

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



ELECTION TIME FAST APPROACHING!

No, not Federal, State, or even local Government, but elections at the Annual General Meeting of BMCS, to be held at the Monthly Meeting in the Conservation Hut on Friday 31 March.

What is the purpose? At this meeting, the members present will elect the Management Committee for the ensuing 12 months.

Why send a notice so early? It really isn't! A notice in the penultimate *Hut News* before the AGM gives you time to think about your involvement. A follow-up notice in March will hopefully crystallise it.

Those familiar with past AGMs and elections will recall that, for each position, nominations may be lodged in writing before the meeting, or verbally at the meeting. Because few members wish to be involved in the Society's management, there is commonly one nomination (or not even that!) for each position and the election seems very much a formality. In fact, it may seem that the election is stage-managed to ensure re-election of the chosen few: that is, most of the outgoing Management Committee.

So why should other members bother? I will try to explain, because the perceived 'stage-management' results from necessity rather than preference.

Some Management Committee Members (MCMs) want to relinquish office because of changed personal circumstances or, perhaps after many years, they have had enough. Indeed, some of last year's positions were reluctantly filled by such outgoing MCMs, or remained empty, or were filled by individuals taking on more than one position: not satisfactory.

To minimise the risk of having no one nominate beforehand or on the night, Management Committee tries to ensure that there is at least one nominee for each position. This measure is precautionary, not exclusionary. Re-nominating MCMs provides 'corporate memory' and minimises disruption to Society business, but fresh blood is essential to the health of both Management Committee and the Society.

PREPARING YOUR HOME AGAINST BUSHFIRE

This constant drizzle upon the Mountains, has not only replenished Lake Burrangorang, but has so far spared our region of the fearsome bushfires that are ravaging the southern States. But while summer has come, we do well to hearken to the ancient soothsayer and his warning to the overconfident Julius, "Aye, Caesar, but not gone."

Hugh Paterson, the Society's Bushfire Officer, a member of the Good Bush People organisation, is a man who is extremely knowledgeable in the field and an excellent communicator.

Hugh has offered to provide Consoc members with one-on-one advice on preparing their home against the threat of bushfire. The assessment will be carried out either by Hugh himself, or by one of his colleagues. To get the ball rolling, you may phone Hugh on **4751 2303** or email him at goodbush@pnc.com.au

What does Management Committee really do? It runs the affairs of the Society. For example, it is responsible for the nurseries at Blackheath and Lawson, organising and conducting bushwalking, Monthly Meetings, engagement and advocacy regarding environmental matters affecting the Greater Blue Mountains and its local government areas, and involving and informing membership via *Hut News*, the website and Monthly Meetings. All the submissions to governments, attendance at meetings, evaluation of development applications, participation in court actions, development and promotion of new park proposals, and engagement with the media, are done by MCMs and a few other members in a voluntary capacity, often using their specialist knowledge.

Please participate in the election process, by nominating and bringing fresh blood to Management Committee. Or please offer your skills and specialist knowledge by becoming one of the other members that help Management Committee.

The bottom line! You and your contribution are really needed.

Brian Marshall – President

**Face to Face with the
BLUE MOUNTAINS
WORLD HERITAGE INSTITUTE
BMCS Monthly Meeting
7.30pm Friday 24 February 2006
at the Conservation Hut**



Photograph of Mount Solitary by Wyn Jones, courtesy of the BMWHI

You have heard about it, you may have read that it has headquarters in Gates Avenue, Katoomba, you may even have desecrated that its 'Glossy Black' logo echoes the theme of our own precious 'Yellow Tails' — but here is your opportunity to learn all there is to know about the **Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute**, its aims, its research programs, its education and public programs and its funding.

Joining us at the February meeting will be **Dr John Merson**, Executive Director of **BMWHI**, and the Executive Officer, **Dr Rosalie Chapple**.

John's overview will include a review of current projects, while he will also discuss the environmental impact of climate change on the BMts, pin-pointing the possibility of increased fire frequency and intensity. Rosalie will address complex socio-ecological systems in the BMts area, focusing on people and wildlife. If all that seems a bit heavy, never fear, we will allow a tea break and a good 45 minutes for questions and discussion!

HUT NEWS

"Hut News" is the newsletter of the
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Ron Withington

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FREE WORKSHOP!

Environmental Protection and Biodiversity
Conservation (EPBC) Act explained...

6.00-9.00pm, Wednesday 29 March at the
Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute,
23 Gates Avenue, Katoomba

**ARE OUR HANGING SWAMPS
TRULY SAFE?**

Lyndall Kennedy of WWF provides an explanation of the referral, approval and assessment process, a locally-based case study, an explanation of the heritage provisions and a look at the main case law.

RSVP: Tara Cameron 4751 1130 by 28 March

Letter of the Month – February 2006

Our regular request to members for campaign action by letter writing

The Australian and US governments have rejected the Kyoto Protocol and its binding targets to cut carbon emissions. With China, India, Japan and South Korea, they are pursuing the technological fix of carbon capture and storage (CCS – also known as geo-sequestration) to enable continuing use of their large reserves of coal, and the cheap power it provides.

These six nations between them generate 49.5% of the world's greenhouse gases.

Scientists, in a report done for the Australia Institute, say that the CCS technology is at least a decade away from commercial viability.

They say we cannot ignore other technologies already in commercial operation (such as wind and solar power, energy efficiencies and demand management) while we wait for CCS technology to come on stream.

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions are spiralling out of control. By 2020, they will be more than 20% above 1990 levels. European Union experts say they need instead to be reduced by 30% by 2020 if we are to avoid dangerous climate change.

The US and Australian governments currently do not want to force power plant operators to adopt the expensive CCS technology by imposing mandatory climate change targets. They are relying instead on the goodwill of industry to do the right thing.

However, power provider, *Origin Energy*, says without mandatory targets there is no incentive for business to adopt this costly technology, and it will only happen if there is a legal requirement to do so.

There may well be a role for CCS in the future, but it is still too far off to be Australia's only policy for greenhouse gas emissions.

Write to the Prime Minister and express your concern that the government seems to be relying only on a possible future fix instead of giving support to renewable energy technologies already in commercial operation.

Ask for immediate, large-scale investment in safe, clean energy, with a target of 20% of energy coming from renewable sources by 2020.

In particular, ask for details of Australia's policy on greenhouse gas emissions. Contact details: The Hon John Howard, Parliament House, Canberra ACT.

Any queries please to Robin Mosman mosman@hermes.net.au

Senate Enquiry into National Parks

A **Senate Committee Enquiry** is being conducted into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. Does the Australian Government provide the funding resources necessary to meet all the needs of these areas?

The full terms of reference for the enquiry along with guidelines for making a submission to a Senate Enquiry can be viewed on the web at:

www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/nationalparks/

but the Committee will be focusing on:

- the values and objectives of the protected areas;
- sufficiency of governments' resourcing the objectives and their management;
- threats to the objectives and management;
- governments' long-term responsibilities to create/manage protected areas; and
- governments' record in this regard.

Written submissions are receivable until Wednesday 1 March 2006, from interested individuals and organisations, preferably by email to ecita.sen@aph.gov.au or faxed to 02 6277 5818. The submission must include full postal address and contact details.

The Society will be making a submission through its National Parks Officer, but there is no doubt that BMCS members, prolific users of the parks and reserves, will be able to generate a veritable wilderness of soundly-based views, supported by very personal experience. The Society urges you to make those views known!

Destressing Glenbrook Lagoon

World Wetlands Day is marked each year by the United Nations in February. It marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971 to encourage awareness and focus on the essential importance of wetlands.

Glenbrook Lagoon is a local wetland in considerable stress and is infested with salvinia and cabomba. Blue Mountains City Council has received a grant from the Hawkesbury Nepean CMA to harvest the weeds and establish an Aquatic Bushcare Group. **Drawing these threads together, Council is holding a World Wetlands event at Glenbrook Lagoon on Sunday 12 February, 2006 between 1pm and 3pm.**

The focal activity for general participation will be an hour-long aquatic weeds workshop and training session, designed to impart the secrets of removing the specific weed infestation. There will be speakers on Lagoon as Wetlands, and on other aspects of the restoration. A series of interpretive signs will be installed around the Lagoon. A tour of the Lagoon has been arranged, there will be activities for the kids and some afternoon tea. Jasmine Payget at Council on 4780 5739 has more...

Loving trees, nor clearing them away

John Lang, arborist and tree surgeon, came to us to impart a deep personal knowledge of trees. John has fed and bandaged trees, he has cut their hair, he has engineered their demise with care and precision. He has chopped their limbs in axeman competition. He has embarked on mature-age tertiary study of their fruits and foibles. John loves and needs trees. His return to the rain forest of Kedumba Valley after a life-threatening illness, hastened his recovery!

John is a natural raconteur, who was able effortlessly to lead us into some 'Arborist's Tales' of a tree surgeon's life – of his schooling with Frank Barker up the pinus radiata at Blackheath, when the observed fauna included an unclad lady on a tartan rug, posing for her artist friend – of axeman Tom Kirk explaining the 'standing light' technique for Council staff selection – of felling a twenty-tonne lightning-damaged pinus radiata onto a mere two-metre walkway twist Eric Dark's house and garden – of learning the fundamentals of foliage management at the strictest feet of Alison Campbell – and of an out-of-body experience among the sassafras and coachwood during his survey of the site for the new Scenicender terminal.



Such has been John's intimate and professional exposure to trees, shrubs and gardens right across the Mountains, that it is apparent that he no longer feels an urgent need to differentiate between the native and the exotic – for example pine trees and eucalyptus can live as neighbours, he avows, without invading each other's territory – and anyway they all hark back to a common ancestry in the Gondwana period.

While many of us have home gardens that do include both native and introduced species, it was possible to detect a ripple of dissent in the audience from those whose monthly mission is to rid our native bush of introduced species. But there are many such paradoxes among men and women of tolerance that will never be resolved.

John was followed by **Reece Turner**, an arts/law graduate who is a Campaigner against Land Clearing for the Wilderness Society. His message concerning the native trees, woodlands, grasslands and wetlands was more dire.

Land clearing in NSW is affecting climate change as bulldozed trees are burnt and release greenhouse gases, it is pushing some 240 animal and plant species towards extinction and it is aggravating dryland salinity. Due to inadequate mapping systems, the full extent of land clearing is not accurately known. The Department of Natural Resources approved 49,700 hectares of clearing in the last financial year, but the Australian Greenhouse Office claims that there were 75,000 hectares cleared in the same period. The Wilderness Society estimates that including illegal clearing the current annual levels are around 100,000 hectares of native vegetation. The acceptable level is only 10,000 hectares.



Queensland has acted to stop broadscale clearing. The NSW State Government has been unable to fix the issue. Reece suggested that the compliance with native vegetation legislation has failed and needs an independent investigating unit, that systematic mapping every six months is required, that loopholes that allow landholders to clear so-called 'native weeds' and sow crops should be closed. He acknowledges that many landowners, particularly those of long experience on the land, are sensitive to the challenge, while \$436m of State and Federal revenue has been allocated to help landholders implement a new native vegetation regime. The Wilderness Society asserts that "the money needs to be tied to a native vegetation reform to ensure that the economic and social costs of environmental conservation are borne by the whole community."

This Wilderness Society Campaign is supported by a song line adaptation of Banjo's famous words, "Now a jolly swagman/Can't find his billabong/'Cos they have bulldozed/The Coolibah trees." It is set out on a postcard featuring a despairing Tom Roberts swaggie. Reece asked for members to contact him for a copy to sign, Phone (02) 9282 9553 or email reece.turner@wilderness.org.au Otherwise to please

And what of trimming?

During the discussion session which followed on from supper, a query was raised over the tree management practices of power supplier, **Integral Energy**, particularly in reference to a perceived policy of lopping and chopping trees near power lines. John pointed out that in his experience, best practice involves simply trimming the first few nodes of regrowth, which is not only more aesthetically pleasing but has the effect of slowing the encroachment of foliage.

Member **Frank Winternitz** has had his own frustrations with **Integral**, and had written this note to **Hut News** during the very same week:

Dear Editor

*There has been a shift in **Integral Energy's** 'tree trimming' practices.*

*Recently, at Faulconbridge, **Integral** (not a contractor) cut down 50-60 large trees and many smaller ones. They then sprayed herbicide on the stumps.*

*This particular area has been 'tree trimmed', not 'tree destroyed', for at least 20 years. For explanation, as always, **Integral** moved to the high ground citing worker safety and fire hazard. I, however, maintain that it is for a meaner reason, viz it is cheaper to chop and poison trees than to trim them every year. One needs to be suspicious when a company's high moral position coincides with its economic benefit, as if by mere chance.*

There is a riposte to this uncaring practice – it comes from the Electricity Supply (General) Regulation 2001, NSW. The Act says (cl. 102, Preservation of Trees):

1. a service provider must not remove any tree, or trim any tree in a way that substantially damages the tree, unless,

a) it is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so to protect its powerlines or the safety of persons or property under or near its powerlines,

b) it has considered alternative methods and it is of the opinion that none of those methods are feasible in the circumstances (including economically feasible), and

c) the service provider is acting in accordance with a tree management plan.

***Integral** may have a 'tree management plan' but, so far, it has by obfuscation and wilful misunderstanding not given me one. It remains to be seen what it contains.*

*Frank Winternitz, 4751 2957
cherimolla@yahoo.com.au*

Changes to the BMCS Constitution

The three proposed changes as circulated to members in January were approved at the Special General Meeting on 27 January, 2006. In brief, they:

- (1) act to ensure that a new status of provisional member will meet our insurance requirements in respect of guest or visitor bushwalkers,
- (2) grant us clearance to commit to direct debit accounts, as is required by internet providers and some other suppliers, and
- (3) regularise the current practice of annual approvals for recurrent expenditure, such as say, **Hut News** printing.



ALAN HARRIS – ADMINISTRATION OFFICER

Alan is married to Pam and they have two married sons: Mitchell, a freelance web site designer in Melbourne, and Broderick, a software engineer in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Their only grandchild, Aralyn, lives in Ann Arbor, so an annual visit is required.

Alan began his working career as a high school teacher before retraining to become an auditor/accountant with the Public Service in Canberra in the 1970s. In the early 1980s Alan joined Pam and another partner in establishing a mid-sized management consultancy. Following dissolution of the partnership in 1992, and with the boys having left home to study, Alan and Pam seized the opportunity to try something different.

First they moved to Kalkaringi (460 kms south west of Katherine, and north of the Tanami Desert) where Alan became the CEO for the Daguragu Community Council, working with the Gurindji people (of the 1966 Walk-Off fame) where English was a third or fourth language and many of the folk still followed a fairly tribal lifestyle.

In 1995 Alan became the CEO of the Nguu Community Council working on Bathurst Island with the Tiwi people, a community which was seen by the NT Government as a ‘show place’ often visited by Territory and Federal cabinet ministers to garner ideas. In 1999 Alan took up a consulting role, completing assignments for the NT Government, ATSIC and others, and acting as financial and administrative adviser to several indigenous communities across the Territory.

However, when the heat and humidity in Darwin proved too much, Alan and Pam decided to move to the gentler climes of the Blue Mountains which they had often visited in their childhood. Now established in Wentworth Falls as a “self-funded seeker of enlightenment and good health”, Alan is concerned with preserving the local area for future generations. He is interested in local history and is a keen believer in fitness: enjoying regular Pilates classes at the Leura gym, walking to Wenty village for coffee and the paper, and of course often heading off into the bush.

LYNDAL SULLIVAN – LAND USE OFFICER

The beauty of the Blue Mountains had always attracted me, despite the misfortune of Sydney being located so close! In spite of this drawback, I moved here in 1986 to take up a position as a carpenter on the NPWS Heritage Centre at Blackheath. Having just emerged from an apprenticeship in Bathurst working mainly on brick veneer dwellings, it was a bit daunting to both work on this different style of construction and also to be teaching skills to a work experience team.

I had come into the building industry for a ‘rest’ from my first career as a Community Social Worker in Brisbane and then later in Bathurst. Building offered the satisfaction of producing something tangible as well as many mental challenges; but it wasn’t exactly a ‘rest’ from dealing with the fixed ideas of the ‘civic fathers’ and others.



During my time in Bathurst I developed further my love of the bush during trips with the Central West Bushwalking Club. One of my first experiences of the Society, in about 1987, was a Land Use subcommittee field trip to Kanangra Walls with Margaret Baker, Carol Proberts and others. They astounded me with the number of bird calls they could differentiate as well as their knowledge of plants. I realised the Blue Mountains was a place not only full of exhilarating natural beauty but also of inspiring people.

Later I became a partner in a building company specialising in cypress pine houses. This provided many opportunities to learn about more sustainable alternatives in design and materials.

I joined the Minnehaha Landcare Group upon its formation in 1991. This led to studying the Bush Regeneration course at TAFE, which is the best learning experience I have ever had.

I have been a member of the Society’s Land Use subcommittee continuously since about 1996, when I abandoned self employment and became more involved in land use planning matters, also pursuing Environmental Management studies at university. Working with this subcommittee has provided many opportunities for learn-

ing, and for contacts with a wide range of interesting people.

These days I am primarily a bush regenerator working for local contractors, which takes me to many beautiful places – even to Lord Howe Island! It also provides great opportunities to observe the complex workings of the natural world, to give something back, and to ‘make a difference.’ Occasionally I keep my hand in with some building work.

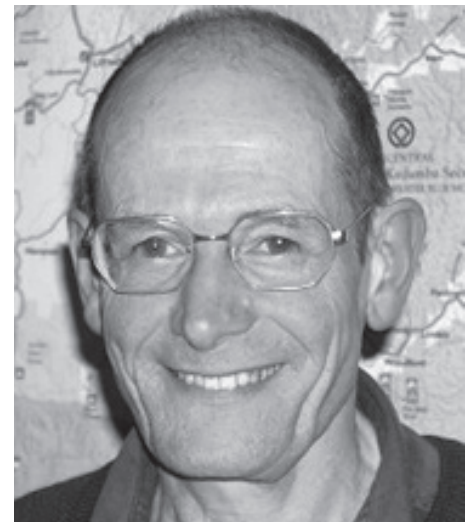
JIM WALLACE – MEETINGS CONVENOR

Jim is a valuable person to have with us. Once responsible for bushwalks and publicity, he now organises our Monthly Meetings and introduces his speakers and topics with off-beat flair and affecting sensitivity.

Appointed as a schoolteacher, first in Wilcannia, then in Broken Hill and in other places around NSW, Jim developed a profound respect for the vastness and haunting beauty of the Australian bush, but especially for the Blue Mountains.

While working here at various “mundane” jobs, Jim completed the Outdoor Guiding Course, with honours, which led to positions with YHA and at the Scenic Railway, where he could most effectively put his knowledge to use when introducing visitors to the region.

Best of all, he says, was his work as a NPWS Discovery Ranger, leading countless groups of all ages, experience and backgrounds. On such walks and tours, Jim imparted a wealth of information on geology, flora, fauna, history, and practical bushcraft. He went on to develop further skills as a poet and photographer in order to better raise the awareness of people about the natural world, and of course the need to conserve it!



As a whimsical Meetings Convenor, Jim employs all of his talents, and enjoys the challenge of finding the best speakers available, ranging from local identities to leading researchers of international standing. He says he tries to seek out those speakers who “not only can educate, entertain and enthuse but also inject a sense of the fragility and wonder about the Nature we all share.”

Darwin's Walk Day, News from an old friend and an Assault on an old enemy

The Consoc Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group was duly represented at the *Discover Darwin's Walk Day* on Sunday 22 January, our convenor, Karen Hising presiding with some of her members at a weed education display stall in Wilson Park. The Rotary Club of the Central Blue Mountains, BMCC, the RFS, *Wild Plant Rescue*, *Streamwatch* and local



Karen with her weed display at Wilson Park

Bushcare Groups joined together in a day of sunny celebration. Yabbies, skinks, snakes, butterflies, gang gangs, whip birds, heaths and eucalypts joined with the less welcome blackberry, montbretia, coreopsis, broom and privet to highlight the incredible diversity that in fact underlies Darwin's theories of natural selection. Not to mention of course the human presence, some 200 representatives of this species turning out for the talks, the guided walks, the cooling dip at Fletcher St overhang and the sausages back at the park.

News of this impending event revived his memories and encouraged one of our respected senior Life Members, **Wilson Alcorn** to drop this very welcome line to the President:

Greetings, Brian. Firstly I'd like to say how I appreciate Hut News and it is obvious the Society is a powerful force in the Conservation struggle. I was President of Katoomba and District Wildlife Society as it was called from 1970, a time when we were involved in many battles. I was also publisher and/or Editor of Newsletter and must have turned the handle of the old Gestetner machine a few thousand times.

I was moved to write by the item on Darwin's Walk, a pet project of mine. Sadly I started on it the same week I retired!! At one time, private land belonging to a religious sect included a part of the creek. Walkers could be met by naked bodies meditating in the stream!! Our Land Preservation Fund could not buy it but I understand a government grant came later. Secretary Winsome Gregory was a tower of strength in money matters with the Land Preservation Fund and Native Plants.

My brother was BMCC Head Ranger for 20 years when I took over for 5 years. John Metcalf, Chief Engineer, was a good friend of the Society. I think those years maintaining the tracks and reserves from Mt Victoria to Woodford plus the involvement with fine people in the Conservation Society were the best of my life. I supervised building the Nature Trail with volunteers but our fine botanist Isobel Bowden was the project manager and made the map with detailed info on plants in each numbered area. I trust the Society still has the map.

Some wonderful people nurtured the Conservation Society: Isobel Bowden, Eleanor Dark and Dr Dark, Frank and Greta Vanry, Annette and Fred Wintzler (who kept supplies up to the Hut), Winsome Gregory (the perfect secretary) and Fred Astle a founder member. Walks were popular as we had experts on native flora like Jill Dark and for native birds my brother Graham Alcorn.

I am 87 and have finished up in this hostel in Orange after a major cancer operation, but hope to see Blue Mountains again one day. I gave a talk on 1970s conservation battles and sadly gave the Society two slides, only photos of the old Hut. I suppose they are lost. I meant to enlarge one for the Society. All the best for Darwin's Walk Day!

Note: Consoc is arranging to send Wilson a copy of the photos and the map.

Before we take leave of our Valley of the Waters Bushcarers, here is hot news of their **AGGIE ASSAULT** on Saturday, 11 March 2006! Agapanthus (weeds!) have become firmly established in an area behind some houses and are beginning to creep further into bushland. The Group have been steadily working on this problem. They have had success cutting and painting the larger or medium-sized plants with glyphosate and prising out the juvenile plants, but have only managed to put a dent in the aggie infestation.

Members are invited to come along to help. Meet at the bus shelter at the corner of Valley Road and Armstrong Street, Wentworth Falls. Work starts at 9.00am and finishes at 12.00 noon, although any time you can spare would be great. Take herbicide-proof gloves, if you have them – if not, they will be provided. Tools and training will be available, as well as a delicious morning tea. If you wish to know more, please contact:

Karen Hising, 4757 1929 or at karenhising@bigpond.com

GRABS AND JABS

Defamation Workshop in the BMts

On Thursday 9 March 2006 Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre will present a two-hour seminar dealing with the recent introduction of uniform National defamation laws.

The seminar is pitched at community workers and activists, and will comprise a brief rundown of the new laws followed by some engaging case-studies.

Time: 10 am - 12 noon

Cost: \$10 including morning tea

Venue: TBA

For more information or to book, contact Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre on (02) 4782 4155 or at admin@bmclc.org.au

Gardens of Stone Stage 2

Following on from the launch in December, a "Lobby Book", illustrating in colour photos the values intrinsic to this Park Proposal has been completed by the Society in consultation with the Colong Foundation. The promotion phase now commences – meetings with the LCC, BMCC, Government Ministers and the Aboriginal Tribal Council.

DA 22/15 Heliport Capertee

Present indications are that the proponent will not appeal the LCC decision to reject the development application.

Lawson Golf Club Redevelopment

The Bushcare Option 6 remains on BMCC Exhibition along with Options 10 and 11 until 3 March, 2006. Members are again encouraged to register positive feedback on our Bush Heritage Vision for the site.

Remote Bush Care

Not bushcare by remote control, but rather a "handling" of weeds that are migrating further into good bush than existing programs are dealing with. BMCC Bushcare is beginning a remote area autumn program with a return to Fraser Creek, Winmalee, on Sunday 26 March from 9.00am to 4.00pm. Andy Forster would like to have your expression of interest. Please contact him on 4780 5623 on Fridays or by email at aforster@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Bushcare BBQ at Megalong

This Annual Event, where BMCC says 'Thanks' for another year of effort by the 50 plus Bushcare groups, is on again – Saturday 25 February, 2006 at Megalong Valley Hall. Food, drinks, games, awards, Bushcare Olympics and the Bake-Off. Starts around noon. Bring chair, table, eating irons, sunscreen, a big parasol, a banner and the widest of wide grins.

Nature rules – Vulcanism in the Galapagos Islands

Puerto Villamil looks pretty quiet this morning... why? Maybe everyone is up on the volcano, maybe people have abandoned this Isla Isabela fearing the fury of God Vulcano, or maybe it is just too early for most of the inhabitants of this tiny fishing village. However, there is something that's changing their daily routine. Now the world has its eyes on them, on this lovely place with a long white sandy beach at the base of an active volcano.

We board the pick-up trucks and head to the rim of **Sierra Negra**. Everyone wants to ride on the back, despite the dust, the bumpy road, the low branches in this narrow path. We have gotten a permit to get to the rim. We have an appointment with the eruption, and there is no time to lose. Once at 2800 feet, we leave the pick-up trucks behind and start the walk to the very rim at 4890 feet. It's a little steep, and we are anxious to know if we'll actually see the eruption or not. We find groups heading back already; they look radiant, shining with a special spark. I guess it's the glow one only gets with the invigorating light of an erupting volcano. A guest inquires of the leader of the other group about their encounter, what they saw, how it was, what to expect once we arrive there. I think that it's better not to know, to be surprised by our own thoughts.

Anyway, we are already there. We can hear it, and we can smell it. And we did see it! At the moment there was an opening through the guavas, we discovered the spouts of lava being ejected to the skies, from two different vents. One of the lava fountains was approximately 400 feet high. There was a wide lava flow running into the floor of this second largest caldera in the world. There was a cloud of gases and water vapour reaching at least two miles

into the blue skies. The guavas around the rim and inside the volcano had been burned when the winds blew south a few days ago. But the fair southern trade winds are taking most of the gases to the north east. Puerto Villamil is on Sierra Negra southern flanks, and we are also standing on the southern edge of the volcano so we can enjoy the eruption with no fear or let's say with the normal fear when one is faced with the power of nature.

We get as far as it's allowed by the National Park Service, and once there, we sit down and watch. Sierra Negra, with or without an eruption, is already impressive. The wide caldera of approximately 5 by 7 miles in diameter is filled in by black and young lava. The summit of this volcano collapsed long ago, and the last eruptions have occurred along the rim. These features are called parasitic eruptions, and the last one was in 1979.

Now this volcano has been erupting for five days since 22 October, when people celebrating a party in the highlands of Isla Isabela experienced a small earthquake. Goat hunters felt it too; they were at the rim and left everything behind and ran down to town. The news also came from a boat anchored in Elizabeth Bay: Sierra Negra was spouting a lava fountain nearly a thousand feet high. Our boat, the *Islander* was a hundred miles away from the volcano, in Espanola. But even from there we could see a reddish horizon thanks to the energy of this magnificent eruption. Six days later the volcano is still sending molten rock into the sky and pouring rivers of lava into its caldera. It has lost some power, but still, it is Sierra Negra, erupting, in front of our human eyes. We are so little, but feel so huge now that we have witnessed one of the processes that shape planet Earth.

Liz van Reyswoud, Membership Secy

A Spurt in Membership

Our Membership Secretary, Liz van Reyswoud has returned from the Galapagos Islands to find herself processing a flurry of new membership applications.

Liz acknowledges that some of the influx has arisen because of the popularity of the membership 'deal' offered to participants in the upcoming **BMCS Sustainability Workshops**, but she is nevertheless delighted to report that 850 barrier has been breached and membership is now at 866.

[Incidentally, concerning the Sustainability Workshops – BOTH ARE FULL !

The team organising the Workshops is overjoyed! Even before the first of the two events ran in January the second one for February was completely booked out. Craig Linn, the Society's Environmental Education Officer, said that it was great to see so many members keen to make the Mountains a sustainable place to live.]

Well these are our very welcome new members (and lobbyists?) Dare we hope that a number of them have the time, skills and enthusiasm to respond to our President's Page One plea for fresh blood around the Management Committee table? (But not of course on the floor!)

Ilan Salbe, Lawson
Aaron Lloyd, East Blaxland
Sandra Nicholson, Leura
Stuart Taylor, Leura
Laura Nielsen, Katoomba
David Laughlin, Dee Why
Bill Avery, Leura
Tristan McLachlan, Katoomba
L Dungeate, Katoomba
Katrina Knight, Wentworth Falls
Leta van der Wal, Hazelbrook
Mark Watson, Katoomba
Brenda Linn, Katoomba
Alex Lean, Blackheath
Mary Ellen Duggan, Blackheath
Kathe Boehringer, Blackheath
Grant & Caroline Miller, Wenty Falls
Alan Jones, Winnmalee
Kathleen Linehan, Wentworth Falls
Deidre O'Connell, Wentworth Falls
David Minard & Karen Terry, Emu Hts
Jan and Bill Webster, Blackheath
Ruth Spence, Cambridge Park
Juliana Krstevski, Castle Hill
Sharon O'Regan, Castle Hill
Julie Favell, Blackmans Flat
Chris Jonkers, Blackmans Flat

Chris Jonkers in fact has been elected to the Management Committee, as Project Officer representing the Lithgow Regional Subcommittee of Consoc, the formation of which was announced last month.

Let's Banish Brutish Biobanking

Biobanking is a biodiversity offsets and banking scheme. Currently, biodiversity offsets allow that biodiversity loss arising from a given development on pristine land can be offset by rehabilitation and perhaps purchase of already degraded land in another area. The issue is usually determined on a case-by-case basis.

But now the Department of Environment and Conservation is seeking to implement a formal Biobanking scheme and have it up and running by 2007. A second working paper on this proposal has been released for public input by 28 February, 2006.

The Society and the NCC see the scheme as totally devastating; it has the potential to allow future clearing of already over-cleared environments by allowing developers to pay what is simply a form of compensation.

In fact the whole concept of offsets and biobanking is unacceptable. Brian Marshall has termed it a 'Claytons' process – "All developments," he said, "should be required to pay environmental compensation, but this should not be termed an offset, because it should not have bearing on the granting or rejection of a DA."

The proposal will probably go ahead regardless but it is worth ensuring that as many loopholes as possible are closed in the working paper. Again the Society will be making a submission, but members are invited to register their own (outraged) objections.

To obtain the working paper, email Consoc at ronwit@ozemail.com.au or download it from the website www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatspec/biobankscheme.htm

Comments may be emailed to biobanking@environment.nsw.gov.au or posted to Deputy Director-General, Environment Protection and Regulation Division, Department of Environment and Conservation, PO Box A290, Sydney NSW 1121.

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES
Elizabeth van Reyswoud
4757 2694,
mcreysw@bigpond.net.au
PO Box 29 Wentworth Falls 2782

This is the final article dealing with the responses to the **Membership Survey** and identifying the matters that Management Committee has 'under consideration'. Some of these matters have already been implemented, while others matters, as Management Committee evaluates them, will be either progressively introduced or perhaps set aside.

Article 4 deals with survey Questions N, K and L. These respectively relate to **the ages of the responding members, the dearth of 'young' members and how to change this, and the ongoing need to attract more members irrespective of age.** The responses to K and L were too variable for simple statistical analysis.

Question N

The age-distribution of the responding members turned out to be: '16 or younger' 0.5%; '17-30' 1.5%; '31-45' 10%; '46-55' 16%; '55 or older' 72%.

As 50% of the respondents indicated that they are 'retired', this equates to ~69% of the '55 or older' cohort, provided the assumption that all retirees are 55+ is reasonable. Again, if 65 is taken as the retirement age (debatable, but not unreasonable), the retirees' data suggest that ~22% of members are '55-65' and ~50% are 'older than 65'. Clearly, the Society's membership is heavily skewed to older age groups and retirees.

The above should be no surprise to anyone who has attended Monthly Meetings or met many of the current and past Management Committees. Nevertheless, it is disturbing because the Society is failing to reach a significant proportion of potential members, and arguably failing to ensure its long-term future.

Question K

This effectively asked: (a) why there are so few 'young' members (defined as under 55 and not retired); and (b) how might the proportion be increased? The respondents' unquestioning acceptance of the premise in (a) affirmed the belief that BMCS is dominated by 'oldies', as has been substantiated by the results from Question N.

The dominant themes in answers relating to part (a) were: retirees have time for engagement because they have fewer responsibilities than those with young families and mortgages; too busy with work and earning a living is an essentially similar theme; 7.30pm Friday inconveniently conflicts with social activities; reflects the demography of the upper Blue Mountains from which most members are drawn; the organisation has a stuffy retirees' aura (although this could be a consequence rather than a cause) and the meetings lack punch; and the problem is endemic with volunteer organisations and not peculiar to the Blue Mountains.

Lesser themes included: waning credibility of the environmental movement; 'youth' is apathetic and self-centred; 'youth' is interested in short-term, high-profile activities rather than protracted local issues; and younger people don't need the social interaction of meetings.

Two answers merit particular mention, because they go beyond the immediate question. One implied that 'old' members are over-represented in the survey because they wish to redress the declining quality-of-life and environmental compromises that accompany increasing affluence ('affluenza'!). The other contrasted 'BMCS' (tackles local and complex issues) with 'youth' (likes big-ticket issues with simple slogans) and felt that satisfying both would require a 'Young BMCS' division. The respondent concluded that BMCS should focus on recruiting more 'oldies' rather than creating headaches!

In responding to part (b), many treated 'young' as meaning 'teens' and early twenties. This is apparent in comments like: send speakers to high schools and TAFE and get in early; need social activities for youth; have special events for under 35s; reduced/free membership for under 25s/under 18s; get young funky speakers; and provide financial incentives for environmental projects through youth centres. More general suggestions again emphasised: changing the meeting day and time in a range of ways

(Saturday morning, through to mid-week during the day); making meetings less formal; and remarketing bushwalking.

A different approach was adopted by those who advocated surveying a younger age-group to find out why they are not joining. This is initially appealing, but logic says that, as they are not members, saying why they haven't joined would at best be couched in generalities. Perhaps a more useful exercise would be to survey younger people who have left the Society.

Matters under consideration by Management Committee

- (a) Membership concessions for younger people not eligible for the family rate.
- (b) Loosening the meeting procedure on selected occasions.
- (c) Review the role of financial inducements in stimulating 'youth' membership.
- (d) Survey of 'young' people who have dropped membership.

Many of the suggestions (e.g. school environment awards, interacting with schools, exposure at libraries, direct advertising) already happen, or are better addressed under Question L, so if 'your' idea is not listed for consideration, please realise that there may be a simple explanation.

Question L

This asked for suggestions on how to increase membership, irrespective of age. For a range of reasons, the Society's membership fluctuates over periods of several months to several years. Management Committee's aim is to ensure that these fluctuations vary about an upward trend relative to population growth.

As with **Question K**, suggestions include fee concessions for under 18s; reactivation of Kids Club; 'family friendly' promotions and meetings; and publicity through schools, TAFE and libraries.

Less age-related suggestions comprise: membership drives through existing members (bring along a friend); more publicity through the BMG; 'presence' at festivals/fairs, shopping centres and tourist outlets; run more educational activities; produce practical publications/guides; and develop an increased presence in the lower Blue Mountains and in communities along the Western Escarpment.

For consideration by Management Committee

Because many of the suggestions are already being implemented to some degree, it would be easy to accept comments such as 'continue the same way'. But this would disregard the possibility of doing things better, as envisaged in the following:

- (a) Re-examine opportunities to promote the Society and publicise its activities beyond the membership (e.g. more widely distribute *Hut News*; 'showcase' the website; achieve more exposure in the *Blue Mountains Gazette* and *Lithgow Mercury*).
- (b) Pursue educational outreach via workshops, practical publications and bushwalking.
- (c) Undertake incentive-driven membership promotions.
- (d) Develop ways to better engage communities outside the upper Blue Mountains.
- (e) Be realistic and take steps to attract additional members irrespective of age.

Members' reactions

If, when you read this article you identify significant omissions, please send your comments to bmc@bluemountains.org.au or BMCS, PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782 and mark them M'shipSurvHNArticle4.

Should your comments refer to earlier articles or be more general, please mark your communication accordingly and again send it by email or snail-mail.

Finally, whilst again emphasising that members' suggestions and ideas are appreciated, please recognise that Management Committee comprises volunteers that are stretched thinly and prone to burnout. Implementation of some of the suggestions under consideration will involve more work, so greater involvement of non-Executive members is most necessary and would be welcomed.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY WALKS

These walks are all of medium difficulty, except Roberts Pass which is hard. If this is your first walk, or you are unsure of the classification, please discuss with the leader or with Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au

Feb-18	Turpentine Track, Breakfast Creek	Meredith	4782 4823	Woodford Station Carpark, <i>Swimsuit</i>	9.00am
Feb-25	Giant Staircase, Leura Forest, Furber Steps	Mary	4787 6918	Gearins Hotel, Katoomba	8.30am
Mar-04	Camel's Hump	June	4787 7312	Mt Victoria Station Carpark	8.30am
Mar-11	Wollangambe River	Bob	4757 2694	Mt Victoria Station Carpark, <i>Swimsuit</i>	8.30am
Mar-18	Lawsons Long Alley, Lockyer Road loop	Liz	4754 4966	Mt Victoria Station Carpark	8.30am
Mar-25	Roberts Pass, Valley of Waters, Cons Hut	Mary	4787-6918	Wentworth Falls Stockyard Carpark	8.30am

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS

Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours, suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded medium: ie. can include some short rock scrambles, or some short sections off track. Bring morning tea and lunch. Carry at least one litre of WATER. Two litres on hot days.

Feb-20	Den Fenella, Wentworth Falls	Norah	4757 4058	Wentworth Falls Stockyard Carpark	8.30am
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Classic Mountains glen and views over Kedumba Valley.

Feb-27	Grand Canyon, Blackheath	Terry	4787 6918	Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre	8.45am
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Magnificent canyon with shaded areas.

Mar-06	Lockyers Pass, Hartley	Marie	4787 1257	Mt Victoria Station Carpark	8.30am
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Historic mountain track.

Mar-13	Bennetts Lookout, Blackheath	Ron	4757 1526	Mt Victoria Station Carpark	8.30am
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Bush walk with views over Grose Valley.

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS

Easy to medium grade walks conducted to suit walkers on the day. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there may be an option for a slower group to complete only a section of the distance. Carry at least one litre of WATER. Two litres on hot days.

Feb-23	Red Gum Park, Bullaburra	Bill	4759 1692	De Quency & Genevieve Rds, Bullaburra	10.00am
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Easy walk through Red Gum Park past Minnatonka Falls. Return to 1 Cottle Road for BBQ lunch. BYO food & drinks.

Mar-02	Tableland Road to Rocket Point, W.Falls	David	4757 3416	Wentworth Falls Stockyard Carpark	10.00am
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*Walk through heathland for views over Wentworth Falls and Jamison Valley. **Please phone by 8.00am to check if walk is on.***

Mar-09	Hyde Park near Hartley	Marie	4787 1257	Mt Victoria Station Carpark	10.00am
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Easy walk to picnic area and swimming hole on River Lett. Bring chairs and picnic.

Mar-16	Witches Leap, & Furber Steps, Katoomba	Joan	4782 2218	Gearins Hotel, Katoomba	10.00am
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Descent from cliff top though rainforest. Possible extension to Leura Forest via Federal Pass. Return via Scenicender. Bring lunch.

Nursery News: We've had a good start to the year with the award of a contract from Blue Mountains City Council for 1350 plants to re-vegetate an area of Summerhays Park in Winmalee, following construction work later in the year.

During December and early January we were busy collecting seeds of local provenance from a list supplied by Council but as it was late in the season and especially following the burst of hot weather, many species had already shed their seed. Both the bush area of Summerhays Park and nearby Deanii Reserve are classed as Shale Sandstone Transition Forest, an endangered ecological community, so Mike Purtell and his Deanii Reserve Bushcare Group were able to come to the rescue and were able to supply seed collected during the year!

The nursery is intent on establishing a seed bank with as many species as possible from a range of areas of the Mountains and is seeking the help of members to collect seed either from their garden, if the area is natural, or during a bushwalk. (But do note, it is illegal to collect in a National Park)

If you can identify the plant, please collect the seed and label it with the species name, date and where it was found. Then you may drop it into the office, bring it to a Monthly Meeting, give it to a nursery volunteer or post it to Kevin Bell, PO Box 81 Blackheath 2785. You will be helping us greatly – whenever we are asked to supply plants of local provenance, we will have a good seed stock to plant immediately.

Following the holiday break both our nurseries are open again in the mornings – Blackheath at 9.00am on Tuesday and Lawson at the same time on Wednesday. We have a fine variety of over 70 species to cover your needs. Trees and shrubs, big or small, rockery plants, ground-covers and climbers – you are always welcome to browse through our greenhouses, and our volunteers are there if you need help.

Kevin Bell, Nursery Manager, 4787 6436

khsbell@pnc.com.au

Walk Against Want: The annual Oxfam Australia *Walk Against Want* will be held on Sunday 12 March 2006.

Oxfam Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, secular, community development organisation working in partnership with local communities in over 25 countries worldwide, as well as with Indigenous Australia.

The Walk is the national fundraising event, symbolising the long walk that women in developing countries make to collect water. The money raised helps Oxfam Australia in alleviating poverty and promoting social justice through its on-going community-based projects, advocacy and campaigning. **Consoc members would be aware that progress in these areas can work towards an increased capacity of the subject groups and countries to begin to take greater care of the environment. And so the event carries your Committee's firm endorsement! Look, it doesn't clash with any of the Walks in our list above, and would be a worthy training run!**

The 5km Blue Mountains Walk will begin at Wentworth Falls Picnic Area at 9.00am, and will follow the Overcliff track to the Conservation Hut past the Lookouts and back to the Picnic Area. Walkers can obtain sponsorship books and register on 1800 034 034. Further enquiries can be directed to Consoc member, Simone Windon on 4751 3549.

After your Walk with June to Camel's Hump on Saturday 4 March, why not plan to spruce up your favourite nasty spot as a participant in **Clean Up Australia Day, 5 March, 2006?!**

Consoc does not sponsor a particular site: we prefer to leave it to members to choose their own possie for this well-drilled, widely-advertised and truly inspired environmental initiative.