

## The Goats of Grant Marine Park



Goats grazing in Grant Marine Park? Cottesloe residents strolling along the foreshore would hardly believe their eyes. Although it is easy to imagine that any goat would like the vegetation so lovingly restored by Cottesloe Coast-care volunteers over the last few years. But, no, there are no goats nowadays so volunteers can rest easy.

But just over one hundred years ago such an idyllic semi-rural scene would have presented itself to residents strolling by.

Although the term "idyllic" may be a bit euphemistic and would not have come readily to the mind of any casual observer; the truth was much more prosaic. What we today call 'Grant Marine Park' was a sandy wasteland and the straying goats and sheep had a very hard time to find anything green to fill their bellies. And the word sandy is no exaggeration! Adjoining land owners complained to Cottesloe Council that their six foot tall fences were constantly buried by sand drifts, despite the best efforts of the Council to regularly remove large quantities of sand.

We can say this on the authority of an official document in the Town of Cottesloe archives dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 1896 which describes Grant Marine Park. The paper provides an interesting description of an eroded sandy wasteland with a complete absence of scrub

and undergrowth, on the south-east corner of Grant Street and (macadamised) Swanbourne Terrace (now Marine Parade) in Cottesloe. The document is actually a funding petition from Town of Cottesloe to the Government of Western Australia for a fencing and revegetation project.

THE ACTING SURVEYOR GENERAL, -

In accordance with your instructions, I have made an inspection of A/1203 shown red on the attached litho.

2. Owing to the total absence of the natural scrub and undergrowth throughout the reserve, there is a strong sand drift South Easterly from the North West corner of the reserve. This drift is a menace to adjoining properties, and if action is not taken early, will necessitate large expenditure by private owners and the Cottesloe Municipality.

3. Lots 24/23 and 15 (see tracing) are fenced with strong 6ft. closed picket fences. The sand has now reached

Minute Paper for the Executive Council.

I recommend the Cabinet to advise His Excellency the Governor in

Council to approve of Reserve N<sup>o</sup> 3260 as herein described

for the purpose of Public Utility at Cottesloe. (S. Lot 144)

*A. H. Richardson*

Commissioner of Crown Lands

18. 2. 96.

The local Council had recently spent 20 pounds spreading seaweed across the 2¼ acre site followed by seeding of the area with Marram Grass (a European grass). Straying goats and sheep had, however, eaten all the vegetation. A closed picket fence was mooted but the report states that the pickets would most

likely be removed by residents for fire wood! The report concluded that a wire fence should be installed, then the site replanted with Marram grass. The Governor and Premier of W.A. both approved expenditure of one hundred and eighty three pounds and six shillings for the project.

Fast forward one hundred years! Seven years ago, in 2003, Cottesloe Coast-care volunteers decided to make a new attempt at restoration of Grant Marine Park. By now the 'natural area' was dominated by weeds and the site was latticed by eroding sandy tracks. Rabbits, vandalism, dogs and people were causing the latter-day damage. But at least no straying goats, which was a blessing.



When a new site is chosen for a restoration project the first thing done is to find out what vegetation is present. No Marram grass had survived but most of the vegetation present was weedy. A so-called mini-herbarium collection is a great start. Plant specimens are collected, pressed and dried. The Perth Herbarium provided identifications of nineteen remnant local plant species. The next step was to find a good bit of bush nearby, for comparison. The Swanbourne SAS barracks gave permission for a vegetation survey to be taken at a very similar, but much healthier site, very close by. There, two more local plant species were identified. The walk was carefully guided by Dr Boyd Wykes so that no harm would come to us from "unexploded ordi-

nances". We did not come across any of these but it was great to see wonderful bird life in the beautiful bush at the Swanbourne rifle range. Restoration of any site is not just about plants, Coastcare's aim was to provide habitat for birds, animals and insects too.

Cottesloe Coastcare raised money from Federal and State agencies to have fencing done, paths made and a lookout built; to pay for four thousand seedlings and on-going rabbit control. We also erected small plant identification signs and had a weed barrier installed to stop lawn grass growing in to the natural vegetation. The group always works closely with Cottesloe Council. The Council moved the children's play equipment out of the dune and on to the lawn so that the natural vegetation would not be trampled. Volunteers collected seed and cutting material from the native plants on the site and started the huge job of hand weeding. Sea spinach, lupins, rose pelargonium, garden daisies and gazanias are just a few of the weeds that were removed, by the trailer load, by volunteers.

Working bees may be hard work but we have lots of fun too. Home-made cake at 'smoko' is always something to look forward to and it is an excuse for a break and a yarn. During one morning tea in 2004, John Utting, then a Town of Cottesloe Councillor told us that when he stood for Council around 1970 one of his strong motivating factors was a determination to retain this dune at Grant Marine Park as a natural area. At the time there was a plan to convert the area for car parking and other developments. We were delighted to learn that John had won his cause thirty years earlier.

It is now 7 years since Cottesloe Coastcare volunteers started restoration work at Grant Marine Park. When we look back at the photos from 2003 and see the site today we are pleased with the positive changes. The vegetation is growing well and it provides habitat for birds, lizards and butterflies.



Many people enjoy the non-irrigated natural vegetation and some people have been inspired to grow some of our local plants in their own

coastal gardens. Many groups including school children have assisted Cottesloe Coastcare at Grant Marine Park over the years. Some children seem to have especially enjoyed the experience. Unfortunately some damage by people and their dogs persists and rabbits are difficult to control.



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We have, however, made good progress and are proud when we look at the vegetation today. It's a stark contrast to the picture painted in that 1896 Council document and also a reminder that 'the good old days' are not always better than what we have today. We are also glad that we don't have to contend with goats on the dunes!

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Robyn Benken

28<sup>th</sup> April 2010