



THE MONTAGU HACKING GROUP.

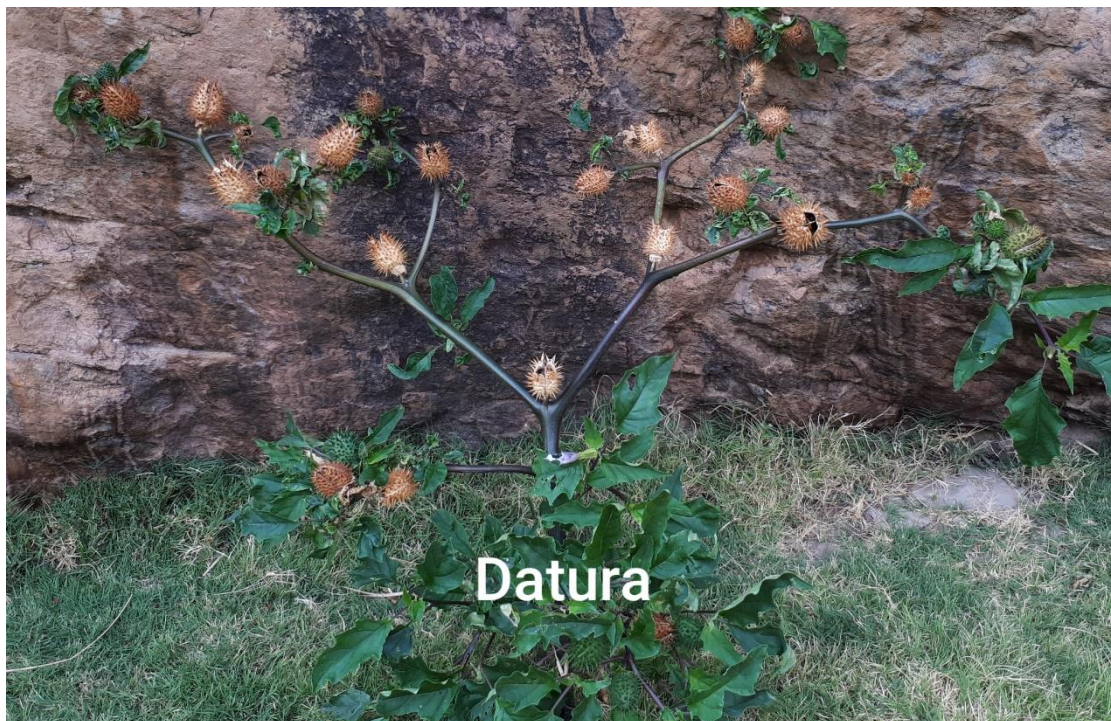
Willie Long October 2019

The Montagu Hacking group has been in existence since the **early eighties** and has been instrumental in keeping Montagu and its immediate surrounding areas relatively clear of alien vegetation which was rapidly encroaching on the town over the past number of years.

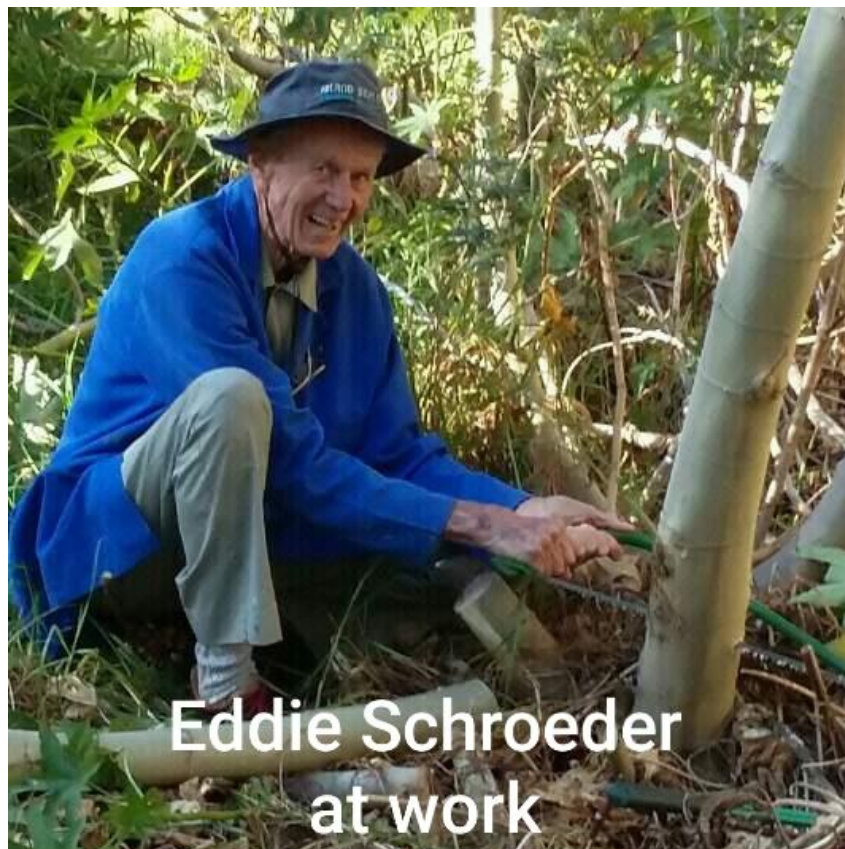


Cecily Van Niekerk and her late husband, Solms had lived in Montagu West for many years and one day Cecily stood on the veranda of a friend's house at the end of Berg Street, looked across the valley below and noticed all the alien vegetation, mainly Black Wattle in this particular area. In other areas around Montagu and mainly along the rivers there was a considerable amount of Sesbania, Port Jackson and Blue Gums as well. It was on that day Cecily decided to do something about kerbing this infestation. Cecily was very close to nature as was her husband, Solms, who was originally on the local Nature Conservation Committee as was Cecily after his passing.





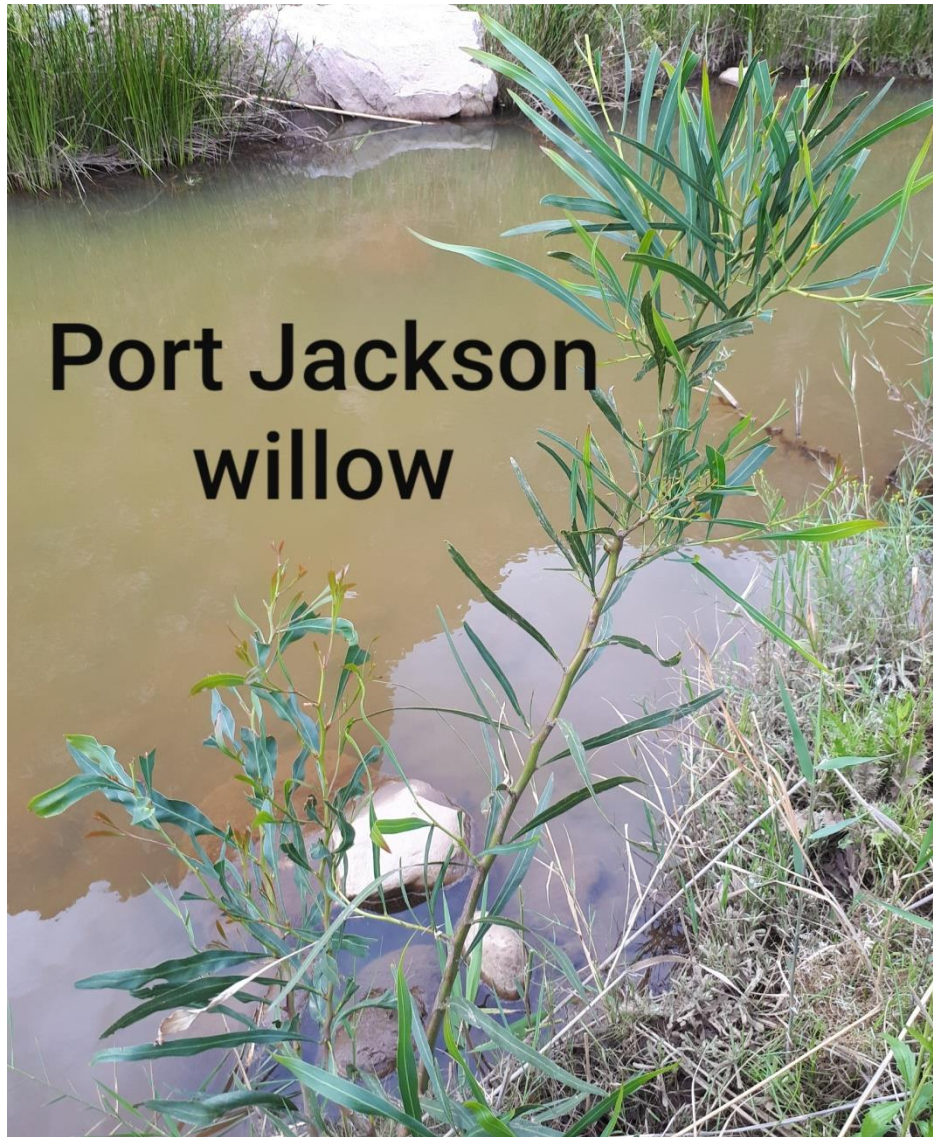
After observing similar infestations in other areas around Montagu Cecily discussed the issue of alien invading plants with some of her friends and she managed to muster up a group of four likeminded people who lived in the town and they decided to tackle the problem. A good friend of theirs, Pieter Fouche, a minister and two others offered a lot of encouragement and assistance in getting the group established and **The Montagu Hacking Group** was born. During those early days, Cecily contacted Vrolikheid Nature Reserve who kindly assisted with some basic information as well as providing some of the chemicals required to do the job. The local Municipality initially offered limited assistance as in those early days invasive plant encroachment did not appear to be such a problem. Over recent years the Central Breede River Water Users Association have been assisting the group with some chemicals, sprayers and saws for which the group is grateful, the group in turn provides them with a monthly schedule of their activities.



The areas worst infected were the two rivers which run through the town of Montagu, these being the Kingna and Keisie Rivers as well as other areas such as Badskloof and Kogmanskloof all the way down to just beyond the Old English Fort known as Fort Sydney which is situated above the tunnel to an area which is known as Kallkoennes which was at the time and still is owned by the Torrance family.

Over the years the Hacking groups' regular participants varied between four and six active members per session peaking on occasions at ten participants.

Cecily Van Niekerk would regularly provide her vehicle to transport the hacking group to and from wherever they were hacking and provided refreshments such as homemade fruit juice and biscuits for the group after a hacking session.



It is encouraging to report that the spread of Sesbania and Port Jackson has reduced over the years however Castor Oil and the Common Thorn Apple have proliferated as they were never targeted until quite recently. There are two areas of Gum tree plantations on the outskirts of town and these have been prevented from spreading by the regular eradication of the seedlings as they develop. There is however one bad patch of Port Jackson near the Montagu Hospital which is of concern and this will be tackled in the near future. One other problem area stretches along the Keisie River from the Padstal to the Brown Street Bridge which is in need of regular clearing as there are dozens of Casuarina trees on the boundary of the adjacent properties causing the constant spread of seeds and regrowth. The alien plants are removed by either pulling out and ensuring the roots come away or cutting and spraying the freshly cut stump, frilling and then spraying the frilled area of the trunk and on occasions but not often foliar treatment, In all cases where possible ensuring that no run off of the applied chemical occurs. The seed pods are removed for incineration and where practical the plants are removed from the watercourse thus preventing build up in the event of flooding. A dye is used so treated plants and stumps are easily visible and not repeated or missed.



The Hacking team is currently (2019) concentrating on the immediate vicinity in and around the town and venturing into the Kogmanskloof now and then when time allows. It is hoped that the department of Environmental Affairs and the Langeberg Municipality will realise the scale of the problem in the Kogmanskloof area and at some stage come to the fore and help clear the river between Montagu and Ashton and beyond.

There appears to be limited appetite by those involved in the agricultural industry upstream of Montagu to clear their properties of these encroaching invasive plants. This is causing continual re infestation of the areas downstream of the town, having said this, there are a few who are tackling the problem on their properties.

At the time of writing (2019) the hacking group is busy as it has been for the last five weeks in Badskloof removing large quantities of Castor Oil plants and their seeds.



Hackers busy with the removal of castor oil plants

The Montagu Hacking Group which has been operating nonstop since the early eighties under the able guidance of Cecily Van Niekerk are a group of volunteers who offer their free time for the love of nature during the cooler months of the year and always encourage and welcome new volunteers to the group.

Looking at the state some of the municipal areas in nearby towns, one can clearly see what benefit this voluntary hacking group has been to Montagu.

The hacking group has an association with the Montagu Eco Club (MEC) who assist from time to time with equipment such as hand sprayers, saws, secateurs etc.



Cecily enjoys a catch up with the Hacking team

Montagu and its residents will always be indebted to Cecily and her team for all her hard work, dedication and encouragement over the last forty seven years and we wish her good health and happiness in her retirement.

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The top 10 invasive alien plants affecting the Western Cape are:



Rooikrans



Australian Myrtle



Spider gum



Cluster pine



Long-leaved wattle



Stink bean



Black wattle



Port Jackson



Silky hakea



Blackwood

Grapevine: Quarter3 March 2023

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