

Maldon Urban Landcare Group – repairing mining sites a long-term commitment

By Barry Murfett and Bev Phillips

The Central Victorian town of Maldon was established in 1853 during the gold rush. Widespread alluvial surface mining led to the land and creek beds being turned over. This was followed by deep shaft mines that left mullock heaps and extensive ore processing sites. Most trees within five kilometres of the town were felled for mineshafts and boiler fuel.

Once the mines closed the town slowly depopulated, leaving vacant blocks and large areas of crown land. This left a palette of weed infested lowland and hills covered with gravel heaps, poor topsoil, relatively young regrowth trees and little understorey. Maldon was an ideal town to start a Landcare group.

The Maldon Urban Landcare Group (MULGA) was established in 1992, making it one of Victoria's pioneer urban Landcare groups. The early priorities were education, revegetation, and rabbit, salinity and erosion control. We now focus on weed control and indigenous revegetation. Roadsides are also a priority with one section treated for blackberry in 2001 being re-treated in 2014.

One of the first activities was to have a joint information table with Nuggetty Landcare Group at the Maldon Agricultural Show. The minutes from the group's early meetings show that grant applications were a priority and this hasn't changed.

Our first large project was the 20-hectare South German Mine site, which included a processing plant, a three-hectare dam and mullock heaps of processed quartz. The Maldon Land Protection Association started revegetation work at the site in 1990 with two large areas of ripping and the planting of indigenous trees and understorey.

MULGA took up the project in 2000, grooming gorse and blackberry from the dam wall and planting 100 shrubs on National Tree Day. Work continued over the next 10 years with weed control, planting days and the creation of several rabbit-proof enclosures. A recent site visit revealed the emergence and spread of native grasses, cranberry heath and other small native species in the enclosures.

Our current large-scale project site runs along Long Gully, which is part of the Maldon Historic Reserve. MULGA's



The South German mine site following a MULGA planting day in 2004.



In 2015 the same site is a native forest, which is now ready for some maintenance.

work at this site has stimulated positive community interest because of its high profile. The site is alongside the main road into town and we have uncovered some significant historic mining infrastructure. Weed control has been a priority with blackberries, gorse, and elm suckers produced from street trees, requiring attention. The next stage will be clump planting of trees, shrubs and grasses.

These major projects have involved working closely with both Parks Victoria

and community heritage groups. Today MULGA is a small group with 10 active members. With assistance from Landmate crews from Corrections Victoria, along with contractors engaged through grant funds and our monthly working bees, we have been able to continue our work at repairing the local environment of Maldon.

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