

Aranda Bushland fire history

Aranda Bushland has an extensive history of fires, from before the construction of the suburb in the late 1960's to the present day. From 1978 to 2003 there were 74 recorded wildfires in the area, which includes Black Mountain and Bruce Ridge, and all were reported as arson. In Aranda Bushland the fires came from Caswell Drive, Bindubi St. and the suburb itself. Recently only one fire (to my knowledge) was arson, and this was on Christmas Day 2001 in the bushland behind Mirning Crescent and was quickly extinguished by the fire brigade, followed up by Colin McDonald and myself.

Since 1995 controlled burns in the Aranda Bushland have been undertaken by the Parks Fire Unit as components of the ACT bushfire management plan. These fires are relatively frequent, and based on fuel load and proximity to the suburb. Closest to the suburb, in the asset protection zone, slashing of vegetation behind the houses is (at least) annual, and controlled burns are carried out 100-200 metres into the bush regularly. In the bushland overall, different areas are burnt (or scheduled to be burnt) almost every year, so that the whole of the northern forested section of Aranda Bushland will eventually have been burnt.

Most areas are scheduled to be burned on about a 10-15 year rotation, depending on fuel load. One recent burn (2014) was done in an area that had no fire history at all and was furthest from the suburb. We were unable to find records of any fires there since the beginning of the last century. To burn this area seemed to us as unjustified as it would have provided a control site which could have been used for comparison to the burned ecology elsewhere.

The present endeavour by Parks to provide patchy burns, saving about 25% of the areas unburnt, is a welcome development. In collaboration with Parks we have identified areas that we would like saved from recent burns, particularly those with rare orchids, and a considerable effort by the Parks Brigade has been put into preserving these sites, with success.

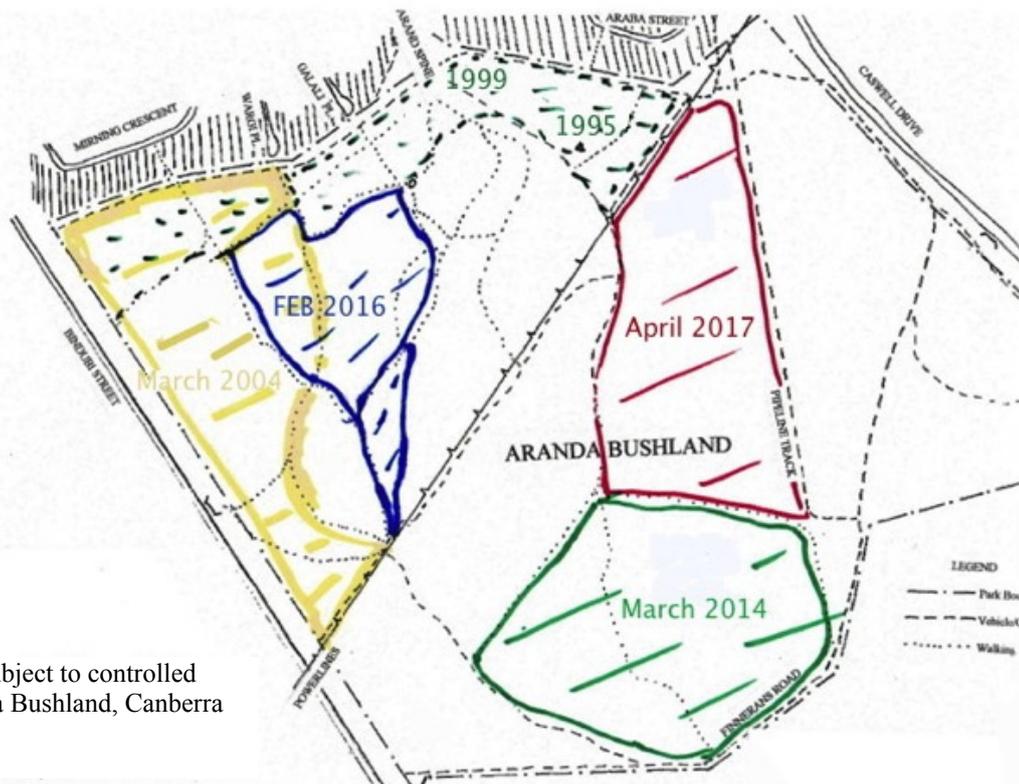


The controlled burn areas of 1999, 2004, 2014, 2016 and 2017 are in varying stages of recovery, and our field trip will particularly examine the regeneration of vegetation from the burns of 2014, 2016 and 2017. The area burnt in 2004 is a good contrast, as it is fully revegetated with a dense understory and abundant orchids (see Map).

Ian Falconer

Ian is a water quality consultant with an interest in drinking and recreational water, and in catchment management. He is also Independent Chair of the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group.

He has lead a Community Fire Unit in Aranda and is a member of Friends of Aranda Bushland, which is concerned over the biodiversity effects of recurrent controlled burns. He will be leading the field trip to Aranda Bushland on Sunday, to see the impacts of burns over the last decade on dry eucalypt forest adjacent to the suburb.



Map of areas subject to controlled burns in Aranda Bushland, Canberra Nature Park

Some examples from Aranda Bushland, CNP



2014: Fire damaged educational walk



2017: Cool burn



2016: Hot burn, 80% crown scorch



2017: Cool burn, some crown scorch