

Friends of Parks Forum 2008

Each year the Friends of National Parks from around South Australia come together for their annual Forum. The Board of Friends of Parks invites a different Friends Group to host each Forum. In 2008 it was Friends of Flinders Ranges National Park group which hosted the Forum.

Most Groups have the luxury of a town in their area where they can hire a hall and engage caterers quite readily. In the Flinders ranges the nearest town to the National Park is Hawker. The Memorial Hall there accommodates around 140 people. Our goal was to attract 250 delegates so clearly the hall was not an option. True, there is a huge tin shed at the race course but this was hardly suitable. Besides, we wanted to showcase the magnificent Flinders Ranges National Park and what better way to do it than to hold the Forum within the Park.

Our members had made the decision to accept the invitation to host then handed the task to a small committee of highly dedicated people.

With the support of DEH staff at Wilpena it was agreed that we would hire large marquees and erect them in the grounds of Old Wilpena Homestead, a stunning location for the Forum.

Everything needed for the Forum had to be hired or borrowed. The only on-site assets were a small toilet block and a tin shed. The old homestead could

provide electricity but no facilities for meeting, food preparation and so on. So we hired, borrowed and purchased. Everything that was necessary to host 250 guests.

Planning for Forum steadily occurred over almost 2 years. As the date came closer so the intensity of activity increased. But by the time delegates began to arrive everything necessary had been finalised. The one factor beyond our control was the weather. Forum was mid August. We have been in the Flinders in August and the weather has been magnificent. In other years August has thrown wet and windy conditions at us. We hoped and prayed for fine weather over the Forum days; it could rain as much as it liked after that to benefit our Flinders neighbours.

As it turned out the promised rain held off, the sun peaked through threatening clouds from time to time, and although a cold wind blew more than we needed, the weather did not detract from the Forum program.

*Mornings were set aside for a range of excellent speakers on the theme *Footprints in the Flinders*. Afternoons were spent touring the iconic Park to learn more about the geology, aboriginal culture, pastoral history, early mining, and to take in the beauty of the region.*

Saturday night's Forum Dinner was a program highlight. In a stunning setting with a true Flinders

atmosphere delegates dined, were entertained by local talent, heard from the (then) new Environment Minister, applauded Award winners, and generally had a great time together.

Two years planning and preparation was all expended far too quickly. By Sunday night delegates were tired and the Forum wound to a natural close. Committee members too were exhausted but happy, happy to have hosted their 250 guests in true Flinders Ranges style. We were delighted when delegates started commenting about the friendliness of the Forum, about the wonderful program, the seamless presentation, the smooth organisation. It made the time and effort all worthwhile. Having said that, there is

nobody on the Committee ready yet to host another Friends Forum.

Forum Sponsors helped make the program possible and we are indebted to them. Sponsors of Forum 2008 were CMV Group, ElectraNet, Dick Smith Esq., Nature Foundation SA, Dept for Environment & Heritage, Rawnsley Park Station, Nyrstar Port Pirie, Heathgate Resources, Temple Bruer Wines, Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, Willow Springs Station, and Gum Creek Station.

You will find more about the Forum in the website photographs.

Enjoy. And we hope to see you when you visit the Flinders Ranges.