

50th Anniversary address by Lachlan Garland – 29th October 2011

Welcome everyone to what is truly a momentous achievement for Blue Mountains Conservation Society, 50 years in existence!

I would like to start by acknowledging the **Dharug** and **Gundungurra** people who are the Traditional Custodians of this Land on which we are standing. I would also like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

It feels quite different making that acknowledgment outside. Usually we are stuck in a stuffy building and it feels so much better doing it out here.

Standing in the open air with the beautiful vista of the Blue Mountains behind us makes that acknowledgment mean quite a lot more. I can imagine a traditional owner standing in this place looking at this same scene. They did enjoy the views the Mountains provided. Just look at some of the places where the grinding grooves are located. Kings Tableland, below Grose Head and others hidden away, but beautifully located.

It is places like this and numerous others that encouraged our original members 50 years ago to create the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society. The flora and fauna is very important, but it is when you look at a view like that beside us, you say, wow, this place is important and needs to be protected at all costs.

In 1973, the then president noted that the Conservation Hut was their joy and their taskmaster. Many jobs had to be filled to maintain the Hut as a kiosk and tea room and then on top of that there was education and never ending conservation issues.

Times have changed, the tea room has gone, demolished and replaced by the building you see beside us now. We still have many jobs to fill, some the same as those in 1973. We still grow plants but in purpose built nurseries, education is still needed for the increasing Mountains population and the campaigns continue. They may be new issues, but some are big and ugly. We succeed; we fail but push on regardless. One thing they didn't have in 1961 and in 1973 was email and they should be extremely thankful for that!

Those who started BMCS 50 years ago and followed on worked hard to change attitudes towards the environment at a time when it wasn't fashionable to do so. To them, we owe a huge debt of gratitude. There were many of them who served the Society in too many ways to name them individually.

One man, who stood out as being significant in the starting of the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society, was John Buki. This garden opposite was named in his honour. John was a Hungarian professor, who arrived in Australia in the 1950's. He initially worked as a railway ganger in Broken Hill, and then he was appointed as a teacher at Katoomba Public School. He and his wife, Elizabeth, lived in a small cottage just above where the Hut car park is located now. It was John's enthusiasm for the flora and fauna of his adopted country, and his charm and happy personality, which was largely responsible for the formation of the original Society.

We gather here today to honour John Buki and all those other pioneer conservationists, who have provided us with the solid foundation we have to continue the work of protecting this special place, the Greater Blue Mountains.

I will now ask Mick and Jill Dark, pioneers in their own right, to join me, to plant a shrub, grown in our own nursery, in the John Buki Garden.