



October 2016

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



*Acacia maitlandii*, Maitlands Wattle or Spiny-leaved Wattle. The globular yellow flowers are fading to brown but emerging from them are the shiny red seedpods. Photographed along the Papunya road: Barb Gilfedder.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00 PM at Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Visitors are welcome.

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## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be November 2016.  
The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 October.  
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

**Wed 12 Oct** Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club **GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. **Speaker – Ken Johnson** "Development of Mammalogy in central Australia: what and why it happened."  
**Remember to bring cash to pay for your Membership renewal if you have not already paid. Also Central Australian Flora Brochures #1 and #2 will be on sale to members for \$4 each. Correct change appreciated.**

**Wed 9 Nov** Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club **GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speakers: Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair showing pictures from their latest trip to Africa.

Please contact leaders if you intend going on any of these field trips.

**Sat 8 Oct** A day trip **Drive through Owen Springs Reserve** on service roads normally inaccessible to the public, down to James Range Bore and McCluers Gap with a Park Ranger. Less than 200km round trip. High clearance 4WD essential. Limited number of vehicles. Members only. Contact Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

**Sat 15 Oct** **Walk from Standley Chasm to Reveal Saddle.** This is quite a long walk with a lot of steady climbing. Estimated walk time is about 6 hours. Wonderful views reward those who make the effort. Afternoon tea at the Standley Chasm kiosk available afterwards. Leader: Neil Woolcock. [neilwool48@gmail.com](mailto:neilwool48@gmail.com) Meet at Flynns Grave in time to leave at 7.30am.

**Sun 23 Oct** **Drive along Ross River Road** stopping to admire and discuss flowering plants. Meet outside Pichi Richi opposite the bore at 9:00am. Lunch at Ross River homestead if you wish. **Leader: Neil Woolcock.**  
[neilwool48@gmail.com](mailto:neilwool48@gmail.com)

**Sat 29 Oct** **Early morning walk** on new Telegraph Station tracks. Leader: Rosalie Breen. [rosalie.breen@email.com](mailto:rosalie.breen@email.com) 6.00am start.

**Sat 12 Nov** **Picnic/ barbeque at Simpsons Gap** followed by **Spotlight walk** with Pam Keil. [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com)

### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: [apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au](mailto:apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au)

**Sat 1 Oct** Don't miss the **OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN PLANT SALE** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden starting at 8 am. It is a perfect time to get more native plants into your garden, after all the rain and with the weather warming up. A big range of local native plants for sale in tubes and pots at very reasonable prices. **BE EARLY!**

**Wed 5 Oct** **APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic at 7.30pm. Speakers: **Karlee Foster** and **Peter Jobson** on **Eremophilas**

**Wed 2 Nov** **APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic at 7.30pm. Speaker: **Connie Spencer** on her recent trip to **Canada**

### BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

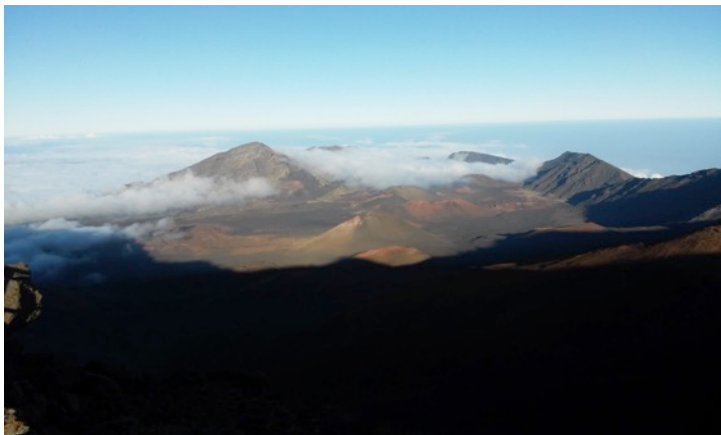
Contact: [birdlifeca@gmail.com](mailto:birdlifeca@gmail.com)

**Wed 26 Oct** **Birdlife Central Australia Meeting** 7.00pm in Meeting Room at Alice Springs Desert Park.

### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	8953 6394	Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Secretary	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.	Committee Member	Pauline Walsh	0416 094 910
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Committee Member	Robin Grey-Gardner	8952 2207
Website	Pamela Keil	8955 0496	Newsletter	Pamela Keil / Barbara Gilfedder	

**If you have not renewed your ASFNC Membership subscription yet, please bring cash or cheque to the meeting, post to ASFNC, PO Box 8663 or pay direct into the club account at Westpac NSB# 035-303, account # 100981. Reference with your name please, so we know who has paid. A membership form was in the August newsletter, if you need one, otherwise send email to [contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au](mailto:contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au)**



## September speaker - Doug McDougall “Highlights of Hawaiian Wilderness”

Report by Jill Brew

Between ‘Aloha!’ and ‘Mahalo!’ (‘Welcome!’ and ‘Thank you!’) Doug took us along his Hawaiian holiday track of last February— on and below the waters, and up, down and teetering on the edges of island landscapes.

Humpback whales, green turtles and gobies: There were spectacular close-up shots of Humpbacks (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) breaching—hauling themselves out of the water on their backs—with Mt Haleakala, Maui, in the background. The whales move towards winter breeding in

the seas around the Hawaiian Islands, after summer feeding along south of the Russian, Alaskan and Canadian coasts. Hunting together, the 12 - 16 metre whales get below schools of prey fish and create a ‘bubble net’ that surrounds and traps the fish above. Studies of the songs of whales indicate that the songs of those from the North Pacific are different from those from the Atlantic. The songs don’t remain constant, but change over years.

The sunken crater of Molokini, Maui, is a marine sanctuary and a site for high-visibility snorkelling with coral, fish and green sea turtles.

The Hawaiian islands are on shifting plates, moving north-west and eroding down. In the north-west the former volcanic islands are reduced to atolls. 2,500 km away in the south east of the chain, the Big Island of Hawaii, above a ‘hot spot’, has active volcanoes. Rainfall varies across the islands from areas of 0 – 25 cm to 4m – 5m, and varies widely on individual islands, according to the altitude and rain shadow.

Population of the formerly barren islands with plant and animal species has been a process taken over a 32-million-year period, through ocean-borne salt resistant seeds, windblown spores, seeds, insects and spiders and migrating and storm-driven birds. 90% of the flora is endemic. There are numerous introduced weeds though, the thorny Mesquite (‘Kiawe’) – *Prosopis pallida* – native to South America, being one.

The Nene Goose – *Branta sandvicensis* – striped grey and white, and related to the Canada goose, is one of the world’s rarest geese. It suffered from cats and from hunting by humans, dropping in number to about 30 birds in 1952 from an estimated 25,000 in 1770. There are now 2,500 following breeding programs, but the population is considered inbred.

The Big Island is dominated by Mauna Kea, 4,200 metres, and the climatic variations it creates. You can drive yourself to the top, but it needs a 4WD. As you move fairly quickly through the altitude levels, you need to stop and acclimatise as you go up. A partial solar eclipse was underway while Doug was on the mountain and he visited the observatory there. (As the site is considered sacred, construction of the observatory was controversial.) Views to sheer drops as you drive down the steep roads are part of the driving experience on the way down. ([Above: view from the top.](#))

Kilauea, an active volcano in the Volcanoes National Park on Big Island, is considered the home of the life creator, the fire goddess, Pele. Doug had some exciting slides of rich thick fiery glowing flowing lava. A cooled lava flow was like a moonscape of rocks. Where the lava oozed down and hit the ocean – dropping down a precipitous cliff of previous lava flow – steam issued up towards insecure-looking curious spectators. Remnants of collapsed lava feeder flows, now cavernous lava tubes like subway tunnels, can be seen in the park too, in proximity to covering rainforest. Pictures of the surface of Kilauea Iki Crater looked like broken up asphalt. Plants that surface after lava flow are the fern ‘Ae’ (*Polypodium pellucidum*) and edible fruit like cranberries ‘Ohelo’, (*Vaccinium reticulatum*), in the Heather family. It can survive in 25 centimetres of ash. Another native plant is ‘Ohialehua (*Metrosideros polymorpha*), from the Myrtaceae family, a bright red flowering shrub like the NZ Christmas tree. It grows on the old lava fields.

Other plants featured included ‘Amou’ (*Sadleria cyatheodes*), deep red ‘Pilo’ (*Coprosma achracea*) and ‘Kumakani’ windbreak (*Dodonaea viscosa*), found around the world.

On Maui is a region that was in line to become a golf course, but instead was bought by the Hawaiian Islands Land Trust and is now the Waitiee Coastal Dunes and Wetlands Refuge. At one end, the Waihee River (once exhausted by diversion for water-needy sugar cane) runs through to the ocean. Freshwater gobies (that use suction mouths to move upstream to spawn) perished when the river stopped. They are returning now to the river. Sand dunes 60 metres high form an arc behind a sweep of inland-based fish ponds – important archeological and cultural sites of previous habitation. Also on Maui is Haleakala – 3,020 metres – a ‘shield’ volcano where overnight hikes are available. The rare Hawaiian silver sword, *Argyroxiphium sandwicense subsp. macrocephalum*, that grows to 3m tall after a cushion start, is found here. ([right](#))

Doug repositioned Hawaii from being seen mainly as a halfway stop between Australia and the US, to being a serious destination for nature lovers.

Mahalo! Thanks, Doug!

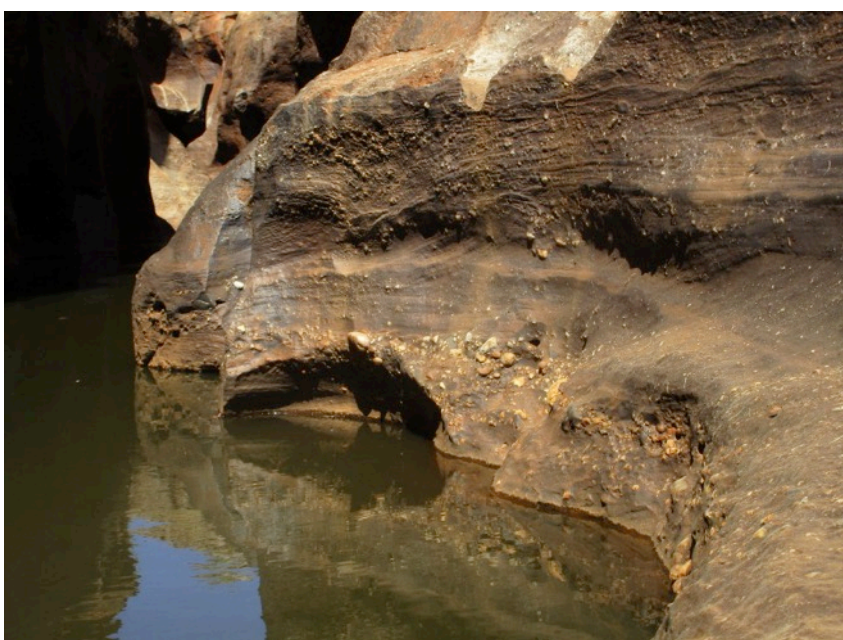


## COBBOLD GORGE by Rosalie Breen



A month or so back Gavan and I were on a road trip to western and central Queensland. One of the highlights was a visit to Cobbold Gorge. Situated 85 km south of Georgetown is Cobbold Gorge Village, in a privately owned cattle station, set in natural and unspoiled bush land, so you don't realize you are in a tourist place. We camped. The actual gorge is in a massive, rugged sandstone plateau.

It is very interesting from a geological point of view. In the Jurassic period, around 180 million years ago, large river systems flowed over a featureless plain of weathered granites and volcanic rocks, depositing coarse sand and sometimes gravel from the higher lands to south and east in a vast sheet becoming hardened into sandstone with time. When this sea withdrew, the region underwent weathering, uplifting and faulting. Much of the sandstone was worn away but a large area over hundreds of kilometres and around 50 metres thick was preserved around Cobbold Creek.



In the gorge we could see the mostly horizontal layers or bedding of this sedimentary rock. Each layer shows different grain types and size indicating the different conditions of deposition. These have different resistances to weathering and so become etched out in intricate patterns and shapes, large and small. (shown in top two pictures) Also some inclined layers, termed cross bedding, were seen. These can be formed when large ripples or sand bars migrate along the riverbed in large water flows and the sand slips down the steeper front of the ripple. Pebbles in thin layers indicate periods of flood when the stronger current can carry gravel. Finer grained shale indicates a slow current or water spread over a flood plain allowing the silt and clay to

settle.

The surface of the sandstone is crisscrossed with fractures or joints and almost bare of vegetation, so that it stands out from the air or from the lookout walk. Creeks follow some of these joints. The final part of the original Cobbold Creek route is now an abandoned gorge as the waters were channeled into another joint. The cause of this "stream capture" is not really known but could be due to the head of the capturing gully eroding towards the original gully and being at a lower level. Or the change of course could be due to fault movements tilting the area so the old course became uphill. Being a young (geological speaking) gorge means it is narrow, 2 m in some places, as erosion has not had time to widen it. (Right) Under water the walls are undercut and eventually they will collapse.



We went in a battery powered punt gliding for 500m, down in the chasm and back, with the majestic sandstone cliffs towering above on both sides, sometimes up to 30 m, exposing the sandstone layers. Silently gliding on the water was like opening up a mystery, as each turn revealed interesting formations in the weathered rock, overhangs (mind your head), shadows, recesses, light plays on the walls from the ripples of the water, reflections, mossy crevices, water seeping down the walls, ferns, freshwater crocodiles, a Great Egret, St Andrew's Cross spiders, a touch of the rock textures, blue sky straight above. Magic – such a quiet, peaceful feeling in a special place.

The tour also includes a walk to the top of the sandstone to view a little of the gorge from above and the incredible sandstone formations up close, and a walk in the bush to identify the trees and shrubs, mostly new to me, and with lots of history of the early pioneers and mining ventures.



I have gleaned most of the information from the comprehensive booklet "Cobbold Gorge" written by the owners, the Terry family.

Photos: top - towering sandstone cliffs; left – view from the top; bottom – light play on the rocks, from the water ripples as the battery-powered boat silently squeezes through; the Great Egret.



## The other side of Mount Zeil...and a new Schoenia to photograph

by Barb Gilfedder

We had an opportunity to visit an area on the North side of Mount Zeil. It is the highest peak in the Northern Territory, and the highest peak in Australia west of the Great Dividing Range. No, we didn't climb it, but had great views of it.

It is believed that Mount Zeil was named during or following Ernest Giles' 1872 expedition, probably after Count Zeil, who had recently distinguished himself with geographic explorations in Spitzbergen; a footnote in Giles' published journal implies that the naming was instigated by his benefactor Baron Ferdinand von Mueller.

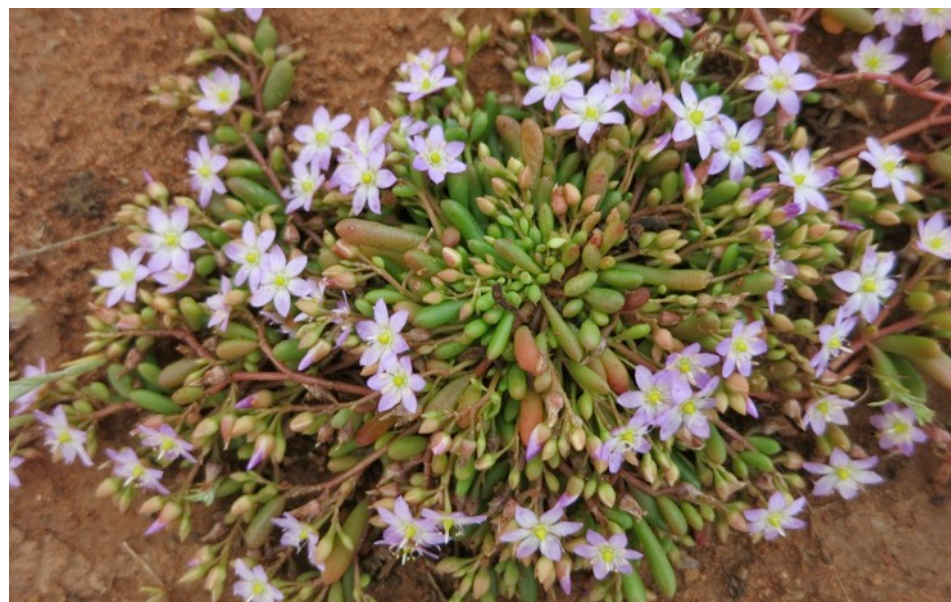
The area, once part of Narwietooma Station, is being developed as a Wilderness camp, although not open to the public yet.



There are very few tracks in the area, but we could drive on one to where a small wetland is being developed - earth has been scooped out and a dam built to hold back the water when it arrives. I found this interesting because with the dampness and the disturbed soil, some small native plants were growing.



Clockwise from the above – Hairy Carpet Weed (*Glinus lotoides*), a tiny yellow daisy later identified as Dainty Everlasting (*Schoenia ramosissima*), Cannonball saltbush (*Dissocarpus paradoxus*), a Parakeelya (*Calandrinia stagnensis*) and a Billy Button, *Calocephalus platycephalus*,





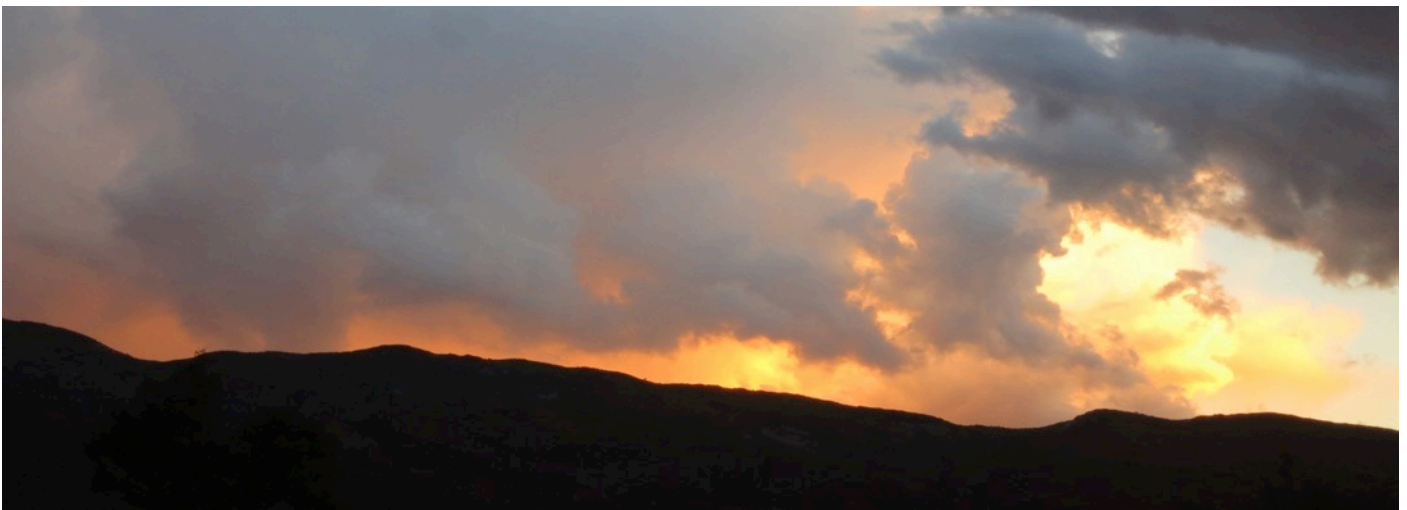
The tiny Daisy, that Jim had pointed out, was a new plant for me. On the drive in I had seen some yellow patches under mulga as we drove through a cutting. On the return journey we stopped and it was the same tiny daisy but these were bigger plants. Many of you will know my passion for native Daisies, so I was thrilled to identify it when we got home as *Schoenia ramosissima*, confirmed by Peter Jobson at the Herbarium.

As a reminder there are two other plants in the *Schoenia* genus in central Australia,, that are much more common and you may be familiar with. They all look so different.

*Below Schoenia ayersii and Schoenia cassiniana.*



So an interesting trip for me, we did get a bit wet, but the storm clouds and sunset behind Mount Zeil were stunning.



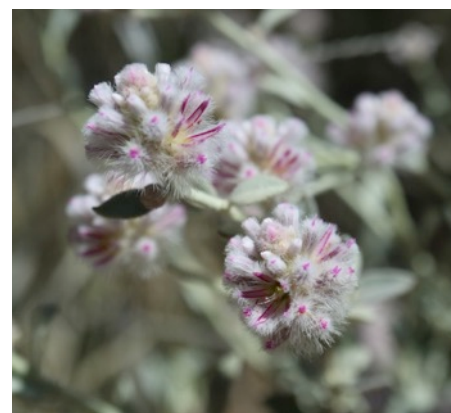
## Old Telegraph Station blossoming beautifully by Bec Duncum



I recently took myself on a few walks around the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. The flowers are all blossoming beautifully so if you have some spare time, take your bike or get your walking shoes and head out there to check these out. The Telegraph Station is so close to town and there are several short walks to choose from. Don't forget to take along your copies of the Central Australian Flora brochures to help you identify what you see.



Clockwise from top left. Three beautiful pea flowers in the Fabaceae family. *Swainsona phacoides*, Dwarf Swainsona; *Indigofera leucotricha*, Silver Indigo and *Swainsona canescens*, Grey Swainsona. *Ptilotis obovata*, Silvertails; *Senna artemisioides* ssp *helmsii*, Blunt leaved Cassia; *Calocephalus platycephalus*, Billybuttons; *Senecio gregorii*, Annual Yellowtop and *Melaleuca glomerata*. Inland Teatree.





## Sue Fraser

It was with great sadness I learnt of the untimely death of Sue Fraser at the age of 60.

Sue had lived in Alice Springs since the 1970's, and I believe that she was in the Field Naturalists Club in her late teens in 1974. When I joined the Field Naturalists in 1996 she was one of the most active club members. Her bright cheery personality and her enthusiasm were great assets to what was then a small and struggling club. She loved the bush around Alice and was keen to learn about all the plants and wildlife, and share her knowledge and discoveries with others.

Always an adventurer, I well remember pushing a small inflatable raft of backpacks across the Glen Helen Waterhole with her on a rather under attended Field Naturalists excursion.

The records show that she has held offices various offices in the club for a total of 12 years, having held every office except President (her choice not to). She was Secretary/Treasurer in 1988 and 1989 in what must have been the difficult period when the club had just come out of a four year recess, and again from 1997 to 2001, then Public Officer 2001 to 2003 and Vice-President 2008 to 2011. The bald facts do not do justice to her contribution. She was always efficient and encouraging to others on the committee. In 2000 the first ever ANN Get-Together (a national event) was held in Alice Springs and Sue did a brilliant job in organising the local clubs part in this event.

Through her we got considerable material support from L.J.Hookers. When the newsletters still mostly went out in print form she printed them there, saving us the cost of photocopying which had been a major expense. Several times when we had a stall at the Garden Fair Sue organised not just the loan of shade shelters but L.J.Hookers staff erected them for us. She was always happy to take her turn manning the stalls too.

In 2004 the club awarded her one of the first two life memberships for the dedicated service she had given the club over the years.

The last trip I remember her going on was a walk partway up Mount Gillen in 2012, where in true Sue style she was interested in everything and very observant, from spider holes, new shoots on trees and tiny plants emerging after a recent fire to the wonderful views of her beloved Macdonnell Ranges. Afterwards we were all invited back for a beautiful morning tea served in her immaculate garden.

Our hearts go out to Doug, Scott and Emma.

Bob Read



**Christmas party at Simpson's Gap in 2002. Standing - Lyndall White, Leoni Read, Bob Read, Jim Gilfedder, Pat Gallagher. Sitting - Rosalie Breen, Kevin Boyle, Josie Petrick, Barb Gilfedder. Elsa Corbet and Sue Fraser.**



**Part-way up Mount Gillen in 2012. Wendy Mann, Connie Spencer, Sue O'Callaghan, Rhondda Tomlinson, Sue Fraser and Jill Brew. Hidden: Bev Dawson and Ian Mann**