to do community service on the Koppies. This is a mixed blessing as they need close supervision which we are prepared to do only on weekday mornings with the Conservation Team.

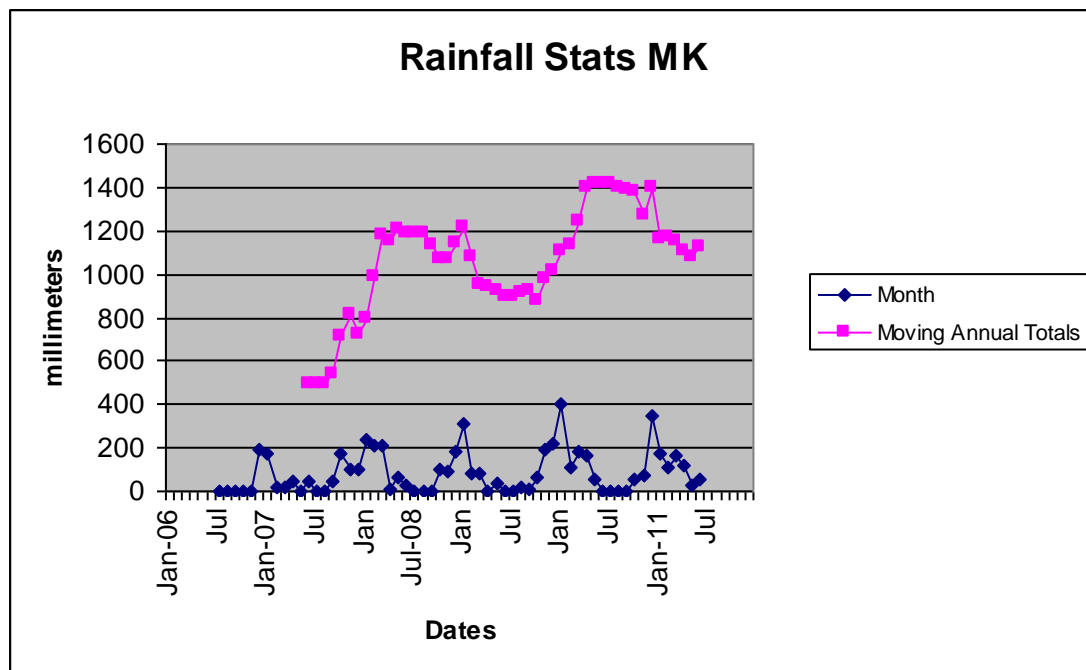
Out of interest, David Carstens hired a walk meter and measured all the paths on Melville Koppies Central and East. The total distance of paths on Central is 6.8km and on the East is 2.4km. The distance seems much greater because the paths are steep, rocky, twisty and wind through areas where the perception of distance is obscured by the vegetation. People assume that they have walked much further than they actually have.

A sewerage spill into the Westdene Spruit was reported by Wilfried Grimm. Fortunately Andries Botha of Joburg Water was able to stop the spill in two days.

Bishop Ngobeli of Joburg City Parks (JCP) outsourced the grass cutting of paths and firebreaks to contractor Gary Nemudzivhade. His team members, dressed in red overalls, are very efficient and pleasant to work with.

The pyromaniac was less active on Melville Koppies Central in the winter of 2010 so the Conservation Team did a controlled burn of a section of the northern grasslands with the help of two JCP workers, Moses Raimune and Thomas.

Rainfall stats are kept by George and Heike Hofmeyr who live next to Melville Koppies. David Carstens drew up the graph below from the stats. The steady increase in annual totals since 2007 perhaps explains why we have had such a tough time weeding. Rain equals weeds.



Structures

Five of the educational panels at the lecture Hut were revamped by the Committee at a cost of R14 000. They were re-sited under the roof of the furnace which was kindly replaced and extended by Tony Nunes. One pane of shatter proof glass on the furnace was smashed by vandals in May 2011. Sue and Buddy Vaughn of Northern Glass and Mirror replaced the pane free of charge as a service to Melville Koppies.

John Cartwright put permanent signage advertising Melville Koppies on both his Emmarentia Residents' Association information boards. The newly revamped chromadek information board below the police flats on Melville Koppies West has been stolen. This was put up to inform people of the Do's and Don'ts on the Koppies.

Tjaart DeMeyer installed The Cave heritage plaque high up the face of a quartzite outcrop to prevent vandalism. This was a very difficult installation that cost us R810.

JCP replaced the mangled divisions of the palisade fence on the west pavement of Beyers Naude Drive.

Public Relations

This requires constant effort to encourage people to come to Melville Koppies. Despite our free, wide exposure in a variety of media, radio, websites, residents' newsletters, newspapers, magazines, TV, some people still complain that the reserve is 'only open once a month!' Pigeon post is not an option for us. Lis Jones is doing important calendar updates to the Caxton community newspapers and the Saturday Star about our 7/8 scheduled activities every month.

David Carstens answers many queries about Melville Koppies, and the rest of Joburg, on the Melville Koppies 24/7 call line, 011 482 4797.

Congratulations to Jacques Clifford, news editor of the Northcliff and Melville Times, who has been promoted to online editor for the website LookLocal. This covers news in all the Witwatersrand areas where Caxton publishes community newspapers.

Jacques has been a great friend of Melville Koppies and has published almost everything we have sent in, adding relevant researched information to certain articles. He continues to promote Melville Koppies in LookLocal. Unfortunately Norman Baines stopped writing the very popular '*View from the Koppies*' for the Northcliff and Melville Times due to work pressure. Norman Baines also did a series of colourful newsletters up to February 2010.

Melville Koppies had a stand at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) annual 'Yebo gogga yebo amablomo' exhibition. We have exhibited here for the past 7 years in the 5-day show.

Number of visitors

Melville Koppies is a sensitive environment and cannot sustain huge crowds or inappropriate recreation. People come from the stressful atmosphere of the city to find peace in a natural unspoilt area. Melville Koppies should not be seen as a major income-generating area but rather as a place of spiritual upliftment.

Daily tours were available during the World Cup in 2010. Four very engaging JMPD trainees accompanied the few tourists who came. We did not anticipate large groups but provision for such tours was made.

Due to security constraints, we only do guided group visits on Sundays as we cannot guarantee the safety of visitors if they stroll around on their own. This is frustrating for guides and the regular visitors who used to like solitary walking. As to be expected, numbers on Sundays have dropped off, except for hikes on the 5th Sunday of every month where we have a pleasant three-hour group hike.

Groups included; Melville Koppies West walks, school tours, special interest groups, university students from a variety of faculties, artists, meditators, teachers, brownies, pensioners, abused children, deaf children and hiking clubs. The 1st May Day and 24th Heritage Day hikes are very popular.

All visitors sign a liability form, prepared by Ronald Bobroff. They are told of the possible dangers from overhanging thorny branches, loose rocks etc. This is standard FGASA practice for guides.

George and Heike Hofmeyr lead a group of walkers every weekday afternoon on Melville Koppies East. David Dickinson does the same on Melville Koppies West on Sunday afternoons.

Special courses

These are arranged every month to educate people about the special assets that Melville Koppies offers. Numbers are limited on these popular tours and pre-booking and pre-payment is required. Special tours over the past year were;

- Birding every second Saturday alternating with John Freer and Anthony Paton
- Geology with Prof. Kim Ncube-Hein
- Flowers with Wendy Carstens and Maggie Hompes
- The magic of plants with Suzi Poulson and Ann Lamprecht
- Grasses with Norman Baines
- Two photography courses with Donald Gair
- Insects with Bernice Aspoas
- Trees with Tim Conradie

Guiding service

In alphabetical order, the guides and volunteer assistants who shared so much of their knowledge of Melville Koppies with visitors over the past year were *Aspoas*, Bernice; *Baines*, Norman; *Carstens*, David; *Carstens*, Wendy; *Freer*, John; *Gair*, Don; *Green*, Chris; *Hammond-Tooke*, Margaret; *Hompes*, Maggie; *Hugo*, Jackie; *Jones*, Lis; *Lamprecht*, Ann; *Nunes*, Tony; *Pavaracini*, Tendo; *Poulson*, Suzi; *Rose*, Cynthia.

Security

The two suspects who mugged over 60 people in 2008/9 were sentenced to 35 and 45 years in April 2011. There have been some reported attacks since then on Melville Koppies West but fortunately they seem to have been opportunistic and not a regular onslaught. Precautionary chromadek notices have been wired to all the entrances warning people not to walk alone, carry valuables etc.

Problems on Melville Koppies Central have been the theft of muti plants, particularly Pineapple flower bulbs (*Eucomis autumnalis*) and the bark of the *Ziziphus mucronata*.

A glass pane on the furnace was smashed by vandals. Two of the four youths seen at the scene were caught and a court case is currently in progress. The Committee gave Freedom Fighter security guard M. Molefe a letter of commendation and a small cash reward for pursuing the four suspects and catching two with the help of a CSS guard, Michel Booyens, and CSS back-up. JCP funds 24 hour security, with one guard on duty at a time, for the furnace.

Our first recorded accident happened when a visitor tripped and broke her leg. The next day we bought a stretcher, valued at R900. This was stored at the Lecture Hut in the rafters for easy access in an emergency. It was stolen soon afterwards, but recovered at the Parkview Police Station. Tony Nunes then made a metal cylinder for the stretcher to slide into. The cylinder has a keyed-alike lock for guides to access the stretcher as needed – hopefully never again.

A back-up team of volunteers from the community, led by Peter Rolfe, is on hand to assist with security problems that arise. WO Smal from the Brixton Police station is particularly helpful with security matters on the Koppies. Cynthia Rose, chairman of the Melville Community Policing Forum (CPF) and a MKMC member, co-ordinates help very quickly when there are security issues.

Research

Peter Johnson is refining the research that he did on the flowering times on Melville Koppies. He is working on a layout which gives the core flowering times of each species as well as the outliers and freak sightings.

Gail Schaum and her team of bird ringers from the Witwatersrand Bird Club continue to ring birds at Melville Koppies every month. The continuous records of bird ringing at Melville Koppies were started in 1972 by Ken Newman. They are probably the oldest records in South Africa.

Anthony Paton is counting birds in the pentad (atlas grid cell) which includes Melville Koppies, for the second South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP 2).

Wendy Carstens has produced six power point CDs related to Melville Koppies on flowers, trees and shrubs, geology, archaeology and history, environmental management of Melville Koppies and an overview. Valuable professional help was given on the geology by Prof Terence McCarthy and Prof Kim Ncube-Hein and on the archaeology by Prof Revil Mason. David Carstens and Lis Jones did editing and provided sound criticism. The CDs are a reference source for Melville Koppies. Funds from the sale of the CDs are used for the maintenance of Melville Koppies.

The website www.mk.org.za is an important source of information for students doing research. Webmaster, Norman Baines spent many hours writing up the information on the website. Now it just needs calendar updates when necessary.

The Association of African Independent Churches on MKW (AIC)

Report by David Hirsch

As in 2009/2010, there are less than twenty congregations belonging to the association, meeting regularly on Sunday afternoons, each at a circle. The membership is stable, and is probably less than 500.

This year there seem to be far fewer church groups of newcomers to the city, coming throughout the week and posing a risk of escalating environmental damage, for example by dispersing to worship singly over a wide area, rather than confining their environmental footprint to a church circle.

Following the many muggings in late 2008 and early 2009, and the successful arrests, co-ordinated by a group of Melville (and Westdene) residents, assisted in one instance by men belonging to the association, they and the association 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.

Eleven joint patrols (2010:11) were held. By agreement, this year the patrols included the full association Code of Conduct in their brief:

Do not make fires
 Do not stay at night
 Do not gather (more than two people) except on concrete Visitors Circles
 Do not cut trees or dig up or damage plants
 Do not kill or injure animals and birds or damage termite mounds
 Do not litter, leave things, dig holes, move rocks, make clearings, break glass or burn candles
 Do not ride bicycles
 If you belong to a group that meets here often, send a representative to the meetings of the Association of African Independent Churches of Melville Koppies

The code has been posted at all entrances and circles. It is mostly observed, with the exception of one congregation. Three work parties have been held to maintain paths and manage the donga below the Kloof. David Hirsch has also worked a morning once a week for most of the year with an assistant, Nkosinathi Ngwenya. They were attacked and injured at midday on Christmas Eve by three young thugs, who ran away with their pick and shovel. However, it was an isolated incident and Melville Koppies West seems to be reasonably safe for church groups, pedestrians and dog walkers.

Prof Dickinson and David Hirsch donated a further R1000 each to the cost of transport of patrol members (R1657 for the 11 patrols), bringing the total since inception to R6000. They also provided refreshments and incidentals.

We believe that an effective and appropriate self-policing structure is being built for Melville Koppies West. However, its powers, appropriately, remain limited to that of law-abiding citizens rather than that of law-enforcement officials. The joint patrols hope to directly assist the SAPS in the near future.

Finance

The annual financial report, prepared by Vaughan Russell, will be available at the AGM. Rough figures are:

- Income was R117 000, half of which was derived from open days and group visits and the rest was from private and corporate donations and sales.
- Expenditure was R110 000, of which 84% was on conservation labour.

Annual donations during the past financial year were received from: *Bankenveld Botanical Society; Baines, Norman; Betty, Dave; Bobroff, Ronald; Brown, H&M; Doyle, Bryan; Emdon-Elk, Cliff and Erica; Gaul, Vic; Gibbon, Theresa; Jones, Alan; Lamprecht, Ann; Macozoma, Mr & Mrs; Meeuwis, June; Ockenden, Mike; Rademeyer, Claire; Wixley, Tom; donations for the late Richard Hall and two anonymous donations.*

Monthly donations during the past financial year were received from: *Berry, William; deVilliers, Michelle (JUNKIE charity shop); deWet, Sandra; Freer, John; Godsell, Gillian; Hammond-Tooke, Margaret; Hewlett, Cecily; Hill, Cavan; Hossack, Colin; Johnson, Gordon; Ludlow, Anna; Maree, Lynne; Nunes, Tony; Vermeulen, Phillip; Wilbraham, Annemie.*

David Dickinson and David Hirsch fund workers and patrols on Melville Koppies West.

Obituaries

Alan Farndell, who did legal work, including advice on the constitution, for the MKMC, died after complications from an armed hijacking in his friend's driveway.

Trish Burton, a Melville B&B owner, died suddenly. Trish ran the Melville community news update and sent out many Melville Koppies news updates.

Val Kleyn, Chairman of the Braamfontein Spruit Trust, succumbed to cancer. Her final fun-fling was a tandem parachute jump in Namibia.

Our sympathy to the family and friends of these people who all made their mark in community service.

Committee members 2010/2011

Wendy Carstens	Chairman, PR, conservation, guiding
George Hofmeyr	Vice chairman, security, guiding
Bernice Aspoas	Bot Soc rep, guiding
Lis Jones	PR, guiding, conservation
Norman Baines	Webmaster, security, guiding
John Cartwright	PR, Emmarentia Residents' Association liaison
David Hirsch	AIC liaison, conservation, security
Cynthia Rose	Security, Melville Sector Community Forum Chairman (security), guiding
John Freer	Guiding, mentoring
Lucky Mdluli	Conservation, security, AIC rep
Clement Ndlovu	Conservation, security, AIC rep
Cllr Pat Richards	Ex officio ward councillor

Everyone is eligible for re-election and we welcome new committee members. Norman Baines resigned from the committee but fortunately for Melville Koppies, he still guides and runs the website.

The hard work and dedication of the committee is reflected in the superb condition of the priceless asset that we have in Melville Koppies. The guides' contribution is difficult to measure as it contributes to building a mindset attuned to nature and heritage. This is important for the preservation of the Melville Koppies heritage. Funding from the tours that the guides lead and donations from the public enable the Committee to care for Melville Koppies.

A sincere thank you to all who contribute in so many ways to Melville Koppies. Thank you all for your support and encouragement – it keeps us all motivated.

Wendy Carstens

August 2011