



Isabel Mackenzie chats to gardener Stewart Henderson in the garden at Wombat Park 2015
Picture: JULIE HOUGH

We were saddened to hear of the death of Isabel Mackenzie of Wombat Park on the 30th December.

Isabel and Alistair Mackenzie bought Wombat Park from the Brooke family in 1996 making them only the second family to own this historic property dating from 1854 on the outskirts of Daylesford. Isabel embraced the garden and with Stewart Henderson set about caring for, and restoring the whole garden. The friendship that developed between Isabel and Stewart has been key to the garden's survival. I liken the gardener and friend relationship Isabel and Stewart had to the friendship between Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and Michael Morrison.

AGHS working bees took place there from the last couple of years of the Brooke family's ownership until about a year ago. Isabel Mackenzie inspired me with her management of this garden and her understanding of weed control. The first time we worked there for Isabel was just as the seed from what was then a dominant weed in the garden, Sticky Weed or Cleavers *Galium aparine* was bursting forth. Isabel asked if we were to come again would it be possible to come a month earlier so that we could pull the Sticky Weed before it spread its seed. Surely, one of the most effective ways of eliminating problem weeds from a garden. In the following years we went a month earlier and I like to think that AGHS contributed to a significant reduction of this troublesome weed at Wombat Park.

Isabel was a passionate environmentalist and I remember her ringing me in early 2015 asking for John Hawker's phone number. She was concerned about the removal of red gums for the widening of the Western Highway between Beaufort and Ararat. She said to me that she was prepared to chain herself to the trees to save them from the bulldozer. I can remember saying, 'well, that would make the news Isabel' and only a couple of days later hearing the radio news saying '91 year old grandmother chains herself to tree to stop road works in western Victoria'.

Last March Miffy Gilbert gave the first of the 2017 AGHS lectures on her further research, funded by the Victorian branch, into early photographs of Wombat Park. Isabel was there as were members of the Brooke family. Miffy has told me in recent days that only a couple of weeks ago when she was in the Daylesford area she was able to call on Isabel and what a delightful time they had together.

Vale Isabel Mackenzie.

Helen Page
4 January, 2018