

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"

The Corridors of Claustral Canyon

Members are invited to explore Claustral Canyon with our guest speaker Jack Wolfenden, at our general meeting on Friday 28 February.

Jack Wolfenden is a lecturer in Landscape Management and Conservation at the University of Western Sydney and interested in adventure recreation and its affect on natural ecosystems. Using the monies provided by a small university grant and support from Professor Shelley Burgin, Head of the Centre



for Integrated Catchment Management, Jack set out to explore the ecology of canyons, in particular the Claustral complex of canyons.

Claustral Main is historically one of the most popular canyoning destinations, a "classic" Blue Mountains wilderness canyon relatively close to urban Sydney. The experience includes abseiling down sheer waterfalls and swimming through stretches of bracingly cold water and bushwalking for many kilometres over difficult, steep 'gorge' country.

Jack is now writing up the results of almost three years of research, which involved studying sensitive insect populations that inhabit the streams, track erosion and the results of interviews with 250 canyoners conducted over a six-month canyoning 'season'.

"This is baseline research" states Jack, as there is little published data in the scientific literature about the ecology of adventure canyons. "Difficulties associated with hauling even small items of monitoring equipment and water samples in and out of Claustral and the time involved are good reasons for the lack of any in-depth study of canyons", he muses.

"I have been in and out of this system many times and am always struck with a sense of wonder and awe as I wander through the majestic corridors of Claustral", Jack said.

The meeting at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls, on Friday 28 February starts at 7.30 pm. Visitors are very welcome.

Autumn Plant Sale

Make a note in your diary. The Society's Nursery will hold its autumn native plant sale on Saturday 12 April 2003, 9am to 1 pm, outside the Conservation Hut at the end of Fletcher Street in Wentworth Falls.

All our plants are hardy natives, and will benefit from autumn planting. Tubes are \$3 each (or 4 for \$10); supertubes are \$5 each. Bring a box and load up!

The Blackheath nursery is open for retail sales on Tuesday mornings, 9am to 12 noon. Where? At the traffic lights on the Great Western Highway at Blackheath turn east down Govetts Leap Road, and after 2.5 km turn left at the roundabout down Lyndsay Lane. Two hundred metres further, enter the Workshop Compound of the NPWS. The BMCS Blackheath Nursery is ahead.

David Coleby, Nursery Manager, 4784.1395.

Break the Rules: Change the Rules

January Hut News carried an article about the retrospective approval given for invasive weeds planted near a hanging swamp contrary to both the submitted plan and the development conditions.

Members have expressed concern about this process. It is important to let Council officers and elected Councillors know if you do not agree with this development process. Write/email/phone your discontent to the General Manager and to Councillors Angel, Creed, Egan, Kime, Myles and Van der Kley who supported it. (Postal address is c/o BMCC, PO Box 189, Katoomba 2780.)

Consider taking an active role in the management of the Society ...

Our Annual General Meeting is on Friday 28 March 2003. At the meeting all management positions will become vacant and members will elect a new Management Committee for the year to 30 March 2004.

Would you like to take an active role in the management of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society? No experience is necessary, just a commitment to serve the environment, and a determination to "make a difference".

Serving on the Management Committee can be immensely rewarding.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is one of the oldest and largest regional environmental groups in Australia and enjoys respect from the community and from the agencies with

which it deals.

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 focused on helping the 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 panel on page 2), or you can come along as an observer to one or both of the remaining committee meetings, to be held on 22 February and 22 March at 9am at the Mid-Mountains Community Centre, Lawson.

There is plenty of work for all. This year we have had some vacancies, placing additional work on other members of the management committee. Members are also required to help in our sub-committees which play a crucial role in supporting the work of the management committee.

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.

Don't be shy! 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 present Management Committee.

"Hut News", the newsletter of
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Inc.

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Blue Mountains Public Lands Rationalisation Plan

Land transfers to National Parks? Who should look after our escarpments?

Changes to the future use and management of 6442 ha of public land in the Blue Mountains could mean better conservation or more degradation. Which is the best way to keep our precious escarpments in public ownership? Which is the agency best able to deal with the complex management issues necessary to protect those escarpments from future development or from too many absentee-ers? The community is now being asked to comment on whether certain lands should be amalgamated and which public authority should own and manage it.

Blue Mountains National Park

There is a proposal to transfer about 4000 ha of public land into the Blue Mountains National Park. This is made up of a large number of lots across the mountains and is mostly land adjacent to the existing Park boundary. This seems to be a good idea that it becomes part of the national park however there is not enough funding now to manage the existing area of Park. Whilst we urge you to support these additions to the Park, we also ask you to request that it comes with

Endangered Species Roadshow

Meet Koala, Masked Owl, Yellow-bellied Glider and Tiger Quoll at the Rainforest Information Centre's Endangered Species Project roadshow at Katoomba Civic Centre on Saturday 22 February, 6-8 pm.

The Endangered Species Project is raising awareness and sympathy for endangered species in the run-up to the NSW state elections next March.

Using Koala, Masked Owl, Yellow-bellied Glider and Tiger Quoll as examples, the Rainforest Information Centre hopes to convince NSW decision-makers to protect sufficient habitat to allow endangered forest and woodland species to avoid extinction.

It aims to present NSW Parliament with some hundreds of thousands of letters and petition signatures to convince them that they have a mandate to protect habitat on public lands and to hinder land clearing on private lands in order to prevent the extinction of yet more of Australia's unique species.

Fabulous costumes have been made by master costume-maker



Dale Woodward and Wollonbar TAFE students. The animals are visiting schools, hospitals, festivals, shopping malls etc. and star in a video "On the Brink" about their plight.

"On the Brink" is narrated by Sir David Attenborough, David Suzuki and David Bellamy and features the voice of Jack Thompson as Quoll, Olivia Newton-John as Koala.

The roadshow is travelling around NSW with the 4 costumes, screening the video "On the Brink" and includes local speakers and musicians.

Katoomba Roadshow is hosted by Blue Mountains Rare and Endangered Species Group and co-sponsored by Blue Mountains Conservation Society. It will feature local band **Didgereedoo Dingoes**.

You can help gather signatures on the Endangered Species Petition: print copies from www.rainforestinfo.org.au/spp/petition/htm



ongoing funds for management.

The Eastern Escarpment

The community is being asked to choose between three options for the management of about 460 ha of land between Mt Riverview and Lapstone. The best option being suggested is to add this area to the Yellomundee Regional Park which is managed by NPWS. But Regional Parks do not appear to have strong conservation objectives, which National Parks offer. There are other options being considered including management by Council, a trust or Dept Land and Water Conservation.

The Western Escarpment

About 1330 ha of escarpment land from Mt York to Blackheath is proposed to be managed as one single Reserve. The Society believes that a reserve under the NPWS Act is the best option because of the need for a coordinated approach to all escarpment areas suffering from impacts of rockspouts. A strategic plan is needed to select the most resilient sites for recreational activities to manage these to minimize the environmental impact over the long term. Should this be a Regional Park or a National Park?

Bushcare Group Issues

Eleven bushcare groups will be affected by the proposed transfers. In some cases only part of the bushcare site will be transferred to NPWS, and the part where all the work is needed will stay with Council. For those groups where the whole of their site is to be transferred to NPWS, there will be a need for NPWS to provide bushcare officers and other resources to support their work.

The Blue Mountains National Parks

and Wildlife Service does not have even one qualified Bush Regenerator whose sole task is to provide support and expert advice for its existing volunteers. It is long overdue that a position be funded within NPWS to coordinate volunteer efforts and to provide this expertise to its already overstretched rangers.

Members are urged to look at the proposals themselves at Council libraries or offices or on the web at www.npws.gov.au. Please let the Society know what you think by contacting Kevin Stapleton on 4784.2871 of (kevinsta@hermes.net.au) and also send in your own letter by 28 February 2003.

Clean Up Australia Day Sunday, 2 March, 2003

The Society will be organising a clean up at north Lawson, below the Lawson swimming pool near Dante's Glen. Watch the Gazette for details about this site and other sites in your area. Contact Margaret 4759.3350 or Ann 4758.6096 if you would like to help.

Welcome to New Members

Eileen Ashton, Blackheath
Michele Hockley, Katoomba
Michael and Shila Maack, Faulconbridge
Lynn Willis, Springwood
Susan Tweedy, Blackheath
Helen Gillam, Blackheath
Krista Thomas, Katoomba
Peter and Sylvia Tullock, Leura
Andy MacDonald, Springwood

Membership Enquiries

Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud

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Email: ereyswoud@hermes.net.au

Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

The Blackheath Plateau

(Extract from a Blackheath resident's submission to the Blue Mountains Public Land Rationalisation Plan)

My mission over the last two years has been to have a few simple signs erected in the bushland of the Blackheath Plateau, warning off illegal trail-bike riders and general vehicular bushbashers. In this I have singularly failed.

The reasons given for inaction from the several authorities relate to territorial fragmentation by the various jurisdictions over the area. Land and Conservation 'own' one bit, Blue Mountains City Council another, the Electricity Commission a third (and there are probably more!) - all in the relatively small area of a few square kilometers!

So it was with a combination of joy and foreboding that I read in the 15 January Blue Mountains Gazette of "a plan to simplify and improve management of the public lands of the Blue Mountains". Joy in seeing a possible end to this multi-ownership madness; foreboding at the prospect of this sensible proposal becoming mummy-wrapped in red tape.

Blackheath (or Boromoko) Plateau is a regional treasure, not only because its main entrance at Ridgewell Road is only a short seven minutes walk from Blackheath railway station, but due to it being a substantial area of bushland directly adjacent to the town—one still in unexpectedly good condition.

In my regular walks through the area's shady tracks and fire trails, I frequently see or hear kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, possums, lyre birds, and legion other avians and reptiles. As well, it abounds in native plant life, including waratahs, ground orchids, wild cherries, tree ferns, geebung, callicomas, grass trees, flannel flowers, and many banksia, grevillea and wattle species—all canopied by a rich community of eucalypts.

Most important are the many so-called 'hanging swamps', their contribution to the vitality of the area confirmed by the fact that, even in these severe drought conditions, they are maintaining a continuous trickle of sparkling water to the ferny creeks below.

Alas, currently the Blackheath Plateau, like so many similar bushland remnants, is suffering an incremental death of a thousand neglects.

THESE HILLS

These hills that we regard as everlasting,
Are but a glance at time,
Hurried and haphazard in the casting,
The gentle breeze erodes their changing lines.

And poor man—he seems them shimmer,
Himself a transient spirit touched with clay,
Sees the hills all coloured in illusion
And is reassured, day by day.

A morning flower blooms here on these hills,
And passes like a perfume borne on rain.
Man and hill and flower, though not of equal worth,
Are in their substance, very much the same.

Clive R Roebuck
"Under the Scenic Hill".

Canberra Bushfires

On the afternoon of Saturday 18 January 2003, 100 km hour winds fanned flames and sent embers flying up to 20 km ahead of the fire front. The airborne embers easily passed over hazard reduced areas and grassy buffer zones around Canberra rendering them completely useless in the campaign to save outlying suburbs. As fire experts have pointed out, it was these air borne embers, and not the fire itself, which set fire to properties in Canberra.

Like Canberrans, NSW residents were looking for answers in the aftermath of the horrific Christmas bushfires last year. How could a disaster of such magnitude occur? Could it have been prevented? And if not, what could we have done to have been better prepared for it?

Some people unfairly blamed the Rural Fire Service and National Parks for the inferno while others pointed the finger at 'greenies', suggesting that lack of hazard reduction was responsible for the destruction.

However, subsequent Inquiries found that it was not lack of hazard reduction that was responsible for the fires. Instead, the convergence of high temperatures, low humidity and ferocious winds were identified as the prime reason for the out of control fires. Lack of home owner preparedness and slack enforcement of building and development controls were areas identified where improvements could be made.

But the record breaking weather conditions experienced this time last year in NSW now look as if they may have been trumped by those experienced in the ACT and Southern NSW over the

weekend.

As a result, scientists and fire-fighters are now saying that they will need to completely reassess fire management strategies in the Australian capital.

CSIRO's Phil Cheney, one of Australia's leading fire scientists said on Tuesday that: "This has blown the concept of what is an acceptable buffer zone out of the window. The ember load and intensity of these fires was so high nothing could be done." He said that "We are now wondering whether we should put an extra level on our fire danger rating system above extreme... I don't know what that would be."

The irony of the past 12 months has been that despite being provided with some of the most convincing evidence of the limited effectiveness of hazard reduction, we continue to hear vocal individuals calling for more off-season burning and hazard reduction.

Once again, environmentalists are finding themselves reminding people that they are not opposed to hazard reduction ... but this misses the point.

Pointing the finger at any one group, whether it be environmentalists, fire fighters, the government or unprepared householders detracts from the serious process of identifying weaknesses in our bushfire management systems and then working together to find innovative and effective ways of improving them.

More often than not, scapegoating simply amounts to cheap politically motivated point scoring and shouldn't even be qualified with a response.

(Andrew Stanton, Bushfire Management Project Officer, Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales)

Environment Minister Bob Debus calls for comment on the Land Rationalisation Plan. Well, this is mine: Please help save this small but valuable Blackheath Plateau wilderness. The Gazette article speculates on the forming of a 'trust' of some kind to manage the various land parcels. I would gladly volunteer my services to such a body; especially in relation to my own neck of the woods.

My credentials are sound in this respect; not only in trying to rid the place of the motorized menace of the trail-bikes which tend to terrify or degrade much of this natural splendour, but in conducting the annual Clean Up Australia, focusing of course of the Blackheath Plateau bushland. Regretfully, being so close to urban areas, it is often exploited as a dump by the socially irresponsible and morally challenged. Again, a single authority would help vanquish this perennial problem.

I was disappointed to note that Blackheath Plateau is not included in the published Land Rationalisation propos-

als. Why not? It seems to meet all the criteria: "Adjacent to a national park" the illimitable Grose River wilderness is the area's north-east border. It should have "high conservation values in rainforest, open forest and rare and threatened species". This natural treasure has all these, the rainforest being in the creek gullies.

The plan is either to create "a large addition to Blue Mountains National Park" or "a range of reserve options for other areas". I think it best to lock the area into the former; but could alternatively see benefits in one of the reserve options. Whatever they might be?

Blackheath Plateau is enjoyed, in a non-intrusive way, by many open-air enthusiasts, local and visitors. Good fortune has ordained that it is not too late to save this priceless heritage from further, sometimes irreversible, degradation. Hence it is worth fighting for.

Support for inclusion in the Land Rationalisation Plan will go a long way in helping conserve this sacred place not only for today's Blackheathens and visitors, but for generations to come.

Alan (and Susan) Whitehead
Blackheath

Draft Native Vegetation Management Order

It's back! Watch out for the Draft Native Vegetation Management Order which should be on exhibition soon. The original VMO has now been revised to cover native vegetation only.

Cox's Catchment Capers

Multi-day activity, 8-12 April 2003
Limited Accommodation Available

This year's multi-day activity will include a three night stay on Shipley Plateau at Kanimbla View Cabins, a night walk on Tuesday night, short walks on Wednesday and Thursday, and an overnight walk Fri/Sat to Green Gully, Black Dog Ridge, Splendour Rock, Medlow Gap. (Full details of the activity were in December Hut News.)

There are still limited vacancies at Kanimbla View Cabins for the nights of 8-10 April. Maximum cost will be \$38 per night accommodation.

Contact Don Morison 4782.3993. Also talk to Don if you would like to join in any section of the walk.

Pre-School Walks

In the walks program we have advertised coming walks for parents/grandparents/carers with children under 5 years. These are short, easy walks of less than one hour duration, suitable for toddlers and small children, held on the first Wednesday of every month, starting at 10.30a.m.

Contact Megan 4782.5898 or Cathy 4759.3669 for more information.

GOD OF THE MORNING

Out through the gum's informal crowd,
Through the stilted ranks of pines;
Up through the mist of Hampton Pass,
Through tussocks where Bindo winds;
Under the heath and bracken brakes,
Each brown and frosted leaf
Knows that God of the morning wakes
To bless the earth beneath.

High in the hills of the Great Divide
The moon weeps her morning dew.
The stars at length put their lamps aside,
For the East is tender blue.
I hear the restless spirit of night
Take flight through the river oak boughs.
The Ranges mass in the morning light;
Each hill the dawn God crowns.

Slow, from the shelter of cattle camps;
From silver shade to sun;
Herds graze down to their yellow dams
Through parks of green and dun;
And we've left fellow man at variance
To lean on the fence awhile;
To bask in the warmth and radiance
Of God of the morning's smile.

Clive R Roebuck
"Under The Scenic Hill"

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Feb 22 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9am, Mid Mtns Community Centre, Lawson.
Feb 28 (Fri) General Meeting at the Conservation Hut, 7.30 pm. Explore "The Corridors or Claustal Canyon" with Jack Wolfenden. (Page 1)

Mch 02 (Sun) Clean Up Australia Day.

QUOLL CLUB (Activities for 12 and under) ☎ Jessica 4757.3686 for more info.

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

Feb 08 (Sat) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (9 am, 2nd Saturday of every month) Tools provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen on 4757.1929 for the meeting place.

BUSHWALKS:

Pre-School Walks, for parent/grandparent/carer with children under 5 years. Short, easy walks, under 1 hour, 1st Wednesday of every month, starting at 10.30am. Bring a snack and a drink. Contact Megan 4782.5898 or Cathy 4759.3669 for more information or if the weather is doubtful.

Feb 05 Radiata Plateau. Meet at the end of Pulpit Hill Road, Katoomba. (Turn off the Highway at Explorers Tree.)

Mch 05 Part of Darwin's Walk. Meet at the play equipment in Wilson Park (cnr Falls Road), Wentworth Falls.

Apl 02 Red Gum Park. Meet end of De Quency Road (off Noble St) Bullaburra.

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

Walks may be cancelled due to Safety Closures of National Parks walking tracks during the fire season. We request walkers call the contact or Bill G (4759.1692) before 8pm the day before the walk to verify whether the published walk is on, or an alternative arranged. This arrangement will continue for the duration of the season.

Feb 10 Dargan Creek Dams. ☎ Allan 4739.2767. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9 am. Easy. BBQ at Mt Victoria.

Feb 17 New Boardwalk from Furber Steps, return via Scenic Railway. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Meet Katoomba Station (Gearins Hotel) 9 am. Medium. Bring BBQ lunch.

Feb 24 Watson's Bay Coast Walk. ☎ Mary 4787.6918. Meet train which leaves Lithgow at 6.39 am (Wentworth Falls at 7.34), second carriage, bus to coast. Lunch at Doyles on pier, return to Circular Quay by ferry about 4 pm. Medium.

Mch 03 Pheasant's Cave, Mt Wilson. ☎ Allan 4739.2767. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9am. Easy/medium. BBQ lunch at Waterfall Park.

Very Easy Walks on Thursdays:

These walks are conducted at a slow pace to suit the walkers on the day and are usually 2-3 hours. Lunch follows for those so inclined. Contact Bill 4759.1692 for any enquiries about the program.

Feb 13 Berghofer's Pass. Meet Mt Vic Station 10am. Take lunch.

Feb 20 Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens. Meet Mt Victoria Station 10am. Easy. Tour of garden with volunteer guide. 'People Mover' available. Entry cost \$2.20 pensioners, \$3.30 seniors or \$4.40 per person. Lunch and BBQ facilities available.

Feb 27 Gordon Falls to Leura Cascades. Meet corner Olympian Parade and Lone Pine Avenue, Leura, 9.30am. Easy walk, with some rough parts, which can be done in full or in part to suit ability. Lunch and BBQ facilities available.

Mch 06 Katoomba Cascades via Witch's Leap and Wheelchair Path. Meet Scenic railway carpark at 10am. Easy walk. BBQ lunch at Cascades Park.

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. 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 Tocher 4758.8545.

Feb 08 (Sat) Spit Bridge to Manly. 6.39 am train from Lithgow to Central (2nd carriage), then bus to the Spit. ☎ Mary/Terry 4787.6918. Medium, shady walk. Bring lunch and water as we will have lunch along the way, catching ferry at approx 2.30 pm from Manly to Quay.

Feb 15 (Sat) Jungle Circuit. Meet Blackheath commuter carpark 8.20am. ☎ Ron 4757.1526. Medium cool walk. Steep climb out, in the shade. Bring lunch and extra water. Alternative available if closed. Finish 3.30 to 4.30pm.

Feb 23 (Sun) Mt Kuring-gai Rail Station to Berowra Station via Cowan Creek. ☎ Bill 4758.8545. Easy/medium 8 km. Train leaves Mt Victoria 7.06 am. Bring extra water and lunch. This is an exploratory walk using NPA map and detailed directions.

Mch 01 (Sat) Thor Head and Blair Athol Mine. Meet Mt Victoria Station 8.30 am. ☎ Ron 4757.1526. Medium. Bring torch, also lunch and water. Alternative available if closed.

Mch 08 (Sat) Pope's Glen and Pulpit Rock. Meet Blackheath commuter carpark 8.20am. ☎ Ron 4757.1526. Medium. Bring lunch and water. Finish 3.30—4.30 pm. Alternative available if closed.