

Vice President's Report - Wiruna 2013

By Joe Cauchi

January 2013 started with some extreme hot weather conditions at Wiruna and Statewide with disastrous consequences around Coonabarabran. In sharp contrast we had a substantial snowfall at Wiruna during the October 2012 new moon weekend and floods in Northern New South Wales and Queensland in February 2013.

As a consequence of the bush fires a curved fire break/access road was bulldozed from the south to the northern fence of the property, behind the outdoor kitchen (west) and joining up with the Bon Glen road. A large gate will be installed at this southern boundary for an emergency exit in case of fire.

The driveway was graded and 3 loads of road base were spread on the existing road from the kitchen, in front of the meeting hall, down to and past the storage shed. This has smoothed out the road and filled in all the depressions.

Regular maintenance was carried out on the club's telescopes, buildings and property. The house now has hand railings along the edge of the verandah and down the stairs, thanks to Barry and Trevor Gerdes.

The old, leaking galvanised water tank adjacent to the amenities block was drained and taken down from its wooden stand, the support structure was removed and the area cleared in readiness for the new water storage tank. This old tank was later cut in half and one section has been placed on wooden boards near the kitchen as a firewood storage unit.

During the June new moon weekend a delicious, come back for more tagine communal dinner was served by our club chefs to the vast majority of those on the property.

The month before the Star Party saw a hive of activity, preparing the facilities, camping and observing fields in readiness for our yearly big event. A special thanks to all those who helped with these preparations.

The 2013 Star Party was an outstanding success. The attendance was similar to last year and the weather was fantastic, with 2½ clear nights and observers and imagers taking advantage of this opportunity until the early hours of the mornings. As usual the guest speakers were very well received. Telescope making and astroimaging competitions, various workshops, swap tables, vendors' displays and a large range of door prizes make the SPSP the premium event of the ASNSW's year. The Kandos Scouts provided the valuable service of catering, as in previous years, and the Saturday night roast dinner cooked by Society members was delicious and well attended.

During the Star Party there were a few problems with the septic tank and hot water supply to the ladies amenities block. A completely new system has been undertaken to address these problems, starting with installing a new water storage tank. The grey water from the showers will be rerouted from the septic tank. A large capacity water pump will supply water directly to both the amenities blocks and an improved gas supply to both blocks will eliminate cold showers.

During the July new moon weekend an ambulance had to be called to Wiruna for a medical emergency. This was the first time there has been a major emergency at Wiruna and we need to be prepared in case there is another. The committee decided to implement a system of knowing who is on the property and contact details in case of an emergency. An incoming call only phone has been purchased for the bush kitchen. This will allow anyone outside, or lost on the way to Wiruna to contact someone on site.

Attendance was slightly down on last year with 30.6 people per month. Income from camping, bunk house and house fees was \$3829.00. As I don't personally collect the fees for on-site tents and vans, income from these is not included.

The number of clear Friday and Saturday nights of new moon weekends increased to 13.5 nights last year. Rainfall for the same period was around 450mm, half of last year's total, hence the dry conditions at Wiruna and surrounding area.

There are a few on-going jobs that I hope will be finished this year, including fitting a Stella Cat to the 17½" Dob and adjustments to the 25" to make it more user friendly. The extensions to the outdoor kitchen have to be modified to meet local council regulations and it is back on the drawing board.

A big thanks to all those who helped with projects throughout last year at Wiruna, and also to all the organizers and volunteers who helped prepare and run the SPSP.

We have had several overseas visitors throughout the year who thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were lucky to get good, clear weather.

Wiruna has a strong community spirit, with everyone pitching in and helping. I invite all who have the time and interest to visit the property. The Society's 17½" and 25" are available for sky tours on clear nights, with information on the night sky always included.