

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"

BM Adventure Tourism

At our meeting on Friday 22 February guest speakers will be commercial adventure operators Colin Skinner (abseiling, canyoning, climbing), Ted Taylor (four-wheel driving), and Tim Tranter (eco-friendly commercial bushwalking).

Colin, Ted and Tim will discuss their concerns for the environment and the methods by which they self-regulate to conduct their activities in an eco-friendly manner.

The meeting at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls, starts at 7.30pm. Visitors are very welcome.

Public Land

For Development or National Park?

Rationalization of public land sounds a bit worrying – we all know what happens when governments start rationalization programmes.

The Society is hosting a workshop to discuss Council's intention to rationalize land under its current management.

Speakers from BM City Council, NPWS and Dept Land & Water Conservation will inform us about local and state Government plans.

If there is public land in your street or neighbourhood or a bushcare site that you would like to see remain as public land under Council or NPWS care then please come along.

The workshop is open to members, bushcare workers and other conservationists.

When: Wednesday, 13 February, 7.30 pm, at Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson

VMO on Display

As outlined in the last Hut News the Draft Vegetation Management Order (VMO) is to replace the tree preservation order and is designed to take tree and vegetation protection to a higher level, provided potential loopholes are adequately addressed.

The VMO is now on public exhibition until February 15. We must make sure that council gets the message that it is vital for our community and environment that native vegetation be protected, particularly at this time when post fire fears may see people making rash decisions about clearing and management of the bush by fire. We must embrace the opportunity to help make this document as tight as possible to secure the protection and preservation of our native environment.

TAKE A ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIETY

Our Annual General Meeting is on Good Friday, 29 March 2002, not very far away. At the meeting members will elect a new Management Committee for the year to 30 March 2003.

Serving on the Management Committee can be immensely rewarding. No prior experience is needed, just a commitment to serve the environment, and a determination to "make a difference".

Our Society is probably the largest regional environmental group in the State, possibly the largest in the country. It enjoys respect from the community and from the agencies with which it deals. We have over 850 members. Last year, we celebrated 40 years of unbroken service to the Blue Mountains environment.

There is an insert in this issue of Hut News with details of all Management Committee positions. You can obtain more information from members of this year's committee (see the panel on page 2), or you can come along as an observer to one or both of the remaining committee meetings (on 16 February and 23 March at 9 a.m. at Mid-Mountains Community Centre, Lawson).

The committee tries to spend minimal time on administrative matters. Meeting agendas are structured so that highest priority is given to conservation issues. The Society is in a strong financial position, so the committee does not have to be involved in fund-raising. Your time on the committee will be very focussed on helping the environment.

Please give consideration to nominating for a position. Whilst our constitution allows for nominations to be received on the night of the AGM, we really need to be organised beforehand to ensure that there will be at least one nomination for each position. To be nominated, all you need to do is leave a message on the office phone for our secretary, or contact any member of the

Areas of concern are:

- There is no apparent strategy for education and there is a lack of prosecution measures for those who do not comply with the VMO. These issues need to be addressed to ensure the utmost effectiveness of the order.
- The clearing of 250 sq metres of bushland in addition to the areas cleared for a dwelling seems excessive to be permitted without an approval being sought.
- The retention of vulnerable or endangered ecological communities is not an aim of this VMO unless they already have an intact structure and complete floristics. Communities such as shale sandstone transition forests are so threatened that there are usually only degraded remnants; this VMO should support the retention and rehabilitation of

4759.3572

Street Stalls

Are you interested in helping out on street stalls for the Society? It would be great to have a team of 3 or 4 people who would like to look after a regular monthly stall at the Ivy markets in Springwood.

The task would involve promoting the Society's bushwalking programme, providing information about nature and conservation issues and most importantly inviting interested people to join the Society. It would be easiest if lower mountains members could do this.

If any members are interested in helping on stalls at any location please ring Meredith after 5pm, 4782 4823.

Publicity Officer Needs Help

The Society needs members for a

vulnerable and endangered ecological communities although their structures and floristics may be incomplete.

• Not enough protection or consideration is given to "likely habitat" for birds or other animals. There is no consideration of vegetation which may have for example special value as a food source or perching site.

• Buffers to sensitive vegetation do not appear to have any special protections. Native buffers to Endangered Ecological Communities (Sch. 3, Threatened Species Conservation Act) should be included in the aims.

You can collect a copy of this draft VMO at Council Offices or at a library. Please take the time to have a read of this most important document and to jot down even just a few concerns or suggestions and get them into Council by 15 February.

For further information and/or a copy of a form letter, contact Claire 4759.1319 or David

"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
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Feral Wasps

Are European wasps in your flowering shrubs this summer?

European wasps evidently like the nectar of our native shrubs. They have been seen swarming in flowering *Eucalyptus stricta* and *Banksia spinulosa*. Honeyeaters hovered overhead and flew away, missing out on a nectar meal. Is this a new threat to our native wildlife?

The wasps are a declared agricultural pest as they destroy fruit crops. In recent years they have moved into the mountains and seem to be spreading.

If wasps are in your backyard get rid of them! The best way is to find the nest and destroy them in the nest. Ring the Dept of Agriculture on freecall 1800 675821 for free detailed information.

Willows a Threat to Swamps

The recent 'Mount Hall Fire', covering some 20 X 30 km ~ immediately south of the Great Western Highway between Wentworth Falls and Blaxland, creates the conditions for the near certain, irretrievable escape of Wild Pussy Willow (*Salix cinerea*) into inaccessible parts of the Blue Mountains. In a few decades this would profoundly change the riparian habitats and the moister areas of the Blue Mountains National Park ... unless at least 95% of the present potential seed supply (i.e.

Our Home & the Environment

Black Water - Grey Water

What goes into the town sewerage system isn't very nice (for the environment). Lots of money has and will be spent on the upgrade of the Blue Mountains sewerage system, but no matter how good it progressively gets there is always going to be some overflow from treatment plants and pumping stations into the natural environment. This is either when there are breakdowns or during 10 year flood episodes. The terracotta pipe infrastructure of the town supply has seen its day. These old pipes are however being lined with pvc pipes (in a previous article we have already discussed the demerits of this substance).

We (or at least Jessica) like fiddling about with compost, so we decided to try and treat all our sewerage on site. This is an ambitious proposal since we live within the catchment of Lake Burragarang (Sydney's drinking supply). The Blue Mountains is also a fragile environment with swamps, creeks and bush near to our urban development. We need all sorts of approvals from the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA), Council and Sydney Water. While legally we need the approvals we figured that ethically, whether we needed them or not, we don't want to be treating our wastes and having them leave our site through either surface runoff or seepage into ground water, so we are happy to try and design a very rigorous system.

Black-Water

In keeping with our philosophy of trying to make things simple, we decided the first thing we needed to do was separate the toilet wastes

(black-water) from all other waste water (grey-water). While using a flush system with a toilet means the solids can be transported away somewhere, it complicates the treatment process and really is a terrible waste of fresh drinking water. We are on the town sewer system but have received approval from SCA and Council to disconnect the toilet and install a dry composting toilet. We are using a Rotaloo. A dry composted material is produced every three months. It is buried 75 mm below the soil surface away from the veggie patch. It should be great for our fruit trees.

Grey-Water

Grey water recycling from the house to the garden is not, surprisingly, as easy to manage. It is difficult to treat and dispose of the large volume of grey water produced in a house. The real issue is that no one can easily say what happens to the material once it gets into the subsurface water system. Fats in kitchen water and fats, salts, phosphates and nitrates from soap and detergents (even green ones) are the problem. Watering the garden with untreated laundry waste produces a similar problem. The outcome is usually a plume of weeds somewhere down stream or a patch of dead or damaged native plants. The aim is to prevent detergents, fats, nutrients, etc from leaving the property.

We are presently using consultants to help us design a system to treat our grey-water. We hope to clean the water through a series of garden beds within a



plants >1m tall) in the Blue Mountains is eliminated before Oct 2002.

Salix cinerea, the Wild Pussy Willow, is (with *S. nigra*, the Black Willow) one of the two most invasive willows in Australia. Although it is already beyond control in much of New Zealand and Victoria, it still can and should be totally eradicated elsewhere in Australia.

In New Zealand, 'S. cinerea has invaded most swamp areas throughout the country'. In one wetland, *S. cinerea* is reported to have increased from a few bushes in the 1940s to 1243 ha some 50 years later, and these reporters say that *S. cinerea* will dominate wherever there is shallow permanent or near-permanent water.

In Australia, *S. cinerea* has so far spread predominantly in the lowland and mountain streams of eastern Victoria, where it 'occurs along streams or in seasonal or permanent swamps and bogs, from sea-level to above the tree line; invasive of both disturbed and

undisturbed situations', especially 'in wetter parts of the Eastern Highlands and the Gippsland Plains'. My assessment, from botanical reports and a survey of the Owens Valley, is that *S. cinerea* in Victoria now infests at least 2000 km of streams.

Eradication from the Blue Mountains now requires an urgent, dedicated, directed and comprehensive effort involving a wide range of parties (e.g. NPWS, DLWC, RTA, Blue Mountains City Council, NSW Agriculture, Landcare, landholders). Only total eradication is worthwhile, because the seed is carried by wind for tens of kilometres.

For more information, look for *Salix cinerea* and for all willows at www.ffp.-csiro.au/publicat/articles/willows.

Membership Enquiries

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OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

As the astute writer of one recent letter to a newspaper said, two of life's certainties are Australian bushfires and the avalanche of uninformed comment that always follows them. Greenies are to blame! NPWS is to blame! There are victims, heroes and villains. Simplistic slogans are rife: "People are more important than trees." "No fuel, no fire." One-dimensional solutions are promoted. Public opinion is manipulated and exploited. The mass media are ignorant and compliant. It happened in 1994, it happened in 1997 and it's happening again.

Sadly, it is not only the nature-haters who get the science and logic wrong — so do many conservationists. If we are to have a positive impact on bushfire policy we need to be armed with knowledge. This humble contribution, based on 20 years firefighting with NPWS (so I may be biased), explores some of the myths that seem to have been adopted as conventional wisdom in recent weeks.

'Bushfire is simple to manage if only the ignorant bureaucrats would listen.' This position reached its zenith when farmers in the Central West, grieving after the Goobang fire, claimed that the NPWS (whose officers have spent collective centuries observing and studying fire in the bush) did not know how to manage fire in natural systems as well as they did.

In fact, the complexity of fire as a factor in Australia's ecology can be compared with the weather, with which it is linked. Every Australian environment and ecosystem, indeed every species, has a different reaction to fire. Sydney sandstone is a special case because of its ecology, landscape and climate. The fire ecology of the wet-dry tropics is about as relevant as it is to Tasmania's highlands. Scientists have a good understanding of fire behaviour and a limited knowledge of fire ecology. Although traditional knowledge is a valuable source of information, there is no substitute for hard science. Over-simplification is fraught with danger.

'Fire destroys the bush./The bush needs fire.' Both myths are a little bit true and equally wrong. Fire may destroy human structures, but it only changes the bush. Fires are not universally destructive but vary in intensity across the landscape. A single fire, whether of high or low intensity, is not as important as the pattern of fire over a long period. Species respond in different ways — some are diminished while others flourish under any long-term fire pattern. Some ecosystems such as alpine and rainforest will not survive fire, whereas heath thrives on it. Frequent "cool" burns may be more damaging to local biodiversity than the occasional "firestorm". Fauna populations which are now isolated in small national parks (eg. Royal) away from other populations are particularly vulnerable. For ecological management, the ideal fire pattern depends on what you are trying to protect. Fire control (by indiscriminate use of backburns and

bulldozers) is often more damaging to the bush than the fire itself. As usual, the complete story is one of complexity.

'The Aborigines burnt off regularly to stop big fires.' Although the evidence is quite strong for this in some parts of Australia, the scientific jury is still out on the Sydney area. The alternative theory is that the less productive and steeper sandstone country was only thinly populated and not burnt in this way. If it had been, much of the vegetation we see today would be different.

'National parks are a fire threat.' This is just as logical as the claims that national parks are dangerous reservoirs of weeds and feral animals. Not to mention wolves, dragons and barbarians. The impact of a wildfire on property depends on what happens in the last few hundred metres, at the back fence and at the back door, not where it came from or how long it has been burning. Most property loss in the recent fires did not occur on national park boundaries. Any bushland adjoining property is a potential threat if the properties are not effectively managed for fire protection. Since July last year, 93 wildfires have burnt into NSW national parks and 50 have escaped from them.

'More hazard reduction burning is the answer.' Dear oh dear, where do I start? Whilst much of the Sydney sandstone country could probably cope with, and even benefit from, more planned fires, and whilst off-season burning is one tool for managing bushfires, it can never replace property preparation and protection. Some reasons.

Planned burns are very difficult to get right. They require major resources and finesse in execution. They can only be carried out in a narrow window between fuels being too dry to burn safely and too wet to burn at all. There are on average only six such days per year in the upper Blue Mountains. Many dry and wet environments, such as the wet sclerophyll forest of Tasmania (and many Blue Mountains valleys), will only burn under summer wildfire conditions.

Hazard reduction does not equal hazard elimination, and does not stop fire. A poor hazard reduction burn may promote leaf fall and fuel buildup, rather than fuel reduction. Repeated burning can encourage more fire-prone vegetation, such as a grassy understorey, as well as weed incursion and erosion. The benefit from a good hazard reduction in reducing wildfire intensity can last from a couple of years to no time at all in severe fire conditions of drought, low humidity and high winds, when severe wildfires can burn straight through recent burns. No-one can predict where wildfires will start or force them to aim for recent hazard reductions.

Hazard reduction is nearly as risky as wildfire. In Springwood in 1998, a bushfire emergency was declared in response to a hazard reduction lit in dubious conditions which became uncontrollable and threatened houses. In the winter of 2000, four firefighters were killed and three seriously maimed when a routine burn went awry in Kuring-gai

Chase National Park.

Burning on a scale and frequency to protect all, or even most, property on the bushland fringe would be impractical, dangerous and ecologically destructive. As long as we want the bush (and we know many people don't), fires will come out of it. As long as we persist in living in front of fires without proper buffers or preparation at the interface then we're going to get burnt. Expecting firefighters to risk their lives to save poorly prepared property and then blaming the greenies when they fail is not only outrageous but a completely ineffective approach in the long term.

'"Blow-up" wildfires threaten everything in their path.' Urban areas are reliable firebreaks, but fires do not burn right through them. Although embers may set smaller fires further in, the main front only impacts on the first, and in rare cases second or third, line of houses (eg. Jannali 1994). Although the legendary "firestorms" are capable of destroying houses quite quickly, most houses burn down long after the fire has passed because there is no-one there to put them out.

'In the face of wildfire, broadscale backburning is the best (only?) strategy.' Backburning from behind threatened properties is actually the proverbial 'blunt axe' of fire control methods. It is certain to "work" because there is no more bush to burn on the other side, but requires enormous resources. Large backburns in areas away from houses are often lit under risky conditions — against the wind in the face of an oncoming fire front. They regularly fail, "get away" and actually make things worse by extending the fire and impacting on property themselves or endangering other fire crews. There are examples of escaped backburns from the recent fires, as well as many unnecessary and poorly executed bulldozed firebreaks. There is an untold story of counter-productive, avoidable and destructive mistakes in the heat of emergency.

The fact is that under very severe conditions, there is little that can be done with head fires. Falling back to property protection and controlling the less intense fire flanks are the prudent strategies. But "blowup" conditions rarely last more than a day or two. National park authorities throughout Australia have become expert at putting out fires further into the bushland when conditions moderate and at night — using natural fire boundaries like wet creeks, aerial fire-seeding and water-bombing, targeted "remote area" fire-fighting crews and a lot of local knowledge. But these techniques tend to get overlooked in major fire events. The dominant firefighting agencies (as opposed to fire managers) are more comfortable with vehicle-based methods and unfamiliar with what can be achieved with finesse and a detailed understanding of fire behaviour in the local landscape.

— Ian Brown.

Discussion Paper on DAs

Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has released a discussion paper which explores the corruption risks in the administration of development applications by local councils.

If you have had an experience with a development application (DA), which you believe was not handled well, you should look at this. It does not need to be a matter of a bribe or a threat to be relevant. ICAC is trying to identify ways councils can administer DAs that are "resistant to corruption". That means procedures which are reliable, transparent, and effective to ensure that the decisions made are consistent, independent and objective.

Are development applications decided behind closed doors without any real opportunity for the community to be involved and monitor the process? Do Bushcare Groups get consulted about developments which may affect creeklines where they have been working? Is the community notified when rare species or communities, such as hanging swamps are to be built on?

Where a council officer has a financial interest, should an independent panel decide the DA, rather than just receive advice from a consultant of council's choice?

These are the sort of public interest matters that ICAC wants to hear about.

Copies of the Discussion paper can be obtained by ringing 1800 463909, from their website www.icac.nsw.gov.au, or a copy is at council offices.

The Land Use subcommittee is compiling a response to this discussion paper and is interested to hear the experiences of members, so please contact us on 4782 1635. Members are also encouraged to write directly to ICAC. Submissions close on 1st February, however there is a good chance that late submissions will be accepted.

Welcome to New Members

Susanne & Stuart Hedges, Katoomba
David & Patricia Anderson, Woodford
Joyce Gibson, Canley Vale

I never met Graham Alcorn, but I read his poems, when they were printed here. I was saddened to hear of his death. There will be no new poems from him, thus these lines were born:

Mist moves through the mountain maze with soft rain falling.
Jewelled leaves lay in morning's light, as birds are sweetly calling.
Morning speaks softly in silence and calls to youth.
Evening holds happiness humbly and knowledge of truth.

The poet pauses in pleasure and draws in his mind.
Words wind wisps of fog to entwine in the vines.

Long since, we silently read of the past.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- Feb 13 (Wed) Workshop "Public Land: For Development or National Park".** 7.30 pm, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson. (See page 1)
- Feb 16 (Sat) Management Meeting,** 9 am, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson.
- Feb 22 (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.)
- Feb 08 (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.*

- Feb 11 Ferntree Gully.** Meet Katoomba Station GWH side 9 am.
☎ Bill 4759.1692. Rylestone Hotel for lunch.
- Feb 18 Mount Irvine, Tessellated Pavement.** Meet Mount Victoria Station 9am.
☎ Jock 4758.6346. BBQ lunch at Mt Wilson.
- Feb 25 Historic Glenbrook, Zig Zag, Bridge.** Meet Glenbrook Station 9am.
Medium, half day. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Lunch at cafe.
- Mch 04 Woodford Dam.** Meet GWH cnr Winbourne Ave Hazelbrook 9 am.
☎ Jock 4758.6346. Easy, take lunch.
- Mch 11 Sassafras Gully.** Meet Springwood Ave cnr Homedale 9am.
☎ Bill 4759.1692. BBQ after at Springwood

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.*

- Feb 09 (Sat) Roberts Pass.** Meet Leura Rail car park 9.30 am. ☎ Jim 4784.3305. Medium, bring lunch
- Feb 16 (Sat) Mt Banks.** Meet Mt Victoria Station 9.30 am. ☎ June 4787.7312. Medium, bring lunch.
- Feb 23 (Sat) Katoomba Falls, Rainforest walk.** Meet Gearins Hotel car park 9.30 am. ☎ Jim 4784.3305. Easy, bring lunch.
- Mch 02 (Sat) Empire Pass and Dantes Glen.** Meet Lawson Bowling Club carpark 9.30 am. ☎ Bill 4758.8545. Medium, bring lunch.

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.

Mary Whiticker, Winmalee
Stephen & Juanita Stockwell, Woodford
Martin & Hazel Geliot, Faulconbridge
Mary Marks, Valley Heights
Robin Ware, Wentworth Falls
Jane Chadwick, West Pennant Hills
Ingrid Chapman, Blaxland
Yvonne Moss, Springwood
Kath Wray, Armidale
George & Jean Winston, Leura

Walk to Fortress Ridge

For our first walk of the New Year, 13 of us set off to Fortress ridge. The day was quite cool to start with but after a couple of hours it started to get very warm. The trees and native vegetation was green and fresh, no sign of any damage from bush fires. We all were hoping to see the wedge-tailed eagles which are often

seen in this area, but were unable to spot any.

Some of the group decided to have lunch under a beautiful cool ledge, while the rest of us headed down the canyon. After lots of laughs and slides we reached the creek which was deep with a sandy bottom. By this time we were quite hot so we all jumped in the water. It was cold but very refreshing.

After lunch we climbed back to meet the rest of the group. There was a water dragon one of the ladies spotted on the way back, but not many native birds to be seen. I expect they were sheltering somewhere cool.

The walk was enjoyed by everyone and we are looking forward to our next walk. *June Baxter.*

In the Garden

Two years ago Mary Shaw gave me some Everlasting Daisy plants, and they have thrived. Low, sprawling shrubs, they flower all the year with masses of bright yellow "paper daisy" flowers. The butterflies love them.

I picked a flower yesterday. On it was a little spider. Its round body was about a centimetre across, its legs not much longer, and its colour the brightest