

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Monthly Meeting: Rebuilding the National Pass



The Grand Stairway, National Pass

The National Pass is a spectacular bushwalking track completed in 1908, a two and a half km engineering marvel that clings to a narrow ledge halfway up a 250 metre cliff face. The masterpiece of this heritage listed track is 'The Grand Stairway', steps cut down a 90 metre cliff face that descends to the ledge and to the middle tier of Wentworth Falls. The National Pass was the brainchild of a Scottish Sea Captain, James Somerfield Murray who led a small team called 'the Irish Brigade' in a two year construction program. Captain Murray had himself lowered over the cliff in a bosun's chair to survey the cliff and access the ledge and completed the work using dynamite, picks and shovels.

The National Pass then went through almost a century of wear and tear until Colin Delap led a team of track workers in a reconstruction that encountered a range of difficulties over

five years unique to the location, particularly how to build a bridge across Wentworth Falls that had to withstand major flooding. Previous bridges had been swept away. His new bridge is regarded by many as the masterpiece of the reconstruction which won the National Trust's top award for Conservation of a Built Heritage and a UNESNO Award of Distinction for Culture Heritage Conservation in the Asia-Pacific.

Blue Mountains Filmmaker, Gary Caganoff of Lysis Films will screen his 28 minute film about the reconstruction at the August Monthly Meeting at the Conservation Hut. Master Track Builder, Colin Delap will also be there to answer questions. The film takes us along the Pass, notes the challenges of the original construction and the reconstruction and includes historic photos and footage.

The meeting at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls on Friday 28 August starts at 7.30 pm.

From the President

Welcome to this edition of Hut News. The Society has many things planned this month and I hope to see many of you at our activities.

On **Saturday the 15th**, we are holding a public meeting in Katoomba to reinforce the message that **National Parks are for Nature** and not inappropriate tourism development or hunting. This is one in a series of public meetings being held by environment groups at Kuring-gai, Sutherland, North Coast, and Parliament House. The aim is to stop the State Government introducing legislation in the September sitting of parliament to facilitate the changes. I really hope to see you there.

Tuesday the 18th of August is our first day in the Land and Environment Court for the Coxs River Case. Our aim is to improve the water quality in the upper Coxs River while also lobbying the government to fix problems with the upper Cox catchment as a whole and the water licensing system. The first step in our case is a request for a Maximum Costs Order to limit costs. This will affect if we can continue proceedings so we hope for success!

We have an interesting monthly meeting planned for Friday the 28th, not to mention bushwalks, nursery and bush regeneration work. A big thank you to all of those making these activities happen. Tara Cameron

National Parks are under attack: Help Nature take them back!

PUBLIC MEETING: Saturday 15 August

9:45am for a 10am start (finish by 11:30am)

Santa Maria Centre, 253 Great Western Highway, Lawson

National parks are currently under significant pressure.

Legislation could be passed in September to allow increased commercialisation and development of on-park accommodation, in competition with local businesses, and recreational hunting in national parks.

National parks in the Blue Mountains region are winding back conservation work due to a lack of funding.

Please join us to learn more about these proposals and send a clear message that **National parks are for NATURE conservation.**

Speakers: Andrew Cox (National Parks Association) plus local representatives of conservation and animal welfare groups.

Invitees include: Mr Koperberg MP, BMCC Councillors, Mr Richardson MP

HELP NEEDED

This month we are calling for volunteers to help at our Lawson nursery on Wednesday or Saturday mornings. There will be lots of work to do during the next year growing plants for RTA contracts, so the more the merrier. Please read Nursery News on page 2 and phone Kevin Bell 4787 6436.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society

Monthly Meeting

7:30 pm, Friday, August 28, 2009

Conservation Hut, far western end of Fletcher St. Wentworth Falls.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME.

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HUT NEWS EDITORIALS

The deadline for the next issue of Hut News is **22nd August 2009**

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Lachlan Garland, phone: 4757 1929
email: lachlan@hermes.net.au
PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

BUSHCARE GROUP

Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets second Saturday of each month, 9am till noon. Tools and gloves are available. Bring a drink, a snack and a hat. New members are always welcome. Phone Karen on 4757 1929.

Nursery News Kevin Bell, Nursery Manager

Another RTA contract: In partnership with *Wildplant*, the Society's nursery has been awarded another contract with the RTA to collect seed and supply 36,000 plants for restoration work along the Great Western Highway between Tablelands Road and Wentworth Falls station. Members will have noticed that work has already begun on this section and will continue for at least two and a half years.

This contract adds to the one we have already underway with the RTA at Lawson/Bullaburra with the first delivery of our plants scheduled for September of this year and continuing until September 2010.

Together with contracts with Blue Mountains City Council, involving a total of 6100 plants, and providing a wide range of species for home-gardeners and landscapers as well as the RTA work, our volunteers are kept extremely busy and we would welcome the addition of new faces.

Can you spare a morning a week or less because any contribution would be valued? No experience is necessary as you will quickly learn the techniques and will find great joy in seeing seeds germinating and growing into lovely plants. The company is congenial and you will feel gratified at helping to care for the environment and providing much-needed funds for the work of the Society. Just give me a call at 47876436.

When we open again in the first week of August, come and visit us (Tuesday morning at Blackheath, Wednesday morning at Lawson or at the Lawson Magpie Markets every 3rd Sunday of the month) and see our wide selection of plants suitable for your mountains garden. We would consider opening our Lawson nursery on Saturday mornings if volunteer numbers were to increase.

Goodenias: This genus of plants honours Samuel Goodenough (1743-1827), cleric and botanist and adds to our list of plants described in previous issues of *Hut News* which recognise famous botanists. This august gentleman has been described as being "learned, pious, exemplary and venerable" but aren't we all? He held posts as tutor at Christ Church, Oxford where he gained masters and doctoral degrees and, later, as bishop of Carlisle from 1808-1827. During his time at Oxford he befriended Sir Joseph Banks and was one of the original framers of the Linnean Society in 1788 where he held the position of Treasurer. Of his many botanical studies, his contributions to knowledge of the genus *Carex* were highly regarded but he also enjoyed the study of birds and the Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*) honours his name.

Goodenias are a genus of about 170 species almost all of which are confined to Australia but a few are found in nearby northern islands. Our nursery will offer three local species in Spring but hope to offer more later.

Goodenia ovata (egg or oval shaped, referring to the leaves) is a small, open shrub to about 1m high with glossy green, sticky leaves which contrast nicely with the pretty yellow flowers borne in the leaf axils and produced in Spring. A distribution map shows it occurs over the whole of NSW and I have seen extensive stands right along the roadside between Mt. Wilson and Mt. Irvine. It grows quickly and can be used as a filler under larger shrubs. A prostrate form is also known.

G. bellidifolia and *G. heterophylla* are small (to about 30cm), erect plants, ideally suited to a rockery and are widespread over the mountains. Both will spread by suckering and lend a natural look to the garden. *Kevin Bell.*

Blue Mountains City Council SWAMP CARE EVENTS:

Monday 17 August. North Katoomba Swampcare-Landcare, North Street, Katoomba : 9-12am. Come along and give a helping hand to the new North Katoomba Landcare group which is looking after a swamp on private and public land, which is home to the Giant Dragonfly.

Saturday 15th August. Newnes Plateau Swamp vegetation and ecology workshop -Newnes Plateau 9.30-12.30. Want to learn more about the flora and ecology of Newnes Plateau Shrub Swamps. Join Ian Baird and Michael Hensen for Newnes Swamps 101 at Carney Swamp.

Tuesday 8th September. Groundwater dependant ecosystems of the Blue Mountains 7-8.30pm , Santa Maria Centre, 253 Great Western Highway, Lawson. Join Peter Serov, an aquatic ecologist from Department of Natural Resources, to learn more about groundwater dependant ecosystems of the Blue Mountains.

Book with Michael Hensen on mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au (preferred) or 4780 5471.

CLIMATE CHANGE: LETTER OF THE MONTH CAMPAIGN

Actions speak louder than words

On Friday 03.07.09 the Sydney Morning Herald carried two articles relating to climate change. The first spoke of a report prepared by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), commissioned by the CSIRO, to examine Australia's energy sector and look at ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The study looked at five scenarios for NSW, ranging from building more coal-fired power stations through to a large energy-efficiency campaign combined with more renewable power. **It found that building baseload power using coal was much more expensive than focussing on energy efficiency and tapping into a network of small "co-generation" power sources sprinkled in the suburbs.**

The second article stated that the Rees government has dumped key elements of its plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which included setting a state-wide efficiency target and mandatory standards to force big business to use less energy.

The recent NSW state budget announced an investment of \$205 million for the expansion of the state's second largest coal-fired power station at Eraring, and a \$20 million taxpayer handout to one of the state's biggest coal companies, Centennial Coal, to help it export more coal. The government has also recently approved plans for massive expansion of coal mining under Sydney's drinking water catchment. **However the NSW Minister for Climate Change, Carmel Tebbutt, claims that the state is still "a leader in climate change action".**

The government continues to shift the responsibility of reducing greenhouse emissions to Australian taxpayers, with high-profile programs, like BASIX, which cut energy use in new homes, and funding schools to switch to low-energy lighting in spite of findings that is not a cost effective way to save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Write a letter to Carmel Tebbutt, Minister for Climate Change and Deputy Premier, as well as your local state member of Parliament Phil Koperberg (better still, phone him!). Here are some questions you may wish to ask:

- **When is the NSW government going to stop putting all the responsibility for emissions reduction onto NSW taxpayers?**
- **When is the NSW government going to put the responsibility for the bulk of this state's greenhouse emissions onto the real culprits, the heavy greenhouse gas polluters and the coal industry?**
- **Will NSW taxpayers also be required to pay the costs of adverse impacts on Sydney's water supply and damage to the Princes Highway by subsidence from mining, as predicted by the mining company in its environmental assessment?**

Contact Details:

The Hon Carmel Tebbutt
Minister for Climate Change and the Environment,
Level 30, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney 2000
Email dp.office@tebbutt.minister.nsw.gov.au

Phil Koperberg MP
Shop 3, 107-109 Macquarie Rd, Springwood 2777
Email bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Phone 4751 3298

Finally, one of the most powerful message we, as individuals, can send to the government is through our consumption patterns. If we vote with our feet and walk away from polluting coal power, by signing up for green electricity, we would effectively show both the government and big business that we are determined to have a clean energy future.

Check out the options on www.greenpower.com.au.

Robin Mosman and Rosemary Lathouris

BLUE HORIZONS

A photographic exhibition
By WYN JONES

Celebrates the 50th anniversary
of the designation of
Blue Mountains National Park

Sat 29 August—Sun 20 September
10 am—4 pm, Visitor Centre
(free after garden entry)

Mount Tomah Botanic Garden,
Bells Line of Road, Mount Tomah

Enquiries 4567 2154
www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

Katoomba Airfield

At present the Department of Lands is in discussions with Department of Planning and Blue Mountains City Council re the best future use of this site, situated on Grand Canyon Road, Medlow Bath.

Tenders will be sought through an Expressions of Interest (EOI) process but the timing of this is unclear. There will be a meeting between the Director-General of Lands and the D-G Planning, after September, to discuss this proposal (D-G Lands on leave until then). Therefore, no EOIs are currently active and we do not know if a commercial airfield or other uses are most likely.

Tara Cameron, with Peter Ridgeway and Sidney Ryrie of the Land Use Subcommittee met with Phil Koperberg recently regarding the site. As a result of this meeting Mr Koperberg has written to the Minister for Climate Change and Environment to ask if DECC will submit an EOI for the site, given it is surrounded by Blue Mountains National Park.

Incorporation into the National Park would mean that the airfield would be used for fire fighting but not commercial purposes.

We will keep you up to date with the progress of this issue.

Sidney Ryrie, Land Use Officer.

In the BMCS office

Two members have offered their services for Admin. Assistant. Leah has been helping me for about three weeks now and is extremely capable. She will be a great help in trying to improve Admin matters and in making it all more efficient. Rob Baigent

Sustainable Living Competition

We have 16 entries for the Sustainable living competition from amongst 42 who expressed interest. There are entries from Blackheath(2), Faulconbridge(2), Glenbrook(1), Hazelbrook(1), Katoomba(6), Leura(1), Springwood(2), and Winmalee(1). So a good spread across the Mountain towns, though not as many as I hoped for in total (I would have liked to have 30).

In about 2 months time I plan to have a meeting with all contestants where 2 or 3 speakers will briefly outline what they have done or what can be done to reduce consumption, and then have a long discussion period. Rob Baigent.

Do you feel threatened? Three cases of dyspepsia are heading your way!

We need to ACT NOW. Please read these three articles and write a letter, send a submission, become a stakeholder to ensure that our National Parks and World Heritage Areas are kept for Nature Conservation. Brian Marshall

EXPLORATION FOR COAL SEAM GAS IN GREATER BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE AREA

Pangaea Oil & Gas Pty Ltd and Biogas Energy have respectively made a Petroleum Special Prospecting Authority Application (PSPAA 42; dated 28 May 2009) and a Petroleum Exploration Application (PELA 112) over portions of national parks and the World Heritage Area (see map on page 5).

Although other encroachments exist (e.g. PEL 2), they are minor compared to PSPAA 42, which covers some 49 blocks of the Greater Blue Mountains region extending from Mt Barakee southward to the Wombeyan Caves and the Wollondilly River. PSPAA 42 effectively involves (from north to south) the southern part of the Wollemi National Park and Wilderness, Blue Mountains National Park and Grose Wilderness, Kanangra-Boyd National Park and Wilderness, Yerranderie State Conservation Area, and Nattai National Park and Wilderness; in short, the southern half of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWH). Therefore, in terms of river systems and their catchments, the northern half of PSPAA 42 impacts on the Colo, Wollangambe and Grose Wild Rivers, whilst the southern half impacts on the Coxs, Kowmung and Wollondilly systems. These southern rivers and their catchments feed Lake Burratorang and are fundamental to Sydney's water supply.

PELA 112, although only affecting a small portion of the Blue Mountains National Park, also impacts on Sydney's water supply in terms of the Coxs River system, and Lithgow's water supply by encompassing Farmers Creek.

The applications are principally for coal-seam gas. A spokesperson for Pangaea has said that there would be relatively little impact from exploring for and exploiting coal-seam gas (Ben Cubby, SMH July 23 p3); but that is the spokesperson's job! Underground coal miners are similarly trying to convince communities that surface impacts are negligible, despite contrary evidence. Could they also have their covetous eyes on our parks?

If granted by the Department of Primary Industry, the applicant (Pangaea Oil & Gas Pty Ltd) will access the parks, wilderness and GBMWH to carry out exploration for coal-seam gas. Furthermore, as the right to explore inevitably carries the expectation of a right to exploit, a successful and inevitably destructive exploration program could lead to the need for exploitation infrastructure. Such a Development Application would probably be handled by the Department of Planning as of 'Part 3A' importance; and we all know what that entails! The simple fact is that Delta wishes to expand capacity using coal- or gas-fired technology (Marian Wilkinson, SMH July 22 p5). Do you believe that this Government would forego exploiting a coal-seam gas resource beneath the GBMWH?

The Society has written to State Government Ministers Tebbutt and Macdonald, and Federal Minister Garrett (in view of the threat to the GBMWH) asking them to intervene NOW to ensure that PSPAA 42 is entirely rejected, and parks and river systems pertaining to water supplies are excised from PELA 112.

What can you do? Contact these Ministers and Premier Rees expressing your outrage that our parks and the GBMWH are under threat. Tell them it is time to stop cannibalizing parks for short-term political expedience. [Minister Garrett, PO Box 6022, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 Peter.Garrett.MP@aph.gov.au; Premier Rees, Level 40, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney NSW 2000, thepremier@www.nsw.gov.au; Minister Tebbutt, (Level 30), dp.office@tebbutt.minister.nsw.gov.au; Minister Macdonald, (Level 33) macdonald.office@macdonald.minister.nsw.gov.au.

NATIONAL PARKS PLANS OF MANAGEMENT TO BE REVISED. BE ON THE STAKEHOLDER LIST.

Plans of Management (PoMs) for the Blue Mountains, Kanangra-Boyd and Wollemi National Parks, within the GBMWH are soon to be revised by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS). PoMs are key tools in the management of national parks and reserves. They cover a range of issues including fire, pest animals, weeds, threatened species, Aboriginal and historic heritage, recreation and education. Irrespective of the broader specifications of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, a PoM contains management conditions and requirements specific to the particular park. Changes to PoMs might obviate the need for broader conceivably contentious changes to the *NP&W Act 1974*.

As an initial step in revising the PoMs, the Blue Mountains Region of NPWS is establishing a stakeholder list of individuals and organisations wishing to be involved in the process. Because the nature of the revision process is capable of benefitting narrow sectional interests for which parks were not created, it is important that 'all' members of environment groups participate and promote their requirements. So, to get on the stakeholder list, register using the on-line stakeholder registration form, available through: <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/protectedareas/bmrsregistration.htm>. Alternatively contact the Planning Officer by mail PO Box 552 Katoomba, 2780 or phone 4784 7312 and ask for a hard copy of the registration form.

Please appreciate that the PoMs revision process creates the opportunity for parts of parks to be made increasingly available for such things as horse riding, mountain biking, 4wd driving, trail biking, and even hunting. Conceivably, provision could be made for 'essentially non-invasive' exploration and 'elite' accommodation for tourists as our parks become increasingly commercialized. **Act now to preserve what you love!**

CLARENCE COLLIERY HAS APPLIED TO PUT MORE COAL TRUCKS ON GWH

Centennial Clarence Pty Ltd has applied to increase the amount of coal carried by road from 200,000 to 500,000 tonnes per year (Clarence DA 504-00.MOD 1). This could increase truck movements by up to 70 per day from Clarence via Bell and the Darling Causeway to Mt Victoria, and then down the Great Western Highway.

Submissions opposing the Environmental Assessment (EA) need to be in by close of business on 17 August. Write to Anna Bradley, Planner, Major Development Assessment, Department of Planning, GPO Box 39, Sydney 2001, or email plan_comment@planning.nsw.gov.au,

The Society's submission pointed out the peak oil and greenhouse gas implications, the loss of amenity (noise, visual impact, health impacts from coal dust and diesel particulates, and risk to life from truck movements), the impact on property values and small businesses in the affected communities, and the fact that the route is paralleled by rail!

You could also contact your local member Phil Koperberg, Shop 3, 107-109 Macquarie Road, Springwood NSW 2777 email bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au; Gerard Martin, Ground Floor State Office Block, 140 William Street, Bathurst NSW 2795 email gerard.martin@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ask that they intervene to ensure that rail is used to reduce the impacts attached to these additional truck movements. Point out that the Company's small loss of revenue (if any) incurred by using rail is nothing compared with the penalties inflicted by trucks on residents across the mountains.

Loose Feathers, with Carol Proberts

The Rockwarbler with its rusty-brown breast and jaunty movements is a rather special little bird. It's the only bird species limited entirely to mainland NSW - in fact it's only found within a 200km radius of Sydney, and I reckon the Blue Mountains is the best place of all to see one.

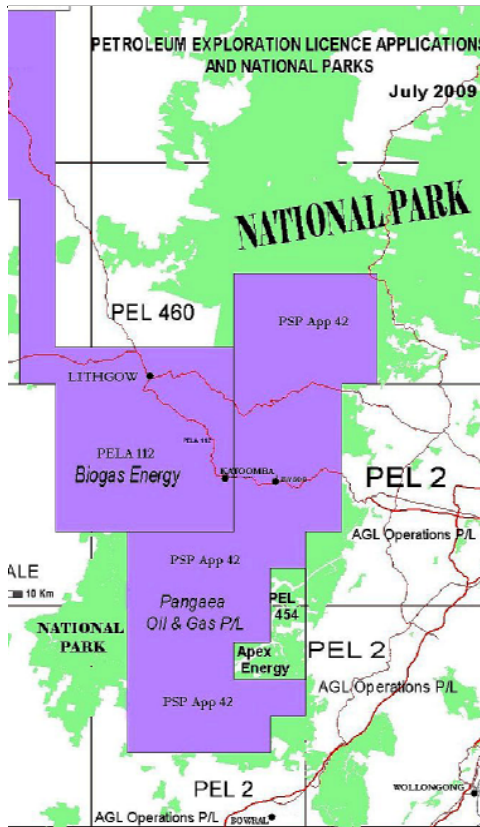
If you sit quietly at any of the rocky lookouts or cliff areas for a while there's a fair chance one or two will come along and hop cheekily around your feet. They are one of those species that look fairly uninteresting in the book, yet in real life are full of charm and charisma!

At Evans Lookout they forage underneath parked vehicles in the carpark and in the stone picnic shelter, looking for tiny insects, spiders and seeds, and probably, crumbs from picnickers. As they naturally inhabit caves, enclosed spaces are no deterrent for them. At this time of year they can get surprisingly tame. The other day one hopped straight across the carpark toward us as soon as we arrived, to stand next to our toes and peer upward at us. But move a single muscle and they're off in a flash! I guess they've learnt to associate people with food, like many other species have.

On a more disturbing note, over the last few weeks Noisy Miners have been making incursions into the upper mountains where they are not normally found. Although a native species, Noisy Miners are one of the most problematic birds of our area, due to their habit of taking over a patch and aggressively excluding most other species from their territory. At least two studies have shown the presence of Noisy Miners to be linked to a loss of bird diversity, in both urban and woodland habitats, and they are arguably worse than the introduced brown Common Myna (a completely unrelated species despite the similar-sounding name).

The grey-coloured Noisy Miners are already well established in the lower mountains but, apart from one colony regularly seen at Wentworth Falls golf course, are generally not found in the upper mountains. But since early May I've seen small groups at Leura Cascades and Shipley Plateau and been told of a colony appearing at Blackheath, and more recently with the Interpretive Bushwalkers saw a group of 30 feeding in banksias at Mt Victoria. Are these all temporary visitors or does it augur a new invasion?

Carol Proberts (origma@westnet.com.au)



Map: Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and Gas Exploration licence application area.

Seeing the Gardens... nature-based tourism and recreation in the Gardens of Stone Stage Two Park Proposal

The Society, along with Colong Foundation for Wilderness, commissioned Ian Brown to produce a report entitled 'Seeing the Gardens... nature-based tourism and recreation in the Gardens of Stone Stage Two Park Proposal'. It has recently been printed and is available on our website www.bluemountains.org.au

This report follows the initial Gardens of Stone Stage 2 proposal document launched in 2005 (also on our website), and develops the case for lands such as Newnes Plateau, Mt Airly, Mt Genowlan, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests to be protected as a mix of State Conservation Areas and National Park. These areas were left out when the Gardens of Stone National Park was created in 1994 because of things such as coal mining underneath.

The new report highlights the tourism and recreation benefits that could be achieved by enacting the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 park proposal and builds on the ecological reasons for conservation outlined in the initial report. It outlines a positive economic vision for the area under conservation management.

As stated in the report, GoS2 comprises a large part of that distinctive and remarkable landscape that forms the high western edge of the Blue Mountains

sandstone plateau. The region is characterised by a unique assemblage of spectacular rock formations, coloured clifflines, canyons, forested valleys, windswept plateau heathlands, rainforest gorges and montane woodlands and swamps. Some features (e.g. Lost City, Carne Creek gorge, New Hartley mining heritage, Wolgan Valley Rail Trail) have the potential to become iconic attractions. A number of easy wildlife viewing opportunities exist and Aboriginal heritage experiences are available.

The potential of the GoS2 area for low-impact, nature-based recreation and tourism is great, but under-recognised and under-utilised at present. This is because of poor promotion and activities such as illegal off track trail biking that tends to displace more passive and low-impact recreations such as bushwalking, cycling and family camping.

GoS2 has the potential to complement the more rugged world heritage area by presenting less daunting Blue Mountains bushland which is more readily accessible by vehicle and for visitors without specialist bush skills.

The report outlines in detail what could be done in areas such as Airly-Genowlan mesas, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests, Newnes Plateau

Tara Cameron

and the western escarpment to promote appropriate nature based recreation. For instance, two campsites are proposed for Newnes Plateau being at the Bungleboori picnic area and the Afforestation site. A shrub swamp and pagoda valley walk are marked, along with lookouts such as Lost City and Birds Rock.

Building on these proposals, the 'Seeing the Gardens' report then describes the economic benefits that could come from the Gos2 proposal (with input from economist Rob Gillespie). Based on comparable statistics and studies from NSW, Queensland and Victoria, the upper estimate for tourism to a GoS2 park with the proposed facilities is 50 000 visitors a year. This level of tourism activity is estimated to produce net benefits in the order of \$28M to \$38M (depending on the discount rate used) with regional estimated as a direct spend of around \$3M to \$4M.

Members of the Society's Management Committee and Subcommittees will be presenting and distributing the 'Seeing the Gardens Report' to local Councils, politicians, businesses, media in the coming months. We hope it strengthens the case for protection of this beautiful area.



Powerful Owl. Photo by Eric Halbert

An encounter with a Powerful Owl Erik Halbert

It was in September 2008 and five of us including my wife Janet and I were going to try and find Alum Caves in an obscure gully off McDonald Hole Road, in turn off the Mudgee Road towards Wollemi National Park. We were in a land cruiser and after leaving McDonald Hole Road and crossing the western train line several times we stopped on a saddle where a couple of pretty awful dirt roads met. We could have gone a bit further before stopping but the road ahead was getting very steep and we did not relish the idea of leaving the car at the bottom of the hill, wherever that might be and walking back to Blackheath.

We walked down the hill and struck off down the gully towards the map reference of Alum Caves. It was located in a steep gully with a dry creek bed in which there were some caves and on the right hand side was a large fig tree hugging the bank. The middle of the day was hot and Janet decided to stay in the shade of the fig while the blokes did cave exploration in the immediate area.

When I returned to the fig Janet said to come up to where she was and to keep quiet. I did so and found her about three metres away from this very large and very alert Powerful Owl. It was holding onto the lower half of a ringtail possum and was not in the slightest bit concerned by our presence. I quickly took three or four photos and then we sat and admired it for twenty minutes or so. It seemed quite unconcerned by us being there and simply fixed us with these huge unblinking eyes. After a while we left.

At home we looked up the owl and its habits and found that the behaviour that we had seen was quite typical. The bird catches food in the morning, eats the top half and then roosts most of the day holding the lower half of its catch in its claws. In the evening it consumes the bottom half and then goes hunting again. Ringtail possums are one of its favourite foods. We felt honoured to have seen such a beautiful bird at such close range. I have heard them in valleys previously but had never seen one in its habitat.

Look out from atop the ridges

By Reginald Reid

Look out from atop the ridges
Across the valleys and the streams
To the mighty rock outcrops
In this land of ancient dreams

See rivers and streams converging
Amidst the canopy of trees
As the rocky rapids babble
About a sea of brown and green

Sheer walls of coloured sandstone
Play out a show of light all day
As the sun moves across the heavens
And clouds with breezes play

The mix of light and shadows
That mingles with the heat
Bring moments of cool refreshment
In time with earth's heartbeat

So many ancient stories
May be born from such a view
So many modern insights drawn
Into what we all should do

As I stand in such great wonder
And contemplate that view
I feel part of this creation
Is that how you feel too?

From "The Nature of Things"
Images in Poetry
By Reginald Reid



On a recent trip through the Hunter Valley I came across this sign near Scone. There were other similar signs. I am trying to find out how wind farms are bushfire hazards!!



Here is an alternative Hunter Region landscape. The Lemington coal mine was photographed by Gliding Instructor Morgan Sandercock of www.sandercock.com

NATIONAL PASS

I came across the National Pass website while preparing Hut News. Very impressive! If you want an armchair view of the National Pass or inspiration to go there, have a look at <http://www.nationalpass.com.au/index.php> Christine.

Interestingly there were far more signs around Scone saying **STOP Bickham Coal-mine.**

Many residents in this part of the Hunter believe - to extract coal at the very head of the Hunter Valley Catchment - is a bad idea.

Lachlan Garland

Short walks on the Newnes Plateau

by Karen McLaughlin

“Shorts Walks on the Newnes Plateau” is a brochure which has been produced by Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness. It includes a map showing several places to visit and descriptions of how to get there.

The brochure also includes information on the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 Proposal. It was produced as a follow-on from “Seeing the Gardens” by Ian Brown. (See report by Tara Cameron on page 5.)

To quote from the Brochure – “This leaflet has been produced to encourage greater appreciation of the little-known scenic and natural attractions of Newnes Plateau. Located right at Lithgow’s doorstep it has spectacular escarpments, curious pagoda rock formations, narrow canyons, beautiful forests and heathlands and endangered swamp communities. Beyond the rough dirt roads and other current disturbance lies an unspoilt world of natural wonders.”

I have been involved in the GOS2 campaign since it’s beginning because I am passionate about protecting the Newnes Plateau. I have been walking and canyoning in the area for many years. As part of the campaign we want to show the uniqueness of the area to all who are interested.

Part of me wants to keep these places secret, but I feel people who visit the Plateau will see the magnificent landscapes and agree that it would be better protected in an SCA. My favourite places on the Plateau are away from the roads and disturbance where you can feel you are truly isolated.

To obtain a copy of “Short Walks on the Newnes Plateau” or help with the campaign contact Blue Mountains Conservation Society.

Welcome to new members

Mary and Wayne Read, Blaxland
Rod and Sue Campbell-Ross,
Wentworth Falls

Alex DalGLISH, Katoomba
Paul Norris, Katoomba
Stephanie Chew, Kingsgrove
Emanuel and Dianne Conomos,
Wentworth Falls

Carmel McCallum, East Blaxland
Erin Hall, Woodford
Derek Cannon, Richmond

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

JOHN MUIR VISITS THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

‘Yosemite Park Estate’ was the name given to a new subdivision opened in North Katoomba in 1910. While I have no evidence of any direct connection, it is interesting that six years earlier the man most closely associated with the establishment of the great American national park of the same name, pioneer environmentalist John Muir, paid a brief visit to the Blue Mountains during the Australasian leg of his 1903-04 world tour.

Having spent Christmas 1903 in Melbourne and visiting the Mountain Ash forests around Healesville, Muir sailed up the east coast to Sydney. Then, on New Year’s Day, he caught the train to Mount Victoria where an early mist gave way to sunshine and the “promise of a fine day”. While “crowds of visitors” were already in the Mountains for the holiday weekend, the *Blue Mountains Gazette* reported that “every train brought increased numbers”. Muir went unnoticed among the holiday throng.

In the Mountains for approximately a week, he was impressed by Jenolan Caves and expressed similar enthusiasm for the “gloriously forested” and “very fine” landscape surrounding Katoomba. Not everything, however, was to his liking for one diary entry on 3rd January records his displeasure at “the sad sight” of blackened trees and stumps, the results of a substantial land clearance. The exact location he is describing is unknown but his distress at what he saw is acute: “tens of 1000s of dead bleached tree ruins prostrate encumbering the ground or erect gaunt bleached stumps with few stubs of main branches stretched to heaven as if for help.”

It is interesting that, at the time of Muir’s visit, a “very noticeable failure to keep the reserves in good order” appears to have been a subject of public discussion. The day after Muir left the Mountains a letter from ‘A Mountain Visitor’ appeared in the *Blue Mountains Gazette* (8th January 1904) lamenting the “very large number of exceedingly attractive spots sadly neglected. In numerous instances there will be found mountain tracks in lamentable disrepair, while seats and hand railings are in ruins in all directions, finger-posts and direction boards have disappeared, and a general state of decay is painfully noticeable.” I wonder if any of this neglect was noted by Muir.

The *John Muir Papers* are held in the Holt-Atherton Centre for Western Studies at the University of the Pacific in California. Little from his journals and correspondence has been published about his Australasian visit. Perhaps the most comprehensive account of his travels in Australia and New Zealand is contained in C. Michael Hall’s “John Muir’s Travels in Australasia, 1903-1904: Their Significance for Conservation and Environmental Thought”, in *John Muir: Life and Work*, edited by Sally Miller (1993). Hall had access to Muir’s papers but when I contacted him a couple of years ago he was unable to give me any further information about the Blue Mountains excursion.

John Low (johnlow@iprimus.com.au)

Repairing the damage on Newnes Plateau Tara Cameron

There is extensive damage on Newnes plateau caused by illegal recreation, particularly trail biking on unformed roads. In April, the Society hosted a roundtable of relevant stakeholders to discuss the situation (attended by State Forests, Police, Mingaan Aboriginal group, NPWS, Blue Mountains and Lithgow Councils).

As a follow up, Gavin Jeffries from State Forests accompanied BMCS members on a field trip to the plateau on June 30. Eric Mahoney from Blue Mountains City Council met us at Zig Zag to update us on where the Save our Swamps programme was up to. We then headed off to examine some of the most damaged places which were very shocking.

Photo: Inspecting damage caused by illegal trail bikes.



BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY 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 Liz van Reyswoud on 4757 2694, email bushwalks@bluemountains.org.au or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782. **Late changes to the program will be published on the website.**

SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace. Before attending ring the designated contact person or the Group Co-ordinator Jim Percy 4758 6009 or email jp34@tpg.com.au

Date	Details	Grade	Contact	(Map)	(km)	Meet
Aug 15	Evans Lookout to Pulpit Rock and return. All on track, some steep bits. Spectacular views.	2/3	Peter 4751 9637	Katoomba Mt Wilson	14	Blackheath Station CP
Aug 22	Birrabang Walls. Great views of the Grose. Half off track.	2/3	Bob 4757 2694	Mt Wilson	6	Mt Vic Station CP
Aug 29	Newnes to Glen Davis - Pipeline Track. Steep slippery ascent to great views of Wolgan Valley. Steady descent. BUS TRIP. Bookings required. Cost \$12. Book with leader.	3	Meredith 4758 8545	Ben Bullen & Mt Morgan	18	Katoomba Council depot
Sep 5	Mount Banks and tracks of the area with spectacular views into the Grose Gorge	2/3	Bill 4758 8545	Mt Wilson	12	Mt Vic Station CP
Sep 12	Mt York historic tracks. Lockyers Road to Vald of Clydd and Cox's Road return	2/3	Liz 4754 4966	Mt Wilson	9	Mt Vic Station CP

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 Maurice Kerkham, 4739 4942, email mauricekerkham@hotmail.com

Aug 10	Roberts Pass to Wentworth Falls. Historic mountain track.	3	Phil 4787 5560	8.30am Wentworth Falls Station car park
Aug 17	Jack Evans Track, Glenbrook. National Park walk includes Erskine Creek.	2	Heather 4739 1493	9.30 Glenbrook Station car park.
Aug 24	Glebe Historical Walk. Visit historical places and buildings of Glebe.	1	Jan Craney 9960 2174	9.30am Central Station, top of escalators.
Aug 31	Blue Gum Swamp and Shaws Ridge, Winmalee. Walk amongst majestic blue gums.	2	Heather 4739 1493	8.45 Springwood Station multi-story carpark. Car pool.
Sep 7	Hat Hill and Bald Hill. Stroll through open forest to upper Grose Valley.	2	Phil 4787 5560	9.30 am, Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. Car Pool.

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS: Walks of 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 Simone Bowskill, 4757 3416, email simbow@tpg.com.au

Aug 13	Tesselated Pavement, Mt Irvine. Extensive sandstone rock platforms, spectacular views.	2	David 4757 3416	10 am, Mt Victoria Station.
Aug 20	Castle Head, Narroneck, Katoomba. Walk along ridge to lookout via firetrail and bush track. Take lunch. Possible exploratory walk.	2	Joan c/o 4782 5966	9.30 am, Gearins Hotel, Katoomba.
Aug 27	Bus Trip to Taronga Zoo. See note elsewhere regarding bus trips. Cost \$12 for bus plus \$23 zoo admission. To be paid on booking.	1	Simone 4757 3416	8.30 am, Council depot, South Street, North Katoomba.
Sep 3	Empire Pass, short circuit, Lawson. Classic mid mountain walk, some steps & bush paths.	2	Phil 4787 5560	10 am, in large carpark on north side of Lawson Station.
Sep 10	Transit of Venus Track, Woodford. Historical walk.	2	Maurice 4739 4942	9 am, Woodford Station (north or downhill side)



South Lawson Waterfall Walk Christine Davies.

The interpretive bushwalkers recently did this walk on a cool day after a few days rain. I have never enjoyed the walk so much.

There was the constant sound of water bubbling along the creeks, water pounding down the five waterfalls, water trickling down massive tree trunks, their bark newly shed, colours bright, leaves glistening. (To the left of Adelina Falls there is a moss-covered stone wall where water trickles and drips down through the mosses from the swamp above even during dry times—it's very pretty!)

And there were the small hidden treasures—the bright green of the mosses,

ferns with fronds tinged pink, lichen-patterned rocks, shapely bracket fungi. Wildflowers, especially four species of wattles, a few birds, not many insects at this time of the year. It was even too cold for leeches. Excellent stonework has recently been done at both ends of the walk. In between, a couple of wooden bridges need a plank or two but overall the track is in fairly good condition.

Typically, we took 2½ hours to do the 2.5 km walk but why would you want to hurry. The interpretive bushwalkers walk on Thursdays during the school terms. Enquiries to Christine 4787 7246 or email hutnews@bluemountains.org.au