

# MEENTHEENA

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It is a pleasant duty for me to forward to all our sponsors, supporters, Veterans associations, Returned Services branches, and other veterans retreats, a report on our progress to have our retreat visitor friendly and to show the work completed since its inception in 2010 to July 2014.

I became Secretary at the 2013 AGM at Bruce Rock, and as well as those duties I have been to two work parties and two other times at the retreat. I was an original member of Veterans Retreats at Meentheena but never became actively involved until February 2013 when I became a member of the committee.

Without sponsors and dedication of many members we would not have seen the retreat grow to what it is today. This July just past we had over 20 in the recreation hut sitting down for a happy hour. For those unaware I will start with a few photo's of the retreat during its early days until the present time. We were assisted with the clearing of the site, airstrip and access road by Warrawagine Pastoral Company. The valuable assistance of Robin & Lyle Mills, continues to this day with the loan of a bobcat, wire and pickets for our electric fence and other smaller items. Too many to mention really. It is much appreciated.



Retreat at the start

The founding committee headed by Norm Whitburn completed a lot of the hard early work obtaining permits and other necessary paperwork before the work for the retreat could actually start. The location of the retreat in itself had its own problems. Approximately 1500 north east of Perth and 75 KM from Marble Bar. It is the only retreat in WA that is open to all defence personnel as well as Police, Fire, and Ambulance Officers and SES personnel. All these can, and do work in stressful situations and Meentheena is set up as a place to de-stress.

All that was at the retreat at the start was the old cottage (now our Recreation Room) and a shed which was open on three sides. Some sponsors always come to the front when donating for a good cause and

Enzo from GCS Budget Portables came to the front with a loan of a 4 bedroom Donga and two sea containers for the retreat. Then Boom Logistics came all the way from Port Hedland with a crane and riggers to load the Donga and containers onto the cyclone rated concrete footings, at no cost to us. We had to get the bore operating, a compostable toilet and generators to enable everything to operate.



VRWA applied for grants from the Lotteries Commission, and other organisations. Brendon GRYLLS the local member assisted us with a grant from Royalties for Regions. Grant Woodhams the local member of Parliament for the area also assisted us in obtaining some funding. Andrew Smith, of Persistence Drilling of Kalgoorlie, has assisted us in many ways including the donation of a generator for pumping water, financial assistance for fuel, and our Phone/communications tower. We obtained a Lottery-West grant for a Toyota Land Cruiser and trailer for the transport of goods to

and from the retreat. We also purchased a two unit compostable toilet. We were donated a surplus Toyota fire truck from the WA Fire Brigade for use at the retreat.



Member, Peter Fitzpatrick and his wife Kathy, who were also founding members have supported us with cash

donations and other support. We have had many supporters and sponsors for the retreat and an updated list is printed at the end of the document. Please support our sponsors. We thank them all. We would not be where we are today without them.

*Above - the retreat before April 2012*

In July 2012 the retreat was in a position to open its doors and an open day was held with members of Parliament, community members from Marble Bar, ABC radio, police and Shire Councillors from Marble Bar, committee members, the general public with. Warrawagine station attending in their mustering helicopter.

Derek Phillips, who is our current treasurer, and has been with us from the start, he has just been awarded the O.A.M. for his services to the veteran community. We are pleased to have Derek on board and congratulate him on his award. Derek attends the retreat regularly and is our cook. This allows all the others to complete their set tasks. Thanks Derek you are a gem. You always have veterans on your mind. (see Derek in red photo right)

The retreat has been an eye opener and to see the amount of work already completed and another work party in September this year will see further improvement. As can be seen at the opening, the large shed was only sheeted on one side and open both ends. It was an ideal place for respite from the heat from the mid day sun. It has since been sheeted on the other side with donations of sheeting from Swan Patio's of Joondalup.



Power was a problem as we are about 75km from the nearest power source at Marble Bar. Solar power was looked into and quotes obtained and after funding was obtained we signed with REGEN Power of Jandakot. The system was a series of Solar panels which fed into a large battery bank and when the power was low a Diesel Generator was to cut in and recharge the batteries. Members attended the retreat and completed all the manual labour with technicians from REGEN connecting the system. It was a disaster and did not work correctly from the start. I am pleased to say that recently we have had a new member, David Thornborough, arrive at the retreat who knows the type of system we have. The system is now working about 95% and when he next attends he will have it working fully. It has been difficult for him without any operators manuals being supplied by Regen Power. Dave has also put the good word in for us and obtained

from Brookfield Rail a 400amp generator Welder for use at the retreat. He not only obtained it but fully serviced the unit before towing it to Meentheena for us. Thanks Dave and Fiona.

In the meantime we had replaced the large water tank on the hill and connected it to the water bore. A new bore pump was installed and it pumps water to the water tank on the hill, water is then gravity fed to the site. A large amount of pipes were laid about the camp with taps so we could water the many trees that have been planted. The next task was to erect a tank stand and 2 shower cubicles below. This was completed in April 2013. We even have a small laundry with a manual washing machine with wash basin for the use of everyone who attends. All concreting is done manually, and we have to thank Chris Ferris of Hedland Hiabs, who brings us metal and sand as we require it. Thanks Chris, much appreciated.



As can be seen by the amount of work already completed that it could not have been done without our many sponsors and donors. Many tons of materials have been conveyed to the site by members and sponsors. Chris Dicker of Mandurah Bolt supplies has supplied an endless supply of bolts Tech screws and other items for the retreat. The truck on the right was loaned by Robert Boelen of Lake Clifton, and the truck is loaded with the steel frames roof purlins and sheeting for the shade shelters which was donated by Colin Rutherford of Miami Bobcat and Sand Supplies. We had two drivers, both military veterans who volunteered their time to drive the truck to and from Meentheena.

The amount of time given by some of our committee and members is incredible. Each member supplies his own fuel to travel to and from the retreat. This is an average of about \$700 plus per trip often towing very heavy loads of materials for the retreat. No one hears anyone complain, we are doing it for a worthwhile cause. We have all suffered stress due to our service and we can understand and help each other.

In no special order I have to thank Gerry Loveridge from Donnybrook. He spends all his waking hours working for the community. He has restored a 3 ton truck which is now at the retreat. The truck was in poor condition and was donated by the Donnybrook Golf Club. He then restored a ride on mower, and has been like a bower bird for materials for the retreat. Pat Scallan of Talison Lithium Ltd of Greenbushes has donated all the spares, oil and other goods to keep our vehicles running. The company also repaired the hoist for the truck. Our committee resident mechanic Barry Boyle has a wide range of knowledge and saved us heaps by servicing our vehicles on his regular visits. Thanks Pat and Barry.

The next I will mention is Gavin "Doc" Livingstone. He has taken his small tractor with front end loader bucket to the retreat on several occasions. The track into the camp from Ripon Hills Road was recently graded by Doc. No charge to us for fuel, blown tyres and wear and tear on his equipment. He and his wife organised a raffle at last years, Back to the Bush Reunion and all proceeds donated to VRWA. Thank you Doc and Lorraine for your efforts. As can be seen in the sign. "No Shooting" The retreat is on a conservation reserve and all wildlife is protected. Les McGoldrick has also been a tireless worker for the retreat often spending much of his own finances on materials we required for the retreat that we could not get donated. Les is like a worm and never stops long for a break at the retreat. Les is taking a break at the moment and we thank you Les and Lesley.



During the April 2013 work party many other tasks were completed. Three frames were erected on the eastern side, and one sheeted so that the area under was shaded. The other two were to be shaded by shade sails at a later date. The storage batteries in one of the containers were becoming hot and some insulation and an air conditioner was installed to alleviate the problem. At this stage we had very little knowledge of the power setup so we were relying on just the solar. It is not all work and no play during work parties. The routine was the same. Up at about 6am to beat the heat with a tea or coffee then to work until about 9am. Then it was a cooked

breakfast by Derek. Work until about 1.30pm then lunch and then a swim at the nearby "Paperbarks". The "Paperbarks" is a section of the Nullagine River about 2km from the retreat. Water is usually flowing constantly and always fresh. The depth can vary between 30 cm and 3 metres depending on the season and what sand has been washed down river by the cyclonic flooding. After an hour or so cooling off it is back to the camp and a few small tasks before the day is at the end.



No camp is complete without friendly banter and lots of friendly jokes between us whilst having a few drinks before dinner. It is usually an early night before the same again following day. We had committee meetings where tasks planned for the work parties were set and we attempted to complete these tasks. The only reason some of the tasks were not completed was the lack of materials or finances to purchase those materials.

Meentheena retreat is manned almost all year by a full time camp host. He will welcome all visitors and advise on the rules for the retreat which are very basic. The host is very familiar with the area, and aware of veterans needs as he is a veteran also and can advise any person attending information on the local area. Our notice board has maps of the area showing points of interest. The Royal Flying Doctor Service has provided us with a full emergency first Aid Kit and staff from the RFDS have attended and trained members on the use of this kit, as can be seen in the photo to the right.



The 5km gravel track between Ripon Hills Road and the retreat is maintained regularly but without the possession of a tractor to tow a grader blade we maintain the road by towing other implements over the road to keep it in reasonable condition. We are endeavouring to obtain a tractor of about 50HP with a front end loader bucket and 3 point linkage to maintain the road and tracks of the retreat.

During the work party of September 2013, work was commenced on the old cottage now called our recreation hut. Part of the concrete floor was poured and stove and cupboards built. A communications tower of about 20 metres was erected and Norsat Communications from Port Hedland completed the necessary technical work. The signal is obtained from Spinaflex Ridge North West of the retreat and we are not guaranteed a signal but we get a telephone signal through Telstra Next G about 80% of the time. The signal is usually not strong enough for internet.



During the cyclone season of late 2013 and early 2014 we had significant rain at the retreat and further inland. The rain washed away some of the access road and highlighted our need for a tractor and front end loader to maintain the track. April 2014 we laid two culvert pipes to the main washaway and although it will never be 100% due to cyclones it is an improvement and can be quickly repaired when we get a front end loader.



In the middle of summer it can get very hot at the retreat and AGI Insulation has assisted us with the supply of a large amount of insulating bats. Most have been used in the battery container and the remainder will be used to insulate the ceiling in the recreation hut.

We will continue to enhance the retreat. One of our next tasks will be lay concrete paths for wheelchair bound visitors. Soon we expect to put a roof between the two containers as a shelter/shade area with coils for some hot water for the showers. The photo on the bottom was taken the afternoon we had our burn-off so it is a bit dark. A better photo next time.

We had a few problems with wandering cattle coming through the retreat, so an electric fence was erected surrounding the retreat. Three gates were erected which are usually left open all day and closed at night or when cattle or camels are in the vicinity. Keep your eyes open for wandering camels and bush turkeys.



Above Retreat April, 2013.

Below Retreat April, 2014.



Below July 2014.



There is always something we would like to achieve. In the middle of 2015 we hope to raise enough funds to take a bus load of veterans to the retreat and surrounds for a week or so. This will give them a break and also a break for their carers'. We have a 15 seat bus already, courtesy of Honouring Indigenous War Graves. We are also looking at a food trailer so we can operate a sausage sizzle at next year's Marble Bar Races.

Our next A.G.M. is scheduled for the “Back to the Bush Reunion” at Bruce Rock on the 10th of October 2014. It will be held about a month earlier this year as Albany is to have their 100 year commemoration for the fleet leaving for Gallipoli on the week we normally have our AGM and Bruce Rock hold the Back to the Bush Reunion..

**We have many sponsors who have been with us from the start. They deserve special mention**

WARRAWAGINE - Robin and Lyle Mills and family -provided equipment and labour to establish initial site works, airstrip and positioning Donga and Containers etc. Still continues today with freight to the retreat. Loan of their bobcat, and the list goes on. GINA AND BIANCA RHEINHART - substantial cash donation which enabled the establishment of the association, and provided “seed” funding.

GCS TRANSPORTABLES - Enzo Gullotti, loan of Donga, concrete footings and containers, also cash donation to assist with purchase of communication tower.

NEWCREST MINING - expedited transport of Donga, Sea Containers etc from Perth to Meentheena, plus several donations of cash and in kind.

PILBARA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION - Substantial Grant Funding, for solar power, water tanks and pumps and self composting toilet system.

LOTTERIES WEST - Substantial Grant Funding for Toyota Troop Carrier and Trailer.

BOOM LOGISTICS, Port Hedland - supplied mobile Crane and riggers to place Donga and Containers on site, no cost.

PERSERVERENCE DRILLING, Kalgoorlie, Andrew Smith---donated 5kva Generator— Financial support ,Fuel for work parties, assistance with Solar Power, assistance with communications tower

HEDLAND HiABS - Chris Ferris for the many truck loads of Sand Metal and other goods to the retreat for us.

**Sponsors in no particular order are.**

Battery Word Bunbury	Supply of vehicle batteries	Preston Valley Maint'	Steel sheeting and other goods
AGI Industries	Supply of Insulation bats	Bunbury 4 X 4	Supply of spare parts for truck
Donnybrook Civil	Supply of Diesel and other goods	Swan Patio's	Supply of sheeting & tube.
Robert Boelen	Loan of truck to convey goods.	South West Fire	donation of ladders and other fire Equipt'
Covert Signs	Made several sign for our retreat	Miami Bobcats	supply of frames for shelter sheds
West Kimberly Cement	Donated large quantity of Cement	Melville Air-conditioning	Supply of fridge and Air conditioners.
J.A Davy and Co	Donation of 2 blood Pressure Monitors	Donnybrook Panel Beaters	Fitting of Windscreen to truck
Nukleen Industrial Cleaners	continous supply of rags, safety gloves, glasses, hats & electrolytes	Out Back Trees	They have been with us from the start with a continuous supply of trees when required
Norsat Comminications	The erection of our communications tower at a very reduced rate	Mandurah Bolt Supplies	Has supplied us with all the bolts. rivets, Tek screws etc that we have asked for.
GME	Supply of personal EPIRB (PIB)	Agro Spark	Donation of 2 truck batteries
Brookfield Rail	Donation of 400am generator /Welder and other office type goods.	Talison Lithium	Supply of parts and consumables to service our vehicles.
Busselton RSL	Cash and a stove for the retreat	Cockburn RSL	Cash Donation
Peter Fitzpatrick	Various donations - Thanks Kath and Peter	Orcon Steel	Various steel sheet, tube and pipe
Sam Litciardello	Fruit &Vegies for Work Party	Bob Currie	Donation of 2 Canoes

I cannot finish this bulletin without mentioning the unselfish members of work parties and committee members who have donated so much toward Meentheena Retreat. Time, their own money, wear and tear on vehicles and the list goes on. It all adds up, with the collecting of goods, loading trailers and trucks then the many hours work at the retreat.

I have not forgotten Terry Holl and our President John Schnaars. John was with Meentheena from the start then had a break and at the AGM at the end of 2012 John was nominated for president. He was duly elected and Terry told John that he would assist as long as possible. John is still our President and Terry has the job of organising work parties. That is a big job on its own.

**Camp Hosts.** As mentioned above the retreat is manned all year round and currently we have Terry Gadean and his wife Val. Before Terry, we had Dick Bligh. Dick done the hard time in the heat and cyclones, from July 2013 to April 2014 and is due to return in September for another stint. The retreat is looking good due to the efforts of these two hosts and Val. The retreat would not be looking as good as is without the daily duties they perform.

Thanks everyone

Ian Armitt



Preparing for water tank



Part of the Fluorite Deposit



Full Moon behind a giant ant hill