

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Land Clearing by Stealth

Surrounded by a million hectares of bushland, it is difficult to imagine that land clearing is an issue here in the Blue Mountains. But land clearing is not just a problem for the farmers, it is our problem too. Its impacts are not immediately obvious. Land clearing is the major cause of species loss according to the recent Federal Government report "Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002".

Loss of bushland has already had an impact. Within the Blue Mountains local government area there are 32 animal species, 35 plant species and four vegetation communities which have been recognised by our State Government as being endangered or vulnerable to extinction, some found nowhere else.

Some of these plants and animals are under threat because they prefer to live where we do—along the flatter ridge top areas (for example, the Eastern Pygmy-possum). Others have suffered more indirectly from urban impacts. The Blue Mountains Dwarf Pine, *Microstrobos fitzgeraldii*, found only in the spray of the waterfalls on our southern escarpment, suffers from the effects of water polluted by urban runoff and competition from introduced plants such as ivy.

In the Blue Mountains the problem of land clearing has not been effectively addressed in spite of existing legislation. This is primarily because most illegal clearing has been small scale.

Clearing is approved for houses and then the bushland in between is cleared by stealth, a bit at a time. Over time a lot of people all clearing little bits of bushland results in large-scale destruction of our urban bushland.

The Council has responded to community concerns to protect bushland and has developed a Native Vegetation Management Order. We hope that our

suggestion to call it a Bushland Protection Order will be adopted to explain what it is intended to do. We also hope that Council does not bow to the pressure to remove any of the proposed safeguards to protect the habitat of threatened species.

It is expected that this Order will be considered by Council at its next meeting on 15 July. Copies of the redrafted Order will be in the Business paper which is available on the Friday before that meeting.

It is important that Councillors know of the support that there is in the community for a Bushland Protection Order. The most useful thing you can do is to contact the Councillors in your ward and ask them to ensure that Council introduces a strong bushland protection order. The Councillors' phone numbers were included in the June Hut News, or you could write to any of them c/-BMCC, Locked Bag 5, Katoomba 2780.

If wish to discuss any of the details of the draft Order contact the Land Use subcommittee through 4782.1635 or email lyndal@hermes.net.au.

Bushcare at the Lake

Wentworth Falls Lake Bushcare Group

To mark five years of involvement in local Bushcare activities members of Wentworth Falls Lake Bushcare Group gathered on 17 May for a small celebration. Council's Bushcare Department was represented by Chris Dewhurst and Richard Lee and each volunteer was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation acknowledging the value of their contribution in time and effort.

The group has made a real difference to the health of the bushland on the northern edge of the Lake and has been involved in a number of initiatives that have proved beneficial to the environment. "Streamwatch" was added to our agenda 18 months ago and has proved to

be enjoyable and interesting. In our role as stewards of the local bushland we are aware that there is still much to do and we look forward to the challenges of the years ahead.

If you would like to join us as a regular volunteer and can be available on the second Tuesday or the third Saturday of each month (or both!) Rae Druitt will be happy to provide further details on 4757.4020.

Help to "Make a Difference"

Welcome to new Publicity Officer Samantha Stevens, and Meetings Secretary Rosemary Lathouris. With Samantha on board we can expect to hear a lot more about the Society in the media in coming months. Rosemary will take over from Heather Hull who has been filling in as Meetings Secretary. Now Heather will have more time to fulfil her duties as Senior Vice President. Jobs going this month are:

New Quoll Club leader:

The Quoll Club, our club for primary aged children was started by Jessica Wellham in 1999. There are currently 82 members. Not all the children go on activities, but they love to get the Quoll Club newsletter which is edited by Laura Hayes and sent out monthly to members.

Jessica is unable to continue as leader due to personal commitments and we need a replacement. The job entails organising one activity per month, and helping to produce the monthly newsletter. There is a pool of people who will help run activities.

If you can help with this important work or need more information please contact Jessica on 4757 3686, email nimbee@hermes.net.au

Helping at Society Stalls:

The Society recently had stalls at World Environment Day Festival at Springwood and Winter Magic Festival at Katoomba. At the stalls we were able to promote the Society, gain a few new members, and encouraged a large number of people to write letters in support of our campaign for the Bushland Protection Order.

We need more helpers, the more the better—ideally a long list of people in all parts of the Mountains who can be contacted to help out at various times for an hour or two, on stalls at festivals or in shopping centres when we are conducting letter-writing campaigns.

If you think you might be able to help at any time, please contact our Senior Vice President Heather Hull 4739.1493 heatherhull40@hotmail.com

Environmental Education via Radio

The guest speaker at our general meeting on Friday 25 July will be Alexandra de Blas. The topic will be Environmental Education via Radio. Alexandra de Blas presents Earthbeat, a half-hour weekly environment program on ABC Radio National. Earthbeat is a diverse and dynamic environment program with a strong emphasis on environmental science. Breaking environmental stories, providing in depth analysis of current green issues, and exploring cutting edge ideas are all part of the mix, together with grass roots community initiatives and new practical solutions.

Earthbeat looks beyond the immediate environmental conflicts and explores new solutions and alternative visions for the future. It's essential listening for people working in the environmental field, and the program is also engaging for a more general audience, especially young people.

The general meeting will be held at the Conservation Hut on Friday 25 July, starting at 7.30 pm. Visitors are very welcome.



**"Hut News", the newsletter of
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P.O. Box 29, Wentworth Falls, 2782
Phone 4757 1872 Fax 4757 1753
Email: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au
Web page: www.bluemountains.org.au

President: Kevin Bell
4787.6436, khhbell@pnc.com.au

Senior Vice President: Heather Hull
4739.1493, heatherhull40@hotmail.com

Second Vice President: Tony Towers
4757.1321(ph/fx)
atowers@dlwc.nsw.gov.au

Treasurer: Bart Beech
4739.9947, bbeech@invensys.com.au

Administration Officer: Joy McDonald
4757 2725, jl2@tpg.com.au

Membership: Elizabeth van Reyswoud
4757.2694, 0418206899 (mobile)
ereyswoud@hermes.net.au

Meetings Secretary: Rosemary Lathouris
4757.2511, lath@pnc.com.au

Meetings Convenor: Jim Wallace
4784.3305, jimwallace@in.com.au

Education Officer: Richard Phillipps
4739.2568, r.phillipps@uws.edu.au

Plant Nursery Manager: David Coleby
4784.1395 (ph/fax) dcoleyby@pnc.com.au

Land Use Officer: Lyndal Sullivan
4782.1635, lyndal@hermes.net.au

Bushcare Officer: Clive Heywood-Barker
4787.5574, ozbundu@hotmail.com

Publicity Officer: Samantha Stevens
0425316953, belbeach@bigpond.net.au

Walks Convenor: Bill Tocher
4758.8545, lintoch@pnc.com.au

Bushfire Officer: Hugh Paterson
4751.2303, goodbush@pnc.com.au

National Parks Officer: Jenny Rich
4787.6243 or 9874.9821

Web Site Manager: Margaret Sleath
4759.3350, msleath@ozemail.com.au

Threatened Species Officer: (VACANT)

Project Officer: Ian Baird
4782.6775, ianbaird@mountains.net.au

Project Officer: Ann Fox
4758.6096, foxy@zip.com.au

Project Officer: Les Coyne
4757.3327, 4757.2820(fax)
coyne@pnc.com.au

Project Officer: John Haydon
0421.479.146
johnhaydon@iprimus.com.au

Newsletter Editor: Christine Davies
4787.7246, 4787.7777 (fax at BANC),
hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

The Progress of Draft Local Environment Plan 2002

Council is now reviewing all submissions made about the DLEP2002, and the issues raised by the community are being identified for further debate by councillors. It is expected that Council will hold a special meeting to discuss these issues over the next few months.

A detailed review of community responses and options to be considered by Council is available for Parts 1 & 2 (as an enclosure to the Council report of 10 June 2003).

This has been a major exercise in community consultation with a total of 1404 submissions received, raising 6,300 individual matters. Only 4.3% [60] requested major changes compared with 51.9% [7286] which supported the

Ben Esgate 1914-2003

A newspaper Death Notice hailed Ben Esgate as the 'last of the Cox's River men'. He will be remembered for his associations both with the natural environment and the man-made icons of the Blue Mountains. In an interview in 1996, he told me that he lived off the land in the Megalong Valley while unemployed during the 1930s Depression. He obtained food by fishing and presumably, hunting and trapping.

His expertise on the marine species of the Southern Blue Mountains was unsurpassed during that period before Warragamba Dam when several migratory fish species could be found well upstream in Cox's River and its tributaries. The fishing was threatened by a drought (probably 1939-40) which stripped the natural environment of bait but Ben cut callouses from his feet and baited his hook with them.

He made a path into the Megalong Valley near Megalong Head so he could carry his dog 'Scottie' down the cliffs with him on his foraging expeditions. This became known as 'Esgate's Ladder'. In the early 1940s when it was feared that a Japanese invasion would drive resistors into the Blue Mountains bush, those authorities who were making contingency plans consulted Esgate on matters of bushmanship.

The dismissal that had led Esgate into a life of subsistence in the bush was from a position at the Hydro Majestic Hotel—he may have been the longest surviving employee from the era when Mark Foy owned the Hydro (1904-1936). Esgate assisted in bringing milk and eggs from the Valley Farm in a rope flying fox. He pointed out that by using a bucket of water as ballast, one man instead of two could work the flying fox—that was why he lost his job. His mechanical engineering skills produced a lasting monument in 1957 when he combined with electrical engineer, the late Harry Hammon to fit out the Katoomba Scenic Skyway car. Esgate also built Megalong Church.

A poem called 'The Tree' was written in honour of Ben Esgate and appeared in the NSW Confederation of Bushwalkers newsletter. In 1992 Esgate was featured in cartoonist Mick Joffe's book 'The Rare and Endangered Characters of Australia'. Vale Ben Esgate! *Don Morison.*

... In June 1990 when our Outdoor Guides class led by Jim Smith walked to the Wild Dogs we were privileged to have Ben Esgate join us for part of the way.

Ben met us on Bellbird Ridge and led us on a detour along part of an old bridle trail between Burragorang and Megalong. We lunched beside a quiet little creek where there were axe grooves and nearby a circle of stones which may have been put there long ago. Back on the fire-trail near where it bends and crosses Sliprail Creek, Ben pointed out that the old track was lower down, along a low cliffline beyond the 'Brittlejacks' (Scribbly gums). He said that the western extremity of a ridge is always more arid and the vegetation thinner, and therefore more easily negotiated, and this is where you will find Aboriginal tracks.

He showed us the gashes in the trunk of a leaning Grey Gum made by possums to eat the sap. We finally walked for an hour in the dark along a boggy horsetrack to camp in the cave at Mobbs Soak. There was no sign of tiredness in the old man. He left us then and went further on to camp alone. *Christine.*

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overall direction of the Plan.

A large number [42.5%] only addressed one or more specific matters and did not express an opinion about the general direction of the Plan. By far the biggest single issue raised concerned Proprietary Fast Food outlets, with 343 submissions containing 1315 signatures on petitions, letters etc.

The number of comments made in support of Environmental Protection Zones was particularly encouraging for the Society as this is the major way that sensitive lands and creek-lines are to be protected. Almost 92% of submissions (out of the 694 made on the subject) were in support of the zones proposed for private land. Another 264 comments were made about the EP zones on private land with 95.5% supporting or suggesting extensions and only 4.5% objecting.

Another significant conservation issue is the amount of land where buildings or other hard surfaces are allowed. This is a key issue because it affects the amount and speed of water leaving a property, which determines the quality of water entering the creeks. 250 submissions supported the restrictions

whilst 104 objected to site cover restrictions in Living Conservation or Living Bushland Conservation zones.

Subdivision is primarily regulated by minimum lot sizes. 238 or 3.8% of all comments were made about this issue, with 87.8% supporting minimum lot sizes, with most requesting council not to reduce these standards.

The land use subcommittee will be continuing to monitor the review of the DLEP2002 and will be looking closely at any amendments being proposed.

If you are interested to discuss this further, please contact the subcommittee through Lyndal Sullivan on 4782 1635, email lyndal@hermes.net.au.

Welcome to New Members

James Silkman, Blackheath
Colin and Dorothy Hyndes, Springwood
Anne Kemp, Leura
Margaret Bligh, Paddington
Chris Barrett, Faulconbridge

Membership Enquiries
Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud
Phone 4757.2694
Email: ereyswoud@hermes.net.au
Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782



"I remember when we could drink from any mountain stream"

by Grace Bayley

I'm an old woman now, and live by the sea, but I remember the Blue Mountains. I knew them well and drank from the clear streams in my youth.

To recall my first experience of these mountains I must step back to the early 1920s and see myself as a little child, tired, cranky, enduring the train journey from Orange to Sydney. I was frightened of the tunnels, the noise and the smoke streaming past the window in ghostly wraiths. Father made a heavy mark with chalk on the lid of his kitbag for every tunnel. "Here comes another one" he would say as the noise increased and my baby sister opened her mouth to roar. At Mount Victoria he would alight to buy some food and perhaps pick up a handful of snow to show us. We would be in a panic that the train would start without him.

I remember a little of the first holiday we spent in Blackheath, in a cottage overlooking Megalong Valley, and to my eyes it appeared to be up in the sky. There were steps cut into the earth bank from the gravel road right up to the wide verandah of the house. Little flowers grew in the steps, little warm coloured stones were just asking to be collected. Strange that I recall those steps! And the stones! I liked them more than the Three Sisters.

Yes! We visited the Three Sisters. The Lookout then was fenced with wire. We all yelled "Cooee" and heard the echo return. Imagine that today! My father pointed out the Sisters and I had no idea what he was talking about as I looked vainly for them below among the tiny far-off trees.

We also visited Jenolan Caves. A long open limousine drew up on the road below the cottage but I just wanted to stay and play with the stones on the steps until my mother hustled me down. What did I know about caves or the long

journey ahead? The other tourists smiled as I was tucked into the dicky seat, well wrapped for the windy drive. The wonder I felt in the caves that day remains with me in old age.

Dad was a clergyman in Redfern during the worst years of the Depression. In January of 1932 we went for a holiday to Blackheath in the very house in Shipley Road. Still there – the steep steps, the latticed verandah, the view of Megalong, the old watertank and fuel stove. There was a tin bath in a draughty lean-to but the water had to be heated in a kerosene tin on the stove. There was no shower and the old dunny was in the backyard overlooking the valley. All I remembered was the steps, but the magic was there.

From our vantage point at the head of the Megalong it was easy to go down to the blue depths. Sometimes before breakfast Dad would pack the old black billy with mugs, tea, sugar and milk, all wrapped in newspaper to start a campfire, and we would take a loaf of stale bread with butter, jam and knife, then pile into our little Morris Minor and drive to Mermaid's Cave. We would leave the car at the top sign and descend a narrow cleft into a hidden place where a waterfall spilled into the green light of an open cave full of ferns, tumbled rocks and white ledges. There was a picnic table by a pool, and a fireplace where we would light a fire, boil the billy and toast the bread over the embers, precariously speared on a green forked stick. If the bread fell off, what did it matter? Spread liberally with butter and jam there is nothing that tastes or smells so good this side of Heaven!

Sometimes we would go farther down the valley for our breakfast and always get our water from the creek. In those days we could drink from any mountain stream. How wonderful it was!

After a few holidays we knew most of the sights and walks and ventured farther afield. There were exciting things to see in Katoomba and Leura in the 1930s. The floodlighting of Leura Cascades had just been completed. Then we heard about the railway truck which ran down the cliff to the coalmine near Katoomba Falls and it was possible to thumb a ride if one was brave. We were brave enough for anything! So we fronted up at the top of the little railway and when the next empty truck went down Mum and Dad were sitting on sacks in it and Flo and I were standing on the wooden bumper at the back, hanging on for grim death. The guard stood on the side bumper and warned us: "When I tell you to crouch, DO WHAT I SAY!"

Modern riders of the Scenic Railway know how

From Carlon's Head

*The broken rocks, and scrape of sliding nails,
A final heave, and then the mournful wails
Of crows, protesting that I thus intrude
Their high demesne, disturb their solitude.
They call again with dismal, wailing cry
As, turning, I watch eagles soaring high
Above the sloping and majestic height
Of Guouogang, with distant cliffs of white,
Kanangra Walls, upon the southern rim;
And on the left, the ramparts fierce and grim,
The manes of further mountains clear and blue
In distant splendour; and I sense anew
The joy that only open ranges bring
To lonely hearts in lifelong wandering.
A sun-scorched valley lies below the land
On which detached, alone I make my stand;
Detached, alone, at peace on timbered range
With memories of scenes that never change,
Of sunlit valleys and of silent hills,
So far from clamoured haste and petty ills
Of city life; the quiet scene sinks deep
Within my thoughts; I feel the silence creep
Into my very soul, a sweet release
In lands where even hills themselves breathe—peace.*

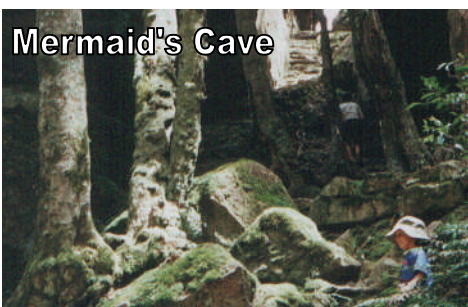
**R Knightly, Sydney Bushwalkers
Published in The Bushwalker 1947**

deceptively gentle is the first slope, then the line plunges through a tunnel so steeply downhill that the carriages seem to be suspended. When the sudden drop happened and the roof of the tunnel threatened to knock our heads off, we were petrified and could hardly obey the man as he yelled at us. We're still here to tell the tale! Now when I see the Scenic Railway at Katoomba and hear the long scream from a hundred throats as the modern carriages loaded with tourists go down – I REMEMBER!

I wonder now, as I write this, how many of my tribe are left? Folk who walked the Blue Mountain tracks in the 1930s, who saw the beginning of things and could drink from any mountain stream? © Grace Bayley, August 2002.

A scarce-seen, leafy path between tall trees;
And trees themselves, that sway to every breeze,
Standing straight and stately, friended or alone,
Then, the fine friendliness of birds, full-grown,
Knowing not man; and the liquid notes
Of lyre-birds; butcher-birds, a song that floats,
Joyous and free, through sundrenched air; the calm
Serenity that is the mountain's charm;

An extract from "The Bush Walker" by Dorothy Lawry, published in The Bushwalker 1947.



Mermaid's Cave

Trees

My mother had little patience with children playing in the house. "Go down to the back tree and play" she would say, and we would ... and over the fence and into the bush until hunger drove us home. We swung in a tyre on a rope which Dad tied to a lower branch of the old Turpentine and we trod carefully underneath it, the sharp-cornered seed capsules painful for bare feet.

Mum planted an English Oak. It grew from an acorn from my grandfather's tree which was a seedling from the Anthony Horderns tree which grew near Camden. The Oak was slow growing and 25 years later we began to hold our family get-togethers in the shade of its spreading branches, and this continued for nearly 30 years, with games of cricket in the yard and generations of children swinging in a tyre on a rope tied to a branch of the Turpentine.

There is a playground nearby. One day Mum heard bulldozers clearing the land and arrived in time to rescue a stand of young Turpentines. 50 years on they are tall trees, with seats underneath for people to sit in their shade.

There are two Scribbly Gums in my Blackheath garden, and I have planted more. One of the trees was sickly after years of abuse. I've removed the exotics which were trapping the moisture and drowning it, scattered native fertilizer, and planted 40 native shrubs and groundcovers beneath it, including a dozen wattles to nourish the soil.

In the National Park behind us the trees are Scribbly Gums and Peppermints and a few Black Ash. I love to watch the changing moods of the trees: silhouetted by the sunrise or in the moonlight; sparkling with early morning dewdrops or when the sun comes out after rain; leaves reflecting silver in the winter sun; white trunks of Scribbly Gums golden in the glow of sunset—and there are so many birds! The tallest trees are the Peppermints. Their branches bend and whip in the strong westerlies which gust through Blackheath. I can imagine the birds holding on by their beaks.

I could fill this newsletter with descriptions of the trees we have seen during our bushwalks: beautiful Mountain Ash, twisted Angophoras, mottled Grey Gums, magnificent Blue Gums and all the trees in between. As you walk along a ridge or down a hill the trees change with the soil and slope and aspect. Each one has its own place where it grows best.

Sunday 27 July is National Tree Day. Trees are the largest of all living things. They first appeared on the Earth about 400 million years ago, long before the dinosaurs and some of them can live to more than 1000 years old. Trees make oxygen for us to breathe, improve water quality, stabilise the soil and provide food and habitats for native animals.

Plant a tree to celebrate National Tree Day and future generations will benefit and enjoy it. *Christine.*

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Jul 19 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9am, Mid Mtns Community Centre, Lawson.
Jul 25 (Fri) General Meeting at the Conservation Hut, 7.30 pm. See Page 1.

BUSHCARE (Tools provided — bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water)

Jul 12 (Sat) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (9 am, 2nd Saturday of every month) Tools provided. Contact Karen 4757.1929.

QUOLL CLUB: Activities for 12 and under. ☎ Jessica 4757.3686 for more info.

Jul 27 (Sun) Den Fenella walk and games. Meet at the lookout next to the National Park car park at the end of Falls Road, Wentworth Falls.

BUSHWALKS:

Pre-School Walks, for parent/grandparent/carer with children under 6 years.

Short, easy walks, approx 1 hour, 1st Wednesday of every month, starting at 10.30am. Bring a snack and a drink. Contact Megan 4782.5898 or Kathy 4759.3669 for more information or if the weather is doubtful.

Jul 09 School Holiday picnic and walk at Euroka Clearing. Bring big brothers and sisters. Meet at Glenbrook National Park entrance 10.30am.

Aug 06 Horseshoe Falls, Hazelbrook. Meet end of Alexander Ave Hazelbrook, opposite Camp Fletcher.

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually 'Short Day' walks of 4-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short sections off-track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

Jul 07 Victory Track, following creek lines from Faulconbridge to Springwood through meandering gullies and mixed vegetation. ☎ Bill 4759.1692. Meet at Faulconbridge commuter carpark 9am.

July 14 Bus Trip to West Head, Kuring-gai Chase NP. Walk from lookout to beach, and possibly examine Aboriginal rock drawings. Cost \$10. Meet 8.30 am Katoomba Council Depot. Bookings essential. To book and to arrange pickups along the highway contact Laurel/Norm 4784.1554. BBQ available for lunch.

July 21 Peggy's Pool; another of Alan's secret Mountain places. Meet 9am, cnr. Grose Road and GWHwy, Springwood. ☎ Alan 4739.2767. Contact Laurel/Norm 4784.1554 if you require transport from Faulconbridge Station.

July 28 Wall's Ledge; through heath scrub, to lightly wooded forest track under the escarpment, and on to sacred Aboriginal site, climbing steps out to Centennial Glen. Meet 9am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. ☎ Norah 4757.4058.

Aug 04 Queen's Road Long Swamp. Meet 9.15 am Lawson Bowling Club. ☎ Bill 4759.1692.

Easy Walks on Thursdays:

These walks are conducted at a slow pace to suit the walkers on the day and are usually 2-3 hours. Lunch follows for those so inclined. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and transport issues.

Jul 10 Braeside Walk. Walk from Braeside Street to Govett's Leap waterfall and along clifftop to Evans lookout. Car shuffle to return. Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 10am. ☎ Bill 4759.1692.

Jul 17 Woodford History Walks. Short walks to view historic features at Woodford and Linden. Meet Bull's Camp 10am. ☎ Allan 4739.2767.

Jul 24 Parramatta River Excursion. Train to Circular Quay, lunch at Quay, ferry to Parramatta. Return on train arriving at Katoomba 4.07pm. Meet on train leaving Mt Victoria 9.07am, in second carriage. ☎ Simone 4757.3416.

Jul 31 Glastonbell. Walk on bush tracks in private reserve to see Cathedral Cave and pagodas, some steps. \$5 entry donation. Meet Mt Vic Station 10am. ☎ Marie 4787.1257.

Aug 07 John's Seat, Woodford. Walk on fire trail along ridge to site of ruined cottage. Early wildflowers also possible. Meet corner of Great Western Highway and Woodford Avenue 10am. ☎ Bill 4759.1692.

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. 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 Tocher 4758.8545.*

Jul 13 (Sun) Lawson Cascades and Terrace Falls. Meet Honour Avenue, south side of Lawson railway station, 9.42 am. ☎ Bill 4758.8545. Medium grade with hard climb up steps, spectacular rain forest and waterfalls. Finish 3 pm approx.

July 19 (Sat) Narrowneck to Carlon's Head. Meet Katoomba rail carpark, Gearins Hotel, 8.30 am. ☎ Judy 4787.1191. Medium grade. approx 18 km. Great walk, even in fog. Bring extra water.

July 26 (Sat) Pierce's Pass. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9.51 am. ☎ Bill 4758.8545. Medium/hard, climb out. Bring extra water. Finish 4pm.

Aug 02 (Sat) Sun Valley walk, Valley Heights to Blaxland. Meet Valley Hts rail carpark 9.05am. ☎ Ron 4757.1526. Medium grade.

NOTE: All bushwalkers need to carry water, 1 litre minimum, a snack for morning tea and lunch for all day walks.