

# HUT NEWS

*"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"*



## Designing for the environment

At our monthly meeting on Friday 28 January Nigel Bell, architect for the Conservation Hut, will talk on ecodesign and ecohousing.

It was Winston Churchill who said: "We shape our buildings and after that they shape us." At a time of increased environmental concern and need, designing and building memorable but minimal buildings is essential.

Nigel will outline the role of design for the environment and workshop ecodesign principles. He will illustrate this with examples from the Eco Home Tours that he runs.

The meeting at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls, on Friday 28 January starts at 7.30 pm. After the talk there will be supper and a chance to meet and socialise with other members, followed by a discussion of issues. The meeting will finish at around 10 pm.

We need more members to come to our meetings and visitors are always very welcome. Bring a friend.

## Groundwater

### A letter to the Society's Groundwater Subcommittee

Dear Rosemary,

Re the issue of bore water. I live at Clarence where all the households rely either on bore water or rainwater tanks. A very disturbing incident has occurred whereby Lithgow Valley Springs Water – who has dried up its water resource in Lithgow – has now sunk two bores on a property here in Clarence. The company has applied to council for permission to begin carting water away to be bottled as a boutique water. In fact this is where most bottled water comes from – bores.

The residents here in Clarence are strongly opposed to this happening, as we already have a huge sand mine which is using water from the water table. Some people have already had their bores dry up and as we don't have access to town water, this is indeed a very frightening situation in this time of extreme drought.

I certainly don't see bore water as a never-ending supply. Indeed we are quite frugal with ours.

Ms S Flynn, Clarence.

## Auction to help Society member

Most of you have probably heard by now of the tragic death of 6 year old Rian Payget Strathdee on 26 November 2004. Rian died when his family's car was run off the road by a semi trailer on the Hume Highway. Rian's mother Jasmine Payget is a member of the Society and is known and respected by many of us in the Society as Council's Environmental Education Officer. Laurie, her husband, had two vertebrae in his neck broken and is encased in a body and head brace until they knit. Rian's brother Kym has had surgery for facial reconstruction. The truck that caused the accident did not stop.

It is unlikely that either Laurie or Jasmine will be able to work for quite a while, and any insurance payment could take years to come through. Their neighbour Libby Delfsma is organising a charity auction to raise funds to assist the family. A number of local businesses have donated quality goods to the value of \$20,000. If anyone has anything they could contribute to the auction, it can be dropped off at Bluey's Party Hire, Unit 11, 26 Megalong St Katoomba or at the Century 21 office at Hazelbrook. Cash donations can be sent c/o Libby at 65 Wilson St Lawson (phone ah 4759 1190).

The auction will be held at the Mid Mountains Community Centre on Saturday 5 February at 2.30 pm, with a free BBQ from 12 noon. Please come and bid generously. *Robin Mosman.*

## Mining under Nepean opposed

BHP Billiton has proposed a controversial technique for extracting coal from underneath the Nepean River despite the damage the same method caused when it was used on two other local rivers. The mining is being opposed by the Nepean Action Group (NAG).

NAG spokesperson Leonie Kelly reports: "We have seen this company's long wall mining wreck the nearby Lower Cataract and Upper Georges Rivers in recent years. These rivers were poisoned and polluted and lost much of their flow down thousands of subsidence cracks in their bedrock. Millions of litres of methane were vented and combined with hydrogen sulphide, killing all aquatic life and riparian vegetation.

"Sydney Water is currently releasing 1.7 million litres a day from Broughton Pass Weir into the Cataract to ensure some environmental flow, and BHP are daily using another 1.5 million litres to dilute their polluted water flows into the Georges. That's 3.2 million litres being used to camouflage environmental damage due to mining.

"Some NAG members successfully sued BHP for damage to the Cataract River in 1998. This did not dissuade the company from following up with similar damage to the Upper Georges River. Now they are seeking approval to mine under the beautiful, pristine Nepean River.

"A parallel mining operation is being undertaken by Austral Coal at the Tahmoor mine. The lease just granted prohibits mining any closer than 300 metres from the top of the escarpment to the Bargo River which flows into the Nepean. Austral Coal decided that mining under the Bargo River could not be justified, and the configuration for proposed long wall panels was designed to ensure the gorge was not damaged. Austral Coal took note of the damage near Rockford Road and made the responsible decision not to compromise the health of the Bargo River again. Why should BHP Billiton not be subjected to similar constraints?"

"The Nepean/Hawkesbury River, Sydney's most important waterway, is already under major stress from urban development. That the Nepean could be threatened with a similar fate as has already been inflicted on two neighbouring rivers, with the very real possibility of similar loss of flows and replenishment from Sydney Water's scarce resources, is a scandal of the highest order.

NAG suggests you write to the following ministers: The Hon Kerry Hickey, Minister for Mineral Resources, Level 19, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrar Place, Sydney 2000; The Hon Bob Debus, Minister for Environment, PO Box A290, Sydney South 1232. "Everywhere underground longwall mining has been carried out under rivers and major towns there has been unacceptable environmental damage."



The Scientific Committee, established by the Threatened Species Conservation Act, has made a Preliminary Determination to support a proposal to list 'Alteration of habitat following subsidence due to longwall mining' as a Key Threatening Process in Schedule 3 of the Act. The Scientific Committee's findings can be found at [http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/longwall\\_mining\\_ktp\\_preliminary](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/longwall_mining_ktp_preliminary).

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## Tony Towers' resignation

Society members Barbara and Tony Towers are moving to Coffs Harbour. We wish them well in their new life and thank Tony for his work with the Society over the past few years as Second Vice President. Through his background in Local Government and strong knowledge of planning laws Tony has made a valuable contribution to the work of the society.

## Stealth video

To complete the video I made of the Stealth campaign (the Blockades, Blackheath rally, Parliament House rally and Katoomba Magistrates Court) I need copies of two TV news items which cover events I was not able to film.

- 1) the arrests at the blockade
- 2) Bob Carr's statement that he was going to change the legislation after the successful court action.

If anyone has copies of these news items could they please contact me on 47 825 905 or 0402 140 716.

Julie James Bailey

## GROUNDWATER

### Article 4: Groundwater as a resource.

By Brian Marshall

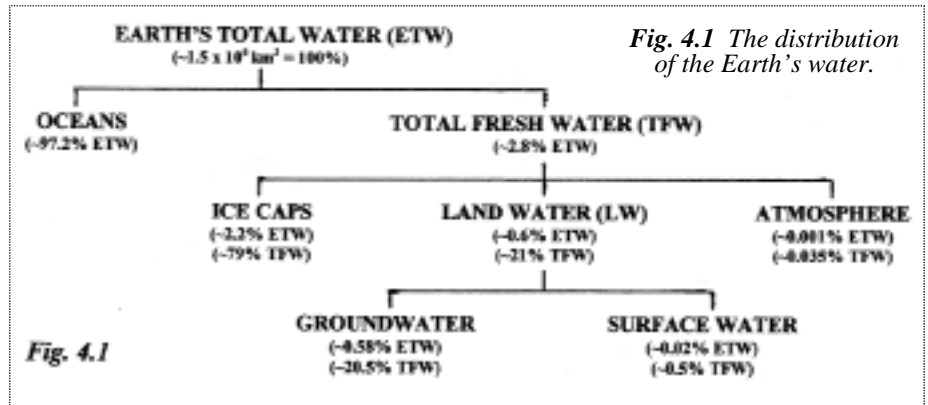


Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of the Earth's total water. The data from different sources vary in detail, but a useful approximation is that greater than 97% is in the oceans and less than 3% is fresh.

Of the fresh water, approximately 79% is contained in glaciers and ice caps, greater than 20% is groundwater and less than 1% is surface water. Unless countries use ice-bound water or attempt large-scale desalination, water supply depends on groundwater (0.58% of total water), surface water (0.02%) and (mostly negligible) recycling.

Such data are commonly used to show the fragile basis of the 'civilized' world's water-dependency. However, groundwater and surface water are inequitably distributed between and within continents. This means that some countries and parts of countries are more vulnerable than others.

Australia is said to be the world's driest continent and, although our larger cities are in the wetter coastal rim, their water supplies are under threat from population growth, global warming and political expediency. Beware of an assault on groundwater!

Groundwater is an economic resource, irrespective of whether it remains in place or is extracted.

In place, it supports the scenic value and biodiversity of swamps, ponds, lakes, watercourses and cliff-related spring and seepage sites, together with the dependent tourist industry and linked commercial activities; it reflects the dynamic balance between natural discharge and recharge.

When extracted, it variously supports a range of domestic, recreational (e.g. golf), agricultural and industrial activities; but extraction disturbs the natural dynamic balance and the environmental consequences may be extremely unacceptable.

Despite 'guesstimates' by the then Department of Land and Water Conservation, there is an abysmal lack of knowledge regarding the economic benefits of groundwater extraction versus those derived from leaving groundwater *in situ*. In fact, for the City of the Blue Mountains region, we don't know the total number of licensed and unlicensed bores that exist, what aquifers they tap, and the annual amount of groundwater extracted.

We also don't know the amount of recharge needed to sustain healthy ecosystems and their important vulnerable species.

These matters are emphasised because this knowledge is essential to making an informed compromise between a sustainable water-balance (i.e., when natural and engineered discharge is balanced by natural recharge) and environmental sustainability (i.e. when the dynamic balance between natural discharge and recharge is undisturbed).

In some regions, excessive extraction of groundwater lowers the watertable and causes regional subsidence. A classical example is Houston (Texas, USA), where several metres of subsidence over an area of 4000 square kilometres result from the watertable falling by 90 metres. The cost (approaching a billion US dollars) continues to grow.

Luckily, the shallow soils and strong sandstone rocks of the Blue Mountains ensure that this could not happen here!

The adage that 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' doesn't apply here. The benefits experienced by some are gained through costs to others; some are drinking from your pocket!

This will be returned to in the next article.

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## Tasmanian forests update by Jenny Rich

Concerned people all around Australia helped to make protection of Tasmania's ancient forests a major issue in the October federal election. The Australian Conservation Foundation, Wilderness Society and Greenpeace produced a policy to protect 240,000 hectares of threatened high conservation value old growth forests, create jobs, modernise the forest industry, address the problems of land clearing and end the conflict that has arisen in Tasmania and the whole country over this issue. Given the amount of concern around Australia, both major parties were forced to come up with policies but, unfortunately, both delayed issuing them until the last few days of the campaign, leaving people very little time to understand or assess the policies.

The Labor Party promised \$800 million to restructure the Tasmanian timber industry and promised to protect all of the key areas of old growth forest after a one-year review, but logging was to continue during the review. The Coalition produced a weaker policy, promising to protect only 170,000 hectares of old growth forests in parts of the Styx, Tarkine, Blue Tier, Great Western Tiers, North East Highlands, Eastern Tiers, Central Highlands and some private land, without the loss of any jobs, but no details of exactly which areas were to be protected were given. Mr Howard also pledged to work with the Tasmanian government to end 1080 poisoning on both public and private land by December 2005. Forestry Tasmania's exemption to Freedom of Information legislation was to end and

there was to be increased funding for research on the impacts of forestry on water and on Tasmanian Devils.

The Coalition won the election, even gaining a majority in the Senate, so we now have to continue lobbying the Coalition to protect the Tasmanian forests. Tasmanians voted overwhelmingly for the two parties with the strongest forest policies (54% for Labor or Green compared to 42% for the Liberals). However, Labor lost two Tasmanian seats where loggers voted in large numbers against restructuring of their industry and for keeping their own jobs. Support for Labor's environment and forest policies helped them to win several mainland seats, including Brisbane, Richmond, Hindmarsh and Adelaide.

Everyone is still waiting for the Howard government to release details and maps of the areas which are to be protected. As soon as the details are released, logging of all other areas is expected to begin or continue apace. The main concerns are that many important areas will not be protected and when protection will actually start. Many people are very unhappy that some of the 170,000 hectares of old growth forests Mr Howard promised to protect may have never been intended to be logged, because of their isolation or other factors. The protected areas may be widely scattered, leaving tiny islands of protected forest in a sea of logging devastation.

The destructive practice of land clearing did not even get a mention in the Coalition's policy, despite the fact

that Tasmania has one of the highest rates of land clearing in the world and this clearing is a major threat to hundreds of thousands of our native animals.

Good news is that after lobbying, Mitsubishi has recently promised to cease using trees from old growth forests and areas of high conservation value as soon as possible. Bad news is that Gunns Ltd is suing 20 individuals and conservation organisations for 'corporate vilification and disruption to logging operations' - see below for further details. The Wilderness Society and Australian Conservation Foundation are urgently seeking funds to continue the campaign to protect Tasmanian forests. Phone the Wilderness Soc. 1800 030 641 or ACF 1800 332 510 in business hours to donate.

If you need inspiration, I recommend a wonderful new book about the Tarkine wilderness. This magnificent area in north western Tasmania has ancient and untouched rainforest, wild and jagged coast, vast sand dunes and magnificent fields of button grass. The book has beautiful colour photographs and text by a large group of photographers and writers. *Tarkine* edited by Ralph Ashton and published by Allen and Unwin for the World Wide Fund for Nature Australia costs \$85. Megalong Books at Leura have copies. All the photographs can be bought individually (framed or unframed) from WWF.

Anyone interested in joining a tour of the Tasmanian forests in late February/early March please phone Jenny Rich 4787 6243 as soon as possible.

## Gunns sues environmentalists in a bid to halt forest protection campaign

In mid December Gunns Ltd issued 20 conservationists and environmental organisations with a multi-million dollar damages claim. The 216 page writ (lodged in the Victorian Supreme Court) alleges 'corporate vilification and disruption to logging operations' and seeks compensation totaling \$6.36 million. Those being sued include Senator Bob Brown plus office bearers of the Wilderness Society, the Tarkine National Coalition, Doctors for Native Forests and the Huon Valley Environment Centre (now referred to collectively as 'the Gunns 20'). The Wilderness Society and its staff face a total compensation claim of \$3.5 million, accused of organising the campaign against Gunns, while Senator Bob Brown is being sued for \$305,000. Brown and others are accused of publicly denigrating, vilifying and criticizing Gunns and encouraging others to boycott or protest against it (see Melbourne Age 14/12/04).

The Melbourne Age 17/12/04 reported:

*"If corporate writs can silence Australians who speak out on public issues, our democracy is in trouble.*

*"The fate of Tasmania's old-growth forests is a matter of great public interest. A political and environmental debate is raging around Tasmanian forestry giant Gunns Ltd. The company has raised the stakes horribly by launching a \$6.3 million damages claim against critics of its actions in old-growth forests, most of which are on public land. ... This intimidatory action, which exposes individuals to financial ruin, expands the debate far beyond forests and Tasmania.*

*"Everyone who cares about how public issues are decided in a democracy ought to be alarmed by what has been described as a US-style SLAPP writ. "Strategic litigation against public participation" is a US term coined in the 1980s to describe the use of lawsuits to deter or punish individuals who express views on public policy that are at odds with business interests. ..."*

This is a major issue for everyone concerned about free speech and the right to protest. A good source of further information as it becomes available is [www.mcgunns.com](http://www.mcgunns.com)



On Tues Dec 15 around 700 people gathered in Hobart's Franklin square to protest forest company Gunns Ltd's attempt to silence freedom of expression by suing activists for up to \$6.3 million. Photo: <http://melbourne.indymedia.org/news/2004/12/84762.php>

## Christmas Eve, 2004

Gathering, galloping  
rolling peels of thunder—  
low and menacing,  
intermittent flashes of lightning,  
the street party cancelled.

Life goes on for  
the Eastern Spinebill—  
wet, sodden, but still busy,  
white waistcoat, rufous/black  
and gunmetal blue colours merge  
almost as one.

Its tongue, far too quick  
for the naked eye,  
feeding on a Grevillea,  
as it twists and turns.  
A slight hesitant reaction  
as a globule of  
water falls on his head.

No sign of the aggressive  
Red Wattle Birds—  
Cowards!

More thunder and a  
flash of lightning.  
The spinebill stops  
for a fraction of a second,  
then continues—  
Beautiful!

Ron Hyslop.

## Welcome to new members October—December 2004

Bronwyn Owen, Katoomba  
Bruce Browne, Mudgee  
Kate Litchfield, Hazelbrook  
Robin & Roger Walker, Leura  
Yvonne Hellmers, Katoomba  
Sallyanne Williams, Blackheath  
Jennifer Wearn, Faulconbridge  
Pamela Stewart, Springwood  
Christine Elliott, Springwood  
Carol Horrocks, Katoomba  
Karen Jensen, Valley Heights  
Eileen Gordon, Springwood  
Nelson Nunes-Mafra, Katoomba  
Philip Hammond, Katoomba  
Marilyn Price, Linden  
Lewis Morley, Linden  
Lynne Elliott, Katoomba  
Janne Anderborg, Glenbrook  
Cheryle Yin-Lo, Hazelbrook  
Joey Clarke, Mt Victoria  
Lorna Taylor, Leura  
Kaye Birch, Turramurra

## Pre school bushwalks

The December pre school bushwalk was to Minne ha ha Falls where the children enjoyed paddling in the creek. This was the last pre school walk. Thank you to Liz Riley who has been organising the walks.

## Quoll Club newsletter

Spot the Quoll's helper Christine is a bit tired and asks if there is a parent or somebody out there who would like to work with Spot to help compile and type the monthly Quoll Club newsletter?

Please phone her (or Spot) on 4787 7246 (after 16 January) or email hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

## BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP

Our bushwalking group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud. For membership enquiries contact Membership Secretary Liz van Reyswoud. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers of \$15 per member is payable with your membership renewal.**

**Monday Leisure Walks:** Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short section off track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

**Jan 03 Asgard Head, Mt Victoria.** Upper mountain heath. Meet 9.15 Mount Victoria station. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

**Jan 10 Cateract Falls to Terrace Falls.** Wonderful waterworks. Meet 9am Honour Ave, Lawson. ☎ Bill 4759 1692. BBQ.

**Jan 17 Wonderland Track.** Meet at Medlow Bath outside Hydro Majestic at 9am. ☎ Jock 4758 6346

**Jan 24 Mermaid's Cave.** Cool grotto and walk in coachwood forest. Meet Blackheath commuter car park 9.15 am. ☎ Norah 4757 4058. BBQ.

**Jan 31 Bus Trip:** Depart Katoomba depot 8am. ☎ Laurel 4784 1554.

**Feb 07 Lithgow waterways.** Shady walk. Meet Mount Victoria Station 9.15 am. ☎ Bill 4759 1692.

**Thursday Pleasure Walks:** These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and transport issues.

**Jan 20 Woodford stroll and picnic lunch.** Meet Woodford Station 11am. ☎ Simone 4757 3416.

**Jan 27 Mt Victoria stroll, and picnic or BBQ lunch in Mt Vic Park.** Meet Mt Vic Station 11am. ☎ Marie 4787 1257.

**Feb 03 South Lawson waterfalls.** Circuit bush track to view waterfalls, some steps. Meet corner of highway and Honour Avenue Lawson. 9.30am ☎ John 4757 1558

**Weekend Bushwalks:** 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 Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email [mcreysw@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mcreysw@bigpond.net.au)

**Feb 05 National Pass.** Medium. Meet Wentworth Falls Stockyard Carpark 9.30am. ☎ Meredith 4782 4823.

**Feb 12 Fortress Ridge.** Medium. Meet Mt Hay Road near Leura Public School 9.30 am. Bring swimming costume. ☎ June 4787 7312.

**Thursday Interpretive Bushwalks** will recommence on 3 February. Meet 9.15 am at Blackheath Station commuter car park. Sorry, no new vacancies as numbers are limited. ☎ Christine 4787 7246 (after 16 January).

## Haiku at Ingar picnic area

by Diana Levy

On a very hot day in mid November, the interpretive walkers went out to Ingar picnic area to learn a bit more about haiku. It was hard to put pen to paper as our hands were steadily occupied in batting away flies. The waterhole was an antidote to the heat and flies—just the sight of it was like Mum putting a cooling flannel to your forehead. Here are some of their haiku:

Water trickles and drips  
Down smooth rocks  
To calmness below

Jenny R

The area was quite thoroughly burned by bushfire in 2002 and so we emerged from our walk somewhat scratched and streaked with charcoal.

Black burnt branches  
clutching the air:  
new life for old

Heather

I was the only one to sample that swimming hole—warmish on top and so cool underneath!

Water falling  
down glistening rocks  
to a dreamy pond

Diana R