

Riesling Trail - AGM 2014

Thank you for invitation and congratulations on the past several years. But how do I squeeze 20 years into half an hour.

Clare is to me a DIY community with great achievements created through working together .

I think often of the great facilities that have been made possible by the community working together. The greening of the golf course, the development of the Inchiquin Lake area, the redevelopment of our war memorials, the Lions and Apex parks. the Zonta northern entry, with the most recent being the creation of the first privately developed, community owned airport in Australia in the past 50 years to name just a few. Significant in these achievements has been the Riesling Trail.

In reflecting on the past 20 years in regard the Trail, paramount in my mind are the people who made it possible and who today maintain it, not only as the first ever rail trail conversion in our State, or possibly in Australia, but still amongst the finest.

The tragic 1983 bushfires opened the way for Australian National to shut down the Riverton to Spalding branch line. in many ways they vandalised the infrastructure of the railway with the demolition of bridges and the rough removal of other items of historic relevance. Thankfully the bridge abutments, the embankments and cuttings along with two bridges were too costly to remove.

Trails both walking and cycling became a focus of the State's recreational activities with Terry Lavender of the Office for Recreation and Sport (ORS) being a leading light in the development of the Heysen and Mawson Trails. But Terry loved the bush and helped to create trails that were great for the enthusiasts but not really suitable for others.

A dilemma for the winemakers of the Clare Valley was what could be done to enhance the tourism potential of the region by making use of a derelict and unsightly rail corridor. Two winemakers, Tony Brady and Evan Hiscock sat down with Leith Hughes of the ORS and Greg Carmody of Transport SA. Together they developed the vision of a trail that would allow the widest possible range of walkers and cyclists to discover the beauty of this very special wine region. Stephanie Toole acquired the Auburn station building, the only one left standing in the corridor and set about its restoration.

The first elements of the Trail, small trial sections between Watervale and Sevenhill and between Riverton and Rhynie were officially opened in May 1944 by the then Minister for Recreation, Sport and Racing, John Oswald MP.

A major challenge to creating a trail of any length was the destruction of the Quarry Road bridge. Tony Brady together a number of his contacts, the support of the winemakers, and 'Bluey' Jenner of Clare Metal Fabrications became the saviours when a new bridge was fabricated locally. Built offsite I recall 'Bluey' saying how everyone breathed a huge sigh of relief when it slotted in with millimetres to spare. Strong support also came from Trevor Schmidt of Clare Quarry who developed a surface laying process that has stood the test of time. The support of the Schmidt family continues unabated.

November 7th, 1998 saw the official launch of the Trail by the then Minister for Recreation, Sport and Racing, Iain Evans. With a substantial trail in place it was felt essential that a system of local management be established.

A public meeting in May 1999 resolved to establish the Riesling Trail Management Committee (RTMC) .

Initial members were Patricia Jacka; Graham Mill; Carita Brown; Leith Hughes; Ted Nettleton; Rosemary Goode; Bev Hannaford; Richard Rowe and Julie Cowperthwaite.

In 2000 The Riesling Trail Inc. was incorporated. Much credit must go to Ted Nettleton who was the principal drafter of the constitution for the new organisation. About the same time the CVWA registered the name 'The Riesling Trail'. With the strong support and involvement of the key local organisations, the general community, winemakers, tourism operators, the Council and the State Government through the ORS we were underway.

Another big step forward in 2000 was the provision of funds by ORS to commission the development of a landscape master plan for the Trail. The brief for the project went to EDAW Landscape Architects & Environmental Planners. The development of the plan involved much community consultation and the outcome is an incredibly valuable document. In my view it is vitally important that this document be returned to the care of the community through the facilities of the Clare Regional History Group. The plan became the basis for all developments over the next decade.

To me an especially important section of the plan is that on the importance of public art along the Trail. This area was not the easiest to gain acceptance of, several attempts to get discussions with Council underway rejected. Initial attempts were made in 1999 led by David Hay and Michael Speers of Thorn Park but to no avail. Later Ryves Hawker took up the challenge with the strong support of Ann and a small group of enthusiasts. A concept plan for Art Along the Riesling Trail was crafted in 2006 by Sydney Wood, (Destiny by Demand). The first installation 'Power Lines' by local artist, Vivian Ziersch was completed in 2008 through the support of Ann and John Bastian. Two further installations 'The Gathering' and 'Mob of Sheep' were completed last year. The support of local community members and SA Government agencies in funding these art pieces is greatly appreciated. I look forward to further installations.

A major issue remaining to be dealt with was how to cross the River Wakefield at Auburn and bring the Trail into the Auburn railway station. This remains a major challenge. The Clare Valley winemakers resolved to provide substantial financial support for the bridging of the river using the existing pylons and creating a tunnel under the Main North Road. Plans were drawn up and funding sought from the State government. Strong support came from then Council CEO, Mark Goldstone, and in May 2000 local member, Rob Kerin advised that the 2000/01 State budget would include \$300,000 and I quote, "to complete the Riesling Trail which will fund the construction of a road underpass and a bridge to complete the link between Auburn and Clare". Then a battle began as a small group agitated against the proposed project and consultants were appointed to seek a way forward. In the end the battle was lost and an alternative link was developed involving a new foot bridge across the river within the township and a shared pathway along the Main North Road. Auburn is left with a pleasant pathway, confusing access to both the Trail and the restored railway station building. Even more confusing is the different route signed within Auburn for the Mawson Trail.

A long held dream was the extension of the Trail from Clare to the northern boundary of the internationally registered Clare Valley Wine Region's 'GI'. We were stuck for almost a decade on the southern boundary of the Clare railyards until expansion of the Leasingham Winery opened the way forward. In this regard the passion of Richard Rowe was to the fore. Richard's dream of creating a memorial garden for Mick Knappstein is a challenge still to be met. With joint funding from the RTMC and the ORS (here I note the passionate support and expertise of Anthea Shem) a contract for the

preparation of a feasibility study was let, and what a study we got! The 'two Mikes' , Mike Maher of Transplan Pty. Ltd. and Mike Halliburton of Mike Halliburton Associates produced a report of the highest order. It went well beyond the brief for the study. The report with significant input from Trevor Schmidt of Clare Quarry on trail surfacing remains a model now used across the nation. In working toward the extension we overcame another bridge challenge. At the time there was very strong pressure for the demolition of the Farrell Flat Road bridge but we won this time!

Great, we had an incredibly detailed plan but how to fund it.

To the rescue the local community, especially the Clare Valley Winemakers and two key State Government agencies, SA Tourism Commission and the Dept. for Trade and Economic Development. In this regard I note particularly the assistance of Mark Blyth of SATC and Kelly-Anne Saffin of the Mid North Regional Development Board.

Well, we had something under \$250,000 to produce an extension costed at over \$300,000. Again the local community was to the fore with major in kind contributions from the trail builders, Russell Schmidt and Gary Sims of Clare Quarries, Paul Jenner of Clare Metal Fabrications and Trevor Mace of Mace Engineering Services. Vital to this was also the encouragement and support of adjoining landholders especially Roy Schaeffer working closely with the Clare Quarry team. We even saw the removal of many feral pines much to the joy of Ryves Hawker. Most helpful also was the native vegetation and weed survey undertaken by Jean Turner and Mick Higgins of the Clare Office of the Dept for Environment and Heritage. The extension was launched by Premier Mike Rann on 15th November 2009.

Just look at what has happened since thanks to the team under the leadership of Peter Wood and now Alan Mayfield.

Patricia Jacka and the Waninga black swan.

Andrew Male attempting to cycle from Port Pirie to Clare

Alan Aughey hosting Governor Scarce on a Riesling Trail ride.