

## **2008/9 Annual report Of the Melville Koppies Management Committee**

1. Introduction
2. Finances
3. security
4. conservation
5. publicity
6. guiding
7. number of visitors
8. research
9. African Independent Churches
10. Joburg City Parks (JCP)
11. conclusion

### **1. Introduction.**

50 years ago Melville Koppies Central was established as a nature reserve. The foresight of concerned citizens has given the people of Joburg an invaluable asset in the middle of the city. In keeping with the quiet ambience of the reserve, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary has been celebrated in many appropriate ways such as special tours and ‘thank you’ breakfasts for a number of people who have contributed to the Koppies

### **2. Finances.**

The costs of running the Koppies have escalated. Labour costs have increased because we cannot let people work alone because of security reasons. A minimum of two people work together on MK Central and East, and generally three people on MK West. 81% of income is spent on maintenance.

During the past year, security became an issue. Because of this, 15% of income has been spent on security since December 2008. Income from visitors on open days does not cover expenditure. Income from group visits covers this occasionally but it cannot be predicted. The Bankenveld Botanical Society organises some tours at MK and donates the proceeds to MK. Private and corporate donations make up some of the shortfall. The balance is covered by dipping into the education fund.

Thanks to the Droste Trust (R5 000) and another trust (R6 000), which wishes to remain anonymous, for their donations towards maintenance over the past year. Thank you to the families Hinton, Herold, Godsell, Hewlett/Johnston for regular donations and to the other benefactors who have made significant donations.

The constitution was amended slightly to comply with the South African Revenue service requirements for a public benefit organisation. Thank you to Alan Farndell for his work on this.

### **3. Security.**

More than 60 people were mugged on Melville Koppies over the past year. Several emergency meetings were held at the Koppies, Brixton and Sophiatown police stations. Members of the community, the Melville Sector Community Policing Forum (CPF) and MKMC assisted the Brixton, Sophiatown and Parkview police precincts in catching some of the armed muggers. Some sweeps of the Koppies were done by the

police and JMPD. A 'Thank you' breakfast for the police was hosted by the MKMC and CPF. George Hofmeyr, Cynthia Rose, Peter Rolfe, Ross Herbert and their volunteer teams need special mention for their help with security.

The security issue has improved but has not gone away as crime still persist in the neighbouring areas.

Proactive measures to improve security on MK include;

- security training for Lucky Mdluli and Clement Ndlovu who accompany groups of visitors during the week.
- The hiring of a guard by the MKMC from Clause Protection Services for open days on MK Central and monthly walks on MK West
- Visitors on open days do not wander around on their own any more, but stay in escorted groups.
- Group walks are organised by residents on MK East and West.
- Notices have been put at all the entrance advising people to walk in groups and to leave valuables at home. People are requested to report all incidents to the relevant police precincts and to give the MKMC case numbers for follow up.
- The message is that we need to take care of our own security.

There have been no recorded attacks on the open sections since February 2009 and on MK Central since November 2008. We assume that this is because of the proactive measures, not because crime has gone away.

There is not much to steal from the Koppies but thieves did dig up and remove half of the old 6m water pipes that ran along the old road. This was for scrap metal. They were dug up when a large section of the fence was down. Norman Baines arranged for the rest of the pipes that were lined up to be taken away in case any visitors bumped into the thieves while they were removing the rest.

Muti collectors are steadily debarking a *Ziziphus mucronata* next to the old road on a weekly basis. A notice pinned to the tree warning that this is a criminal offence was shredded. The tree is regularly doused with lime sulphur to try and prevent fungal infections in the fresh scars. The Mabotwane guard cannot patrol this area on his own.

#### **4. Conservation.**

The conservation team is ambitiously and optimistically perfectionist. The drive is to bring all 160ha of MK into prime condition. Over 500 hours per week are spent on weeding, clearing litter, cleaning the spruit, building erosion bars, maintaining structures and rehabilitating degraded areas. The area above the lecture hut is a real success story of rehabilitation. The track from Kafue Rd is currently being worked on. The team is slowly winning despite the continual influx of alien vegetation from neighbouring areas, particularly from the north.

Paths on MK East were so overgrown that Cecily Hewlett and Gordon Johnston paid a gardener to cut them

The pyromaniac targeted MK again last year for the fifth consecutive year. Extensive areas were burnt on all three sections of MK between September and October. Fire breaks proved useless as he set multiple fires from within the reserve, in

particular MK Central. In July 2009 he set multiple fires again on MK Central .Seven keyed-alike locks were put on all the entrances to MK Central and all three fire departments (Brixton, Roosevelt park and Rosebank) were given keys. Despite this three locks were cut in the first fire in 2008. The locks are now chained to the gates so hopefully this winter the firemen will cut the chains and not the locks.

A new trail map has been made of MK Central with all the paths drawn according to Peter Johnson's GPS coordinates. Intersections of paths are numbered on the paths and on the maps for easy location reference.

Two officials from GDACE visited MK recently and did a 5 hour tour of all three sections of MK. They said that the whole reserve should be classified as a category 1 reserve, instead of its present status as category 2, because of its good condition.

Thanks to conservationists Lucky Mdluli, Clement Ndlovu, Dennis Nyirenda and Joseph Kasonga for being such pleasant reliable people to work with. Congratulations to Lucky and Octavia on the birth of their first child, Cloete.

### **5. Publicity.**

The number of visitors to the reserve is proportionate to the amount of publicity we get. There is no budget for publicity, so all the coverage that we get is due to the goodwill of the various media that publicises MK activities. The local Northcliff and Melville Times (NMT) is exceptional in this and MK photos have been front page news four times last year. Norman Baines has had a total of 88 weekly nature-related columns on MK published by the NMT.

Marianne and Geoff van Heerden have put all the email addresses of friends of Melville Koppies on a data base for email newsletters.

The Melville Junction Church organised carols on MK East in December. After a magical half hour on the Koppies, visitors were invited to coffee and mince pies at the church. There was no damage to the Koppies because there were no sound systems, erected structures etc.

The MKMC had a display again at Wits' annual yebo gogga yebo amablomo exhibition organised by Caroline Crump, museum curator. Our condolences to Caroline on the death of her husband, Alan, in May this year.

The new website [www.mk.org.za](http://www.mk.org.za) has proved an absolute boon for publicity. TJ de Klerk set it up in November 2008. Norman Baines then embarked on an exponential learning curve and revamped it aesthetically. The text was also stylishly revamped. After many hours' work, the new version was put up in June 2009. Thank you to David Hirsch who first put us on the internet with the original 'veld' website, before websites even became *de rigueur* for organisations.

### **6. Guiding.**

This has been rather a frustrating year for guides. Because of security issues, visitors are obliged to stay in a group and be guided whether they want it or not. If there are enough people, a 'just walking' group can be offered but this depends on numbers. Guides have adjusted and worked out a pattern in which the guide on duty decides on

the route. Other guides may give input along the way. It is a very good way for new guides to settle in.

Guiding has become sociable and we have three regulars, Wendy Carstens, Norman Baines and David Carstens who devote every Sunday to the Koppies to either guide or provide back up. Other guides who give regular service are Maria Cabaco, John Freer, Donald Gair, Bernice Aspoas, Ann Lamprecht, Lis Jones, TJ de Klerk, Colleen Flanagan, Margaret Hammond Tooke, Heike Hofmeyr, Katty Cousins and Gus broekmeyer.

Guides have also joined special MK tours and gone on courses e.g. veld management and first aid, to improve their knowledge.

The value added service that guides provide is invaluable in giving the public an insight into just how precious the heritage of the Koppies is.

### **7. Number of visitors.**

The table below reflects the drop in numbers on open days because of the security issues which were extensively covered in the media. Group guided walks mean that we do not get repeat visitors very often.

	2007/8	2007/8	<b>Totals</b>	2008/9	2008/9	<b>totals</b>
	adults	children		adults	children	
Open days	1246	366	<b>1612</b>	861	122	<b>983</b>
groups	1343	1217	<b>2560</b>	1649	1229	<b>2878</b>
<b>totals</b>	<b>2589</b>	<b>1583</b>	<b>4172</b>	<b>2510</b>	<b>1351</b>	<b>3861</b>

Groups in 2008/9 included 24 schools, 12 MK West walks, 2 environment training groups, 12 other tours, 2 cross Koppie hikes, 3 university groups, 3 bird ringing sessions, special tours on flowers, trees, orchids and geology. There were 340 people on the May 1<sup>st</sup> Hike, a record. Ninety 2<sup>nd</sup> year geography UJ students came on open days over a period of 6 weeks to gain insight for a project set on MK. A team of officials from the London Health Authority came to MK as part of a fact-finding survey to see how NGOs work with authorities in SA.

### **8. Research.**

Peter Johnson completed his two-year survey of the flowering times of plants on MK. It is a wonderful easy- to- use field guide. The guide was published in a booklet and is also available on the website.

Sadly Peter will not be standing for re-election to the committee this year, but fortunately he will continue to do research and conservation on MK. Peter's concerns with maintaining the indigenous integrity of the flora of MK has been a valuable input at committee meetings. I think he has only missed one meeting in the ten years or more that he has served on the committee. Thank you Peter for such loyal commitment.

Gail Schaum does bird ringing on MK on the second Saturday of every month. Members of the public are invited to join these sessions to learn more about birds from experts. Booking with the Witwatersrand bird club is essential to keep numbers reasonable.

Wits student, Megan Field, has completed a year's survey of the temperatures inside termite mounds. A synopsis of her early results is on the MK website.

### **9. African Independent Churches.**

The AIC leaders agreed to a new code of conduct which prohibits night services and fires. The Koppies are closed from dawn to dusk for security and in accordance with JCP's policy in green areas. Trees, particularly Proteas, have been hacked to make fires by vagrants and unregistered worshippers. The only way to control this is to ban all fires which is common sense in a nature reserve. The unregistered worshippers are difficult to control without support from the JMPD, the police and JCP.

Attendance at work parties was very disappointing. David Hirsch is working with the members now to encourage them to keep their own circles litter and weed free.

### **10. Joburg City parks. (JCP)**

Contractor Tim Ryder was appointed by JCP to assist with conservation on MK from October 2008 to April 2009. He concentrated on cutting paths and perimeters. In June he was appointed to cut fire breaks. Contractors were paid according to before and after photos.

Kenneth Mabila resigned as area conservation manager in September 2008. Kobus Theunissen was acting manager until Bishop Ngobeli was appointed in February. We congratulate Bishop and wish him success in his appointment. He has already shown a pleasing commitment to help MK. Lovejoy Mokutu is the new conservation manager. Suzette Gordon, in charge of park rangers, resigned and was replaced by Sizwe Mabuza.

Members of the MKMC met with Geoffrey Cooke, Operations Manager, and Reggie Moloi, General Manager of Cemeteries, about the degraded area on the south side of West Park Cemetery adjacent to MK West. It was an escape route for criminals and a fire hazard for the fence. A 6m wide firebreak was cut along most of the cemetery side of the fence and dumped litter was cleared. The bugweed is still a problem.

Mabotwane still supplies only one daily guard sporadically for MK Central despite repeated requests to JCP by the MKMC for two guards to be on duty at a time. One guard, frequently a new man, without a cell phone is not effective security.

Park Rangers assist with security, i.e. removing squatters from MK West when requested to do so. Daily security patrols of MK were promised at a security meeting at Sophiatown police station (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2009) by Oscar Oliphant but to date none have been encountered. .

### **11. Conclusion.**

Every year brings challenges. We can plan for the anticipated ones such as weeding which we know will never be entirely met. New ones, such as the security issues which were thrown at us this year, have been a huge challenge. This has been a real test for the committee and the response has been tremendous. I would like to thank each member of the committee for their work and support over the past year. Even so, we would not have coped without the additional support by volunteers from the community and the police. Our network of neighbours is always ready to help. A special thanks to my husband David for his invaluable involvement in all aspects of management.

Wendy Carstens  
Chairman

