

Doug Leane



Doug Leane's love of the bush, of being outdoors and of doing something for the community, come together in his commitment to the Friends of the Heysen Trail. He has certainly earned his position of Honorary Member, having worked and

walked with the Friends since shortly after the organisation's inception in 1987.

With a life-long passion for bushwalking, Doug has walked many trails, not only in Australia but also in a number of overseas countries including Greece, Italy (twice), France (4), Spain (2), Great Britain (4), Norway, New Zealand (4), Papua New Guinea, India including Kashmir, Switzerland (2), Austria, Nepal and South Africa. But no matter where he has roamed, Doug has always returned to his family home in Thebarton, and I can understand why. It's that kind of place. A villa with the strength and character of beautiful weathered stone and with lacework softening the timbers of the verandah. With a slatted timber bench for watching the world go by - if you had the time - and a tangle of greenery bringing a hint of the country into the inner city suburb. The house was built for Doug's parents in 1917 and has been the place he calls home for all of his 79 years.

There are photos of Doug's family in the lounge room, including a photograph of his mother holding her favourite possessions - a Bible and a violin. A number of small diaries, unpretentious but obviously filled with so many memories and adventures, sit on a coffee table under the window. I think of their value, not only to Doug and to the history of the Heysen Trail, but also to our South Australian heritage in general. An invaluable account of one man's involvement with one of South Australia's icons.

Sunshine streams in through the window as Doug talks about the Thebarton of his childhood - a very different place to the clean and orderly suburb of today. He remembers a lot of children living in the area and how for some reason they used to congregate in his street, so there were always plenty of mates to play with. Perhaps this had something to do with the disused pughole which was almost at the back of Doug's home. This was the 'adventure

playground' for the neighbourhood kids - a deep hole - a dangerous place. Naturally the local children weren't supposed to play there, but they did. The clay had been dug out for the local brick factory and once the brickmakers stopped using it in around 1913 it became a place to dump rubbish, and soon attracted legions of unsavoury squatters such as rats. Doug remembers he and his mates making shanghais and using them to shoot at the rats. Thankfully the pughole and the vermin are now just a childhood memory!

Doug attended Thebarton Technical High School, which taught elementary woodwork and sheet metal work in preparation for moving students into a trade. In Doug's case this was cabinet making. This career was interrupted by the WWII and in 1943 at the age of 18, he joined the Royal Australian Air Force, being assigned to the local transport unit for the South West Pacific region which was based in Townsville. Doug worked on the aircraft and helped to arrange transport to Papua New Guinea and Borneo. His responsibilities included loading aircraft and getting them away.

When the war ended in 1945 Doug returned to Adelaide and went into joinery and carpentry, working for numerous builders. In 1963 he joined the South Australian Railways and worked on signal installation. This work took him all over the state. Doug and his fellow workers slept in sleeping vans - mobile rooms on wheels on the tracks, which were shunted into sidings where ever the men happened to be based at the time. Initially the sleeping compartments were made of timber, but later these were discarded in favour of steel. Doug describes them as being like bakers' ovens in the heat.

After spending two years living in hostels in Peterborough, Doug returned home in 1965 to care for his mother, and continued his work on signalling. This included constructing boomgates, which at the time were made from oregon timber. Doug retired from the railways in 1988, and this enabled him to become more involved with the Friends of the Heysen Trail.

Doug's first experience with trail maintenance was in 1987 when there was a call for volunteers and he contacted Fred Brooks, who was running a working party at Mylor. (The group included Terry Lavender.) At this time a number of walking groups took on responsibility for different sections of the trail, and Doug took on Mount Lofty (Piccadilly to

Norton Summit). By 1994 he was working three days each week on two sections of the trail. When Fred Brooks retired he asked Doug to take on the Barossa section (Cudlee Creek to Bethany) and the Ramblers took on Mount Lofty.

During Doug's time leading the Barossa section there were a number of major works. These included building two giant staircases (to Mount Crawford summit and South Para in Warren Conservation Park), four suspension bridges in the Myponga area, the construction of Rossiter's Hut and countless stiles. And of course there has been the ongoing general maintenance work centred around re-marking the trail with the red and white Heysen Trail signs and cutting back the undergrowth to make the trail visible and accessible.

The staircase to Mount Crawford Summit numbered 106 steps in all, using three-metre treated circular pine logs 150mm in diameter and each weighing 18 kgs. The work was done in day trips, with early morning starts and long hard days. The South Para staircase was 100 steps, built under similar conditions.

The four suspension (swing) bridges built in the Myponga area between 1990 and 1993 remained in use for around 13 years and have now been replaced with fixed bridges. I am so glad however that I had the opportunity to cross the original swing bridges. I

loved the sense of adventure - felt as if I was truly out in the wilderness as I held on to the chains and felt the slight drift under my feet as I took each step. Doug remembers the day that 60 people crossed the Yulte Creek bridge in one day - all adhering to the obligatory 'one at a time' ruling.

Freeman's Hut near the Wirra Wirras in the Williamstown area was another major achievement for Doug and his volunteers, and once again it was a physically-demanding exercise. For example, the men accessed slate for the verandah floor from Victoria Creek. Just raw rock to start with, they had to split it to break it up, and then hauled it up on ropes and loaded it on to a trailer to transport back to the site. They bedded the slate down into sand that had been carted, on the suggestion of the ranger, from up behind Mount Crawford.

Rossiter's Hut in the Barossa is another achievement of which I have personally been very grateful. This was originally an old hermit's hut on farmland known as Pohlner's Estate. In 1972 Forest SA bought the land and planted the pine forest. The old hut was in a broken down state of disrepair and completely open at the front when, in 1996, the Friends asked Doug if he would be able to rebuild it into a hut suitable for walkers who might want to stay the night. He accomplished this with a team of around six volunteers.



Laying the slate verandah floor – Freeman's Hut

Dean Rossiter of Rossi Boots donated \$1000 and this gave the group a start in buying the materials, including iron and the timber for the bunks. During the reconstruction they practically demolished the old framework. There was a chimney, but it was very smokey, so they built it up another 400mm. There were blocks of stone under the earth that covered the floor of the hut and these were lifted and used to make the floor for the front verandah. Using a touch of ingenuity, the group laid a broken concrete floor inside the hut that gave the appearance of slate. The concrete was from a garden path which had been broken up, loaded on to trailers, carted to the site and then laid in a 'crazy' pattern. The front window came from a temporary building at the Kidman Park School, and the furniture came from hard rubbish collections. The result is a cosy hut with two three-level bunks providing six beds for weary walkers. The fire now draws perfectly and there is a stack of firewood ready to take the chill off the coldest winter night.

A couple of weeks ago, on a Friends of the Heysen Trail Sunday walk, a group of us made excellent use of the hut. We arrived at lunch time after climbing Kaiser Stuhl, just as a heavy rain squall blew through, but we were able to stay out of the rain, sitting on the verandah and inside the hut, chatting and enjoying a typical German communal lunch of wurst, cheese and ryebread. Without the shelter of the hut our lunch stop would have been a rather hasty

cold and miserable affair. Instead it was the stuff that memories are made of! Added to these major undertakings there have been the countless seemingly smaller achievements, but which are imperative for providing a safe and enjoyable experience for those walking this first class South Australian Trail. For example, the many stiles that we can so easily take for granted, the Heysen markers that are crucial to staying on track, and being able to walk without having to bush-bash our way through the undergrowth.

Doug is still committed to the upkeep of the Trail, still working with volunteers, and still happy to be there after 17 years. He now works on maintenance one day a week and on other days he enjoys walking in a range of areas closer to home, often along the beach or along the river on the linear path. He also walks regularly with the Four Seasons walking club, riding into town on his bike and then catching a bus with the group to the walk location. And he enjoys the Lord Mayor's walks around the parklands.

Chatting with Doug brought home to me yet again that the Heysen Trail that we enjoy so much doesn't just happen - that it is the result of a lot of hard yacka by a number of hardworking and dedicated people. And one with a remarkable history of commitment is Doug Leane.

Jo Chesser

Nominations For Honorary Members

Nominations of members (including self-nominations) are invited to be submitted to the Honorary Membership sub-committee of the Council, including name, address, contact numbers, and qualifications.

Recommendations from the sub-committee will then be considered by the Council, before being presented to the full membership at the next AGM. In order to be considered for the 2006 AGM, nominations should be received by the **end of January, 2006**.

Guidelines for Honorary Membership (Distinguished Service)

- (i) normally at least 10 years of paid membership as an Ordinary, Family or Life Member;

AND

- (ii) at least 6 years of substantial voluntary contributions to the Association, including especially one or more of
- Membership of Council
 - Chair of Walking Committee
 - Regular Walk Leadership Roles
 - Chair of Maintenance Committee
 - Maintenance Section Leader or Volunteer
 - Office Volunteer

Guidelines for Honorary Membership (Exceptional)

Substantial and sustained contributions to promotion, development and/or maintenance of the Heysen Trail, or the Association other than as a paid member or volunteer through, for example, public service support, media support etc.