



From the BMCS President

It is important that we make comment on, and reflect upon, the recent bushfires and in particular the impacts on our members and the plants, animals and ecosystems which are the purview of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

We express our collective sadness for the lives lost and property damaged. This sadness incorporates a concern for all species inhabiting our precious Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It is now a time where our community needs to act with compassion and kindness ... a time when scientific and other relevant knowledge needs to be at the basis of decision making on fire and other planning issues ... a time when climate change denial and destructive divisive politics are relegated and called out.

Articles by Ian Brown on the Blue Mountains Conservation Society website www.bluemountains.org.au and by Clare Power in this edition of Hut News bring considered thought and wisdom to the dialogue about bushfire. Our Society has a proud history of being credible and accurate in our statements. Please be assured that, in the coming months, we will uphold our responsibility to care for each other and help give a voice to nature and those species that cannot speak for themselves.

The Society has prepared a statement outlining our position. It can be found at - www.bluemountains.org.au/documents/bushfires/bmcs-bushfire-statement-Jan2020.pdf

Tara Cameron, President
Blue Mountains Conservation Society

A message of hope

We are all devastated by the trauma and grieve for the consequences of the recent bushfires, but Keith Muir (Colong Foundation) offers a message of hope.

An edited version of Keith's message about National Parks and fire recovery is on page 7 of this newsletter.

I found it inspiring at a time of stress and recommend that you read it. (Christine)

Sunset Gathering

We will be holding our annual Sunset Gathering at The Conservation Hut, end of Fletcher Street, Wentworth Falls, on Thursday 27th February, arriving at 6:30pm for a 7pm start. There will be a musical performance, and then we can all gather on the balcony to watch a magnificent Blue Mountains Sunset.

Our Bushfire Representative, Hugh Paterson, will give a short talk, addressing what happened in our recent bushfire crisis and what we can all do from here to help.

Come along, meet other members, meet the Management Committee, have a cuppa, be part of our great Society.

Volunteering to help the environment

At our AGM on Thursday 26th March, a new management committee will be elected for the year to March 2021. All positions fall vacant. A list of MC positions and duties is enclosed with this newsletter and available online (<https://www.bluemountains.org.au/documents/aboutus/agm/bmcs-mc-positions-1921.pdf>)

Two current MC members who will not be standing for re-election are Admin Officer and Newsletter Editor (read more, pages 4 and 5). Publicity Officer position has been vacant and a new position has been created, "Social Media Officer".

What are you able to do to help the environment? Volunteers are needed to work on subcommittees, help at events and in many other ways. Contact the President or one of the Vice Presidents if you want to discuss (contact details on page 2).

Environmental Citizen of the Year 2020



Margaret Baker receives award from Mark Greenhill, photo by Mark Baker.

Congratulations to Margaret Baker who has won this inaugural award, presented by Blue Mountains Mayor Mark Greenhill at the Australia Day ceremony at the Springwood Hub.

The award certificate states: "Margaret has been a tireless, committed and passionate advocate for protecting the Blue Mountains environment for over four decades. Giving her time as both a professional and a volunteer, Margaret has shown outstanding commitment to and excellence in education, life-long learning and the promotion of the natural environment."

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Jim Barrett (1923-2020)

Glenbrook's Jim Barrett who has passed away just shy of his 97th birthday was a bushwalking and publishing legend.

From the regimentation of the two world wars and determination to preserve Blue Mountains wilderness through the great depression and beyond, as well as the sheer exuberance in bushwalking being healthy and free for everyone, the ranks of bushwalking environmentalists swelled.

One of the largest bushwalking clubs of the 1940s and 1950s was the Catholic Bushwalking Club and Jim Barrett was their greatest scribe. He wrote multiple books especially about the southern sections of what we now call the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

An insight into what was significant to Jim is gained by delving into his book "Shack Country and the old Burragorang" (published 1990). This particular story begins in 1939, when an important southern Blue Mountains character, Les Maxwell, drove Father Coughlan and two other priests in a truck across the Cocks River (then undammed) and up to a deserted building called Kowmung House on the Scotts Main Range.

In 1943, Father Coughlan became the first chaplain of the Catholic Bushwalking Club and his long association with the Scotts Main Range area and "The Shack" the priests built there would be faithfully documented by Jim Barrett. Jim noted that it was significant that, at Father Coughlan's installation, Father Thomas addressed the young bushwalkers thus: *You are part of a vast body, namely Catholic young people. Your particular vocation is walking. Keep in touch with the one body of Catholic young people and be part of a vast crusade which is not aiming to wreck something, but endeavouring to restore the full life ... to bring back something which will give us sanity and Christianity in the modern world.*

Jim Barrett found it poignant that there were a number of churches in the Burragorang Valley area at the time in the late 1940s that it was decided to construct Warragamba Dam and flood the valley. The church at Yerranderie and the Scotts Main Range buildings erected by bushwalking priests would be among the handful of surviving structures.

The Kills of Kedumba

THE STORY OF
 A BLUE MOUNTAINS PIONEERING FAMILY

including a short history of the Kedumba Valley



Jim Barrett



Jim Barrett—on the way to the Blue Gum Forest anniversary

Barrett collaborated with fellow Blue Mountains author Jim Smith to present information about the indigenous people of the Cocks River catchment. He collaborated with Father Jim Tierney, first chairman of the Colong Committee, and others to present the story of the saving of the Kanangra Boyd Wilderness in books such as "Kowmung River" (1993). He collaborated with Valerie Lhuede over his tome "Yerranderie, story of a ghost town" (1995).

Jim Barrett leaves behind an extensive collection of literature that is his legacy.

Don Morison.

Sharing Our Grief

by Clare Power, Climate Change and Sustainability Officer
with illustrations by Cate Dudley, Blue Mountains artist

We now live in the context of the tragedy of the unprecedented fires that have ravaged our land - the tragedy of those who have died, those who have lost their homes, those who have been traumatised by their experiences of the ferocity of the fires, and the tragedy of the devastation and suffering of our wildlife, of decimation to ecosystems and biodiversity and the hastening of extinction of many of these. How do we face this tragedy without turning away or sinking into denial and hoping that things will return to normal?

There have been many powerful articles written during this time which discuss the devastating impact of the fires, as well as Australia's inaction on climate change. Joelle Gergis, climate scientist, wrote a confronting article in the Guardian in early January, 2020, where she states:

"As a climate scientist, the thing that really terrifies me is that weather conditions considered extreme by today's standards will seem sedate in the future. What's unfolding right now is really just a taste of the new normal."

How do we confront such a statement; how do we absorb such information and still cultivate hope and participate in whatever forms of actions each of us are called to initiate or participate in? How do we learn to share the grief that we are feeling?

Another article in the Guardian considered how scientists are coping with environmental grief. I think the words of Ashlee Colman, a scientist who works in Labrador in Canada which is experiencing the brunt of climate change, are very pertinent to our experiences of grief and loss through the fires:



"The offering"

Katoomba Airfield helicopter flights rejected

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment has rejected an application for a lease involving helicopter charter flights at Katoomba Airfield at Medlow Bath after "overwhelming community opposition" to the idea. 85% of the 1,582 submissions opposed the application, with noise the key issue.

We call on the Energy and Environment Minister, Matt Kean, to add this large piece of Crown Land to Blue Mountains National Park. The airfield can continue to operate for emergency and rescue purposes as it does now.

Thank you to all who campaigned, wrote letters and contributed to the result.



"We lay down and wept"

'There's a power and an honour to grief, because it means that we have loved something, and we've had a connection to a place or to species of the planet. We need to find ways to mark our loss and share our loss, but also to remind ourselves that we only grieve what we love. I think new rituals are essential to celebrate that love, and to mark the loss and to come together for loss ... to start talking about grief as a totally normal response to climate change or other forms of environmental degradation. So it's not something to feel ashamed about'.

Glenn Albrecht, Australian philosopher, coined a term – Solastalgia - which I'm sure many of us can identify with in response to the impact of the fires on fauna and flora of the Blue Mountains. Solastalgia is:

the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault. It is manifest in an attack on one's sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging to a particular place and a feeling of distress about its transformation.

Now, more than ever, we need to bear witness to the tragedy, to nourish ourselves, to band together in community to support those who have experienced loss, human and non-human and to find ways to share our collective trauma, and express our grief and our experiences of the precariousness of life. And we need to keep holding our government and corporations to account for immediate and meaningful action on climate change – if not us, who? If not now, when?

VALLEY OF THE WATERS BUSHCARE GROUP

The Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets on the second Saturday of each month, 9am - noon. Tools and gloves are available. Bring a drink, a snack and a sunhat.

NEW MEMBERS WELCOME
Phone Karen 4757 1929

The changing focus of Blue Mountains tourism. By Jim Smith.

Christine Davies wrote to me with this observation: "I recall that during the Outdoor Guides Course we were asked to do an assignment on tourism, about how the focus changed gradually from promoting bushwalking to other activities which made more money for the providers."

Since I arrived in the Blue Mountains in the mid-1970s, one of my hobbies has been collecting the old guide books published for Blue Mountains' tourists. There have probably been more of these guides published about the Blue Mountains than for any other region in Australia. I have over 100 different ones, the earliest being published in 1879. Up until World War II these guidebooks were almost exclusively lists and descriptions of Blue Mountains bushwalks and lookouts. Before the word 'ecotourism' was invented, the Blue Mountains was a place where people came to get close to nature, primarily along our beautifully made walking tracks.

After World War II the condition of these tracks began to deteriorate, as fewer resources were allocated towards their maintenance. At the same time there was increased promotion of man-made activities. If you look at the most widely-distributed guides for tourists, the great majority of the space in these publications is devoted to commercial indoor 'attractions' in the townships. Most of these could be anywhere in Australia. The locally distinctive scenery, lookouts and bushwalks have received far less emphasis in recent decades. I really shake my head at some of the ideas of tourist entrepreneurs. We have had both chocolate and Elvis festivals, and I've always thought that 'Yulefest' was a silly idea.

I've never been impressed with the numerous 'fun runs' that are now held annually. Groups of hundreds of sweating and panting people pounding along our historic tracks cause a lot of wear and tear and the participants are not getting any the wiser about the environments they are passing through. The agonised looks on their faces say it all.

Bushwalking is now seen as a specialised niche activity rather than something that every able-bodied visitor to the Blue Mountains can do. Unfortunately, the poor state of maintenance of many of our most popular tracks is discouraging to parents who are hesitant about taking children along them.

A few years ago I was asked by 'BLOT' (Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Tourism) to assist with the editing of a brochure for a local 'Bird Trail'. Most of the information was contributed by the Blue Mountains Bird Observers, particularly Carol Proberts. This leaflet, which listed the best birdwatching places, and species likely to be seen, between Glenbrook and Lithgow, as well as the Capertee, Glen Davis and Jenolan Caves areas was an excellent initiative. Unfortunately, it seems it was not reprinted after the first print run of a few thousand copies. This is the type of publication which encourages interaction with our natural environment. Members of our society could easily do a similar brochure for tourists interested in wildflowers.

Let's get back to the old style of Blue Mountains guidebooks which encouraged families to explore the bushland. Children in particular are very open to the sense of wonder that grows in our hearts when our eyes are opened to the non-human lives all around us.

BMCS NURSERY PLANT SALES

We offer the home gardener, landscaper or contractor a big variety of quality local native plants at economical prices.

Blackheath Community Market, 1st Sunday of the month, Blackheath Public School 9am to 1pm.

Magpie Market, 3rd Sunday of month. Lawson Public School, 9am-2pm. Tube stock \$3.50. Discounts for bulk orders.

nursery@bluemountains.org.au

Admin Officer needed— Can you help?



Jeanette Robertson (photographed) has been our Administration Officer since 2014 and will not be continuing in the role after the March AGM.

The role of Society Administration Officer (affectionately known as SAO) is an essential part of the running of the Society. It is neither daunting nor boring, and doesn't involve taking minutes. It's interesting and allows you to work with some amazing people - all for the good of the Blue Mountains environment and the increasing challenges it faces.

Putting it simply, the Society Admin Officer reroutes correspondence (emails and letters) to appropriate Society office bearers, electronically files outgoing formal correspondence and compiles a monthly report on inward and outward correspondence. Besides the occasional trip to the Wentworth Falls Post Office and The Conservation Hut, most of the duties can be fulfilled at home. It is a voluntary position.

To learn more about what is involved and to have an opportunity to visit our office in the Conservation Hut, please contact Jeanette on 0414 956 060 or sao@bluemountains.org.au

Volunteer Wildlife Groups Urgently Need Our Help!

Volunteers who rescue and care for injured and orphaned native wildlife do it in their own time and at their own expense. Summer is a busy time, this year exacerbated by drought and bushfires.

You can donate to the special appeal by **Foundation of National Parks and Wildlife** www.fnpw.org.au/

or **WIRES** (NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service) <https://www.wires.org.au/>

Newsletter editor retiring – answer the challenge! Christine Davies

In late 1995, I responded to an invitation to attend a meeting at the Conservation Hut. I learned that membership of the Society had been declining and management positions were unfilled. Grace Bayley, who edited the society's quarterly newsletter, was leaving the mountains to live in Gerringong – would I take on the position of newsletter editor. Les Coyne, who I met for the first time, left the meeting with the jobs of secretary and treasurer and I was the new editor of a now monthly newsletter. Thor Schache was the President.

In my first four-page newsletter we advertised a competition to find a name for our monthly newsletter. "Hut News" won the prize of dinner for two at the Conservation Hut café. We quickly filled all the vacant positions. Ross Coster and Don Morison were among those recruited. Membership numbers increased dramatically and the newsletter evolved over time as my knowledge and skills improved.

24 years and 270 newsletters later, I need a break and will not continue in the position after the March AGM. These have been wonderful and worthwhile years, meeting and getting to know so many amazing people and developing lasting friendships.

Are you a member of the Society who would like to produce your own brand of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society newsletter?

The position of Newsletter editor is a voluntary one. The newsletter doesn't have to be 12 pages; it doesn't necessarily need to use the name Hut News. Its aim is to keep in contact with members, to inform and educate about environmental issues and the natural environment and, ideally, to entertain and inspire. (Unfortunately environmental news can be very depressing.) The newsletter is also a promotional tool for the Society and a journal of record.

You will not be alone. Society members will contribute campaign news and can advise on content and other things. There are people with a wealth of knowledge on many subjects eager to contribute to

the Society's newsletter who can be persuaded to cooperate with deadlines and word limits. There are people who can help with subject advice, check accuracy, proof read, provide photos.

Others take care of the distribution. A majority of members prefer a hard copy of the newsletter and these are posted. A version is also published on our website. Copies are distributed at the Conservation Hut, Blue Mountains libraries and at local events. Spare copies are letterboxed.

Please have a look at past copies of the newsletter and think about how you would do it. You can find back issues of Society newsletters in Publications/Archives on our website www.bluemountains.org.au all the way back to January 1991 (thanks to our amazing website manager Alan Page).

Contact Christine at hutnews@bluemountains.org.au or 4787 7246 if you want to meet and talk about it.



Christine Davies—"a woman with stile", Megalong Valley, February 2016. Photographed by Don Morison for a Blue Trail article.

Environmental Education project at North Katoomba

As a result of a planting day at Katoomba North Public School in November, another project has evolved. Lyndal Sullivan has had discussions with one of the teachers to continue this type of activity, but with a more intensive and long-term focus.

Lyndal suggested the focus of Bureau Park, an area of four hectares which is adjacent to the school and, besides having the usual park amenities (and stone grotto), includes a fairly intact section of bush dominated by stands of the mighty *Eucalyptus oreades* and accompanying understorey. Recently, Lyndal and I walked around this section in the mist, light rain and smoke. It presents as an ideal area to develop an environmental, educational and enduring relationship with the school.

This could be a project which will involve a weekly or fortnightly session with one class visiting the park, noting the flora and fauna and caring for the park in small sections. The teacher involved would like to see a literacy component. We will refine the aims and parameters of the project when school resumes.

This is an exciting project for Consoc and one which will not just be a one off but has the potential to maintain continuity.

Cathy Cavanagh, Environmental Education Officer.

Regeneration after fire

There are many signs of regeneration of the burnt bushland, leaves shooting at the base of burnt shrubs, epicormic growth on trunks and branches, native grasses sprouting, Grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*) leaves bright green above the black.

Isopogons and Banksias had been shedding their seed. There's a little forest of seedlings about to pop up out of the ash.

It worries me that I see so many people walking into the burnt bushland, usually taking photographs, and crushing little plants before they have a chance to show themselves. Christine.

Greater glider declines in the Greater Blue Mountains by Stephanie Chew



Greater gliders are Australia's largest gliding possum, with a gliding membrane between their elbows and ankles that allow them to glide up to 100m between trees. They stay high in the canopy to feed and almost never come to the ground. Greater gliders require mature forest to provide large hollows in old trees in order to survive.

Listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act, key threats include

habitat loss, too frequent or intense fires, logging and climate change. Drought and bushfires have taken a heavy toll on the local population, with reported sightings of dead gliders on the ground, five from Kanimbla Valley, two from Lithgow and one from Capertee. The Kanimbla Valley was not affected by the bushfires, but sightings from Lithgow and Capertee were in or near the fire ground.

During 40 years of experience in the field, ecological consultants Peter and Judy Smith have come across only one dead greater glider as they tend to die in their hollows. To have eight reported sightings in the space of a few weeks is very alarming.

The results of an autopsy on a dead specimen from Kanimbla Valley suggest that it suffered from a combination of dehydration and starvation.

Greater gliders obtain most of their water through their diet of eucalyptus leaves and by licking moisture from leaf surfaces. In addition to reduced water consumption from these sources, dehydration is exacerbated by high temperatures.

The finding that the glider also suffered from starvation is compelling as they feed almost exclusively on eucalyptus foliage, which is plentiful in their habitat. However, they prefer young eucalyptus foliage as it is softer and more nutritious. High temperatures and low soil moisture have likely resulted in very little new foliage growth this season.

Numbers have been decimated by continued habitat loss from land clearing and logging and are worse with extensive areas of hollow-bearing trees being damaged or destroyed by fire. With small home ranges of 1-4 ha and a low reproductive rate (females produce a single young per year), greater gliders have low dispersal ability and will be very slow to recolonise.

Peter and Judy Smith's extensive study on the species had predicted declines in the greater glider population as a result of climate change in the future. It appears that the future is already here and it looks very bleak indeed.

If you have observed any dead greater gliders in the Blue Mountains, please report your sighting to Stephanie Chew at step_chew@hotmail.com with location details. If you find a freshly deceased specimen, please place it in a plastic bag in your freezer and contact Peter Ridgeway at peter.ridgeway@lrs.nsw.gov.au for collection as we are looking for more data on the causes of recent greater glider deaths.

A sliver of hope! A small population that I have been monitoring in the Megalong Valley for two years appears to be stable, with at least two new juveniles added in 2019. Most of the gliders in my surveys are still there in January 2020 and recent rainfall gives hope of their continued survival.



Greater Gliders have thick, dark grey-brown fur on their back and creamy white fur on their under-side, and can be found in different dark and light-coloured morphs. They have a long, furry prehensile tail and large furry ears. Photos (left) juvenile; (above) adult by Stephanie Chew.

Say NO to a toxic incinerator near Lithgow

Energy Australia and Re.Group's proposal to build a 'Waste-to-Energy' facility at the Mt Piper Power Station is a cause for great concern, given the impact it is likely to have on communities and ecosystems. This proposal will see toxic gasses and waste by-products poison World Heritage ecosystems and communities, extending from Lithgow to the Blue Mountains and the Sydney Basin, and emit more greenhouse gasses per unit of energy than coal, gas or oil.

Nearly 100 trucks full of rubbish will travel daily from waste facilities in western Sydney via the Bells Line of Road and the Great Western Highway to Lithgow where it will be incinerated to generate electricity.

The NSW Government has labelled the proposal a 'State Significant Development' due to its alleged status as a renewable energy project. However, it will be a major emitter of greenhouse gases and will leave a lasting toxic legacy and does not qualify for this status.

Take action: <https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/form/say-no-toxic-incinerator-sydney%E2%80%99s-water-catchment-make-submission>

Submissions close 28 February 2020.

National Parks and Fire Recovery

A message of hope

As we grieve after the fires, Keith Muir, Executive Director of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, offers a message of hope.

He praises the leadership during the fires of Fire Chief Shane Fitzsimmons, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Blue Mountains Mayor Mark Greenhill and NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean and the actions of Greens MLC Cate Faehrmann. He expresses confidence in Matt Kean who has promised “the best ever post-fire (pest) control campaign ever”. He rejects demands by NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro to log and graze National Parks.

Keith writes: “Our large national parks, those big wilderness areas, did their job well. Like battleships of old, wilderness is designed to take a hammering from fire. There were losses, but nearly all will recover with nearly a full complement of wildlife, provided we assist that recovery right now.

“Due to their size and the diversity of the landscapes they contain, the old growth ecosystems in wilderness are more likely to survive than in smaller, more fragmented reserves. Wilderness provides more opportunities for ecosystems to adjust to large fires.

“Wilderness provides larger and better-connected wildlife populations, reducing extinction risk from impacts. Fire fragments habitats. It reduces, subdivides and isolates wildlife populations, but with effective pest control and appropriate fire management these habitats can consolidate and reconnect. It is neglect after fires that causes extinctions, and Environment Minister Matt Kean ain’t going to let that happen!”

Keith tells us that new fire intensity mapping provides some assurance for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. “The extent and integrity of the Blue Mountains wilderness has afforded wildlife refugia from all the Gospers, Grose, Erskine and Green Wattle Creek fires. There are patches of bush everywhere from which wildlife populations will expand, provided there’s not another large wildfire for a few years and effective pest control is applied.”

He concludes: “We will get better at nature defence and recovery. The NPWS saved the Wollemi Pine, and with new knowledge and skills gained we will save wilderness and threatened species again and again ...

“Keep being a part of the changes that we need to see, and support those in politics who work to greatly reduce carbon pollution, whether they be coloured red, blue, green or brown, as we need them all.”

To read the full message, go to <https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/news/2020/national-parks-and-fire-recovery>

The Blue Trail Corridor Don Morison

Around 2015, ideas were put forward for upgrading the walking route from Katoomba to Kanangra (K2K), normally a three-day trek. Although initial proposals were for fire circles, toilets and navigation aids, it became clear that some wanted commercially operated huts. In the view of BMCS Management Committee, over-development runs against the letter and the spirit of the Wilderness Act, which applies to the natural areas from the power line near the southern tip of Narrow Neck to Kanangra Walls lookout and beyond. There are a few walking trails in New Zealand and Tasmania where the dominance of commercial walking operations has become essential to coping with the trails’ popularity, but this does not have to be the future for the Greater Blue Mountains.

Management Committee favoured keeping the Katoomba to Kanangra route as natural as possible and one member suggested an alternative North to South trail, well to the west of the currently popular walking route. With the help of Christine Davies, I began researching a corridor from the Greater Lithgow area southwards. We became aware that there are multiple points of interest en route to the Goulburn area and further on. All can be visited by foot, bicycle and car or one of the above. Publicising these fascinating sites should help many local economies and small businesses in widespread communities.

We began reporting what we discovered in the “Blue Trail” series of articles and realised that we had found something all sections of the population could keep returning to – something different from a “once in a lifetime” wilderness bushwalk.

The “Blue Trail” title can apply to both the Blue Mountains and the waters of the South Coast as well as the fascinating locations in between. While the Hut News reports have been about the section from Greater Lithgow to Goulburn, the total list to which this concept can relate includes:

- The Gardens of Stone Region with its Pagoda Formations and Indigenous Art
- The Six Foot Track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves
- Forest and River Country Around the Upper Kowmung and Morong Falls
- Various National Parklands in the Wombeyan Caves Area
- Culturally Interesting Places around Taralga, Goulburn, Gunning and Gundaroo
- Greater Canberra, including the National Arboretum and the receiving dish that accepted the first signals from the 1969 Moon Landing
- Tinderry Plateau and Tinderry Nature Reserve
- The Historic “Corn Trail” between Braidwood and Nelligen
- The South Coast Beach and Forest Walks from Depot Beach to Eden.



Morong Falls, photo by Sue Nicol

The permanent home of Blue Trail information is the Simply Australia website, <http://www.simplyaustralia.net/>

As a child I sifted soft soil

Through a fine wire mesh
In my grandfather's shed.
A quiet task.

Then to the park,
Barefoot on the swing
To feel the dust
Between my toes
And shut my eyes tight
To catch the sun
Casting rainbows
Between my eyelashes.

At dusk on the last visit
To the outside toilet
I saw 5 bandicoots,
Ears up,
Dark, dancing silhouettes
Of fine pointed noses
In one of their final acts.

A 'cornstalk* child,
Privileged, growing tall below
The clear colonial sky,
In a brief butterfly wingbeat of time.

Cathy Cavanagh

*the term refers to the first generation of children born to convicts and emancipists in Australia. They grew taller than their British born counterparts.

Save Kosci

Fire has devastated Kosciuszko and the Australian Alps region. The 25,000 feral horses in the region will undermine its capacity for regeneration, as horse damage is significantly magnified in a post-fire landscape.

To ensure the recovery of the ecosystem and its species, a major cull of feral species is required in Kosciuszko National Park. Our suffering wildlife and natural places need all the support they can get.

Help reclaim Kosci by calling on the NSW Government to repeal the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018 and put in place effective and humane feral horse control.

Tell your State MP that you support immediate action to reduce horse numbers in the Australian Alps and protect our native species.

Close encounter with a Silvereye by John Low

Some time ago, while taking an afternoon walk around the streets of Portland, I spotted a small grey 'lump' in the middle of the road. At first I thought it was a stone but, just as I realised it was actually alive, a large SUV careered over the hill at great speed. I could only watch as it closed on the 'lump', convinced of an impending tragedy. However, fortune smiled and in the vehicle's wake a small bundle of feathers was blown topsy into the air and tumbled back to earth, deposited in almost the same spot it had previously occupied.

Racing onto the road, I found a small Silvereye hunched in a ball, with what appeared to be a damaged wing. I managed to get her (actually, I have no idea whether it was male or female) free of the road surface to which she clung tenaciously and into my cupped hands. With her tiny head poking out between my fingers I carried her the rest of the way home.

I have never before had such a close encounter with a small bird like this. Even with binoculars it's difficult to get a steady, close view for any length of time. They always appear to be in constant movement. In my hands, however, though alert, she seemed calm and for a moment I felt that our eyes locked. It was strange to look into the eye of that small bird and to sense it looking directly back. Though brief and difficult to put into words, it was very affecting. There was a vitality there beyond my ability to plumb. I can only describe the experience as one of those rare moments of grace, for which I am profoundly grateful.

I chatted away to that little bird all the way home, rang WIRES and a knowledgeable lady soon arrived. Unfortunately I didn't hear if the Silvereye recovered and was released again. But, when I walk past that spot now I look up at the bushes by the road, always noisy with birds, and reflect on that brief encounter.

Just an old tree by Christine Davies

It was not part of the view from the lookout. The old Scribbly Gum stood beside you on the edge of the cliff looking over the Grose Valley, as it had for generations of tourists. Was it part of the forest that had been there before? I knew it for 26 years, not long in the life of a tree.

Each year, it casually shed its bark and rid itself of the marks of misguided visitors who scratched their initials on its trunk. A few years ago, it appeared to be sick and dying and the skills of a tree surgeon brought it back, perhaps to reign for another hundred years.

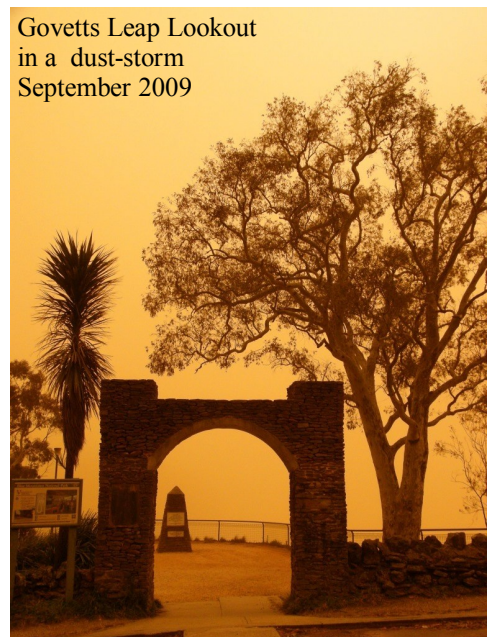
This summer, it stood there as the fire in the valley approached and then spread up the cliffs to the left and to the right and left the forests below it unburnt - as had happened before.

But, when our homes are threatened, one old tree is of no importance. After the smoke had cleared and the lookout eventually reopened, all that was left of the old tree was a smooth-cut stump. Did it burn in the backburn? Would it have recovered?

The fires have been traumatic. Vast areas of national parks have been burnt. Does one old tree really matter?

But, farewell old tree, I will miss you.

Govetts Leap Lookout
in a dust-storm
September 2009



Women and men of the past built the foundations of modern-day Blue Mountains environmentalism. Their stories can inspire us.

It's our turn now! Christine Davies

5. Elizabeth Jessie Hickman ('The Lady Bushranger') 1890-circa1931

Since non indigenous people first came to our region, there have been a very great variety of causes for forming a bond to the landscape of the Greater Blue Mountains. Whatever the truth of Elizabeth Hickman's legend, the sentiments quoted below will resonate for many of us.

According to folk lore, Hickman had a most unusual reason for relocating to the Blue Mountains. In the 1920s she was in a de facto relationship at Granville with a man who was abusive towards her. She killed him, an act for which she was never charged, and set out along Bells Line of Road with another woman and a horse.

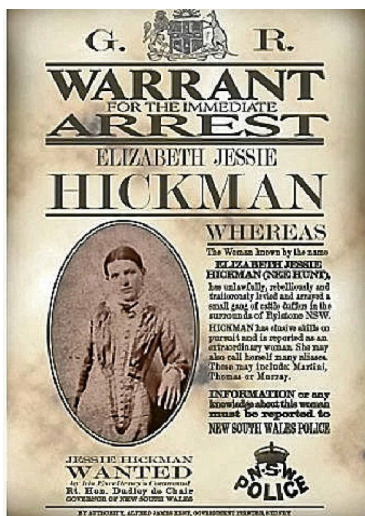
Much information about this character is collected in a 1996 book by Patricia Studdy-Cliff, "The Lady Bushranger", published by Hesperian Press in Carlisle, Western Australia. Elizabeth Jessie Hickman was born in 1890 in Carcoar in central western NSW and most of her youth was spent as a circus performer, specialising in trick horse riding.

Sometime after her escape along Bells Line of Road, Hickman began squatting in the Nullo Mountain area and roamed part of the area now known as Wollemi National Park. She was never guilty of highway robbery but she became a "cattle duffer", making a living from diverting cattle that belonged to others.

Folk lore has it that a prominent policeman, Sergeant Small, was committed to hunting down the perpetrators of this offence. Hickman, however, had formed bonds with an assortment of characters who populated this remote part of what is now our World Heritage Area. It is said that a black tracker she had helped when he was wounded once assisted her to escape the police. Another time she plunged on horseback into a river, then she and the horse swam away from her pursuers. There is even a story that, on learning a lone pursuer was devoutly religious, she stripped off all her clothes and dared him to arrest her – he declined.

To Hickman, Studdy-Cliff attributes the words:

"There are people who accuse us of being a nation of thieves and robbers living in a violent country. Yet I look at the face of these mountains and see a worn and craggy countenance and know I live not in a violent land, but an ancient one, where space and inaccessibility create an isolation for the individual or family, not often endured in the history of mankind. A household of battlers living off the land, mating more by propinquity than by choice. It is a hard choice unless, like me, you love the romance of this land."



You can become a member of Blue Mountains Conservation Society

- Post this Application Form with your cheque or money order to: Blue Mountains Conservation Society, PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls, NSW 2782, OR
- Join online at: www.bluemountains.org.au

(Use capitals please—even for email address)

Name(s) 1.
2.
3.

Address:
.....PC

Phone(s)

Email

I/We agree to support the aims and objectives of the Society as set out on reverse side of this membership application:

Please sign if named above.

Signature(s) 1.
2.
3.

MEMBERSHIP FEES (please circle one item)

Single \$35 Concession (Senior/Student)\$25

Household \$40 Household Concession \$30

Corporate (negotiable)

Membership (circled above) \$

Donation (tax deductible) \$

Bushwalkers: please add
\$20 per walker per annum. \$

TOTAL AMOUNT \$.....

Send my copy of Hut News by
Please tick box ☐ mail ☐ internet only

Would you like to be involved in any of the following activities or working groups? (Please underline):

Land use/development issues; Environmental Education; Threatened species issues; Website and social media; Plant nursery assistance; Bushcare; Publicity/photography; Water quality/sourcing studies; Administration;

ENQUIRIES: Phone 02 4757 1872

Email: membership@bluemountains.org.au

A BEQUEST: Please remember us in your Will

The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording: "I bequeath the sum of \$. to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the treasurer for the time being of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to Blue Mountains Conservation Society".

BMCS Planning & Development Resource Kit

Do you want to take action on an environmental issue in your neighbourhood or the Blue Mountains more broadly? Do you want information about the laws and procedures relating to development and environmental protection? Find out what **YOU** can do! Go to the Planning and Development Resource Kit www.bluemountains.org.au/pdrk-welcome.shtml

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community organisation working to achieve the preservation and regeneration of the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains.

The Society believes that World Heritage status provides an opportunity for local community members to become custodians of the unique biodiversity and scenery of the Blue Mountains.

The Mission of the Society is to help conserve the natural environment of the Blue Mountains.

The Aims and Objectives of the Society are to:

- **Disseminate and foster an understanding of the ideals of Conservation.**
- **Promote the need for ecological sustainability.**
- **Protect the natural environment—flora, fauna, habitat, water, land and air.**
- **Actively oppose those human activities which degrade or destroy the natural environment.**
- **Repair the adverse effects of human activities upon the environment.**
- **Encourage the love of the natural environment by conducting a regular program of bushwalks.**
- **Increase the pool of expert knowledge about the natural environment, through meetings, excursions, research and other activities.**
- **Provide information to the public on matters of Conservation, especially through the Conservation Hut at the Valley of the Waters, Wentworth Falls.**
- **Maintain close and friendly relations with like-minded groups.**

Welcome to new members

Harumi Hayakawa
Brendan Atkins
Jan Atkins
Leigh McKechnie
Saviour Buhagiar
Lydia McKechnie
Rebecca Knight
Kylie Mills
Natasha Mills
Margaret Mills

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

www.bluemountains.org.au

'Like' us on Facebook:

Blue Mountains Conservation Society

Follow us on Twitter: [bmcnsnw](https://twitter.com/bmcnsnw)

Should Penrith go back to Country? An Opinion Piece by Don Morison

The recent 48 degree daily temperature maximum in Penrith was remarkable. But it's an event we risk seeing more of.

The Penrith region and the Nepean Valley used to be a proud outpost of the Cumberland Plain woodland. For much of the time since the 1790s, it has been one of Australia's most important food bowls. Archaeological studies show that it had indigenous inhabitants tens of thousands of years ago even though parts of the upper Blue Mountains were occasional visiting places only until about 5,000 years ago.

In 2020, many aspire for Penrith to consolidate its place as a cultural and economic jewel of Greater Western Sydney. They seek to reinforce its dominance as the centre for health and administrative services to some of Australia's most populated areas including the Greater Blue Mountains.

But how does that square with it being the heat stress and air pollution capital of our nation? It is basic school physics that continuing to remove vegetation, creating ever more hard reflective services for planes and automobiles, interfering with the hydrology and doing little to suppress dust will be socially and ecologically disastrous.

Why is this happening? To begin with, nearly everyone who has been making decisions about the Penrith region resides in neither Penrith nor the Greater Blue Mountains. Potentially magnificent green spaces like Werrington Creek, John Whitton Memorial Place and Warragamba Park (just across the Nepean in Wollondilly Shire) have become havens for weeds, graffiti and rubbish dumping. Yet, in an office far, far away, the Greater Sydney Commission, dominated by identities from even further away, keep promoting this region as "the Western Sydney Parklands City".

Do residents of remote parts of the metropolis see this region simply as a place to accept the aircraft noise from frequent air travel of people from wealthier suburbs?

Is it not too late to produce a radically revamped plan to massively scale down the new airport as well as the over-engineered motorways, stop the dam raising, replant many of the dusty cleared areas, respect indigenous heritage and actually encourage food production from the region's rich soils?



Critically endangered Cumberland Plains Woodland. Photo from Greater Sydney Landcare Network website

**For information about our
PLANT STUDY GROUP and
TING (Thursday Interpretive
Nature Group) Go to our website
www.bluemountains.org.au and**

A BLUE TRAIL: Natural and cultural experiences in the western Blue Mountains

Guest author David Hay (Mr Hay is a long serving guide at Jenolan). Text copyright D Hay 2020.

BLUE TRAIL QUESTION 4 – What are the differences between Wombeyan Caves and Jenolan Caves? (Two of the planet's oldest tourist attractions are still open for business. For the foreseeable future you should check access status before travelling.)

No two cave systems are alike. They do share some characteristics, such as the type of rock, the age of primary formation and decorative elements [crystals] inside the caves. Wombeyan and Jenolan, along with Wellington, Abercrombie, Wee Jasper and Yarrangobilly are limestone. This originates from marine detritus [shells, mud and marine excretory] laid down during the Silurian and Devonian periods, 419-444 million years ago. A vast warm shallow sea covered the now east coast of Australia from Cape York in Queensland to northern Tasmania and Broken Hill. Movement of tectonic plates lifted the rock into a limestone belt or large outcrop. Water, mixed with carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and humic acids in the soil attacks the limestone, slowly dissolving the rock to form caves.

In the case of Wombeyan and Jenolan, differences begin with limestone being overlaid or attacked by other rock. Jenolan limestone was once covered with sandstone which, due to its lower resistance, was eroded away. Intrusive igneous rock from volcanic activity metamorphosed the Wombeyan limestone into coarse crystalline marble. Ross Pogson, an expert at the Australian Museum, discovered a sample of igneous rock in the Jenolan River, indicating some volcanic activity there.

Cave formation generally falls into phreatic and vadose zones. A phreatic cave is made from water moving upwards under pressure, creating vast dome shapes. A vadose cave is formed from water moving along a level plane. Figtree Cave at Wombeyan and Imperial Cave at Jenolan are examples of vadose construction, whereas Orient Cave at Jenolan is a fine example of phreatic action.

Both contain richly decorated caves but Jenolan is more developed for tourism, being closer to population centres. It had Indigenous visitation, the waters that lie in the base of the limestone belt being regarded as medicinal ["The Najung" or healing waters]. Ends of stalactites given heat treatment were prized as spear tips.

Discovered by Europeans in the 1830's, Jenolan Caves were reserved for tourism in 1866 with conservation measures in 1872. Exploration resulted in twelve show caves being accessible by the time of the 1st World War, compared to four at Wombeyan. The status and visitor numbers of Jenolan Caves increased rapidly. Lord Carrington, Governor of NSW, visited twice while in office. In 1927 the Duke and Duchess of York, later King and Queen, inspected the Chifley Cave.



Infrastructure development at Jenolan was accelerated. Glimpsing the crystal wonders by guttering candlelight was gone forever by the 1890s when Jenolan Caves were lit by hydro-power, the first electric lit caves. In 2004, a computer controlled lighting system was trialled in the vast Lucas Cave and it has been extended to all the caverns at Jenolan.

It's been suggested that Wombeyan offers a less clinical tourist experience, slightly more natural than the stainless steel rails, remote control lighting and recorded music at Jenolan. Accommodation is grander at Jenolan, with a large guest house, Jenolan Caves House, on site.

The two systems contain elements of similarity in their natural form. The differences between the Jenolan Caves and Wombeyan Caves become clearer when you visit.

This "Blue Trail" is a collective description for sites in the western Blue Mountains that arouse natural or cultural interest or both. Most are only a short walk from roads or vehicular tracks. One day, a high quality walking path may link them.

Sections of the Blue Trail featuring the western Blue Mountains can be found in past issues of Hut News: www.bluemountains.org.au/hutnews.shtml The full Blue Trail is being added at www.simplyaustralia.com.au/category/blue-trail/



Images:
(top) Figtree cave,
Wombeyan
Source:
nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

Left: Orient Cave,
Jenolan
Source:
jenolancaves.org.au

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc: BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

Membership of the bushwalking group is open to Society members. The BMCS Bushwalking Guide which explains the numbered grades can be found on the Society's website www.bluemountains.org.au or can be posted on request. For more information call Maurice Kerkham 4739 4942, mobile 04024 02783, email mauricekerkham@hotmail.com or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782. **Late changes to the program will be published on the website.**

SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace. Bring morning tea, lunch and adequate water. If you are a new walker to Saturday walks, before attending contact the designated contact person or the Group Co-ordinator Harold Thompson harold.thompson@bigpond.com 6355 1762 or mobile 0409 010 737. Check www.bluemountains.org.au for updates.

Saturday Walks driver reimbursement: *In an effort to ensure that car drivers are adequately compensated for the use of their vehicles a driver reimbursement policy applies* (Check www.bluemountains.org.au Saturday Walks page for details)

Feb 8th Mar 4 Owing to the continuing uncertainty with regards to park and track closures the Saturday Walkers will continue to meet at Wentworth Falls Carpark, 8.00am. The walk and leader are decided the previous Saturday, or on the day. Contact: Harold 0409010737 or Alice 47393086 or 0425738766 to check for more details.

Remember to keep cool and hydrated and stay safe.

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short Day walks of 3-5 hours, suitable for walkers of an average fitness. Bring morning tea and lunch and adequate water. The Group Co-ordinator is Keith Dorrian, 4736 1010, 04111 62345, keithdor53@hotmail.com

Due to the bushfire damage and track closures, there is no Monday Walks Schedule at the moment.

We will endeavour to set up a new program as soon as allowed. Please view the Bushwalking page on the Society's website, <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/bushwalking.shtml> for the future program, when it is established.

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS: Walks 2-3 hours conducted at a leisurely pace to suit walkers on the day. Bring morning tea, adequate water and lunch if noted. Group Co-ordinator is Beverley Thompson, 4757 2076, denfenella12@bigpond.com

Feb 20 Balmoral Beach. Walk along beach and swim. Meet top of escalators Central Station 9.30am.

Leader Dinia 0412 879 295. Take lunch. Grade 1.

Feb 27 Blackheath walk. Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 8.45am. Leader Tracy 0434 362 611. Carpool. Half day walk will be organised on the day. Take lunch. Probably grade 2.

Mar 5 Wentworth Falls Lake. Meet Stockyard Car Park Wentworth Falls 9.30am. Leaders Libby 4759 2969 and Tracy 0434 362 611. Take lunch. Grade 1.

Mar 12 Elphinstone Plateau. Katoomba. Great views into Megalong Valley. Meet Katoomba Station Car Park 9.30am. Leader Keith 0411 162 345. Carpool. Take lunch. Grade 2.

Society bushwalks on facebook: Visit <https://www.facebook.com/bmcslongerbushwalks/>

Snakes and lizards

An email from a visitor aroused my curiosity: *Having a lovely week's holiday in Katoomba - going for walks along that amazing escarpment track every day. Yesterday, we walked to the little lookout with a wonderful view down over the Leura cascades on the opposite rock wall. On our way, we passed the BIGGEST, FATTEST blue-tongue lizard we'd ever seen, dotted with ochre spots - quite a distinctive feature. It looked HEAVILY pregnant. Then, slithering away at speed across the path away from the lizard a juvenile snake! It was a beautiful smooth brown with what looked like a lighter belly, about two and a half feet long and only as fat as one of those tri colour ball point pens. Who was chasing whom?*

The Blue Tongue was obviously a Blotched Blue Tongue skink which is our upper blue mountains species. The snake was most likely a Copperhead.

I couldn't imagine that a skinny young snake would be able to swallow a very **BIG** and very **FAT** Blue Tongue lizard, but was unsure about the reverse. So I googled "do blue tongue lizards eat snakes" and found out that they sometimes do. An ABC Adelaide internet site addressed the **myth** that "Bluetongue lizards keep snakes away" and came up with the **fact**: "Bluetongues may eat young snakes if they are able to catch them, but snakes are also known to eat adult bluetongue lizards."

The words "HEAVILY pregnant" led to another google search. Usually lizards lay eggs, Blue Tongues give birth to live young (1-15 babies who are able to look after themselves just four days after birth, but take 3-4 years to be fully grown.)

Nature Observations in the Blue Mountains

There is always something interesting to see in the bushland of the Blue Mountains and you don't have to go far from the towns. You can carry a notebook and keep a diary of your observations and learn to understand more about the Blue Mountains natural environment. You will find that as your knowledge grows you will become eager to learn more. A highlight for me in January was the mass flowering of Coachwood trees, a rainforest species, seen from above on Reids Plateau, Katoomba Falls Reserve. Mountain Ash trees were beginning to flower.

Christine Davies

Authors Talk: **Life at the Wild Frontiers: Tales from the Wollemi and the Ghost Town of Newnes.**

Saturday 29 February, 2pm to 3.30pm.
Blue Mountains Theatre and
Community Hub, Springwood

Bushexplorers - Michael Keats OAM, Brian Fox and Yuri Bolotin - return to Blue Mountains Library for another of their hugely popular talks on our local bush, its history and secrets.

To celebrate the publication of their latest book, *Wollemi: Day Walks from Newnes Part II*, this talk will delve into the social history and daily life of Newnes c. 1900. Fascinating historic photos, restored and released for the first time, and information on their favourite walks and spots within Wollemi National Park, both before and after the bushfires.

Bookings are essential. By phone or in person to any library branch, (4780 5750 or 4723 5040), or online at Evenbrite (www.bushexplorers.com.au <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/life-at-the-wild-frontiers-tales-from-the-wollemi-and-ghost-town-of-newnes-tickets-91063925653>) This is a free event.