



# NPA *Bulletin*

Volume 50 Number 1 March 2013

National Parks Association of the Australian Capital Territory Inc



**Guns on our borders**



**Ten years of work parties**



**Miners move on the Tarkine**

*Articles by contributors may not necessarily reflect association opinion or objectives.*

## CONTENTS

From the President .....2 <i>Rod Griffiths</i>	Myanmar, admired .....11 <i>Rupert Barnett</i>
A single conservation agency.....3	Kosciuszko National Park — is it a lost cause? .....12 <i>Mike Smith</i>
Judge says no to cows .....3	Mt Kelly: a tough day walk .....14 <i>Rod Griffiths</i>
The Tarkine opened for mining .....3 <i>Max Lawrence</i>	Abbott Peak bushwalk .....15 <i>Brian Slee</i>
NSW: the hunt is on in national parks.....4 <i>Judy Kelly</i>	Chopper to the rescue .....16 <i>Annette Smith</i>
Glenburn/Burbong: a quiet time before the cooler weather.....5 <i>Colin McAlister</i>	Tim’s PLB really does work .....18 <i>Tim Walsh</i>
Bushfire recovery work parties — ten years on.....6 <i>Martin Chalk</i>	PARKWATCH .....19 <i>Compiled by Hazel Rath</i>
After the fires — hope springs eternal. ....7 <i>Brett McNamara</i>	NPA notices.....22
Honours to Tom Uren and Bill Wood.....9	Meetings and speaker information.....23
Gininderra Falls: Chief Minister asked to reconsider park decision .....10 <i>Graeme Barrow</i>	NPA information and contacts .....23
Farewell Jack.....10 <i>Elizabeth Smart</i>	

## From the President

Welcome to the NPA ACT’s first *Bulletin* for 2013.

During the Christmas holidays, I heard the federal minister responsible for the environment being interviewed on the radio. When asked about what were his priorities for 2013, Minister Burke stated that national parks would receive considerable attention by him in the coming year. He identified that some actions by the states and territories were eroding the conservation values of the national park system and that there was a need to emphasise the ‘national’ in national parks. I could only agree, as for too long parochial state and territory interests have sought to influence the management of Australia’s conservation reserves. In Australia, national parks are created on the basis of environmental considerations, and a strong conservation reserve system forms a foundation for a healthy national environment.

As part of this interview, Mr Burke indicated that he was yet to be convinced about the implications of accommodation in national parks. This has been a contentious issue for the environment movement for many years. The movement has consistently said that tourism and recreation in conservation reserves are secondary objectives, which should be implemented only where they do not compromise the environmental values for which the reserve was created.

Accommodation covers a wide spectrum of activities, from basic camping to wilderness resorts. Many supporters of the environment movement had their first taste of nature through camping in a national park. A wider range of the community may now be accessing Australia’s natural environment through more up-market accommodation options. In deciding whether

such developments are appropriate, we must always assess impact on the environment over the entire life cycle of the development. Both NSW and Victoria are now paying the long-term costs of developments at Jenolan Caves and Mt Buffalo, respectively.

In addition, new accommodation proposals in national parks should be assessed for their impact on existing options outside of the parks. And the costs of duplicating infrastructure already in place beyond the park’s borders must also be considered.

In the ACT, I feel it would be difficult to mount a business case for resort-style accommodation in Namadgi given the relative proximity of good accommodation options in Canberra. In Tidbinbilla, the plan of management includes an action to investigate low-key accommodation options. The NPA ACT will continue to monitor any future proposals to ensure that the environment is always the winner.

Readers’ opinions on this issue are always welcome, so write to the NPA ACT’s committee or contribute to the debate by joining the NPA ACT’s environment sub-committee.

All the best.

**Rod Griffiths**



# A single conservation agency

Last November our President Rod wrote on behalf of the NPA to Chief Minister Katy Gallagher congratulating her on the re-election of her government, and expressing support for a single conservation agency instead of having the Parks Service and the policy and scientific research functions devolved to two separate agencies as is currently the case.

In early January Rod received a reply from Andrew Barr MLA, who at the time

was Acting Chief Minister. Mr Barr's letter contained the following very encouraging words:

".... The ACT Government considers the ongoing protection of the Territory's biodiversity values to be of fundamental importance. I agree with you that a move to a single conservation agency will better serve the Territory's interests by bringing together all elements of biodiversity and protected areas management under the same administrative unit.

*"The NPA ACT has a long and proud history of working with the ACT Government for the betterment of the Territory's natural values and I welcome its members' ongoing advocacy and passion for the local environment. The ACT Government looks forward to working with the NPA ACT with a view to ensuring that policies and programs delivered across Government serve to make our natural environment a stronger and more resilient one."*

---

## Judge says no to cows

On 3 January Federal Court judge Susan Kenny dismissed the Baillieu Government's bid to return cattle to Victoria's Alpine National Park. The Court said Tony Burke's decision to order the removal of the cattle was made according to law. Mr Burke said the cattle would have an unacceptable impact on

the National Heritage value of the park, but lawyers for the Victorian government told the court the minister had considered invalid information while coming to his decision.

If ever there was a good example of why the powers of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation

(EPBC) Act should be firmly kept in Commonwealth hands, this would have to be it!

---

## The Tarkine opened for mining

Environmental and conservation groups have campaigned for years for Tasmania's wonderful Tarkine wilderness to be protected from intrusions by loggers and miners. Currently around 80 per cent of the Tarkine is protected from logging, but only 5 per cent is protected from mining. The large open cut Savage River iron ore mine is the main mine currently operating within the Tarkine.

Following a period of Emergency National Heritage Listing a few years ago, and after extensive study, the Australian Heritage Council advised the Federal Government that an area of 433 000 hectares should be permanently heritage listed. On 8 February 2013 Environment Minister Tony Burke rejected this advice, deciding that only a strip of 21 000 hectares along the west coast would be listed. This area was chosen because of the important indigenous sites therein. The listing contains none of the rain forest for which the Tarkine is so famous.

This decision has been welcomed by mining interests and a State Government anxious to boost employment and incomes in its flagging economy. But conservation interests are aghast.

On 11 February the Hobart *Mercury*, in an article headed 'Tarkine enters golden period', quoted the Tasmanian Energy and Resources Minister as saying he expected a burst of new mining and exploration activity.

*Arthur River rainforest, Ted Mead*

The chief executive of the Tasmanian Minerals Council stated that the most dramatic difference, in the short to medium term, would be in the Tarkine's mineral exploration levels. He said that in addition to already announced proposals — such as Venture Minerals' Mt Lindsay tin, tungsten and magnetite and Shree Minerals' Nelson Bay River iron ore projects — there were a couple of other iron ore projects in the area that could be started quickly.

Scott Jordan, of the conservation group The Tarkine National Coalition, is reported in the *Mercury* as having vowed to succeed, where Mr Burke had failed, to

protect the Tarkine. The campaign continues. Go Scott!!

**Max Lawrence**

*Footnote: NPA ACT's Tim Walsh wrote an impassioned plea for the Tarkine in the June 2008 edition of this Bulletin. Tim's article can be accessed via our website*

*<http://www.npaact.org.au> and following the leads*

*Our Publications, The Bulletin, Back Issues.*



# NSW: the hunt is on in national parks

## The NSW deal with recreational hunters

Recreational hunting is due to start within the next month in 79 NSW national parks and nature reserves, the number possibly rising after the trial period. The targets will supposedly be feral animals. The activities of wildlife, and the enjoyment of nature lovers and bushwalkers, will be threatened. The *Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Act 2012* is incompatible with the primary objective of national parks and reserves, which is conservation of the natural environment and protection of biodiversity.

In 2012, NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell struck a deal with the Shooters and Fishers party to allow them access to certain national parks and reserves, including Kosciuszko, Brindabella and Morton, in exchange for their support enabling the privatisation of electricity in NSW. The Shooters and Fishers are associated with the NSW Game Council, which has the support of the very powerful and influential National Rifle Association of the United States.

Between 2002 and 2009, the predominantly pro-hunting Council received more than \$11 million in government funding 'despite promises from Mr Macdonald it would end up being self-funded'<sup>(1)</sup> During 2010–11 the Council received \$2.5 million in grants<sup>(2)</sup>.

## Professional shooters and a scientifically based program

Professional shooters of feral pests are appropriate in national parks when they work in conjunction with national parks and wildlife authorities, following scientifically based and humane programs with auditing, monitoring and strict protocols. Victorian and South Australian national parks have such programs in place.

So far there is no evidence of similar controls for NSW. The initiative is bizarrely and frighteningly open-ended with few if any conditions, parameters, checks or balances. Who will check to see what wildlife is being shot, how many, and whether it is done humanely? Who will dispose of the carcasses? How many native animals and birds will be mistakenly or wantonly shot?

The Invasive Species Council Australia has concluded that recreational hunting is ineffective in controlling or reducing feral animal populations because it is not part of a professional

and appropriately designed program with specific targets for the number of animals to be killed<sup>(3)</sup>.

## No guarantee of safety for public or parks staff

How will the safety of visitors and staff in national parks be ensured, especially when the number of Parks and Wildlife staff in NSW has been reduced? How will tourism revenue be affected in areas surrounding national parks?

NPA of NSW has distributed a flyer for bushwalking leaders that advises: 'Given the level of risk, community groups are warning people not to use any park or reserve where recreational hunting will take place'. The flyer reflects a grim irony by quoting the NSW Government's own risk assessment: 'Most projectile injuries to people are likely to cause serious injury or death ... for this risk, it is not possible to reduce the consequence below major ...'

The International Hunter Education Association estimates that 1 000 people are shot in hunting accidents in the USA and Canada each year, just under 100 being fatalities. Most victims are hunters but non-hunters are sometimes killed or injured<sup>(4)</sup>.

In Australia, fatalities between fellow hunters have occurred. In New Zealand, a nearby hunter accidentally shot a young woman who was staying at a Department of Conservation campground near Turangi, late one night in October 2010<sup>(5)</sup>.

In fatal hunting accidents, hunters sometimes mistake a companion for a quarry. Although hunters are supposed to carefully identify and focus on their target, the proviso is negated by a legal loophole in NSW which allows the

visually impaired to own a licensed gun and to hunt<sup>(6)</sup>. The news item continues: 'The Government was not aware of the issue until 7News started investigating and they have not confirmed whether they are looking into it'.

## Cross-border issues with the ACT

Of concern for the ACT is the likelihood of hunters encroaching on Namadgi from Kosciuszko and Brindabella national parks, both of which adjoin the ACT border. Welcome news from the ACT Government was that recreational hunters would not operate in the ACT, but a problem now arises with the markedly different management of feral animals in nearby NSW. With inadequate staff and resources, who will stop hunters or their quarry from crossing the border?

Professional hunters have expressed concern that amateur hunters may disperse feral animals, and drive them from one area to another; will Namadgi see an increase in feral horses, pigs and other vermin?

Rangers are aware that illegal hunters deliberately introduce game into national parks to maintain their numbers (*pers. comm.*). Will that trend intensify under recreational hunting?

## Illegal and inhumane shooting of wildlife

Two recent incidents of illegal and inhumane shooting of native and feral animals have been reported:

- In August 2012, during school holidays, a family 'were confronted by a group of hunters' driving into a remote but popular camping ground in a south-east national park, "randomly

(continued next page)



# Glenburn/Burbong: a quiet time before the cooler weather

We have been basically resting on our laurels since the last work party in November.

It has been too hot to work in the field, and the Parks Service has been very busy because of fire and fire threats and the influx of fisherfolk and other visitors to the Googong foreshores.

But there are a few items of news.

First, the very large tree at the site of Coppin's ruins has been formally identified by the National Botanic Gardens. It is a male Osage-orange (*Maclura pomifera*), which is native to the south-eastern United States of America.

There are several mature female trees in the Canberra region and they bear very large inedible fruit. Brian Slee took a photo of a female tree and its fruit on one of his walks last year.

Second, I have prepared the draft text of a possible interpretive sign that could be placed inside Glenburn homestead. The draft covers the history of the homestead and its people, and protection and conservation issues — past and future. The Parks Service has agreed to the preparation of text and photos for the sign.

Third, guided walks of the historic sites at Glenburn/Burbong will be conducted by the Friends of Glenburn on Sunday 14 April during the ACT

Heritage Festival and as part of the NPA Outings Program on Sunday 5 May. All are welcome.

Fourth, Rhonda Boxall and myself have lodged nominations to the ACT Heritage Register for the separate Coppins homestead sites in Yarrolumla (now within Molonglo Stage 2) and Burbong. Note that this spelling of Yarrolumla accords with nineteenth century spelling of the Parish, and is different from that used for Government House and the suburb, both of which are some kilometres from Coppins homestead site.

Finally, the Friends of Glenburn met for a planning session with staff from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service on 14 February. It was a most successful meeting. The Parks Service has agreed to get contractors to repair the pisé portion of Glenburn homestead this financial year and to seek quotes for the stabilisation of Coppins chimney and separate fireplace



Work party at the recently erected interpretive sign at Glenburn Homestead, September 2012. Photo Max Lawrence.

and for the capping of the walls of Colliers ruins. The work on Coppins and Colliers might not get done this financial year. The Parks Service also agreed to the construction of two further interpretive signs — at Coppins homestead site and inside Glenburn homestead. The tasks for the 2 March work party were also agreed.

**Colin McAlister**

## NSW: the hunt is on in national parks *(continued)*

shooting kangaroos" ... then loading "some onto a vehicle before driving off, leaving dead and maimed animals behind"<sup>(7)</sup>.

- The acting chief executive of the NSW Game Council was suspended after two men in a NSW Game Council vehicle were allegedly caught trespassing on a private property near Cobar, in pursuit of a goat with 'trophy horns'<sup>(8)</sup>.
- Protection of native water birds is threatened after the NSW Government enacted legislation in November 2012 to transfer the responsibility for issuing duck-hunting licences from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to the Game Council<sup>(9)</sup>.

### What can you do?

Write a letter to NSW Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell MP, GPO Box 5341, Sydney NSW 2001 or email [office@premier.nsw.gov.au](mailto:office@premier.nsw.gov.au) asking for

the recreational hunting decision to be reversed.

For further information:

- NPA of NSW:  
<http://www.npansw.org.au/> or  
<http://nohunting.wildwalks.com>
- The NSW Game Council's view on 'conservation hunting':  
<http://www.gamecouncil.nsw.gov.au/docs/Report-ConHunting-Vol1-Ch1-3;4-5.pdf>
- NSW Government:  
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/pestweeds/spc.htm>

**Judy Kelly**

### References

- (1) <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/macdonalds-game-council-thrill-killer-20090720-dqui.html#ixzz2KYHBvmib>
- (2) Heath Aston, *The Observer*, January 24, 2013
- (3) 'Is recreational hunting effective for feral animal control?'  
[http://www.invasives.org.au/documents/file/reports/EssayProject\\_RecHunting\\_FeralControl.pdf](http://www.invasives.org.au/documents/file/reports/EssayProject_RecHunting_FeralControl.pdf)
- (4) <http://animalrights.about.com/od/wildlife/f/HuntingAccident.htm>
- (5) <http://www.3news.co.nz/Fun-loving-teacher-shot-in-hunting-accident>
- (6) <http://au.news.yahoo.com/video/nsw/watch/d26ae2e4-746f-3e0c-bdff-43cd52f28c6c/legal-loophole-in-shooting-licence/>
- (7) <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/08/15>
- (8) Heath Aston, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Jan 27, 2013
- (9) <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2012/s3638901.htm>

# Bushfire recovery work parties — ten years on

In February 2003, the Namadgi National Park management asked the NPA for assistance in the recovery program that followed the previous month's devastating fires. The assistance took the form of monthly work parties to perform tasks where and when requested.

In February 2013 these work parties are still a regular part of the NPA 'outings' program. Indeed, the regular participants have also clocked-up 10 year's of involvement — a matter that is increasingly assuming greater importance!

Some quick statistics to set the scene:

- We have conducted some 100 work parties.
- We have worked in some 17 different locations, from the Grassy Creek area of Namadgi National Park, to the Sherwood Homestead site in the north and to the east in Tinderry Nature Reserve.
- We have removed a few weed plants: for example, 25 400 wilding pines (*Pinus radiata*) (11 228 from the Lower Cotter Catchment alone), 5 500 English broom, 3 047 sweet briar and 384 willow.
- We have also removed 110 eucalypt and 480 acacia plants from Bendora Arboretum to preserve its character as a conifer arboretum.
- We have removed disused fencing from the former Honeysuckle Creek tracking station site and installed ember-proof fencing around Frank and Jack's Hut and Demanding Hut.
- We have driven over 11 000 km to and from work sites.

Apart from the raw statistics outlined above, the past 10 years have enabled a close working relationship between the NPA and Parks, Conservation and Land (PCL) rangers. Also, it has allowed the NPA to develop a better understanding of



the practical issues that rangers have to deal with. This mutual respect is a valuable commodity that previously had, perhaps, a more ephemeral nature.

## Highlights and successes from the past 10 years

In 2007, the NPA was approached by PCL to undertake wilding pine control in the Lower Cotter Catchment as a 'project'. The area was formerly a pine forest but the fires killed the standing pines and offered an opportunity for the regeneration of native vegetation. However, the pine seed bank in the ground also had designs on the nutritious ash bed. Six years on, the number of pines in the area around Blundell's Flat has reduced to the point where only maintenance is required.

English broom occurs widely in the area between Brayshaw's Hut and Grassy Creek. In 2006 some 1 500 plants were removed. This number jumped to over 3 000 in 2008. In 2011 the number had reduced substantially to 770 and last year it had fallen further to 62. We hope this is a genuine reduction rather than a temporary change.

Stockyard Arboretum, located below the upper reaches of Stockyard Spur, was badly damaged by the fires, with many exotic conifers destroyed. The decision was taken by PCL to return the arboretum to native vegetation. The NPA first visited the area on a work party in 2007, when it removed 85 conifers. The 2008 work party was cancelled due to bad weather but, in 2009, a further 82 conifers were removed. In 2011 the number had reduced to 36, with all but six located in a small area just outside the boundary of the original arboretum. Two magnificent, mature fir trees survived the fires and have been retained. But the recurrence of conifer regrowth within the arboretum seems now to have been reduced.

## Links with NPWS

The NPA work parties have also established links with the NPWS across the border. We have undertaken manual weed removal from sensitive areas of the



Queanbeyan Nature Reserve and study plots for the rare *Swainsona recta* along the Queanbeyan–Royalla railway easement. We have also worked with the Queanbeyan Area office to undertake pig transects in the Blue Bell Swamp area of Tinderry Nature Reserve.

Perhaps one of the more frustrating aspects of the past 10 years is the ubiquitous briar. One hundred and thirty years of grazing have facilitated a robust and resilient plant. Despite removing over 3 000 plants, the task ahead seems daunting. But there is hope. In two successive work parties around Cotter Hut, the briar population seems to have diminished. As I write this on Christmas Eve, I hang on to that positive note.

## Thanks to the old, and a call for the new

The work parties would be nothing without the continuing support of our members. We have fourteen who participate, with a smaller number helping regularly. Age is our enemy, so any members who would like to put something back into the park system at the grassroots level are most welcome to come along and try this variety of 'outing'.

I would like to thank those who have participated over the past decade. I realise the results are difficult to see at times but I believe the trend is a positive one.

**Martin Chalk**  
Work Party Coordinator

*Photographs by Martin Chalk*

*Top. Demanding Hut work party, July 2010*

*Left. Mike Bremers and Brian Slee working on the Australian Alps Walking Track, October 2005*

# After the fires — hope springs eternal

*This article was written by Brett McNamara in 2005 on the occasion of the second anniversary of our disastrous fire storm. Brett was then Manager of Namadgi National Park, and the wounds were still raw. In January 2013 we commemorated the tenth anniversary, and Brett has moved up the ACT Parks and Conservation Service ladder to be Manager Regional Operations. Nevertheless, the effects of the fire are still with us, and Brett's 2005 personal recollections serve as a powerful reminder to all of us of the task confronted by our park staff not only in managing and protecting our wonderful national park, but in looking after themselves and their families as well.*



*A ceramic cherub still playing celestial music amongst the devastation that was a family home; Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve January 2003*

As the years roll by the events of Saturday 18 January 2003 form a narrative that underscores our collective fire history. For what did occur is now history. Lives have been altered, blame has been levelled and lessons have been learnt. Importantly, as a community we have moved on.

As we look to the future, we should not lose sight of the foundations upon which we rebuild that were once the ashes of the January 2003 firestorm. In particular, the horrific events that transpired on that fateful day at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

My current role is that of a Senior Manager with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, with responsibilities for the management of the natural, cultural and recreational values of Namadgi National Park, Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Googong Foreshores. Working with a team of dedicated professionals we deliver a range of resource management programs across a vast area of the ACT.

I commenced my career with the ACT Parks Service back in October 1990 as a temporary ranger on a 6-month contract, prior to which I worked throughout the Northern Territory for close to 8 years.

Throughout my career with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service I have been fortunate enough to have lived on the 'estate' as it were, residing at unique and beautiful work locations, namely Bendora Dam within Namadgi National Park and then at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

For nearly five years I lived in a special part of the world, high up in the Brindabella Range of Namadgi National

Park, at a place known as Bendora Dam. I was the resident area ranger. It was at Bendora that Jordan and Gemma took their first steps and called the Brindabella Range home. To work and live with a young family in such a special part of the world with its sense of isolation yet with the nation's capital on its doorstep was indeed a special experience. As a young family we were privileged to have had the opportunity.

## ***At Tidbinbilla we had pretty much the 'perfect' rural lifestyle ...***

With Jordan and Gemma starting to yearn for an education we moved from the idyllic world of Bendora to another little piece of heaven — Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

At Tidbinbilla we had pretty much the 'perfect' rural lifestyle — all on the urban fringe of Canberra. The children commenced their pathway into the education system via Tharwa Primary School, which was your typical small country school with 30 kids in the whole school not the one class! I had levitated through the ranks from being 'simply a simple ranger' to Manager of Namadgi National Park.

However, most importantly as a family we were part of the local rural community. We had a real sense of belonging against a backdrop of tranquillity in tune with nature. Life was good.

To give you an example of how 'in tune' our lifestyle was at Tidbinbilla, I can recall many starry nights sitting outside watching shooting stars over the mountains while enjoying a glass of red wine or two with the kangaroos in our backyard swaying to the sounds of the music resonating across the valley floor!

Or at least I thought they were swaying.

As a family we were privileged to live in harmony with our surrounds. Then on one hot and catastrophic summer afternoon in January 2003 it all ended.

For me personally the fires didn't arrive on our doorstep unannounced on 18 January. I had received a calling card some 10 days beforehand. On the afternoon of Wednesday 8 January 2003, a massive dry thunderstorm swept across the Australian Alps National Parks registering over 165 separate lightning strikes from the Alpine National Park in Victoria through to the Brindabella Range of Namadgi National Park.

Of the lightning strikes in Namadgi, three had started fires with one — to become known as the infamous McIntyre's Hut fire — just outside the ACT. Little did we know that soon they would become one massive firestorm — a conflagration of epic destructive proportions with deadly consequences.

## ***... there are many sights, sounds and incidences that are literally 'burnt' into my memory***

As a deputy fire captain with the Parks Brigade I spent the next 10 days working 12-hour, or sometimes 22-hour shifts fighting the fires in the Brindabellas — a place I knew very well. Over those 10 long days and nights there are many sights, sounds and incidences that are literally 'burnt' into my memory, but one clear recollection I have is that of the professionalism and dedication of the crews I worked alongside, volunteers and parks service fire-fighters alike. I look back on our combined effort with a sense of pride that, given the circumstances and resources at the time, we fought the good fight.

To my mind it is nothing short of a miracle that somehow we all managed to walk away from the experience. The collective professional effort of the fire crew and incident management team reinforced the need to keep the safety

*(continued next page)*

## After the fires — hope springs eternal *(continued)*

and welfare of the firefighters uppermost in our minds. While ultimately we may not have suppressed and contained the fire given the conditions, we did keep our crews alive — a fact which should not be lost. Be it good management or simply good luck we did just that; not one firefighter was killed in the firestorm.

### ***[I witnessed] the fire crowning over the top of the Tidbinbilla Range at Fishing Gap***

After working a gruelling 14-hour night shift as sector commander, I returned to Tidbinbilla as the sun rose on Saturday 18 January 2003 only to find that the fires had followed me home. I have a vivid recollection of standing in our backyard in the soft morning light witnessing the fire crowning over the top of the Tidbinbilla Range at Fishing Gap — a sight few if any had witnessed before.

This was not going to be a good day. The predicated weather conditions were extreme. As it transpired they were catastrophic.

It was at that point we decided that Tidbinbilla was no place for a young family.

After evacuating Jordan and Gemma to the relative safety of a friend's house in Canberra I returned to Tidbinbilla to again fight the good fight, or at least that was the plan.

As the saying goes the 'best laid plans of mice and men ...'

Before evacuating our home we had prepared the house. The gutters were overflowing with water as the drain pipes had been blocked; the yard was clear of flammable material and the lawn was lush green. Utilising a grader, a bare earth mineral containment line had been established around our home. We had a fire break. The valley had little or no grass thanks to the kangaroos. We were prepared.

Upon returning to Tidbinbilla I tasked a firefighting light unit to assist me with asset protection of our family home. Pulling into the driveway I recall seeing water everywhere, overflowing from the roof over the house. I briefed the crew and we waited.

We did not have long to wait.

I will undoubtedly take to my grave the terrifying sights and sounds of being engulfed within an all-consuming cataclysmic firestorm. The ferocity of the cyclonic winds, the deafening sound of the roar of the fire, the burning sensation of heat upon my face as my face cloth caught alight and literally burnt on my face. The pure strength and

intensity of the ember attack was unimaginable. I have vivid recollections of being pelted with red-hot flying embers with such force that I was knocked to the ground. Crawling on my hands and knees, desperate to find refuge I recall peeling off my burning face cloth thinking that I was going to die.

Mere simple words are totally inadequate for describing the sights and sounds of being consumed by an inferno. It was terrifying.

Miraculously, I crawled across the lawn while being engulfed by fire to the spa, which was well alight; yet I found enough water. I recall looking up and seeing flames licking at the house, dancing as if they wanted to overwhelm and consume everything in their path. My thoughts turned to the crew who were with me. I scrambled inside to the relative safety of the house, away from the ember attack and flames. It was there that I found my crew standing in the study pouring milk over their faces in an attempt to sooth their smoke filled eyes. It's funny the things you think about in the middle of a crisis; to this day I can recall thinking how I was going to explain the milk all over the computer and onto the carpet!

### ***... the house was now fully alight; the excruciating sound of the corrugated iron being peeled off the roof still resonates with me.***

Meanwhile, the house was now fully alight; the excruciating sound of the corrugated iron being peeled off the roof still resonates with me — an unimaginable sound. It was if the house was groaning — crying out as it was being consumed by fire. I walked down to the kitchen which had a large window facing the north-west; as I stood there peering out into the raging firestorm the window exploded under the force of the cyclonic wind; flames once again licked at my face.

With the burning sensation of heat on the back of my neck, I ran past Gemma's bedroom only to see her bed well alight, her beautiful toys burning as they sat upon her bed. I can honestly recall thinking that I was about to meet my maker, I sincerely feared for my life and that of my crew.

### ***We sat there and simply watched my home burn to the ground.***

At that point the roof collapsed. It was time to get out of the house. We crawled from the house and found refuge in the 'black'; an area that had

been burnt by the fire. We sat there and simply watched my home burn to the ground.

Undeniably, our personal protection clothing, fire jacket and pants saved our lives. Without such clothing we would have been burnt to death.

It is the feeling of absolute helplessness; helplessness as you watch your family home burn — burn with a wealth of cherished family possessions — that leaves you feeling numb and shocked to the core. It was at that moment I felt absolute despair beyond words. An experience I would not recommend to anyone.

On reflection, it **wasn't** a good day.

The events of Saturday 18 January 2003 had an impact on so many different levels. For us, not only had we lost every aspect of our personal lives, but also we were soon to learn that we had lost so much at a professional level.

Over 95 per cent of Namadgi National Park was now burnt — a park I knew so very well. The children's first home at Bendora was totally destroyed; the Cotter was destroyed. Despite the demanding and gruelling effort we had put into fighting the fires, we lost so much in that January firestorm.

What of the future?

The days after the fire were filled with mixed emotions — shock, sadness, anger and distress. The sense of where to begin, where do we start — as a family we were off on an emotional roller-coaster ride with many low points and gut-wrenching turns. Its funny how kids have such a wonderful way of summing up the situation and seeing things for what they really are. Young Jordan, with his whole seven years of life experience said to me one day, 'Daddy it doesn't really matter that the fire took away our home, we still have our memories ...'

In so many ways Jordan was right. Memories of the good times — the fun times at Tidbinbilla. The kids' birthday parties in the backyard, Christmas Day lunches with the obligatory walk to Gibraltar Peak in the afternoon, the dinner parties watching the shooting stars over the Tidbinbilla Range. Such memories will always stay with me.

It's a funny thing to one day wake to find that all you have are the clothes on your back, being a fire jacket, and then to realise that you don't even have a coat hanger to hang it on. To lose your material possessions is to lose your sense of identity. You don't have your driver's licence, a passport, your bank account details — you no longer exist in terms of your ability to identify yourself.

*(continued next page)*



# Honours to Tom Uren and Bill Wood

Two former politicians very well known to NPA ACT featured in the 2013 Australia Day Honours List.

The Honourable **Tom Uren** AO has been elevated to Companion (AC) in the General Division of the Order of Australia, our top gong. His award was for eminent service to the community, particularly through contributions to the welfare of veterans, improved medical education in Vietnam and the preservation of sites of heritage and environmental significance.



In 1983, as Federal Minister responsible for the ACT in the then new Hawke Government (self government for the ACT only came in 1989) Tom Uren made Namadgi Nat-

ional Park a reality. The following note appears in the 40th Anniversary *NPA Bulletin* (March 2000):

*On the crisp sunny morning of 31 August 1983, NPA members escorted the Federal Minister for Territories and Local Government, Tom Uren, and a contingent of his office and departmental staff on a tour of what was then Gudgenby Nature Reserve.*

*On a map spread over the bonnet of a truck at Glendale ranger station, NPA President Neville Esau passionately explained the Association's national park proposal.*

*Tom Uren followed the detail closely.*

*Then he turned to his departmental head, John Enfield, and said "John, can you arrange that?"*

*Namadgi National Park was gazetted on 3 October 1984!*

Mr **Bill Wood** was made a Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia. His award was for significant service to the community and the Legislative Assembly of the ACT. Bill Wood was Environment Minister in the second Follett Government (1991 – 1994), and held a number of portfolios in the first Stanhope Government, retiring in 2004. NPA found him to be an interested and cooperative minister with a keen interest in matters environmental.

Our warm congratulations go to them both.



## After the fires — hope springs eternal *(continued)*

However, we were soon to learn that we were not alone. Following the fire the outpouring of community support was remarkable on so many different levels.

As a family, I recall us being overwhelmed by donations, gifts and, most importantly, support. I remember commenting to a number of people that if I had to experience a natural disaster I would much rather experience one in a country called Australia and in a city called Canberra than in any other place in the world. We also experienced compassion and empathy that mere words cannot adequately describe.

One day walking through the Old Kingston Bus Depot markets a stallholder recognising our plight, paused and gave us a little wooden bowl, saying that she could relate to our loss and grief having lost her sister in the Bali terrorist bombing. The loss of a house simply does not compare to the loss of a loved one; yet this total stranger felt such empathy to our plight, that she wanted to help.

Words cannot describe our reaction to that simple gesture. That wooden bowl is now a priceless and treasured item. It was one of the first things we acquired after the fires.

Returning to work, I found a national park almost completely burnt, with many losses in terms of intrinsic natural and cultural heritage values of the park. Over 80 per cent of the internationally significant Ginini Wetlands had been completely burnt, a critical habitat of the

endangered Corroboree Frog. The oldest club-built ski chalet which had stood proudly at Mt Franklin for over 65 years now lay in a pile of ashes. Ranger staff living at Glendale, Bendora and the Cotter had also lost their homes in the firestorm.

### ***The natural and cultural landscape of the park had been significantly altered beyond initial comprehension.***

However, as land managers we focused both personally and professionally on nature's rehabilitation strategy, to gain knowledge and to glean an insight into nature's overall recovery plan. We coined a new phrase, the 'green fur' look, to describe the extensive epicormic regrowth of the eucalypts and witnessed tonnes of new topsoil deposited from the mountains onto the alluvial plains of the valley floor.

### ***Nature has an amazing way of recovering from such a fire event.***

We witnessed nature at work as she crafted and moulded the iconic granite boulders of Namadgi as sheets of granite literally 'peeled off' before our very eyes! Nature has an amazing way of recovering from such a fire event. For millennia she has seen fire in the landscape and will undoubtedly see fire again across the mountains. As park managers we were witnessing an event on a scale not seen before by our predecessors. Fire on that scale and

with that intensity is a landscape-building event.

Bearing witness to such an event, suffering the personal losses and, more importantly, surviving, provides you with an opportunity to glean an insight into what is truly important. Material possessions are just that, mere possessions. They are soon replaced. It is a deeper understanding that we are merely passing through this place, at this point in time, that resonates with me.

The time scale on which we conduct our daily lives is dwarfed by nature.

However, the human spirit, like nature, has an amazing way of bouncing back after adversity. As the years roll on and with each anniversary I grow stronger, wiser and with a greater sense of purpose to ensure that those who will walk in our footsteps as land custodians are spared similar experiences of that fateful day.

That is our legacy, to ensure that history does not repeat itself— not today, not tomorrow, nor in 20 years time.

That is the experience I take from the summer of 2003.

**Brett McNamara**  
**Namadgi National Park**  
**18 January 2005**

# Gininderra Falls: Chief Minister asked to reconsider park decision

The Ginninderra Falls Association (GFA) is advocating that a working party from the ACT and NSW governments and the Yass Valley Council be established to look at all the ramifications of a national park centred on Ginninderra Falls.

In December 2012, a letter was sent to ACT Chief Minister Katy Gallagher, suggesting such a working party. The letter asked if she would write to NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell, putting forward the idea for his consideration.

The GFA, while appreciative of what

she has already done on the national park issue, was disappointed in Ms Gallagher's reply indicating she would not agree to the request. The Association decided to write again to the Chief Minister asking her to reconsider. It believes that, for the national park proposal to make progress, there needs to be the active involvement of both governments and the Yass Council.

Meanwhile, the GFA was to make a presentation about the national park bid to a meeting of the Yass Council at

an open forum in early February. The Association sought the opportunity because of council changes following elections last year.

There were to be two speakers at the GFA's first public meeting for 2013, in the Belconnen Public Library on Tuesday, 26 February, at 7.30 pm: Christine Goonrey, President of the National Parks Australia Council, and Kevin Evans, CEO of the National Parks Association of NSW.

**Graeme Barrow**

## Farewell Jack

*In the December NPA Bulletin we noted the passing of life member Jack Smart, and that a picnic would be held to spread Jack's ashes in Namadgi. That function was held on Orroral Ridge above Honeysuckle on the evening of Friday 4 January. It was attended by around thirty or more of Jack's NPA friends, and at least as many more of Jack's family and ANU friends and colleagues.*



*Following the picnic Jack's wife Elizabeth wrote the following note for publication in our Bulletin.*

The family and I want to thank members of the NPA for their continued warm friendship for my husband Jack Smart.

Bushwalking with NPA was one of Jack's greatest pleasures for the 23 years that we lived in Canberra.

When we arrived in 1976 he was still playing hockey and became increasingly frustrated as matches played on a Saturday interfered with what he really wanted to do at the week-ends. Eventually I persuaded him to give up hockey, so, 3 days before his 60th birthday, he played his last match, and was at last free to join the NPA walks and other programs.

He came home with many tales of adventures and of the kindness (and forbearance!) of his fellow walkers, so it was good to meet some of you whom I had previously only known by name, when you joined us to scatter Jack's ashes. It was a wonderful evening at an unforgettable spot.

Thank you all for coming and thanks to Max Lawrence for overseeing the proceedings so efficiently and well.

All of us who were there will remember that very special evening.

**Elizabeth Smart**

## Speckled light

wash in a pool  
stand on a boulder  
smell of the Earth ...  
all those rainforest  
mornings long ago

speckled light  
on leaf litter  
the sound  
of running water  
washes right through me

overgrown track  
and fallen trees ...  
the mind  
seeks all problems ...  
climb over or duck under?

I am the tick ...  
the leech that lopes  
towards warm blood ...  
I am a creature  
of the forest floor

flickering flames  
and mopoke calling  
voices of frogs  
and cicadas ...  
above us the starry night

**Gerry Jacobson**

# Myanmar, admired

September 2012 proved to be a good time to join a tour in Myanmar, first because the in-flight entertainment offered the film *The Lady*, so its portrayal of the life and role of Aung San Suu Kyi was a timely reminder of the country's troubled past. Then, in that same week she and the country's President addressed the UN; we can hope this action confirms the signs of new directions for its future.

In the Yangon airport, though it was with hesitation, I asked a security guard if it was okay to photograph a sign — airports are 'strategic locations' after all. He looked up surprised, then replied with a big grin. 'Yes, please!'. The sign read, 'Welcome to Myanmar'.

That was the first of a thousand pictures that portray a little of a people for whom I quickly developed a real admiration. So what can be learnt from a short trip?

## A mix of old and new

The drive from the airport was along manicured avenues, past neat and lush parklands, but past buildings mostly older and sometimes dilapidated, though with new ones going up too. Small businesses were common, as were the lines of washing on balconies. The streets, some buildings, the frequent bilingual hoardings and later, the 2-foot rail gauge, reminded that much remains from the century this land had been a British colony.

It was clearly also a 'developing' country, yet in the mix of often old and 'wrong-drive' cars, trucks, vans and buses, a woman on a motor scooter manoeuvres adroitly without once taking the mobile phone from her ear. Or was it a mobile? — their availability and use has been tightly controlled until now.

## Religion pervasive

The West's sanctions have been often criticised for causing much of Myanmar's poverty, but I wonder if that has been greatly outweighed by internal factors. There is a fairly inclusive education system (in which Australia has a \$80 million program) to primary level and one felt the people had good organisational skills. Yet, one third of a family's income traditionally must be directed to religious purposes (and some statues must be inches deep in gold leaf);

as well, a significant proportion of its people become monks and hence a burden and a loss to economic activity, and I see on the internet that in just a decade enough of a new and grandiose capital (Nay Pyi Taw) has been built that it already is home to over a million people — mostly government employees.



In Yangon (Rangoon) the most photographed subject (by visitors) is surely the immense gold-covered spire of the Shwedagon Pagoda; it and a thousand others gleam with the deep faith of these people. Their primary creed is a form of Buddhism, but their practice can include elements of ancestor worship, animism, Hinduism and perhaps Islam. Also complex are the region's ethnic and political histories; the visitor can see a little of it in the thousands of millennium-old pagodas scattered over the plains of Bagan, Hindu figures on a Mandalay palace, temples for the worship of ancestors and spirit gods on Mt Popa, ethnic dress in a hill-country market, the 'new' capital on the Ayerwady River floodplain destroyed two centuries ago by an earthquake, and perhaps that current new capital project.

## Village industries and national parks

Day-to-day living is still largely based on the cottage or village industry — weaving silk, casting brass Buddhas, hammering gold leaf, smithing traditional knives, schooling (the alphabet is complex!), temple rituals, rural activities, and by the bullock chewing patiently by the wagon that has 'Taxi 1' carefully printed across its canopy. Much is implied about community values when one realises

there have been no street beggars, no guards at the village gold-leaf factory, no one sleeping in the streets — but perhaps we were in the wrong places?

The tour touched a couple of national parks; their number has gone from 3 to 9 in the last decade, and includes substantial areas of habitat of tigers and wild elephants. Other reserves number some dozens, though my only wildlife 'spectacular' is a butterfly. We were told that guided walking tours can be arranged in much of the country.

Much about a different people can only be learned by reading or listening, of course. One story I found telling: a key event that helped move the junta towards more liberal policies came from an early visit by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: walking from his aircraft towards the dignitaries waiting in the grand reception tent he stopped, then moved off the carpet to talk first with the people behind the distant barricades.

## What's in a name?

As for names, it seems *Burma* was a poor transliteration of the informal name for the main ethnic group (better is *Bamar*); their formal name is *Myanmar* and we noted that name is universally used in the country. There are many non-Myanmar, as we know from the long-running conflicts involving groups we've heard about — Mon, Hmong, Karen, Palaung, Shan to name a few of the 150-odd ethnicities which are (nominally) recognised. That list does not include the Moslem peoples on the north-west border who are currently involved in civil conflict. The country's official name, *The Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, is perhaps an attempt to recognise that diversity. But if the country is trying to 'come out', it seems to me outsiders should try to respect their name, especially our politicians and the media.

My visit was brief, but opened up a much richer appreciation of this country once labelled 'Axis of Evil'. For me it has generated a lot of questions I haven't an answer for yet; if you've got any, there's lots of good information about Myanmar in tour guides and other books and, I'm finding, on the internet.

If you're interested, it is probably also an ideal time to vote for 'change in Myanmar' with your feet too.

**Rupert Barnett**

# Kosciuszko National Park — is it a lost cause?

In the beginning there were mountains, valleys and pristine rivers; a wholly natural landscape unaffected by humans. There was an environment of trees, scrubs and animals in harmony with their mountainous surrounds. There was snow in winter and occasional wildfires in summer, both of which create the environment; snow slowly releases water and fire is needed for regeneration. The few humans that had lived in or traversed the landscape were Aboriginal people and maybe a few explorers and they had little impact on the environment.

Then came white settlers on the Monaro, Riverina and other areas surrounding the Snowy Mountains!

## Grazing

In the 1830s, the settlers saw well-watered grassy meadows in the high country, so they built fences and huts, and moved their sheep and cattle in for summer grazing. However, the grassy areas were often sphagnum/heath swamps and the hard-hoofed domestic animals soon turned them into bogs, destroyed the sphagnum, polluted the watercourses and generally caused the meadows to dry out. But the settlers still only saw grass, water and profits. This was also probably the start of the decline of High Country aquatic life such as the Corroboree frog. Summer grazing in the High Country above 1350 m was eventually banned in 1958 essentially to stop soil erosion in the river catchments that were vital to the Snowy Mountains Scheme and phased out completely from the Kosciuszko National Park in 1969.

## Dam building

In the early 1950s, the constructors came, the builders of the Snowy Mountain Scheme. They built roads, more huts, dams, tunnels, aqueducts, towns and much more. With the construction came exotic flora and lots of altered landscapes. There was little regard for the environment in those days; people needed electricity and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area needed water so they got on with the job and diverted water from the Snowy River to the Murray River catchment, leaving the lower Snowy River bereft of water. Only recently have works been undertaken to increase flow in the Snowy River.



## Skiing

At around the same period, skiing took off in Australia. Ski resorts were developed, which included cleared and modified slopes, and infrastructure in the form of ski lifts, chalets, and lots of bitumen-surfaced roads and car parks. The small, native animals that lived in these areas must have been severely affected but then they were probably expected to move and maybe they did. The saving grace with the ski fields was that they were of limited extent, a very small proportion of the high country.

## Park establishment

Finally, when the landscape had adjusted to accommodate these changes and come to some sort of equilibrium, it was gazetted in 1967 as a national park — the Kosciuszko National Park — a park to protect the remaining environmental assets of the Snowy Mountains and surrounding areas. There were still large areas of generally unmodified landscape and by removing activities such as the grazing much more of the landscape reverted to a more natural state. Native grasses and other flora grew and proliferated, rivers were generally clean and unpolluted and the native animal life probably thrived.

## Feral plants and animals

But in subsequent years this was all to change; weeds and feral animals arrived and they proliferated. The

environment suffered, native animals suffered and the values of national parks were compromised if not lost. Introduced plants such as Orange Hawkweed, blackberries etc. out-competed the natural grasses and other vegetation. Vermin or feral animals arrived and made life difficult for native animals.

## Wild dogs

Wild dogs (adjoining landowners also put dingos in this category), foxes and cats found haven in the Park and they lived off smaller native animals, which had limited defences against such predators. Some of the feral animals also ventured out of the Park and attacked local farmed animals such as sheep, lambs and new-born cattle. This gave the Park the reputation amongst locals as a haven for killers. The problem was tackled by the Park by trapping and eradicating where possible these feral animals. But is this being maintained at a sufficient level in the face of decreased funding? I wonder!

## Rabbits

Rabbits have been in Australia since they were introduced with the First Fleet in 1788 but didn't become a real problem till they were released on a property in Victoria for hunting in 1859. However, the CSIRO's myxomatosis and calicivirus now appear to have controlled them to a degree. Although present in Kosciuszko National Park rabbits don't appear to be a real problem, particularly in the country above the snowline.

*(continued next page)*

## Kosciuszko National Park — is it a lost cause? *(continued)*

### *Pigs*

Pigs have been the bane of the Australian environment since their release, deliberately or accidentally, around Cooktown in Queensland by Captain Cook in the 1770s. They are or were probably present in all national parks but better controlled or even eradicated in some. In Kosciuszko, pigs are an increasing problem as the landscape in places attests. They root up large areas of grasslands, killing the grasses and causing erosion. They are trapped, poisoned or shot in most parks, with varying degrees of success. It has probably been the same in Kosciuszko. But is it continuing at a sufficient pace to reduce the number of pigs? I think not! Funding cuts have probably also affected this. Recently, an unused pig trap was observed in an area of old and new pig-damaged landscape along the Tooma River.

### *Deer*

Deer are a relatively recent addition to the list of feral animals in Kosciuszko National Park. They are probably as yet in small numbers but if left unchecked could multiply and become a problem similar to that of feral horses. They do the same type of damage.

### *Horses*

Feral horses are the really big problem. They damage watercourses and wetlands causing erosion; they pollute water with their waste; and they leave large piles of faeces along roads, tracks and other open areas. They are now virtually in plague proportions in the lower areas of northern and southern Kosciuszko and they breed prolifically. Due to the public perception that these feral horses are the descendants of the brumbies of *The Man from Snowy River* fame they are virtually immune from realistic methods of eradication. Instead, they have to be trapped and removed from the Park, a costly method which is unlikely to keep pace with their rapid breeding and thus unlikely to dramatically reduce their numbers in the Park. Again, due to the funding pressures, is even this method of feral horse control being seriously advanced by the Park service at a level likely to reduce feral horse numbers? I doubt it!

As an interesting aside it appears that the southern feral horses are scruffy and interbred but they live in a generally weed-free environment, whereas the northern feral horses appear to be much more thoroughbred in appearance but live in a very weedy environment. It just

happens that the commercial horse-riding activities occur in the northern region. Could this just be a coincidence?

### **Politics and politicians**

The greatest threat to Kosciuszko National Park and all other NSW national parks is man in the form of politicians. They have cut funding and reduced ranger numbers to the extent that NSW parks must be close to unsustainable, if not already so. The only part of parks that hasn't suffered is the part responsible for collecting park entry fees and other monies for the government treasury. That says lots about government priorities. It's pretty much a truism that the environment doesn't vote and it shows. All recent governments, both Liberal and Labor, have increased income from, and cut funding to, national parks, on the premise of them 'paying for themselves' (user pays principle) but this doesn't take into account the environmental and biodiversity values of national parks and forces commercialisation. It has been said that the current Liberal NSW Minister for the Environment doesn't know the meaning of environment. That's probably unfair, as she is almost certainly tasked by the NSW Government to increase income from the environment and decrease expenditure on the environment. This doesn't get her many friends in the environmental movement. It is also probably unfair to single out the current NSW Government as being anti-environment. A Labor government in NSW not so long back dramatically increased the number of

national parks with much heralding of the achievement but did it increase the funding to maintain these new parks? I think not!

### **Commercialisation**

Commercialisation of the Park is occurring. Politicians are considering allowing all sorts of commercial activities in the Park; the horse riders want access to wilderness areas; the Shooters Party, which holds a balance of power over the NSW Government, has gained access to shoot selected feral animals (but feral horses are excluded); various commercial interests including the shooters want vehicle tracks and fire trails opened to them; and the cattlemen want grazing back in the Park. What a nightmare! The concept of wilderness was developed to allow only minimal impact activities and generally keep commercial interests out. Horse riding in fragile environments could hardly be considered minimal impact; horse riders already damage and spread weeds in the existing areas they are allowed into. The Park needs shooters to control feral animals, but they need to be professional shooters who know what they are doing, how to do it correctly and have an understanding of where the ferals may be. The members of the amateur Shooters Party may want to shoot feral animals, but feral animals such as pigs are good at keeping a low profile, at least during the day. I pity the poor wild kangaroos; I can already hear the amateur shooters saying that they are not domesticated so are really only feral animals anyway. I won't get into the dangers to national parks of cigarettes and pit-bull terriers (or similar), which

*(continued on page 14)*



# Mt Kelly: a tough day walk

I'm tired, bloodied and have a dull ache in my left ankle. It's always amazing how the last kilometres can drag on.

Another walker appears to our left, striding purposely across the open landscape to the north of Yankee Hat. She'll easily beat us back to the Yankee Hat car park, still another 20 minutes away.

Alex Holland and I are in Namadgi National Park, in the final stages of a day walk to Mt Kelly and back. We had started out at 7:30 this morning, nearly 11 hours ago.

When I first joined the NPA, as part of my welcome package I received a copy of the NPA's 40th anniversary supplement. Amongst its wealth of information was a photo of Julie Henry standing on top of Mt Kelly. Julie went on to become an NPA Life Member, and Mt Kelly gathered iconic status as it became the focus of the NPA's push for a national park for the national capital.

After 10 years with the NPA it was time for me to honour the past and visit Mt Kelly.

## *Could it be done in a day?*

NPA walk leaders have regularly taken groups on two- or three-day walks to Mt Kelly, but over the years, I had heard stories of walkers doing the trip in a day. Was it possible? I asked Max Lawrence, an NPA stalwart. The reply was not altogether positive. 'There's been heavy regrowth since the 2003 fires which would make a hard walk even harder'. However, Max did say that if it was

going to be done, then the route taken should be to the left of the southern branch of Middle Creek and high enough out of the creek to avoid the thick scrub notorious along many of Namadgi's watercourses.

So, armed with this sage advice, Alex and I set off past the many kangaroos dotting the sides of the Yankee Hat walking trail. It was a cool November morning in 2012 with a promise of a hotter day ahead. The walking trail led us quickly to the lowest slopes of Yankee Hat, where we left the track to skirt across the open grasslands towards Middle Creek. Just on the edge of the tree line to our left, three dingoes surveyed our progress.

Reaching the edges of Middle Creek, the vegetation slowly started to thicken as we worked our way along animal pads. We passed a dozing copperhead ... cautiously. Max had also advised me to avoid ascending the spur leading up to Mount Burbidge, so we continued westward. We crossed a couple of minor tributaries and from there we began to rise quickly up a north-west spur.

## *... the vegetation closed in on us, and the ascent steepened.*

At the two-hour mark we checked our position and congratulated ourselves on our progress. A dangerous move for, sure enough, in the next section, the vegetation closed in on us, and the ascent steepened. As we started to get distant glimpses of Mt Burbidge, we found our-

selves locked in a struggle with the undergrowth and the steep slopes. Although I had donned gloves and had eye protection from my sunglasses, my legs were still slightly exposed, and the vegetation slashed away at the flesh above my gaiters.

Alex and I had slowed significantly as we worked our way towards Bogong Gap. In thickly vegetated, untracked bush, the walker in front works harder than the rest of the group, as ways of least resistance are sought through the bush. We swapped positions regularly, working as a team through these stages, as the leader became tired.

## *... we found ourselves in an area of significant eucalyptus regrowth.*

We were able to track our progress against Mt Burbidge's stunning rocky ridge line and, after four and a half hours, we were pleased to find ourselves on the edge of the marshy open area in front of Bogong Gap. This stretches for about a kilometre and, while the slope of the land had eased, we found ourselves in an area of significant eucalyptus regrowth. These tough plants ensured a slower progress, so that it was one o'clock by the time we finally got to the lower slopes of Mt Kelly.

## *... time running short*

Alex and I were both worried at this stage about whether there was sufficient time to climb Mt Kelly itself. But, after

*(continued on page 15)*

## **Kosciuszko National Park — is it a lost cause?** *(continued from page 13)*

are generally associated with amateur shooters. I wonder where greenies and bushwalkers fit into the feral categories. Apparently the Shooters Party has suggested that bushwalkers should wear 'hi-vis' clothing but is this for visibility or as a target! Maybe bushwalkers should be wearing 'hi-vis' flak-jackets. And cattle back in the High Country would be a return to the bad old days.

### **Prospects**

Is Kosciuszko National Park a lost cause? Probably! Politicians will continue to increase their income from national parks, and Kosciuszko in particular, and while reducing expenditure. Feral plants and animals will flourish and proliferate as, due to the lack of funding, they are not being tackled. Business will continue to take people into the Park on horse treks or by vehicle, if allowed by government (for a

fee of course), to show them the lovely brumbies of *The man from Snowy River* fame, but will not show them the damaged landscapes or polluted watercourses; they will take them back to their luxury accommodation and feed them bottled water when they are not drinking chardonnay. Rangers, bless their hearts, will continue to fight the threats (probably in 'hi-vis' flak jackets) but with little success (no resources, no funding) and wonder why they are banging their heads against a brick wall and that there must be more satisfying ways to make a living. Ecologists and environmentalists will continue to voice their concerns but no one listens; in the Australian vernacular it's called 'pissing into the wind'. Bushwalkers will wring their hands in horror, continue to get sick from drinking the water but gradually drift away to less damaged landscapes and national parks. But will the problems follow them?

Is there any hope? Probably not! Funding is the answer, but governments only react to public pressure and the public at present is most concerned with hospitals, schools and policing. Getting the environment off the bottom of the pile is a must. But can it be done?

However, it's not all doom and gloom, there are still areas of Kosciuszko, particularly in the real High Country, generally above the snowline, that are relatively pristine and thus lovely areas to walk, view and contemplate. But will it last; there are already mutterings that High Country summer grazing leases could be a 'nice-little-earner' for the NSW Government?

**God-help-us!**

**Mike Smith**

*(Photos by Sabine Friedrich)*

# Abbott Peak bushwalk

Walk: Abbott Peak, 10 February 2013  
Participants (6): Brian Slee (Leader),  
Margaret Power, Peter Anderson-  
Smith, Max Smith, Jenny  
McGrath, David Dedenczuk

Weather: Cool to warm, windy,  
clouding over about 2 pm, no rain.

Leader's Comments: Townsend is the  
customary destination for NPA  
walks NW of Kosciuszko but  
Abbott Peak was a good  
alternative as most participants  
had not climbed it before. This  
was a walk with edge, providing  
the opportunity to celebrate, or  
otherwise, a candidate for PM.  
The leader suggested a way of  
marking the occasion but details  
are sketchy.

As is the way, we again loaded ourselves  
into a pair of Subarus before gliding  
away from the Calwell Club at 6:30 am.  
High cloud accompanied us to Jindabyne  
but skies were clear over the mountains.  
Thredbo was replete with mountain bike  
competitors yet we found parking  
100 metres beyond the footbridge.

Chairlift \$32! Better than climbing,  
so all aboard Kosciuszko Express at  
9:15 am. The forecast wind met us at  
Eagles Nest but it proved beneficial in  
cooling us down as the day wore on.  
Only a few walkers on the steel track;  
welders repairing a section. The sunrays  
at Cootapatamba Lookout had faded to  
grey. By 10:30 am we were at Rawson  
Pass and stopped for morning tea at the  
start of Main Range Track. No flies, no  
wind (Kosciuszko acting as shield),  
layered clouds for entertainment.

We left the track and descended  
scrubby rocks to Wilkinsons Creek. A  
few eyebrights and trigger plants were in  
flower but billy buttons had gone to  
seed. Oreobolus studded the claypans as  
we headed west to the base of Abbott  
and started to climb. It got rocky toward  
the first peak — the glorious leader was  
flagging and cursed when the mob  
surged to the furthest peak. However, it  
was a good move as it was the intended  
destination (2145 m). Impressive place  
to see Kosciuszko's full height, the  
Ramsheads, Geehi and everything for  
miles around. Bushfire near Jagungal.

The wind was easily avoided just  
below the summit but lunch had to be  
brief and we were away at 1:00 pm.  
Peter found a lovely grassy descent back  
to the creek from where we climbed the  
old road to Muellers Pass. A fledgling  
pipit huddled in its grassy nest while  
mother fluttered around. Mobs of ravens  
in the area.

Dark clouds were rolling in from the  
west. The drop to Rawsons Creek and  
climb to Seamans Hut on a foot pad was  
relatively easy. (Don't stop for anything,  
the ants are ferocious.) From there we  
walked south, keeping east of craggy  
Etheridge Ridge: at first, grassy meadow,  
then tufts, then low mint bush, before we  
rejoined the grid near Snowy River. We  
were at the chairlift at 4:05 pm and  
Jindabyne at 5:00.

After coffee at Sundance (serious  
shortage of pies), we were back at  
Calwell at 7:15 pm. An expensive,  
extensive (18 km) effort but a great day.  
Worth repeating in January when the  
flowers are blooming.

**Brian Slee**

## Mt Kelly: a tough day walk

agreeing to assess the situation in another  
half hour, we pushed on. The under-  
growth fortunately thinned to woodland,  
and the passage up Mt Kelly was helped  
by expanses of granite boulders and  
faces.

### ... simply magnificent views

After passing a false summit, the route to  
the top was very speedy and, within 20  
minutes of starting the final climb, we  
were being buffeted by strong winds on  
the top of Mt Kelly. It was too short a  
visit as the views are simply magnificent.  
Mt Jagungal reared in its isolation on the  
southern horizon, while to the west the  
peaks of the Bogong Range stood out.  
The beauty of Namadgi was also spread  
out below us. In the distance, to the east,  
a clearing, marking the Yankee Hat car  
park, showed how far we had come.

### ... few visitors

The weather-worn visitors book showed  
that only six other groups had been there  
since the start of 2012. But there was no  
shelter on the summit from the gale that  
was blowing, and a reading of the  
accounts of other walkers would have to  
await a return visit, when the elements  
were a bit friendlier.

We descended slightly and, in the lee  
of some rocks, again took in the views  
while quickly dispatching our lunches.  
Just to the north, a cricket-pitch-like

*(continued from page 14)*

shape showed up on Rotten Swamp, in  
place for some remote scientific  
research.

### ... many traps for feet and ankles

Setting out again, we knew that downhill  
the return trip should be quicker, but we  
were already well into the afternoon and  
there was a chance of a moonlight stroll  
across the grassy plains, many kilometres  
away. I gauged the rate of our return trip  
against the rocky outcrops of the  
Burbidge Ridge and we were making  
good time. But as the granite tors and  
flanks faded from view we again found  
ourselves in steep country, well covered  
in vegetation that resisted our passing.  
Scratches upon scratches demanded that  
we pick our way gently through the  
scrub. It is hard to concentrate when you  
are tired, but this sort of country hides  
many traps for feet and ankles.

Another copperhead required a slight  
detour from our intended path. It would  
be interesting to know how many we  
didn't see.

We reached the gentler and more  
open slopes near Yankee Hat after four  
solid hours. As Alex pushed on, I leapt  
down from a fallen forest giant, only to  
roll my left ankle in an unseen hole.  
After ten hours of walking, this lapse in  
concentration brought me down in a  
painful way. The next few steps were not

pleasurable, but we were not going to  
have to activate the PLB.

As the pain dulled, we emerged from  
the forest and picked our way across the  
thistled grassland, sending rabbits  
scattering in our wake as the day drew to  
a close.

### ... a hard, long day but worth it ...

Back at the car park we turned and  
looked to the west. Mts Namadgi,  
Burbidge and Kelly dominated the sky-  
line, a view that had spurred the creation  
of a fantastic national park. It had been a  
hard, long day but worth it to share the  
vista that inspired Julie Henry and others  
so many years ago.

**Rod Griffiths**



# Chopper to the rescue

*How often have you found that your day has not gone to plan: instead events led to a situation that you could not have predicted in your wildest imagination?*

## A walk to the Pretty Plain Hut

Nearly ten years after it was destroyed in the 2003 fires, in November 2012 Mike and I had the opportunity to return to see the reconstructed Pretty Plain Hut on a five-day pack walk organised by Di Thompson for the NPA. Also accompanying Di were Gary Thompson, Helen Stevens, Kathy Saw, Esther Gallant, Meg McKone, Tim Walsh and David Large. We spent two nights at the Pretty Plain Hut, all new and clean-cut, hoping for a long fire-free life. The final night of our trip was at Wheelers Hut but without the Gang-gangs that had so frequently nested there. Our last day dawned fine, and, eager to beat the heat, we set out early. We negotiated a bad landslide along the way that made the fire trail impassable for vehicles. We bid farewell to the mighty Jagungal, forever rampant. We sat over morning tea watching strange cloud formations. Apart from the continuous ups and downs, the walking was deceptively easy. With no risk of taking a wrong turn along the Snakey Plain fire trail, we spread out; walking and talking at our own pace; stopping awhile to photograph flowers, admire views and watch birds as the inclination took us. The main incentive to keep moving was the thought of a late hamburger lunch at Cabramurra, together with real coffee.

## News of a mishap

Around 11 am, the call echoed up and down the fire trail that Helen had fallen. We were only 3 km from the cars. She had skidded on the loose gravel on a steep section of the fire trail, and hurt her ankle. As a precaution, she did not attempt to stand and, to our relief, we were able to gently move Helen a few metres uphill to a flatter section of the fire trail. We too had been

skidding as we stood beside her where she had fallen.

A brief examination convinced us that Helen shouldn't walk any further. Without any phone coverage from any of the various services members of the party subscribed to, the only option was to set off the personal locator beacon (PLB), something we carry in the hope that is all the insurance we need not to need it.

## Waiting for rescue

For the next few hours we sat around, wandered around, chatted, speculated, boiled the billy and waited. All sorts of questions arose: should we give Helen water, food, painkillers? How much warmth? Once we'd settled some foam mats under Helen and she swapped her damp shirt for thermals, she was resigned to wait patiently. For the rest of us, the waiting became tenser as time drew on. We strained our eyes scanning the sky, as though that would make a helicopter materialise. Occasionally, we heard the throb of a vehicle on the road or a high-flying jet, but each time the noise faded.

There was no way to communicate with the rescuers. That brings a feeling of powerlessness. In the meantime, we kept a record of Helen's vital signs, which were reassuring. The only time her pulse became elevated was when finally we heard, then sighted, the Snowy Hydro SouthCare Rescue helicopter. Then we had anxious minutes when the helicopter circled us four or five times, each circuit radiating further from us. It was looking for, but couldn't find, a convenient landing place.

## A difficult retrieval

The accident happened on a steep fire trail under Snow gums with a few small areas of low scrub nearby. Just as we were fearing the helicopter might leave to send in a land rescue, it dropped an orange smoke flare a hundred metres away, and descended low enough to allow two medics to slip out onto the ground to an area almost out of sight from us, before ascending again. The noise was immense, and the air was filled with flying litter. Our efforts to stay calm and in control were well and truly sabotaged.

The rescue team consisted of a doctor and a paramedic who immediately took over managing Helen. The doctor quickly examined Helen and the message was relayed to the helicopter that an evacuation was indeed needed.

Fortunately, we had a couple of brawny, gym-trained blokes in the group who were able to carry Helen up the fire trail to where there was a bit of a clearing between the trees and the helicopter could hover for a winch rescue. We were asked not to do anything to distract the helicopter pilot, who would need to fully concentrate on positioning the heli-copter.

## A superb pilot

For me, impressive though the doctor and paramedic were, the prize for professionalism went to the unseen helicopter pilot who held his machine so steady as it hovered as low as possible but out of reach of the trees. The consolation prize for bravery goes to Helen. The medics were fitted with

helmets and earmuffs but Helen had to wait on the fire trail directly under the helicopter as the doctor was winched up before she was harnessed and winched up with the paramedic. Although her head was huddled under the collar of her jacket, the noise, the mini-tornado of dust and stones from the road and plant debris flying around must have been really uncomfortable.

Once the helicopter left, a pall descended over us, and we were

*(continued next page)*







## Chopper to the rescue *(continued)*

Helen was on crutches eight weeks later on 13 January 2013, just a few days over ten years since the Kosciuszko fires began, when their property *Chitty*, close to the Warrumbungle National Park near Coonabarabran was suddenly burnt after lightning strikes. Their mud-brick house and Helen's studio that they'd built, and other sheds and vehicles were utterly destroyed.

Many members of the National Parks Association as well as other walking groups have enjoyed the generous hospitality of Helen and Jimmy over the years. Who could ever forget coming back from a walk guided by Helen and/or Jimmy, showering in the outdoor 'visitor' shower with water heated in Jimmy's ingenious arrangement,

and sitting around the camp fire of an evening. Helen's studio comprised one room for her pottery and another for her 24 years of ornithological surveys, library and computer. Fortunately, the computer with all the bird records was saved, as it was elsewhere at the time. Not so lucky Jimmy's garage and workshop.

Life is a pattern of give and take. This time Helen had to accept assistance from

others. On the first day of an NPA stay at *Chitty* in 2000, Adrienne Nicholson cracked her kneecap and spent the week there on crutches, with Helen looking after her.

The message: be well equipped and prepared.

Broken legs and ankles are not uncommon amongst experienced bushwalkers. I know of around a dozen breaks, mostly ankles/legs, in the last decade. Knowing that it can happen to any of us, and being prepared, will assist the rescue and recovery. We were lucky on this trip that all members of the group were well-equipped, well-experienced walkers.

Our experience with this helicopter rescue brought back memories of a memorable walk that Mike and I were on in January 2003. We arrived at Pretty Plain Hut on the day that lightning strikes started numerous fires in Kosciuszko National Park. Judy Kelly gave a firsthand account of that event in which we were helicoptered out to our cars thanks to the vigilant and proactive Park service personnel (*NPA Bulletin*, March 2003). For us it is particularly poignant that firstly Helen was helicoptered out nearly ten years later, then suffered the devastating loss of her and Jimmy's home in 2013 as a result of lightning.

Our thoughts are with Helen and Jimmy. We thank them for the memories that they have shared with so many of us and wish them well for their future.

**Annette Smith**

left to walk the remaining hour back to our cars and head for home. Never have we walked more carefully down the steep and loose gravelly fire trail, and somehow admiring our surroundings became secondary to arriving at the cars safely.

Now for that hamburger with the lot and coffee at Cabramurra; but guess what? The café had just closed for the day.

Helen was X-rayed in Canberra hospital and the initial diagnosis of a badly broken leg was confirmed. That evening they encased her foot, but she couldn't have a shower and wash six days of dirty hair until the following morning. That adage from grandma about clean underwear, could also apply to hair.

### More disaster follows

As if the traumas of a broken leg weren't enough at a time when Helen and Jimmy were celebrating significant birthdays with the extended family,

*Photos. Facing page and above. Helicopter rescue photos by Dianne Thompson.*

*Right. NPA memories from Chitty: Helen and Jimmy at home, by Max Lawrence; Inset. Up the Chitty hill, koala with a Siding Spring telescope dome on the skyline, by Annette Smith.*



# Tim's PLB really does work

*Tim Walsh was a member of Di Thompson's NPA packwalking group featuring in the previous article by Annette Smith. It was Tim's Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) which, through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), brought SouthCare to the rescue. In this article Tim provides a brief account of the rescue with emphasis on the role played by the PLB and helicopter rescue team. He does not intend it to be a first-aid primer.*

A PLB is an electronic device that uses the global COSPAS-SARSA search-and-rescue system to send out an internationally recognised distress signal. The message sent out is cross-referenced to a database of registered beacons. This means that AMSA is able to tell who has set off the alarm, and where they are.

This is the first time I have used a PLB in an emergency so I was interested to note the sequence of events and to see if I could make any improvements to my own preparation for a bush-walking trip.

The initial thing I realised was that my basic and remote area first-aid certificates are out of date and need renewing as soon as possible. I found I was hazy on such basic points as how to treat a person who could be in shock, other than to keep them warm and give reassurance. What about a hot drink for instance? Our group designated one person to record details of the accident for the medical crew: name of patient and contact details of next of kin; when and how the accident happened; what first aid had been given; the ongoing condition of the patient; and whether any food, water or drugs had been administered. The patient carried her Medicare card with her.

This information was appreciated by the rescue doctor. Although obvious after the event, it is one of the things that can easily be overlooked in the tension of an accident.

The rescue team took about two hours to arrive. I found out later that the

AMSA duty officer had not at first been able to pinpoint our position from the beacon's alarm. He called all three of my registered contacts to try to see if our position was known. Later he was able to locate our exact position from the PLB and notify the rescue team. Therefore, it seems one cannot assume automatically that by setting off a PLB the exact location will be known immediately.

PLBs have to be registered with AMSA. In doing so a personal web page is created. An important facility on this page is a section where one is encouraged to record forthcoming trips with the salient facts of the trip. I had recorded a brief summary of our intended route. However, some map references and size of the party may have been of some use. It is probably worth



*This rescue helicopter had to hover to allow the doctor and paramedic to jump out with their rescue and medical gear.  
Photo by Dianne Thompson.*

telling the contacts nominated with AMSA that one is off on a trip and the approximate area being visited.

This particular rescue was tricky in that the helicopter pilot, because of the slope of the hillside, was able to make only a very brief "landing" to off-load the doctor and paramedic before having to take off again. He was not able to land again to load the patient — this had to be done via winch. It was interesting to note that as the approaching helicopter got close to the site the PLB let off a more rapid beeping noise, presumably a direct

homing-in pattern. On landing, the paramedic appeared to use both her own communications device and my PLB to keep in touch with the pilot.

When we set off the beacon we also laid out bright groundsheets. This was supplemented by one of the group, who, on hearing the helicopter, stood in a prominent position on the fire trail in a red top. She believes that this was the first visual sighting of the group the pilot had. Obviously, common sense is required to take action appropriate for the individual circumstances of the incident.

Generally, mobile phones do not work in Kosciuszko National Park and one that might have worked (Telstra being the carrier) was not taken on this trip. Only Telstra-network phones seem

to be worth taking. Ironically, the accident happened about 3 kilometres from where our cars were parked on a main access road and a Telstra phone may have worked from one of the nearby peaks. It is probably worthwhile for groups to carry a phone, even when there are doubts about reception.

When home again I contacted the manufacturer of the PLB to find out the process for exchanging the battery and securing the seal. To my surprise I was asked to return the PLB and that a new one would be issued, free of charge. This I did of course and a new device arrived by express post. I am not sure if all manufacturers have the same policy.

It has been necessary to revise my PLB registration with AMSA as its serial number and something called the IUN are different.

**Timothy Walsh  
December 2012**

# PARKWATCH

*Edited extracts from recent journals and newsletters*

## NSW wilderness update

Since the 5th National Wilderness Conference in 2006, significant progress has been made towards wilderness protection in NSW. The Mummel Gulf, Yengo and Curracabundi wilderness areas and forty-six wilderness additions to existing areas have been declared over a total area of 228,459 hectares. Two wild rivers have been created within national parks, the Colo and the Grose rivers, bringing the total to six protected.

Counter-balancing these decisions have been policy changes to NSW park management. Respected barrister Tim Robertson SC believes the passage of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Visitors and Tourists) Act 2010* overturned 20 years of case law and destroyed the 'delicate balance that the Courts have struck, which give primacy to the conservation objectives of the Act'. For the first time, commercial tourism operations have been allowed in wilderness areas and a three-year horse riding trial has now been announced in five wilderness areas. In 2009, three huts were quietly renovated by the NPWS for commercial visitor accommodation in the largest area of wilderness acquired with the Dunphy Fund, the 16,200 ha Green Gully area. These facilities, and the signage directing visitors to them, are contrary to the management principles of the Wilderness Act and the development was undertaken without public comment and review process.

The protected areas of NSW, like those in Victoria and Queensland, are suffering from the redistribution of political power towards those with an interest in hunting, grazing of domestic stock, high-impact recreational uses and commercial development. When the O'Farrell Government was swept to power in March 2011, the Shooters and Fishers Party (SFP) strengthened its hold on the balance of power in the Legislative Council. The SFP has given notice of introducing, in the spring session of parliament, legislation that would open up wilderness areas to mountain bike and horse riding. More high impact national park access for shooters, bike and horse riders is just the tip of this political iceberg.

The political pressures on national parks and wilderness are becoming greater. Visitor-focused management is being distorted by political pressures, so that national parks risk being seen as just

another resource. Conservationists must work smarter, not harder, if we are to reinstate bipartisan support for nature-focused reserve management and adequate protection of the public's national parks.

*Nature NSW*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (summer 2012)

## Kattang Nature Reserve

Situated on the mid north coast of NSW, just 25 km south of Port Macquarie, is a tiny jewel in the national park estate. It is easy enough to overlook. After all, at 58 hectares, it is just a tiny dot amid a series of delightful national parks and nature reserves on this coastal strip. But it would be a shame if you did overlook it, since it has many hidden delights.

Kattang Nature Reserve was first suggested as a potential addition to the national park estate in 1977. A group of locals, under the banner of 'Save the Headland Action Group', prepared a submission for its dedication, and in November 1983 the land was converted from Crown land to become a reserve. It comprises the spectacular Perpendicular Point, accessible by an easy walking track, that juts out into the ocean and that promises so much for whale watching and pelagic birding. From there you get glimpses of the sharp, vertical cliffs to the south-east and sweeping views back along the coast to the north, taking in the entire North Haven beach front.

The reserve is based on Triassic sediments. The sediments form bands of conglomerates, shales and sandstone and this was then overlain by sand during the last glacial period (Pleistocene Period approx. 1 million years ago). As can be expected of such a combination, the soils are highly erodible, most moisture soaks in and the creeks are intermittent. The fragile soils support a surprisingly diverse array of flora. According to the Plan of Management that was signed off in 2005, there are 29 vegetation communities within this small patch. Perhaps the best known is the so-called 'Flower Bowl', a heath community that has a walking track and that attracts many people during the spring flowering.

The site was once badly affected by an infestation of Bitou Bush, but the Parks Service and local community groups, including active members of the Mid North Coast Branch of the NPA, have worked over many hours to bring that weed under control. It has been helped by a variety of grants, including one in 2012 for \$69,000 which the local Federal

MP, Rob Oakeshott, announced by stating:

Kattang Nature Reserve is a biodiverse natural area, part of a climate change migration corridor. NPWS and community groups have been restoring the reserve for many years. Lack of long term funding has meant that follow-up work has not always happened. Invasive species are still a problem. Well planned work over 6 years allows the targeting of regrowth in a strategic manner.

Given how this area looked prior to its reservation, the community and the Service deserve praise for what has been achieved!

Kattang Nature Reserve is worthy of a visit. It is small but it offers so much. Take time out and call in. You will be rewarded.

*Nature NSW*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (summer 2012)

## Defend the Commonwealth's environmental laws!

The influential Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, which includes some of Australia's big names in environmental policy and action, has released a statement on the proposed hand-back of environmental powers from the Commonwealth to the states, which was initiated in September by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Group puts the view that: 'There is no justification for handing Commonwealth approval powers to the states. It puts at risk decades of national environmental reform'.

The Group gives some suggestions for an alternative suite of reforms, drawing on the recommendations of Dr Allan Hawke's 2009 independent review of Australia's national environment laws (*Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act*). It argues that these Hawke reforms, many rejected at the time by the Rudd-Gillard Government, would help deliver COAG's dual goals to 'reduce regulatory burden and duplication for business' and, at the same time, 'deliver better environmental outcomes' for Australia.

The Commonwealth has been consulting with states and territories on how the hand-over might work, and is believed to have produced a series of standards that the states would have to follow. Many states would need to

*(continued on page 20)*

## **PARKWATCH** (continued from page 19)

update their legislation to make it consistent with national environmental laws. This appears to have triggered at least two conservative states, WA and Queensland, to consider such an update. The Barnett Government has announced that it plans to replace WA's 60-year-old conservation act with legislation to protect endangered species and habitat in alignment with federal laws, to avoid duplication and streamline development approvals.

The Baillieu Government has been a strong advocate of the hand-back but, as it has no real policies on the environment, and has thumbed its nose at federal laws on issues like alpine cattle grazing, it is difficult to understand how it could reconcile its approach. The Victorian Government's review of environmental impact assessment laws includes elements that appear to align with national laws.

The Victorian Government's poor performance on environmental regulation has been further highlighted by the Victorian Auditor-General. In a report on the 'Effectiveness of compliance activities: Dept of Primary Industries and Sustainability & Environment', tabled in parliament in October, the Auditor-General concluded that 'DSE deficiencies are substantial and require a concerted effort to address them ... These include the lack of accountability, oversight and risk-based compliance planning ...'

Everyone working for the environment has long known this. But instead of strengthening its environmental laws and enforcement approaches, the Victorian Government has put up a smokescreen. It's all too hard, they argue. We just have to water-down the rules so they don't have to be enforced.

*Park Watch* (VPNA), No. 251  
(December 2012)

### **Feral horses under the spotlight — again**

Horses are great animals, but they are domestic stock and belong on a farm or a paddock where they can get good shelter from bad weather. They don't belong in Victoria's High Country, where they have to suffer through fierce winter weather, only to face the possibility of dying in a summer bushfire, as a couple of thousand apparently did in 2003.

A 2009 survey of horses across the Victorian and NSW alpine region estimated the population at over 7,500, an increase of 20% annually from the previous post-fire survey of 2003. That yearly increase is continuing, with

current estimates of some 6,000 feral horses in the Victorian alpine region alone. Most of those horses are in the remote Cobberas region of the Alpine National Park, near the NSW border, with a much smaller population on the Bogong High Plains.

Though managers are well aware of the range of available solutions, the horse population is still exploding and the damage they do is growing. Importantly, the main population has to be managed across the national park/state forest boundary in Victoria, and across the NSW border into the Kosciuszko National Park. But a combination of a lack of funding and a fear of public sensitivities has frozen effective action.

Parks Victoria has now set up a community reference group, backed by a scientific advisory group, to try and come up with a management program that is workable and acceptable. This is not the first attempt to sort the problem out — far from it. But we hope it will be the one that comes up with much-needed fair-dinkum action. One thing that is not acceptable is ongoing neglect of this problem. It isn't good for the horses, and it's very damaging for wetlands and grasslands in the Alpine National Park.

*Park Watch* (VPNA), No. 251  
(December 2012)

### **Did you know?**

The earliest fossils of the short-beaked echidna date back to approximately 15 million years ago (Pleistocene era), with the oldest specimens found in South Australian caves.

*Park Watch* (VPNA), No. 251  
(December 2012)

### **Ecotourism in national parks**

The Queensland Government has introduced a bill into parliament to amend the Nature Conservation Act to provide for the development of privately funded, permanent ecotourism facilities. Based on current information, NPAQ is strongly opposed to this proposal, and is pursuing the matter accordingly. We are seeking further details, and preparing material to assist members who may wish to take up the matter individually.

*NPA News* (Qld), Vol. 82, No. 11  
(December 2012)

### **Great Queensland Bushwalk**

Membership Officer Anna Tran has provided Council with a comprehensive evaluation of the recent Great Queensland Bushwalk, sponsored and organised by NPAQ. One hundred and seventy two people attended the

17 activities held on 25 and 26 August 2012 in the Glass House Mountains, Lamington and D'Aguilar National Parks. Council will use the report as a basis for looking at the approach to be taken in 2013.

*NPA News* (Qld), Vol. 82, No. 10  
(November 2012)

### **World first — HSI ensures all Australian department stores go fur free**

This year will see the end of the sale of fur in all department stores in Australia. After many years of negotiations, the final department store has made the pledge. The department stores involved include Myer, David Jones, Big W, Target, K-Mart and Harris-Scarf.

In 2004, the Humane Society International (HSI) secured a ban on dog and cat fur imports into Australia after its undercover investigation in China revealed a dark and dirty world of illegal dog and cat fur trading. Millions of animals die every year to feed this horrific trade. Although HSI secured the ban in 2004, there has been no effort by Customs to uncover illegal fur entering our country. They have in fact admitted that they have no staff trained to detect dog and cat fur.

In response to Customs inertia, we alerted our members and thousands of retailers to the possibility that, due to inadequate labelling, they could inadvertently be selling dog and cat fur. The response has been overwhelming and the resulting fur-free policies from all Australian department stores lead the world in compassionate fashion.

*Humane Society International Newsletter*, Issue 21 (2012)

### **Kilimanjaro Fieldmen — saving Africa's wildlife**

HSI has supported the West Kilimanjaro Fieldmen Project in Tanzania for about 10 years. This is a project in which local Maasai villagers carry out frequent patrols of the 700 sq km that encompasses their communities. To the west of Africa's Kilimanjaro, its mightiest mountain, the Fieldmen work to protect some of east Africa's most endangered wildlife.

The Fieldmen patrol the greater Amboseli basin, which straddles the Tanzania-Kenya border, monitoring all wildlife and human activities in the area. Their presence has proved a key deterrent to poachers — one of the greatest threats to wild animals.

With the consideration of a range of  
(continued next page)

## **PARKWATCH** (continued)

stakeholders, illegal trophy and bushmeat poaching has been virtually eliminated. Elephant and giraffe populations have risen sharply, and data have been gathered on the abundance of lion and cheetah. However, such encouraging trends will continue only as long as the patrols are sustained and the local community continues to benefit and your ongoing support will ensure this occurs.

Humane Society International  
Campaign Report 2012

### **Managing tourism in protected areas**

Protected areas are the major mechanism for the conservation of biodiversity, internationally and in Australia. Australia has a good track record in creating protected areas, including programs to promote an ecologically representative and comprehensive system of parks. Many parks are also popular with visitors, providing people with the chance to experience nature and appreciate these stunning landscapes. However, visitors to parks, their activities, and the facilities they use, have environmental impacts. This includes impacts on soils, vegetation, aquatic systems and animals. Managing visitors involves minimising impacts while still providing opportunities for nature-based tourism and recreation. Visiting parks can also enhance conservation directly via fees and other income for parks, and indirectly through increasing support for the establishment and management of parks and other natural areas.

Recreation ecology is a specific area of research focused on evaluating the range and severity of impacts from different types of recreational and tourism activities and ways to minimise impacts. This includes documenting impacts on birds from small-scale, nature-based tourism activities such as hiking, to evaluating mass tourism developments such as ski resorts. This research can be used by park managers, tourism operators, conservation organisations and others to conduct and evaluate desktop assessments of environmental impacts when new activities and facilities are proposed for parks. It is critical that assessments are done, done well and evaluated prior to implementation. Adequate monitoring of impacts once the activity or infrastructure is up and running is rare in Australia, due to limited resources. Also, once operational, it is often politically difficult to then remove the activity or

infrastructure even if it is shown to have impacts. It is also expensive to rehabilitate a site once it is damaged. Before any ecological or social analysis is undertaken, the following question needs to be addressed: should the park even be considered as a location for the activity/infrastructure? Tourism and recreation in parks should be nature-based and, more particularly, ecotourism focused: that is, the attraction should be the natural environment, and use of the park should contribute to conservation. This particularly applies to high-impact activities and infrastructure where the setting is of secondary importance. Often there are far more suitable locations outside the park.

Pre-assessments need to consider the conservation value of the site, the nature of the disturbance (e.g. horse riding, hiking, skiing), the resistance of the site to disturbance, its capacity to recover from disturbance, the susceptibility of the site to erosion, the severity of direct and indirect impacts, likely amount of use, timing of use in relation to critical ecological events (flowering, nesting etc.) and in relation to social factors such as crowding, conflict, temporal and spatial displacement of visitors and likely compliance with minimum impact behaviour, and the total area likely to be affected. They also need to evaluate the likely success of potential management actions to minimise these impacts.

*Nature NSW*, Vol. 56, No. 4  
(summer 2012)

### **VNPA calls for marine planning framework**

The VNPA has sent a submission to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) outlining critical areas that the Council should consider in

developing its Marine Investigation Discussion Paper. The full submission is on the Association's website. One of the key opportunities in this investigation is for VEAC to establish principles for a statewide marine planning framework that will provide for better management and protection of the state's entire marine environment. The 2011 Victorian Auditor-General's Inquiry into the environmental management of Marine Protected Areas also identified this critical gap, and suggested that an integrated statewide policy and planning for the whole marine environment is the most effective way of managing threats. Importantly, the Victorian Government committed to implement all of the Auditor-General's findings, which adds further weight to the need to develop a comprehensive marine plan.

The findings of the recent Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW strongly backed the extensive domestic and international scientific literature and evidence about the overwhelmingly positive biodiversity benefits of MPAs. Some of the scientific evidence has shown that habitats and ecosystems improve after the establishment of no-take MPAs, particularly the recovery of target species such as lobsters and large predatory fish.

The VNPA believes that VEAC should also consider gaps in the current network of MPAs, with information on this in the VNPA's recent marine nature conservation review being a good starting point.

*Park Watch* (VPNA), No. 251  
(December 2012)

**Compiled by Hazel Rath**



*Participants on Esther Gallant's relaxed pack walk October 2012. Photo Adrienne Nicholson.*

# NPA notices

## New members of the association



The NPA ACT welcomes the following new members:

Meg and Frank McCone  
Terrence Purs and Sandra Matthews  
Sandy Clugston and Kerry Blackburn  
Debbie Worner and Fred Leftwich

We look forward to seeing everyone at NPA activities.

### National Parks Association Calendar

	March	April	May	June
Public holidays	Mon 11 Fri 29-Sun 31	Mon 1 Thur 25	—	Mon 10
General meetings	Thur 21	Thur 18	Thur 16	Thur 20
Committee meetings	Tues 5	Tues 2	Tues 7	Tues 4
Gudgengy Bush Regeneration <sup>1</sup>	Sat 9	Sat 13	Sat 11	Sat 8

Further details: 1. GBRG. Meet at Namadgi Visitor Centre, 9:15am or Yankee Hat car park 10:00am

## NPA Life Membership



The committee is calling for nominations for Honorary Life Membership. If you think that a member has done some extraordinary work for our association and is worthy of this recognition, please send a confidential nomination to the secretary Sonja Lenz by mid-April. Further information on what to put into the nomination can be found on the NPA website or by contacting Kevin McCue: phone 6251 1291 or email [mccue.kevin@gmail.com](mailto:mccue.kevin@gmail.com).

## Timor Leste

NPA member Elizabeth Teather wrote an article about her trip to Timor Leste in 2009 which we published in the *NPA Bulletin* (December 2010).

*A longer account of that memorable trip has just been published by another participant, Stephen Utick. Written in diary form, it is both readable and informative. Stephen is a botanist, and NPA members will appreciate his detailed botanical notes (as well as notes on a wide variety of other aspects, from 'capoeira' to 'cisterns and sanitation'). The armchair traveller will enjoy the immediacy of the diarist's reaction as each day unfolds new landscapes in this poverty-stricken but beautiful nation, and opens new windows on its terrible recent past. Intending travellers will find invaluable practical advice. The text is illustrated by 66 small colour photographs. It costs \$15. Proceeds will go to projects in Timor Leste sponsored by Canberra Friends of Dili. To purchase it, contact Robert Altamore 6287 7512, [altamr@bigpond.com](mailto:altamr@bigpond.com)*

*There was an earlier version of this account, which was in such demand that Canberra Friends of Dili asked for a new, expanded version. We hope to sell enough copies to cover costs and then help fund our projects in Timor Leste.*

**Liz Teather**

## NPA Scholarship

The ANU has extended the closing date for all Honours student scholarships, and the result is that the recipient of the NPA scholarship has yet to be determined as we go to press. Details will be in the June edition of the *Bulletin*.

However, NPA has been informed that the ANU central communication office has asked to profile recipients of awards from the Fenner School, and the School has put the NPA scholarship forward for this purpose. Watch this space.

## KOALAS

Kevin McCue has dug up this interesting article from *The Central Queensland Herald*, Thursday 28 November 1940, page 8. Will we ever learn??

A NATURALIST'S NOTEBOOK (By "N.L.R.")  
THE VANISHING KOALA.

*The slaughter of that curious Australian mammal, the koala, is a perpetual disgrace to the authorities who sanctioned it. In 1908 no less than 57,933 koala pelts were marketed in Sydney alone and carefully compiled statistics reveal that in 1920 and 1921 205,679 of these interesting and inoffensive creatures were sacrificed to the fur trade. Periodically disease takes a heavy toll and it is estimated that millions perished in this manner in virulent outbreaks in 1897-8-9 and from 1900 to 1903. Unfortunately, too, the koala is not plastic or adaptable like the fox or the rat being dependent upon gum trees for its existence and selecting only a limited number for food purposes. It is a classic example of a highly specialised animal penalised by its specialisation.*

## Cover photographs

### Front cover

**Main photo.** Tim Walsh, Esther Gallant, David Large and Adrienne Nicholson: four cold NPA walkers in Rendezvous Creek valley at the end of Esther's "relaxed pack walk" last October.

Photo Max Lawrence

**Insets. Left.** No NP shooting protesters (article page 4).

Photo supplied by NSW NPA

**Centre.** Martin Chalk victorious over the pine (article page 6).

Photo Max Lawrence

**Right.** Arthur River rainforest (article page 3).

Photo Ted Mead

### Back cover

**Main photo.** Tianjara Falls in Morton National Park

Photo Martin Chalk

# General Meetings

Third Thursday of the month, (not December or January)  
8:00pm, Uniting Church hall, 56 Scrivener Street, O'Connor



## Thursday 21 March

*Burrhamys: possums with attitude*

**Matthew Higgins**

Historian, writer and film maker

Australia's mountain pygmy possum (*Burrhamys parvus*) is an iconic yet rarely seen animal of our high country. The world's only marsupial to hibernate for long periods under snow, Burrhamys is Australia's only mammal to live solely above the snowline. It is also endangered. This presentation will describe these beautiful animals and the annual fieldwork that is undertaken to increase our knowledge of them so that their future might be secured.

## Thursday 18 April

*The secret life of the Platypus*

**Dr Elise Furlan**

Post-doctoral Fellow – Molecular Ecology, Institute for Applied Ecology, University Research Centre, University of Canberra

What makes the platypus unique? Does their body size alter with the local environment? Are platypus of Tasmania different to those of the mainland? All will be revealed in this presentation.

## Thursday 16 May

**To be advised.**

Check NPA website or *Burning Issues* closer to the date

This *Bulletin* was prepared by:

Editor, Max Lawrence;  
Sub-editor, Ed Highley;  
Presentation, Adrienne Nicholson

## National Parks Association of the ACT Incorporated

Inaugurated 1960

### Aims and objectives of the Association

- Promotion of national parks and of measures for the protection of fauna and flora, scenery, natural features and cultural heritage in the Australian Capital Territory and elsewhere, and the reservation of specific areas.
- Interest in the provision of appropriate outdoor recreation areas.
- Stimulation of interest in, and appreciation and enjoyment of, such natural phenomena and cultural heritage by organised field outings, meetings or any other means.
- Cooperation with organisations and persons having similar interests and objectives.
- Promotion of, and education for, conservation, and the planning of landuse to achieve conservation.

### Office-bearers

<i>President</i>	Rod Griffiths	6288 6988 (h)
	rod.blackdog@gmail.com	
<i>Vice-President</i>	Vacant	
<i>Secretary</i>	Sonja Lenz	6251 1291 (h)
	sonjalenz67@gmail.com	
<i>Treasurer</i>	Chris Emery	6249 7604 (h)
	chris.emery@optusnet.com.au	

### Committee members

Christine Goonrey (Immediate Past President)	6231 8395 (h)
	cgoonrey@grapevine.com.au
George Heinsohn	6278 6655 (h)
	george.heinsohn@gmail.com
Clive Hurlstone	6288 7592 (h) 0407 783 422 (mob)
	cjhurls@bigpond.net.au
Judy Kelly	6253 1859 (h)
	judy.kelly@tpg.com.au
Max Lawrence	6288 1370 (h)
	mlawrence@netspeed.com.au
Kevin McCue	6251 1291 (h)
	mccue.kevin@gmail.com
Bernard Morvell	0401 679 254 (mob)
	bernard.morvell@daff.gov.au
Mike Smith	6286 2984 (h)
	msmith@netspeed.com.au

### Conveners

<i>Outings Sub-committee</i>	Mike Smith	6286 2984 (h)
	msmith@netspeed.com.au	
<i>Environment Sub-committee</i>	Rod Griffiths	6288 6988 (h)
	rod.blackdog@gmail.com	
<i>Publications Sub-committee</i>	Kevin McCue	6251 1291 (h)
	mccue.kevin@gmail.com	
<i>Bulletin Working Group</i>	Max Lawrence	6288 1370 (h)
	mlawrence@netspeed.com.au	

The NPA ACT office is in the Conservation Council building, Childers Street\*, City. It is staffed by volunteers but not on a regular basis. Callers may leave phone or email messages at any time and they will be attended to. The post office mail box is cleared daily.

\* the office move to new premises in Barry Drive is imminent.

<b>Phone:</b>	(02) 6229 3201	0412 071 382
<b>Website:</b>	www.npaact.org.au	
<b>Email:</b>	admin@npaact.org.au	
<b>Address:</b>	GPO Box 544, Canberra ACT 2601	

### Subscription rates (1 July to 30 June)

Household membership	\$44	Single members	\$38.50
Corporate membership	\$33	<i>Bulletin</i> only	\$33
Full-time student/Pensioner	\$22		

All the above subscription categories reduce to \$11 if a donation of \$100 or more is made.

### Advertising

The *Bulletin* accepts advertisements and inserts. Contact the Editor for information and rates.

### NPA Bulletin

Contributions of articles, letters, drawings and photographs are always welcome. Items accepted for publication may also be published on the NPA website. Items accepted for publication will be subject to editing. Send all items to The *Bulletin* Team, admin@npaact.org.au, or the postal address above.

**Deadline for the June 2013 issue: 30 April 2013.**

Printed by Instant Colour Press, Belconnen, ACT.

ISSN 0727-8837



For information on NPA ACT activities, please visit our website <http://www.npaact.org.au>

The great range of NPA field guides or a beautiful book about Namadgi National Park are available from the office or some bookstores.

