

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"

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Pagoda formations in Ben Bullen State Forest. Photo by Henry Gold.

IT'S TIME by Keith Muir

All eyes will be on the NSW Government as the planets align for significant environmental announcements in the coming weeks and months. The World Parks Congress in Sydney was attended by dozens of world leaders and environment ministers, as well as thousands of foreign dignitaries. The environmental performance of NSW Government came under intense scrutiny. This pressure and the state election in March combine to create the best chance in many years to get the Gardens of Stone protected.

Last month, as you know, the Planning Assessment Commission not only rejected the Coalpac open-cut but reasoned that conservation was the highest and best use for the area. The Commission also found that pagoda landforms are of special significance and worthy of the highest level of protection, that is they should be fully protected from risks of mining-induced impacts. The overreaction of the coal industry to this decision is not really surprising, it's not used to losing.

Coalpac lost, not once but twice, its open-cut mining proposals in the public forests of the Gardens of Stone being firmly rejected by the independent umpire. This absolutely unique outcome in the history of NSW planning did not mean that the planning system is broken as the NSW Minerals Council claimed. It meant that Coalpac's open-cut proposals are no good and in the wrong place.

When it is all done and dusted we must not forget that this pivotal decision isn't about the imperative of stopping the coal industry from making the planet unliveable, but about saving a unique part of the Australian bush. After a campaign spanning over 25 years the Gardens of Stone region should now be reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

Read more on page 3.

*** For your diary ***

March 2015 State Election Meet the Candidates Meeting hosted by BMCS

Just a few weeks before the State Election the Society will be hosting its *Meet the Candidates* meeting, so come along and stay well informed. All candidates have been invited to present their environmental policies and positions, and there will be an audience Q&A after the candidates' talks. Details are as follows:

Date: Sunday 1st March 2015

Meeting Time: 2 PM

(An informal pre-meeting cuppa will be available from just after 1.00 PM)

Venue: Mid Mountains Community Centre, 7 New Street, Lawson

This is a public meeting and all are very welcome.

BMCS Vote for the Environment Campaign Team.

THE CANDIDATES



Roza Sage
(Liberal)



Trish Doyle
(Labor)



Alandra Tasire
(Greens)

Read the candidates' responses to our questionnaire

www.bluemountains.org.au

"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.
P.O. Box 29, Wentworth Falls, 2782
Phone 4757 1872 (leave message)
Email: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au
Web page: www.bluemountains.org.au

President: Alan Page 4784 1704
president@bluemountains.org.au
Senior Vice President: Tara Cameron
0419 824 974 taracameron4@gmail.com
Second Vice President: Don Morison
8230 2116 2vp@bluemountains.org.au
Treasurer: Bart Beech 4739 9947
bart.beech@invensys.com
Administration Officer: Jeanette Robertson
sao@bluemountains.org.au
Bushcare Officer: Paul Vale
4787 8080 0429 014 454
bushcare@bluemountains.org.au
Environmental Education Officer:
Gary Humble 4784 1648 0427 841 078
gaz.humble@gmail.com
Landuse Officer: Angela Langdon
0417 004 722
angela.langdon@bigpond.com
Meetings Secretary: Heather Hull
4739 1493 hhull001@bigpond.net.au
Membership Secretary: Ross Coster
4739 2987 0418 462 576
membership@bluemountains.org.au
General Meetings Convenor:
Brendan Doyle 4757 2197
brendan049@gmail.com
National Parks/World Heritage Officer:
Brian Marshall 4784.1148
briannamar@bigpond.com
Newsletter Editor: Christine Davies
4787 7246
hutnews@bluemountains.org.au
Plant Nursery Manager: Sue Nicol
4787.8887 nursery@bluemountains.org.au
Publicity Officer: Annabel Murray
0404 455 626
publicity@bluemountains.org.au
**Sustainable Population and Climate
Change Officer:** Peter Green 4751 9474
peter@pwgreen.id.au
Threatened Species Officer: Nakia Belmer
0414 344 741 bayern11@tpg.com.au
Website Officer: Alan Page 4784 1704
president@bluemountains.org.au
Walks Convenor: Maurice Kerkham
4739 4942
mauricekerkham@hotmail.com
Project Officer-Events: Rob Baigent
4759 3104 rob.baigent@bigpond.com
Project Officer: Craig Linn
craig.csmc@exemail.com.au
Bushfire Representative: Hugh Paterson
4751.2303, mob 0427 512 303

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT
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hutnews@bluemountains.org.au
PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Ross Coster
02 4739 2987 0418 462 576
membership@bluemountains.org.au
or write to
PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

State Election Questionnaire: Candidate responses

Sounds boring? Not at all. Make them part of your holiday reading!

As we have done in the past the Society has sent an Election Questionnaire to all NSW State Election candidates for the seat of Blue Mountains. Many important environmental topics are canvassed: from the candidates' personal positions on the big environmental issues of our age, through key local Blue Mountains concerns, to state-wide issues that affect us all.

The candidates' responses are due back by Monday December 8th, and hopefully a few days after that we will have their responses up on the Society's website for your consideration.

So, from around the 10th December, just go to our website homepage (www.bluemountains.org.au) and you will find a prominent link to the candidates' responses.

A link to the actual questionnaire we sent to the candidates in early November is already there.

BMCS Vote for the Environment Campaign Team.

Nursery News

The warm spring weather has produced lots of new growth in our seedlings and cuttings. We have a range of plants now ready for sale. There are many species of *Acacia*, *Banksia serrata*, *Lomatia silaifolia* and several different *Correas*. How about *Dodonaea viscosa* or Sticky Hopbush, with gorgeous red winged seed capsules? There are White Paper Daisies and yellow *Podolepis* and finally we have (after waiting all winter for our cuttings to strike) the ground cover *Grevillea laurifolia*! Come and see us at the Lawson Nursery or at the markets.



We will be closed for the Christmas/Summer break from Wednesday 17th December until Wednesday 21st January but we will be at the Magpie Markets on the 21st Dec. Happy planting.

Sue Nicol, Nursery Manager (nursery@bluemountains.org.au 4787 8887)

Grevillea laurifolia is endemic to the higher parts of the Blue Mountains. It grows as a prostrate shrub with a spread of 3-4 metres. Its "toothbrush" flowers are deep red in colour and usually occur in winter and spring. Photo by Alan Page, www.waratahsoftware.com.au/wpr_flora_bluemountains_banksias.html

BMCS NURSERY PLANT SALES

Our nursery offers the home gardener, landscaper or large contractor a big variety of quality local native plants at economical prices.

Lawson Nursery, Wednesday and Saturday mornings, 9am to noon.

The nursery is located in the Lawson Industrial Area on the corner of Park and Cascade Streets, opposite Federation Building Materials - see map on our website www.bluemountains.org.au.

Blackheath Community Market, 1st Sunday of the month at Blackheath Public School, 9am to 1pm.

Magpie Market, 3rd Sunday of month at Lawson Public School, 9am to 2pm.
Closed for the Christmas/Summer break from Wednesday 17th December until Wednesday 21st January

Tube stock \$3. Larger pots available.

Discounts for bulk orders and large contracts.

Enquiries Sue Nicol 4787 8887, nursery@bluemountains.org.au

The Gardens of Stone ...a photographic journey with Hugh Speirs



Bungleboori Wilderness: The Five Ladies: named in respect of Alice, Barb, Elaine, Elizabeth and Lotti.

IT'S TIME (continued from page 1)

It is right to protect the natural environment, spectacular pagodas, wonderful bushland, with so much wildlife, and so many threatened species that would be destroyed forever by open-cut mining. The decision also makes economic sense. Removing the last tonnes of coal by open-cut mining would destroy a fantastic tourism asset, perhaps the best one in the Blue Mountains.

The Gardens of Stone region has relatively gentle topography that enables easy access. As a result of the region's heritage diversity, scenic interest and accessibility from Sydney, it represents an outstanding opportunity for low-impact, nature-based tourism.

The Lithgow region needs the economic diversity that comes from tourism. Lithgow's economy collapses each time the price of coal drops and many are saying that the price will now stay down permanently. Lithgow actually needs to save the Gardens of Stone region from open-cut mining!

Our determination as opponents to open-cut mining stems from a passion to protect the natural and cultural attractions of the Gardens of Stone that are many, varied, widespread and highly appealing. Indeed features such as the Lost City are becoming iconic attractions of wide fame, despite the degradation and general havoc caused by unregulated off road vehicle use.

When reserved under the [National Parks and Wildlife Act](#), a network of visitor experiences would provide the basis for a whole new nature-based marketing initiative promoting the *Gardens of Stone region as the other side of the Blue Mountains*.

Against this alternative vision, the Coalpac proposals would have provided zero benefit to NSW electricity consumers and not improved energy security. The economic arguments for the mine are contradicted by data from EnergyAustralia, the company that was to buy Coalpac if its proposals were approved.

The Wallerawang Power Station is already closed. EnergyAustralia's claim at the Planning Assessment

Commission that the Coalpac mines would reduce NSW electricity prices by allowing EnergyAustralia to increase supply of electricity into the market is incorrect.

Lithgow has everything to gain by protecting the Gardens of Stone region. Katoomba, once a mining town, became a tourism mecca. Lithgow needs to broaden its cultural horizons and reinvent itself.

Help reserve the Gardens of Stone, write to the Premier, the Hon. Mike Baird, at Parliament House, Sydney, NSW, 2000. A webform letter can be found at www.colongwilderness.org.au and follow the links.

References:

Brown, I., 2012, A threatened wonderland the Gardens of Stone, Colong Foundation and Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

Campbell, R., 2014, submission to the Planning Assessment Commission on the Coalpac mine modifications.

Editor's Comment: Facing Fire

At time of writing, the efforts to minimise property damage by bushfire were being relatively successful in the Blue Mountains for the summer of 2014/15. Unfortunately, one occupied home was lost near Cahill's Lookout, Katoomba, but the efforts of multiple organisations had saved others. The effects of fires near Blaxland and Warrimoo appear to have been minimised. In this context, the article by Ian Brown in this issue is very timely.

The balancing of saving life and property, tourism and ecological protection in the Mountains has long been a multi-disciplinary, multi-organisation effort. In graphic and text, Ian explains the special role and local knowledge that National Parks and Wildlife employees contribute to that balance.

The mainstream media do not always have a complete idea of how outcomes are achieved. Ian Brown's contribution, on page 5 of this newsletter, certainly helps to complete the picture.

China, iron ore and 'coalamity': a chain reaction? Brian Marshall

In the November Hut News ("*Is coal mining on life support?*") I used Centennial's plans for the Western Coalfield to show that rejection of Coalpac by the Planning Assessment Commission (PAC) was not the death-knell for the region, despite contrary bleatings from the NSW Minerals Council and some media. This reasoning was superficially undermined by Centennial's unheralded decision to place its Angus Place mine on care and maintenance. I say superficially, because Centennial's action and Glencore's announcement that its coal mines will have a protracted shut-down over the Xmas-New Year period are unrelated to the PAC's decisions and environmental activism. Rather, they are a direct consequence of the radical price-drop of exported steaming coal. So, if coal companies are suffering, don't blame the planning system and PAC, and don't blame environmental and heritage activism.

Now read on!

The Chinese economy (GDP per capita) was growing at about 10%. This reflected massive investment in steel-consuming infrastructure and export-dominated manufacturing. Over the past few years, crude steel production and the infrastructure boom have flattened. GDP has eased to 7.3% and would be lower were it not supported by increasing domestic consumption. Easing steel demand has created an iron ore oversupply and resulted spot-prices falling nearly 50% since November 2013. Not surprisingly, some of the Pilbara's junior and mid-tier miners are marginal and may need to shut down.

Steel manufacture needs coking coal (770 kg of coal for 1000 kg of steel), so it too is facing oversupply such that prices have fallen more than 60% from the 2011 peak. Miners running at a loss are opting for temporary closures to address the oversupply and create price-recovery. This could be too optimistic as the still-profitable miners may snap up vacant demand.

Thermal (steaming) coal is used for power generation. The export markets are oversupplied so prices have plummeted; local markets are less than robust. About one-third of Australia's exporters are said to be running at a loss as the price is nearly 50% below its peak and has dropped 25% over the past year. Some miners have opted for care and maintenance while awaiting an anticipated recovery, but others continue to operate as they are contracted to pay haulage even if nothing is sent; better to send product at a loss than not send it at a bigger loss!

China exacerbated export concerns by placing tariffs of 3 and 6% on coking and thermal coals respectively (though these may now be progressively lifted under the bilateral free trade agreement). But from January 1, 2015, in a move to improve air quality and meet climate-change commitments, China will limit the use of imported coal with more than 16% ash and 3% sulphur in its main industrial regions. It may also cut coal imports by around 50 million tonnes over the coming 12 months. Australia's and NSW's coalfields could well be impacted by the low-ash specification and any total tonnage limit.

Local and export markets for thermal coal are also impacted by moves towards renewable power generation and, somewhat regrettably, to gas-fired and nuclear power sources. Locally, Wallerawang Power Station has

effectively shut down and Mt Piper Power Station is at 70% capacity, while globally, the agreement between the USA and China is an interesting prelude to next year's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. Even Prime Minister Abbott has made mealy-mouthed noises about the need to combat climate change, provided the economy and jobs are not impacted! Doesn't he know that climate change is an integral part of the economy and jobs?

Despite its problems, the Australian coal industry remains bullish about coal's future. This seems to be based on carbon capture and storage (but even if it works commercially, don't talk about the cost!), the Indian market expanding and replacing the Chinese market (but India will surely force a hard bargain), head-in-the-sand analyses, and a hard-headed belief that governments and multinationals are insufficiently altruistic for the Paris Conference to truly succeed.

So, will the 'coalamitous' chain reaction affecting the coal industry presage its 'coallapse', or will coal's survival ensure at least 4 degrees of global warming, after which we mortgage our existence by exploiting a nuclear chain reaction?

Council exhibits Development Control Plan

Council has released for public comment its new Blue Mountains Development Control Plan (DCP). The DCP provides detailed information for anyone considering a new development in the Blue Mountains. It provides guidance on issues such as how environmental factors must be considered in a development application, to what stormwater mitigation measures must be incorporated into new developments.

The Council was required by the Department of Planning and Environment to prepare a new DCP as a companion planning document to the new Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (LEP). Unlike the new LEP which must be endorsed by the Department of Planning and the Planning Minister, the development of the DCP is largely in the hands of the Council.

The DCP is important as it contains further information and guidance on how to meet the environmental provisions within the draft LEP. Unlike a LEP, however, the DCP is not a legislative instrument. The DCP is a policy based document offering guidance only and there is not strict requirement to comply.

The draft Blue Mountains DCP is currently on public exhibition from **29 October 2014** to **10 December 2014**. Written submissions on the draft DCP 2014 can be made online via a submission template or email, or by letter addressed to the General Manager. More information about the draft DCP 2014 and how to make a submission can be found on the Council's website at bluemountainshaveyoursay.com.au/draftdcp2014.

The Society will be making a detailed submission to the DCP which will be uploaded on the Society's website. The Society is also preparing a draft submission template which residents can use as a basis of their submission. These will be available early December and members will be alerted via email. **Land Use Committee.**



NPWS firefighters backburning in Wollemi National Park, State Mine Gully Fire, October 2013. Photo by Ian Brown.

National Parks and Wildlife Service and fires

Ian Brown

Last year around this time I spent a couple of days out in the bush with my former colleagues in the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Deep in the Wollemi Wilderness, with the help of interstate firefighters, they were closing off the northern fringes of the infamous State Mine Gully Fire — the one that was actually spread from Marrangaroo army base and ripped through the Zig Zag Railway and Mt Irvine. I was out there to get some photos of NPWS in action, weeks after the fire had disappeared from our televisions and newspapers.

The media profile of NPWS firefighting is about as low as it can get. They rarely squirt the 'wet stuff on the red stuff' as houses burn and the cameras roll. They are usually toiling away out in the scrub a long way from the media. All the journos and cameramen that go out to bush fires have to go through Rural Fire Service media training. They love the volunteers. The media are well managed and RFS enjoys enormous public support and political goodwill. NPWS as a smaller player cannot challenge that hegemony. How many readers know that it was NPWS remote area firefighting teams (RAFT) who put out the northern part of the disastrous Links View Fire last year in the Grose Valley? Or that local NPWS staff filled key roles in the incident control team for the recent Cliff Drive fire at Katoomba?

As I write (on 9 November), NPWS is dealing with at least 13 other fires in remote parts of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, mostly lightning strikes

in Wollemi, with access by helicopter. Nine are 'under control' with the other four 'being controlled'¹. One fire is not even in national park, but in Ben Bullen State Forest — part of the proposed Gardens of Stone Conservation Area that the Society is campaigning for.

This level of activity is far from unusual. Most years NPWS is in control of extinguishing hundreds of fires on park, some with help from the RFS, but many not. As for planned burning (or hazard reduction), in the 2013-14 financial year NPWS carried out 80% of all burning in NSW, on 9% of the state's land area.²

In areas like the Blue Mountains, Greater Sydney and Kosciuszko, where fires are frequent, NPWS staff are trained, highly skilled and very experienced, not just in on-ground firefighting, but also in aerial operations, planning and strategy. They spend weeks every year on fires. Behind the scenes, RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW value these skills highly and rely on them extensively.

Poor public knowledge of the NPWS role in fire doesn't just frustrate NPWS staff and damage their morale, it also threatens conservation. Fire is a key driver of Australian ecosystems, and is one of the few 'levers' available to 'manage' natural areas, for better or worse — especially as climate change bites harder. If the community doesn't know what NPWS does, and how effective they are at it, then it will not support them doing it.

(continued on page 7)

Numantia's forgotten bushwalking track in Faulconbridge by Jim Smith PART 1.

An interesting period in Blue Mountains history began in the 1870s, when a number of prominent Sydney identities purchased large areas of land in the central Blue Mountains, where they erected cottages for weekend and holiday visits during summer. On the eastern side of the railway line, between Faulconbridge and Linden, thousands of acres were owned by Sir Henry Parkes, Sir James Martin, Sir Alfred Stephen and Professor Charles Badham. The houses were completed by December 1877, when the men brought up their families for Christmas.

These gentlemen carried out extensive landscaping in their grounds and constructed lookouts and tracks to nearby waterfalls.¹ The best known of these is Parkes's track to Clarinda Falls (part of what is called the Victory Track today), which is on public land and enjoyed by many bushwalkers today. In contrast, the track made by Alfred Stephen to Numantia Falls is virtually unknown.² These Falls are marked on maps today and can easily be visited, as a side trip off the Victory Track. However, some of Alfred Stephen's other beauty spots, for example 'Waterloo Rock' and the 'Fountain of Egeria', will probably never be found, as they do not appear to have been mapped or described.

Readers may be interested to hear how the long forgotten track between Numantia Falls and the site of Sir Alfred Stephen's home *Alphington* was relocated.

When I taught the Outdoor Guides Advanced Certificate course at Katoomba TAFE, one of the interpretive bushwalks in the course was between Faulconbridge and Springwood stations, via Sassafras Creek. My assistant teacher Wilf Hilder (1934-2011) suggested, in about 1985, that we add a deviation up the side creek to Numantia Falls. There was no constructed track to the base of the Falls, but I was surprised to see that there was a well-made track from the bottom to the top of the Falls and that a heavily overgrown track continued westwards from there. We did not have time to see how far it went, but Wilf and I made a resolution to follow it to its destination one day.

One of the events of the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations in the Blue Mountains was an outdoor play for children performed beside the ruins of *Eurama*. Written by John Low and Amanda Morris, it was entitled 'Mystery in the Mountains: The Ruined Castle' and was produced by The Spectacle Theatre. Like other train travellers, I had been intrigued for years, as the train approached Faulconbridge, by the high wall beside the railway line (behind which stood the original *Numantia* cottage of Sir James Martin) and the charred chimneys and walls of *Eurama* (Andrew McCulloch's home, originally called *Weemala*³, which had burned down in a bushfire in 1968. This had been built beside Sir Alfred Stephen's *Alphington*). John Low described the setting:

*...the forlorn outline of a towered ruin against the eastern sky. Roofless and floorless, the silent stone rooms and hallways, open to the wind, are all that remain of a 19th century palace of dreams.*⁴

I purchased a ticket for this play, mainly for the opportunity it offered to have a closer look at these ruins. Unfortunately, 1988 was a 'La Nina' year and, when I arrived at the site, there was a terrific downpour which



Wilf Hilder and Jim Smith at Kanangra Walls in 2004, beginning their seven-day walk to Wentworth Falls. Photo by Ted Taylor.

led to the cancellation of the play (despite the advertising which stated that it would "still be performed, hail, rain or shine"). I did have an umbrella and, wandering around the ruins, I experienced amazement at the complex garden landscaping. A master stonemason, probably the builder of *Weemala*³, Paddy Ryan, had built beautiful stone staircases, dry stone walls, ornamental ponds and decorative structures from the local sandstone. One of the staircases down the hill led to a track, which I felt sure must have been the top end of the pathway to Numantia Falls. I formed a resolve to one day follow it all the way down. However, sixteen years were to pass before I achieved this.

In 2004 Wilf Hilder and I were discussing, how, in the years since the early 1980s, we had managed to relocate virtually all of the old and forgotten constructed walking tracks of the Blue Mountains. I suggested that it was time we found the track to Numantia Falls, as well as other walking tracks associated with the *Numantia* and *Weemala* properties. We spent two days on this task. Wilf would come up on the train from Sydney and I would come down from Wentworth Falls and meet him at Linden Station. After walking down the highway, we explored the ridges and gullies around the old estates, finding more tracks, stone staircases and landscaping features.

On 12 August 2004 we found the faint remains of the track, unused for over a century, between the ruins and Numantia Falls. The following is an extract from Wilf's diary:

Numantia Falls track overgrown, lost at crossing-- Jim located north side —recrossed — found parts with Jim — more on return. Lunch foot of Falls. Rush [for] 15.54 interurban [train].

(continued on page 7)

Numantia's forgotten bushwalking track in Faulconbridge (continued from page 6)

We could have easily just followed the creek down, but it was important to us to follow in the footsteps of those who had walked that way in the 1870s.

As Wilf hopped on the train for his 2 ½ hour journey home, I reflected on all the hundreds of days over the last 20 years that he had travelled from Sydney to help me find the 'lost' historic walking tracks of the Blue Mountains. Even though he was then aged 70, we still had many great walks ahead of us, including three epic journeys, up to a week's duration, along the Gundungurra Aboriginal pathways of the Southern Blue Mountains.

Memories of Numantia: Part 2 of this article, in February 2015 Hut News, will include extracts from an article, previously unknown to historians, by Sir Alfred Stephen.

References:

A. Stephen, 'Numantia. A Place of Disillusioned Aspirations', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Volume 31 (4), 1945, pp. 249-276.

A. Searle, *Faulconbridge*, Springwood Historical Society, 1977.

Endnotes:

¹ In my *Blue Mountains Walking Track Heritage Study Historical Report*, published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1999, I outlined the history of private walking track construction in the Blue Mountains. (Table 1 in this report mistakenly attributes the construction of the Numantia Falls track to Martin rather than Stephen.)

² Numantia Falls is on portion 46, of 20 acres, Parish of Magdala, purchased by Stephen in December 1880.

³ The earliest usage of the placename Weemala is for a locality north-west of Moree. McCulloch may have had an association with this area and transferred the name to the Blue Mountains. It is curious that the earliest published version of the Three Sisters Aboriginal legend (written by a non-Aboriginal schoolgirl in 1931) includes the name Wimalah for one of the sisters. The better-known version, published by Mel Ward in 1949, uses the spelling Weemala. There is no definitive proof that the names used in tourist literature for the Three Sisters were those traditionally used by the Aboriginal people of the area.

⁴ 'Dark forces invade Lower Mtns', *Penrith Press*, 22 March 1988.

The Gardens of Stone Visitors Map

\$7.50 plus \$1.50 postage.

Buy the map online

(www.bluemountains.org.au) or

write to BMCS, PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782 with your cheque or money order.

National Parks and Wildlife Service and fires (continued from page 5).

We all know that fire is highly politicised, with an ongoing 'debate' that is often fraught with ignorance. The 10/50 clearing laws are just the latest sad example of the sort of policy outcome this can produce. The 'greenies' – and that lumps in NPWS as well as this Society – come in for a lot of undeserved and ill-informed criticism. Shock-jocks inflame spot fires all over the place. In this climate there are forces in play that would love to strip NPWS of its role in fire, and that could be disastrous.

Why? Because the RFS and NPWS have different, complementary skills and cultures in firefighting, both of which are needed. The RFS is on the outside of parks looking in, while NPWS is on the inside looking out. RFS could not easily (or ever?) replicate the NPWS approach which uses detailed understanding of local landscape and ecology to apply nuanced fire suppression strategies, often remote from road access. The RFS has been criticised, even internally, especially in regional areas, for adopting 'blunt axe' strategies that involve big backburns from major roads without using enough local knowledge.

But most importantly, we cannot allow a key ecological 'lever' to be taken out of NPWS hands and thrown into the political melee. The RFS will always be the biggest kid on the block, but NPWS has a vital role to play. It's important that environment groups provide vigorous 'back pressure' against any trend to take NPWS out of fire – by law, by policy or by stealth.

<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fires-near-me> (as at 9/11/14)
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/fire/mngfireinnswnatpks.htm>
(accessed 9-11-14)

Damming for damnation's sake?

Much of the economic future of the Blue Mountains and Central West will depend on tourism. One of the lesser known jewels is the catchment of the Belubula River, west of Blayney. With its extensive limestone caves, historic gold mines, pre-historic marine creature fossils and picturesque ghost towns, the Belubula Valley should be altered as little as possible. Nevertheless some who seem to want a dam just because NSW has had no new dams in recent decades are targeting Needles Gap on the Belubula—more in February Hut News.

Don Morison.

Our Society: Land Use Committee

The Society has a very active Land Use Committee (LUC), led by Angela Langdon.

2014 has been a busy year for the LUC. The highlight was the draft Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (DLEP) campaign. During the public exhibition of the DLEP the Committee conducted 10 market or streets stalls, held one public meeting, initiated five media articles, gave seven presentations to community groups, produced numerous campaign materials, developed an extensive web page and, finally, prepared a comprehensive submission.

All of this contributed to over 65% of the public submissions supporting the DLEP, with over 50% of submissions supporting the Society's submission all or in part.

Members of the Land Use Committee then attended and spoke at the seven Council meetings which considered the public submissions.

For more on the finalised DLEP see page 9.

Loose Feathers, with Carol Proberts

Homesick early white settlers often remarked that the songs of Australian birds were tuneless and strident. They may have had a point when it comes to the raucous flight calls of our parrots or Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, or nectar feeders like wattlebirds and lorikeets squabbling over flowers. But the visiting naturalist who in 1854 claimed "no songsters among the birds here" surely hadn't listened to many of our songbirds.

Among Australian birds can be found some of the most talented and remarkable singers anywhere, as well as many that are unusual and memorable. A large part of the joy of bird "watching" is getting to know and recognise the rich variety of sounds that birds make.

Recently I came across an incredible sound emanating from a thicket of shrubs, a jumble of sweet vivacious notes as four Golden Whistlers were seemingly trying to out-sing each other. Was this a territorial dispute, or a singing lesson for the young? The whistlers are a particularly tuneful family and will sing in response to a clap of thunder or other sudden loud noise, earning them the nickname "thunder bird". The Rufous Whistler's song has a more impetuous and spirited flavour than the Golden's. To me, it's one of the most evocative sounds of summer.

One of the most beautiful and haunting songs belongs to the tiny White-throated Gerygone: a descending cascade, often described as a "falling leaf" song. But if the White-throated is like a falling leaf, the Western Gerygone's song is like a falling leaf that twists and turns and meanders on its way down, never quite reaching the ground.

The whipcrack call of the male Eastern Whipbird is truly extraordinary, passing quickly through a huge range of frequencies. It's hard to ignore the piercingly sweet notes of the Pilotbird emanating from the gullies, while the silvery song of the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren interwoven with a stream of soft mimicry wafts across the heathland. More than 60 species of Australian birds are known mimics.

Even the familiar Australian Magpie is capable of some of the most complex music of the bird world and can sing two notes simultaneously using both sides of the syrinx (the vocal organ of birds).

Perhaps the most musical, hauntingly beautiful songster of all is the Pied Butcherbird. Capable of endless variation and improvisation, its voice is rich and pure. Heard in the pre-dawn hours it can transport you to another world. Its relative the Grey Butcherbird, with a song more rollicking and less musical is common in the Blue Mountains. The Pied can be found within a couple of hours drive, in more open country.

I can't imagine a world without birdsong. It would be a barren and unbearable place. I wish you all a rich soundtrack to your Christmas and New Year break provided by a full orchestra of birds.

Carol Proberts

origma@westnet.com.au Twitter: @carolproberts



"The whipcrack call of the male Eastern Whipbird is truly extraordinary".

Photographed by Carol Proberts at Blackheath.

Return to the mountains

I was impatient to be back
here where mist weaves
about still-life eucalypts.
From the lookout,
dawn-soaked cloud
creeps along the valley.
To touch each day this wildness
as one touches a lover
or a tiny wildflower,
to hear torrents of skywater
somewhere
thundering, invisible.
The tin roof creaks in the sun
and I am home.

Brendan Doyle.

Maternity ward in the shed

After lamenting the loss of the White-browed Scrubwrens' first nest, very likely predated by a Pied Currawong, I was surprised to discover the location of the second nest ... on a chair in the shed.

The brick "workshop", mainly used for storage, is fully enclosed with only a narrow gap between one wall and the roof, and the birds are safe from cats and currawongs.

I wonder how long it will be before I can remove the "do not disturb" sign.
Christine.

Barren by name but not by nature ...

During a recent trip to the Kiama district, the Interpretive Bushwalkers visited Barren Grounds Nature Reserve. Barren Grounds is known as a birdwatcher's paradise, with around 180 different species of birds. We didn't see many birds on that day in November, but the wildflowers!

Masses of cream flowering Melaleuca covered vast areas, white Epacris, a Leptospermum with pink flowers, and many, many more. A magnificent display!

We wondered about the behaviour of some ants—a great "heap" of them on an area the size of a dinner plate, with individuals emerging and re-entering, some carrying pupae.

The surrounding fertile pastureland is beautiful, but the weed *Lantana camara* is a major problem.

Christine.

DLEP now with State Government

After seven marathon Council meetings, the finalised Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan (DLEP 2013) has been approved by Council. The result is a final DLEP which largely reflects the existing hard fought planning framework contained in LEP 1991 and 2005. Importantly, the finalised DLEP does not include any major re-zonings or removal of planning controls which could potentially change the character of our villages or impact on our beautiful bushland.

The Department of Planning and Environment will now review the finalised DLEP and make a recommendation to the Minister of Planning Pru Goward, for final approval and signoff. The review process could result in major changes to the DLEP, including removal of the R6 "residential leafy streets" zone unique to the Blue Mountains. Maintaining the DLEP as endorsed by Council, including all of the key environmental provisions, is a key plank of the Society's state election campaign.

At the last two Council meetings where the DLEP was considered, a number of significant changes were made:

- The final zoning of Knapsack Reserve was deferred (ie not included in the DLEP) so updated vegetation mapping can be considered in determining the final zoning of the Reserve. This is a good outcome and is almost entirely due to the efforts of Society and Bushcare members.
- In its submission the Society expressed strong concerns that the DLEP as drafted gave landowners the false impression that E2 (Environmental Conservation) land could be subdivided. Council conceded that their approach had created some confusion. Council amended the DLEP to ensure it is clear that privately owned land with high environmental values which is zoned E2 cannot be subdivided. We are very happy with this outcome and spoke in support of it at the Council meeting.
- In its submission the Society sought to have environmentally sensitive areas, such as mapped significant vegetation areas and watercourses and buffers, excluded from the operation of the statewide 'exempt and complying development' code. Exempt and complying development does not require Council approval or development assessment. Council agreed with the Society that this was a key issue and suggested an amendment to protect these areas. Again the Society spoke in support of this change at the Council meeting.

Land Use Committee.

Commitment to expand and protect National Parks

At the recent IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, NSW Labor committed to defend, protect and expand our national parks to build a fully comprehensive, adequate and representative public reserve system.

"International scientific consensus confirms that a large national parks system, managed primarily for conservation, is the central piece of an effective biodiversity protection regime.

"Commercial logging, amateur hunting and grazing of hoofed animals are incompatible with the management of public reserves for the conservation of native flora and fauna.

"The principal objects of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 are the conservation of nature and the conservation of objects, places or features (including biological diversity) of cultural value within the landscape." (Source: Luke Foley, MLC)

We congratulate Labor for this declaration and ask other parties to make the same commitment to expand and protect our national parks.

You can become a member of Blue Mountains Conservation Society

- **Post** this Application Form with your cheque or money order to: Blue Mountains Conservation Society, PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls, NSW 2782, **OR**
- **Join online** at: www.bluemountains.org.au

(Use capitals please—even for email address)

Name(s) 1.
2.
3.

Address:
.....PC

Phone(s)

Email

I/We agree to support the aims and objectives of the Society as set out on reverse side of this membership application:

Please sign if named above.

Signature(s) 1.
2.
3.

MEMBERSHIP FEES (please circle one item)

Single \$30 Concession (Senior/Student) \$20

Household \$35 Household Concession \$25

Corporate (negotiable)

Membership (circled above) \$

Donation (tax deductible) \$

Bushwalkers: please add

\$20 per walker per annum. \$

TOTAL AMOUNT \$

Send my copy of Hut News by

Please tick box mail internet only

Would you like to be involved in any of the following activities or working groups? (Please underline):

Land use/development issues; Environmental Education; Threatened species issues; Website and social media; Plant nursery assistance; Bushcare; Publicity/photography; Water quality/sourcing studies; Administration;

ENQUIRIES: Phone 02 4757 1872

Email: membership@bluemountains.org.au

BMCS Planning and Development Resource Kit

Do you want to take action on an environmental issue in your neighbourhood or the Blue Mountains more broadly?

Do you want information about the laws and procedures relating to development and environmental protection?

Find out what **YOU** can do! Go to the Planning and Development Resource Kit www.bluemountains.org.au/pdrk-welcome.shtml

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community organisation working to achieve the preservation and regeneration of the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains.

The Society believes that World Heritage status provides an opportunity for local community members to become custodians of the unique biodiversity and scenery of the Blue Mountains.

The Mission of the Society is to help conserve the natural environment of the Blue Mountains.

The Aims and Objectives of the Society are to:

- Disseminate and foster an understanding of the ideals of Conservation.
- Promote the need for ecological sustainability.
- Protect the natural environment—flora, fauna, habitat, water, land and air.
- Actively oppose those human activities which degrade or destroy the natural environment.
- Repair the adverse effects of human activities upon the environment.
- Encourage the love of the natural environment by conducting a regular program of bushwalks.
- Increase the pool of expert knowledge about the natural environment, through meetings, excursions, research and other activities.
- Provide information to the public on matters of Conservation, especially through the Conservation Hut at the Valley of the Waters, Wentworth Falls.
- Maintain close and friendly relations with like-minded groups.

JOIN Blue Mountains Conservation Society,
or renew your membership online.
www.bluemountains.org.au

A BEQUEST

Please remember us in your Will.

The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording: "I bequeath the sum of \$... to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc. for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the treasurer for the time being of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society".

Down the Wallaby Track: a backward glance, with John Low

BY A SMALL LAGOON OF FRESH WATER

On the night of April 25 1815 Captain Henry Antill, ADC to Governor Lachlan Macquarie, slept in his clothes and rose the following morning as daylight broke. Later, with a fine autumn day unfolding, Macquarie's retinue began its grand tour of the new road across the Mountains.

"About 5 ½ miles", scribbled Antill in his journal, "[we] came to the first depot established by Mr. Cox ... A small guard of soldiers are stationed here in a good log hut with two rooms, one of which answers as a store. It is placed about 100 yards on the right of the road, near a small lagoon of fresh water. The soldiers had enclosed a small piece of ground for a garden ... laying it out in little arbours and seats formed from the surrounding shrubbery, which gave the place an appearance of comfort and simplicity."

Nine months earlier, in July 1814, William Cox's first supply depot at the edge of what is now Glenbrook Lagoon had just been completed and the road-building party's provisions and military guard transferred there from the Nepean. This small squad of soldiers were all drawn from Macquarie's Veteran Company based at Windsor and most were over the age of 35. An exception, though, was the sergeant in command, 28 year-old William Bounds who, subsequent events suggest, had serious health problems.

Enlisting in England as a Private with the NSW Corps, William Bounds arrived in Sydney on the 'Recovery' in July 1808. When, a year later, the Corps was returned to England, he was one of the many who preferred to remain in Australia, joining the Royal Veteran Company in 1810. Still a private in 1812, a promotion must have come through by the time he joined Cox's party.

Sadly, any pleasure was short-lived for, on 26 August 1814, William Cox, returning to the Mountains after a week's absence at his property 'Clarendon', stopped at William Martin's farm near Castlereagh and found the body of "the sergeant of the party, he having died the day before. Sent to Windsor to the sergeant commanding there for a coffin and party to bury him at Castlereagh, but Sergeant Ray sent for the corpse to bring it to Windsor. Wrote to the Governor for another sergeant, and sent back Corporal Harris to the depot, where to remain until relieved."

The road uppermost in his mind, Cox's record of the death of his young sergeant is unemotional, practical and matter-of-fact and includes no indication as to cause. As work on the Western Road continued apace, he was buried at Windsor in the churchyard of the original St. Matthew's Anglican Church.

It is not with Windsor or Castlereagh, however, that I associate his memory. William Bounds, it would seem, died at the depot by the lagoon where he was stationed, with the birds and the trees and the wind around him, his body brought down to Martin's by Corporal Harris. Now a much larger body of water than was known to him (it was dammed in the 1880s for railway use), Glenbrook Lagoon is still a peaceful place where people walk, reflect, watch the birds – and maybe give a nod to Sergeant Bounds. But, perhaps not, for few have heard of this young man, the only one of Cox's men to die during the construction of the road.

John Low (grizzlybear3au@yahoo.com)

Grandparents for Generational Equity www.genequity.net

Go the website ... keep informed ... write letters ... tell your friends. Let's take some real action to help leave a world our grandchildren can survive in.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc: BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

Membership of the bushwalking group is open to Society members. The BMCS Bushwalking Guide which explains the numbered grades can be found on the Society's website www.bluemountains.org.au or can be posted on request. For more information call Maurice Kerkham 4739 4942 email mauricekerkham@hotmail.com or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782. **Late changes to the program will be published on the website.** Programs for Saturday and Monday walks are on page 12.

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS: Walks 2-3 hours conducted at a leisurely pace to suit walkers on the day. Bring morning tea, adequate water and lunch if noted. Group Co-ordinator is Beverley Thompson, 4757 2076, roybev12@bigpond.net.au

Dec 11 **Christmas Party at Lindsay's house.** Contact Lindsay on 4751 6640 for details.

Dec 18 **Walls Cave Blackheath.** Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 9.45am. Car pool. Take lunch. Afternoon tea at Tracy's. Please bring something to share. Leader Tracy 0434 362 611. Grade 2.

No walk Christmas Day or New Year's Day.

Jan 8 **Greenwich Point Sydney.** Lovely harbour-side circuit. Take lunch. Meet top of escalators Central Station 9.30am. Leader Maurice 4739 4942. Grade 2

Jan 15 **Birdwood Gully and Madeline Glen Springwood.** Walk through rainforest and unusual rock formations. Take lunch. Meet Springwood Station car park north side 9am. Leader Keith 4736 1010. Grade 1/2

Jan 22 **Transit of Venus Woodford.** Historic waterfall circuit. Car pool. Take lunch. Meet Woodford Station north side 9am. Leader Tracy 0434 362 611. Grade 2

Jan 29 **Jack Evans Track Glenbrook.** Walk to Erskine Creek with possible swim. National Park Passes please. Car pool \$5. Take lunch. Meet Glenbrook Station car park 9.30am. Leader Maurice 4739 4942. Grade 2

Feb 5 **Fairy Bower Mount Victoria.** Walk through beautiful forest. Take lunch. Meet Mount Victoria Station 9.50am. Leader Tracy 0434 362 611. Grade 2

Feb 12 **Minnihaha Falls Katoomba.** Creek-side walk to lookouts with short descent to base of waterfall. Car pool. Take lunch. Meet Katoomba Station car park 9.30am. Leader Tracy 0434 362 611. Grade 2.

Your memorable experiences

At the end of Jim Smith's recent talk at the Wentworth Falls School of Arts, he invited everyone to share some of their own experiences with Nature. Quite a few people spoke – and this complemented Jim's talk wonderfully well. I asked for people to send their reminiscences for publication in Hut News. Bill Orme's story is on this page.

Would you like to share your story with members in Hut News? Just a few lines will do, about your special experience with Nature in the Blue Mountains—it doesn't have to be spectacular, just something you have seen or heard which was memorable for you. Christine Davies, hutnews@bluemountains.org.au, 4787 7246.

Welcome to new members

Anne Smith, Clarence
Sabrina Roesner, Katoomba
Justin Morrissey, Katoomba
Graham Scott, Katoomba
Fiona Schonstein, Katoomba
Dean Patrick Driscoll, Blackheath
Tibor Gulyas, Leura
Johanna O'Hea, Katoomba
Letitia Kemister, Springwood
Jack Wolfenden, Springwood
Susan Moylan, Mount Riverview
Desmond Arthur Peterson, Faulconbridge
Edward Santos, Blacktown
Frances Miller, Balmain
Carl Perkin, Leura
Margaret Levin, Springwood
Michael Wishart, Springwood
Tony Holgate, Katoomba

**BLUE MOUNTAINS
CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc**
'Like' us on Facebook:
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Follow us on Twitter: [bmcnsnw](https://twitter.com/bmcsnsw)

Platypus encounter Bill Orme

In January 1989 I was the first to walk solo the Robert Sloss planned Ensign Barrallier Track from Katoomba to Mittagong, made possible by the opening of the passage through the previously closed Warragamba Catchment Area.



After crossing Beloon Pass I pitched my tent beside the Nattai River and was making a cup of tea when two small black heads appeared a metre from the shore and checked me out. Soon two young platypus emerged and stood still watching me as I sat quietly watching them.

One then moved forward and sniffed the air before making a small squeal which seemed to indicate to the other I was not a danger. The second joined the first who then alone came slowly forward to smell my feet.

Again it called to the other and the two became like a pair of young puppies. They checked my boots and pack, then gamboled into my tent and explored that. After a further gambol around me they went back to the river.

Possibly I was the first human they had seen (smelt!). I can only hope they enjoyed our meeting together as much as I did.

Bill Orme is keen to promote walking. He formed the Walking Volunteers to help develop the network of Sydney harbour and coastal walks which is described on www.walkingcoastalsydney.com.au "Walking Sydney Harbour & Coast" On this website you will find detailed maps and brochures for sections of the walk.

Bill and his wife Nedra have walked over 50,000 kms around the world since retiring and their 14 part Practicals Series explain why and how they do it. Contact Bill wjenorme@bigpond.com if you want information about long distance walking.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc: BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

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SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace. Bring morning tea, lunch and adequate water. If you are a new walker to Saturday walks, before attending contact the designated contact person or the Group Co-ordinator Jim Percy—phone 4758 6009, email jp34@tpg.com.au Check www.bluemountains.org.au for updates.

Saturday Walks driver reimbursement: *In an effort to ensure that car drivers are adequately compensated for the use of their vehicles a driver reimbursement policy applies* (Check www.bluemountains.org.au Saturday Walks page for details)

Dec 13 **Glenbrook Circuit Walk** - Red Hands Cave and Kanuka Brook Karens Kanuka - Swimming ops available in this delightful brook- Leader **Karen** 4751 9695-Meet at Glenbrook Stn Carpark-8.00 am -10 Km-Gr3-Map **Penrith**

Dec 20 **Christmas Lunch** Wentworth Falls Country Club. Traditional Buffet \$36 pp. Please confirm attendance with Bob - Deposit required. Leader **Bob** 4757 2699--Lunch 12.30 pm

Dec 27 **No programmed walk**

Holiday Specials

Jan 3 **Wentworth Falls Area** - Local Walk - to be specified on the day - Ems front-yard -Leader **Emanuel** 4757 1090- Ring Leader for details. Map **Katoomba**

Jan 10 **Wentworth Falls Area** - Local Walk - to be specified on the day Ems front-yard-Leader **Emanuel** 4757 1090- Ring Leader for details. Map **-Katoomba**

Jan 11-17 **Perisher Valley**, Cooma Ski Club Lodge. Five days of a **variety of bushwalking experiences above and below the tree line**. Booked out - Ring leader for wait list- Leader **Warwick** 4757 1354 -Maps **Kosciusko** etc

Jan 17 **Bonnie Doon Track, Nellies Glen and return via the Devils Hole**. Leader **Warren** 4767 5403. Meet at Katoomba Station Carpark-8.30am-12Km -Gr3-Map **Katoomba**

Jan 24 **LWE-Dalpura Gully - a great adventure if the weather is warm** - wade deep wade - (bring swimmers, thermal top, wetshoes and/or change of clothing) - If the day is cool we will not wade and add Jinki Gully (gaiters & gloves)-Leader **Jim** 4758 6009-Meet at Mt Vic station CP-8.00-8Km-Gr3-Map **Mt Wilson**

Jan 31 **Govetts Leap Grand Canyon Up to Old Pt Pilcher and Mark Foy's Old Stagecoach Road and to Medlow Bath**. A great walk with history. Leader **Christine** 4784 2385. Meet at Blackheath Stn Cp-8.30-10Km -Gr3-Map **Katoomba**

Feb 7 **Fortress Fantasy - the Ridge to the Valley and on to Lockleys Pylon**. A Harold variation of an old favourite. Leader **Harold** 9600 8005-Meet at Leura School Mt Hay Road-8.30-7Km-Gr3-Map **Katoomba**

Feb 14 **West Street Valley of Waters Vera Falls Wentworth Pass West Street** - Have Valentines Day with Warren- Leader **Warren** 4787 5403-Meet at W Falls Stockade CP-8.30-10Km-Gr3-Map **Katoomba**

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short Day walks of 3-5 hours, suitable for walkers of an average fitness. Bring morning tea and lunch and adequate water. The Group Co-ordinator is Keith Dorrian, 4736 1010, keithdor53@hotmail.com

Dec 15 **Christmas Party, 60s Theme**. Dress, sing and dance to the 60's Cold Meat and Dessert Buffet. Cost \$35, Pay Judith. Hazelbrook Bowling Club, Bonnie View Ave, Hazelbrook, 12-12.30 start. Judith 4758 6310. Grade 1.

Dec 22 **Furber Steps to Landslide and return, Katoomba**. Meet Katoomba Station carpark 8.35. Car pool. Ros 4733 3880. Grade 3.

Dec 29 **South Lawson Waterfalls - Adeline, Junction, Federal and Cateract Falls**, 4 km Circuit. Meet Lawson, Honour Avenue, near highway 8.45. Keith 4736 1010. Grade 2.

Jan 5 **Rose Bay to Watsons Bay** via Parsley Bay for lunch stop and swim. Meet Central Station 9.30. Ken 0423 450 200. Grade 2.

Jan 12 **Horseshoe Falls Reserve, Hazelbrook**. Three falls walk and rainforest. Meet Hazelbrook Station top of steps 9.15. Maurice 4739 4942. Grade 2.

Jan 19 **Water Nymphs Dell/Wentworth Falls Lake**. Cool forest walk to a waterfall. Option of walking around lake. Meet Wentworth Falls Station 8.45. Ros 4733 3880. Grade 2.

Jan 26 **Australia Day - NO WALK**.

Feb 2 **Hyde Park, mid Hartley**, easy walk to River Lett. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9.50 am. Car pool \$5. Maurice 4739 4942.

Feb 9 **Porter's Pass and Collier's Causeway, Blackheath**. Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 8.45.

Tracy 0434 362 611. Grade 3.

Feb 16 **Medlow Bath to Blackheath via Mermaid Cave**. Meet Medlow Bath Station 8.30. Liz Start 4754 4966. Grade 2.

The program for the Thursday Pleasure Walks is on page 11.

VALLEY OF THE WATERS BUSHCARE GROUP

The Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets on the second Saturday of each month, 9am till noon. Tools and gloves are available. Bring a drink, a snack and a sunhat. New members are welcome.

Phone Karen 4757 1929.



VOTE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
NSW State Election, 28 March 1915
www.bluemountains.org.au