

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"



Carr Government not so green?

The National Parks and Wildlife Amendment Bill 2001, is presently before Parliament. The Bill proposes the most significant change to our national parks system in the 25 years since the National Parks and Wildlife Act was rewritten in 1974. If passed, national parks will be opened up to commercial development and safeguards that protect the NSW national park system will be downgraded. Some of our objections are listed in the enclosed form letter.

There has been no public consultation. The Bill may be passed into law before 7 December when Parliament is due to rise this year.

During the term of Bob Carr's State Government, more National Parks have been declared than under any other Government.

But is the bottom line preservation or exploitation of our natural areas?

In August 1997 the State Government released a "Draft Public Access Strategy" Discussion Paper. If adopted the Strategy would have opened up the parks to

increased commercial tourist development and access for four wheel driving and other high impact recreation. The Strategy was opposed by environment groups.

A "Draft Nature Tourism and Recreation Strategy", released in November 1997 outlined changes in national park management to benefit the tourism industry and make parks pay their way. Environment groups opposed the strategy on the grounds that NPWS should develop a broad visitor management strategy that gives precedence to nature conservation rather than focussing on commercial tourism.

What happened to the input in the submissions from these groups?

It may already be too late to stop the passage of the present Bill, but it's still worth our while expressing our opposition.

Phone Bob Debus' office now (Springwood: Mark Andrews 4751.3298; Parliamentary office: Mark Aarons 9230.2400) or complete the enclosed form letter (you can add your own comments or write your own letter) and fax (9228.3935) or post to Bob Debus.

liaising with Blue Mountains Council and representing the Society's views to Council, with lobbying to increase education activities. It would also entail writing some submissions and being a representative on a community education committee.

This voluntary work would be terrific work experience for those interested in future paid employment in environmental education or may suit a retired school teacher or any other enthusiastic and committed member.

All enquiries welcome, ring Meredith after 5pm on 4782 4823

Vegetation to be Protected

Have you been heartbroken when some beautiful bushland where you have watched the wildflowers blossom every year has been cleared? Well, this could soon be prevented.

Council is soon to put a draft Vegetation Management Order (VMO) on public exhibition. (Watch the Council's "Communicator" page in the Gazette over December and January for the announcement.). It is to replace the Tree Preservation Order (TPO), extending protection to all vegetation, not only trees. Like the TPO it will work on a system of defining the situations where approval will be required and outlining the considerations to be used by Council in giving permission or not for allowing vegetation to be removed.

Overall it is a good document in that it takes tree and vegetation protection to a higher level, provided the potential loopholes are adequately addressed.

Members are often telling us of the failure of the existing Tree Preservation Order to be effective. To make the new Vegetation Management Order effective, we need to give Council and Councillors our support for a strong VMO to protect native vegetation. We have to let Council know that we want an effective public education campaign and want to know that Council means business and will enforce it.

You can help by talking to your friends about it and writing a letter. Don't hesitate to contact the Land Use Subcommittee if we can help you with your letter, or if you can help with information for the Society's submission (ring 4754 1055 or 4782 1635).

Draft Planning Study Maps

Do any members have copies of any of the books of A3 maps that Council produced as part of the Draft Local Environment Plan 1997 (which is now DLEP 2000 about to be renamed DLEP 2002!). These are the maps and written documents prepared for each of the five study areas of the Blue Mountains. These maps contain valuable information for the Land Use subcommittee and the Mountain Watch project.

If anyone has copies that they could spare we could put them to good use. We would particularly like a copy of the maps of study Area 5 as we don't have any copies at all of this one. Please contact Lyndal on 4782 1635 if you can help.

Environmental Education

Are you interested in becoming an advocate for environmental education?

We have an education sub-committee in the Society and would like a person interested in advocacy to join our group.

The advocacy position, as a representative of the Society, would entail

Quoll Club Newsletter

Is there a member out there who would like to put together a monthly newsletter for our children's club? Jessica would love some help.

For more information please call Jessica on 4757 2190.

Native Plants for Christmas

Our native plant nursery has gift vouchers for native plants (\$10, \$20, \$50). Call into the Blackheath nursery any Tuesday morning between 9 and 12 or phone David Coleby 4784.1395.

Welcome to New Members

Ursula Brookhoff, Katoomba
Cathy Grinbergs, Menangle
Susan Flynn, Blackheath
Muriel Tonkin, Hazelbrook
Jo Mountwinter, Katoomba
Nicky Chialvo, Blackheath
Pam Studd, West Ryde
Dina S Lee, Campsie

Membership Fees

At a special general meeting on Friday 28 December, members voted unanimously to increase the Society's membership fees, the first increase in seven years. Annual membership will now cost \$25 single, \$30 family, \$15 single concession, \$20 family concession, \$10 Quoll Club (free to children of members).

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Our Home & the Environment Energy Production

Sorry we missed last month's newsletter, higher things happened. We talked last time of the ways we are trying to reduce the amount of energy (electricity) we use in the finished house. This is an issue because four kilowatt hours of energy are used at a coal powered power station to produce one kilowatt hour of electricity use at the house. This is an enormous waste of energy so we have decided to produce our own. There are a number of ways of doing this but solar, wind and micro-hydro power are the commonest on a small scale. The wind is too intermittent here to generate constant power and we don't own a creek so we looked at the Sun (not too long as it was giving us a headache). Solar photovoltaic panels convert sunlight into electricity. Apart from reducing the amount of wasted energy at the power station they also result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions, local air pollution and acid rain.

We considered putting in solar panels and connecting them to a bank of storage batteries, which would mean we were independent from the big power companies and wouldn't be affected by the relatively common lightning storm blackouts we get. We didn't however because we weren't keen on using those expensive acid filled devices, which need replacing at times and require a smelly backup generator. We do know of one fellow in Victoria who has a battery bank and no generator as backup. He monitors the amount of electricity he produces and manages his house so that he doesn't use any more than he produces, a bit like monitoring a water tank.

We chose instead to connect the solar

photovoltaic panels to the electricity grid. In this way we produce as much power as we can which is then supplied to Integral Energy. They then supply us power back, but we only pay for any excess power we use. This ensures a system which is easier for us to maintain.

We have used a roof tile style of solar panel. This sits on the roof but doesn't require the normal roofing material (tiles or corrugated iron) underneath and hence saves on roofing materials. Another alternative we considered was tracking panels which follow the daily movement of the Sun and hence are more efficient but which require space in the yard, which we couldn't spare. Our panels face north at a slope of approximately 35° to average out the benefit of the full year's Sun. If we had used batteries the panels would have been at 45° to maximise benefit from the winter Sun.

The cost of installing the quantity of panels needed to run the average house is around \$12,000 however SEDA are offering roughly a 33% rebate on this. SEDA (NSW Sustainable Energy Development Authority - 9291 5260) can provide information on suppliers and installers. It is also expected that electricity prices will increase over the next 20 years and while our system in the long term may not totally cover its cost we felt that the principle of reducing impact on the environment was more important.

The next issue will be about water use and recycling
Cheers - Greg Wellham and Jessica Yuille.



The Naturalist Challenge

By Gregg Borschmann

We say we love nature. We pride ourselves on being members of a conservation group.

But does that make us good conservationists? What have we observed about the daily or seasonal rhythms of nature around us? Do we know when the tree frogs are calling, the black cockatoos are flocking, the honey-eater migration returns, the swamp rat babies are born, or the female crayfish have their babies attached to their tails?

Has the modern conservation movement railroaded itself by becoming politically active, even obsessed? This activism has occurred at the same time as we seem to have lost the powers of natural history observation that were once the essence of conservation awareness.

Jim Smith's talk at The Hut on 26 October contained many challenges and raised some tough questions.

Perhaps most insightful was Jim's observation about the origins of the conservation movement, which was once mainly comprised of 'naturalists'. Jim defined a naturalist as someone who has a love of nature at the centre of their life, who has a sense of wonder whenever they enter the natural world. He said many of us are now too busy socialising to notice much at all about the natural world when we are in it.

He mentioned Isobel Bowden and Graham Alcorn, both former members of

the Society, as true naturalists. Significantly, Isobel resigned as secretary of the Society when it canvassed the views of political candidates before an election.

As Jim pointed out, despite the national environmental propaganda and blackmailing of politicians over green preferences, only 9% of respondents in a recent national poll named the environment as the most serious issue.

So why are we not making the environment more of a mainstream imperative? Could it be that we've lost this personal connection with the natural world, and the ability to help others make that connection?

If we could, we may be on our way to Jim's vision of Australia as the first nation within a national park. Forget about the Blue Mountains as a 'City within a National Park' — lets work towards becoming the world's first continental national park, with nature an intimate part of our daily lives. What a dream -- maybe we've been selling ourselves seriously short with our green political agenda!

Of course, we must first know our place. Jim presented us with the beginnings of a seasonal calendar for the Blue Mountains. It's part of the Timelines project, inspired by the work of Victorian naturalist and Gould League member Alan Reid.

Reinforcing the point that perhaps we're more conservation activists rather

than naturalists, Jim said it was disappointing that only three of the society's 900 members had responded to several invitations to contribute to the calendar.

Nevertheless, what those present at the Hut got over the next 40 minutes was draft one of possibly the single most important conservation document for the Mountains.

If we can devote real resources and commitment to this seasonal calendar, it will help change the way residents and visitors alike know and appreciate the Blue Mountains. It should become THE priority project — not just for the Society, but all levels of Government, the business world, schools and the community.

One sobering thought to finish with. Jim notes that Gundungurra man Billy Lynch, who lived from 1830 to 1913, spoke in 1896 of massive environmental change and loss during his life. In addition, Jim's friend and mentor from the Cox's River country, Ben Esgate, who was born in 1914, says he estimates that there has been an 80% reduction in wildlife — most noticeably birds, mammals and fish — in his lifetime.

If this anecdotal evidence of biodiversity loss is reliable, the calendar becomes an even more important tool to document not just seasonal change, but more critical long-term patterns. Let's get to it.

Walking on the Far Side

In September 2001, when Wyn Jones and others organised the Gumnut Songline walk to celebrate World Heritage listing, Keith Muir of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, the man who deserves a lot of the credit for World Heritage being granted, organised another walk — *Walking on the Far Side (of World Heritage)*. Here is an extract of a description of the walk, written by Keith Muir for the November issue of *The Colong Bulletin*.

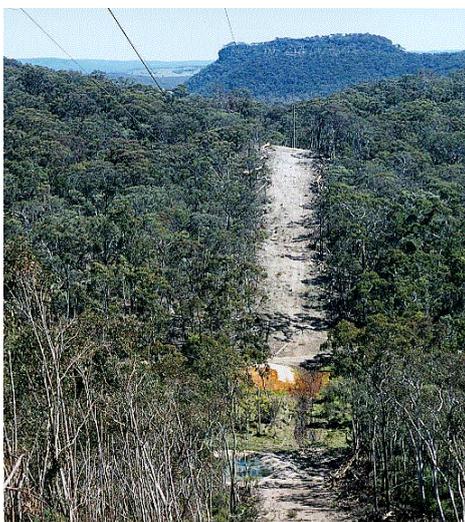
“Capertee village was the starting point for a week long adventure to see the damage to public lands along the western (or far) side of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area.

Airly, our first destination, is the site of a proposed coal mine, but little work has commenced despite being approved 10 years ago. Like ancient oil shale miners we camped snug on the north-east face of Airly, overlooking the Capertee Valley — the most scenic valley of all in NSW. The view of Tayan Peak — a mini Mount Fuji — in the purple light of early morning is with me yet.

We had an early start on Sunday. After 18 kilometres at 5pm, the Parish of Coco had lived up to its name, as the saddle near Pantoneys Crown makes for interesting navigation. There are ever so many gullies, and our dead reckoning was just a step away from being benighted without any water. We made camp on Crown Creek after dark — a cute swamp wallaby with lovely rounded ears bounded off in the right direction, all we had to do was follow.

Next day after struggling over Baal Bone Gap we entered a fantastic realm of low narrow creek valleys, grassy flats and pagoda-lined ridges. Coal mining is tearing the heart out of this part of the proposed extension to the Gardens of Stone National Park. A new powerline, dams, pumping stations and pipelines have been cut into the landscape, and cliff collapses and water pollution scar and poison it.

Nearby Gardiners Gap (named after



Jackie Gardiner) is protected and has retained some of its bushranging romance. Monday night's camp on Long Swamp on the headwaters of the Coxs

River was ideal, except for the scars of the modern-day bushrangers — trail bikes and 4WD vehicles. These motorised denizens have torn up every mine exploration road in this wonderful area creating erosion gullies.

Next day, Tuesday, we headed east to Lambs Creek, another classic grassy valley that offered wonderful walking. A cliff fall has created a rock block up, which had closed off the head of this creek. Scrambling over this and fighting through the scrub led our party directly onto the Temple of Doom, aptly named for its forbidding twin towers. The view from this native pagoda rock temple is well worth a look, and like most of Newnes Plateau, offers views of the Wolgan, the Gardens of Stone and north Wollemi.

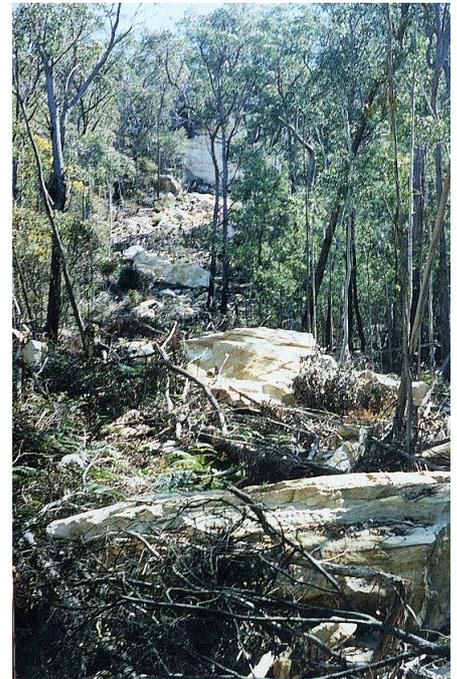
Nearby, the track to Wolgan River Falls appears as a scene-of-valiant-struggle where mechanical 4WD vehicle beast is mercilessly pitted against an innocent pagoda landscape. In this battleground heavy, giant rubber wheel-spinning monsters have reduced the rough old tracks to a moonscape. Trees have been ring-barked by winch cables, then pulled over and collected into neatly chain-sawed stockpiles alongside the favourite hill climbs. We boiled all the water taken from the Wolgan River at camp because of upstream pollution from the Springvale mine — multiple land use is a brave new world.

Next day a 12 kilometre road bash along Sunnyside Ridge leading to Newnes Pine Forest was easy and there was time to visit Birds Rock Flora Reserve. This lookout offers the best view of the Newnes Plateau. Hooray that this site did not become home to the biggest power station in NSW, as proposed in the late 1970s. The Bungleboori camp in pine forest, however, had been recently totally destroyed by trail bikers. The tap was knocked off the water tank, the grass torn off picnic ground, the bollards and picnic seating burnt, so the picnic area is a ruin.

At this point we had planned to catch up with Wyn Jones, but instead were compelled to walk a further 4 kilometres to find water. Our small party then walked through the lost city of pagodas on Bungleboori Creek, not south to look at sand mines as planned. It seems incredible that Clarence Colliery is mining under this creek! The warning signs to advise of the danger of cliff falls, we saw only as we were leaving the area.

Our journey then led east to Gooches Crater — a landscape with the lot — upland swamps, wetlands, rare plants, a slot canyon, extensive pagoda formations, a natural rock bridge and majestic old growth forest. All this could be deprived of life giving water and reduced to rubble by mine subsidence if unrestricted mining is approved. Although the nearby Clarence mine expansion proposal is now on hold, it is unclear whether Gooches Crater will be protected.

Further east 14 olympic swimming pools a day of pollution are still discharged to the Wollangambe River, a



Cliff collapse caused by mining at the Baal Bone colliery

formerly pristine wild river in the Wollemi wilderness. Our party was inspired to further action to protect these neglected bits of the Gardens of Stone.

After crossing the blackened Wollangambe, it took three hours to reach Bell Station and flag down the best stretch limo in the State — the Lithgow to Sydney interurban train. You can't beat trains for a hassle free trip. The Far Side Walk was one of the best trips I have been on in recent years, due to the excellent company and the incredible variety of sandstone scenery.” (Keith Muir)

The Colong Bulletin is the monthly newsletter of The Colong Foundation for Wilderness, 2/362 Kent Street, Sydney, website: www.colongwilderness.org.au

Helmet Orchid

Oh such a tiny colony
Set amongst all eternity
Where the great bloodwoods stand
It is the helmet orchid
That will not lift itself
Higher than a fallen leaf
But waits intent and secret
Leaning its ear to the ground
What could it hear but silence?
Yet where the orchid listens
Low in its purple hood
Among the trees' immensity
Out of the depth of the world
Dark and rainy and wild
Sounding through all eternity
Silence like music flowed.

(from 'The Collected Poems of Douglas Stewart')

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The Pilliga Scrub

Mentioning the Pilliga Scrub instantly evokes images of wild acres of Ironbark and Cypress forest with kangaroos bounding and glossy black cockatoos screaming overhead. Dry red earth underfoot, with superbly patterned skinks slithering under rocks as soon as footsteps are felt. I recall cool evenings filled with shadows of tiny insectivorous bats flying past and owls calling. Around a small and comforting campfire, new friends share stories of *The Pilliga* and conservation campaigns underneath a clear star filled sky.

The recent Pilliga Biodiversity Research Project has formed powerful images for me and a sense of heart felt connection with this land. I was only there for a week, yet the experience has deeply touched my life. How can this be?

National Parks Association, with funding to meet expenses, conducted the Community Biodiversity Survey in the eastern Pilliga, north of Coonabarabran. The research data will contribute vital information about the biodiversity of the area, of which little is known. This survey is a part of the Western Regional Assessment in preparation for timber forest agreements for western NSW.

It was exciting to be part of a community based project with volunteers exploring the bush and gathering information about wildlife and their habitats to create a picture of biodiversity for the Pilliga. The team leaders were experienced and the methodology was such that the data gathered was credible and comparable.

There were four major research teams – birds, mammals, frogs and reptiles and botany. This meant about 50 people in camp, so there was lots of action.

The day began with the birds teams departing camp at 6.30am and on return about 10am, were just in time to wave the reptile and plant teams off for the day. The mammals teams had a busy time, they had to check their Elliott traps in the morning, close them during the heat of the day and then return to the survey site and open the traps in the evening.

Late afternoons in the camp were buzzing with excitement as all the teams talked about their discoveries of the day and skinks were admired; a nocturnal underground snake held us in awe as did the tiny bats and a baby pygmy possum, that would fit in a large teaspoon.

Around sunset about 110 Glossy Black Cockatoos would fly in, often in pairs, coming from all directions. They would screech and circle the dam close to our camp whilst gathering and then, in a large swoop, in the last minutes before dark would descend to the shores of the dam and drink. Within minutes they were up, away in small groups or pairs, departing in all directions. Needless to say the bird teams watched from ringside seats with binoculars fixed before their eyes – a spectacle to behold!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Dec 15 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9 am, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson.

No General Meeting this month. A Happy Christmas to all.

Jan 19 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9 am, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson.

Jan 25 (Fri) General Meeting at The Hut.

QUOLL CLUB (Activities for 12 and under - contact Jessica 4788.1200)

BUSHCARE (Tools provided — bring morning tea and gloves.)

Dec 14 (Fri) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (2nd Friday of every month) Contact Karen on 4757.1929 for the meeting place. (following Friday if wet).

BUSHWALKS:

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually half day walk unless noted, leisurely pace.

Dec 03 Kings Tableland. ☎ Norah 4757.4058. Wentworth Falls Station 9am. Easy. BBQ.

Dec 10 Darwin's Walk to Kings Tableland. ☎ Kees 4759.1958. Wentworth Falls Station 9am. Easy. BBQ.

Dec 17 Evans Crown and Christmas Party at Tarana Hotel. ☎ Bill G 4759.1692. Bus leaves Katoomba 8.30 am. Easy. Arrange pickups with Bill.

Getting to Know the Blue Mountains Walks. On Thursdays (Half day, easy/med)

Dec 05 Woodford Dam. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Great Western Highway, cnr Winbourne Ave, Hazelbrook, 9 am. Easy. Take lunch.

Dec 12 Sassafras Gully (from Springwood Avenue, cnr Homedale Street — Meet there 9am). ☎ Bill 4759.1692. BBQ after

Dec 19 Portal Lookout and Euroka Clearing. ☎ Allan 4739.2767. Glenbrook Station carpark 9am. Easy. BBQ and picnic. Last walk in 2001.

Weekend Bushwalks: Bushwalkers are requested to phone the contact before 8 pm the day before the walk. The walk may be cancelled if fewer than 4 walkers register, or if other circumstances make conditions unsafe.

Dec 01 Walls Ledge, Centennial Glen, Porters Pass. ☎ Mary 4787.6918. Blackheath Station carpark 9.30 am. Medium. Bring lunch.

Dec 09 Nellie's Glen, Bonnie Doon Lookouts. ☎ Jim 4784.3305. Gearins Hotel Katoomba 9.30am. Medium. Bring lunch.

Dec 15 Weekend Walkers and Friends CHRISTMAS PARTY at Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens. Meet Mt Victoria Station 10 am for car pool. Self catering. All invited.

Walks are generally Easy to Medium Grade, unless otherwise noted. Easy:

Mostly good surfaces, but some rough or steep sections. Suited to people of average fitness. **Medium:** Includes rough or steep sections, some of which may require clambering over natural obstacles. Suited to people of better than average fitness, but discuss with the contact if in doubt. **Hard:** We occasionally arrange a walk considered most suited to experienced and very fit walkers but it is conducted at a moderate pace. Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is Medium/hard or Hard, before attending. **If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bill Graham 4759.1692.**

Bushwalks will resume mid-January

Being able to share the pleasure of quietly walking through the scrub listening for birdcalls or the excitement of examining a scat – is it possum poo? or having a lively discussion to identify a remnant rainforest plant created a companionable closeness with fellow volunteers. No one was in a hurry – there was no destination, we had all the time in the world to stand and touch, smell, hear and see nature in detail.

One of the most noticeable things was that *everyone, always* had a small notebook and pencil with them and were forever scribbling species names or long descriptions of what they had seen. The notebooks became a bit crushed and dusty as the days went by and on the last day we all wrote in each other's names and addresses.

Then I remembered that early members of the Society during the 60's were naturalists – they walked and studied nature. Jim Smith said recently that all naturalists carry a small notebook and pencil to record their detailed

descriptions for later identification of the species seen or heard. Vegetation habitat, numbers and place are also worth recording.

The experience I had in the Pilliga is available to us here in the mountains – perhaps we could be more attentive to nature on bushwalks, perhaps we could have camping weekends and do our own research of local wildlife and their habitats. Getting to know the bush around and returning to a particular tree to look for a nest or knowing which rocks skinks live under is infinitely more fun than reading a textbook.

Community biodiversity research, like the NPA surveys means that the knowledge of the environment resides within the community and would enrich our lives and empower us to care for it.

So sharpen your pencil, put your notebook in your top pocket and become a Blue Mountains naturalist.

— Meredith Brownhill.