

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"

HOW MANY HOUSES DOES IT TAKE TO KILL A HANGING SWAMP?

This time last year Council allowed 600 square metres of hanging swamp to be cleared on a block adjacent to the Minna Ha Ha Falls Reserve in North Katoomba; because it failed to enforce its own consent conditions.

At the December meeting of Council 2001, Council APPROVED over 130 square metres of hanging swamp to be cleared in First Avenue, North Katoomba.

It approved a very large house to be built on part of the hanging swamp and the clearing of a further 3m beyond the house into the swamp. A modest house could be built on this site and the swamp protected, if great care is taken.

Hanging Swamps are recognised in the Local Environment Plan LEP 91 as an 'environmentally sensitive vegetation unit'. The LEP says that Council should not approve a development unless it can be sure that the development has "no significant adverse environmental impact on ... any environmentally sensitive vegetation unit"

No flora and fauna studies and no hydrological studies were done. (Council's environmental scientist did a one-paragraph report!) This hanging swamp is potential habitat of the Blue Mountain Water Skink. Council has an obligation to assess and protect these threatened Skinks under state legislation.

Blue Mountains hanging swamps are

special. They are only found in the Blue Mountains. They cover only 0.003% of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area, but they are so important. They keep our waterfalls flowing and our water clean, by acting as soaks and filters. They are vital for a wide range of plants and animals.

Only some of our hanging swamps are protected by being in the National Park; those swamps on privately owned land need to be protected too. We have to take an interest in what is happening to them because they are being destroyed bit by bit.

Many swamps have been destroyed in the past because their significance was not understood. Now we know and we have to act decisively to prevent further unnecessary destruction. Council needs encouragement to protect our hanging swamps.

PLEASE WRITE EXPRESSING YOUR CONCERN before the next Council meeting on 29 January 2002 to both the Blue Mountains Gazette and also your Ward Councillors (c/o Blue Mountains City Council, PO Box 189, Katoomba 2780). The only councillors who voted to protect the swamp were Kozelj and Henson. Those who voted for the house in the swamp were Angel, Hamilton, Van der Kley, Kime, Myles, Greenhill, and Egan. The other three were absent.

For further information contact Lyndal Sullivan 4782 1635.

Book" written by Joan Webster, published by Random House in 2000 is worth reading.

This excellent book has chapters covering choosing a safe site to live on, building design to reduce the impact of fire attack, and planting for bushfire protection. It also discusses preparation for the bushfire season and what to do when fire threatens.

It was donated to Katoomba Library by the Society and is also available in local bookshops.

Information is also available from the Rural Fire Service about how to prepare your home in the event of a bushfire. This information covers issues from planning your protection strategy, the layout and design of your yard (including

vegetation selection for your yard) and protective clothing that should be worn in the event of a fire. The Rural Fire Service is located at Emergency Services Centre, Cnr Great Western Highway & Valley Road, Katoomba. Phone (02) 4782 2159.

VMO on Display Soon

The draft Vegetation Management Order is now expected to be on public display around mid January. Watch the Council page in the Gazette. It is important we express our support for stronger protection for native shrubs and groundlayers as well as trees. We need lots of people to check there aren't any loopholes. We need to demonstrate that we are a community that accepts its responsibility to care for our land. Contact 4754 1055 or 4782 1635.

Help Needed:

Publicity and Web Site Development

Do you have any web development skills and/or writing skills? or would you like to get some? The Society needs to find members for a sub-committee on communications for 2002. Just 2-3 hours of your time each month would be a great help. This committee would be

W h a t i s "Streamwatch"?

The aquatic life found in a stream can tell us about the health of the stream. Geoffrey Smith, environmental scientist with Blue Mountains City Council will speak at our January general meeting about Streamwatch and how the community can get involved in improving the health of the waterways in the Blue Mountains.

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

Public Land:

For Development or National Park?

Public land in the Blue Mountains is coming into the spotlight.

Blue Mountains Council and the State Government have been looking into the management of public land in the mountains for several years and want to decide what should remain public and who should manage it. This project is known as the Public Lands Rationalisation Project. It has involved developing a framework to assess proposals for transfers of land from DLWC (Crown lands), Council and the

NSW Dept of Planning to national parks.

The recommendations for public land transfers to Blue Mountains National Park are due to go on public exhibition in February and March 2002.

Members and interested conservationists from other groups are invited to attend a workshop to be briefed on the project and its recommendations by representatives of the NPWS, DLWC and BMCC. This briefing session is your opportunity to become more informed about the project as the public exhibition commences. The workshop will be held on Wednesday, 13th February 2002 at 7.30pm at Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson.

Bushfire Safety

The bushfire season is with us again and it is time to make our homes fire safe.

Post-fire analysis by researchers has indicated that homes that survive wildfire are generally better designed to withstand fire attack and better maintained than those that do not survive. Prescribed (or fuel reduction) burning of the surrounding bushland will not necessarily give full protection from a wildfire.

"The Complete Bushfire Safety

"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Inc.

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accommodation from independent houses to a nursing home, with professional rooms and recreational facilities.

The 404 hectare property is a national park "inholding" being bound on all sides by the Blue Mountains National Park. The future of this site has been of great interest to the Society for some time.

Members of the Land Use Subcommittee have made a number of visits to the site to assess the proposed development. We met with developers to get a better understanding of the size and extent of development and to raise our concerns. Our main concerns are:

1. The size of the proposed Development Area. Existing buildings and infrastructure cover an estimated 7 ha which already significantly exceeds the maximum site cover allowed in the LEP. The proposal is to increase this to 16 ha. Most of this site is highly constrained and zoned Environmental Protection.

2. The development area contains the threatened *Persoonia acerosa*. It also includes some of the buffer to two hanging swamps and a significant heath community. One swamp is known habitat for the threatened Blue Mountain Water Skink.

3. Unacceptable levels of bushland will be cleared to allow for the proposed development (due to the size and nature), including continual slashing for fire protection zones. This slashing is in very close proximity to the *Persoonia acerosa* which will prevent regeneration of this already threatened species.

A detailed submission has combined the efforts of many members who identified a range of other concerns from the location of sediment basins to the planting of environmental weeds.

For further information contact Claire Wilson 4759.1319.

A Trout Farm for Leura

organisations working in greater Sydney must cope with a growing challenge to keep their supporters actively involved and cope with debates about organisational identity and direction. In this atmosphere, it is probably best to be 'a broad church', valuing rather than questioning diverse contributions from each other.

Centres of Reflection

One sector enjoying rising popularity in the Blue Mountains is Meditation Retreat Centres. From the mid mountains to Blackheath, a number have undertaken building and expansion projects recently.

While isolation from the outside world has a role in some of the meditation programs, Brahma Kumari Meditation Centre has taken an opposite approach, inviting members of the Blue Mountains community (and even politicians) to a series of conferences at their Leura site.

At their 'Think Clean, Think Green' forum in December, Ian Cohen, Greens Upper House MP, gave an amusing account of how, by his late forties, he

Three years ago there was a proposal to develop a Trout Farm out along the Mt Hay Road just before the National Park starts. Council refused the development on environmental grounds and others. However the Land and Environment Court overturned that decision. One wonders how much bearing the commissioner's belief that this was in the Megalong Valley had on the case!

The development approval is due to lapse without any substantial work having commenced. The applicant has therefore submitted another development application which has been on public exhibition. It appears that the applicant's consultant is still of the belief that the Mount Hay Range is in the Megalong Valley, and is using the LEP objectives for Megalong to justify the suitability of the development.

The site has some spectacular hanging swamps and heaths. It also has a number of *Persoonia acerosa* and *Pultenaea glabra* which will be removed because of the clearing needed for the development.

In a nutshell, our main concerns are the amount of clearing of environmentally sensitive vegetation communities, the discharge of runoff into hanging swamps, the impact on threatened species, and the impact on Govett's Creek and the World Heritage Area.

For further information contact Andrew Moody 4784.1572

Environmental Law Workshops

Seven Society members attended the green campaigners workshops run by the Environmental Defenders Office on the 27 October and 3 November 2001. It was a very interesting and informative two days, helping us to understand some of the ins and outs of environmental law.

EDO solicitors are available by phone (first point of contact) to give free advice. Phone 02 9262 6998. See also

Queen Victoria Development

There is a proposal to redevelop the site of the old Queen Victoria hospital at the end of Tablelands Rd, Wentworth Falls. This development has been on public exhibition and is to be soon assessed by Council. The proposal is for an aged care facility providing a range of



Valuing Each Other's Contributions

Last issue Greg Borschmann wrote about the traditional role of conservationists. He mentioned that Jim Smith's very worthwhile calendar project had attracted only a few contributors. Considering the total BMCS membership, the numbers engaged in political lobbying and even bushwalking are not huge. However, the Blue Mountains does have an expanding role as a dormitory suburb for a city offering the world's most dazzling array of lifestyle and vocational choices. All voluntary

had excluded himself from all possible career paths other than being an environmentalist politician. Local contributors included Franklin Scarf, Chris McDonald and Glenys Livingstone.

Glenys shared some of her doctoral research in Social Ecology, focussing on seasonally oriented Celtic celebration days, which she has adapted to the Southern Hemisphere cycle, allowing participants a sense of communion with the environmental changes in our year. This is a timely message for a society whose only major festival is a Northern Hemisphere winter celebration come consumerist orgy, transplanted into the Eastern Australian bushfire and storm season.

North Shore Misbehaviour

Northern Sydney's bush regeneration credentials have been blighted by a Kuring-gai Council sign, filmed in a huge patch of lantana, that plays the title role in a current release movie. The human actors do almost everything in or near this lantana except to weed it. Will the Council get rid of this

Our Home & the Environment

Water Use and Recycling

We live in Wentworth Falls and hence our drinking water comes from the Cascade Dams at Katoomba. Six dams supply the Upper Mountains to Faulconbridge. These dams collect water from local catchments as well as water pumped some distance from the Fish River. Lake Burratorang supplies the lower mountains. Lake Burratorang also supplies Sydney without really being in the catchment of the Sydney Metropolitan area. The majority of water that falls on Sydney 'waters' the fish in Sydney Harbour and the Pacific Ocean. Consequently vast amounts of energy and resources are used to produce and maintain the infrastructure that distributes the water from Lake Burratorang to households in Sydney.

Some years ago there was talk of raising the height of Warragamba Dam to increase storage to meet demands. The dam is surrounded by a natural area, which would consequently have been partially submerged, a significant environmental issue. One wonders how much ownership of water usage

there is in Sydney because of the distance between the supplier and the user — "out of sight out of mind".

Apart from the issue of the amount of infrastructure needed to transport water, one has to question the efficiency of storing water in dams because of the substantial loss of water through evaporation.

While we are relatively close to our water supply at Cascade, like Burratorang there is a good deal of infrastructure to pump it from the Fish River. Our concerns with these issues made us feel we should stick to our principles and supply our own water as much as possible. So it was important that we collect water from our site and use it efficiently and recycle it wherever possible.

Water is used for human consumption, flushing the toilet (black water), washing in the bathroom, kitchen and laundry (grey water) and watering the garden. We decided to look at each of these areas and try and design the most efficient means of managing them. Here we will talk about water collection and follow that up next time with reducing consumption and recycling.

Collection: The essence of our collection strategy was to work out

how much water we would need over a year, how much rain on average falls and put in big enough storage tanks to hold the volume to meet our demand. We have disconnected the house from the



town supply but have kept one outside water line in case of emergencies (fire or drought). We decided to use two 10,000 litre tanks (one hidden the other exposed) — we wanted to maximise holding capacity without having the garden dominated by huge tanks.

Rainwater collects all sorts of nasties in its travels on the roof, gutter and piping to the tap. Rather than add the chemicals that Sydney Water uses we have used alternative cleaning methods. We have used 150 mm half round gutters, for ease of cleaning, and a leaf catching net over the downpipe. This seems to be an easier way of catching leaves than a leaf guard over the whole gutter, which may easily clog up.

A first flush system has been put on the downpipe to collect the roof sediments, such as lead and carbon,

Nature Conservation Council Annual Conference 2000/2001

When I joined the Society I remarked to Ross Coster that I didn't think that the NCC was getting its message to "the person in the street" and as one of those, I objected to its lack of visibility. He said that its role was less as a public media instrument and more as a behind the scenes lobby group with government and the bureaucracy. It was clear I didn't have the understanding of NCC I should have, and resolved to fix that for myself.

The NCC or Nature Conservation Council of NSW has been the umbrella organisation for more than 130 groups of conservation minded citizens around NSW for over 30 years and there are similar organisations in all states. Its annual conference was imminent in October and I went to it as an observer for two of the three days. The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a member of the NCC and entitled to submit motions to the Conference. The business papers included our motion regarding improving the effectiveness of SEPP 1, a subject dear to those dealing with the daily issues of change.

On the first day, the twenty plus Project Officers and Operations staff, led by CEO Kathie Ridge, gave their presentations of activities, issues and forward plans. Seeing these young people in action, with their vibrancy, enthusiasm and dedication, was very encouraging and says a lot for the future success of the NCC towards achieving conservation aims on our behalf. Only the NCC works on the full spectrum of environmental issues and plays a central coordinating role within the NSW

environmental movement. Many environmental issues are decided at the State level, so NCC's work is crucial to the future of the NSW environment.

Of those who presented I would highlight only three in our limited space. CEO Kathy Ridge gave the overview of achievements, including the first Regional Group Meetings, Parliamentary successes, new-look newsletter, Developing stakeholder relationships in 2001/2002, Integration of Natural Resource Management in NCC, and a mention of the major areas of achievement and targets in Native Vegetation, Bushfire Management, Sydney Catchment Authority Audit and many other areas.

The NCC has a resident lobbyist in Parliament House, Rachel Walmsley, attending briefings and meetings with environmental outcomes. The job entails lobbying of members of all parties and both Houses to review legislation and achieve amendments for the improvement of the NSW environment. The adoption of Sustainable Agriculture principles and the Nature Conservation Trust Bill were recent issues. Rachel gave an entertaining rundown on her ten point plan for Legislation, which is worth a more general hearing among members.

A recently appointed staff member Adam Young is the Communication Officer. His comments are memorable on the subject of "getting the Conservation message across". With such a glut of information to present, it's how we say it, not what we say. His procedure is to poll voters then package results to make a news story, helping to show the Government the public opinion, which is what drives action in the NSW

Government. Give the media what they want—NEWS! The whole story in the first thirty words. Maybe there's a plan for us.

I wish I could give you more about this fascinating visit I made to the NCC Annual Conference. You might have concluded by now that I am converted to doing more to promote the activities of the NCC and why not a bit of feedback from us to encourage them.

NCC is a non-government organisation, and relies on support from interested people to run their projects and support member organisations such as BMCS.

If you would like to know more about the activities of the NCC, I will be able to provide you with the NCC magazine, "environment NSW" on request to 4759.1692. Their web site address is www.nccnsw.org.au to give you more about their current activities.

Best wishes, Bill Graham.

Nursery News

The Society's volunteers at our Blackheath and Lawson nurseries are working hard to complete the RTA contract of 25,000 plants for Soldiers Pinch. We are well on track for success!

Our first price rise in 10 years occurs at midnight on 31 December 2001. In the New Year, tubestock will be \$3 each, or four for \$10. Supertubes (70mm square) will be \$5 each.

David Coleby, Nursery Manager
Phone and Fax: 4784.1395

Membership Enquiries
Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud
Phone/Fax: 4759.2508 (a.h.)
Email: ereyswoud@hermes.net.au
Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

THE MUSHROOM TUNNEL

Glenbrook, Blue Mountains

The highway roars itself senseless.

Beneath, gloved in circular brick we find the old railway tunnel which worms an S shape through the hill

like a grub through an apple.

When engines dragged the

tourists up

from filthy Sydney, with fire and smoke

they pushed them through this dark hole,

sometimes half way through wheels slipping on slick wet track

fire-box roaring, engine straining,

the driver would conk out for lack of air.

Across the tunnel's mouth

an arched door with a fan flushing millions of spores at the day -

a corrugated iron cervix for a sandstone womb cultivating fungi.

It draws me in — the door clangs shut.

Inside it's damp and faintly mauve,

fluoro lights illuminate the curve which glooms around a corner,

wet light dribbles along the floor,

the smell of libraries rotting away.

Wedge-Tailed Eagle

On the Sunday before Christmas, I rose at dawn and took a cup of tea into the garden to watch the birds. The resident magpies were in the garden. In the trees were currawongs, crimson rosellas, king parrots, red wattle birds, bower birds, a grey thrush. Nearby I heard the cackle of kookaburras, and the screams of yellow-tailed black cockatoos.

At 11 o'clock we were attracted by the sound of a magpie and the calls of other birds all at once. A wedge-tailed eagle soared across the garden, just above tree-top height. The magpie's mate pursued the eagle, attacking from behind.

The eagle circled a few times, the circles large enough to take him out of the magpie's territory. The magpie returned to the garden, satisfied that he had chased the eagle away. Then higher and higher, and like a surfer catching a wave, the eagle caught an air current and

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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

Jan 25 (Fri) General Meeting at The Hut, 7.30 pm. (See page 1)

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

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

Jan 11 (Fri) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (2nd Friday of every month) Contact Karen on 4757.1929 for the meeting place. (following Friday if wet).

BUSHWALKS:

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

Jan 14 Ingar Picnic Ground, Explore Mt Bedford. Meet at corner of Tablelands Rd at Ingar sign 9 am. Swim and picnic. ☎ Bill G. 4759.1692.

Jan 21 Grand Canyon. Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 9 am. ☎ Bill 4759.1692. Medium. Lunch at Gardner's Inn.

Jan 28 Leura Cascades to Katoomba Falls. Meet Leura carpark, cnr GWH 9am. ☎ Kees 4759.1958. Easy, BBQ after.

Feb 02 McMahon's Point, car pool. Meet Wentworth Falls Station 9 am. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Easy, BBQ after at carpark.

Feb 11 Fernree Gully. Meet Katoomba Station GWH side 9 am. ☎ Bill 4759.1692. Rylestone Hotel for lunch.

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.

Jan 19 (Sat) Fortress Ridge. Meet Cnr Mt Hay Road & GW Hwy 9.30.

☎ June 4787.7312. Easy. Bring lunch. Cancelled if fire risk.

If you would like to lead a walk in February, please contact Bill 4759.1692.

Walks are generally Easy to Medium Grade, unless otherwise noted. Easy: Mostly good surfaces, but some rough or steep sections. Suited to people of average fitness.

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

disappeared behind the trees, back to the Grose Valley. *Christine Davies.*

Christmas Day 2001

Christmas Day dawned as a wild bushfire day. But thoughts of Jamison Valley with waterfalls to swim in, creeks to paddle in and the deep cool of rainforest shadows beckoned me and so, I set out to walk Overcliff — Undercliff Walk and Wentworth Pass.

The howling wind was a strong deterrent, and I quickly realized the bush was dry, everything a dull green and the chocolate brown butterflies were missing from the Sword grass. There wasn't a bird to be heard or seen.

Den Fenella provided welcome relief from the wind and the dry silence of the bush. A family of white browed scrub wrens, two pilot birds and some brown butterflies were busily on the move.

Undercliff Walk had some delightful patches of white flowers on the cliff face. A small orchid with four delicate green flowers was growing from a tiny crack in the rock. Glorious red and yellow flowers of Christmas Bells were a joy to see.

Close to the Falls, the wind roared in gusts up over the falls and cliffs. The smoke billowed up behind King's Tableland as I felt a hot and fierce Australian summer day and some Dutch tourists asked me, "Is this a normal summer day"?

At Wentworth Falls, the westerly wind was lifting the water up and dropping it as

rain back on the rocks and rainforest. So, at the upper steep drop there was not any water falling — it was all being swept back up again to froth and seek to fall again. It was quite an extraordinary sight.

Lunch at Weeping Rock out of the wind was most appealing. There was cool water for feet and a Water dragon for company. The water dragon kept moving closer, how friendly I thought and admired its red chest. Suddenly the dragon darted and grabbed my toe! I laughed with surprise and it fled back onto its rock.

Heading for home to get a stubbie from the fridge I was well satisfied with all the happenings along the shorter walk. *Meredith.*

Interpretive Bushwalks

Our next series of Thursday morning bushwalks will start on 14 February. There will be eight walks of 3 to 4 hours duration, at a leisurely pace, with special guests on some. Cost for the series is \$20. Contact Christine 4787.7246. As usual, for the first walk we will meet at Blackheath commuter carpark at 9.30am.

Welcome to New Members

Peter Ferry, Wentworth Falls
Rebecca Voom, Katoomba
Vivienne Carking, Winmalee