

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca Working bee report, 2026

Wildcare Friends of Melaleuca is working with PWS to care for, maintain and interpret natural and historic heritage at Melaleuca and Claytons Corner in Southwest Tasmania

There are no roads to this area, the waterways being the local means of transport, giving the place its unique character. Challenges faced here are presented by the west coast weather and the relative isolation. Transport and freight by air or sea are major costs and always require rigorous forward planning and flexibility.

Working bee, March 2026

There was a big turn out for our annual working bee, held from 11 to 22 March, funded by FoM, although the participants dribbled in over a number of days due to poor weather and cancelled or full flights. Nineteen participants arrived by air or boat and rangers Dan Rowe and Marty Doyle were there for several days to work with the trackworkers. The park caretakers Russell and Debra Brown provided encouragement and scones, and helped with numerous little jobs before, during and after the working bee. The two Melaleuca stalwarts, Barbara Willson and Stephen Mattingley, who we lost in 2025, were sorely missed. Janet and Geoff Fenton's absence left a gaping hole in the working bee, though they were thoroughly involved from a distance.

Major jobs for this working bee involved track remediation at Clydes Hill and Mt Beattie, the laying of new carpet tiles in the museum, and the cataloguing of items at the Rallinga Mine smelter. Routine annual brush-cutting, weeding and drain clearing were done as well as maintenance on Kings' lease, the Willsons' place and at Claytons.

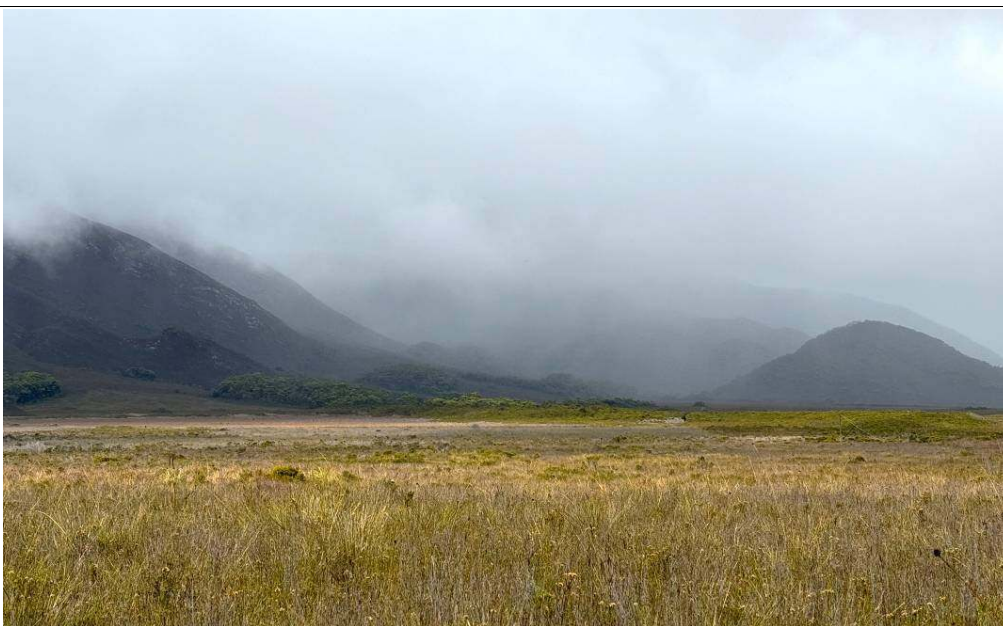


Photo by Anne Goldizen – typical weather at Melaleuca during this working bee

Our thanks to those who transported gear to Melaleuca aboard their boats: On Board Expeditions *Odalisque*, for freighting carpet tiles for the museum and being willing to take the old tiles out; Mitch and crew on *Sequoia* and Andrew and crew on *Juliet* for transporting other heavy and awkward gear, tools and food, and Bob and Sue Cleary for freighting floor boards for First Camp, gas, fuel, treated pine poles and other hardware aboard *Georges Bay* in December. These working bees would be a logistical nightmare without this support from the boats.

Volunteers stayed in the Charles King Memorial bushwalkers hut and campground, at Willsons', Karina's, Kings and on board boats, *Juliet* and *Sequoia*. We greatly appreciate Barbara Willson's family's generosity for inviting five of our volunteers to stay in her home and Dagmar Weihkopf Willson for hosting at Melaleuca South for the first days of the working bee.

Our group included one new recruit - Nikki Hutchings. Other volunteers included Rob Banfield, Geoff Brian, Andrew Boon, David Butler, Jannie Chin, Chris Creese, Mark Devine, Gary Eiszle, Tony Fenton, Anne Goldizen and Alan Goldizen, Rik Head, Mel Jack, Ken and Lauren Jones, David Mitchell, Ian Terry, and Nikki Kingsmith.

The weather was as it usually is in the SW – very changeable with many days of showers hanging around the edges of the valley and occasionally coming across Melaleuca. Proper sunshine was a rare thing. The fish-oiling program had to be deferred again this year due to unsuitable weather.

Work at Clayton's

Dan, Marty, Rob, Mark and David did four days of trackwork at Claytons, after 18 hours of prep work and 3 T bar steps done by Dan and Marty on March 11th. Track work on the Clyde's Hill track involved installing wooden steps, T bar steps and wooden box gutters. Work completed to the first knob with 43 new steps installed and many others improved. This project will most likely continue in 2027.



Photo by Mark Devine of new steps made on Clyde's Hill track



Photo by Mark Devine of a new step and gutter on Clyde's Hill track

Minor tidying was done on the Mt. Beattie track

Back at Clayton's the following work was done:

- Nine hours of work on Win's garden, including pruning and removal of weeds including many Watsonia and one foxglove
- Moss was removed from the front pathway
- The house was cleaned inside, spiderwebs removed from outside, gutters were cleaned
- The downpipe on the water tank was inspected and renewed with PVC under engineer Geoff Fenton's remote guidance
- Rusted roof screws were removed and inspected and sent to PWS for analysis
- At least 20% of the netting on the Clayton's jetty was replaced
- The Clayton's big tank inspection hole was temporarily sealed and a new flange made, ready to fit in 2027

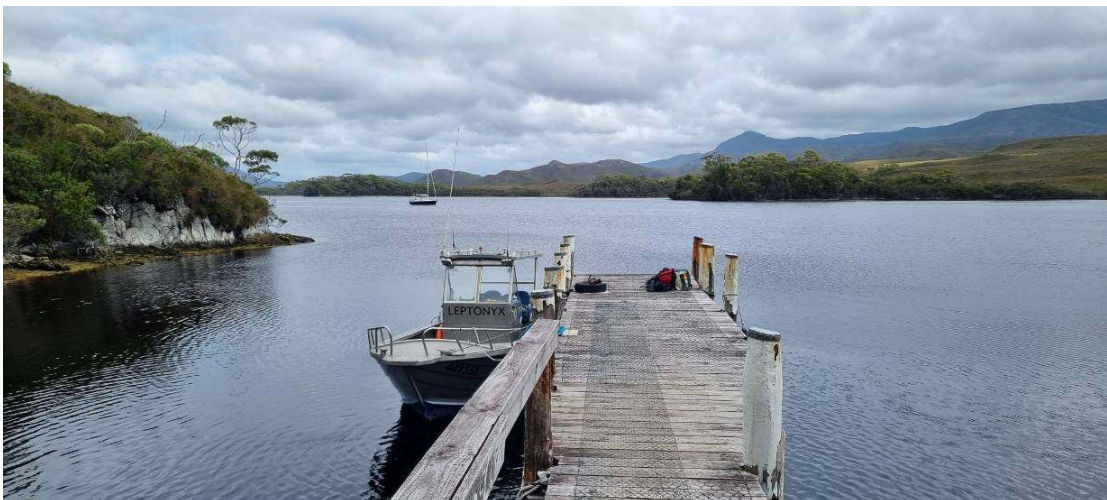


Photo by Mark Devine of jetty at Clayton's

Brushcutting and work on drains around Melaleuca

- Mitch was chief brushcutter and mowed the top and bottom paddocks and fire breaks around Kings’
- David brushcut the edges of drains at Willsons’ and then cleared them out.
- David brushcut around the red shed
- David cleared drains at the southern end of the airstrip



Mitch refuelling the brushcutter

Cataloguing of items at Rallinga tin smelter

Nikki Kingsmith and Ian Terry had the great privilege of spending four days cataloguing moveable items at the Rallinga tin smelter. Unfortunately with the weather delaying their arrival by two days they didn't have time to finish the inventory, completing about 75-80% of it. The smelter, built and operated by Peter and Barbara Willson from scratch, has outstanding heritage significance, for being the last operating tin smelter in Australia and for its association with Peter and Barbara.



Photo by Ian Terry of Nikki Kingsmith at work cataloguing items at Rallinga tin smelter

In total they catalogued 77 objects, using an Excel spreadsheet and recording details a professional museum catalogue would include. These include descriptions, history of use, dimensions, conservation advice and statements of significance for each object.



Ian Terry at work cataloguing items at Rallinga tin smelter.

Each object was also photographed and labelled both with registration numbers painted on to them and a metal label attached. They catalogued a range of material from Texta pens, engineer's chalk and Dolphin torches, protective gear and a can of grease to tools and equipment made by Peter and Barbara on site, which was specific to the smelting and refining of tin. Chris Creese provided them with a great deal of help, identifying some of the tools and equipment and their uses when they could not work it out. They also completed two video interviews with Chris - on the construction and operation of the smelter and the operation of separating plant. These will be given to FoM for future reference.



Tags for items at Rallinga tin smelter

Work at Melaleuca museum

Anne and Alan Goldizen removed the old carpet tiles and installed new ones.



Photo by Anne Goldizen - Museum viewing room with old carpet tiles



Photo by Anne Goldizen – Alan Goldizen at work cutting carpet tiles



Photo by Anne Goldizen – New carpet tiles in the Museum

Work at private leases

The King and Willson homes are the hubs for the volunteers: eating and meeting places, plus accommodation. Materials for private works are provided by the lessees. Kings is listed on the State Heritage Register and an application has been made to list Willsons' and the Rallinga Mine.

At Kings':

- Fridges - Geoff Brian and Mitch serviced the Dometic fridge plus spare one. The main fridge wasn't working properly so was swapped out for the spare one.
- First camp/museum - Geoff removed a broken window from First camp, Jannie put primer and then top coat paint on the window frame and then an acrylic sheet was installed to replace the broken glass. Geoff and Rick completed laying a new floor. Roof leaks were fixed and some roofing nails



Photo by Andrew Boon – new solar panel at Karina's

replaced with screws. Flashing was put on the door step.

- Jannie sanded the window and door at the front of the King house as well as the back door and back window of the main bedroom. The front door was painted and the window primed. Nikki H. put a coat of “Brunswick Green” on the front and back windows.
- Garden shed - Rob did a general renovation of the shed and its contents. This renovation involved rebuilding structural elements of the wall as well as removing rotten boards and reworking the ‘good stuff’ into a reconstituted and authentic looking wall. Rick assisted with sanding and general cleanup of the garden shed tools and Jannie then oiled the garden tools in the with linseed oil.
- Electrical work - Andrew and Garry installed two LED strip lights in Karina’s hut, a USB



Photo by Andrew Boon – new light in Karina’s

charger, 12 volt battery (7Ah), solar panel and regulator. They also installed a 24 volt light fitting and switch over Tony’s bed in the main house.

- Kings’ garden – Rik removed dead fronds from tree ferns. Nikki H removed rhododendron seedlings. Nikki H weeded the berry patch.
- Blueboat – Ken and Lauren prepared the slip cradle for Blueboat, jacked and packed the boat onto the slip to increase access below the water line to investigate possible sources of the chronic bilge leaks. Open seams at the bow were prepared, primed, caulked, sealed and puttied, then recoated with primer. Garboard plank was refastened at port and starboard and the bow repairs were primed and painted. Blueboat was then relaunched.
- Rik renovated three essential airport wheel barrows and retrieved important spare parts from broken wheel barrows.
- The Southern Cross engine received its annual “certificate of compliance” from Chris Creese.



Blueboat on slip at Kings

- Karina's hut – Geoff Brian removed a broken northern window at Karina's, which hasn't been opened for many years for fear of it disintegrating. He replaced the surround timber framing with new timber as well as trimming and put on undercoat. Inside trimming put on to cover the gap between the window frame and wall. Corflute was installed to make the window semi-waterproof until a rebuilt window can be installed next year. A template was taken so that the new window will fit to the aperture, as it isn't square.
- Fire barrow shelter – Geoff and Rik prepared site for 'Friends of Melaleuca Fire Station' shelter, by removing a stump, collecting gravel, digging holes and placing posts into them. A floor was made and installed, and cross bracing fitted. A bright red cover was also installed onto the actual fire barrow - freighted in by Dave Ross and handed to Mel for her to approve his handiwork, which indeed it did pass spectacularly, especially that red! The fire barrow shelter needs further work at the next working bee to complete the roof.

At Willsons':

- Chris installed a new water pump.
- Chris installed foam strips and expanding foam under the north side of the west wing ridge capping to prevent leaks
- Chris cleaned the stove chimney
- Chris cut and stacked an enormous amount of firewood at Willsons', with Nikki H. helping with the stacking. Barbara would have been pleased.
- Mark replaced silicon joints under the window and painted two coats of sealer on northwesterly wall with the help of Nikki H.
- Chris replaced a rusted roof sheet on the porch at Willsons'. The old sheet was leaking and filling shoes left at the door.

- Chris and Nikki H applied coats of Simply Woodcare decking oil to the NW and SW exterior timber cladding on Willsons' house plus a small section of the east side. 10 litres of decking oil used. More required to finish the job.
- Nikki H. cleaned the oven.
- Chris repaired a soft patch of floor in the west wing of Willsons'.
- Ken and Lauren cleaned moss and algae from the exterior of Willsons' dinghy Pixie and constructed base pads to raise Pixie above ground level.



Photo by Andrew Boon – Willsons' home improvements crew Mark Devine, Nikki Hutchings and Chris Creese

Mel masterfully organised group catering across the week. Volunteers took turns as chefs for the evening meals and produced some terrific feasts for the hungry hoards at Kings and Willsons. Thanks also to all the kitchen-hands, dishwashers, nibble and chip providers and beer brewers. Thanks to Craig and Deb Searle (orange-bellied parrot volunteers) who teamed with Deb and Russ to host our farewell team dinner. Deb and Craig have also been a great help with various jobs. It is wonderful to share the job with the extended Melaleuca residents.

Thanks also to Janet and Geoff for enthusiastically enabling us to continue with the working bee in their absence. Their generous support and detailed information has been immensely valuable. As always their planning was thorough and this has led to great outcomes and supported us to be a strong and cohesive team.

A huge thank you to our Treasurer, Tony Fenton, who stepped into his father's massive shoes as workshop coordinator, general brains trust around the house, and keeper of history and stories. This working bee was all the richer for his humour and presence. Thanks also to PWS rangers Marty and Dan, who were great to work with.

Many extra volunteer days were involved in planning, purchasing, preparation and freighting materials beforehand, unloading at Melaleuca, more cleaning-up, assessing and then reporting post working-bee. On site volunteer hours tallied to 917.

Thanks to generous donors who have directly funded work through the FoM webpage donation portal, and also those who have donated through the on-site collection boxes. Thanks to the volunteers who funded their own return fares and to Bob, Mitch, Andrew and crews for transporting gear, and to the Willson family for accommodation in their home.

Our thanks to Wildcare for granting funds for the trackwork project, and special thanks to the Mountain Air Foundation for fully supporting it: <https://www.mountainairfoundation.com.au/>
