‘Meldanda’

At Cambrai Area School

BACKGROUND: THE EARLY DAYS

Meldanda is a 40 hectare property situated along the River Marne just out of Cambrai. The late Mr Les Weiss bequeathed the land to the Cambrai Area School for use as an educational facility to benefit the young people of the district. The property, which was inherited by the school on the 6th December 1991, had been greatly denuded through livestock grazing and only a token effort had been made to preserve or protect the natural environment. However, Mr Weiss defied the local ‘experts’ on numerous occasions by finding permanent water wherever he excavated on the property, including Mermaid Lake, a freshwater spring that cannot be pumped dry. The property also has the River Marne running through it, with its permanent water holes and shady red gums. At the handing over ceremony, Mr Weiss, who was losing a long battle with cancer, expressed the wish that the land, flora and fauna be looked after and cared for.

In the early 1990s, the work of revegetation was begun, with students using direct seeding and tube stock to beautify the Mermaid Lake area and establishing cement steps leading to the lake. Further trees were planted on either side of Meldanda’s roadway. Considerable fencing took place at this time, as well as the establishment of a woodlot (agro-forestry) and broombush area. A flock of Wiltipoll sheep (grown for the heavy prime lamb market – shed own fleece annually) was established and continues to develop to this day, protected from dog and fox attack by a pair of very diligent alpacas.
REJUVENATION

Meldanda lapsed into ‘maintenance mode’ for a number of years, until a ten-year plan was developed in 2003. As the current custodians of Meldanda, we are committed to developing the site for the benefit of the local community, as well as school students from all Barossa schools and from across the state. We support only projects which are environmentally friendly, ecologically viable, sympathetic to the indigenous past of the land and educationally proactive. Meldanda seeks to provide open classroom opportunities in the areas of: Environmental Education, Agricultural Education, Outdoor Education and Aboriginal Education.

COMMITMENT TO A HEALTHY WATER SYSTEM

From the outset, we have seen Meldanda as an opportunity for students to appreciate the natural environment, to assist nature to heal the damage done by generations of stock grazing and to monitor the success of their efforts over time. As there is no mains water supplied to the property, great care is taken with the on-site sources of water. The three suppliers are the River Marne, Mermaid Lake and a bore sunk in May, 2008. Cambrai has been a Waterwatch school since 1992, with students monitoring both the river and the lake. We are also involved in the annual Frog Watch program and classes have used our water habitats to also study turtles and minibeasts.
REVEGETATION

The revegetation of the site has been supported through a number of grants from both government and private enterprise. Students have planted thousands of trees from tube stock raised in the school’s own plant nursery. It is anticipated that this nursery will be transferred to the Meldanda site within the next twelve months. Three attempts at direct seeding proved unsatisfactory, but hand planting of saplings has been highly successful, once the incursion by rabbits had been controlled. To prevent rabbits from eating the foliage on the young trees, a rabbit-proof fence was constructed to surround the planted area and tree guards placed around the plants to save them from kangaroos.

Year 11 student, Michael Pix, took on a community project to design and construct the gate into the ‘protected zone’.

Whole school tree planting is conducted at least once per year, usually in conjunction with the annual Japanese student visit.
BIRDLIFE

Birdlife is plentiful at Meldanda, particularly in and around the river and the lake. Students have constructed bird boxes for the trees, many of which have been nesting places for a variety of birds, particularly parrots.

BIRD HIDE

One of the major achievements has been the construction of a bird hide by middle school students, under the guidance of Tech. Studies teacher Mr Kym Hampel and the groundsman and Meldanda Chairman, Mr Ross Elliker. From the Mermaid Lake hide, well over eighty species of birds have been recorded. The hide was opened on August 11, 2005 by Mr Steve Coombe from the Eastern Hills and Murray Plains Catchment Group.
THE BAT PROJECT (BAT ISLAND)

The bat monitoring began at Meldanda at the beginning of 2007, with a set of data being received through our equipment strategically located on Bat Island. The Mid Murray Local Action Planning Committee Implementation Officer interpreted the data for us and we found that there were six species of bat present. They were the white-striped free tail bat, wattled bat, lesser long-eared bat, chocolate wattled bat, little forest bat and the large forest bat and/or southern forest bat. Calls from some of the species have been very consistent and definite. Cambrai Area School is the only school in Australia with a full-time bat monitoring program.

THE AGRICULTURAL ASPECT

Following the handover of Meldanda to the school, several of the paddocks were cropped to help raise funds to help with future development. However this proved a difficult commitment for local farmers and, since the late 1990s, the farm acres have been the sole domain of the Wiltipoll sheep and their alpaca protectors. Plans are underway for the No-Till SA Farmers Association to use the land for demonstration purposes. Other agricultural groups are also taking an interest in establishing trial plots. There are plans to eventually develop an animal nursery.
Student physical health is another focus area for the Meldanda site. Cross country and fun runs have always been popular activities. Students have developed both a long and a short walking trail, covering most of the property and an orienteering course is close to completion. Thanks to Faith Lutheran School, hiking trails have been developed from the nearby Adelaide Hills, leading to Meldanda.

An Outdoor Education program is currently being developed for Semester 2, 2008. Purchased camping equipment will be made available for use by students from other schools staying overnight at Meldanda. As the campsite is developed to cater for visiting schools, a range of activities will be introduced, including beach volleyball, commando course, high ropes and laser skirmish.
TAKING THE CLASSROOM OUTDOORS

All manner of classes, at all levels, R-12, have been conducted successfully at Meldanda. These range from the obvious environmental activities to the variety of learning opportunities depicted below.

- Drug Awareness Project, incorporating use of media
- Mathematics class – measuring orienteering course
- Junior Primary/Year 9 mentoring program
- Primaries ‘digging for gold’ in river bed
- Environmental treasure hunt
- Technical Studies activity – floorboarding shearing shed
The Federal Government’s *Investing in Schools* grant was used to develop a campsite for the Meldanda property. The site consists of a recreation hut, with kitchen, as well as toilet and shower facilities. Construction of the rec. hut was made possible through the *Target Work* program which offered building experience to students from Mannum Community College, Faith Lutheran School and Cambrai Area School. A bore was sunk to provide non-potable water, with large rainwater tanks collecting drinking water. Solar and wind power are being used to generate the electricity needed for the campsite to operate effectively. Accommodation would be either tenting or the aboriginal shelters constructed by visiting students. The campsite project was officially opened by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young on May 4, 2011.
The year 8-9 Career Education class created a garden at the Recreational Hut. The project consisted of creating a virtual company called Green Scene. The 8-9’s then had to create their own pamphlet to give to the Principal.

They then picked out the plants, ordered them, and created the garden. Whilst deciding on the plants, the class had to take into consideration whether they were native to Australia, if they were frost and drought resistant, if they liked lots of sun and what kind of soil they preferred.
The native bush garden is the initiative of the Local Action Planning group, which in conjunction with the Meldanda Committee seeks to establish a garden containing all the plant species native to the Murray Plains area. The piece of land at the entry to the Meldanda property has been laid out and the first load of mulch has been spread.

Year 11 students have been responsible for the first of four sculptures to be placed in the garden. This sculpture, designed and constructed by the team of: Barbara Endersby, Kym Hampel, Ashleigh Norman, Jaccooa Slagter and Heather Tuckwell, is in the form of a giant set of wind chimes. Each chime depicts a different aspect of the Meldanda site: the environment (gum leaves, gumnuts and foliage), agriculture (wheat stalks), dragonflies, butterflies and bats, the elements (water and wind) and aboriginal culture. The cart wheel is a recognition of the pioneering spirit of the first German farmers as they tried to eke a living out of the land. The sculpture was officially opened October 29, 2008 by Ms Aimee Linke (Implementation Officer, Mid-Murray Local Action Planning Committee).
THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

The Butterfly Garden was established to offer a delightful experience for younger children. 18 May, 2005, the Junior Primary class and their teachers planted the first native plants selected especially for their attractiveness to a wide variety of butterfly species. Meldanda Committee members Steve and Joy White were the driving force behind the garden, giving many voluntary hours to its establishment, including the erection of the gateway containing information on this project.

The giant butterfly art pieces were created by school students and members of the community under the direction of Mr Kym Hampel. Each is a different design and colour, comprising tile mosaic on a board background. The sculptures have been attached to trees and logs throughout the garden.

THE BUSH-TUCKER GARDEN

Bush tucker refers to any foods native to Australia and used as sustenance by the original indigenous owners of the land. It can be plant, bird, fish or animal. At Meldanda, our plant species are varieties used by the aboriginal people of the Murray Plains and will give visiting students the opportunity to appreciate the tucker that was available before the white man introduced his exotic foods. An aboriginal shelter has been erected inside the Bush Tucker Garden.
INDIGENOUS CULTURE

We are very aware of the special place the Murray Plains was for the indigenous population. These lands were traversed by peoples from four different tribal groups during their regular walkabouts. These cultural groups were: the Paramangk (Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges and Barossa Valley), the Ngaiawang (Western Lofty Ranges and Riverland), the Ngnarrinjeri (Coorong, Lakes, Lower Murray) and the Nganguruku (Mannum, scarp of the Lofty Ranges).

We are in the early days of developing suitable activities in and around aboriginal culture. However, students have been shown how to build shelters by a member of the Ngnarrinjeri tribal group, bush tucker plant species have been planted, as have two stands of broom bush to be used for future shelter construction. Mr David Larritt, former manager of the education facility linked to Para Wirra National Park has shared many useful teaching ideas with us, including: tracking, cooking with bush tucker, memory games, listening skills, throwing skills, observation and sensory walks.
THE JETTY (BOARDWALK)

In 2009, Mr Hampel and his middle school class took on the task of constructing a boardwalk into Mermaid Lake, to enable easier access for studying of the water system and the cycle of life contained in it.

In 2010, Year 6/7 Class continued the fine work and completed the jetty on. The final stage leading up to the top of the bank of the lake was unfinished at the end of the year before, and because the rise here was so steep, steps had to be installed before the jetty became functional. Much digging, drilling, bolt-tightening and cutting was involved. Finally, in the last week of Term 2, the jetty was completed, and all the students involved celebrated with a Bush BBQ at Meldanda.
Due to the complications of the weather over a number of years, the Meldanda Committee made the decision to create a separate frog pond, to give a better chance for frogs and turtles to survive if Mermaid Lake ever runs dry again. The pond has its own system, being filled by water pumped from the bore. The pond was dug in 2010 and, in that year, students planted the vegetation around it, as well as trees further afield, to develop a beautiful shady spot where classes can be involved in quiet activities and have a picturesque view of the eastern slopes of the Mount Lofty Ranges. The pond is also stocked with River Murray Rainbow Fish.
THE BOMB SHELTER AND WOODLOT

The Bomb Shelter is a dried-out dam that we plan to use as the site for a laser or paint skirmish activity. The land rear right in the photo left will be developed with high rope and commando courses.

The woodlot was established in the late 1990’s and will provide wood for use at the campsite.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

The beach volleyball court was established in 2010 and has been made possible by the Murray and Mallee District Council. They supplied and carted in truck after truck of sand and used their workforce to excavate a 20m by 12 m by 0.8 m deep to pour the sand into. Fencing around the court was erected by Meldanda community volunteers.

OUTDOOR CHESS

The first installation for student activities was a chess board. The board consists of large dark grey and cream pavers laid by the Year 10/11 Personal Learning Plan students in 2008. The large chess pieces were purchased through funds raised by the Senior SRC.

THE COMMANDO COURSE

In the process of development
MELDANDA ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ross Elliker

Ross has been the powerhouse behind Meldanda from the day the property was handed over to the school to the present day. He is a man of passion, initiative and ideas who stayed true to the Meldanda vision, even when others lost interest. Much of the hard work on the property has been done by Ross alone or in conjunction with volunteers and school students. He is currently the Chairperson of the Meldanda Committee and school groundsman.

Paul Paulenas

Paul became principal of Cambrai Area School in 2003. Before his time, a great deal of work had been done by the school in revegetating of the site, but Paul had the vision to see the site being developed into something wonderful for all the young people of South Australia – an outdoor education campsite, with a focus on environmental sustainability, aboriginal education and agriculture. A long-term ten-year plan resulted and now the campsite is close to becoming a reality.

Kym Hampel

Kym has been the Technical Studies and Art teacher at Cambrai Area School since 2003. Many of the structural pieces around the campsite are a result of the work he has done with his classes at a variety of year levels from Year 6 – 12. Projects have included: the bird hide, jetty and bird boxes at Mermaid Lake, the wagon wheel sculpture in the Bush Gardens and the bat boxes, possum boxes and bird boxes along the River Marne.

Community Members, Past and Present

Warrick Barnes, Inez Bormann, Charly Elliker, John Endersby, Graham Hollitt, Sally Gethin-Jones, Louise Jaunay, Aimee Linke, Rob McCallum, Lester Miller, Eddie Silic, Tim Starkey, Bill Stevenson, Joy White, Steve White

Staff and Students

Glen Chamberlain, Tanya Dohnt, Barb Endersby, Bob Fidge, David Hutchinson, Kate Marschall, Mary Morris, James Murray, Vanessa Peterson, Jennifer Pinnock, Michael Pix, Lynda Rivett, Mathew Rotolo, Luke Stewart, Peter Talbot-Male, David Troup, Kelly Varcoe, Ted Wright