

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"



At the A.G.M.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Friday 27 March at the Conservation Hut. If you are considering standing for an office please phone and talk to a member of the present management committee (contact numbers at the bottom of this page). Office facilities are available.

Following the election of officers for 1998/99 our guest speaker will be Chris Dunstan who will talk about reducing greenhouse gases through developing sustainable energy in NSW.

Chris Dunstan is project officer at the Sustainable Energy Development Authority, a NSW Government body which was established in 1996 to fight global warming by promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency.

This is a very topical subject in light of the Australian Federal Government's poor performance at the Global Warming conference in Kyoto in December.

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions are close to the highest per capita in the world. Using renewable energy and being energy efficient are important factors in reducing greenhouse gases.

The meeting starts at 7.30. Visitors are welcome.

Day of Action

Badgery's Creek Airport Day of Action, Sunday 15 March, from noon, at Jamison Park, Penrith (near Panthers).

It will be a family fun day with free entertainment and rides for the kids. Be there and be part of the World's largest living anti-airport logo. (More details are enclosed with this newsletter.)

Sale of Native Plants

With summer and the heat on the way out (hopefully!), now is a good time to plant new natives. The Society's native plant nursery will have a sale of plants on Saturday 14 March at the Conservation Hut, from 9 am to 12 noon.

Fuel Management

The Bushfire Management Assessment Committee is now preparing the annual hazard reduction program. This year it will include slashing as well as burning treatments.

If you would like to know what is proposed in your area and flag any matters that should be considered please contact Hugh Paterson (4751.2303) or Ron Wheeler (4757.1526).

An issues paper about the fuel management plan is also available for those who would like a better understanding.

Beautiful Airly in Need of Friends

Beautiful Airly, near Capertee, with its magnificent pagodas and golden cliffs is unique. It is the most spectacular pagoda country in the State and should be protected in a National Park and be part of our World Heritage area. It is also an important part of our early mining history, with relics of kerosene shale mining which was carried out on a smaller scale than at Newnes and at an earlier time.

But it is not protected — a mining lease is held by Centennial Coal Company Limited. A condition of this lease was that work should start within five years of the granting of the lease (before the end of April 1998).

We have recently been advised that Centennial Coal Company Limited intends to start production on a trial mine at Airly in the next few months. The company intends to mine 300,000 tonnes of coal to be transported by road to the power station.

It is not economic to mine coal at Airly. At the present time, coal mining in the Lithgow area is being scaled down, and men are being sacked from viable mines. It is obvious that because of the 5-year clause in the lease Centennial Coal Company Limited is going into Airly at this time to make a mess of the area so that they can retain the lease. It is vandalism to destroy Airly.

We must act urgently! Please write to the Premier and the NSW Minister for the Environment. Send a copy to Bob Debus (and a copy to us if it is not too much trouble). The addresses are on page 2.

In the short term this trial mine must be stopped. The lease can be extended so that the company does not mine now. In the long term the lease must be cancelled. Airly is too precious to be destroyed. (See page 2: How the Airly lease was granted).

An Auditor for CHANGE

CHANGE (Coalition of Hawkesbury and Nepean Groups for the Environment) need a voluntary auditor.

With only 30 members and few secretarial expenses, it is a very small job once a year which is, at present, costing the group more than it can afford.

If you can assist, John Murphy (President) would be delighted to hear from you. Please ring 02.4587.7990 (9-5) or 02.4577.4078 (home).

We Deserve a Pat on the Back!

The Society has had a very successful year, and many people have helped.

Belinda Coster, one of our younger members, who helps Joan with supper and helps in many others ways at general meetings, working bees and children's activities; **Kees Putting** who organises the leisure walks; **Ron Wheeler** who is always willing to lend a hand.

The Society's native plant nursery has raised substantial funds for the Society. Volunteers work **EVERY** Tuesday morning (*plants don't take holidays!*) from 9 am to noon. For this we owe a special "thank you" to **David Coleby**, **Imre Gahl**, **Joan Gahl**, **Phillipa Fincher**, **Kevin Bell**, **Mary Shaw**, **Naomi Estelle**, **Rae Druiit**, and **Noreen Skellon**.

Hut News, the newsletter of Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.

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Land Use

Kowmung Safe for Now

The Carr Government's decision favouring a new Spillway for Warragamba Dam will, for the time being, spare the Kowmung River Valley and other important areas of the Southern Blue Mountains Wilderness.

Sadly, State Liberal Leader Peter Collins and others have already launched a political scare campaign, claiming that it is necessary to raise the dam wall.

Raising the wall would flood much of the wilderness. It would cost \$500 million. It would not solve flooding problems for the Penrith and Hawkesbury local government areas, since river systems other than the Warragamba are responsible for a large proportion of their floods.

If the wall-raisers persist, they will strike a wall of opposition from environmentalists.

Meanwhile, why not send a message of congratulations to local member Bob Debus on the Carr Government's decision?

Badgery's Devalued

Federal member for Lowe Paul Zammit has resigned from the Liberal Party. This means that Badgery's Creek Airport can make no political sense for the Federal Government — it certainly makes no economic or environmental sense.

With Lowe gone, the Liberals are hardly likely to lose their other Mascot-affected seats of Bennelong (John Howard), North Sydney (Joe Hockey), or Wentworth (Andrew Thomson).

In contrast, their Badgery's-affected seats of Macquarie (Kerry Bartlett) and Lindsay (Jackie Kelly) now become more important to the forthcoming Federal Election.

Surely the Howard Government must now decide to keep air traffic at Mascot until a genuinely suitable site is found to act as an alternative or supplementary airport.

Chop Chop

Oberon Council has approved a regular Helicopter tourist operation to overfly the Southern Blue Mountains wilderness en route from Sydney to a property on the west bank of the Cox's River.

A landholder on the east bank of the river (in Blue Mountains Council area) is developing a proposal for a competing helicopter operation.

Fair Comment

Naturally, I was interested to read Bob Debus' response to my column in January *Hut News* (circulated with February *Hut News*). The title of my item, 'Will Labor Be Green Again?' acknowledged State Labor's past achievements, but I expressed fears about how some current issues will develop.

Since then we have had an excellent decision on Warragamba (see first item), but little progress on the other matters. I would dearly love to have it proven that all my fears were unjustified.

— Don Morison.



How the Airly Lease was Granted

In 1992 a newspaper advertisement advised that Novocoal had applied for a lease on Airly. Novocoal is or was a wholly-owned subsidiary of CRA, which in turn is owned by Rio Tinto. Anyone opposed to the lease should appear in the Warden's Court in Katoomba.

Bathurst Conservation Society, National Parks Association, Total Environment Centre, and other environmental groups appeared at Katoomba. Company representatives said that it was a replacement lease to keep men from Western Main employed, and that they had orders for Airly coal. They refused to give evidence under oath.

There had been a long-time proposal for a Gardens of Stone National Park. A letter from Tim Moore, then Minister for the Environment, stated that Mount Airly was integral to a Gardens of Stone National Park.

The Katoomba Court decided that it was an environmentally valuable area. The lease could not be granted under these circumstances (when the company would not give evidence under oath). The matter was referred to a Commission of Enquiry.

At the Commission of Enquiry, the Commissioner, Justice Simpson, (there was only one man) found in favour of the company and granted the lease.

There is no appeal to a Commission of Enquiry.

The company did not provide work for the men from Western Main. They did not have orders for Airly coal. In 1997 Novocoal sold the lease to Centennial Coal Company Limited.

Centennial Coal Company Limited now claims to have orders for Airly coal.

Some Addresses for Airly

- The Hon Bob Carr, Premier of NSW, Level 40, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney 2000
- The Hon Pam Allan, Minister for the Environment, Level 9, St James Centre, 111 Elizabeth Street, SYDNEY. 2000.
- The Hon. Bob Debus, Member for Blue Mountains, 107-109 Macquarie Street, Springwood 2777. (Fax 4751.1245)

Welcome to New Members

Ann Elliott and Ron Bradford, Katoomba
Bill Harvey, Wentworth Falls
Irene Vlachou, Wentworth Falls
Fleur Marshall, Blackheath
The Lawson Family, Katoomba
Frances Love, Wentworth Falls
Paul and Simone Windon, Faulconbridge
Peter and Michele Sherwen, Wentworth Falls
Philip Simpfendorfer, Bell
Dean and Kerry Knibbs, Faulconbridge

Useful Internet Sites

Jenny Stubbs, who was our guest speaker at the January general meeting, has supplied this list of useful internet sites:

Book selection www.amazon.com.au
University thesis www.anu.edu.au State Archives www.records.nsw.gov.au Australian Archives www.aa.gov.au National

Membership Enquiries: The Society is keen to have new members who are concerned about the welfare of the Blue Mountains natural environment. Contact membership secretary, Ross Coster: Work (047)59.1247, Home 59.1837 FAX 59.1095, or write to P.O. Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782.

Library Archives enzo.nla.gov.au, British Library www.bl.uk Film archives www.cinemedia.net Maps www.aodc.gov.au and www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/enviromaps/enviromaps.pl Australian Conservation Foundation www.peg.apc.org/~acfenv Patents www.patents.com and www.apio.gov.au Environment Australia www.erin.gov.au Australian Greens www.peg.apc.org.au/~ausgreen/Australian Nature Conservation Agency www.erin.gov.au/portfolio/anca.html Centre for Alternative Technology www2.cat.org.uk/cat/Earthwatch www.earthwatch.org/australia.html Friends of the Earth www.foe.co.uk Greenpeace www.greenpeace.org Greens NSW www.peg.apc.org/~greensnsw Landcare WEB www.agfor.unimelb.edu.au/lcweb.html Rainforest Action Network www.igc.org/ran/Solar Power Sites seds.lpl.arizona.edu/billa/tnp/sol.html

Keep the Spirit of Kakadu Alive

Help in the fight to protect Kakadu National Park from a new Uranium mine.

Kakadu is World Heritage listed. This is the first of 26 proposed uranium mines in Australia. We must tell the Government: **National Parks are not the place for mining!**

First prize in the Kakadu National Raffle is a trip for two people to Kakadu. If you would like to buy (or sell) a book of raffle tickets contact Simone on 4754.4054. Or make a tax deductible donation to Australian Conservation Foundation, PO Box 660, Springwood 2777.

At The Hut

The Conservation Hut Cafe is under new management with a team committed to providing for local residents, day trippers and bushwalkers. It is open from 9 am to 5 pm every day.

Information will be provided, focusing particularly on the Valley of the Waters.

This is where we can participate. In the original Conservation Hut, members of the Society provided information to bushwalkers and visitors about the Blue Mountains bushwalks and the local environment.

The new manager Michell Conway has invited us to come to the Conservation Hut at weekends to provide information to visitors. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to promote the Blue Mountains environment.

What we need is a number of people (the more the better) who can help for an hour or two or half a day so that we can make up a roster. If you would like to co-ordinate of help out, please contact Christine on 4787.7246.

(By the way, their coffee is delicious! — Ed.)

On the Night Train by Henry Lawson, 1922.

Have you seen the bush by moonlight, from the train, go running by?
Blackened log and stump and sapling, ghostly trees all dead and dry;
Here a patch of glassy water; there a glimpse of mystic sky?
Have you heard the still voice calling — yet so warm, and yet so cold:
“I’m the Mother-Bush that bore you! Come to me when you are old.”?

Did you see the Bush below you sweeping darkly to the Range,
All unchanged and all unchanging, yet so *very* old and strange!
While you thought in softened anger of the things that did estrange?
(Did you hear the Bush a-calling, when your heart was young and bold:
“I’m the Mother-Bush that nursed you; come to me when you are old.”?)

In the cutting, in the tunnel, out of sight of stack or shed,
Have you heard the grey Bush calling from the pine-ridge overhead:
“You have seen the seas and cities; all is cold to you, or dead —
All seems done and all seems told —
But the grey-light turns to gold?
I’m the Mother-Bush that loves you; come to me now you are old.”?

(This was one of Henry Lawson’s last poems. I recently heard it sung by Blackheath’s Roz Wells. It is a beautiful song. — Ed.)

In the Bush

A cool change and a shower of rain prompted Bunyip to explore fresh billabongs. Nangar National Park was gazetted in 1983 and consisted of approximately 3,500 hectares. Since then the Nangar State Forest has been added and thus its area has now trebled. It is located roughly half way between Orange and Forbes, or just a little east of Eugowra.

I was naive to hope that the Park would give me some idea of what the Mid Western Slopes may have been like in pre-white days. Alas, except for its profile of cliffs and crags, I doubt if there is any semblance to what it may have been 200 years ago. The State Forestry picked the eyes out of it before the handover, they and bordering farmers grazed stock through it, and now the goats

are there. Dense thickets of young cypress pine have emerged and along the only access road into the park there was a dearth of shrubs.

I can’t see how the condition of the other newly-proclaimed western parks can be any different. The farmers regard them as havens for grass and

crop-eating kangaroos. Some resentment is felt because they cannot graze stock within the N.P. area as was their practice when the home paddock was bare.

If the Park is goat free there is the bogey of dense undergrowth and very hot fires. Once that would not have mattered so much as the burnt out areas would be recolonised from the lowland bush. Nowadays, farming and grazing has removed that reservoir so these Parks will degenerate into islands of burnt out and weed infested bush.

No-one is to blame except perhaps public apathy. I heard that about

\$2,000,000 worth of fireworks went up on New Year’s Eve harbour display with obvious public approval.

Much more is spent on the race track and casinos, but a politician would not last five minutes if he or she made increased taxation to help National Parks a re-election platform. Can this attitude ever be changed or do we just become supporters of Groucho Marx who said, “Why should I worry about the next generation, what has it done for me”.

— *The Bunyip.*

History of Our Walking Tracks

The Blue Mountains network of walking tracks is unique in Australia’s history. How did it all come about?

In October 1997 Jim Smith spoke at the Conservation Hut about the Walking Track Heritage Study. I have enjoyed reading a copy of Jim Smith’s Draft Historical Report, and, with his permission, will publish some excerpts in the next few issues of *Hut News*. — Ed.

The First Constructed Walking Tracks

The 1832 *Post Office Directory* in describing the landmarks of the western road between the Nepean River and Wellington, encouraged travellers to leave the road for the purpose of enjoying the scenery at only two places: at the Weatherboard Inn (Wentworth Falls) and Gardner’s Inn (Blackheath).

At Wentworth Falls it was stated that “the wild scenery of the inaccessible valley into which it (the falls) vanishes is well worth the travellers attention”. At Blackheath the guide said there “is another fine cataract, named Govett’s Leap”. Thus the *Post Office Directory* could be considered to contain the first tourist’s guide to the Blue Mountains. The two inn-keepers had probably by this time cut rough tracks from their inns to the two sights mentioned. These tracks could be considered the first constructed walking tracks in the region.

Both tracks were used by Charles Darwin in 1836. Darwin carried the 1835 edition of the *Post Office Directory* which had added a few lines of poetry on the mountain air at Wentworth Falls. These lines, the only ones in that austere publication, began a long tradition of poetic and romanticised descriptions of Blue Mountain scenery in guide books. Darwin’s own more scientific descriptions of the two sights, published in 1839, brought international attention to these two early “bushwalks”.

The next bushwalking track to be constructed was made especially for the visit of Queen Victoria’s son Prince Alfred in 1868. The Colonial Secretary Henry Parkes organised the construction of a carriage road from the Weatherboard railway station, to the edge of the escarpment. From there a walking track was made to the lookout known today as Prince’s Rock. Trees were cleared from around the rock to improve the view.

(Next Month: A remarkable period of private track construction.)

The Turpentine Walk

A group of five walkers braved the hot weather to walk the Turpentine walk.

The bush is in good condition after the recent rain. Murphy’s Glen was a great spot for morning tea among the giant trees reaching for the sky, then on to the old dam where the track starts to Bedford Creek. A friendly dragon seemed interested in our presence.

It was time for lunch by the time we reached Bedford Creek. There was plenty of shade and it is such a peaceful spot that we spent an hour over lunch. We had a visit from a Sacred Kingfisher.

The walk back was at a leisurely pace with lots of rests and drink stops. All agreed that it’s a great walk. We finished at 4 pm.

— Ron Amos.

Saving the Bush From Us

Part 4: Health in Bushland - Water

Water is a rather magic mineral. It moves from solid to liquid to gas fairly easily. Moving from liquid to gas and back it evaporates and condenses releasing and capturing heat. It is a universal solvent and no living thing has life without it. Its interactions with soil, vegetation and animal life are dynamic.

Water and Soil: Soil is one of the banks for water. Water moves up, down, and sideways in soils. Sometimes it is liquid and sometimes gases. Its states change according to the vegetation, temperature, air pressure and acidity or alkalinity. Soil water attaches itself to organic matter and to clay particles. It sits in earthworm's and ant's holes and nests.

Water and Vegetation: Vegetation is another bank for water. Plants are up to 98% water and Bill Mollison, Permaculture originator, describes a forest as a vast stream of water washing up hills, across ridges and down hills in the plant biomass. Vegetation and water have a close relationship. They serve each other.

Plants protect the soil from erosive properties of water. Plants take up soil mineral nutrients in solution through their root system via the root hairs. Roots will actually seek out soil water as many people know when their sewerage pipes are blocked. By removing water from the soil, the plants keep the water table in the soil at a level so soil salts do not accumulate in a narrow soil layer and cause soil salinity. Plants use so much water they can drain the soil. Mussolini drained the Pontine Marshes with Eucalyptus spp.

By releasing water through their leaf pores, called evapotranspiration, plants humidify very dry air and make the air easier to breathe. And when the air is warm and humid, and plant leaf surfaces are cool, water will condense on the leaves and start to drip, even if it has not rained (rain gauges are not always accurate about how much water is available). So the plants help to dry humid air. They render the local microclimate more pleasant for humans and other living things.

Water, on the other hand, washes the leaves of dust, virus and bacterial particles as well as insect faeces and supplies a nutrient rain to the roof's dripline. Water fills the spiders webs; its infiltrates the bark; sits in holes and seedcones, and flowers and when the trees is all wet, it starts to drip. Rain is bathtime for plants. Water is also a trigger for seed germination, and sometimes for animal growth.

Clean Water and Plants: Apart from soil health, and climate modification, the main purpose of plant-water interaction is that of cleansing water. There is no clean water unless there is vegetation. Firstly the leaves, then the bark, then soil litter and various soil particles filter dirty water, slow down its flow and the release it clean to rivers and streams. The present NSW

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MARCH

- 08 (Sun) **Nature Trail Bushcare Group, Special Working Bee**, 9 am to 12 noon. Bring gardening gloves, morning tea, water and a hat. Meet at Backhouse Street (turning west off Valley Road). Contact Jessica 4757.2783.
- 09 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Leura Forest**. (Up via Scenic Railway). Meet 8.30 am, Leura Station. Contact Kees Putting 4759.1958.
- 14 (Sat) **Sale of Native Plants** at the Conservation Hut, 9 am to 12 noon.
- 15 (Sun) **Badgery's Creek Airport DAY OF ACTION**. From 12 noon at Jamison Park, Penrith (near Panthers). See enclosure and story on page 1.
- 16 (Mon) **Nature Track Bushcare Group, 9-12**. Meet at The Hut at 9 am. Contact Jessica Yuille 4757.2783.
- 16 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Minni Ha Ha Falls**. Meet 8.30 am, Katoomba Station north side. Contact Carolyn O'Neill 4757.3141.
- 19 (Thu) **Committee Meeting**. Mid Mountains Community Centre, 7 pm.
- 21 (Sat) **Bushwalk — Crayfish Pool**. A lovely walk in the Blue Mountains National Park at Glenbrook. Fairly long, but medium grade. Meet 9 am Glenbrook Station. Contact Ron Amos 02.9727.8931.
- at
22 (Sun) **Kids Club — Bonnie Doon Visit**. Investigate animal bones, scats and signs. Meet at the Nellies' Glen shelter shed (follow the road in from the Explorers Tree to the beginning of the Six Foot Track). Bring lunch and a drink. Contact Jessica 4757.2783.
- 23 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Den Fenella**. Meet 8.30 am, Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls. Contact Millie Rogers 4782.6631.
- 27 (Fri) **Annual General Meeting** at The Hut, 7.30 p.m. Guest speaker Chris Dunstan, "Reducing greenhouse gases through developing sustainable energy in NSW". (Story on page 1.)
- 30 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Old Hartley Shale Railway**. Meet 8.30 am, Mount Victoria Station. Contact Mervyn Bird 4787.7959.
- APRIL (Note: Leisure Walks commence at 9.30 am.)**
- 06 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Crayfish Pool, Glenbrook National Park. (BBQ after, BYO)**. Meet 9.30 at the carpark, Glenbrook Picture Theatre, Contact Kees Putting 4759.1958.
- 16 (Thu) **Committee Meeting**. Mid Mountains Community Centre, 7 pm.
- 20 (Mon) **Nature Track Bushcare Group, 9-12**. Meet at The Hut at 9 am. Contact Jessica Yuille 4757.2783.
- 20 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Old Point Pilcher**. Meet 9.30, Medlow Bath Station, North side. Contact Gillian Janus 4787.6181.
- 24 (Fri) **General Meeting** at The Hut, 7.30 p.m.
- 27 (Mon) **Leisure Walk — Mount Boyce**. Meet 9.30, Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. Contact Christina Jones 4784.1101.

recommendations that 30m each side of a river should be kept vegetated is based on this knowledge. Indigenous vegetation is best adapted to ebbs and flows of the local rainfall and the rivers. — *Ro Morrow*.

(Next Issue: *Edges of Bushland*)

Feathertail Glider Sponsorship

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is the sponsor of a Feathertail Glider at Taronga Zoo. These tiny creatures are wonderfully adapted to living in our environment, but because of their size and nocturnal habits are rarely noticed in the bush or the garden.

It is worth a visit to the zoo to see the Feathertail Gliders in the Nocturnal House.

A Tribute to Eric Mahony

Eric Mahony, Council's former bushcare officer, has resigned from his position as Urban Run-off Coordinator with BMCC and has returned to teaching at TAFE. Council's loss is the TAFE students' gain — he is a exceptional teacher. In Council, Eric's contribution to environmental management and education gained the admiration of fellow workers and bushcare volunteers.

From a fellow worker (name withheld): "Eric Mahoney has a dedication to generating a local knowledge of our flora and fauna. He has been my mentor. When I

came to Council I was able to rely on Eric to empower me with the subtleties and values that each bushland remnant possessed.

"I recall when attending a great public talk by Tim Flannery that before white settlement in Australia many of the indigenous tribes had to survive severe El Nino events — periods of great social and environmental crisis. In what was considered a biologically resource poor continent, the only way many of the tribes could survive was to develop and share their cultural resources.

"Much of this was done by special people — people who moved around the tribes and passed on local dreamings, song lines and survival successes.

"Their greatest gift was their knowledge of where the scarce marine sedimentary rock, chert or flint was.

"They would assist the tribes by trading in this rock. The rocks could be fashioned into stone axes. This would lead to greater hunting and gathering successes in the difficult times. These people were called the 'stone-axe traders'. They kept tribes alive through networking resources.

"Although it is frowned upon these days to appropriate indigenous metaphors, it is difficult not to attribute Eric Mahony as being one of the Blue Mountains' great 'stone-axe traders'."