

Environment and Heritage Assets in the Upper Reaches of Brownhill Creek?

1. Brownhill Creek Recreation Park (Seven Pines: Dam Site 1):

- Only eight kilometres from the CBD, Brownhill Creek Recreation Park was set aside in **1841 by Governor Grey** (*Brownhill Creek Recreation Park Management Plan*, DEH, June 2003, Synopsis page ii). “Brownhill Creek Recreation Park is one of Adelaide’s oldest parks, containing important historic sites that remain from early human occupation” (Ibid page 6). According to John Hill, then Minister of Environment and Conservation, **“Brownhill Creek Recreation Park has long been cherished by South Australians and as one of our state’s oldest parks, it is rich with cultural heritage”** (Ibid, Foreword).

Classification:

- Brownhill Creek Recreation Park is classified as a **Natural Monument (IUCN Category III)**. IUCN Category III management objectives direct authorities “to protect or preserve in perpetuity specific outstanding natural features because of their natural significance, unique representational quality, and/or spiritual connotations” (Ibid page 6).

Aboriginal Heritage

- The **Kaurna** Aboriginal people call this area ‘**Wirraparinga**’, place of scrub and creek, and “it was an important camping and hunting ground” (Tindale N B, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1974). (Ibid, page 6). The Seven Pines heritage site (dam site 1) is right in the heart of Brownhill Creek Recreation Park and is an important part of the living Kaurna culture today. In a letter to the SMA, the Kaurna Board states that **“we the Kaurna people stand together as custodians of Brownhill Creek. We urge the Government to reconsider the plans to build a dam at Brownhill Creek, a Significant Site to the Kaurna people”**.

Fauna at Risk:

Native Mammals

- The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) applies to Nationally listed threatened species. “With regard to Brownhill Creek Recreation Park, the **Southern Brown Bandicoot (Isodon obesulus)** is a nationally listed, threatened species that occurs in the park. Commonwealth approval is required for any action that has, will have or is likely to have a significant impact on this nationally threatened species” (Ibid page 4).
- Brush-tail Possums, Ring-tail possums, Koalas, Swamp rats, Water rats (*Hydromys chrysogaster*), Bush rats, Echidnas and up to ten species of native bats are listed (Ibid page 20)

Fish

- **State listed, threatened native fish species, the Mountain Galaxias (*Galaxias olidus*, Rare) and Climbing Galaxias (*Galaxias brevipinus*, Vulnerable),** are to be protected under the NP&W Act (Ibid page 21).

Reptiles and Amphibians

- There are seven species of reptile, including the Eastern Brown Snake, Sleepy Lizard, Eastern Bearded Dragon, Eastern Blue Tongue, Barking Gecko, Adelaide Snake-Lizard and the Creamed-striped Shining Skink (Ibid page 21).
- The park's amphibian population includes the Common Froglet, the Bull Frog and Brown Tree Frog (Ibid page 21).

Birds

- There are thirty-seven native bird species recorded in the park, including the Little Wattlebird, Superb Fairy-wren, Rainbow Lorikeet, White-faced Heron and the **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Clyptorhynchus funereus*)**, considered **vulnerable** in South Australia (Ibid page 20).

Flora at Risk

- Seven Pines is a key terrestrial restoration site, ten years in development, with the following stakeholders: Mitcham Lions Club; Mercedes College and The Friends of Brownhill Creek. This site contains eight different tree species, including seven Native Apricot specimens (conservation rating **rare**), seven different shrub species, including five Austral Trefoil (conservation rating **uncommon**), nine different grass species and two ground layer species (*Submission Covering the Environmental and Heritage Aspects of the Proposed Flood Mitigation Dam Construction Within Brownhill Creek Recreation Park*, The Friends of Brownhill Creek, 17 December, 2011, page 4).
- Four remaining **Stone Pines (*Pinus Pinea*)** are listed on the **State Significant Tree Register**. Their Register Number is 720, with the following Citation: "These specimens make a contribution to the immediate landscape of Brown Hill Creek Recreation Park. Along with other *Pinus Pinea* in the Park, they are linked to a prominent 19th century Mitcham Village identity and his English agricultural and horticultural heritage. Their immense size is outstanding. They are possibly the most massive examples of the species in Australia from the late 19th century still in existence. Specimen 1 may be the most massive example in Australia and internationally" (*National Trust of South Australia, Register of Significant Trees Report for Pinus Pinea*, National Trust of South Australia, 7 August, 2014). These historic Stone Pines have also been nominated for listing on the National Significant Tree Register and further research is being carried out on their national and international significance (*Report on "The Seven Pines" at Brownhill Creek Recreation Park, Brown Hill Creek, South Australia 5062*, Charlie Buttigieg, Tree Nominator to the Register of Significant Trees of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria & South Australia), July 2012).

Seven Pines Heritage Precinct

- In addition to Kaurna heritage, the Seven Pines site is surrounded by Colonial heritage: Mundy's Quarry, wagon loading bay and crushing plant foundations; Dyer's Cave, is linked to the exploits of Alexander Tolmer, South Australia's Commissioner of Police and pioneer of the first Gold Escorts to South Australia (*Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career at Home and at the Antipodes*, Alexander Tolmer, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, 1882).
- With the threat of a proposed dam **at Seven Pines, Brownhill Creek Recreation Park was placed on the National Trust At Risk Register:** "The integrity of this public recreation reserve (the oldest in SA apart from the Adelaide Parklands) would be destroyed by a 15 metre concrete flood control dam across its width, yet viable alternatives exist" (Heritage@Risk2012).

Community Activities at Seven Pines

- Seven Pines picnic ground is the "heart of the park" and "it attracts more day visitors than any other site in the park for family gatherings, corporate functions and weddings" (*Submission Covering the Environmental and Heritage Aspects of the Proposed Flood Mitigation Dam Construction Within Brownhill Creek Recreation Park*, The Friends of Brownhill Creek, 17 December, 2011, page 2). This area is also used for television and film productions, artistic pursuits such as painting and photography, horse riding and general recreation. In its quiet times, it is a place for "solitude and spiritual reconnections" (Ibid), away from the built environment.
- The Warraparinga and Yurrebilla walking trails pass through this site, in honour of the Kaurna / Aboriginal heritage. The establishment of the shared use trail along the length of the park has seen a significant rise in visitor numbers in recent years and as neighbouring areas such as Waterfall Gully become overcrowded, walkers are choosing BrownHill Creek Recreation Park instead.
- Brownhill Creek Recreation Park is the gateway to Yurrebilla, The Greater Mount Lofty Parklands. As Adelaide grows into the future, this park will become increasingly important as a connector between the plains and the hills, allowing Adelaideans to leave their cars and tread a path well worn by countless generations of Aboriginal people and colonial settlers before them. As the 'Yurrebilla Sign' states at the entrance to the park: "the creation of the Greater Mount Lofty Parklands as the 'second generation of parklands surrounding metropolitan Adelaide, continues Colonel Light's founding vision of parklands surrounding the City of Adelaide".

Conclusion

"The Brownhill Creek Recreation Park is unique within its landscape, as it is the only remaining part of the upper catchment riparian system under public ownership" (Ibid page 2). "The Friends of Brownhill Creek have found it difficult to believe that this proposal of a dam within Brownhill Creek Recreation Park (1841) is to be taken seriously. The intention to build a very substantial structure in the heart of the Park is entirely

contrary to the environmental, heritage and amenity values that the Park was proclaimed for. As indicated by other studies, it is possible to achieve flood mitigation without this destruction” (Ibid page 1). The main objective under ‘Hydrology’ in the Park management plan, is to “restore and maintain natural hydrology as far as possible” (*Brownhill Creek Recreation Park Management Plan*, DEH, June 2003, page 17). The Creek Capacity Upgrade Option, along with Creek Rehabilitation should be implemented as a feasible, cost effective and responsible No Dam option for the greater good.

2. Ellison’s Gully (Dam Site 2).

- Ellison’s Gully is once again in the firing line, but we must remember that this site was previously rejected, as part of a flawed 2006 Master Plan. A dam would be significantly more expensive here and the out of sight, out of mind / private property argument will not hold up to scrutiny.
- Ellison’s Gully is linked to Brownhill Creek Recreation Park because it contains the major tributary of Brownhill Creek, shares a common riparian zone and has common environmental and heritage values. There is public right of way access along this riparian zone and an **interpretative public heritage trail** is being planned to run from the entrance of Brownhill Creek Recreation Park to the Mitcham Waterworks heritage site at the head of Ellison’s Gully. Up to ten years of dedicated research has been carried out in Ellison’s Gully, with the involvement of the Flinders University Department of Archaeology, Mitcham Council Heritage Committee, Mitcham Council Heritage Research Centre and the Mitcham Historical Society.
- A dam constructed in Ellison’s Gully would negatively impact on the downstream Brownhill Creek Recreation Park, restrict public access into Ellison’s Gully and ruin the aesthetics and ambiance of this beautiful place. Ellison’s Gully leaves visitors with the feeling of being in a remote valley, while still being relatively close to the city. There is the potential for the Brownhill Creek Recreation Park to Ellison’s Gully walking trail to become one of the most popular and rewarding walks in the Adelaide foothills, with recreational, educational, cultural, spiritual and tourism benefits for the community.
- In the Brownhill Creek Recreation Park Management Plan there is a reference to the broader values of the Brownhill Creek environs: “In addition to important natural resources, Brownhill Creek has extensive cultural Heritage, including Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and sites remaining from its mining and market gardening past” (*Brownhill Creek Recreation Park Management Plan*, DEH, June 2003, Synopsis, page ii). Ellison’s Gully is in fact rich with significant Aboriginal, Colonial and State heritage and by no means does this heritage stop at the Park boundary.
- The No Dam Petition, with over 10,000 signatories, applies equally to Brownhill Creek Recreation Park and Ellison’s Gully. The wording of our community petition is “we the undersigned, hereby Petition Council to protect the environment and heritage of Brownhill Creek by opposing the

damming of the creek” (*No Dam Petition Data Analysis*, No Dam in Brownhill Creek Community Action Group, 18th February, 2014). The clear intention of the petition is to prevent a dam anywhere in the upper reaches of Brownhill Creek, in line with the geographical reference provided in the five council agreement of May 2012: “In reaching this agreement, the five councils have recognised the community opposition to a dam in the *upper reaches of Brownhill Creek* and so have committed to a preference to pursue a feasible and whole of catchment, community supported, ‘no dam’ solution” (*An Open Letter To The Residents Of The City Of Mitcham*, 20 June, 2012).

Aboriginal Heritage

- Ellison’s Gully contains a major tributary and spring fed source of Brownhill Creek. This creek is known to the Kurna as **Willawilla** (*Reclaiming Through Renaming: The Reinstatement of Kurna Toponyms in Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains*, Article, Rob Amery and Georgina Yambo Williams). Willawilla (Brownhill Creek) in Ellison’s Gully is still significant to the living Kurna culture today and in a letter to the SMA, the Kurna Board states that “**we the Kurna people stand together as custodians of Brownhill Creek. We urge the Government to reconsider the plans to build a dam at Brownhill Creek, a Significant Site to the Kurna people**”.
- Extremely rare **Kurna aboriginal rock art** is located in Ellison’s Gully and is on the Aboriginal Heritage Register.

Colonial and State Heritage

- **South Australia Company Sheep Station**, established 1837-38. The first such farm in SA (Norman, 1953 p.7).
- **Mining history** is very much a part of Ellison’s Gully. Adits, tunnels, shafts and other remains of mining activity by **John Grainger** of Wheal Grainger Mining Company are still in existence today. It is quite an adventure to enter the tunnels of these lead, silver, bismuth and copper mines, first established in 1848. There are associated foundations of stone buildings and remains of fig trees nearby (Norman, 1953 pp 7,17). Grainger was the early colonial owner of 1950 acres, which he divided into 10-20 acre lots for lease to farmers.
- 19th century **market gardening/farming** activity was undertaken in Ellison’s Gully, as part of up to 190 acres of farming by some 23 families in the general area. This activity occurred from the 1850’s to the 1990’s (Roger Griggs, Mitcham Heritage Research Centre). **Samuel Ellison** leased allotments from John Grainger from 1853 (*Brownhill Creek Chronology*, Mitcham Local History Service, September 2004). We are fortunate to have access to the descendants of these early settlers. Roger Grigg and Andrew Tilley volunteer their time to guide and educate the community on the richness of the heritage in these valleys. They both worked hard on market gardens in the area and their stories bring the history alive.

- **Mitcham Water Works** is “a rare example of mid-nineteenth century technology for harnessing and reticulating water” (*Mitcham Water Works*, <http://www.mitchamcouncil.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=1570>). Also view <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/archaeology/research-profile/current-projects/mitcham-water-works.cfm>. Since 2002, research has been undertaken on this system by the Department of Archaeology at Flinders University, under the direction of Dr Pamela Smith. The Mitcham Heritage Research Centre and the Mitcham Council Heritage Committee have also been involved. A settling pond, 137,000 litre brick well, valves and iron piping cast in Glasgow, form part of a complete, historic Mitcham water supply system (1879-1930's), which gravity fed Mitcham Village and supplemented the water supplies of Unley and Adelaide. (Smith, Pate & Martin, 2006 p78). Four kilometres of six inch iron pipe imported from Scotland connected the spring fed Water Works to the Mitcham Tank, a large water storage tank at the end of Fullarton Road, Springfield. There is a growing interest by engineers and heritage groups in the restoration of the Mitcham Water Works and to see it functioning again!

Flora and Fauna

- Remnant native vegetation exists on the steep slopes of the valley and Ellison's Gully is still a significant wildlife corridor, linking Brownhill Creek Recreation Park to the Adelaide Hills.

Conclusion

Ellison's Gully is part of a working farm and that adds to its charm and attraction. For city children in particular, it is an opportunity to experience rural life in a setting that seems so remote and far from the built environment. Nevertheless there is a powerful sense of nature here, with open woodland and Brownhill Creek/Willawilla flowing freely from its spring fed source. Public access already exists here, but the establishment of a heritage trail linking Ellison's Gully to Brownhill Creek Recreation Park would create an even more valuable and popular community resource. The shared heritage of these two valleys should be preserved and promoted and “we as custodians of our current environment have a duty to make intelligent decisions for the benefit of future generations to come. The history that we have all around us exists only from the protection and preservation by others before us” (Mitcham Historical Society Letter of Support, Julie Hogan, Chairperson, April 2012). A “Terra Nullius’ view of Ellison's Gully, that there is nothing there so put a concrete wall across it, cannot be justified. This private and public asset should not be ruined, especially when a feasible and cost effective Creek Capacity Upgrade Option, along with Creek Rehabilitation works, are available.

No Dam in Brownhill Creek Community Action Group: Steering Committee
Representing local residents, the broader community and over 40,000 annual
visitors to Brownhill Creek Recreation Park (1841) and Ellison's Gully.

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