

Melville Koppies Management Committee (MKMC)

AGM report: 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015

Every year brings new challenges and rewards. Our motto is 'Just do it' and don't give up.

AGM August 2014

Barbara Shaw gave an empathic and enlightening talk about the personal benefits obtained by the people who worship on Melville Koppies West.

Conservation

Perhaps the easiest things to deal with are alien invasive plants as they passively submit to our systematic eradication programme over all three sections of Melville Koppies. MK Central and MK East are currently in pristine condition. Due to our limited resources, our efforts on MK West have been restricted to regularly removing the extensive and ever-accumulating litter along the trails and the Westdene Spruit and to keeping The Cave heritage site weed- and litter-free. Weeds that have seeded have been bagged and taken to the municipal dumps by George Hofmeyr. We have also controlled indigenous species that threaten to overrun the biodiversity of the precious grasslands. Our three full-time and one part-time conservation workers, funded by the MKMC, have been assisted sporadically by Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) workers funded by the government.

Rainfall

Rainfall for 2014/2015 has reverted to the norm of 704 mm pa after several years of above-average figures, resulting in continued lush grass cover. These stats are courtesy of Heike Hofmeyr's meticulous record-keeping.

Veld protection from mountain bikes

Neither the MKMC nor the Conservation Department at Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) knew about the JUMA mountain bike race for 5 000 bikers planned to go through MK West in October 2014 until the event was almost upon us. This was discovered only when David Dickinson chanced upon a trail carved through the sensitive riverine area of MK West and got race details and contact numbers from the trail makers. Such a race would have caused irreparable damage to MK West and set a precedent here for biking and future races. After many email objections from concerned citizens and ecology experts, an emergency meeting was called with the JCPZ's Facilities and Conservation Departments, race organisers and representatives from other affected green spaces. A compromise was reached to divert the race along the border between MK West and West Park Cemetery, thus sparing MK West. JUMA's 2015 race will follow the same route.

Fire

All the valleys of MK West have been burnt. Firebreaks here proved ineffectual against irresponsible users. Firebreaks have been burnt on MK Central and MK East – effective so far. The potential fire-load of dense bulrushes on MK East was cut and burnt in a safe place in June.

Maintenance of structures and donations

There are no dripping taps, missing slats, etc., thanks to Tony and Neilen Nunes. They installed a heavy duty grid under the Beyers Naude tunnel bridge for security (to keep trespassers out of MK Central) and also cast a concrete slab to shore up a scenic path that had collapsed after a supporting

metal pipe was stolen. All the trail numbers on MK Central have been replaced with white numbering on recycled brown painted kerb slabs. Recycled kerb slabs from the 27 Boxes container development in Melville have also been used to construct steps at the steep, well-used entrance at Kloof road, MK East. Frans van der Merwe and Gail Millard helped to transport the heavy kerb slabs.

The rusty MK fencing has not been painted since it was erected in 2002 by JCP. Sections of fencing on Beyers Naude west pavement which were smashed a year ago have not been replaced yet.

The Godsell family donated a polywood bench for the Lecture Hut in memory of Richard Hall. Teodor van Wyk donated his two-box collection of local butterflies to MKMC. This is in addition to his previous donation of two boxes of MK insect collections. Big Brown Dog which had gone feral and made its home on MK Central was relocated to Woodrock Sanctuary thanks to Debra Maclean. Henry Staal painted the fence along Zambesi Road and Orange Road. Tim Conradie donated two *Buddleja saligna* trees to shade the Iron Age furnace area.

Pikitup supplies reusable hessian bags for bagging seeded weeds.

Publicity

As we have no budget for publicity, all free media avenues are explored. These include newspapers, magazines, websites, radio, TV, Twitter and Facebook. Lis Jones sends regular diary inserts to various media and also proofs most of my media articles. I presented '*The value of MK as a heritage resource*' at a History teachers' conference and the corresponding article appeared in the History journal, '*Yesterday and Today*'. 2 300 subscribers on our database receive the monthly newsletter. MK's Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/melvillekoppies> is updated weekly. The www.mk.org.za website, set up by Norman Baines and updated by Barbara Shaw, is very informative and easy to navigate. It elicits many compliments. Over the past year we have had to do much damage control to counter the negative publicity given to security issues on MK by some media.

Recorded visitors

The success of publicity is partly reflected in the number of recorded visitors on MK Central. Attendance on Sunday guided tours is very variable, but the Sunday hikes are proving popular. School groups, from pre-primary to matric have come on special tours. Some schools cancelled because of security issues). Topics requested by teachers range from story-telling, nature walks, Iron Age history, geology, ecology and human/plant evolution. These are all catered for by our team of school guides (see the table below for MK guides). University groups and individuals have done field work and research which all adds to the MK body of knowledge and helps with publicity. Entomologist Bernice Aspoas did a special insect course for the public, which was particularly enjoyed by the younger 'gogga' enthusiasts. The total number of recorded visitors at MK Central for the year was 2 487 visitors (429 on 35 Sunday guided tours, 297 on 12 Sunday hikes, 1662 on booked mid-week groups { 15 schools, 16 university and 24 other groups } 99 on 12 dog walks). Numbers dipped at the beginning of 2015 because of adverse security publicity, but are picking up again.

George Hofmeyr organises informal community walks every weekday afternoon on MK East.

Security

This has been a stressful year for SA, with Joburg and MK not excepted. Houses adjacent to MK East and MK West have been robbed. The intersection of Beyers Naude Drive and Judith Road continues to be a smash-and-grab hotspot. A hijacked car speeding along Beyers Naude landed upside down in the spruit, centimetres away from the Nunes' newly-installed security grid under the tunnel bridge.

Robbers, operating at night from MK Central, have stolen cables in Kafue and Zambesi Roads. Worshippers and walkers on MK West have been frequently robbed of cell phones and valuables by armed gangs. In January 2015 a tour group was robbed on MK Central.

Our responses to the security issues are as follows: all Sunday tour groups on MK Central are accompanied by an MKMC-funded CSS security guard with patrol car back-up and some of our workers and volunteers; the conservation team and EPWP workers provide security for tours during the week; the organised monthly Saturday morning dog walks and the weekly Sunday morning dog walks on MK West are accompanied by volunteer security; notices warning people not to take valuables onto the Koppies are at all the entrances; Lori Coogan is compiling a record of case numbers of incidents to pressurise SAPS to take preventative action; resident Ronet Martin has funded a secure entrance at Kafue Road; the Democratic Alliance is petitioning for patrols and proactive assistance from SAPS, JMPD and JCPZ rangers; we constantly remind JCPZ about the shocking state of the damaged and vandalised fencing along Beyers Naude as this facilitates criminal activity; police reservists help sporadically with security. In addition, the security companies and the police constantly do press releases in which motorists are advised not to leave valuables in sight to avoid smash-and-grab. Regrettably the Witwatersrand Bird club, which has used MK for bird ringing since 1972, has stopped ringing at MK because of concerns about security.

Finance

Due to windfalls, our financial situation is sound despite extra expenditure on security since February.

Security, averaging R3 000 pm, has been a new expense since February 2015. Michillay Brown did a fund-raising 500 letter drop in part of Emmarentia which resulted in some new donors. Nicky and Strilli Oppenheimer made a very generous donation to assist with professional security for tours on MK Central. Our security costs will double when the current EPWP programme ends as some of these workers supply additional free security on tours and hikes.

About 80% of our income was spent on conservation labour at R14 200 pm. In addition, we spent R1 200 pm for maintenance, printing, insurance and website hosting. There is no remuneration for volunteers who guide, use their own vehicles, petrol, computers, stationery, telephones and home offices.

Income from tours and hikes led by volunteers only covers about 40% of expenditure. The rest of the variable income is made up from modest amounts from sales (a set of eleven CDs about different aspects of Melville Koppies, gift vouchers and a booklet of the 'Flowering times on the Melville Koppies') and MyPlanet fund-raising contributions; a substantial income from JUNKIE charity store; and most welcome private donations (see below for 2014/15 donors). The Godsell, in addition to large monthly contributions, have made an exceptional donation this year in memory of Richard Hall (father and grandfather) whose passion, expertise and dedication earned him the well-deserved title of 'Mr Melville Koppies'.

Funds have been invested in high interest long-term savings accounts to cover possible future deficits through a reduction in income. This will ensure continued maintenance of the Koppies for several years.

Our accountant, Vaughan Russell, has kindly prepared the annual financials for the MKMC.

Melville Koppies West sub-committee

This was set up a year ago to deal with issues specific to MK West, particularly security, which continues to be a serious problem. David Hirsch's conservation focus has been on cutting of *Hyparrhenia tamba* (thatching grass), firebreaks and building rubble erosion bars. The grass cutter machines are privately owned by individuals and are not the responsibility nor the possession of the MKMC. Sub-committee members Tony Lelliott and David Dickinson have taken over the monthly dog walks and raised a total of R1 405 for the year. These walks were started nine years ago by the MKMC. Lori Coogan has started Sunday morning public walks with volunteer security. David Dickinson continues with Sunday afternoon social walks, with volunteer security.

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ)

JCPZ has employed EPWP workers in many of its reserves. MK has had three women and two men helping out for odd periods.

Paths and some perimeters have been cut on all three sections. A contractor was employed to cut down large woody invasive alien plants from all the reserves, including MK.

All the locks on MK Central and JCPZ's other reserves have been replaced with expensive keyed-alike locks. One key fits all. JCPZ provides us with one Mabotwane security guard for day and night duty in the archaeological area on MK Central.

JCPZ employed Dr Noel van Rooyen to do an ecological survey of all its reserves, including MK, with a focus on game-carrying capacity.

Volunteers

For the continuation of our very special educational/recreational programme of guided tours and hikes at Melville Koppies– we will always need new committed volunteer guides and hike leaders. Volunteer are also always needed to help with publicity, administration, security, conservation and fundraising.

The last year has been one of knee replacements, knee repair jobs, other operations, car crashes and a fall off a bicycle – but the tough volunteers return to the Koppies when they have recovered. It is thanks to the resilience and dedication of our volunteer committee, conservationists, tour guides, hike leaders, ecology advisers and donors that Melville Koppies continues to be a benchmark for excellence. The Sunday volunteer guides play a very important role in introducing the public to our natural and cultural heritage, so ensuring its preservation. The mid-week experienced school guides enrich lessons learnt in the classroom. Every person plays an important part, no matter how large or small.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely thank all involved, including my conscripted husband, for their contribution to Melville Koppies.

Wendy Carstens (Chairman of the MKMC)

2014/2015 Cash donors in random order

Alan Jones, Godsell family, Lynne Maree & Cavan Hill, Tony Nunes, Nikki & Strilli Oppenheimer, David Carstens, Cynthia Rose, Anna Ludlow, James Wellsted, Sandra de Wet, Claire Rademeyer, Martin van Rensburg, Debbie and William Harmsen, Johann & Nicole Krynauw, Brian Bayne, Tom Wixley, Mike Ockenden, Sue & Terry Hinton, Carol Stier, S. Behan, anonymous friend, Jenni Janks, Richard Doehring, Helen Abbott, Andrew Ziffo, Tom Campher, Michelle Booth, Gert Swartz, Shayleen

Peake, Bronwyn Coppola, Heike Hofmeyr, John Freer, Viv and Noel Pope, Laetitia & Roger Ford, John Cartwright, Basil Kransdorff, Tessa Reddy.

2014/2015 Volunteers in random order

MKMC	Guides	MKMC sub-com	Other volunteers
Wendy Carstens (chair)	Wendy Carstens *	Tony Lelliott (chair)	Neilen and Benita Nunes
George Hofmeyr	David Carstens *	David Dickinson	Wilfried Wank
Lis Jones	Tony Nunes	David Hirsch	Theresa Gibbon
Barbara Shaw	Alison Wilson	Albert van Urk	Peter Johnson
Cynthia Rose	Don Gair *	Lori Coogan (WRA rep)	Michillay Brown
Alison Wilson	Maggie Hompes *	Man Nleya (AIC rep)	Shayleen Peekes
Vaughan Russell	Jackie Hugo *	Enoch Nkomo (AC rep)	Ozma Mcithwa
Tony Nunes	Cynthia Rose	Wendy Carstens (ex officio MKMC)	AIC (African Independent Church) monthly work parties on MK West
Bernice Aspoas	Cally Johnson *		
Lori Coogan	Anthony Paton		
Clement Ndlovu	Arjen van Zwieten		
Tony Lelliott (ex officio MK West sub- committee)	Liz Brown**		
John Cartwright (ERA rep)	Nomsa Mbere**		
Lucky Mdluli (AIC rep)	*also school guides		
Cllr Pat Richards (ex officio)	** hike leaders		
Conservation Team			
Clement Ndlovu			
Lucky Mdluli			
Best Ndlovu			
Joseph Kasonga (part-time)			