

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"

Slides at Easter Meeting

The first part of our March General Meeting will be the Annual General Meeting. Come along and have your say by voting for the people who are going to represent the Society for the next 12 months. There will also be the receipt of the President's and Financial Reports.

Following the election of officers, we will proceed with our ordinary general meeting, with "Green Quiz" from MC Jim Wallace, "Green Soapbox" where members can have a brief say on conservation issues, and a selection of slides from Society stalwart Marion Hawley. Last year Marion made an 1800 km trip around Australia, visiting many out of the way places. A member of the Blue Mountains Photographic Club, Marion's slides are excellent.

Adventurer and explorer Ian Brown will be our speaker after supper and show slides. Ian has visited and photographed many of the wild and beautiful places in the Blue Mountains World Heritage area. His photographs are part of the Society's World Heritage display at The Hut. In recent years he visited Antarctica and journeyed to the South Pole. As this is being written, Ian is somewhere in New Zealand climbing a mountain.

Don't miss an opportunity to have your say in the running of the Society, followed by an entertaining general meeting with some great nature slides. The meeting will be held on Good Friday 29 March at the Conservation Hut, end of Fletcher Street, Wentworth Falls, commencing 7.30 pm. Visitors are very welcome.

Native Plant Sale

Saturday 6 April at Conservation Hut

The next native plant sale will take place outside the Conservation Hut, end of Fletcher Street, Wentworth Falls, between 9 am and 1 pm on Saturday 6 April (the weekend after Easter).

Tubestock \$3 each (or 4 for \$10). Supertubes with semi-advanced stock \$5 each. Please, **not** before 9am!

David Coleby, Nursery Manager, 4784.1395.

We Live in the Fire

In his article in February *Hut News*, Ian Brown has made it clear that there is no simple solution to bushfire protection. Bushfires will reach our houses as they travel across the landscape. This is a normal part of our environment.

More hazard reduction is not the answer. There will never be enough

HOW YOU CAN HELP THE SOCIETY

At our Annual General Meeting on Good Friday, 29 March 2002, members will elect a management committee to represent the Society for the next 12 months. All positions will fall vacant. In the February newsletter, members received a list of executive positions with details of what is required of office bearers. There has been a great response, with nominations already in for all but a few positions. So if you have, for instance, secretarial or management skills, or are interested in bushcare, and can give a few hours of your time each month to the running of the Society, please consider nominating for a position. Contact any member of the present management committee (contact details are on page 2) for more information.

There are many other ways in which members can help the work of the Society. We have sub-committees in Land Use, Education, Threatened Species, Fire Management and Publicity who can always find creative uses for more members. We need volunteers to work at our native plant nurseries (Blackheath and Lawson), just one morning a week.

Extra hands can assist in the office, to organise and run street and market stalls and letter writing campaigns, work with our Valley of the Waters and Digger Cooper Reserve bushcare groups, help keep our computers operating, and help with many other tasks which crop up from time to time. However much or little time you might have to offer, we can find a use for you!

Phone Robin Mosman 4757 1354 if you would

firefighters or helicopters to save every house. Fire trails and containment lines through the bush often fail.

Some hazard reduction burning is useful. It has to be planned in a mosaic pattern to be most useful. The environmental impacts need to be assessed. Burning should not be too frequent or biodiversity will decline. Some loss of biodiversity on the bush edge near houses may be inevitable and acceptable.

Some key strategic fire trails in the bush are useful. They have to be designed and built so they are safe, effective and have acceptable environmental impact. This is not achieved in an emergency. They must be maintained to prevent erosion and weed invasion and to make sure they are useable. It is very difficult to control fire along trails that wind down steep ridge slopes.

Fire fighting will no doubt control some wildfires. But it cannot be relied on to save your house in every fire no matter how much money we spend on it.

You can modify your home to resist the effects of bushfire and having fire protection areas around buildings is an important control.

In future issues of Hut News we will

present ideas on how you can help your home to "Survive the Fire".

The Society will be holding a workshop on the Christmas fires in a couple of months. Please write your observations of what worked and what went wrong with the fire suppression so we can pass them on. This will help plan and implement future fire fighting and public education.

Questionable Development

Will Council permit another subdivision in a fire prone area? Will Council ensure that the swamp will be protected?

The Society has a number of concerns about the revised proposal for a 14 lot subdivision at Orama Rd, Hazelbrook. Members of

the Land Use Subcommittee visited the site to assess the potential impact this would have on the surrounding environment.

The subdivision and its perimeter road would extend into Development Excluded Land, i.e. the hanging swamp and watercourses. Hanging swamps and the buffers required to protect them are Development Excluded Land [LEP 91], which means they shouldn't be built on.

The required Fuel Free Zone and Fuel Reduced Zones would require the clearing of part of the ecological buffers to the hanging swamps. A buffer must be in its natural vegetated state to be effective to protect the swamp.

All of the proposed development area was burned in the Christmas 2001 bushfires as hazard reduction to protect the existing houses along Orama Road. If the proposed houses are built in this existing containment line, will the RFS see it as necessary to continue to burn the hanging swamp which was done this time? Will they also want to burn the steep valley sides? How effective will it be to move this containment line down the slope? and how safe will it be for firefighters?

Can the hanging swamp withstand

"Hut News", the newsletter of
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Help with Computers

Members of the Society's management committee place a lot of reliance on their home computers to undertake the Society's business. Unfortunately some are not skilled at trouble shooting when something goes wrong. Sometimes there are only minor problems which somebody with a little knowledge could fix in an instant.

Can you help? We are looking for members with a knowledge of

computers, in different areas of the Mountains, who could contribute to the work of the Society by being part of a back-up computer team. Phone Christine 4787.7246.

Action on Royal Deer

Indonesian Rusa Deer were introduced into Royal National Park in 1906 when seven deer bought for exhibition purposes were placed in a fenced peninsular called Deer Park. The deer soon escaped and spread into the national park.

The January 1994 bushfires reduced the deer population in Royal to about 150, and provided ideal conditions for NPWS to undertake a rapid cull. The plans were shelved following reaction from animal welfare supporters.

Today the deer are estimated to number 2,500 in the national park, and the population extends from Grays Point in Sydney's southern suburbs to Ulladulla on the south coast.

Fires in December 2001 that severely burnt about 60% of Royal National Park provided a second chance to control deer numbers.

The Royal National Park Deer Working Group, established in July 2000, was convened within a week of extinguishing the fires to finalise a draft deer management plan. In the face of convincing scientific data, the group consisting of state, local government, environmental and animal welfare bodies unanimously agreed that the humane culling of deer herds by professional shooters could enhance the long-term welfare of Royal's ecosystems.

Research referred to in the draft shows that the deer's diet is having a

THE BUSH WILL BURN by Ken Macqueen (1969)

The bush has burned again and men have wept:
Wept to see destruction of their dreams,
But wept most of all for those who died for nought.

The bush will burn
So long as man needs fire for his use,
But having burned,
Will, like man, take courage and restore.

The mighty gums that challenge me
To capture all their bright array on canvas,
Wear, every one, with other colours in their crazy coat,
The charcoal black that only comes with fire.
Fire that may have passed their way in recent months,
Or in past years, unknown to stalwart saplings that surround.

A forest of leafy eucalypts
Giving mottled shade to lush long grass:
Full of songs of birds and chanting of cicadas;
Is turned by summer heat and boisterous winds
To fuel, that given flame, will burn
With such intensity that no man will allay,
And what is left appears to have no future
But man's toil to move the useless stumps.

Yet, look again in but a few weeks time.
New wonders for the artist's brush abound.
Black trunks wear buttonholes of red and green,
Which, given time, will grow to bouquets,

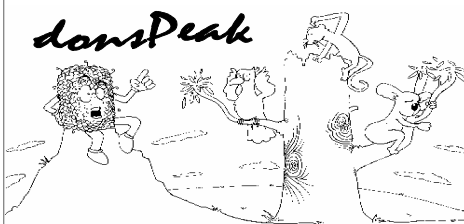
major impact on native species, including rare rainforest areas.

The cull was planned to begin in February, after exhibition of the draft management plan. (Source: National Parks Journal, February 2002)

Deer on Kings Tableland

A member reported having seen, on several occasions, feral deer in the heathland behind his home on Kings Tableland, not far from the former deer park in Hordern Road.

He reported that a neighbour recently saw a large deer with big antlers in



Environment Education Tradition

Various community and commercial groups are discussing the future of a site which has played a prominent role in environmental education, 'Greencorps' and 'Work for the Dole' for several years. The 'Intelife' quarry in Blaxland Road at Wentworth Falls is no longer considered by its owner Mission Australia to be central to its 'core business'.

The site contains a number of eco-friendly buildings and

agricultural installations which have been developed through the efforts of Mission Australia, community groups and volunteers.

One community coalition, the 'Blue Mountains Sustainable Living Group' is advancing the concept of a Sustainable Living Education Centre on the site.

The question of the roles of non-profit and commercial bodies in any compromise plan will raise a number of philosophical issues. But, leaving those aside, it is important that the chance to continue environmental education on the site is not lost.

The existing infrastructure, former industrial use and proximity to bushland are significant elements. They offer both challenges and opportunities. In any resolution of the site's future, the particular relevance of these elements to

promoting sustainability needs to be recognised.

Mission Australia is considering some community proposals. Their response later this month will be of great interest to environmental educators in the Mountains.

Town Centre Lookout to Beat Hoodoo?

The Springwood Town Square proposal - on a publicly owned site with commanding bushland views - has featured in this column before. A unanimous Council vote on 19 February took the proposal to the brink of beating a strange and long standing curse. This curse has meant that policy decisions approved by Blue Mountains voters in formal polls have not been acted on:

1975: Voters support restricting Mountains population to 30,000.

Major Changes to NPW Act

The biggest change to the National Parks and Wildlife Act (NPW Act) since it was rewritten in 1974 passed through Parliament late last year. The changes had been mooted for more than three years but were rushed through in late November with less than three weeks of sitting time before Parliament concluded for the year.

Intensive efforts over three weeks by peak environmental groups improved what was initially a significant weakening of the NPW Act by the Carr Government. More than 50 amendments proposed by environment groups were passed.

"Despite this, in a win for developers, owners of inholdings and the NPWS intent on deriving extra revenue from its reserves, the finalized changes allow expanded leasing and licensing provisions in national parks and mechanisms for private landholders adjacent to national parks to be granted exclusive access rights" said Andrew Cox, executive officer of National Parks Association.

Amendments foreshadowed in 1988.

Amendments to the Act were first foreshadowed in 1988 at a Conference titled Visions 2000. Proposals made for multiple uses of national parks were of concern then.

Eighteen months ago, amendments to the Act were proposed that drew such a reaction that they were not introduced as a Bill. It seemed that the good intentions of the Visions exercise were being perverted by other bureaucratic and political agendas. Proposed changes included:

- easier leasing and licensing of parklands to private interests. This push came about because of court cases where the Minister and NPWS were castigated for ignoring the public interest and Treasury wanted the NPWS to raise more money through leasing;
- expanded farming and sale of native animals;
- more regionalism; this had gained significant political support as a way of getting rural interests and neighbours of national parks 'on side'.
- A positive proposal was a larger role for the NPWS in conservation management.

The strengthening of public interest protection advocated by the Visions Steering Committee was ignored. Other departments opposed any increased role for the NPWS.

Also during this time Aboriginal and conservation groups reached agreement on legislative changes of common interest.

NPWS Amendment Bill

A much reduced version of reform eventually appeared last November in the form of the proposed NPWS Amendment Bill. There were a number of improvements proposed by the government, acknowledged by the peak environment groups. However, the

proposals which weakened the Act were of major concern.

Legal advice was sought from the Environment Defenders' Office. A campaign initiated by the National Parks Association spread the message to concerned conservationists. The Blue Mountains Conservation Society became involved at this stage. Members will remember the article in the December Hut News in which the Society's concerns were given and in which they were asked to send form letters expressing these concerns to the Minister.

Needless to say the NPWS was not given an expanded role in government. Positions had firmed in favour of leasing, licensing and regionalism. The Aboriginal amendments did not appear at all, (though fortunately neither did increased farming of fauna). A big surprise (given the Premier's avowed commitment to wilderness protection) was the purging of the word wilderness from the entire Act!

Of particular concern to the Society were amendments which would facilitate access to landlocked 'inholdings' enclosed by national parks. As members will be aware, the Society recently embarked on a campaign to have Federal funding allocated for the acquisition of inholdings in the World Heritage Area of the Blue Mountains National Park. Improving access will have the effect of increasing the value of such properties, and also the cost of acquiring them.

Another concern was the proposal to create a new category of 'minor amendment' to a Plan of Management for a national park, which would avoid the need for public exhibition. The term 'minor', however, was not defined.

Negotiations with Bob Debus Office

Representatives from the peak environment groups commenced negotiations with senior staff from Environment Minister Bob Debus' office. The representatives proposed over 100 amendments, addressing not only the key points in the Bill but also other crucial matters, such as wild river protection and an independent Board to oversee the NPWS.

To their credit the staffers worked hard to arrive at compromises on some critical areas. The peak groups also compromised, reducing the list of amendments and working on new wording for others. The Opposition took a position of supporting the final list (of over 50 amendments) agreed by the Government and environment groups and those (now less damaging) changes being moved by the Government.

One unfortunate note entered into the discussions the night before parliamentary debate, with the Government proposing a ban on community court action to enforce the new Objects of the Act. This was removed at the last moment, thanks to vigorous lobbying and responsive consideration by the Minister's office, in which the Society took a part.

Positive Outcomes of Negotiations

In the view of the peak environment groups, positive outcomes of their negotiations include:

- the aim of putting national park management into the hands of parochial regional interests was defeated, with the State Advisory Council retaining its primary position;
- wilderness (and wild rivers) were extensively reinserted into the Act;
- all draft leases to be to be publicly exhibited for comment and public register;
- plans of management will be widely advertised and so-called minor amendments cannot be made without re-exhibition;
- extreme amendments moved by the Outdoor Recreation Party were defeated;
- a statutory NPWS audit and compliance unit with clear roles and powers was created.

Weakening of Act

However, they believe that the Act has been weakened in the following ways:

- There is no longer a link between the use of a reserve and the purpose of a reserve, rejecting past court rulings;
- New "adaptive reuse" leases (for activities in existing structures in national parks) can be issued for purposes contrary to the reserve purpose and for unlimited periods (although not now 'for any purpose' and residential, as originally proposed; use should be compatible with values of the land; no use of wilderness);
- 3 day licences (initially proposed to be 7) can be granted for modified areas for any purpose; and
- new easements, rights of way and licences can be issued to landholders for the exclusive access to their inholdings partially surrounded by a reserve.

Environment Groups' task will be more complex.

Total Environment Centre's Jeff Angel, one of the negotiators, says "The outcome of the Amendment Bill for environment groups is that our task will be more complex, having to defend NPWS and the national parks and reserves while at the same time pressing for improvements to the fundamental conservation and public interest mission.

"Leasing and licensing remain a concern, the government adhering to greater freedom in this area, although its initial proposals are markedly diluted thanks to the efforts of the peak groups and the support of the many grass-roots environment groups who lobbied so vigorously in response to our urgent pleas for help."

This is a complex issue and it's impossible to give more than this summary in Hut News. If members want more information, please contact the

Membership Enquiries
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Very Easy Walks Mooted

After a few enquiries from members for a program of very easy walks which would be suitable for the physically challenged, we are calling for interested members and friends to attend a "VERY EASY WALKS Workshop" to decide on the program. This will be held on Wednesday 20th March at 10am at the Wentworth Falls Lake picnic area.

Those of you with reduced capability in the legs due to injury and others who can't cope with longer walks will be interested in very easy walks of about 1 to 1 and a half hours and there are at least 10 such walks we could program. Maybe family groups could join in; mothers who want to walk with infants; those recovering from illness, and if you are in another category who would benefit from VERY EASY WALKS, please come to the 1 hour workshop and have your say.

Discuss your attendance with the convener Bill Graham on 4759 1692

Valley of Waters Bushcare Group

will now meet on the 2nd **Saturday** of every month, 9am to 1pm. Contact Karen 4757.1929.

Welcome to New Members

S & G Alderton, North Manly
Margot Smith, Bullaburra
Benjamin Silverstone, Springwood
Diana Rich, Wentworth Falls
Karen Hull, Blaxland
Kim O'Toole, Blaxland
Su Ming & Lily Wong, Paddington

Building in an 'Extreme Risk of Bushfire' area

When I decided to move to the Mountains, and found the place, a builder and a design, I felt strongly that I wanted to build in natural products, not man-made. Deciding to build in timber on my lovely unspoilt bush block, I knew that we would have to plan for the possibility of bushfire. These plans included a tank, fed from the roof run-off, connected by a pump, (independent of mains supply) powered by a generator (ditto power), to a sprinkler system round the eaves. My builders were sympathetic, and I was surprised to have the application knocked back. After much 'knowledge searching' and discussions with the Deputy Fire Control Officer in the mountains, we were still getting nowhere.

The solution came with specially treated timber. I was warned this would not be accepted without clear information and outstanding specifications from the manufacturer. This we found with the assistance of the Timber Development Association, and had the specifications sent to Council. The specs reached the BMCC, were seen by the FCO and approved within the hour! This

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Mch 23 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9 am, Mid Mtns Community Centre, Lawson.

Mch 29 (Fri) Annual General Meeting at The Hut, 7.30 pm. (See page 1).

Apl 06 (Sat) Native Plant Sale at the Conservation Hut, 9am to 1pm.

QUOLL CLUB (Activities for 12 and under - contact Jessica 4788.1200).

BUSHCARE (Tools provided — bring morning tea and gloves.)

Mch 09 (Sat) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (9 am, 2nd Saturday of every month) Contact Karen on 4757.1929 for the meeting place.

BUSHWALKS:

Monday Leisure Walks: *Usually half day walk unless noted, leisurely pace.*

Mch 11 Sassafras Gully. Meet Springwood Ave cnr Homedale 9am.

☎ Bill 4759.1692. BBQ after at Springwood

Mch 18 Kanangra Walls Bus Trip (full day). Bookings essential - ☎ Kees 4759.1958. Bus leaves Katoomba depot at 8.30 am.

Mch 25 Braeside Walk to Govett's Leap. Meet 9 am Blackheath

Neighbourhood

Centre. ☎ June 4787.7312.

Apl 01 Wall's Ledge. Meet 9am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre,

☎ Norah 4757.4058.

Apl 08 Baltzers Lookout. Meet 9am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre,

☎ Bill 4759.1692.

Apl 15 Forgotten Walk No2. Meet 9am Faulconbridge, 50 metres into St Georges Cres. ☎ Alan 4739.2767.

Weekend Bushwalks: *Bushwalkers are requested to phone the contact before 8 pm the day before the walk. The walk may be cancelled if fewer than 4 walkers register. or if other circumstances make conditions unsafe.*

Feb 09 (Sat) Roberts Pass. Meet Leura Rail car park 9.30 am. ☎ Jim 4784.3305. Medium, bring lunch

Mch 10 (Sun) Narrow Neck. Meet at Katoomba Station, Gearins Hotel side, 9.30.

☎ Liz 4754.4966. Easy day with lookouts, waterfall and cave.

Some

walking tracks.

Mch 16 (Sat) Old Point Pilcher, Grand Canyon, Neates Glen. Meet Medlow

Bath Station, north side, 9.30 am. ☎ Mary or Terry 4787.6918.

Medium to hard walk, some steps, car pool.

Mch 23 (Sat) Gooch's Crater. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9am. ☎ Bill 4758.8545.

Medium, day, car pool. Bring compass.

Mch 31 (Sun) Thor Head. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9.30 am. ☎ Ron 4757.1526.

Medium. Day.

Apl 06 (Sat) Wentworth Falls, Rocket Point, Kings Tableland. ☎ June

4787.7312. Medium, day, some steps.

Apl 13 (Sat) Kedumba Pass. Meet Wentworth Falls Rail car park 9 am.

NOTE TIME. ☎ Kees 4759.1958. Hard day walk. Bring extra

water.

Walks are generally Easy to Medium Grade, unless otherwise noted. **Easy:** Mostly good surfaces, but some rough or steep sections. Suited to people of average fitness. **Medium:** Includes rough or steep sections, some of which may require clambering over natural obstacles. Suited to people of better than average fitness, but discuss with the contact if in doubt. **Hard:** We occasionally arrange a walk considered most suited to experienced and

seems to show their claims of timber not catching fire are well-founded. The company is Worthington Industries in Bayswater, Victoria, the timber is processed with Fire-Ex Retardant and their website is www.firex.bizpac.com.au.

The majority of the other ideas came from the CSIRO 1995 publication (this was 1998, there may be newer ones) 'Building in Bushfire Prone Areas'. The RFS also has some excellent publications, well worth a look.

For those who already have homes in the 'danger zone', the sprinklers we have here are very cheap and easy to install, for someone fit enough to climb a ladder to the eaves. Thank heaven for my sons! They purchased some heavy hose, and those sprinklers normally installed in garden beds - you poke the 'stalks' into the hose. These are around the eaves and across the back verandah, and in the recent fires were only tested, not needed

in emergency (the back burning came into the back yard, but not the fire), but worked as planned though the angles of the spray could do with some adjustment.

The tank is, I think, 2000 litres. We installed it ourselves at the back of the house. Ten minutes of pumping from the tank totally wet the sides of the house, while leaving more than three-quarters of the water in the tank. I understand that in a 'firestorm', the fire front will have passed in approx 10 minutes, with the residual danger being from embers that may get into the eaves and windows, and catch alight. This system should prevent this situation, and still leave water to hose down with afterwards, even with no water pressure in the mains, and without power. Just note, I haven't been able to afford a generator yet!

The joys of the system are its cost-effectiveness, ease of installation, and the fact that it can be installed on existing

