

Bubbler, where art thou?

Water fountains. Remember them? There are only seven in the Canberra city area. Two are in a park, another two don't work and the other three are dirty and unappetising. JORIAN GARDNER went "bubbler" hunting...

WITH the mercury rising to the high 30s in Canberra, it's obvious that there would be demand for access to drinking foundations, or "bubblers" all over the city, as parched pedestrians stop for a sip.

In Canberra they're hard to find. No one in the "CityNews" office could confidently name the location of any more than one (if that). So we got a list from Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) to find out where our public water fountains were, specifically focussing in on the city centre, and took a tour of them.

There are "approximately 96 operational" bubblers scattered across the urban area, predictably in shopping centres, sports grounds and parks. In the city there are but seven bubblers – hardly in convenient places – and at least two of them don't work.

The ACT Government department says the one on their list in City Walk – just outside Subway – is to be replaced. Not any time soon because it appears to have been disconnected for possibly years.

Put your sweet lips next to mine? Not likely!



Hobart Place... cigarette butts.



Hobart Place... chewing gum.



Garema Place... bird droppings.



City Walk... awaiting replacement.

Photos by Silas.

Of the other city drinking fountains identified by TAMS, two are in Glebe Park – hardly convenient for the retail area, and one of those is at the extreme far end of the park that is generally not used.

Both drinking fountains in the Hobart Place area were operational – but filthy. They have cigarette butts, chewing gum and bird droppings all over them. The drinking fountain in Civic Square is clean, but non-operational, and the Garema Place fountain, hidden as it is because it resembles a small bollard, also has bird droppings on it.

Once an abundant and environmentally responsible community service, public drinking bubblers appear to have been all but abandoned in Canberra.

This is also one of the key findings of a new national poll of 1000 Australians commissioned by the Bottled Water Alliance – a group against buying bottled water.

According to its research, 79 per cent of Australians said there aren't enough water bubblers available in their city with 90 per cent having no idea where to find their local bubbler and 85 per

cent saying they're worried about the cleanliness and safety of drinking from a bubbler.

"As far as the public are concerned, public water bubblers have disappeared off the map," says Jon Dee, the organiser of the Bottled Water Alliance.

"The lack of uniform signage for bubblers and the concerns that people have about the upkeep and quality of public bubblers are significant – they're two of the reasons why Australians are spending half a billion dollars on bottled water every year."