

Melville Koppies Management Committee

Annual report 1st July 2015/June 30th 2016

The past year has again been one of challenges, some enjoyable ones easily dealt with and others a continuing problem.

Conservation and maintenance

Conservation is an agreeable challenge if there are resources to cope with alien vegetation and general maintenance. Our full-time Conservation Team (CT) of Clement Ndlovu, Lucky Mdluli and Best Ndlovu, and part-timer Joseph Kasonga have ensured that Melville Koppies Central and East are in pristine condition, including the paths. Because of security issues, only parts on Melville Koppies West are maintained; the Cave and its surrounds, the spruit and the grid under Beyers Naude Drive. We have been helped on and off by six EPWP workers (extended public works programme) on fixed term contracts.

- Despite the Pikitup strike, most of the bagged seeded weeds were dumped at the depot by George Hofmeyr. Pikitup supplied refuse bags and plastic hessian bags.
- Tony and Neilen Nunes replaced up to 100 stolen palisade slats from Melville Koppies Central and East fencing during the year.
- Gail Millard transported seven bakkie-loads of pavers donated by the Samantha and Humphrey Enslin of Parkview to Melville Koppies East for the eroded paths, which were paved by the CT.
- Herman Rowe has a low stone kerbing wall built down the Orange Road pavement to stop erosion. Residents planted up the pavement with indigenous plants.
- The fence around the grassy triangle was painted with paint supplied by James Lorimer, JCPZ and the MKMC
- In January 2016 there was a bad sewage spill below the West Side ridge flats into the Westdene Spruit.
- Melville Koppies West, East and the southern grasslands of MK Central were burnt in uncontrolled fires. Firebreaks were cut on all the perimeters of all three sections.

Public relations

It is a pleasure to publicise the beautiful asset that we have in the middle of Joburg. Lis Jones sent weekly and monthly diary updates to a variety of printed media. Wendy Carstens sent monthly newsletters (meticulously edited by Lis), to the 2500 database, regularly updated the facebook page, was interviewed on Radio Today (heritage and community), Classic FM, Chai fm, Tim Neary's Sappi Nature Journal and the Horticultural Society. Melville Koppies feature articles were in the Saturday Star, The Star Verve, Country Life, Vrydag4uur, Secret Johannesburg and various blog and websites. Barbara Shaw updated the website with the 2016 calendar. JC Burger puts all Melville Koppies facebook posts onto ilovemelville, which boosts the number of visitors to the Koppies.

We need constant publicity to continue to attract visitors to the Koppies.

Tours, hikes and groups

In 2016 we reduced the Sunday guided tours to two and increased the popular hikes to two per month. As a precaution, all Sunday tours are accompanied by CSS security, funded by the MKMC. The number of school groups has declined, perhaps because of the red-tape involved in organising such tours. Most of the school groups are from private schools which have less bureaucratic restraints. The CT, EPWP workers and JCPZ guards act as security for school groups.

Number of recorded visitors on scheduled outings

Booked groups 1324 (This includes schools and universities), Sunday hikes 1006, Sunday guided tours 423. Total 2753

Guides and hike leaders

Don Gair, a regular first Sunday of the month guide for eight years, died suddenly in August 2015. He is sorely missed. Our commiserations to his daughter Monnie. Thanks to guides and hikes leaders Wendy Carstens, David Carstens, Tony Nunes, Danie Swart, Shayleen Peekes, Erica Elk, Alison Wilson, John Cartwright and new guides Jenny Grice, Musarrat Safi and school guides Wendy Carstens, David Carstens, Jackie Hugo and Maggie Hompes for sharing their time and expertise to introduce people to our natural and cultural heritage. George Hofmeyr leads a group weekday walk on Melville Koppies East. Tony Lelliott has led some monthly dog walks on Melville Koppies West but security issues here have limited the walks.

Signage

Thanks to John Cartwright for the spanking new bold do's and don'ts signage on Melville Koppies East (2), Melville Koppies West (1) and the logo and contact details on Koppies Central (1). The 'Kafue Road' signage is invaluable for new visitors to the top entrance.

Research

Last year the management of Melville Koppies was a favourite topic for environmental management students, TuT (1), Wits (4), Unisa (2). In addition, geology students from the Eastern Cape visited Melville Koppies West and Wits students did their annual grass survey. Arjen van Zwieten ringed birds. Dr Brett Gardiner did a training session on collecting samples from birds for bird ringers from the Witwatersrand Bird Club.

African Independent Churches

Groups have been plagued by armed robbers on Melville Koppies West. No church leaders attended an invitation to an educative session on the heritage of the Koppies and imbizo to discuss issues arranged by Barbara Shaw and Wendy Carstens on the 8th May.

Some groups are worshipping at night, making fires and destroying termitaries, on Melville Koppies East presumably because of the problems on Melville Koppies West.

Melville Koppies West sub-committee

Security issues were the focus of the committee meetings under chairman Tony Lelliott. These are still the major problem on Melville Koppies West. There have been no meetings in 2016.

Finance

Income was as follows (rounded off): organised hikes, tours and booked groups 57%, private donations 20%, JUNKIE charity store 14%, MyPlanet 6% and sales 2%. In January 2016 we swapped one guided tour for a hike, making two of each per month. Numbers on group hikes have increased significantly since then. Income from our sources of income is variable.

Expenditure was as follows: labour 81%, security 13%, maintenance 2%, printing 1%, insurance 2% administration 0%, volunteers 0%,

Thank you to Vaughan Russell for doing the annual financial report.

Our generous private cash donor supporters were Bobby and Gillian Godsell, Ansermino, Alan Jones, Cynthia Rose, Lynne Maree and Cavan Hill, the Harmsens, John Freer, Bronwyn Coppola, Roy Hanna, Colleen Campher, David Carstens, Anna Ludlow, Carol Stier, Tom Paulsen, Cassim Moosa, Shayleen Peekes and Alison Wilson.

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) contribution

- In February two day/night guards were appointed from 'Will to Win' security. Previous security companies since 2002 have been Linda, Vela, Mabotwane, Freedom Fighters and Mabotwane.
- A taxi crashed into Melville Koppies central on the 18th December 2015. The three crumpled divisions were repaired a few days later.
- The persistent two month water leak on Melville Koppies Central was repaired.
- A new sign was erected at the Judith Road entrance to Melville Koppies Central. There are now three JCPZ signs at this entrance.
- The large fallen *Celtis africana* branches that blocked the Kafue Road entrance were cut and removed.
- A contractor was appointed to cut and remove the bushes along Judith Road to try and prevent the theft of palisade fencing. (see below)
- A contractor was appointed to replace the 85+ slats stolen from the bushy section the Judith Road fence from November 2015 to May 2016. The new slats were not painted and are now rusty.
- The broken and stolen fencing on the west pavement of Beyers Naude has not been replaced.
- In September JCPZ did a two-day blitz on Melville Koppies – grass cutting in the Kloof area and along Arundel Road and a combined SAPS/JMPD sweep of Melville Koppies West, clearing of bushes on the inside perimeter of the Judith Rad fence.
- JCPZ has appointed contractors to employ and assign six EPWP workers on varying fixed term contracts to Melville Koppies.

- The CoJ and JCPZ have appointed a consultant to assess all three sections of Melville Koppies for the government requirement regarding re-proclamation of nature reserves.

Challenges not met - a continuing problem

Security

- Melville Koppies West (Sophiatown SAPS)

Continual armed muggings of people who venture onto these Koppies. Houses in neighbouring Arundel Road have all had several armed intrusions from the Koppies. Smash and grab robbers operating from the Koppies prey on people at the intersection of Beyers Naude Drive and Judith Roads.

- Melville Koppies Central (Brixton SAPS)

Robbers operating at night from the Koppies have stolen cable from Emmarentia about ten times. Two houses adjacent to the Koppies have had armed intrusions at night. There have been no attacks on visitors because all visitors are accompanied by security in this controlled access section.

- Melville Koppies East (Brixton SAPS)

Most of the adjacent houses in 7th Avenue, Melville, and Kafue Road, Emmarentia, have had armed intrusions at night from the Koppies. A woman walking her little dog was raped at 9am on the 5th May.

Appeals for regular police and JMPD patrols have not been successful.

CoJ community dialogues with Region B

Five meetings (28th September, 26th October, 26th April, 16th May, 20th June) have achieved nothing concrete about issues on Melville Koppies. Security, particularly on Melville Koppies West remains a crucial issue where there is also no official signage. The proposed land swap of degraded national government land for use by the Jewish Cemetery has not progressed despite groundwork of erf details being done by MKMC Lori Coogan. Boundaries of Melville Koppies West and encroachments have not been clarified for the new nature reserve proclamation.

Conclusion

Thank you to all the volunteers, including my very supportive husband, who have contributed in so many ways to the continued preservation and promotion of Melville Koppies and the many challenges that we have met successfully. Our reward is that Melville Koppies remains a unique Joburg community asset for environmental education and sustainable recreation.

Wendy Carstens

Chairman of the Melville Koppies Management Committee

