

# A history of the development of Sweetwater Creek Nature Reserve

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Part 1

**Warwick Exton**

## **SWEETWATER CREEK NATURE RESERVE**

The Bushland Reserve encompassing the land, some 12.8 Ha, covering both sides of the last kilometre of Sweetwater Creek comprises land designated as Open Space – a mixture of land never subdivided for development, subdivided blocks purchased by Frankston Council and parts of freehold blocks adjacent to the creek where owners had requested subdivision.

As the land in South Frankston was taken up for housing, particularly after the Second

World War, unused land on both sides of Sweetwater Creek was subjected to a variety of uses and misuses

It was a “jungle playground” for local children. It was a sporting area for car and motorbike riders and, more unfortunately, it was a dumping ground for garden waste and rubbish.

Then, in 1973, contractors working for Frankston Council commenced installation of main sewer lines in the Reserve as this was the lowest part of the surrounding housing area.

This photo shows some of the work being carried out at the rear of Fleetwood Cres.



This next photo shows debris accumulated at the rear of No. 3 Plummer Ave.



The damage to the environment resulting from this work galvanised local residents to action and they met informally to register their concern, not only about the damage caused by excavation for the sewer line but also about rubbish dumping, vandalism and environmental damage caused by trail bikes and FWDs

A petition to Council was organised containing 800 signatures of residents with supporting letters from academics and members of parliament. This was presented to Council which then set better environmental standards for the laying of the sewers along the creek and arranged better supervision.

As a result of the public concern about the abuse of this unused land and the interest which had been generated, the organisers of the petition saw the need for this concern to be translated into action and decided to set up a permanent community group to work on improving the area for the future.

And so, in 1975, these citizens organised a local public meeting and formed a permanent community group which took the name Action Sweetwater Creek. A committee was duly elected, and a constitution and set of objectives drafted as the basis for future improvement.

Here is part of the first page of the minutes of meeting No. 1 held at Lucy Henty's home at 29 Fenton Crescent.

ACTION SWEETWATER CREEK

Minutes of Meeting No. 1/75 of Action Sweetwater Creek Committee, held on Wednesday, 19th February 1975, at 8.00 p.m. at 29 Fenton Crescent, Frankston.

Present:

Mrs. L. Henty	Mr. G. Buckland	
Miss M. Clark	Mrs. D. Cleveland	
Mr. K. Henderson	Mr. R. Cleveland	
Mrs. L. Bowden	Mr. H. Reddish	(By invitation)

1. Apologies:  
An apology was received from Mr. C. Loewitz.
2. Constitution:  
The attached constitution was drafted as a basis for operation in 1975, subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the committee, and subject to review at the first annual general meeting to be held in February 1976.
3. Committee - 1975:  
The following persons were nominated as members of the 1975 committee:

Mrs. Henty (accepted)	Mrs. Buckland (accepted)
Miss Clark ( " )	Mrs. Cleveland ( " )
Mr. Henderson ( " )	Mr. Cleveland ( " )
Mrs. Bowden ( " )	Mrs. C. Hammett (to be confirmed)
Mr. Loewitz ( " )	Mr. G. Douglas (to be confirmed)
4. Office-bearers:  
The following office-bearers were appointed by the committee for a period of twelve months:

President	-	Mrs. Henty
Vice-President	-	Mr. Henderson
Secretary	-	Miss Clark
Asst. Secretary	-	Mrs. Cleveland
Treasurer	-	Mr. Loewitz
Vice-Treasurer	-	Mr. Cleveland

ACTION

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The next document is part of the Constitution.

THE CONSTITUTION  
OF  
ACTION SWEETWATER CREEK

1. AIMS

The aims of Action Sweetwater Creek are:

- a) To restore the Sweetwater Creek Reserve to indigenous bushland and to preserve it in that state for the enjoyment of the community.
- b) To take appropriate steps to protect the indigenous flora and fauna.
- c) To actively oppose any development of the area or schemes which would be detrimental to the ecology.
- d) To enlist the support of the community, the local council, and appropriate State or Federal authorities to achieve the above.

2. MEMBERSHIP

- a) Membership of Action Sweetwater Creek is open to any person who is prepared to actively support its aims.
- b) Membership is by subscription, the amount of which is to be determined annually, including a concession rate for pensioners, students and juniors.
- d) Subscriptions are payable from 1st October each year.

The aim of the founders was to use the active work and support of local residents to help Frankston Council to effectively preserve and maintain an area of land on both sides of the creek between Baden Powell Drive and Nepean Highway as natural bushland and as a passive recreation area.

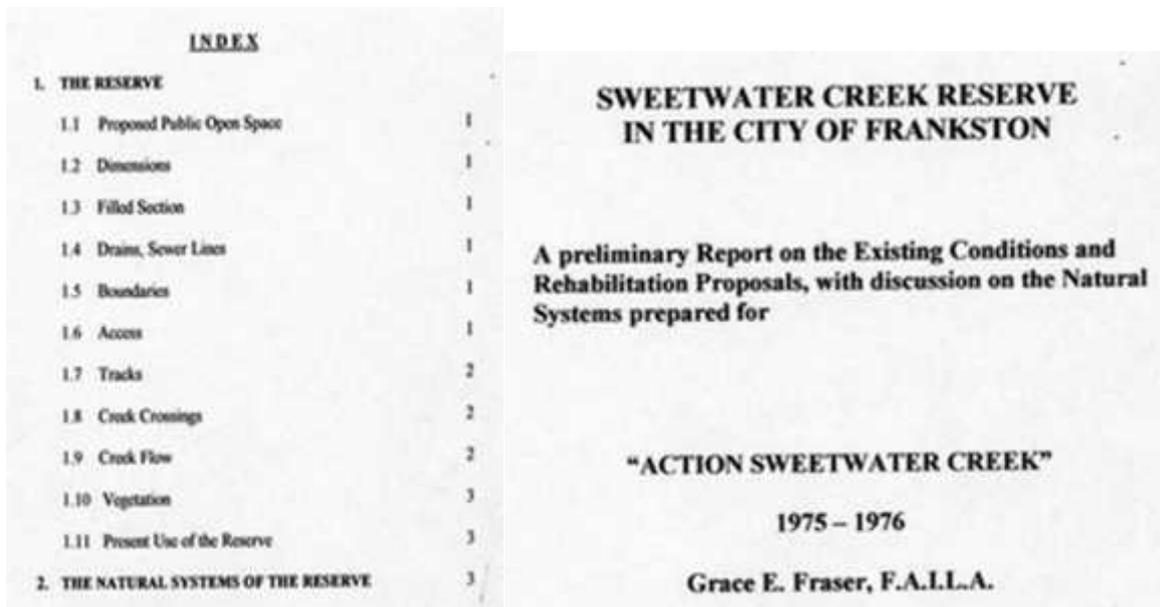
The initial records of the founders and the meeting minutes which have been preserved, show an extraordinary amount of thought and care taken by a group comprising mainly local ladies. Some of these people remained office bearers for many years – notably two sisters, Lucy Henty and Margaret Clark.

After a period of learning and experience, the group found that as a registered community group, it was able to obtain, in partnership with Council as the Reserve manager, substantial financial assistance from State and Federal Government agencies. And so, over years, many thousands of dollars have been granted to the group to help carry out regeneration and erosion control projects.

The first major step the committee took was to gain a Federal grant in 1975 under the RED (Regional Employment Development) Scheme, enabling it to commission a local landscape architect, Grace

Fraser to prepare a professional report evaluating the area and recommending ways to maintain and improve it.

Copies of this report may be seen at the Frankston Library. Here is the title page and index of this report.



In 1977 the Council accepted the report in principle and designated the reserve basically as a “nature reserve” instead of “public open space”. It couldn’t be classified strictly as a nature reserve because of problems and costs of completely fencing it. The Council then took the very important step of buying blocks of freehold land adjacent to the creek & budgeting monies for maintenance works.

Here is a map showing the extent of the properties acquired by the Council for inclusion in the reserve.



In the early 1980's the group started a program of weeding and planting using an ad hoc working bee approach. It attacked areas of exotic weeds and revegetated areas with purchased and propagated indigenous plants.

.In 1983 Council set up a working party to report on the future maintenance of the reserve. It comprised three councillors, relevant Council officers, two consultants and ASC representatives. This led to the acceptance of a five year plan for maintenance and improvement, and the establishment of an Advisory Committee to advise on the management of the reserve. This committee comprised a Councillor, three Council officers, a Melbourne Water engineer and two ASC reps. It operated till 1995 when it was disbanded by the then State Government appointed Commissioners

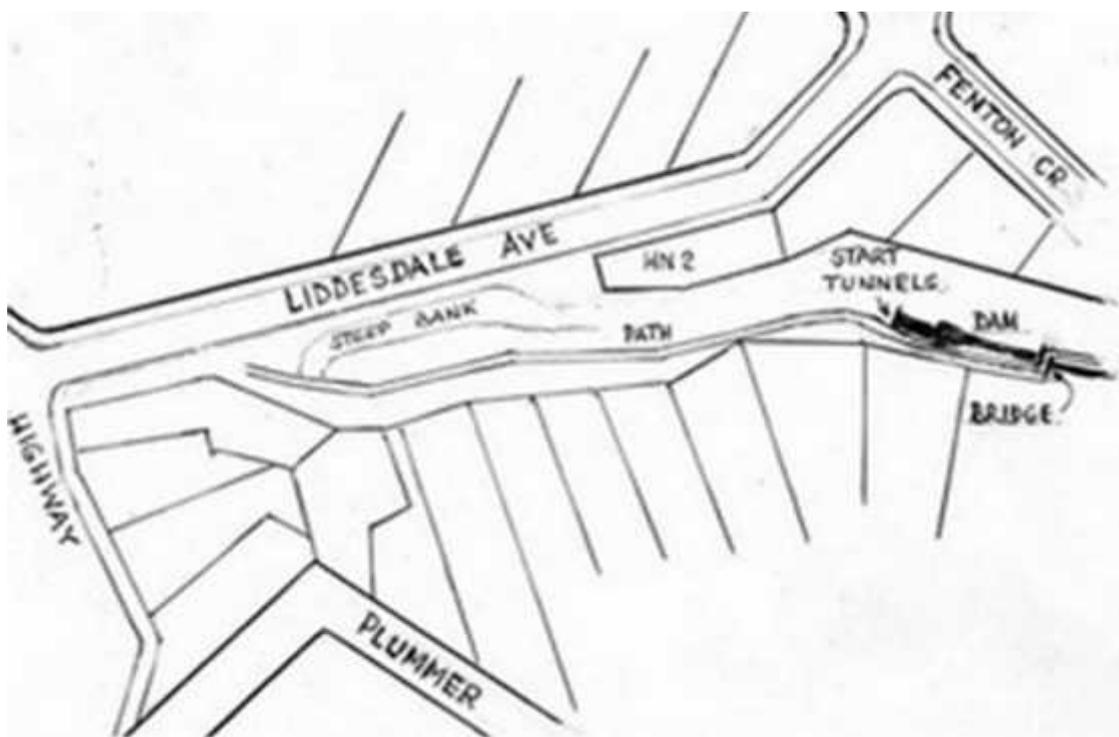
## **MAJOR PROJECTS**

### **DESCRIPTION OF MAJOR PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN BY ASC, FRANKSTON CITY COUNCIL AND MELBOURNE WATER**

#### **LIDDESDALE ENTRANCE - Lower Area**

In December 1993, the ASC committee decided to implement a policy of improving the appearance of Reserve entrance areas and chose the main entrance at Liddesdale Avenue. While the top area, level with Liddesdale Avenue, was certainly in need of major improvement, it was decided to attack the low area between the tunnel entrance and the steep track up to the street.

The next map shows the target area and the position of the two tunnels carrying Sweetwater Creek from the rear of 10 Fenton under the last section of the Reserve, Nepean Highway and the Car Park to the Bay.



On December 6,7,and 8, 1993 an ASC work group assisted by a Green Task Force group under the control of Greening Australia supervisors and a council group led by Rangers Mark Doyle and Dave

Stewart carried out extensive woody weeding. The site, a filled and very muddy area was heavily infested with large Salix (Willow) trees interspersed with Pittosporum and Tobacco Plant. The trees were cut and chipped, and the roots poisoned. The photo shows the Council crew operating a chipper on site.



In May 1994, the ASC group, again assisted by a Green Task Force team continued weeding and planting on the reverse slope of the entrance area and a Council team rebuilt the track between the tunnel entrance and Centenary Bridge. Many of the Salix tree roots were pulled out and a pond established on the Liddesdale side of the track.

The next photo shows what the site looked like after this work



In 1996, after Melbourne Water had provided F.C.C. with \$25000 to build a floodway outlet for the creek at the Liddesdale Avenue entrance, major works were carried out both at street level and on the lower area.

The next photo shows the floodway which was designed to divert flood water away from the house at 579A Nepean Highway out onto Liddesdale Avenue in case the tunnels carrying the creek blocked up with debris during a flood.



The floodway was cut in, the top area and the banks graded & the floodway provided with a road metal base and a granitic sand surface. While really designed as a floodway, it makes an excellent track.

The ASC workgroup matted the steep banks and wired them before planting them out and mulching the plantings.

The next photo shows Ranger Mark Doyle and ASC Committee member Muriel Petersen carrying out this work.



The group also planted out the top garden areas with ground cover, shrubs and trees. This work took place over a six month period.

In April 1997, after obtaining a grant of \$2605 from Melbourne Parks and Waterways, the reverse slope down to the pond, as the next photo shows, was weeded, matted, terraced, and planted, and a seat erected overlooking the pond.



## **FIRE CONTROL PROJECT -- REAR OF BRIGHTON STREET**

In June 1992, as a result of an approach by Mr Charles Dawson, a resident of Brighton St. who was concerned about the risk of bush fire in the Reserve at the rear of his and other properties, the group and Council rangers decided to commence a weed abatement and native flora regeneration program between the rear fences and the track from Rotaract Bridge to Fleetwood.

On June 2, the site was inspected by a group comprising Carol Sweatman who was in charge of rangers, David Skvor, the Reserve ranger, and Stan Chapman and Warwick Exton, ASC Committee members. After consideration, it was decided to carry out a program of extensive woody weeding, with small burns to dispose of the foliage as it accumulated followed by planting and regeneration.

On June 11, a group of 13 ASC workers started cutting Sallow Wattle, Pittosporum and Coprosma trees, piling the foliage for subsequent burning and on June 18, David Skvor with a group of his people continued the process.

This work continued through July and August and then. On August 16, the ASC group planted 2000 trees on the top half of the site.

After further plantings in November and December and January 1993, the main ASC group moved to another project.

However, there was plenty more work to be done on the site, and when ASC was asked if it would like to make use of Corrective Service offenders with its work in the Reserve, the group decided to start work again on the site. In January 1994, a group of three Corrective Service offenders under the control of a supervisor, Ray Crowley, with the assistance of ASC workers, Doug Sharp and Warwick Exton restarted the program of weeding and planting on every Saturday morning from January to October.

After that date work on this project ceased.