

VICE PRESIDENT WIRUNA - 2020 REPORT . Joe Cauchi.

The year (financial) started off quite well with the new PA system and electric updates to the meeting hall. We can, and have, spent cloudy nights viewing movies in the meeting hall in comfort.

The skirting around the 17.5 inch Dob Kennel was replaced with UV resistant high-grade rubber and this has stopped water from seeping in after rain. This was causing a sauna situation with the humidity degrading the optics and metal surfaces. The new telescope cover that Lesa spent a weekend sewing together will help protect one of the society's large assets.

Proper metal gutter guards were purchased and installed on the outdoor kitchen and adjacent building, then finished off with a bead of silicone. This system has proved highly successful in keeping out leaf and litter. Three 44-gallon steel drums were purchased and converted into incinerators for keeping caravan and permanent tent sites clean of leaf litter. These incinerators have proved successful and easy to use and 3 more are planned.

In August, the Kandos scouts and scout masters spent a clear night under the stars at Wiruna. Lesa Moore presented them all with a run-down of the constellations and bright stars with a laser pointer during twilight, followed by an extensive sky tour using the society's telescope.

A major safety issue was addressed in September with the hiring of a concrete grinder to level the cracked and raised concrete sections in the meeting hall which were a trip hazard. This turned out to be a very messy job as water was connected to the grinder. However, the finished job was a smooth finish with no raised edges. The following month the cracks in the concrete were filled with a chemical compound that hopefully will stop any more movements.

A concerted effort by a group of our members and the help of our neighbour, with his tractor filling in a large ditch in front of our gate that was causing cars to bottom out coming in and leaving the property.

It was around October when things took a turn for the worst. Bushfire smoke started drifting across from fires towards the east. One night the smoke was so thick it was similar to a thick fog only very smelly. Bushfire smoke and dust storms continued for the next few months at Wiruna and most of the state.

As bushfires became more intense and advanced closer to Wiruna, for the first time ever the society's dark sky was closed in December to members and visitors because it was far too dangerous to keep the site open. However, a couple of days just before Christmas, a small group of members drove to Wiruna for the afternoon to move all the gas bottles, fuel containers and prepared Wiruna in case fire hit the property.

When we returned in January, the dust was quite thick on the furniture and inside the observatories. After one more modification to the existing fireplace hood that didn't make much of a difference, Mark Notary's suggestion to purchase an enclosed fireplace was taken on board by the committee. One was purchased, picked up from Mudgee and installed during the January new moon weekend. Quite a few of us were involved in the installation with some ingenious ways to assemble and support the flue. The frustrating part of this job was that we could not light the fireplace and test it due to a total fire ban at the time. However, during February, the fireplace was lit with great success, no smoke and everyone happy.

During April Wiruna was closed again, this time due to Covid 19 and travel restrictions throughout the state. This closure extended into May. During May, four members were given special permission for travel to Wiruna for grass cutting and general maintenance. It was unfortunate and disappointing that this year's Star Party had to be cancelled.

As part of our bushfire safety plan recommended by the RFS. I manufactured 2 steel cages for the societies members gas bottles, so bottles can be stored together while there is no one on the property. Five lined steel removable covers were also made and installed on the windows of the meeting hall. Hopefully all these improvements will make a difference in an emergency.

A bronze star for Mike Kerr was screwed into the tree adjacent to his Observatory. Also, a bronze plaque for Scott Mellish has been mounted onto a metal stand and concreted in front of his Humpy.

The large wattle tree besides the Barry Gerdes Lodge was cut down as this was posing a fire risk. Work has started on the Lodge which will include replacing the doors, decking and the skirting around the building. Hopefully this will be finished by Christmas.

During November we managed one communal dinner before all the chaos began and welcomed two lots of overseas visitors. A German member and her parents visited Wiruna for the second time and a sole American amateur. Both lots were very lucky to have clear skies while they were there.

The society's 17.5 inch and the 25 inch have had limited use during the year. So Chris Ross has accredited Mark Notary and Rod Doig to use these 2 scopes under the right weather conditions. This will take the pressure off Chris who had normally carried out sky tours in the past.

There are a few more projects planned for coming 12 months. The main one is to seal the meeting hall from ember attack as part of our compliance and planning with the local council.

Attendance was slightly down on last year with 31.3 people per month over the 9 months. Income was also down accordingly to \$3480.00. As usual this amount does not include caravan and on-site tent fees.

Drought conditions continued through the past 12 months with far less rainfall than the previous 12 months. However, the number of all clear nights (Fridays & Saturdays) has increased.

Wiruna could not operate through the year if it were not for those dedicated members who help and give up their time to make Wiruna the fantastic dark sky site it is today.