

Museum Veld and Medicinal Garden Makeovers

Drs Sue and Richard Dean

The veld and medicinal gardens adjacent to the Tourism Bureau and behind the Fransie Pienaar Museum were recently upgraded to include over 100 new plant species all labelled with common and scientific names. The original veld garden planted in 1996 by Pat Marincowitz and Sue Dean (see *PA Friend* September 2020) had become overgrown and lost its plant name tags.

The replanted veld garden now features 90 plants commonly found in the “Prince Albert Succulent Karoo”, the arid vegetation type around Prince Albert in the rain shadow of the better-watered Swartberg. A poster on the wall of the Bureau shows how geology, altitude, rainfall and vegetation change as one descends from the top of the mountain to the Prince Albert Valley, over the Oukloofberg and onto the plains north of the town.

We revitalised the veld garden by cutting back existing large shrubs and introducing a range of locally-indigenous plants labelled with habitat information. All the plants were supplied by Renu-Karoo Veld Restoration Nursery. But the revamping of the garden required very much more than plants alone. First there was funding support from the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (GCBR), then Sue and Richard Dean with the help of Judy Maguire, Lydia Barrella and Mary-Anne Botha designed the sign boards which were printed, together with all the plant labels at Print@ in Beaufort West. Hugh Forsyth made the supports for the labels in his forge. Wilfred Luttig at Renu-Karoo attached the plant labels to the supports and put signboards on the walls of the Bureau.

The real hard work of pruning and new planting was done by Callum Clark and volunteers from the PA Skills School (PASS) including their teacher Kenneth Myburgh. This school, started by Helene Smit four years ago, gives teenage boys a chance to gain practical skills in cooking, gardening and carpentry. Callum, a Saasveld nature conservation student gaining work experience at Renu-Karoo, is interested in how conservation and sustainability can further social justice and enrich lives. He works with both the PACT Path to Prosperity (POP) Centre and PASS to make LAP Tuine (Love & Peace Gardens), small food gardens. (See article by Enzo Williams in November’s issue of the *Friend*).

The medicinal garden showcases locally-used medicinal plants, the propagation of which could be of economic importance generating new livelihood opportunities for the town: e.g. the well-known antibacterial properties of wildeals and calmativie properties of kougoed are both sought after products. A pamphlet detailing the names and uses of all the plants is available from the Bureau and the Museum. This information was gleaned from various

books over the years by staff and interns at Renu-Karoo and from interviews with Meraai Isaacs who uses many of the local plants for healing. Meraai gave the volunteers a talk on uses of the plants.

We are grateful to the GCBR for funding the upgrade and which paid for the plants, signs, labels, pamphlets and T-shirts for the volunteers. The vision of the GCBR is “*People and Nature Living in Harmony*” and it seeks to achieve that in the scenic and ecologically diverse area between the Gouritz River Mouth in the South to Prince Albert in the North by

- providing easy access to information on the local natural environment for resident, school learners and tourists so that more people will take an interest in their natural environment and to embrace sustainable living practices,
- increasing the engagement of institutions such as municipalities, museums and tourism associations and with biodiversity in the Biosphere Reserve; and
- facilitating the development of a more diverse but sustainable economy.

The upgrade of the veld and medicinal gardens adjacent to the Tourism Bureau and behind the Fransie Pienaar Museum contributes to the GCBR vision because it raises awareness of the local flora and teaches people about the values of local plants and cultures. Collaboration among organisations, businesses and generations of local residents has, we feel, contributed to the success and value of this project. ■



Kenneth Myburgh, Callum Clark and Skills School volunteers preparing the medicinal and veld gardens for planting. Photo: Dr Sue Dean