

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Unique landscapes of the Blue Mountains Ron Withington



Here is an opportunity for members to garner the very latest thinking on Blue Mountains heathlands, pagodas and soil formation. Blackheath resident, **Marshall Wilkinson**, an honours graduate in Science, has just submitted his PhD thesis to the Department of Physical Geography at Macquarie University. The thesis examines the controls of heath vegetation in the western Blue Mountains, with study sites on Newnes Plateau.

Marshall notes that "Heath is somewhat anomalous in the Blue Mountains, where plateau and valley vegetation is dominated by trees (forest and woodland communities), and prompts the question, why does heath occur where it does? I focused on non-swamp heath or 'dry heath', looking at the more obvious variables, such as slope aspect and soil nutrients. However, my research suggests the answer lies in the long-term erosion of slopes adjacent to plateau drainage lines, and/or higher erosion rates during the last glacial period (~20,000 years ago) when the climate was much colder and the western Blue Mountains were above the treeline."

I have been out for a group tour of the Plateau with **Marshall**, in company with our own geology professor, **President Brian Marshall**. It was fascinating to hear both gentlemen in dialogue, marshalling their wide knowledge and experience for easy translation to we lay naturalists and enthusiasts in the group!

Such an experience and more awaits you at the next **Monthly Meeting of the Society, 7.30pm, Friday 28 October at the Conservation Hut.**

Keith Muir of the Colong Foundation, freshly returned from Alaska of all places, will also be along. So while Marshall deals with the nature of the unique landscapes, Keith will remind us again of their significance, showing some more of those wonderful Plateau photos in a power point presentation put together by Dargan resident, **Karen McLaughlin** – and updating us on progress with the proposal for Stage 2 of the Gardens of Stone National Park.

If anyone cannot attend because of lack of transport, please contact Senior Vice President Heather Hull or any other of the management committee in your area so we can try to arrange something for them. Visitors are very welcome.

(Photo: Pagoda action above Gooch's Crater, Newnes Plateau)

Bush heritage vision for Lawson golf course

In June 2005 issue of Hut News we published details of the Bushcare Network Bush Heritage Vision for the redevelopment of Lawson Golf Course, noting that BMCS supported the proposal, titled Option 6, in its entirety.

BMCC has now received their consultant's report on all community submissions. Following the 13 September Council Meeting and subject to an official public Exhibition, Council favours an Option 11, which includes bits of most submissions, and a large residential commercial precinct! Option 11 may even extend to redevelopment of Lawson Oval and BMX track.

However we understand that the various Options will go on Exhibition shortly, for an extended two-month period, and that it is more than possible that our Option 6 will be given equal weight in the display. Barbara Harley, on behalf of her Bushcare Network, with input from our Land Use Officer, Lyndal Sullivan, has put together a detailed exposition on the exceptional environmental and social qualities of Option 6, together with promptings as to how BMCS members can act to support it. This information, with a Concept Plan is provided in the centrefold of this issue of Hut News. Do please turn to it now!

Members are urged to write in support of Option 6 as soon as Exhibition is mounted. Governmental entities are influenced by numbers – a BMCS submission is just 1, but 10 letters are 10 times as impressive.

Western Escarpment Threatened Brian Marshall

The Clarence-Dargan region of the Western Escarpment, some 10 km east of Lithgow and about 2 km west of the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage Area is under threat from sand mining. This is because the Department of Planning has indicated that the region contains potential resources of friable sandstone.

A 156ha block of private land on the Western Escarpment close to Clarence Village was offered for 'sale by tender' in the *North Shore Times* (19 August, 2005). Although designated 'rural zoning' by Lithgow Council, the block comprises pristine bush land and, like the Western Escarpment in general, is unsuited to primary production. Current use predominantly involves passive recreation, bushwalking and climbing. The block, which supposedly contains an

untreated sandstone resource of 50 million tonnes, is effectively being marketed as a sand-mining proposition.

Apart from the potential resource, the block's principal asset is its proximity to rail transport. However, treating the friable sandstone is likely to entail crushing and then washing to remove the undesirable clay content. The resulting waste, which could amount to 44% of the parent material (according to the tender documents), would be retained and stored on-site.

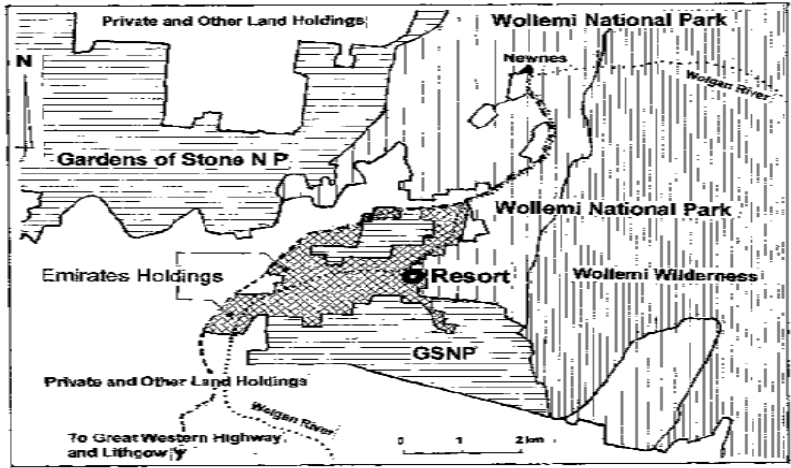
Residents of Clarence and Dargan are rightfully concerned about the impact that sand mining would have on their quality of life in terms of noise, dust and visual pollution. They are also concerned about the impact of mining on groundwater levels in the aquifers that source their water supply. However,

there are more general concerns: the potential mine-site lies within the Warragamba catchment and would thereby constitute a pollution risk to Sydney's water supply; proximity to the National Park and World Heritage Area would inevitably generate noise, dust and cumulative visual impacts; recreational benefits for many would be compromised for the profits of a few; and a distant rehabilitation program could never compensate for the destruction of habitat and the impacts hydrologic change on groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

The region demands protective zoning by Lithgow Council and, as with Newnes Plateau to the north, should be protected under an arrangement factored by State Government.

There must surely be a limit to man's capacity to desecrate the environment!

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EMIRATES RESORT PROPOSAL, WOLGAN VALLEY by Brian Marshall

In June 2005, Emirates Airline and the NSW Minister for Tourism (Sandra Nori) announced a \$A50million investment to build a '6-star' eco-tourism resort on 3600 acres of freehold farming land in the Wolgan Valley, close to the Wollemi and Gardens of Stone National Parks, and also to the Wollemi Wilderness (see map). The resort buildings would occupy about 1% of the land, while the remaining major proportion would comprise a fully fenced and progressively rehabilitated conservation area. Although only indicative, there would be about 100 full- and part-time staff, predominantly accommodated on site, and some 40 guest-units. The guests, up to a maximum of 80 per night (say 10,000 per year depending upon occupancy rate), could expect to pay about \$1200 per person per night. An opening date of 2007-2008 is scheduled.

Following the announcement, the substantial media interest varied from enthusiastic acceptance, through uncertainty, to relatively hostile comment about such things as the source of the funds and the environmental credibility of the proponents. In addition, environmental groups were, and still are, concerned that the Minister will use the unfettered discretionary powers imparted by the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Infrastructure and Other Planning Reform) Act*, to rapidly progress the proposal by overriding environmental considerations.

Environmentally sensitive design, construction and management of the resort, together with the fenced, rehabilitated and restocked conservation area, and the moral pressures placed on adjacent properties to adopt similarly sensitive attitudes, constitute positives for the environment. Direct and indirect benefits for 'Blue Mountains' tourism and businesses are inevitable.

It is not all positive for the environment. Negative aspects include: increased traffic movements, road improvements facilitating access to the parks and wilderness by those pursuing high impact recreational activities, the resort offering 'experiences' ranging from 4WD photo tours to abseiling and canyoning which, by overuse of designated locations, increase the 'need' for additional sites; and uncertainty regarding helicopter movements, exclusive of medical and natural disaster emergencies.

The Society (along with other environmental groups) has taken the view that the proposal will go ahead. Resources that could be directed towards opposing the project are better used to ensure that the resort maintains the highest environmental standards. The Society has indicated these views to the Emirates and has requested cooperative discussions with the principal and the design and planning team.

Water Bottling Industries

Do you drink bottled water? *Do you know where it comes from?* Is it from the same aquifer that has been supplying essential water to a hanging swamp?

Permission is currently being sought to allow groundwater to be extracted for a water bottling business in North Wentworth Falls. There has been a business operating for the last 5 years in McLaughlin Ave. The owners are now seeking to increase the level of extraction to 5000 litres a day and to have "permanent" approval.



The Society is concerned about the future of the significant swamp system near and downslope of the bore. Unfortunately detailed monitoring has not been carried out, even though this was required by the Court when giving

approval 5 years ago. It is unknown exactly how much water has been extracted over the last 5 years and what the impact has been on any parts of the swamp which may have been dependent on that aquifer. It is even less certain what the long term impact could be. It is clearly understood that Blue Mountains Swamps are dependent on groundwater. Since the issuing of the previous licence, the Blue Mountains area has been inscribed onto the World Heritage list and the Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone (THPSS) have been added to the Endangered Ecological Community list.

The Threatened Species Scientific Committee has recognised that THPSS systems are highly specialised and are highly susceptible to changes in hydrological flows, particularly for

components that occur in urban areas: *"Given the location of swamps in the landscape and their dependency on water, they are susceptible to changes in water flow, level of the water table, and structural damage. Several of the components of the Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone ecological community have been degraded through alterations to water flows and a change to the level of the watertable."*

The Society has asked the Federal Minister for the Environment to assess this development for its potential impact on the swamp. This will be a test of the value of having Blue Mountains Swamps listed under federal legislation as one component of the Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone.

For more information contact Lyndal Sullivan 4782 1635.

Parklands battle continues ... Virginia King

The merit hearing in the Land and Environment Court for the proposed development at Parklands in Govett's Leap Road Blackheath has heard evidence over six days. On September 26 an all-day site inspection took place in steady rain, giving the Commissioner a taste of typical Blackheath weather. The development proposes an on-site sewage treatment plant (STP) to disperse 80% of its effluent on the ground. Both Blue Mountains City Council and BRAID (Blackheath Residents Against Improper Development, a subcommittee of RAID Inc.) are arguing that the proposal is not sustainable given the quantity of effluent, the sloping site, the low evaporation especially in winter, and the close proximity of an endangered Blue Mountains swamp and Pope's Glen Creek. BRAID was allowed to join the proceedings as second respondent in a Court decision in August.

Experts for Council and BRAID have argued that the developers have not complied with the appropriate guidelines for on-site effluent dispersal, including not undertaking a crucial groundwater survey. Parklands is famous for the spring which rises along the western boundary and was used in the late 1800s by John Pope's family to water their vegetables, when Parklands (then called Karaweera) was their country estate. An aquifer comes to the surface at the northern end of the property and feeds the swamp immediately outside the north-east fence. At the on-site inspection, the respondents discovered that the Parklands boundary lies several metres beyond the fence to the north and north-east, thus placing the swamp within the site itself. The tanks for the proposed STP are to be located underground in the perched water table with the result that the swamp's water supply will be interrupted.

In calculating their effluent dispersal rates and dispersal areas, the developers have estimated that residents will use an average of 145 litres/person/day, a highly conservative rate, while the respondents argue that an on-site STP which is environmentally sustainable should be designed to accommodate maximum not minimum loads.

Experts for Council told the commissioner that annual testing in Pope's Glen creek shows among the lowest levels of phosphorus in Blue Mountains streams and that if the effluent is applied at a higher rate than the ground can accommodate, or after storm events when Parklands is a sheet of flowing water, phosphorus will contaminate the



creek. Nitrogen leaching from the site would also be a problem, causing rampant weed growth in the riparian zone. The proposed STP will also use chlorine to remove viruses and pathogens from the effluent, with the danger that any overflow will result in chlorine reaching the macroinvertebrates, frogs and fish in the creek with deadly results.

Request for Donations: The Court action has been an expensive one for BRAID which is relying on volunteer time, reduced rates from lawyers and experts, and donations from residents. The inequity has been obvious, with the developers engaging large numbers of consultants. Because it was ruled in August that the proposed STP is not a "designated development", an EIS was not required, leaving Council and BRAID to protect the environment of Pope's Glen. Donations of any amount will greatly assist this small group of tenacious campaigners, especially if a legal appeal is required. Please send cheques (made payable to RAID Inc) to PO Box 354 Blackheath 2785. (Photo: Pope's Glen Creek.)



Forests and free speech meeting in Katoomba

report by Jenny Rich

Doctors for Native Forests and the Huon Valley Environment Centre. Gunns is claiming damages for media statements, lobbying of shareholders, customers and governments and disruption to operations. This is a landmark case which may change the face of free speech in Australia forever.

Louise and Luke summarized the campaign to protect Tasmania's forests and showed the areas now protected as well as the important areas still unprotected. 170,000 hectares were protected under the federal government's Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement in May 2005. Important forests left unprotected include parts of the Weld and Styx Valleys, the Blue Tiers, the Great Western Tiers and the tall wet eucalypt forests proposed for inclusion in a new Tarkine National Park. They said the proposed pulp mill on the Tamar River is of great concern because of the huge amounts of timber and water it would need and the large amounts of toxic effluent it would release.

The precedent set by the Gunns 20 case threatens our right to protest and free speech. If the case is successful any Australian protesting about corporate activities may be sued. Another timber

company is now suing Louise.

The speakers urged us to write ASAP to local State MP Bob Debus, expressing our concern about the issues and requesting that legislation be urgently introduced to protect NSW citizens' right to free speech and right to protest, also to discourage any similar court cases. 25 US states have already introduced such legislation. We were also urged to continue campaigning to protect all of Tasmania's old growth forests by writing to the Prime Minister and local Federal MP Kerry Bartlett.

Donations are urgently needed and can be sent to Friends of Forest and Free Speech c/o GPO Box 716, Hobart, Tas 7001 or to the Wilderness Society (phone 1800 030 641).

www.treedomfighters.org.au has further information, including Gunns' 221 page writ.

Local contact is Jenny Rich 4787 6243 (email jennywombatrigh@aim.com).

Photo (left to right): Ben Oquist, Louise Morris, Dianne Jacobus, Ian Cohen, Pippa McInnes, Luke Chamberlain, Kerrin O'Grady

The Forests and Free Speech national tour came to Katoomba Public School on 19 September. Louise Morris (one of the 20 being sued by Tasmanian timber company Gunns Ltd) spoke to a large crowd of concerned locals including Greens, Con Soc members, young people and local Federal MP Kerry Bartlett. Other speakers included forest campaigner Luke Chamberlain, Greens MLC Ian Cohen, Ben Oquist and Councillor Pippa McInnis.

Gunns (the largest Australian export wood chipping company) is suing 20 individuals and organisations who have protested about Gunns' logging and wood chipping activities in Tasmania – over 6.8 million dollars is being sought. The defendants include Senator Bob Brown, Tarkine campaigner Peter Pullinger, the Wilderness Society,

Membership survey

The Management Committee has received 165 responses to the Membership Survey which represents almost 20% of the membership. We are currently analysing the results. There has been some wonderful feedback some of you covering all the space on the mail out and even including additional pages.

We plan to include our impressions together with some of the suggestions in November Hut News. *Liz van Reyswoud*

BMCS Multi-day Activity MERRY BEACH

Nights 27 Mar – 30 Mar incl. (2006)

BOOKINGS NOW OPEN FOR THOSE
STAYING WHOLE 4 NIGHTS

\$40 deposit for a single berth/\$80 double.

To Don Morison, P.O. Box 170

Katoomba 2780 (Aust Post Money Order

Comfortable cabin accommodation near ocean with spas/barbecues etc (some communal meals) off highway between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay. Total expected cost ~\$40 per person per night

Activity Selection List: Snapper Point Loop Walk (at accom) 90 min stroll, Coastal heath and scrub; wild coast views; Pretty Beach (10 min walk from accom), long walk along a National Park beach with open forest/rainforest hinterland; Racecourse Beach to Swan Lagoon (5 min drive from accom), half day, small basalt beaches; well-interpreted Aboriginal Midden Area; (signed), views to coastal islands; bird habitat. Bawley Point Lagoon (10 min drive from accom) potter-around area; unspoiled coastal lagoon ideal for birdwatching, wading, swimming or meditating. The Pigeon House (45 mins drive from accom), iconic sandstone mountain, steep ascent – ropes not needed; Durras Lake/Pebbly Beach (25 mins drive from accom); Enquiries (02) 8230 2116 (Don Morison)

Bushcare volunteers

For five years I have been trying to control weeds in the National Park behind my home in Blackheath. The area is between the quarry road behind the houses in McLaren Crescent and the road to the NPWS workshop and BMCS nursery. My energy levels have been a bit low lately. The broom which has got away from me is soon to flower and Spanish heath has been spreading.

There is also a dense patch of gorse which I discovered last year. Jenny Rich and I worked on it during the heat last October and managed to cut and paint the more mature plants which were flowering. We would appreciate some help. If you can spare a half day please contact me and I will make arrangements with NPWS. *Christine Davies.*

Welcome to new members

Adam McRae, Helensburg
Wendy Chandler, Wentworth Falls.

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 for bushwalkers 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.

Oct 10 McMahon's Lookout. Walking on Kings' Tableland. Meet 9.30 am Stockyard car park, Wentworth Falls railway station. Marie 4787 1257.

Oct 17 Pierce's Pass, Walls' Lookout, Bell's Line of Road. Wildflowers and views over Grose Valley. 9.15am Mt Victoria Station. Car pool. Norah 4757 4058.

Oct 24 Wollangambe fire trail, Bell. Wildflowers and wilderness. 9.15 Mt Victoria Station. Car pool. Ron 4757 1526.

Oct 31 Old Coach Road, Wolgan Valley. Walk through Glow-worm Tunnel. Bring a torch. 9.15 am Mt Victoria Station. Car pool. Jock 4757 6346.

Nov 7 Glastonbell, Dargan. Wildflower and canyon walk. Private property. Gold coin admission. 9.15 Mt Victoria Station. Allan 4739 2767.

Nov 14 Mt Wilson environs. October Creek with Norah (4757 4058), Zircon Creek with 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.

Oct 13 Wentworth Falls Lake. A very easy walk for those with limited capacity in the reverse direction of the former walk. 10am. Wentworth Falls carpark (near the clock) Simone 4757 3416.

Oct 20 Leura Cascades Circuit. Easy walk to various lookouts via Prince Henry Cliff Walk. Some steps, great views. 10am Corner Leura Mall & Megalong St. Joan 4782 2218

Oct 27 North Lawson Waterfalls. Steep descent into rain forest valley, gradual ascent out via Frederica Falls. Car shuffle if required. 10am Lawson Railway Station. Bob 4757 2694

Nov 3 Pope's Glen. Start at Govett's Leap, slow incline to Blackheath Memorial Park. Car shuffle. 10am Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre. John 4757 1558.

Nov 10 Bus trip to Noble Canyon. Spectacular dry canyon Cost \$10. 8-30am Katoomba Council Depot, South Street. Simone 4757 3416.

Nov 17 Solitary Restaurant to Echo Point. Prince Henry Cliff Walk via lookouts to Echo Point. Car shuffle. 10am Gearins Hotel Katoomba 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

Oct 15 (Sat) Blue Gum Swamp. Medium/easy. Meet Springwood Station carpark 8.30am. Liz 4754 4966.

Oct 22 (Sat) Golden Stairs to Furber Steps via Causeway Creek. Medium/hard. Meet Gearin's Hotel, Katoomba, 9.30am. Car pool. David 4757 3416.

Oct 29 (Sat) Hat Hill to Bald Head via Bennett's Lookout. Medium. Meet Blackheath Station carpark 9.30am. June 4787 7312.

Nov 5 (Sat) Katoomba Creek, North Katoomba. Weeding and walking with other local clubs. A choice of a more rugged through walk involving some creek wading or a dry feet return trip option—both in stunning locations. Afternoon tea provided by NPWS afterwards. Map Katoomba. Contact Liz Stark 4754 4966 before Tuesday 1 November (for details and so that tools can be arranged).

Nov 12 (Sat) Mt Piddington, Horne's Point, Wilson's Glen, return via Zig Zag. Medium. Mary 4787 6918.

Nursery news

Our Spring sale at the Conservation Hut was an outstanding success in that we sold almost our complete stock and netted \$1933.50. We are currently preparing over 90 varieties of seeds and cuttings in anticipation of more orders and for our Autumn sale in March. New volunteers, with or without plant propagation experience, are welcome at both nurseries and we have plenty for you to do. It's fun and provides an essential source of income for the Society's projects.

Enquiries to Kevin Bell 4787 6436.

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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