



**Walking Federation of SA
Annual General Meeting**

**Thursday 22 November
At 7.00 pm for a 7.30 pm start**

At the

Glenunga Sports and Social Club
Conyngham Street
Glenunga

**Guest Speaker: Hon. Stephen Yarwood
Lord Mayor, City of Adelaide**

“The role of walking in making Adelaide a world-class city”.

Coffee, tea and nibbles will precede the meeting and liquor may be purchased at the bar.



NEWS FROM THE WALKING FEDERATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

I've frequently heard people ask the question *“What does the Walking Federation do?”* Perhaps I'm being a trifle paranoid when I think that the implication behind the question is that the Walking Federation doesn't do much at all, other than arrange cheap insurance for walking clubs through Bushwalking Australia.

This observation is sometimes made by walkers who are hard-working volunteers for such focussed groups as The Friends of the Heysen Trail. It has left me to ponder why people should get the impression that WSA is a *“do nothing”* organisation.

I observe that the Federation did develop and manage The Pioneer Women's Trail in co-operation with local government and other interest groups with earlier grants from the

Office of Recreation and Sport. This is a demonstrably tangible, practical Walking SA achievement in conjunction with the Adelaide Hills Council and The City of Burnside.

Walkers in the Mount Lofty Ranges will be familiar with the ubiquitous yellow decals with two black footprints which indicate a trail within the Mount Lofty Network Trails (MLNT). The Mount Lofty Trails Network (MLTN) has its origins back in the early 60's with grants from the (then) National Fitness Council. The revamp in the 1993-1995 was an initiative of The Walking Federation who received a grant from the (then) Dept of Recreation and Sport to employ a project officer, John Herd. A further successful grant application by WSA in 2011 managed by Liz O'Shea, has meant that four new loop walks (each comprising shorter loops) have recently been surveyed in the Kersbrook forests in conjunction with Forestry SA. A fifth loop, with Kersbrook Township at its centre, has also been surveyed. Once the signage infrastructure has been completed, these new loops will provide walking in some of South Australia's most pristine and bio-diverse native forests and commercial pine plantations.

Under Thelma Anderson's eagle eye for road closures, the Access Committee of WSA has stopped the sell-off of many unmade road reserves, without which the Heysen Trail would not have been possible. Ron Jackson has also initiated several gold coin walks with still more on the way.

I've spent the past decade doing voluntary work for WSA on such matters as reviewing and auditing trails and trail networks within Hale and Warren, Sturt Gorge, Belair and Morialta Conservation Parks. As a member of the Access Committee of the Walking Federation with Fran Lucas as Chairperson, I've learnt a lot from Thelma Anderson about how to monitor the disposal of unmade road reserves. These are sold off at the rate of two or three per month - at "nuisance" value to adjacent land-owners. As well there are illegal closures by adjacent land-owners over roads they don't own. They use gates, dogs, guns and signs to discourage walkers from accessing road reserves that we walkers are legally entitled to walk!

Through Thelma's pioneering work in Access issues, Local Government agencies are nowadays much more aware of the recreational and economic benefits of viable walking paths to local communities, and the processes required under the Roads Opening and Closing Act for their proper disposal.

My fellow members of the WSA Committee are equally hard-working on other worthwhile tasks. In reflecting on the nature of the work we do within the organisation, I find that this work is often at a logistic level - to the benefit of all trail-users generally - through more - and better trails and walking infrastructure. But when our projects have been completed, other organisations, especially the land-managers - may have been given the credit. You will now find that the WSA logo will appear on new direction marker decals used on the new

Mount Lofty Ranges Trails circuits. Perhaps we haven't done enough in the past to establish the WSA "brand"? Had we done so, perhaps the question originally posed in my opening sentence would never have been asked.

Towards a strong and effective Walking Federation

The Walking Federation has recently received a grant of \$30,000 from the Office of Recreation and Sport to conduct an *independent* review of its governance and operation. All walking groups will be invited to provide input into what a new federation might become and how it should best operate. However, if we don't have a viable Federation because we have let it die through lack of support, we can hardly conduct a review into its operations or help determine what it might become for the benefit of walking in SA.

The Federation currently receives an annual grant of \$25,000 towards office administration costs. This enables us to keep our office open *two whole days a week!* Should the independent review conclude that there is a future for the Walking Federation of SA, it will no doubt consider such matters as paid executive staffing, skills and stipends, volunteering and what funding level is appropriate for an affective umbrella walking organisation.

Other 2011-12 grants are directed at projects such as the development of five new loops within Forestry SA Reserves as part of a Mount Lofty Ranges Trails network, or the construction of a dedicated pedestrian bridge across the Onkaparinga River at Hahndorf in order to extend the Pioneer Women's Trail to Hahndorf.

However the future of the Walking Federation is seriously threatened. The SA walking community is on the verge of failing to fill vacancies on the WSA Committee. Perhaps the feeling "*out there*" that the Federation doesn't really *do* or *achieve* anything tangible is the reason why representatives from the clubs are reluctant to volunteer for WSA committee membership. I've also heard the theory from those who belong to other community service organisations whose memberships are falling - that the post war "baby boomers" may not be strong on volunteering *per se*. I don't believe it- not if volunteering by parents in school communities is anything to go by. It is more likely that they are exhausted!

If the Walking Community in SA decides that the Walking Federation is not worth saving, we will be left without a *Federation* structure for walkers in this State. What we will be left with is a number of unaffiliated groups of trail maintenance volunteers and walkers, each directing their energies to their own walking program or trail maintenance and trying to do this in isolation from each other.

"Divided we fall"?

My bet is that it won't take long before these unaffiliated, but comfortably focussed walking interest groups –in this *future* scenario - decide to form *ad hoc* committees to better

coordinate their endeavours, to work strategically on the whole trails network and to lobby Local and State governments more effectively. And from the ashes of what was a distant memory of a Walking Federation – the phoenix of a new Federation will emerge. They'll want to call it something else of course but – to paraphrase Romeo to Juliet - a Walking Federation “*by any other name will....still be a Walking Federation.*”

We just might be able to short circuit this by supporting the Walking Federation that we already have and we might as well make it a strong, well-funded organisation representing all walkers – *bush or suburban* - to act in the interests of the whole walking community.



You can support the future of a Walking Federation in South Australia by attending the WSA Annual General Meeting on Thursday, November 22nd - to ensure that WSA is a viable, well focussed organisation worth preserving and hopefully offering to serve on the committee or subcommittees and by participating in the independent review of WSA's governance and operation.

Hoping to see as many walking club representatives and walkers at the AGM as possible!

John Eaton
Walking Federation of SA Inc.
Access Issues and Trails Technical Group
Monday, 29 October 2012