

VISIT BY FRIENDS OF GLENTHORN FARM TO THE AUSTRALIAN INLAND BOTANIC GARDENS NEAR MILDURA -NOVEMBER 2013

PREAMBLE

In suggesting this visit, I felt that The AIBG was an example of what had been achieved by a small group of dedicated people, very similar to the FOG group, who had a dream and brought it to fruition. I hoped that a visit might provide some new ideas and some inspiration to encourage the Friends of Glenthorne to continue despite the many obstacles that are continually thrown up.

The genesis of the AIBG goes back to chats by a small group of three work colleagues, chatting in their tea breaks, way back in 1958. It took until 1983 before they were able to have a local Mildura City Councillor convene a public meeting to set up a formal committee to pursue the idea.

In 1988 they obtained 152 hectares of land across the river in NSW with a frontage on the Murray River. In 1990 they actually started work with construction of fencing which then allowed planting to begin in 1991.

There are important differences between the AIBG and the FOG.

1. The AIBG started off without any land, but having acquired a site, they have full control over it. The FOG have access to land but do not have control.
2. The AIBG had no buildings. The main buildings they now have, have been donated by station owners north of Mildura. They were dismantled and re-built on site.

There are lots of buildings on Glenthorne, both historical and more recent; which are falling into disrepair by total neglect by the university. At this stage we do not have access to most of them.

3. The fundamental aim of the AIBG is to "bring together and display plants of the world." The FOG aim to revegetate Glenthorne Farm with only indigenous plants; restoring it to its original natural state as far as possible. The FOG also believe that they have a responsibility to recognise the historic importance of the site, particularly the restoration and maintenance of buildings.
4. There is unfettered public access to the AIBG. In fact the public are encouraged to visit.

Public access to Glenthorne Farm is totally discouraged and strickly controlled

Apart from the above differences the other aims of the AIBG could easily be taken as our own with only slight modification

. They include:-

- A. Scientific and educational. The gardens aim to be available to all people seeking information on all aspects of horticulture.
- B. Protection of Endangered Species.
- C. Research and Development.

WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THE VISIT.

- 1. We should not be discouraged by the time it is taking to see some sort of a future use plan from the university. The AIBG group took from their genesis in 1958 to first planting in 1991 - 28 years.

FOG has only been around for some sixteen years and has been able to do quite a bit of planting in that time.

- 2a. From the very beginning AIBG realised that they would need much public support if they were to make real progress. . The first formal public meeting was in 1983, with a packed house of supporters. They cultivated prominent and influential people in the community who proved invaluable over the coming years

Two local councils, Mildura City Council (Victoria) and Wentworth Shire Council (NSW) provided strong initial and ongoing financial support.

At the official public launch dinner of the AIBG in April 1989, some 260 people attended and almost twenty thousand dollars were raised.

Local businesses provide significant support either financial or in kind.

Service groups, such as Rotary have provided significant input.

Those people who have given substantial support either financial or in kind are recognised on Honour Boards.

AIBG seeks grants from all possible sources, including Local Councils, State (NSW and Victoria) and Federal governments. For instance at the moment they have a three year grant to employ a part time Education Officer, whose role is mainly to look after visiting school groups.

- 2b. In addition to the above, the AIBG generates significant funds by its own efforts e.g. in 2012/2013 funds raised included:-

Members subscriptions	(\$27,356)
Patrons	(\$50,000)

*Other operating sale (\$74,694)

* Presumably this includes things such as Cafe sales, weddings, functions, conventions, etc and tractor tours.

Total revenue from all sources for 2012/13 was \$369,528.

- 3 With the gardens now well established, the ongoing operational activities are quite considerable. The Management Committee has overall oversight and consist of elected members and representatives appointed by the Mildura Rural City Council and the Wentworth Shire Council.
4. The actual work in running, maintaining and expanding the gardens is dependant on volunteers, allocated to a number work groups. Each work group has a defined task. These tasks include weeding, deadheading roses, building construction and maintenance, manning the cafe, etc.

These volunteers are supported by three paid employees, plus the part time paid Education Officer.

In addition, the AIBG has been able gain additional assistance from Community Service Order workers and work experience Students from local high schools and TAFE college.

What can the Friends of Glenthorne learn from the AIBG.

Firstly we have accept that without more co-operation from the university we have no hope of duplicating the AIBG model. However there may be some things that we might look at.

1. Better networking. Can we make contact with more people of influence? This may mean people who have no great interest in Glenthorne but recognise its importance and support our aims. They may be willing to use their influence when called upon or point us in the right direction. This includes councillors, business persons, politicians and such like
- 2.. At moment we are only a small group and we all tend to work as a team. Can we set up more teams? For instance, from our wider (non active) members can we identify who might be interested in coming along one or twice a year to do planting? Is there anyone who might be prepared to come along just to do some fencing when required? Can we form small specialised teams along these lines?
3. Can we gain access to groups such as Rotary, Lions and Probus or even church groups, men's breakfast, men's sheds and such like and provide speakers to promote our cause? This might assist in locating people for 2. above.

4. Should we be more aggressive in seeking grants? We would need to have firm plans on how we would use any money sought.
5. Look to the future. It has taken the AIBG fifty five years to get where they are now. We are only sixteen years along the path!

Let's not be downhearted!

Leighton Smith
(Friends of Glenthorne)