

Annual General Report of the Melville Koppies Management Committee
for the year 1st July 2019 to 30th June 2020

60th Melville Koppies Anniversary 1959-2019

Stylish designer buffs (200) and bags (250) were made for this special anniversary and sold as souvenirs. Thanks to Jenny Grice for organising this.

The archaeologist who discovered the 500-year-old smelting furnace at the Koppies, Revil Mason, celebrated his 90th birthday last year. His daughter Petra supplied a commemorative plaque for him. This was installed at the lecture Hut.

The Horticultural Society donated three polywood benches for the lecture hut for the anniversary. Thanks to Maggie Hompes for organising this.

Dr Amada Esterhuysen was the guest speaker at the 60th AGM held in August

Wendy Carstens was awarded the Ellen Kuzwayo Award by the University of Johannesburg for her 'Commitment to conservation and tourism in South Africa'. Thank you to Pieter and Kinta Burger for promoting this award.

Sunday guided tours, hikes and booked groups

This has been a disrupted year due to the Corona virus pandemic lockdown which started on the 27th March and continued till the 30th June 2020, the end of the financial year.

Organised activities were well attended before the lockdown with a motivated, reliable and knowledgeable team of guides and hike leaders. Then everything came to a full stop after the 27th March. All activities and bookings were cancelled.

Tony Lelliott organised walks with socialised dogs on the first Saturday of every month on Melville Koppies West. George Hofmeyr organised late afternoon weekday walks on Melville Koppies East. The East is well-used by residents.

Publicity

Melville Koppies events are well publicised in all free media thanks to the sterling efforts of Lis Jones, up to October, and then succeeded by Jenny Grice. Wendy Carstens does the facebook page (melvillekoppies) and other specials. Her ten year stint of monthly newsletters stopped after the database was hacked. Barbara Shaw updates the very informative www.mk.org.za website as necessary.

During the lockdown, 46 special informative, fun posts with lots of photos were put on Facebook to educate people and keep Melville Koppies alive in peoples' minds. Wendy Carstens, Jenny Grice and Tam Scheidgger were the scribes.

Sadly the economic effect of the lockdown has been the closure of many magazines, an outlet for some publicity for Melville Koppies. Juniors, Viv Scheidegger and Huaei-Ing and Huaei-Jin Chen, also contributed articles.

Theresa Gibbon organised a free media monitoring service with Newsclup for Melville Koppies.

Finance

The lockdown immediately affected fund-raising events. Fortunately, with extra private donations, and contributions from JUNKIE charity store and MySchoolMyVillage MyPlanet, plus a surplus we had built up, the Conservations Team's monthly salaries of R17650 were able to be paid during the lockdown up to June, even though the men were not allowed to work. All other expenses such as security, maintenance costs and printing were either stopped or where necessary carried by volunteers. Finances after June 2020 will be a problem unless we can resume suitable fund-raising activities on the Koppies.

Thank you to Vaughan Russell for doing the financials for Melville Koppies.

Conservation

Due to the work of the full-time Conservation Team, supervised by Wendy Carstens and Tam Scheidegger, Melville Koppies is maintained in a pristine condition. But then this year, late rains and warm weather resulted in weed seed banks sprouting profusely. This coincided with the lockdown when the team couldn't work. When they could eventually come back to work, they did lots of frantic weeding. Over 200 large bags of seeded weeds were taken to the municipal dumps.

Tony Nunes and his son Neilen did continual maintenance and replacement repairs to the fencing.

Pieter Burger sourced 2000 pavers which were used on a Melville Koppies East path.

Fires

2019 Controlled burns were done in Melville Koppies Central northern grasslands and in places to reduce heavy combustible loads. A controlled demonstration burn was done for Prof Sally Archibald and Prof Bob Scholes Wits Functional Environmental students.

2020 In June an uncontrolled fire burnt 80% of Melville Koppies East. Most of Melville Koppies West burnt as usual. Controlled burning was started on Melville Koppies Central.

JCPZ (Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo) cut 10m wide firebreaks around all the Melville Koppies' perimeters to protect Melville Koppies' fences and neighbouring properties.

Security

Beagle security is employed for all Sunday events.

The Conservation Team and JCPZ guards do security for midweek groups.

JCPZ insourced guards (two day and two night0 appointed in November 2019, were kitted out in smart uniforms by the end of February 2020.

The basin at the reception hut was smashed so that the tap could be stolen.

The gate at the Old Road entrance, smashed by a taxi on the 17th February 2020, has not been fixed by JCPZ yet.

There is a continual theft of palisade fencing.

Eight divisions of fencing fell down and were fixed by Melville Residents.

Conclusion

A huge thank you to the volunteer army of

- the committed, enthusiastic and expert team of guides and hike leaders for introducing so many people to Melville Koppies, 'A place to be revered' (Denis Beckett)
- the dedicated Conservation Team who are a pleasure to work with
- The vital 'structural maintenance' done by Tony Nunes and his son Neilen and team
- the private donors whose help is vital
- Michelle de Villiers JUNKIE charity shop which has Melville Koppies as a beneficiary.

Wendy Carstens

Chairman of the Melville Koppies Management Committee

August 2020.