 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk.2***

ABC Radio interview No.10 – 2 July 2019

**Riddiford Arboretum, Broken Hill**

As part of its ***Greening the Hill Mk.2*** initiative, Landcare Broken Hill will be highlighting the natural features and attractions of the City and its region. We are keen to remind Broken Hill people and visitors of what we currently have to offer. We will also demonstrate that native vegetation growing in our reserves is not just attractive and interesting. There is so much more that is on offer, which can be gained from such reserves.

1. **Where is Riddiford Arboretum?**

Located on an island site, adjoining the Plaza Shopping Centre, surrounded by Galena Street, Mercury Street, Harvey Street and Pell Street. Its main entrance is from Galena Street (opposite Globe Home Timber & Hardware and Bridgestone Tyres).

1. **What is an arboretum?**

*A large garden where many types of trees are grown, for people to look at and to be studied for scientific purposes****.***

An arboretum may be public or private – Broken Hill’s is a public park.

1. **What’s the history of Broken Hill’s Arboretum?**

The site was formerly occupied by the Silverton Tramway line from the late 1800s through to 1970. The actual site of the Arboretum was occupied by the tramline tracks, used for repairs to the rolling stock and for trans-shipping of oil to the Galena Street oil-fired power station. (The old power station is now occupied by Globe Home Timber & Hardware). Local residents recall the rail trucks full of lead and zinc concentrate would often be parked in the area of the Arboretum so as to allow seepage of water from the trucks.

After 1970, the site fell into disuse until the Arboretum was created over two years from 1986, opening in 1988.

The Arboretum was opened on April 9, 1988 by the then mayor, Cr Peter Black. Named in honour of Walter Frederick Riddiford, who was a former councillor for 28 years and mayor for 13 years from 1949-62 and who had been president of the Workers’ Industrial Union of Australia for 11 years in the 1930s and 40s.

The Arboretum also commemorates the work of Albert & Margaret Morris, who together, in 1937 commenced the planting of indigenous vegetation to create the Regeneration Belt around the perimeter of Broken Hill. A number of display boards around the Arboretum inform the visitor about the work of the Morris’s and about the native flora to be seen. The challenges which Broken Hill faced and which the Morris’s set out to combat are described on an Arboretum display board as follows:

“*Broken Hill had been laid bare. The dust blew unimpeded, forming dunes that crept up to front doors and threatened to engulf the city. Day was turned to night by blowing dirt. There was nothing to stop lead dust from blowing into people’s homes*”.

In particular, one display board quotes Albert Morris. His words are worth repeating.

“*The country stretched for miles without a vestige of anything green and each stone or old tyre had a streamer of sand trailing out of it. The fences were piled high with sand inside and out. Erosion – wind erosion – is what we will have to fight*”.

“*Let me add a plea that all possible measures be exerted to reserve for future generations, the wonderful plants, birds, and animals it is our privilege to see now, because Australia is unique as regards to these things*”

1. **Deterioration a rejuvenation**

The Arboretum initially was set up with good intentions and expectations, but with reducing resources Council increasingly gave less priority to maintaining it, believing that formal parks, gardens and sporting ovals had greater priority. By 2004 the Arboretum had become largely overgrown with Old Man Saltbush and little visited. The Millennium Drought had caused many of the trees to die and so the Arboretum had all the appearances of a neglected eye-sore.

In 2004 a proposal to bulldoze the site and build a commercial retirement village was faced with a number of practical development difficulties, such as the early contamination of the site due to the railway oil transfer activity and the dewatering of lead/zinc rail trucks. The development proposal also faced a community campaign to save the Arboretum. In November 2004, within a split Council, by a majority 8-4 vote, a community proposal to set up a citizen’s voluntary committee to manage the Arboretum was accepted. The community had won and the Arboretum was saved.

1. **Who’s responsible for managing the Arboretum?**

The Council owns and manages the Arboretum. Since 2004 a Council appointed committee of volunteers has been responsible for its care and maintenance, established pursuant to s.355 of the Local Government Act. This group of volunteers would be described in other places as “The Friends of the Riddiford Arboretum”.

Volunteer Friends Groups is the model that Landcare Broken Hill wants to see be adopted for every park and reserve in Broken Hill, galvanising community spirit, energy and enthusiasm.

The volunteers meet about twice a month, one of which is a true working-bee where they get to and do real work, getting their hands dirty for the good of the whole community. Some volunteers attend more regularly when their lives allow them the time. Amongst the volunteers there is one very special treasure.

Faye Whitfield, who is in her 80s, goes to the Arboretum every day, often a number of times a day in the hot weather, to water the plants, remove litter, rake the paths and place bowls of drinking water for dogs and birds. Faye, who has been doing this for some years, is a truly selfless and inspiring volunteer. This is the sort of spirit that we can find in Broken Hill to help look after the many precious places this City values.

1. **What do you see there?**

The Arboretum contains a number of walking paths which are well maintained and capable of being traversed by people of all ages. It is a wheelchair friendly park. Water bowls placed around the site confirm that dogs are welcome, but on leashes.

The plantings of trees and shrubs, all native Australian vegetation largely from the semi-arid zone with a dominance of plants from the Western Division, are planted so as to be easily viewed. Many plants have small metal identification plaques at their base identifying the plant by both botanical and common names. Some also provide the traditional Aboriginal name of the plant.

There are a number of interesting information display boards which describe the plant species and their growing habit. Of particular interest is a display board titled: “Suggested Plants for Your Garden” and another titled “How do I care for Arid Lands native plants?”. These educational display boards give advice to the reader on how to be sensible in selecting plants for your garden in this harsh climate, giving tips on how your plants are best kept alive.

Other display boards of interest discuss Aboriginal bush tucker, Acacias (or wattles), and how to grow salt bush.

There are a number of park benches dotted around the Arboretum and a drinking fountain, all aimed at ensuring the visitor’s experience is enjoyable.

1. **So what are the values and objectives of the Arboretum?**
   1. A quiet place to take a moment out – passive recreation;
   2. A place to understand and study local flora – scientific botanical research;
   3. A place to learn about Aboriginal bush tucker and bush medicines;
   4. A haven or refuge for local birds to live, as well as creating habitat for local lizards and insects (such as bees);
   5. By looking after a selection of local plants and providing habitat for local birds, protecting the biodiversity of the region;
   6. Show-casing appropriate local native plants for people to understand their growing habit and requirements, thereby encouraging like garden planting;
   7. Community seed collecting for private propagation is encouraged;
   8. Promoting a sense of community – underpinned by its volunteer team; and
   9. Fostering a “sense of place” for people of Broken Hill to proudly ‘own’.
2. **Changes are afoot – art installation – Robby Rowlands – a place to display sculpture**
3. **New management plan is being prepared by the Committee**

* to review the original concept and ensure that its objectives are being achieved.

1. **Many of the features of Riddiford Arboretum might be adopted elsewhere by Landcare Broken Hill.** A good precedent for community action, shared management and looking after natural places special to Broken Hill

**Next public meeting to provide an update on *GREENING THE HILL MK.2* and continue of consultation with the community**

**Centre for Community, 200 Beryl Street, 7.00pm Thursday 25 June**

***ALL WELCOME!***

Want to become a Landcare Broken Hill member?

**LandcareBrokenHill@gmail.com**