



THE WITCHIPOOL WORKERS

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RAINFALL

It was a very dry start to the year with only 174 points falling in the first four months and 158 of that in the middle of January

While the rainfall for the year was just on 10 inches, the growing season rainfall (April to October) was only 4.9 inches, with only 50 points falling in the critical months of September and October when the crops need it most.

Average growing season rainfall for the Litchfield area is 11 inches.

A further 345 points fell in November / December providing valuable moisture for the trees, but it also produced a good crop of bindii.

THE CROP OR LACK THEREOF

The growing season started with a handy 170 points falling in May which enabled the crop to be planted.

The next three months produced only 260 points and, as mentioned above, the last two months of the growing season was abysmal.

The wheat in Douglas's yielded less than 2 bags per acre and the barley on the Home block only 4. The wheat in the School Paddock was so poor that it was not even harvested.

To add insult to injury grain prices dropped by about 30 per cent from last years level. All in all a very forgettable season.

REVEGETATION

Queens Birthday Weekend

The Second Annual Queens Birthday Tree Planting Weekend was on again with a number of characters attending a tree planting session and the obligatory social activities associated with these tasks.

We were pleased to see some new blood for the weekend with Geraldine, Marc, George and Eugenie in attendance for the first time.

Returning tree planters assisting with the works were Jok, Louise, Rory and Archie, and Andrew (Lisa has a better offer).

The Melicans' were represented by Andrew, Emma, Ella, Ari, Larry, Mark, Doobs and Ralph.



The Tree Planters Hard At It

Planting on both the Saturday and Sunday started mid afternoon and continued at a fairly leisurely pace.

All up approximately 1080 trees and shrubs were planted, guarded and watered over the two days.



Others not so hard at it

The evenings entertainment was up to the usual standard and a sumptuous meal was provided by Geraldine.

Thanks to the catering department, the motorbike taxi service and all the workers for their efforts over what was almost enjoyable weekend.

The promising start for the trees faded with the lack of rain later in the year. As of the first watering in the last week in October only 550 or 51 per cent of the trees remained. Although it must be said that a fair few were given the benefit of the doubt.

A second watering in late January 2009 revealed the true state of affairs with only 370 (35 per cent) of the original trees remaining. Of the survivors nearly all look to be in very good shape and will hopefully fare well in the recent hot weather.



The strip a couple of weeks after planting.

The overall survival rate of 35 per cent varies in the different areas planted. The triangle section north of the timber was 39 per cent, the timber area, 36 per cent and the strip only 33 per cent. The timber area was expected to be less than the others but the strip south of the timber is a little unusual and may be related to residual herbicides sown with the barley crop.

The task of fencing the newly revegetated area and the remnant timber area, which we would normally undertake ourselves, was completed in July by contractors. The additional funding for the fencing came from some unallocated funds which remained in a program which was ending in June.

The previous programs used to finance our revegetation projects have now ended and we will now have to look at alternative sources of funding to enable our works to continue.

An initial meeting was held with Kevin Spence (Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Coordinator) and Rob "Rabbit" O'Shannessey

(DSE) in early December to look at our funding options. It is early days yet but Kevin is confident that a local program can be implemented for which funding could be obtained. There may however be no funding for projects undertaken in 2009.

WATER OR LACK THEREOF

The dam levels in the Grampians decreased to very low levels with minimal inflows during the year, as a result there was no channel run this year. The dam still has some water but this will not last long.

The channel run and dam fill detailed in Vol 12 was in fact the last ever in our area as the channel and dam system of the Wimmera Mallee Domestic and Stock Water Supply System is progressively closed down. The channels and dams are being replaced with the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

The installation of the Supply Section 3 (Birchip) of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline commenced in the Litchfield area in June 2008 and the whole section is scheduled to be complete in mid 2009.

The 80 mm distribution pipe has been installed in the School Paddock, it runs from the trunk main in Boaks Road inside the paddocks along the south of McNamaras Road to the Sand Hill and beyond.



Pipe Laying in the School Paddock.

Another 50 mm branch from the School Paddock to the new gate in the Channel Paddock is yet to be installed to enable a connection to the House block and Douglas'. Once this connection has been completed and water meters installed a 700 m pipe to the large tank in the yard will be required.

The connections for the School Paddock and Douglas are not critical and are scheduled for 2010.



The Quite Large Trencher.

Along with new connections the old channels will have to be filled in, especially those in the Channel Paddock and the Old Paddock to make these paddocks more useable for cropping.

OTHER WORKS

The garage which was in fairly poor condition has been repaired. The damaged bay was removed and the east wall reinstated.



Remedial Works In Progress.

The fencing of the dam paddock was completed in November with a permanent fence installed to protect the strip of trees along the east side. The installation of the north gate and the reinstating of the post behind the dam has finally completed the Dam Paddock fencing.

FUTURE WORKS

The erection of the shed, purchased last year, is scheduled for some time in March (after a slab is poured).

In order continue the Queens Birthday planting weekend the driveway portion of the 2009 program will be undertaken at our own expense. It was probable that we would not have obtained funding for these works anyway and it is not a significant outlay as it only involves 400 trees and most of the fencing materials are already at hand.

Part of the fencing works will have to be undertaken prior to the Queens Birthday weekend to get the correct alignment for the rows, The balance of the fencing will most probably be completed on that weekend.