The catalyst for the small Betty’s Bay Wild Flower Society becoming a fully-fledged member of the Botanical Society was the Flora 83 flower show in Cape Town. Its stand of restios made so great an impact that the society was invited by the President to become a branch of BotSoc. The Wild Flower Society was already respected for its regular flower shows featuring only specimens of the flowers and vase arrangements, preferring not to ‘rape the veld’ with huge landscaped displays. The invitation was subsequently accepted with two conditions to be honoured in perpetuity. These were retaining its own constitution and control over its own finances as it had an existing robust financial management system. Thus in 1985 the Betty’s Bay Wild Flower Society became the Betty’s Bay Branch of BotSoc – the name later being changed to the Kogelberg Branch as the area extends from Gordon’s Bay to Gansbaai, inland to Caledon, the Elgin area, and embraces the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve.

What we do
From the early days of our Branch biodiversity was supported; botanically there were the flower shows, support for Harold Porter Gardens and a pamphlet advising property owners of desirable and undesirable plants. We participated in the later Flora shows and in flower shows at Kirstenbosch. Locally the branch was the first to protect the colony of African penguins at Stony Point (the first mainland nesting site of these endangered birds in South Africa) by monitoring the colony and by urging the Municipality to erect a fence between the colony and the residential area. Also, at the request of the local Municipality, a fire management plan was devised, another first. The Committee has always included a portfolio watchdog for possible undesirable developments in the area. Adrian van ’t Hoogerhuis proposed the establishment of a nature area which eventually evolved into the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. Later another member Ursula Huyssen drew attention to the planned sale of land, possibly to be developed, which has subsequently become the Brodie Link Reserve bought by WWF-SA from funding by the Brodie Family. The link is the corridor between Betty’s Bay and Pringle Bay.

Biodiversity is to be found in our talks too. Once held quarterly but now monthly and beautifully advertised with Amida Johns’s posters. We are fortunate in having as residents or weekenders willing speakers such as Allan Heydorn, Brian Huntley, John Rourke, John Hanks, Werner Voigt, Michael Orren and Vicki Thomas, to name but a few; and subjects ranging from local geology, botanical art, botanizing in Africa, gardens in the UK, Angola, baboons and climate change. Two that drew the

by Merran Silberbauer, Honorary Life Member of the Botanical Society
largest number of attendees were John James, a Kogelberg member, speaking on the Shackleton Antarctic expedition of which his father was the physicist and Riaan Manser recounting his trips around Africa, Madagascar and Iceland.

Our monthly newsletter is sent to all members and to other interested parties on request. It has been produced since 1963 – originally for the information of the Hack Group, but since 1985 it has been sent to all Branch members, and although expanded to meet the wider interests, it remains the record of past and future hacking. A group of volunteers is responsible for this and fortunately most newsletters are now sent electronically.

As the Kogelberg Biosphere has a core, so too does the branch – the Betty’s Bay Hack which meets once a month on the first Sunday, with a few volunteers meeting every Wednesday morning. The Branch has recently begun assisting the Pringle Bay Hack which was revived in 2005 by Kogelberg Branch member John Whitehead.

The Betty’s Bay Hack began as the private enterprise of Denys Heesom 50 years ago in 1963 and was funded by him. He named it ‘the Battle of Betty’s Bay’ as it is still called. By way of explanation he wrote: ‘Why the name “The Battle of Betty’s Bay”? Frankly I never thought that the name of the now defunct Control of Alien Vegetation section of the Botanical Society would make many hearts beat. It was too reminiscent of the original pedestrian wartime name, the Local Defence Volunteers, chosen by some precise Civil Servant which Churchill at a stroke scrubbed and renamed the Home Guard. So the Battle has good ancestry.’

After his death the hack was supported by the Betty’s Bay Wild Flower Society and therefore became a responsibility of the Kogelberg Branch in 1985. During these past 50 years there have been only five convenors, with Ed Silberbauer, present convenor, at the helm since late 1989! It is the longest continuously active hack group and averages 25 attendees per month. At the hack to celebrate 45 years over 60 hackers joined in. At every hack there is always a mid-morning tea break with delicious sandwiches made by volunteers and at noon the ‘Aftermath’ – a time to relax together over a beer and a ginger beer. Tools are provided and few hacks are cancelled due to bad weather – the committed turning out in some very unpleasant weather on occasion.

This commitment to the environment has been recognized several times – in 1987 with a Keep South Africa Beautiful Certificate and in 1999 by the Cape Times Centenary special commendation for conservation. In 1988 BotSoc awarded the group the Denys Heesom Gold Medal for conservation and in 2004 awarded the same to the convenor, Ed Silberbauer.

A special honour was in 2006 when Hans Huyssen dedicated his composition ‘Proteus Variations’, a musical representation of South Africa’s Proteaceae, to the Betty’s Bay Hack Group. Commissioned by Radio Deutsche Welle and first performed by the S.A. National Youth Orchestra in Germany, the South African premier in Cape Town was attended by several Kogelberg members.

In February 2013 the hack celebrated 50 years of preventing the mostly municipal areas of Betty’s Bay from becoming overgrown by invasive plants. Jill Attwell was present at hack number two and still hacks 50 years later at the age of 90. A thank you to the hackers past and present was a lunch jointly hosted by the Kogelberg Branch and the Overstrand Municipality in February.

Two members of the Kogelberg Branch have replicated the Betty’s Bay Hack group’s recipe for success – James Silberbauer convenes the Friends of the Helderberg Nature Reserve’s hack and Lewis Silberbauer the Friends of Stellenbosch Mountain hack (son and brother of the Betty’s Bay convenor.)

Members of note
We are proud of our many members who are active in the branch in various ways and have been for many years helping as and when needed – at our shows, at our talks, attending outings and hacks to which we also welcome non-members.

We have had, and still do, many notable members and the Branch is especially proud of our three Honorary Life
Members, Jill Attwell (1995), Avril Nunn (2002) and Merran Silberbauer (2013). From the past we remember Marie Vogts (author of The art of walking). I apologize to those special members whose names I have not mentioned.

The centre of the Branch is close to the Harold Porter National Botanical Garden, so inevitably our greatest support comes from those members living in close proximity. Affiliated members include the Caledon Wild Flower Society, Greyton Conservation Society and the Hermanus Botanical Society, all of whom are active in their areas.

The richest flora

The area covered by the branch is the heartland of the Cape Floral Kingdom: moving from the mountains to the dunes on the coast, with salt marshes, river valleys and remnant forests providing habitat to their own site endemic species. Betty’s Bay has been named as the richest area in the kingdom.

Our area has many floral endemics and many on the Red List. One immediately thinks of the Marsh Rose (Orothamnus zeyheri). Of the thirteen pagodas (Mimetes), seven are found in our area and five are endemic: the Matchstick Pagoda (Mimetes hottentoticus), the Mace Pagoda (Mimetes stokoei), the Conical Pagoda (Mimetes capitatus), Kogelberg Pagoda (Mimetes arboresus) and the Cryptic Pagoda (Mimetes palustris). In the Elgin Basin two Proteaceae are highly threatened – the Diminutive Clusterhead (Sorocephalus tenuifolius) and Grabouw Conebush (Leucadendron globosum).

Small sites within our area nurture endemic ericas, for example, in the south-west Elgin Basin you find Erica cabernetea, in the Groenlandberg, Erica viridimontana, at Vogelgat near Hermanus, Erica galpinii, and above Gordon’s Bay, Erica amidae. Our classic endemic erica is Erica perspicua which is found from Rooi Els to Hermanus. Erica kogelbergensis, Erica aristata and Erica lanuginosa (Hermanus Mountains) are also found in our area. Haemanthus canaliculatus of the lowland wetlands is found only from Rooi Els to Bot River Vlei. Irids such as Pillansia templemannii and Nivenia stokoei are also endemic.

Animals abound and most of the Cape fynbos fauna is represented. In the mountains Cape Leopards (Panthera pardus) roam with buck, Rooikat (Felis caracal) and of course the Chacma Baboon (Papio ursinus) which descend to plague the residential areas. In the rivers and streams, free of alien vegetation, the Odonata order of dragonflies and damselflies is well represented and include some of the rarer malachite species. The Hyrax family, (dassies on the coast and Red Rock Rabbits on the mountains), is also present. Many endemic Cape birds can be found here and the Verreaux’s or Black Eagle (Aquila verreauxii) soars above. This eagle, the Rooikat and leopards are our main predators.

Having so much to offer, our outings are popular and have ranged far and wide, from the tiny reserve in the grounds of the University of the Western Cape, down to De Hoop and to Platbos where 26 enthusiasts ignored the driving rain to walk in the forest through the Kogelberg Biosphere, up the Groenlandberg, and to view rare plants wherever in flower in the Kogelberg. A very popular outing was exploring geology with John Rogers of the University of Cape Town.

Whenever Harold Porter Gardens hosts the annual conference of the Curators of the National Botanical Gardens, we host a dinner for them. The last occasion was the most challenging for it was held in the new halls at the Harold Porter National Botanical Garden which do not have cooking facilities – and it was winter! Once again, with tremendous support from our members, we met the challenge to serve a three course meal by creating a field kitchen. Team work and camaraderie prevailed as they do at our fundraising events.

Support for our Garden

We raise funds annually in support of requests from the Harold Porter Garden and have provided them with fire fighting equipment, an industrial cleaner, extra blinds for the hall, shade cloth for the nursery, labels for the plants and more. We assist at flower shows, at functions and in the gardens. In the flood of 2005 which devastated the gardens, Branch members were there from the next day clearing up and replanting as required.
In February 2013 the Betty’s Bay Hack celebrated 50 years of preventing the mostly municipal areas of Betty’s Bay from becoming overgrown by invasive plants. Jill Attwell was present at hack number two and still hacks 50 years later at the age of 90. A ‘thank you to the hackers past and present’ lunch was jointly hosted by the Kogelberg Branch and the Overstrand Municipality on 3 February. This event at Harold Porter National Botanical Garden was attended by 82 people including the Mayor of the Overstrand, Nicolette Botha Guthrie, the President of the Botanical Society, Dr Ted Oliver, Executive Director of the Botanical Society, Zaitoon Rabaney and other special guests. A highlight of the day was the presentation of Honorary Life Membership of the Botanical Society to Merran Silberbauer for her exceptional service to the Kogelberg Branch.

On Sat 15 June, Prof. Brian Huntley will present a talk on the 100 years of Kirstenbosch. This will be followed by a light supper and 100th birthday cake. It will be in the Nivenia Hall, Harold Porter NBG at 18h00. All are welcome. On Sat 20 July Kogelberg Branch will hold its AGM in the Nivenia Hall, Harold Porter NBG at 17h30, followed by a talk by Prof. Dave Richardson, Director of the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology at the University of Stellenbosch. All are welcome.

**Kogelberg Branch Centenary Diary**

Several members trained as guides and conducted tours when the Garden was short staffed. Members interact with the Education Officer and take local school children on visits. In Betty’s Bay there is a growing pre-primary school with which, as one of our Centenary projects, we hope to work in order to encourage awareness of the environment from an early age. The Afrikaans version of the BotSoc Wild Flower Guide *From Hottentots Holland to Hermanus* has been supplied to schools in the Kogelberg Branch area and to 23 members of the staff of the Harold Porter Gardens.

**The future**

The Branch’s original pamphlet recommending what should be and what should not be planted in our area, in particular the area close to the core of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, has been adopted as our other Centenary project. Instead of a pamphlet it is being expanded into booklet form and will include names of invasive plants and how to eradicate them. This will be made available to new property buyers and also be available in rental properties, B&Bs and at the offices of the property agents.

Looking back at the Branch’s history, considering its current activities and regarding new generations becoming more and more environmentally aware, there is good reason to imagine a vibrant Branch celebrating the 200th anniversary of BotSoc.

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