

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



A Change of Climate in the Mountains

Scientists and governments now agree that the earth's atmosphere is warming. In the Blue Mountains we don't have to worry about sea level rises but a warmer climate is likely to mean more frequent and severe droughts and a greater risk of bushfire. Compounding this effect are ongoing increases in the greater Sydney population. The combined effect is less water for more people and the likelihood of ongoing water restrictions.

Catherine Hird, a consultant to State and Local government on recycling effluent from sewage treatment plants, will give a talk about this topic at the general meeting on 28 November. The talk will focus on how this challenge can be met by the garden loving residents of the Blue Mountains living in the catchment of a World Heritage National Park. Rainwater tanks, garden design and grey water recycling will be discussed as well as some bigger picture ideas such as recycling effluent, desalination and water efficient cities of the future.

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

New Format for Meetings

Following a suggestion from members we have decided to change the format of our monthly meeting and introduce the guest speaker at the beginning of the meeting. At the November meeting the format will be: 7.30pm, start the meeting with a brief outline of issues; 7.45 guest speaker until 8.30 with time for questions before supper at 8.45; other business from 9pm. If this format is successful it will continue next year. We would appreciate your comments and suggestions as to any other changes we should make to increase attendances.

The developers of the proposed Newnes Plateau sand mine have been invited to briefly address the meeting after supper on 28 November. If this invitation is accepted members will be able to ask questions on areas of concern.

Celebration at The Hut

The new visual display for the foyer of the Conservation Hut is to be officially opened at a Celebration at 9.30 am on Saturday 6 December.

Events start at 9am. There will be stalls, entertainment by students from nearby schools and a choice of free activities provided by NPWS, Stream-watch and Valley of the Waters Bushcare

Group. You can see live waterbugs in a display by Blue Mountains City Council and Sydney Catchment Authority and participate in an easy walk led by a NPWS Discovery Ranger. Morning tea will be available and BMCS nursery volunteers will have a selection of native plants on sale.

Are there members who can help with morning tea on the day or with letterboxing invitations? Phone Meredith 4782 4823.

Good News

We reported in Hut News that National Parks and Wildlife Service had suffered funding cuts in the NSW budget. Environment Minister Bob Debus has asked us to correct this.

NPWS did not have its funding cut in the State budget. Total expenditure in 2003/04 is estimated at \$305.3 million. Excluding the extraordinary impact of firefighting costs of \$50.2 million, the total expenditure will increase by \$11.6 million. At the local level the planned expenditure of the Blue Mountains Region in 2003/04 is \$6.521 million compared to \$6.369 million in 2002/03

The State Government has nearly doubled the NPWS budget since 1995.

What is Happening with Draft Local Environment Plan 2002?

Council officers have reviewed the 1404 submissions received during the exhibition period and reported back to Council with recommendations on each of the issues raised. Council has voted on all of these matters and made 159 changes to the plan – 81 to clauses in the written document and 78 to zoning or other site specific matters. Most of the LEP has now been agreed to by Council, and Council has voted to send the DLEP off to the Minister for gazettal with a view to amending it after the review of deferred issues.

This draft is a huge improvement on the existing LEP4. Many areas with creeklines and sensitive vegetation will be clearly zoned as Environmental Protection. In zones where development is permitted, there will be a wide range of environmental factors which will now have to be assessed prior to approvals being granted.

Unfortunately the changes approved by Council have brought more flexibility into the DLEP. This runs counter to the support from the Commission of Inquiry for a prescriptive planning instrument, makes it harder for Council to refuse inappropriate developments and puts more pressure on the community to monitor these developments.

78 zoning changes have been made. EP zoning has been removed from all or

part of a number of lots across the city. One of the most alarming of these changes was because a watercourse had been redirected off the private land! The watercourse was once on 78 North Street, Katoomba. Another disturbing change that will not go on public exhibition is the removal of EP zoning from properties located within a large area of land on the eastern side of Minne Ha Ha Falls (39, 40 and 49 Ninth Avenue, Katoomba).

Other gains and losses include increased environmental protection on the St Columbas site and loss of protection for North Lawson park.

You will find a more detailed report on the Society's webpage. Phone Lyndal Sullivan or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls if you would like us to post you a copy. Watch the Council page in the Gazette for notice of the re-exhibition of parts of the DLEP. If you want assistance in understanding what the changes mean in your locality, or if you would like to volunteer to assist in any way, contact Lyndal on 4782 1635.

EPA Act Review

The current review of Parts 4 and 5 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* has been conducted with remarkably poor process. The review is about how all developments in NSW are assessed and is of key interest to environment and community groups. However these key stakeholders have been almost entirely excluded from participating in the review.

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR) has conducted the review with the aid of a 'Taskforce' committee made up entirely of government and industry representatives.

Amending the assessment and consent process for developments under parts 4 and 5 of the Act will have a major effect on planning and development throughout NSW. Therefore the lack of meaningful consultation with environment and community groups is deeply disappointing.

The current act does not consistently deliver good environmental outcomes and given the composition of the review committee this is unlikely to improve.

We urge members to write to Bob Debus (Macquarie Street, Springwood) to voice their objection to the exclusion of environment and community groups from this important review.

If you are interested in helping with this matter please contact Lyndal Sullivan on 4782 1635.

**"Hut News", the newsletter of
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Community Consultation?

Blue Mountains City Council often boasts of "working in partnership with the community", but in land use matters the process has a strong bias in favour of property owners with concerns about their views, privacy or property values. If these same residents were to take an interest in their local creek or bushland reserve and form a local group, they would not have the same credibility or opportunities to participate.

This bias is enshrined in Council's policy DCP35 which deals with land use matters and sets out the procedures to notify the public when Council assesses new developments, changes an LEP or develops a Plan of Management for public land. In this policy a neighbour who owns land adjacent to a proposed development is notified, but not a bush-

care group who cares for adjacent land. Whilst Bushcare groups may not be the only community groups concerned about a local area, it would be simple to notify them as Council has bushcare sites mapped and keeps an updated list of contact people. Another easy solution would be to display a sign on the property as is done in some Council areas.

This bias was again seen in the review stage of Draft LEP 2002. During the exhibition stage Council planners put in an amazing effort to give out information and make sure the community understood the issues involved. It was a major exercise in community consultation with a total of 1404 submissions received, raising 6,300 individual matters. Many volunteer hours were spent by the Society and other community groups preparing detailed submissions. Sadly, community consultation ended here! When Council began to review the Plan, community groups such as ours were disadvantaged.

Planners provided 14 very detailed reports which thoroughly assessed community concerns raised. Because of the wide range of our concerns, it was not possible to properly assess the responses to all the issues we had raised in our submission. Often it was necessary to attempt to assess a very detailed report of more than 150 pages over one weekend and contact councillors to explain concerns prior to their meeting. In contrast, residents who were only interested in the development potential of their own property had a relatively easy task, just to keep an eye out for when their property address appeared on the agenda, and then respond.

Residents could address a council meeting. Three minutes was reasonable to speak on zoning issues related to one property. This was useless if a group wished to raise a number of detailed issues. Not only was the time too short, but the matters raised were not debated by the council at the same time. Sometimes the debates about issues raised by residents occurred hours later or even at the next meeting. This worked to exclude community input and resulted in a watering down of the Plan in favour of individuals who lobbied hard to change the zonings of their properties.

The time available to review reports prior to the council meetings is not a problem specific to the LEP review process. It is the way council normally operates and always presents a problem for volunteer community groups wanting to be heard.

Blue Mountains City Council has on its agenda developing a community consultation policy. It is urgent that this happen to remove the bias in favour of self-interested residents. It is crucial that the large number of residents who care about more than their own immediate gains get heard. Without this there will be no protection of our immediate environment or our World Heritage Area.

Rally Endorses Opposition to Sand Quarry

An estimated 80 protesters against the proposed sand mine at Newnes Junction packed the Uniting Church Hall in Katoomba on Thursday 23 October. The rally, organised by Colong Foundation and Blue Mountains Conservation Society, heard arguments against the mine from Ian Cohen, Greens Senator in the NSW Upper House, Keith Muir and Fiona McCrossan of the Colong Foundation, local resident Sean Butler and Andrew Cox, Executive Officer, National Parks Association of NSW.

Of particular concern was the proximity of the proposed mine to the World Heritage Area (50m only buffer), the destruction of high conservation value shrub swamps on the site and the detrimental effect on the pristine Wollangambe River.

Environmental consultant Haydn Washington pointed out inadequacies in the environmental impact statements prepared by the applicant, Sydney Construction Materials.

A similar application for a mine was refused in 1996, when several government departments deemed mining totally inappropriate at the site. The departmental recommendation was backed up by a detailed land use study that found nature conservation and environment protection were a superior use for the area relative to sand mining.

While participants at the meeting agreed that sand quarrying may not be objectionable in an appropriate area there was strong support for the recycling of building materials, especially concrete, to lessen the impact on the environment.

Two motions were supported overwhelmingly by the meeting:

- "This meeting opposes the location of a 27million tonne sand quarry proposal adjoining the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park at Newnes Junction and calls on the government to develop a strategic plan for the supply of construction materials by the extractive industry that would protect areas of conservation value", and
- "that this meeting supports an expansion of the Gardens of Stone National Park to cover the Newnes plateau".

The meeting concluded with a lively recital by local poet, Denis Kevans, of his popular poem "Concreto", joined by the audience.

A follow-up rally will be held outside the NSW Parliament from noon to 1pm on Tuesday, 18 November.

Hut News by Email

Would you prefer to receive your monthly Hut News by email? If so, please contact Liz van Reyswoud ereyswoud@hermes.net.au.

Membership Enquiries
Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud
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Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

Sydney's Water: Water Restrictions, by Ross Coster

As you should be aware, mandatory water restrictions are now in force for Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Illawarra. The mandatory restrictions include bans on sprinklers and watering systems and on hosing hard surfaces, including vehicles, paths and buildings. You can now only use a hand-held hose to water gardens, a broom to sweep paths, and a bucket to wash vehicles.

These restrictions are stronger than expected and have been introduced earlier than normal. Normally water restrictions cut in when the Sydney Water supply dams get down to 55% capacity but this time were introduced at 60%.

Protesting Citizens. In the Blue Mountains Gazette, 1-Oct-2003, Dick Harris had a letter published questioning the introduction of restrictions in the upper mountains, given that Lakes Medlow, Greaves and the three Cascades Dams are full or nearly full (76% on 23 Oct). He does have a point, however Cascades Dams are topped up daily from the Fish River at Oberon which is at dangerously low levels. The Upper Mountains dams have a very small storage capacity and react rapidly to high usage.

It would be very difficult and unfair to have water restrictions at Springwood (water from Warragamba) but not at Woodford (water from Cascades) and for us to create water shortages at Oberon.

Overall I strongly support the imposition of water restrictions and I further believe that the restriction on hosing hard surfaces should be permanent.

Dick Harris, in his letter, also talks up a rumour that Sydney Water's infrastructure at Greaves Creek is in need of 'urgent upgrade'. This is all rubbish. The water treatment plant at Lake Greaves is in need of replacement, which is under way now, but in no way is this urgent, nor does it have anything to do with the restrictions. Dick will just have to get used to water restrictions like the rest of us! By the way, I never water my garden, and it looks fantastic (native

plants from our Nursery of course!).

Drought Immunisation. So how do you go about having plenty of water, regardless of weather conditions?

Disturbingly, during droughts, there is always a rise in people drilling bores down into one of the Blue Mountains underground aquifers. This is not a good idea! Much of our bushland is dependent on ground water to supply swamps, springs, cliff-side vegetation and base flow for creeks. Bore water is not an endless resource. If you put down a bore you are effectively stealing water from the environment. If you hear someone you know talking about putting down a bore, please try to talk them out of it.

Are Rainwater Tanks the Answer? To some degree, yes. A rainwater tank can be used to catch a deluge like the one I experienced at Lawson on Sat-25-Oct-2003. Boy did it rain! The rainwater tank can then supply water for the garden, laundry, toilet flushing and car washing. Some people even drink tank water but NSW Health do not recommend this practice as tank water can be polluted with lead from car exhausts and Salmonella from bird and animal droppings.

A Rainwater tank needs to be at least 5,000 litres to be worthwhile, and preferably 10,000 litres. To be most effective at reducing mains water use, rainwater tanks need to be connected to toilet and laundry, possibly requiring a pressure pump. Sydney Water now supports the introduction of rainwater

tanks through a rebate scheme and by publishing documents on their requirements (see www.sydneywater.com.au).

If you want a lush garden in times of drought, install a rainwater tank, but be aware that during drought there is no such thing as an endless water supply.

Where are the Butterflies?

The Rhododendrons in the parks and gardens of Blackheath in springtime are lovely, but for me the arrival of spring brings the flowering of the native mints and the passage of the Caper White Butterflies.

I have observed these butterflies during the past ten years. Last year they passed through my Blackheath garden during most days from late September until early November—in ones and twos, meandering from flower to flower, going nowhere in particular but it seems in a generally south-westerly direction—probably several hundred a day at the peak of the season. In November (last year on 22 November) these butterflies are seen in huge numbers travelling across the upper Mountains, fluttering rapidly towards the north-east where they presumably lay their eggs on their preferred plants of the Caper family.

This year they are mostly absent—I have seen four! Where are they? The butterflies are white with black lace edging the wings.

Please write and let me know if you have seen them this year. Christine (c/o PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782, email hutnews@bluemountains.org.au)

Wildlife Entanglement: A Plea from Blue Mountains WIRES

There are various types of entanglement but one that is extremely damaging to our wildlife, especially snakes, is plastic mesh. For those of you who don't know of this nasty material, it is a light weight mostly black plastic type mesh with holes approximately 1 cm square. It is usually draped over fruit trees, vegetable patches and so on, to prevent birds and possums eating the produce.

The fact is – it kills! For some weeks now Blue Mountains snake handlers have been inundated with calls where snakes have become entangled in this environmentally nasty material.

Once a snake noses its way through the mesh it gets tangled, and when it tries to get out it gets even more tangled. It will have a slow, agonising death. The mesh cuts into the animal's body and into vital organs.

Some people use this mesh to drape

over ponds to prevent birds such as kookaburras from eating their fish. However snakes, especially frog eating species such as red-bellied black and tiger snakes, come along for a feed and get tangled in the process.

Added to this problem is the amount of time, food, money and energy spent by volunteers in caring for these animals, often for months until they are ready for release back into the wild.

We can prevent this needless threat to our native animals. Dispose of plastic mesh if it exists on your property and alert other users that you may come in contact with. Use chicken wire instead – the rigidity allows snakes to freely pass through it.

For more information please contact the Wires Hotline on 4754.2946. Donations may be forwarded to Blue Mountains WIRES, PO Box 607, Springwood 2777.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

General Meeting: Friday 28 November 7.30 pm, at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls. (see page 1).

Management Meeting: Saturday 22 November, 9 am, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson. Members are welcome to attend as observers.

Bushcare: Saturday 8 November. Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets at 9am on the 2nd Saturday of every month. Tools are provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen 4757.1929.

Celebration at The Hut: Saturday 6 December. (See page 1)

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bushwalking Group organises a variety of activities for all ages. See page 4.



Photos by Sonya Stanvic: Snake entangled in mesh; being released by WIRES snake handler. Not so lucky, skeleton of a snake found in the same mesh.

Pre-School Walks

New Co-ordinators Needed

The children of the current co-ordinators of the Pre-School Walks are graduating to the Quoll Club, so we need new co-ordinators for the walks to continue. The job involves organising a program of monthly walks suitable for little children and contacting the newsletter editor with the details. Lots of support offered from ex-co-ordinators. Anyone interested can contact Kathy on 4759 3669 or Megan on 4759 2734.

Multi-Day Activity

Wombeyan Caves, 27-30 April 2004

A limited number of full packages for this activity can be booked from 6 November 2003. Full package includes: (all easy to medium grade)

1. **Three nights accommodation** (bunk in modern cabin with ensuite, cooking facilities, BBQ, etc.)

2. ***Heritage tour of the magnificent Wollondilly and Mulwaree caves**—this is a re-enactment of 19th century style cave touring, including areas that have never had electric light; we may supply and wear period dress during the tour.

3. ***The Marble Quarry**. See a cross-section of geology and the origin of Australia's most ornate building material.

4. ***Junction Cave**—electric lit cave.

5. **Fig Tree Cave**—go at your own pace through a spectacular underground dry river gorge.

Other walks at Maher's Creek Gorge, Wombeyan Waterfall, Kanangra Walls area, Porter's Retreat Cemetery, Mount Jellore area.

Maximum cost of full package \$160 per person (this will be reduced if numbers sufficient). Book by sending \$50 deposit (Australia Post money order preferred) to Don Morison, Box 170, Katoomba 2780. Packages allocated on a first come, first served, basis.

*Guided by Wombeyan Caves Rangers.

Welcome to New Members

Elizabeth Bastian, Blackheath
Rosemary Vanderlaan, Lawson
Deborah Scott, Engadine
Robert & Wendy Procter, Blackheath
Margot Ryan, Baulkham Hills
Alan & Pamela Harris, Wentworth Falls
Dindy Boutagy, Blackheath
Irmtrud Valacas, Nth Katoomba.

This is the Day!

How many times have you passed a spot that looks interesting and promised yourself that **one day** you would explore it? Recently the Thursday pleasure walkers discovered that a couple of us had always been attracted to the same interesting rock outcrop on Kings Tableland and decided, **this is the day!** Scrambling through a gap in the rocks we entered a world of small caverns, magnificent rock formations and interesting plants. A great place for morning tea! I'm now compiling a list of all those **one day** spots and intend to visit them all as soon as possible. *Joan.*

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP

Our Bushwalking Group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Leader/Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud 4757.2694 (phone/fax), email ereyswoud@hermes.net.au. Membership details are on page 2. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers is \$12.50 per member.**

Pre-School Walks, for parent/grandparent/carer with children under 6 years.

Short, easy walks, approx 1 hour, 1st Wednesday of every month, starting at 10.30am. Bring a snack and a drink. Contact Megan 4759.2734 or Kathy 4759.3669 for more information or if the weather is doubtful.

Nov 05 Fairfax Heritage Track, Blackheath. Meet at car park at National Parks Heritage Centre, Govett's Leap Road.

Dec 03 Cateract Falls, Lawson. This is a nice little swimming hole so bring bathers if it is hot. Meet at car park/picnic area about 1 km down Honour Ave.

Quoll Club: *A monthly newsletter and activities for 12 and under. For more information ☎ David King 4758.8932 (email dking@lisp.com.au).*

Nov 29 (Sat) Glenbrook Native Plant Reserve. From 12.30 pm to 3.30 pm.

Meet at the front gate of the reserve on Great Western Highway, Glenbrook. Come and test your observation skills. For 5-12 year olds accompanied by parent or guardian. Please bring a drink, afternoon tea, and wear suitable outdoor clothing. Call David King on 4758.8932 to book a spot on the activity.

Monday Leisure Walks: *Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short sections off-track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.*

Nov 10 October Creek, Mt Wilson. A wildflower walk. Lunch at Wall's

Lookout. Meet Mt Victoria Station at 9.30. ☎ Norah 4757 4058

Nov 17 Pulpit Rock, Ross Cave, Fairy Dell, Mt Victoria. Round walk of highlights. Meet Mt Victoria Station at 9.30. ☎ Alan 4739 2767

Nov 24 Bus Trip Forewest Island, Royal National Park. Rainforest walk. Meet 8.30 Springwood Council depot. ☎ Contact Laurel 4784 1554 to book.

Dec 01 Florabella Pass. Woodlands and rainforest. Meet Warrimoo Station car park. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

Thursday Pleasure Walks: *These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and transport issues.*

Nov 6 Den Fenella, Wentworth Falls. Start at Conservation Hut, take Overcliff track to Den Fenella. Climb up to Wentworth Falls picnic area and return to Conservation Hut via Shortcut track. Car shuffle if required. Meet junction of Falls Road and GW Highway, Wentworth Falls 10am. ☎ Marie 4787 1257.

Nov 13 Dante's Glen and Empire Pass. Steep descent into cool valley past waterfalls and rainforest. Gradual ascent past Frederica Falls. Car shuffle if required. Meet Lawson Station (north side) 9.30am. ☎ Jo 4758.6009.

Nov 20 Leura Cascades. Easy/medium walk to various lookouts via Prince Henry Cliff walk. Some steps and great views. Meet junction of Leura Mall and Megalong Street 9.30am. ☎ Joan 4782.2218.

Nov 27 Lithgow Water Supply. Walk up creek, 4 km return, to the dam wall, with optional climb up to dam top. Lunch at Lithgow Workmans Club. Meet at the Workmans Club, 3 Tank Street, Lithgow 10am. ☎ Bill 4759.1692.

Dec 04 Scenic World Boardwalk. Boardwalk through rainforest past old mining works. Access via Scenic Railway, Scenicender or Furber steps. Cost of transport \$6 one way. Meet Gearins Hotel, Katoomba 9.30am. ☎ Simone 4757.3416

Dec 11 Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens Christmas Lunch.

Weekend Bushwalks: *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 Bob van Reyswoud 4757.2694.*

Nov 08 (Sat) Booyong Crags. Great views of the Grose Canyon. Medium/hard. Meet Mt Hay Road, near Leura school 8.30am. ☎ Jim 4758 6009.

Nov 15 (Sat) Kanangra Walls. Easy. Bus Trip—cost \$7.50 per person. Meet 8am Katoomba depot or 8.30am Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Meredith 4782.4823.

Nov 22 (Sat) Bald Hill. Medium. Meet 9.50am Blackheath Station. Finish 3pm. ☎ June 4787.7312

Nov 29 (Sat) Mt Piddington, Wilson's Glen, Zig Zag. Medium, steep climb out. Meet 9am Mt Victoria Station. Finish 2.30 pm. ☎ Mary/Terry Flynn 4787.6948.

Dec 06 (Sat) Vera Falls. Medium/hard. Meet Wentworth Falls picnic ground 9am (via Shortcut Track to the Hut for celebration launch—half hour). Finish 3pm. ☎ Bob 4757.2694.

Dec 13 (Sat) Mount Tomah. Christmas party.

NOTE: All bushwalkers need to carry water, 1 litre minimum, a snack for morning tea and lunch for all day walks.