

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Monthly Meeting: Friday 25 February

Fire regimes in the Blue Mountains: evidence from early explorers

The first speaker at our monthly meeting on Friday 25 February will be Andy McQueen.

In his recently published book "somewhat perilous", Andy presents a detailed interpretation of the widespread fires encountered by the explorer William Parr in the Northern Blue Mountains. Andy is convinced that Parr was up against a huge bushfire (or bushfires) ignited by lightning—much bigger than any recent fires in the Wollemi National Park. This is despite the fact that Darkinjung Aboriginal people were still living in the area traversed by Parr. The Darkinjung's traditional burning practices apparently did not prevent this natural event.

Andy will discuss the evidence from Parr's journal, and from earlier Blue Mountains explorers.

Composting with worm farms

After supper Rebecca Brown (Waste and Resources Project Officer for Blue Mountains City Council) will talk about worms and worm farms. She will discuss worm biology, how to get the best use from worm farms, show us a worm farm in action and answer questions.

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



Radiata Plateau

Radiata Plateau, just 3 km west from Katoomba, is the last remaining undeveloped peninsula-plateau on the western escarpment.

The Transcendental Meditation Organization, via one of its corporate arms (Maharishi's Global Administration through Natural Law Ltd), now proposes to sell its 305 hectare Radiata Plateau property as three separate parcels of land for development.

Fragmentation of Radiata Plateau by any development will result in the loss of its high conservation value. The plateau is of outstanding topography and has the last remaining unpolluted water catchments on the south-western escarpment with rare and endemic plant species whose survival depends on the area remaining undisturbed. Any development will necessarily reduce public accessibility for recreational and educational purposes and impinge on the green belt between Katoomba and Medlow Bath.

The Save Radiata Plateau Group (SRPG), with endorsement of the Blue

Mountains Conservation Society, the Total Environment Centre, the Colong Foundation, the National Conservation Council and indeed the Blue Mountains City Council, along with other concerned groups, has urged the State Government to acquire to property for incorporation within the National Parks system.

Spokespersons for the SRPG, Glenn Humphreys and Sandy Holmes, addressed the January meeting of the Society. Ron Withington reviews their presentation in his regular

contribution, Meeting Matters, in this issue of Hut

Photo: The dramatic southern cliffline of Radiata Plateau, looking west into Megalong Valley. (Ron Withington)

Platypus in Nepean River

(an extract of a story from Sonya Stanvic, Blue Mountains WIRES)

Platypuses are known to breed in many of the ponds and streams throughout the mountains. Over the years WIRES Blue Mountains branch have had a few phone calls on sightings of Platypuses swimming in the Nepean River and volunteers have rescued a juvenile from Clarence and another juvenile from Kurrajong (possibly born along the banks of the Nepean River) whose body was entwined in a thick rubber band.

On New Year's Day 2005 a WIRES volunteer rescued a juvenile female platypus found on a bank of the Nepean River. She was 300 grams and 31 cm (the length of a ruler) and a bit young to be out of the burrow. She was released the same night as she was in fairly good condition and besides she would most

likely still be with her mum and suckling. Hopefully they were reunited. She was not there the next morning when Sonya checked the banks of the river with Fred. She was christened 'Nepean Belle'.

Sonya would be interested in hearing of any platypus sightings. The information will be passed on to a person who is researching these animals in the mountains. Phone WIRES on 4754 2946.

Grass identification workshops

by Van Klaphake

Grass identification has always been a problem for bush regenerators. It is particularly so in regard to the large number of introduced species present—many even in the same genus as native species and sometimes of similar appearance.

For the last six years I have been holding grass and sedge workshops in Sydney and the Blue Mountains—using fully illustrated identification manuals I have written myself.

Until recently I used manuals written for the Coast. Last year I updated the sedge manual to include the Blue Mountains.

I have just finished writing a simplified 'easy to use' grass manual for the Blue Mountains. This is modelled on an equivalent version written a few years ago on Sydney grasses. It contains all but the rarest Mountain species.

The system eliminates the slow process of working through text keys in traditional books, relying on a grouping system using coloured pages and information organised around illustrations.

In April/May I will be running a two-day grass workshop in the Mountains, in conjunction with the Blue Mountains Conservation Society. There will be more information in March *Hut News*.



Photo: Young platypus being released at Nepean River. (Sonya Stanvic).

**"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.**
P.O. Box 29, Wentworth Falls, 2782
Phone 4757 1872 Fax 4757 1753
Email: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au
Web page: www.bluemountains.org.au
President: Kevin Bell
4787.6436 (ph/fx), khbell@pnc.com.au
Senior Vice President: Heather Hull
4739.1493, heatherhull40@hotmail.com
Second Vice President: Vacant
Treasurer: Bart Beech
4739.9947, bbeech@invensys.com.au
Administration Officer: Les Coyne
4757.3327, 4757.2820(fax)
coyne@pnc.com.au
Membership: Elizabeth van Reyswoud
4757.2694, 0418206899 (mobile)
mcreysw@bigpond.net.au
Meetings Secretary: Rosemary Lathouris
4757.2511, lath@pnc.com.au
Meetings Convenor: Jim Wallace
4784.3305, ozblu@optusnet.com.au
Education Officer: Vacant
Plant Nursery Manager: David Coleby
4784.1395 (ph/fax) dcoleby@pnc.com.au
Land Use Officer: Lyndal Sullivan
4782.1635 (ah), lyndal@hermes.net.au
Bushcare Officer: Clive Heywood-Barker
4782.3345, ozbundu@hotmail.com
Publicity Officer: Ron Withington
4757.3984, ronwit@ozemail.com.au
Walks Convenor: Bob van Reyswoud
4757.2694 (ph/fax)
mcreysw@bigpond.net.au
Bushfire Officer: Hugh Paterson
4751.2303, goodbush@pnc.com.au
National Parks Officer: Brian Marshall
4784.1148, Brian.Marshall@uts.edu.au
Web Site Manager: Margaret Sleath
4759.3350, msleath@ozemail.com.au
Threatened Species Officer: Ian Baird
4782.6775, ianbaird@mountains.net.au
World Heritage Officer, John Haydon
0421.479.146,
jhaydonmc@optusnet.com.au
Project Officer: Ann Fox
4758.6096, foxy@zip.com.au
Newsletter Editor: Christine Davies
4787.7246, hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

Welcome to new members

Desley Hardwicke, Wentworth Falls
Greg Chapman, Springwood
Liz Fulham, Springwood
Connie Exner, Wentworth Falls
Dorte Kuder, Blackheath

Donation of painting

Lloyd and Shirley Jones have moved from the Mountains. As a farewell gesture Lloyd has donated to the Society a painting of the original Conservation Hut. The painting has been framed and will hang in a suitable place in The Hut. Many thanks Lloyd and best wishes to you and Shirley in your new home.

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Elizabeth van Reyswoud
Phone 4757.2694
Email: mcreysw@bigpond.net.au
Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

GROUNDWATER

Article 5: Threats, equity and groundwater

By Brian Marshall

The principal threats to a groundwater resource are climate change, 'excessive' extraction and contamination. Climate change and extraction affect the quantity, and this impacts on groundwater dependent ecosystems and scenic tourism. Contamination affects the quality, and this impacts on the domestic, recreational, agricultural and industrial use of groundwater.

Climate change (as currently understood for the Blue Mountains) will induce higher temperatures (equals more evaporation and less infiltration) and lower precipitation (equals less infiltration). Both lower the watertable, thereby reducing the available resource and adversely impacting on vulnerable ecosystems.

The potential for excessive extraction (exploitation) in the Blue Mountains stems from ignorance, inadequate control of bores and springs, and land-use changes. For the various aquifers, little is known regarding recharge sites and rates, and flow directions and rates. Yet, despite this ignorance, little effort is made to curtail or even monitor extraction. Similarly disconcerting is the lack of readily accessible data on the numbers and locations of springs and licensed and unlicensed water bores, the aquifers tapped by the bores, and the amounts of water extracted from springs and bores. Finally, when 'bush' is replaced by development, run-off from hard surfaces (paths, roads, roofs) reduces infiltration. Some believe that the effect is minimal, but intensive development involving large houses and small blocks suggests otherwise.

Groundwater quality can be compromised by surface or near-surface contaminants; it can also be influenced by the aquifer's rock type. Contamination may come from landfill areas, excessive use of organic and inorganic fertilizers, inefficient sewerage and septic systems, and run-off from industrial sites, housing estates and livestock farming. Once in the aquifer, groundwater quality is worsened by components dissolved from the permeable rock. The non-marine sandstones of the Blue Mountains have a negligible effect, but the underlying coal measures contain sulphate and bicarbonate ions, and marine sequences are typically salty (sodium, potassium and magnesium and chloride ions). Even if there are no surface contaminants, dissolved salts constrain the use of groundwater. They clog up water pipes and corrode water supply systems, they make the water too salty for either human or farm animal consumption, and they kill trees and crops.

Because groundwater quality in the Blue Mountains is generally good, the principal threats are climate change (a universal problem!) and environmentally unsustainable extraction (very much a local problem!). Think about this local problem when you next see golf courses, sports fields and some household gardens proudly proclaiming their use of bore water. Think of it when you hear that Blue Mountains groundwater is being extracted at little cost and bottled as high-cost mineral water. Think when you read that local coalmines tap certain aquifers to the tune of 10's of megalitres (a megalitre is the volume of an Olympic swimming pool) per day. Think when you next see hanging swamps stressed by groundwater depletion, springs drying up, and greatly reduced flows in creeks and rivers. And think once again when water costs increase, your use is restricted, your garden is dying and Sydney's dams are still falling! Yes, the use of bore water (i.e. groundwater) has consequences: the user gets the benefit but we all bear the costs (environmental degradation, reduced and costly water access, falling reservoirs). Simplistically, they 'steal' water before it enters the dam; we pay to get it from the dam!

As I said in the previous article, the idea that 'there is no such thing as a free lunch' is, in this context, a furphy! Benefits for some are costs to others; your pocket is being raided!

Take a role in the management of the Society

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Good Friday, 25 March 2005, not very far away. At the meeting members will elect a new Management Committee for the year to 30 March 2006. All positions will become vacant.

Here is your opportunity to help the environment by volunteering to serve on the Society's Management Committee.

This can be immensely rewarding. You don't need experience, just a commitment to serve the environment and a determination to "make a difference". 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.

You can obtain more information from Kevin Bell on 4787 6436 or you can come along as an observer to one or both of the remaining committee meetings (on 19 February and 19 March at 9 a.m. at Mid-Mountains Community Centre, Lawson).

Snowy Mountains activity

by Don Morison

22 people participated in a BMCS activity after Warwick Mosman negotiated availability of the Cooma Ski Club's lodge at Perisher for a week in January 2005. This was an excellent opportunity to view the varied vegetation and landforms of a relatively fragile region two years after it experienced one of Australia's most severe and geographically spread summer of wildfires. We also visited the NPWS creative and informative interpretation centre at Sawpit Creek.

The fields of daisies, native grasses and small mossy swamps are delightful among the stark granite boulders above the Snowy tree-line. The flowers may not be as numerous as veteran bushwalkers remember them from the best of previous years but there is no doubt that the ecology is regenerating. Ravens, rosellas, gang gang cockatoos and a wedge-tailed eagle were identified but the smaller birds move very quickly. The interpretive centre attested that the Mountain Pygmy Possum and the

Corroboree Frog had survived the fires. Many of the distinctive coloured-trunked snow gums stand swathed in epicormic foliage but for others the heat of the fires was fatal.

The three-kilometre circuit of Sawpit Creek was a veritable catalogue of weed species but native shrubs, ground covers and Eucalypts were surviving well.

And, of course, we looked in on those old mates of seasoned Australian bushwalkers—the walks from Thredbo chairlift to Kosciuszko Summit and from Charlottes Pass to the Blue Lake. How much longer will global warming allow us to keep experiencing the scenes of so many summers—bushwalkers on the skyline braced against the fierce summer winds ... the blues, greens and greys of the choppy surfaces of glacial lakes like Lake Cootapatamba and Medley Turn ...



Blue Mountains Conservation Society bushwalkers setting off on a walk at Guthega.

children frolicking on the slightly browned but extensive drifts of snow that stay unmelted through January.

Our camp concert compered by Diana Levy began with acrobatics by the younger females ("Circus Cooma"). Their enthusiasm cured the bashfulness of many a wrinkled singer and yarn-spinner as the night grew old. Thanks to all who contributed to the activity.

Above the tree-line by Christine Davies

I approached the Thredbo chair lift with some trepidation. It doesn't stop! You stand in position and sit down when the chair comes up behind you, quickly pull down the steel safety bar—and off into the wild blue yonder!

What a wonderful experience it was! We were floating—slowly and quietly, climbing up and up. We passed beyond the tree-line and into the true alpine zone.

The main group, including my 14 year-old grandson Martin who was seeing his first snow on this trip, walked to Mount Kosciuszko. I would have loved to have joined them but my left knee objects to such strenuous activity. I had a cup of coffee in "the highest restaurant in Australia" at the top of the chair lift then went for a slow walk, enchanted with this amazing place.

Snow country, which includes the alpine and sub alpine zones together, make up 0.09 percent of the total area of Australia—and half of that is in Tasmania. The true alpine zone is above 1830 metres and is just 10% of the snow country. Half of that is on the main range north of Mt Kosciuszko.

It's wild, worn country with little soil and harsh conditions. Some might see it as a barren moonscape. But look closely! There are no trees but the vegetation

is diverse and beautiful. Low-growing shrubs hug the ground and are no higher than the herbs and little native grasses. Wildflowers are lovely. The rugged granite boulders are patterned with lichens. There are patches of snow on the tops and little streams meander gently downward, fed by the melting snow.

The "high plains" of the alpine region, where the largest naturally found mammal is the tiny Antechinus, were used as summer pastures for sheep and cattle. Now this delicate ecosystem is protected from the tramping feet of summer visitors by a wire "boardwalk". Going up I was walking against a strong cold wind. The same wind on my back made walking down easy. The boardwalk is well used and there were lots of people but I was ahead of the crowd.

Altogether it was a wonderful five days. Thank you to Don for organising the activity and to Warwick for organising such luxurious accommodation.



It's wild, worn country with little soil and harsh conditions.



Rugged granite rocks are patterned with lichens. Deep pockets of snow feed the swamps and little streams.



The Snowy Mountains Cricket changes colour with temperature



The boardwalk protects the delicate vegetation from summer tourist traffic. It is well used.

Mount Wilson multi-day activity:

Beds at Field Study Centre,
nights 20, 21, 22, 23 June 2005,
walks 21, 22, 23, 24 June 2005.

Bookings and enquiries Don Morison
82 302116. \$15 deposit, money order
payable to D Morison, Box 170,
Katoomba 2780.

This activity will cater to members
driving up to Mount Wilson for an early
start but a few bunk beds are still
available if you want to make it a stay
away.

We hope to cater for those wanting
the shorter Mount Wilson walks but also
take small groups into the wilderness
areas not usually visited by day trippers.
A sample of the proposals:

Wollangambe canyon access:
through lush basalt soil forest, sandstone
country and pagodas to a river gorge.

Banks Wall: Heathland and open
forest on a scenic section of the Grose
rim.

Bowens Creek switchback: Revisit
on foot a 1930s attempt to build a
spectacular tourist road through a Blue
Mountains valley on a route now
officially closed to traffic.

Visit to Belgrave Park in Hartley Valley by Marie Morris

Judy had arranged for the Monday
Leisure Walkers to visit this Alpaca
Farm in Hartley Valley. We were to
walk afterwards at the River Lett.
Driving to the farm was beautiful in
itself with the farmland looking healthy
and green after recent rain. Judy
introduced us to Gillian, the owner of the
property. We were settled on her shop
verandah and Gillian proceeded to give
us an interesting insight into Alpacas.

Among other things we learned that
they are members of the camel family
and all except the camel are native to
South America. The llamas are the
largest and are used by the Indians of the
Andes as beasts of burden, then come the
alpacas which are used for their wool
and food. There is also a much smaller
animal, vicugna. The alpacas are the
most intelligent.

Gillian has been raising alpacas for
14 years and the farming of these
animals is still in its infancy in Australia
and other countries. Here they are also
used as minders of sheep as they will
circle a flock and protect them against
wild dogs as they would against lions in
the Andes.

The Hartley Valley is a good
environment for alpacas as they don't
like humidity. The farm doesn't use
chemicals and the alpaca is a very eco
friendly beast. Why? To begin with
they have a split lip which allows them
to gently graze without pulling the whole
plant out as do cattle. With only lower
front teeth their mouths are gentle. Also

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 Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud. For membership enquiries contact Membership Secretary Liz van Reyswoud. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers of \$15 per member is payable with your membership renewal.**

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 section off track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

Feb 07 Lithgow waterways. Shady walk. Meet Mount Victoria Station 9.15 am. ☎ Bill 4759 1692.

Feb 14 Mt Banks. Views over Grose Valley. Meet 9.15 Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

Feb 21 Pheasants Cave, Mt Wilson. Varied open dry forest and rainforest and views. Meet 9.15 Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Allan 4739 2757. BBQ.

Feb 28 Bennett's Lookout, Blackheath. A new walk. Meet 9.15 Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

Mar 07 Nature Track & Lillian's Bridge, Wentworth Falls. Stream walk. Meet 9.30 Wentworth Falls Station carpark. ☎ Mary 4787 7649.

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.

Feb 03 South Lawson waterfalls. Circuit bush track to view waterfalls, some steps. Meet corner of highway and Honour Avenue Lawson. 9.30am ☎ John 4757 1558.

Feb 10 Mount Wilson. New walk on bush paths in this popular area. Meet 9.30 Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Marie 4787 1257.

Feb 17 Gordon Falls to Leura Cascades. Cliff-top walk with varied scenery on bush path. Car shuffle to return. Meet 9.30 at cnr Leura Mall and Megalong Street. ☎ Joan 4782 2218.

Feb 24 McMahan's Lookout. Drive 20km on dirt road to view Warragamba Dam and look around interesting rock formations on the way. Meet 9.30 at Wentworth Falls carpark (near the clock). ☎ Simone 4757 3416.

Mar 03 Didgeridoo played in Wind-eroded Cave. Unique experience to hear this indigenous instrument at Blackheath. BBQ lunch. Meet 10am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. ☎ Bill 4759 1692.

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 Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au

Sat. Feb 05 National Pass. Medium. Meet Wentworth Falls Stockyard Carpark 9.30am. ☎ Meredith 4782 4823.

Sat. Feb 12 Fortress Ridge. Medium. Meet Mt Hay Road near Leura Public School 9.30 am. Bring swimming costume. ☎ June 4787 7312.

Sat. Feb 19 Wollangambe River. Medium. Meet 9.30 Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Bob 4757 2694 or June 4787 7312.

Sat. Feb 26 The Spit to Manly. Meet 6.37am train from Lithgow or 9.23 am top of escalator Central railway. Medium/Easy. ☎ Mary 4787 6918.

Sat. Mar 5 Bedford Creek. Meet Woodford Station 9am. Medium. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

they have soft camel-like feet which don't create the problems that hard-footed animals do in the environment. Their wool is incredibly soft.

One of the females Karen was about to give birth after an eleven month gestation. We followed Gillian down to the paddock where we found the mother sitting under a tree, away from the rest of the herd. These animals always give birth in the morning or early afternoon, the reason being to have the newborn dry and walking well before the cold mountain nights in the Andes.

A while later when we approached again the other females were gathered around and on getting closer we could see that the little one's head and forelegs were in sight. Gillian went up to her and

as she held the head the body slid out and there was the most beautiful deep grey, white-faced baby. We sat in a group watching as she slowly dried and tried many times, with much awkwardness, to stand. Her mother all the while was making soft noises so she would bond to her.

It began to rain so Gillian picked the baby up (a newborn weighs about 8 kilos) and with Karen walking beside her we went back to the barn, just in time to miss the heavier storm. Baby found her feet, had a drink and went to sleep.

We had our lunch and said our goodbyes and thanks for a truly wondrous day. Not our usual Monday experience!