

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



There will be no monthly meeting in December (and no Hut News in January)

SO MARK ON YOUR 2006 CALENDER NOW ...

FRIDAY 27 JANUARY 2006, 7.30 pm

Monthly Meeting at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls.

Our guest speaker is ISAAC certified consultant arborist, **John Lang**, who is also a tree surgeon, and he will be addressing the topic:

Australia's Vegetation: an Arborist's View.



George Bernard Shaw remarked, "Except during the nine months before he draws his first breath, no man manages his affairs as well as a tree does" and his contemporary, Willa Cather was moved to say, "I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things are." Our Australian vegetation is unique and special. John points out that early fossil records from the Gondwana period show us where it all started. But it all changed when Australia started to dry out around 40 million years ago. Some trees and other vegetation we have today adapted to the dryer conditions and survived. Some have evolved since.

John will progressively narrow his discussion to centre on the Blue Mountains, which he says contains some of the most diverse vegetation types and communities found in Australia.

Elton Trueblood said, "A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit." John will go on to explain the importance of the involvement of arborists in the preservation of endemic trees as a vital contemporary vegetation management strategy. A warm invitation to members, guests, holidaymakers and visitors to start the Consoc New Year with us on this our early Arbor Day— Friday, 27 January, 2006 at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls. *Ron Withington.*

(The tree, photographed by Ron Withington, is "The Sprit of Endurance", the Cazneaux Tree, a river red gum in the Flinders Ranges.)

decision to go ahead with the plant in spite of expert reports indicating that it is not the best option. Utilities Minister Carl Scully is "not embarrassed that he can't nominate a single independent expert who supports the plan".

He says **"I rely on the vast silent majority who I think quietly support this Government getting on and delivering infrastructure that secures their quality of life"**.

Write a short letter to the NSW Premier, The Hon. Morris Iemma, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000.

Concerns you might mention are: Cost (\$1.3 billion construction, and tens of millions a year to run). Experts say that pursuing a wider range of conservation, re-use and recycling schemes is a cheaper and more effective option. Sydney Water customer research documents show massive public support for recycling water. In 2 years, Sydneysiders have saved 110 billion litres of water, 12.2% of the city's annual water use, more than double what the desalination plant would produce.

Desalination is a political quick fix. It will only perpetuate demand instead of making residents responsible for water use when there is a global fresh water crisis. We need honest, workable, long-term solutions to Sydney's water needs. Ask Mr Iemma to show real leadership in this issue and to reply to your letter.

If you wish to discuss any issue please contact: **Rosemary** 4757 2511, lathouris@bigpond.com or **Robin** 4757 1354 mosman@hermes.net.au

Desalination enquiry

Greens MLC Ian Cohen will chair an Upper House inquiry into a sustainable water supply for Sydney including the Kurnell desalination project.

The inquiry will look into the full environmental and economic impacts of the Kurnell plant as well as at the alternatives to securing Sydney's water needs.

"This will be an opportunity for the parliament to properly assess the environmental and economic effectiveness of the proposed desalination plant while looking at the alternatives including demand management, recycling and rain water tanks." Mr Cohen said. *(Source: Greens Media Release, 2/12/05)*

New Admin Officer

The BMCS Management Committee welcomes Alan Harris as our new Administration Officer. David Bowskill will continue in the very essential role of Project Officer: Technical.

Sustainability workshop: registration now open!

As mentioned in last month's Hut News, the society will be running full-day workshops on residential sustainability in the New Year. These workshops will be a great opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of sustainability, learn what you can do to dramatically reduce your home's environmental footprint, and meet others who are also serious about sustainability.

There will be a variety of topics covered including: broad energy issues, retrofitting your home, planning your site including a food garden, sustainability in the context of your neighbourhood, water issues of course, and some specific case studies (e.g. solar power). Presenters include Nigel Bell, architect; Rowe Morrow,

permaculturist and author; Sue Bell, landscape designer; Craig Linn the society's Education Officer; and others.

Times: 9am—5pm; **Dates:** Saturday 28th January 2006 (with a repeat on Saturday 25th February 2006 subject to sufficient numbers); **Venue:** Santa Maria Conference Centre Lawson (12 minutes walk from the station)

You will find more information and registration details in the Meeting Matters supplement inside this issue of Hut News.

Letter writers

The Federal Environment Minister has decided that he can do nothing to prevent the building of the proposed desalination plant at Kurnell.

The Sydney Morning Herald ran front page stories on 24/25/26 November critical of the State Government's

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Bells Line of Road Super-highway

Brian Marshall

Gerard Martin (ALP) and Ian Armstrong (National Party and Chair of the Bells Line Expressway Group) released the long awaited Sinclair Knight Merz feasibility study with a fanfare. Articles appeared in 'The Land' (10/11/05) and the BMG (16/11/05), the latter being accompanied by BMCS' opposing comments. The proponents implied that there was bipartisan support at State level and support at Federal level, presumably since the State and Federal Governments each contributed \$1 million to the study. They indicated that the \$2 billion project was scheduled to start in 2008 and be finished by 2012. And pigs might fly!

The Society is strongly opposed to

the super-highway. Construction would wreak desecration on wilderness and the World Heritage area, it would destroy the scenic beauty of Newnes Plateau, and it would bring strip development to Kurrajong Heights, Bilpin and Berambing. International and national oil-based fuel supplies are or soon will be diminishing while demand and costs are increasing, thus making long-distance road haulage expensively obsolescent. Furthermore, the \$2 billion cost and 4-year construction time are absurdly optimistic. For comparison, how long has it taken to 'fix' the Great Western Highway? Oh, they're still working on it and its not scheduled to be four lanes beyond Katoomba!

It now seems that the Martin-Armstrong euphoria was premature. In a joint announcement, the NSW and Federal Ministers for Roads (Joe Tripodi and Jim Lloyd) said that their \$3 billion cost-estimate for the proposed four-lane motorway was unacceptable. They noted that whereas the super-highway was viable from an engineering perspective, it was not justified on economic, social or environmental grounds (Hawkesbury Gazette, 18/11/05).

The Ministers now plan to conduct another two-year study into the region's 'transport needs'! This could be more waste of public money, unless it focuses on the more sustainable option of rail transport. However, it will be nowhere near as wasteful and environmentally destructive as building the 'road to nowhere'!

Destruction of BM Swamp

Julius Timmerman

Council approved a nine town house development for Waratah Street, Lawson in August this year. Originally the development application had been submitted with sixteen units. Local residents raised objections, particularly regarding the environmental impact, including run-off downstream and the effect on a hanging swamp at the lower end of the site. Fairly minor amendments were made to the plans to build housing so close to a Blue Mountains Swamp.

The BMCS asked for more significant changes that did ensure the swamp was to be protected by a 60m buffer of native vegetation, the bare minimum width. However Council's decision to approve this development with a severely compromised buffer raised major concerns about Council's commitment to protect our sensitive environment.

Now all the fears about the development's impact have been justified. The developer has trashed the entire site. It has been thoroughly cleared, including the swamp. No measures have been taken to control run-off. This is despite: Council orders that only the upper half be developed; around two-thirds being classed as Environmental Protection Zone; known concerns in regard to the Urban Run-off Control Program; the developers having

hired a consultant to liaise with the local Bushcare group.

So with full knowledge of all concerns and in the face of guidelines for a site with high conservation value, the developers have done as they pleased. One adjacent resident claims he saw council staff at the site when the clearing started, as there apparently are problems with seepage of sewerage from flats above the site. The clearing took a week.

Will Council do what it has promised to do in the Gazette article of 23rd November and "issue a fine"? Will Council insist that all this damage be adequately regenerated? After it's neglect up to this point, following through with these measures is the least it can do. Or will it back down at the last minute? We will see.

One thing is abundantly clear. In future, Council must monitor developers far more rigorously. The recent national listing of endangered Blue Mountains Swamps should strengthen Council's resolve to stop putting up with this frequently occurring behaviour by developers. When advised of the destruction by locals, Council confessed complete ignorance of the situation. While local residents should always keep an eye on their local environment, they shouldn't have to be environmental police for a lax Council.

Bushland Protection more than just empty rhetoric!

The Good News is that, along with the gazettal of LEP2005, the Blue Mountains finally has a legally binding Bushland Protection Order. This means that our bushland should be better protected. It should mean the end of standing by helplessly whilst you watch beautiful bushland bulldozed and no authority having the power to stop it.

The BPO is the result of many years of effort by the Society, individual residents and other local groups and introduces a readily useable mechanism for Council to regulate the clearing of bushland. It also has value in raising awareness of the importance of bushland. We look forward to seeing the community education efforts planned by Council for next year to publicize the new BPO.

We need to watch closely to ensure that the BPO does not become a paper tiger and that Council means business when it talks about "Bushland Protection".

Bushcare

The Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets at 9 am on the 2nd Saturday of every month. Tools are provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen 4757 1929 for meeting place and more information.

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Elizabeth van Reyswoud

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The Galapagos

Liz van Reyswoud

Giant tortoises roam freely, blue-footed boobies perch on rocks, their blue feet brilliant in the sun. They dive bomb the fish in the sea from on high. The skies are full with wheeling, courting, red-throated frigate-birds, the "vultures" of the sky. Lava rocks are piled high with marine iguanas, warming themselves with each others bodies and whatever warmth there in the sun. A mind boggling array of creatures, untainted by fear, living in a paradise of azure waters, white beaches and cool red mangrove stands.

The famous "Darwin's finches" are everywhere, and swimming involves close encounters with doe-eyed sea lion pups, green sea turtles and myriads of colourful fishes.

To top this experience, "Sierra Negra" on Isabella Island chose to erupt



the day we arrived and we were privileged to be taken to the edge of the caldera (7 kms away) across a sea of molten lava to view the awe-inspiring display. I have always loved fireworks but they are mere pinpricks in comparison with nature's splendour. Our video chronicler was asked by BBC and National Geographic to camp overnight and photograph this event for them - on DVD we saw the rivers of lava flowing at 10 metres per second and the 300 feet high columns of boiled red rocks being flung into the sky.

We were privileged to meet two children from the Charles Darwin Research Centre, who gave us a talk on what they are doing with the Giant Tortoises. These are endangered because of introduced Pigs and Goats which have become feral. However strict environmental laws now rule the islands. No immigration into Galapagos, even from Ecuadorians. No new farms or domestic animals are allowed.

A well supported eradication program has removed all the feral pigs and 90% of the feral goats from the island of Santiago (the remaining 10% should be eradicated by 2006). This means that the tortoises can be re-introduced into their natural habitat. The boys told how each child who belongs to the "club" is given a baby tortoise to rear. They are kept at the institute and

every fortnight the child must attend the institute and record the weight and length of "his/her" tortoise, plus any other significant factor. After five years this tortoise will be returned to its place of origin.

What a wonderful education for these children!! I spent a couple of hours talking with the boys and the director of the institute. I was hoping we could set up some sort of link with this group, with some of our own children. The major problem is that there is only one boy who can speak English. - and my Spanish is limited to a few words. Ideas anyone???

Residents' concerns about Eurama Estate

Faulconbridge residents attended a public meeting at Faulconbridge to discuss the development of Eurama Estate between Faulconbridge and Linden and expressed concern about the development of up to 27 lots on this large area of beautiful bushland.

Poor access, high fire danger, no sewer, and the impacts of development on Numantia Creek and significant vegetation were discussed. Residents were particularly worried that there is little known about the development. They called for the development to be brought before Council so the public know what is going on.

Pippa McInness is working on this but she will need support from other Councillors. Please call Tara for more information 4751 1130.

More Losses of Democracy in NSW!

Lyndal Sullivan, Land Use Officer

There no point in pessimism, let's exercise our democratic rights whilst we still have some! There is still time to write to the NSW State Government to protest against the proposed changes to state-wide LEPs.

Only two months ago we were celebrating the gazettal of the Blue Mountains LEP 2005 after 10 years of hard work by Council and the community. In November Hut News we described the battle, the enormous effort and expense by Council, the many hours of community involvement. It is preposterous that the State Government now wants to discard our hard-won LEP 2005 and replace it with a sub-standard LEP so that it fits a "standard template" for all Local Environment Plans across NSW.

The NSW Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979 was introduced by the then ALP Planning Minister Paul Landa. **The planning laws within the Act were heralded as the best in the country.** They were not perfect. They didn't protect the environment but they did allow for environmental issues to be considered by councils and courts. They also introduced limited opportunities for community participation.

Since then there have been numerous state wide forums on how to improve this legislation to give better results for local areas but, instead of making

improvements to the legislation, the ALP Government has worked to dismantle many of its good features. Amendments have all been directed at making **development easier and environmental protection harder.**

In 1997 major changes reduced opportunities for community participation and also for any environmental assessment to occur. These introduced two new categories of development where no environmental or community assessment was possible; ie "exempt" and "complying" developments; introduced a system of private certifiers; and introduced a process for 'State Significant' developments which is decided by the Minister with less transparency and less accountability than the normal council process.

In June 2005 the government rushed through further changes to give the Minister for Planning absolute powers to approve major developments and decide the criteria that he/she wishes to use. It also took away the community's rights to challenge these decisions about major developments in court. It exempts these personally-approved major projects from normal environmental laws to prevent pollution, protect flora and fauna etc.

Now in it seems a "standard template" for all NSW Local Environment Plans is going to be forced upon us.

This latest change will take planning decisions away from communities and give it to the courts.

Please write to the NSW Minister for Planning (The Hon Frank Sartor, Parliament House, Sydney 2000) requesting a halt to this series of backward changes. Also send our state member a copy (Bob Debus 107-109 Macquarie Rd, Springwood 2777).

The proposed standard LEP is inadequate. It does not easily allow for the high level of precision which is required for good outcomes in different localities and will permit a huge number of developments without any environmental assessment or community consultation.

Request that Blue Mountains, Sutherland and other councils with recently developed, place-based LEPs are granted a deferment of at least five years from the requirement to rewrite their LEPS - anything less is an insult to the community effort. The Blue Mountains City Council must be allowed to pursue its plan of incorporating LEP 1991 (which covers the other half of the Local Government Area) into LEP 2005 to make one plan for the whole Blue Mountains.

More information: Lyndal Sullivan 47821635, lsullivan@eftel.net.au

Upper Blue Mountains Sewerage Scheme

Rosemary Morrow

Sydney Water is in the headlines and on the news. And here it is also in our own HUT NEWS. For us, its proposal for sewerage reticulation and transfer from Mt Victoria to North Katoomba is simply not sustainable and does not meet basic measurable criteria for being low maintenance, best technology; transparent, locally centred and responsible, or ecologically sensitive

It is regrettable that Sydney Water does not address these issues. Over the last five years or more there have been major changes in thinking about water and its use. We are living in a time of general rainfall decline—see dam levels. There is new and efficient water technology and good established examples in Australia and overseas. Prevailing social and political knowledge recognises that all wastewater is a resource not a problem to be moved off site. Respect for natural areas is greater, and tolerance of its damage is much lower.

We need Sydney Water to bring us technology and approaches now common in many other countries and cities. Without these it is doubtful whether this proposal meets the their own ESD requirements.

We require best technology which treats and recycles all water locally back to households, reduces water use through improved dry or hybrid toilets and ensures that toilet water has been used once or more before being used in toilets. In an age of declining rainfall, any water-based technology, which does not reduce water use and recycle it cannot be considered sustainable. Countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong, and European cities are recycling water to drinking water standards. Updated computerisation does not substitute for good sewerage technology.

Problems with Sewerage Transfer to Winmalee. A 12 kilometre swathe through bushland and housing areas is a deplorable solution when each village could have best recycling technology, allow environmental flows, and recycle water locally to supplement its Sydney supply. We require **locally based, transparent and responsive sewerage treatment plants** now widely available.

We require **low risk options.** Despatching all sewage in one pipe to one place is a technical high-risk option and there are multiple threats to bushland such as vandalism/terrorism, earthquakes, materials failure, energy failure, toxic contamination, water supply failure, maintenance failure – no energy to do this work in the future. The ‘all eggs-in-one basket’ or ‘all sewage-in-one pipe’ approach of the 1950s does not sit with the stated ethics of the proposal nor is it Ecologically Sustainable Development.

The Sewage Reticulation Proposal

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP (Walks in this newsletter will now be listed mid-month to mid-month)

Our bushwalking group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud.. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees is \$15 per member.**

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually ‘Short Day’ walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short section off track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

Dec 19 River Lett, Hartley. Relaxing day. BBQ and stroll by river. Bring chairs. Meet 9.15 Mt Victoria Station. Marie 4787 1257.

Jan 9 Wonderland Track. Meet outside Hydro Majestic, Medlow Bath 8.30am. Jock 4758 6346.

Jan 16 Balzer’s Lookout. Shaded walk along firetrail. Spectacular views of Grose Valley. Meet Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre 8.30am. Laurel 4784 1554.

Jan 23 Kurraba Point to Taronga Zoo. Sydney Harbour foreshore walk. Meet 9.30 top of escalators at Central. Mary 4787 6918.

Jan 30 Bus Trip, Forest Island, Royal National Park. Rainforest walk. Fare \$10. Pay when booking, Norm 4784 1554.

Feb 6 Govett’s Leap to Pulpit Rock. Escarpment walk, views over Grose Valley. Meet 8.30am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. Allen 4739 2767.

Feb 13 Dargan dams. Meet 9.15am. Mt Victoria Station. Marie 4787 1257.

Thursday Pleasure Walks: *These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program.*

Dec 15 Christmas Party at Rhododendron Gardens, Blackheath. Bring plate of food and drinks to share. Meet 10.30 Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. Contact Simone 4757 3416 to advise what you will bring.

Jan 12 Wilson Glen. Leisurely walk to cave and waterfalls. Picnic lunch in rainforest shelter. Meet Woodford Station 10.30am Tel Simone/David 4757 3416. PLEASE PHONE BY 8.00am TO CHECK IF WALK IS ON.

Jan 19 Dargan Dams, Clarence. Easy walk to dams and old pump house. Swimming if weather suitable. Meet Mt Victoria Station 10am. David 4757.3416. PLEASE PHONE BY 8.00am TO CHECK IF WALK IS ON.

Feb 2 Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens. Walk in this cool climate Botanic Garden. Take picnic lunch. Meet Mt Victoria Station 10.00am. Tel Marie 4787 1257.

Feb 9 South Lawson Waterfalls. Circuit bush track past waterfalls, some steps. Meet corner Honour Ave and Highway Lawson 10.00am. Tel John 4757 1558.

Feb 16 Gordon Falls to Laura Cascades. Cliff top walk with varied scenery on bush path. Car shuffle to return. Meet corner Leura Mall and Megalong St 10.00am. Tel Joan 4782 2218.

Weekend Bushwalks: *Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is medium/hard or hard, before attending. If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au*

These walks are all medium and shady walks. Contact: Ron 4757 1526.

Dec 17 (Sat) National Pass. Meet Wentworth Falls station carpark 8.30am.

Jan 7 (Sat) Wentworth Pass. Meet Wentworth Falls station carpark 8.30am.

Jan 14 (Sat) Federal Pass. Meet Leura station carpark 8.30am

Jan 21 (Sat) Federal Pass. Meet Gearins Hotel, Katoomba 8.30am.

Jan 28 (Sat) Porter’s Pass. Meet Blackheath station carpark 8.30 am.

Feb 4 (Sat) Little Zig Zag. Meet Mt Victoria Station 8.30 am.

Feb 11 (Sat) Sassafras Gully. Meet Springwood station carpark 9am.

must ensure that residents are educated to make whole site water audits which are pegged to goals of reduced consumption by say 50%, and a timeframe e.g. within one year; are integral to recycling water locally eg. recycle 60% households within five years; subsidises new homes for stand-alone recycling treatment as it becomes available; and introduces new hybrid or dry toilets especially in areas where low-pressure pumps are proposed.

(The Society’s submission on Upper BM Sewerage Scheme is on the web at bmcs@bluemountains.org.au)

Welcome to new members

Sophia Kevans, Wentworth Falls
Phill and Carol Isaacs, Baulkham Hills
Nick and Judith Hill, Springwood

Nursery news

Our nurseries at Blackheath (Tuesday mornings) and Lawson (Wednesday mornings) have a good variety of plants for all situations at \$2.50 each, some Christmas specials and also bargains at \$1 each.

We will be closing the nurseries after 14 December and will reopen from 10 January.

Thanks to our wonderful hard-working volunteers and our valued customers for your support this year and Seasons Greetings. A special thank you from the Blackheath volunteers to Ruth Ley who has donated a new copy to replace our well-worn ‘Native Plants of the Sydney District’ by Alan Fairley and Philip Moore.