

# colong bulletin

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Wayfaring in Wollemi: stories of people in wilderness

BY ANDY MACQUEEN

352 pages, hard cover, 140 maps  
and images

RRP \$40 includes postage within  
Australia from the Colong  
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**C**ONTRARY to arguments  
thrown up by its detractors,  
wilderness does not deny  
human presence, either  
past, present or future. What it  
denies are modern infrastructure and  
development.

In his latest book, *Blue Mountains bushwalking* historian Andy Macqueen celebrates human presence in the Wollemi, the largest protected wilderness in NSW, by presenting the stories of around twenty-eight individuals. These include a number of surveyors, ranging from those who were driven to drink or suicide, to the irrepressible bush-loving Major Clews; various cattlemen who took up holdings in the remote volcanic oases, clearly not for any great profit but rather because they loved the place; the first bushwalkers and canoeists who ventured out there without the benefit of good maps; a government geologist who mapped much of the volcanics, perhaps because he liked being out there more than because he was required to do so; men obsessed with schemes for railways and dams; and conservationists who saved or protected the place.

Perhaps most likeable, there was a wandering phrenologist who preached a

conservation message, still meaningful today, over a century later.

In researching each of his subjects Macqueen followed their footsteps in the wilderness. Each chapter comprises a series of his personal diary entries, each made at a relevant location, in which he describes his subjects' undertakings and contemplates their relationship with the wilderness environment. In doing so, he weaves in a great deal of Wollemi history not specifically related to his subjects, and also much of his personal story, acknowledging the events in his life that have brought him there.

Those looking for a Wollemi guidebook may be disappointed. While his book contains a wealth of stories and information to inspire the bushwalking adventurer, Macqueen does not often describe his own walking routes, and avoids giving too much away when it comes to special places.

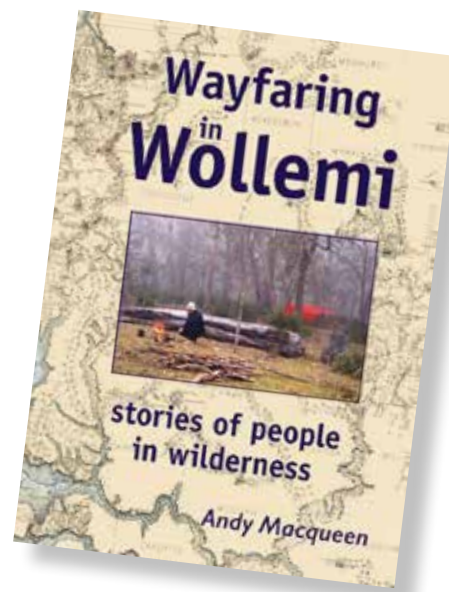
This is not just to protect such places, but to protect the sense of mystery that he sees as a crucial value of wilderness. As he says in the introduction, "I'm sure if you're a keen explorer you'll figure things out for yourself. Feel free to do so: on the way you'll no doubt make your own discoveries, and you'll find your own way to connect with the country. Perhaps you'll keep your discoveries under your hat, so generations of future explorers can make those discoveries for themselves. And make their own connections."

Macqueen also frequently refers to the timelessness of wilderness, contrasting it with "the wasteland of transient modern society". One of his subjects, Sue Morrison, tells him at

Gospers Mountain that "I'm just this tiny blip like one of these ants crawling around. I never did look at the bush in the same way after that, you know. I just had that real sense of—eternity."

The traditional Aboriginal people are acknowledged frequently in the book, but their particular stories are missing. As Macqueen says, their world was lost when their Country was invaded and the English Crown, with its surveyors and place-namers took possession. In the final chapter Macqueen recounts some of his own experience in assisting with surveys of Wollemi rock art. It is in this chapter that his thoughts about the original owners—and mystery of the Wollemi—come together in a moving and positive conclusion.

This book will appeal to historians, bushwalkers and wilderness advocates alike. It is beautifully written and presented, and highly recommended.



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*Monthly General Meetings* will be held at our office at Level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 6.00pm on the third Wednesday of the month on December 20th, January 17th, February 21st and March 21st. Members and visitors are welcome.

# World Heritage gate unlocked for Royal NP

BY GEOFF MOSLEY\*

THE PUSH TO have Royal National Park inscribed on the World Heritage List has now been going on for five years and has won widespread support amongst conservation groups and the local community. The Park falls within the boundaries of Wollongong City and Sutherland Shire Councils and both of these local government bodies have significantly pledged their unanimous support for the nomination. The case for World Heritage recognition is easy to understand when one considers that Royal National Park, reserved in April 1879, was the first protected area to be set aside for what was, then, a new land use purpose of "national park". In the USA the term, as at Yellowstone in 1872, was used differently, to indicate that a park was under federal, not State, jurisdiction.

In the 1870s the public parks movement made an enormous leap from reserves in urban environments such as Parramatta, Hyde and Moore Parks in Sydney and Central Park in New York, into the natural environments of Yellowstone and Royal. This was the beginning of the national parks systems now found in every country around the world, and it is surely important that the significance of this major step in protected area history be recognised at the global level.

The major obstacle to World Heritage listing of Royal National Park, along with the adjoining reserves of



View south of Marley Beach and Royal National Park's dramatic sea cliffs. Photo: D. Noble

Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area (the 'Royal Reserves') is that, surprisingly, the theme of 'an area of importance in world protected area history' was up until now, not recognised by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. Earlier this month the World Heritage Committee made a decision that changed this and paved the way for a successful nomination of the Royal Reserves and also for a renomination for similar values that were not accepted in the 2000 World Heritage listing of the Greater Blue Mountains Area.

On July 9 in Krakow Poland, the World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the English Lake District on the World Heritage List. In doing so, it gave international recognition to the role this area had played in the development of the conservation movement and the concept of protected areas. The boundary of the

area listed was that of the Lake District National Park covering 229,205 hectares, reserved in 1951 under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act.

The World Heritage listing of the Lake District only occurred because of the incredible persistence of English conservationists over three decades. The first nomination of the site was made in 1986, but the World Heritage Committee deferred action in 1987 and again in 1990 while it considered the broadening of the World Heritage values system to include cultural values, including cultural landscapes. After it had recognised these new values, the first sites inscribed under the new criteria were Tongariro National Park (in 1993 for its heritage significance to Maoris) and Uluru-Kata Tjuta (in 1994 for its Aboriginal significance).

It may seem ironic that other sites important to the

19th Century evolution of conservation and protected area ideas and concepts, to include reservation of natural areas have yet to be inscribed on the World Heritage List for these values, when one considers that there are many World Heritage sites commemorating aspects of the industrial revolution, and that it was the centenary of Yellowstone National Park (reserved in 1872) that inspired the introduction of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. There are two reasons for these List omissions, first that Yellowstone (World Heritage listed in 1978) and Yosemite (listed in 1984) were inscribed for their natural values before the cultural criteria were added and have not been renominated, and second because the recognition of the importance of these 19th Century concepts was boosted only this year with the inscription of the English Lake District.

Returning to the Lake District decision, we have to go back in terms of origins to the incredible insight of a Lake District local, the poet William Wordsworth, who in an introduction to the 1810 book *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland and Lancashire*, expressed the now widely held view that everyone has an interest in scenically attractive countryside regardless of ownership, saying that the Lake District was "a sort of natural property in which every man has a right and an interest who has an eye to see and a heart to enjoy".

Initially it was thought

that the conservation remedy for preserving the rural and natural landscapes of the Lake District would be through the efforts of a non-government group – The National Trust formed in 1895 and was given statutory powers in 1907. Today this body owns and manages a fifth of the National Park. Between the two World Wars however, it became increasingly clear, largely through the work of Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Wales (formed 1926 and 1928), that a bigger effort to secure the planning and management of areas like the Lake District was needed and this was provided in 1949 by the passage of national parks legislation. Today there are 13 National Parks and 38 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together occupying a quarter of England and Wales as well as many nature reserves and sites of special scientific significance.

The inclusion of the Lake District on the World Heritage List for its importance in the history of conservation and protected areas must surely have unlocked the gate for the listing of other sites that have played an important role in the establishment of extensive systems of national parks and wilderness areas in natural areas that are now world-wide in distribution. Obvious national park candidates that had their origins in the 19th Century and played pivotal roles in the spread of these systems are Yosemite and Yellowstone in the USA, Banff National Park in Canada

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# Let's make the Gardens of Stone a world-class reserve

A review of NSW botanical data\* confirms that the public forests of the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal have the greatest plant diversity of any public forest in NSW. The research by local naturalists establishes that the Newnes, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests have the greatest plant diversity when compared to other forests of similar size.

This diversity is greatly enhanced by being within internationally significant and spectacular pagoda landscapes, the Gardens of Stone's drawcard. Given the region's well-known dramatic scenery, its cultural and Aboriginal heritage and record plant diversity, these forests would make a world class addition to the NSW reserve system.

The research reveals that Newnes State Forest, the largest forest in the reserve proposal, has the most plant species of any State Forest in NSW with 913, while Ben Bullen State Forest comes third with 645 native plant species recorded. When threatened plant species are compared, these forests have the same top rankings, Newnes recording the most with 29 and Ben Bullen third with 12 threatened plant species.

When forest size is considered, Newnes again comes first for plant diversity when comparing forests in the 20,000 to 30,000 hectare size class, Ben Bullen State Forest is the most diverse mid-sized forest (7,000 to 8,000 hectares), and even the smaller Wolgan State Forest tops the 1,000 to 2,000 hectare size class.

In addition, Newnes and Ben



Grassy Tableland Woodlands are a key part of the pagoda landscape and again threatened by open-cut mining. Photo: J. Templin

Bullen State Forests contain more plant species than local National Parks and reserves, including Mugii Murumban State Conservation Area, Capertee National Park, Marrangaroo National Park and the existing Gardens of Stone National Park.

Newnes State Forest's

twenty-nine Threatened and ROTAP-listed flora species also beats many iconic National Parks: Kosciuszko National Park at twenty-four; Kuring-gai Chase National Park, twenty-two; Kanangra-Boyd National Park, sixteen; and the Royal National Park at thirteen.

If it were readily possible to make comparisons between state forests on the number ecologically endangered vegetation communities (EECs), then the Gardens of Stone Stage Two reserve proposal forests would again rank at the top. The Newnes and Ben Bullen forests have six EECs: Newnes Plateau's Shrub Swamps, Hanging Swamps, Rush-Sedge-Snow Gum Hollow Wooded Heath, and Mountain Hollow Grassy Fen; and Capertee's Rough-barked Apple-Redgum-Yellow Box-Grassy Woodlands (also containing the Vulnerable Black Gum, *Eucalyptus aggregata*) and Capertee Rough-barked Apple-Redgum-Yellow Box Derived Native Grassland.

The local botanical assessment confirms last year's comprehensive review of heritage values by Ian Brown# that found the diversity of the area to be complementary to and almost equal to that of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area which is 25 times larger.

Newnes Plateau is a potentially vital *refugium* for biodiversity during climate change, and its now-forested sand dunes are an important research site into prehistoric climate change, particularly with regard to events since the Last Glacial Maximum around 20,000 years ago. Ian Brown argues that a 'potentially compelling case could be made for an integrated landscape-based [National Heritage] nomination encompassing pagodas, montane sand-dunes and peat swamps, threatened fauna and rare threatened plants and communities'.

In a review of Mr Brown's report, Dr Doug Benson, Hon. Research Associate of the National Herbarium of NSW, recommended that taking a broader view of the Newnes Plateau than just the Pagoda country, and its juxtaposition to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, considerably strengthens the argument for [listing] the whole area.

By any test, the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 reserve proposal is an outstanding region, and irrational job fears must not continue to block its conservation and effective management.

#### REFERENCES:

\* NSW State Forests – Flora Diversity, summary data sheet by Lithgow Environment Group obtained from: [http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/atlaspublicapp/UI\\_Modules/ATLAS/\\_AtlasSearch.aspx](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/atlaspublicapp/UI_Modules/ATLAS/_AtlasSearch.aspx)

# Ian Brown (2016) *The Gardens of Stone Reserve proposal – Towards National Heritage* [https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/files/news/gos2\\_values\\_report\\_web.pdf](https://www.colongwilderness.org.au/files/news/gos2_values_report_web.pdf)

*The State Government needs to act now!*

Reservation of the Gardens of Stone region in a state conservation area is the critical step in transitioning Lithgow's economy away from coal industry decline towards a vibrant tourism future similar to the neighbouring Blue Mountains. Time is running out for both the Gardens of Stone and Lithgow's coal-based economy..

**The Gardens of Stone Alliance**

## World Heritage gate unlocked for Royal NP, cont'd from p.2

and Royal National Park in Australia.

Although the federal government has the final responsibility for nominating sites for World Heritage listing in Australia, it is currently leaving the job of assessment

largely to State and Territory Governments. After taking advice from consultants, the NSW Government arrived at the conclusion that the theme needed for a successful nomination of the Royal Reserves was "The Evolution

of Conservation Philosophy and Protected Areas". This view was arrived at before the World Heritage listing of the English Lake District, which should have changed everything. Time to open the gate Australia!

\* Geoff Mosley has been involved with World Heritage since 1973. He has been a member of the World Commission on Protected Areas since 1979 and represented Australasia and Oceania on the Council of IUCN from 1981 to 1988. He is the author of *The first national park: a natural for world heritage* (2012) and was one of the desktop reviewers for IUCN of the English Lake District World Heritage nomination.



# NCC Annual Conference 2017

The yearly gathering of NSW conservation groups, the Nature Conservation Council's Annual Conference, has morphed into a three-day event, with a Friday training day and a weekend of presentations from a range of speakers, organisational reporting, the NSW Environment Awards and voting on motions and policy put to the conference by members.

This year's Conference heard that the movement continues to become more culturally diverse while vigorously campaigning and engaging with government at all levels. This has been both reactive, with concerted efforts to stop environmentally destructive, new biodiversity legislation, and proactive with NCC's campaign to repower NSW with community-based, renewable energy.

All environment groups in NSW are reinventing themselves as they struggle with the behemoth of NSW Government "reform", that is creating a smaller public service through privatisation of services while undertaking intensification of resource development and urban expansion. This also means more complexity with concomitant difficulties in staying focused on various environmental missions. Overall, conservation groups do a good job, but it is difficult to achieve success and deliver outcomes with a disinterested government.

The 2017 Annual Conference passed the following Colong Foundation motions:

## 1. Western Sydney Airport

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW oppose plans for a Western Sydney Airport due to unacceptable social, environmental and economic costs and request immediate termination of project investment, planning and development.

## 2. Don't raise Warragamba Dam wall

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW oppose NSW Government plans to raise Warragamba Dam wall and the Full Storage Level of Lake Burragarang. FURTHER, that the Nature Conservation Council of

NSW: a) oppose revocation to any World Heritage, Wilderness or National Park areas in the vicinity of Lake Burragarang;

b) support the protection of free-flowing tributaries entering Lake Burragarang from flood inundation, including the Kowmung River, a declared wild river; and

c) support the development of environmentally sustainable flood management strategies for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.

## 3. Reject horse riding in wilderness

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW call for horse riding in declared wilderness to be immediately terminated as it is incompatible with wilderness principles, not popular with horse riders and associated with illegal activities.

## 4. Reject Perisher development

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW call for the Minister for Planning to stop the over-development of Kosciuszko, our largest and most loved national park, by cancelling the lapsed Concept Plan Approval 262-100-2004 for the Perisher Village Resort that would otherwise convert Perisher village into a town.

## 5. Protect The Gardens of Stone – a transition plan for Lithgow

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW call on the NSW Government to take the necessary steps to:

a) reserve as soon as possible, the Gardens of Stone Stage Two proposal in a State Conservation Area; and

b) identify and protect all heritage values in the Gardens of Stone Region when Government

authorities assess and make recommendations in relation to major project proposals; so that

c) Lithgow can transition to a leading tourist destination with its fascinating cultural stories and the awe-inspiring Gardens of Stone on its doorstep, and does not decline as coal resources become exhausted.

## 6. No infrastructure in national parks

THAT the Nature Conservation Council of NSW reaffirm that:

a) infrastructure not required for national park purposes, including pipelines, dams, pump-storage schemes, powerlines, telecommunication towers, easements, roads and railway lines, is incompatible with national park values;

b) existing infrastructure should be removed from national parks when these structures approach the end of their design life, become unnecessary, obsolete or uneconomic; and

c) operators of infrastructure in national parks must progressively implement measures to reduce the environmental impacts of infrastructure, until removal occurs.

The passage of Conference motions ensures we understand each other and where we are collectively going, be it towards legal and economic reform, to the barricades or towards a definitive conservation vision. These collective decisions are conveyed to government and authorities by official correspondence from the Nature Conservation Council.

For more info on the Annual Conference, go to:

<https://www.nature.org.au/about/governance/annual-conference-2017/>

# Dam Madness!

BY HARRY BURKITT, KOWMUNG

IN JUNE 2016, then NSW Premier Mike Baird announced that Warragamba Dam's wall would be raised by 14 metres. The stated reason for the dam wall raising is flood mitigation. The estimated cost of the project is close to \$1 billion, with cost blow-outs likely given the record of many government infrastructure projects.

There is a very good reason why large dams have not been built in NSW for the last 30 years. By their very nature, dams have devastating impacts on the natural environment. Unfortunately, from time to time, governments still see political opportunity in announcing environmentally destructive dam projects when viable alternatives are available. The raising of Warragamba Dam wall typifies such political opportunism.

The increased height of the dam would hold 1,000 gigalitres of water – the equivalent of an additional two Sydney Harbours on top of the existing dam. It would inundate and destroy 1,000 hectares of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, 4,700 hectares of national parks, and 1,800 hectares of declared Wilderness Area. Five kilometres of the Kowmung River, one of our few remaining wild rivers, will be regularly drowned under Lake Burragarang.

Some of our most-loved Blue Mountains bushwalking

destinations, including the Kedumba Valley, would be scarred by a permanent ring of weeds and sediment. The sediment ring would be visible from Echo Point, Katoomba, home of the iconic Three Sisters. The raised dam would irreparably damage World Heritage Listed environments and put the Blue Mountains' \$400 million a year tourism industry at risk.

So, why is the government embarking upon such an expensive, ineffective and environmentally destructive project? We know from recently published records from budget estimates that Water Utilities Minister, Don Harwin, has said the NSW Government plans to open 2,355 hectares of downstream floodplains to property developers if the dam wall is raised. The property developers want to build sprawling new suburbs across the Hawkesbury-Nepean floodplains. This is a seriously dangerous idea.

Property developers think that raising Warragamba Dam will allow them to falsely claim that the thousands of new houses they build will be safe from flooding. Floods are a natural and unstoppable phenomenon in the valley. Raising Warragamba Dam will by no means stop floods from happening. At best, a raised dam wall would marginally reduce the height of some floods. Building houses on floodplains puts thousands of

*continued on p. 5*

*The lower Kowmung River will be flooded to a depth of 14 metres, killing majestic river oaks and other streambank vegetation. Photo: A. Cox*





# Tasmanian Wilderness Update

BY NICK SAWYER, TASMANIAN NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

NORMALLY, NO NEWS is good news, but in this case, it's because all deliberations on proposed developments are being conducted behind closed doors, thanks to the Tasmanian Government's secretive Expressions of Interest (EoI) process.

The 1999 Management Plan for the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area left no doubt about the importance of wilderness: "The area comprises a large percentage of the remaining extensive, high quality, temperate wilderness in Australia, and is one of only a few such regions in the world. It is this wilderness quality which underpins the Tasmanian Wilderness WHA's success in meeting the [World Heritage] criteria as a natural property and which is the foundation for the maintenance of the integrity of both the natural and cultural values of the area". The 1999 plan also contained requirements for the protection of wilderness that proved adequate to prevent major developments during the lifetime of the plan.

The 2014 draft management plan omitted any mention of wilderness. This was greeted with public outrage which resulted in the 2016 [final] management plan

## Dam Madness

cont'd from p.4

lives at risk.

In terms of managing floods in existing suburbs, flood levee construction, pre-flood release of dam waters and improved evacuation routes are all alternative, no-brainer options which can be implemented for much less expense, while not destroying parts of one of the most protected natural landscapes in Australia.

Australia's international World Heritage obligations cannot be a secondary consideration to overdevelopment on Sydney's floodplains. The NSW and Australian Governments risk international embarrassment and ridicule if the dam raising



Tasmania's wild south coast – site for a new hut-based commercial walk? Photo: N. Sawyer

containing some encouraging statements about wilderness values. However (and more importantly), the plan contains no requirement to consider the impact of new developments on wilderness quality, although it does continue the 1999 plan's ban on new visitor accommodation in the wilderness zone.

But, compared to the 1999 plan the "recreation" or "self-reliant recreation" zone has been extended into the former "wilderness" zone to facilitate three specific EoI proposals:

proceeds. Rare eucalypt and dry rainforest communities found nowhere else in the world would die from sedimentation, erosion and weed invasion. At least 29 endangered and critically endangered native plant and animal species are found in the proposed destruction zone. A raised dam would put their very existence at risk.

History tells us that only people power can stop destructive dam projects. Please, in the coming months, join with us to be part of a growing campaign to save our irreplaceable Blue Mountains World Heritage rivers. Head to [www.donraisethedam.org.au](http://www.donraisethedam.org.au) to sign up, donate and spread the word about the campaign.

■ **Lake Rodway Commercial Hut** (adjacent to Cradle Mountain) – the Tasmanian Walking Company which operates the commercial huts on the Overland Track proposes a new hut at Lake Rodway so that it can offer a shorter alternative (one or two nights) to the full Overland Track experience. There is little doubt that this proposal is commercially viable and if built would place additional pressure on an already heavily used area.

■ **Cradle Canyons** – a proposal for heli-canyoning commencing on a tributary of the Hartnett River adjacent to Waterfall Valley on the Overland Track. The helicopter flights would be a major intrusion into the wilderness experience of walkers on the northern part of the Overland Track.

■ **Lake Malbena** (south-eastern Central Plateau) – a proposal to refurbish an old privately owned hut for use as a small, exclusive lodge for fly fishermen. Access to be by seaplane from Lake St Clair, which will affect visitors at Lake St Clair and any wilderness users under the flightpath.

## Commercial Huts on the South Coast

The other EoI proposal of great concern for its impact on wilderness is the propos-

al for commercial huts on the South Coast Track. It is likely that some of the proposed huts would need to be located beyond the narrow recreation zone around the track.

The South Coast Track is substantially longer and harder than any existing hut-based commercial walking operation in Tasmania so demand for such a walk is unlikely to be great, and the track itself would require expensive upgrades to make it suitable for commercial walking operations.

The sensible outcome would be to abandon the proposal but the biggest risk is that it morphs into something with even greater impacts, such as a wilderness lodge at New River Lagoon (with aerial access), with clients walking out over the easier half of the track to Cockle Creek.

## The Geeves Effect Threat

Another alarming proposal is the Geeves Effect <http://www.geeveseffect.com/> a proposal to construct several kilometres of new track to a commercial hut at Lake Geeves, below Federation Peak.

A proposal with greater impact on Australia's most iconic wilderness destination would be hard to imagine! This proposal is not the subject of an EoI (the reason for this is not

clear) and is not provided for in the 2016 management plan (zoning change required for new track and hut), but it has received \$70,000 from the Federal Government for a feasibility study.

The full list of proposals submitted under the Tasmanian Government's EoI process is available at:

[http://www.cg.tas.gov.au/home/investment\\_attraction/expressions\\_of\\_interest\\_in\\_tourism/eoi\\_tourism\\_projects](http://www.cg.tas.gov.au/home/investment_attraction/expressions_of_interest_in_tourism/eoi_tourism_projects)

## Secrecy

The EoI process provides no opportunity for public comment unless a management plan change is required. It is also notable for the extremely limited information provided about each proposal (a proposed house extension requires more information).

It is also possible for proposals to evolve into something substantially different during the "assessment". For example, the Project Point Adventure started off as a proposal to helicopter walkers into the remote Gallagher Plateau (south-east of Mount Anne – within the wilderness zone) followed by a walk down to the Huon River and raft out. In the approved proposal, the landing site changed to forestry land on the periphery of the WHA.

An improvement!



## FEATURED WILDERNESS

## New England

NEW ENGLAND IS a dramatic forest wilderness and the oldest national park in the New England region of NSW. Located on the abrupt eastern edge of the undulating New England Tableland, the wilderness consists of impressive cliffs, rugged ridges, spurs and pristine streams. The bulk of the wilderness sits on tightly folded Palaeozoic sedimentary and metamorphic rocks of slate, phyllite and greywacke. On the plateau, these are overlain by an extensive sheet of tertiary volcanic basalt, trachyte and tuff.

The altitudinal range of over 1,450m from the peaks of the escarpment rim to the Macleay and Bellinger Rivers, is only surpassed in NSW by Kosciusko National Park. The topographic, altitudinal and geological diversity is reflected in the vegetation. New England National Park contains over 500 plant species distributed among eleven main vegetation types. The most widespread and abundant communities are the interknitted rainforest and wet sclerophyll forests. Sub-tropical rainforest occupies valley gullies below 1,000m, these grade into cool temperate rainforests of Southern Beech (*Nothofagus moorei*) at about 1,200m on the escarpment. Occupying the complex of ridges below, and in places traversing the escarpment are wet sclerophyll forests with a demarcation of species composition at about 1,200m.

The lower forest is dominated by taller eucalypt species while the upper is dominated by cold-adapted species.

The tallest known specimen of Hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) at 62 metres tall is found here, in the former Nulla-Five Day State Forest (added to New England National Park in 1996).

The wilderness is part of a broad, virtually unbroken belt of mostly undisturbed forested land extending north to south along the eastern escarpment and plateau margins north from Dorrigo, through national parks and state forests to the Hastings Valley. Together with the Macleay Gorges, Werrikimbe and Mt Seaview wilderness areas, it forms one of the largest significant refuges for forest dependent fauna in north-east NSW.

The wilderness contains rich fauna communities supporting many species of arboreal mammals, while 113 birds have so far been recorded, including 24 of the 36 rainforest-dependent species found in NSW. The area is a stronghold for the Sphagnum Frog (*Phyllorhina sphagnicolus*), known only from a small number of sites in NSW.

Sixteen animal species listed as threatened are found in the area. These include eight marsupials, three bats, four birds, and one amphibian. Several more threatened species are expected to be found, including the Hastings River Mouse, the Eastern



The New England Wilderness viewed from Point Lookout. Photo Henry Gold

Bristlebird, three bats, four frogs and two reptiles.

#### Conservation history

Philip Wright, who became Chancellor of the University of New England, conceived the idea of protecting the area in the late 1920s and with the support of local politicians, Earle Page and DH Drummond, secured a 6,800 hectare Crown Reserve in 1931. A Park Trust was established and rangers appointed for the reserve, named New England National Park in 1932 and officially opened to the public in 1937.

The park was gradually expanded over the decades and in 1986 inscribed on the World Heritage List as one of the Sub-Tropical and Warm Temperate Rainforest Parks of Eastern Australia. With the addition of the Black Scrub area of Bellinger River State Forest after the rainforest decision, it grew to 29,985 ha.

In 1992 a 28,000 ha wilderness was declared by Environment Minister Tim Moore, protecting a third of the area nominated by The Wilderness Society. Minister Moore also established a timetable for wilderness assessment, and logging moratoria were installed into a program of environmental

impact assessments for forestry operations. These assessments then came under the National Forest Policy that ultimately saw a 51,700 ha wilderness declared by the Carr government after a protracted struggle.

North East Forest Alliance protests in 1992 at Mt Killiekrankie in Oakes State Forest were critical in saving the eastern parts of the wilderness from logging. The Forestry Commission would have otherwise allowed the logging of foothill forest wilderness, with erosion prone soils, and containing koala habitat.

#### Park Management

Current wilderness management has seen Grass Tree Trail, part of the popular New England Wilderness Walk, converted to a walking track. The walk takes three days and extends from a camping ground near Point Lookout through to the upper Bellinger River and the eastern edge of the park. The new draft plan considers that it may be necessary to place route markers along this walk. One reason for wilderness is to offer adventure in areas free of signage, as navigational mistakes and learning how

to avoid and correct them are a necessary part of the experience. Rangers must balance this policy with public safety and avoiding emergency service call outs to find lost walkers.

One notable omission from the new draft plan is a proposed wild river declaration for the Bellinger River headwater streams under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974*. The river passes through the Brinerville section of the park that was once a small dairy and later an alternate lifestyle community. Group camps have been proposed at Brinerville that would conflict with the Wilderness Walk that passes through the valley. Reserves closer to the Bellinger should be used for these camps instead of this remote and difficult to access valley.

By and large the existing management of New England wilderness is remarkably compatible with guiding principles in the Wilderness Act, due in large part to the generations of conservation effort invested in protecting this remarkable area. The future for this wilderness will however be determined by how well we manage and curb climate change and invasive pest species.



Photo Henry Gold

# NSW timber industry wants to log national parks

THE WEBSITE OF Timber NSW, the peak body that represents the logging and forest products industry, reveals a new policy of 'legislative reform to create a single public land management agency.' Such a policy would destroy the National Parks and Wildlife Service and create a new agency, one that will 'give greater recognition to the role of the timber industry in the active management of native forests'. Active management means more logging!

The website also has a page on so-called 'myths' about the logging industry. On it they argue that 'in some bioregions more National Parks may be needed and in other bioregions, National parks that are not critical to meeting 'conservation only' objectives should be reclassified as State Forests. This approach would be a much better use of limited public resources.' Meaning national parks will be logged once reclassified!

Claiming to reduce wildfires that damage biodiversity, Timber NSW states that 'Ecological thinning of forests which exhibit woody thickening characteristics not only protects them from mega-fires it also improves biodiversity outcomes. The timber industry has a key role to play in ecological thinning as it is best equipped to undertake the task at least cost.'

There is no evidence that logging forests significantly reduces wildfires and strong evidence that forestry significantly impacts on biodiversity. Forests usually exhibit 'woody thickening characteristics', except when heavily thinned of understorey species.

NSW Timber's conservation ecology arguments are flawed but the State Government, more ignorant of ecology than 'quick-fix' economics, is being seduced by the apparent savings the industry is waving in its face.

## Murray Valley National



The RAMSAR listed Gulpa Wetland within the Murray Valley National Park has one of greatest concentrations of important waterbird breeding colonies in NSW but is now threatened by logging.

### Park – a test case

It is now National Party state policy to degazette the Murray Valley National Park. The rot started with the recommendations of a 2012 Upper House inquiry into the management of public lands that recommended 'ecological thinning' trials for the park. The NSW Government accepted the recommendation in 2013 and determined that 3,000 tonnes of felled red gum trees from the "trial" would be made available as firewood to local residents.

In August 2017, Deputy Premier John Barilaro announced that 15,000 tonnes of red gum timber apparently from the 'thinnings' would be given to the Gulpa sawmill. The owner of this sawmill is allegedly the Secretary of the Red Gum Branch of the Nationals that successfully made it state policy to convert the Murray Valley National Park back to State Forest.

The Nationals announcement contradicts the NSW Government policy response to the 2012 public lands inquiry that "the Government does not support logging in national parks and has no plans to allow it through the implementation of tenure swaps or other means". So a Nationals timber allocation promises could prevail over

the Liberals! And whether the logging is a commercial thinning operation or a so-called 'trial' the effect on the trees is the same.

### Mechanical Fuel Load Reduction (MFLR) – the loggers next trick

Timber NSW wants to log forests that present 'woody thickening characteristics'. The NSW Government has received \$1.5 million in Federal funding and has implemented trials of mechanical fuel reduction by logging or chipping forests. The so-called MFLR treatment recovers costs by selling the 'harvested products' (i.e. logs and woodchips) and so is claimed to be more effective and cheaper than burning forests for hazard reduction.

In an economic case study of the Blue Mountains, Deloitte Access Economics (2014) found a net benefit of around \$34 million per annum from a policy change that increased the total fuel reduction treatment area from 1% to around 6% of forest area (would that also be 6% of the million hectares World Heritage Area!?)

It's easy to see how Mechanical Fuel Load Reduction trials for bushfire mitigation will involve thinning (logging) forest canopies with industrial tree harvesting machines, possibly

followed with understorey burning.

The logging industry has already raised the possibility of financing the expensive machinery involved in MFLR by the sale of 'thinnings' from such operations to the scientifically discredited wood biomass, 'renewable' energy industry.

A MFLR trial logging that has occurred in a NSW state forest on the north coast was reported as first getting rid of the 'rubbish' – in this case 'shade' tolerant Tallowood and Bloodwood trees, and then leaving Blackbutt trees at the 6-10 metres spacing preferred for improved tree production. So MFLR converts a moist forest to dry hardwood forest monoculture and claims bushfire benefits – it seems this theory might have a few 'kangaroos loose in the top paddock'!

### References:

Timber NSW Myth 7, Available from: <http://timbernsw.com.au/debunking-myths/>

Ximenes, F. et al. (2017): Mechanical fuel load reduction in Australia: a potential tool for bushfire mitigation, Australian Forestry, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049158.2017.1311200>

Deloitte Access Economics (2014) Scoping study on a cost benefit analysis of bushfire mitigation. A report prepared for the Australian Forest Products Association. Available from: <http://ausfpa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/AFPA-DAE-report-Amended-Final-2014-05-27.pdf>

## PLANNERS SUPPORT OPEN-CUT MINING OF UNIQUE NATURAL HERITAGE

THE politically-connected Manildra Group has had its proposed Invincible mine recommended for approval by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. If approved, this open-cut coal mine will turn another visually prominent part of the publicly-owned Gardens of Stone forests into a moonscape. The proposal is really just a foot in the door bid to restart a larger open-cut mine.

The proposed mine will be located in Ben Bullen State Forest beside the Castlereagh Highway and so will further degrade the region's tourist appeal if it proceeds. A Planning Assessment Commission previously stated in October 2014 that the "highest and best use of the area is for conservation purposes" – that ruling is not something that can be changed by a Departmental decision.

In recommending the open-cut Invincible mine, the Department of Planning and Environment is supporting habitat destruction for threatened squirrel gliders, broad-headed snakes, Capertee Stringybark trees and more. It has apparently forgotten that the flatter forest valleys where threatened species are found are a biologically important and vital part of the unique and irreplaceable Ben Bullen Pagoda Land System.

Due to past mining, only thirty-five per cent of the Lithgow coal seam remains and only ten percent of the coal produced at Invincible will be suitable for use in Manildra's starch plant at Nowra. If approved, mining a depleted coal resource will destroy high conservation value forest at three times the rate than that at other open-cut mines. No wonder the Commission twice rejected mining in this area!



## SUPPORT THE COLONG FOUNDATION!

To: The Treasurer, Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd., Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
The enclosed remittance or advice covers the item(s) indicated by a tick. (One cheque payable to the Colong Foundation is sufficient to cover subscription and donation.)

- Membership application for individuals or households (\$30) to 31 December 2017  
(NB Membership application covers *Bulletin* subscription)
- Colong Bulletin Subscription (\$15) to 31 December 2017 (non members only)
- Membership renewal to 31 December 2017 (\$30)       Life Membership (\$550)
- Tax deductible donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the Colong Wilderness Fund
- PLUS \$\_\_\_\_\_ being for publications as indicated on the reverse side of this form.

NAME (Mr, Ms, Mrs, Miss) .....

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**Payment by credit card.** Mastercard  Visa  Expiry date \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_

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Bank: Westpac Mordale, BSB: 032 268 Account number: 11 7302

Please add your full name in the Reference Field so that we may trace your contribution and also inform the Colong Foundation by email immediately after you have made a payment. Email foundation@colongwilderness.org.au with your name and address details, so we can mail to you an official tax deductible receipt. We also need notification so as to track all contributions to those who have provided them for our accounting purposes.

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION Why not join or invite a friend to join?

Yes, I wish to become a member of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. I subscribe to the Foundation's aim of preserving Australia's wilderness remnants. I accept the liability provided in the Colong Foundation's Articles of Association to guarantee \$20 should it be needed in the event of the winding up of the Foundation. Signed .....



### A BEQUEST

**Please remember us in your Will.**

The Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording... "I bequeath the sum of \$... to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd.

for its general purposes and declare that the receipt of the treasurer for the time being of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to the Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd."



### ABOUT THE COLONG FOUNDATION

The Colong Foundation, the successor to Myles Dunphy's National Parks and Primitive Areas Council, is Australia's longest-serving community advocate for wilderness. Its proposal for a Wilderness Act was accepted in 1987. To supplement this legislation, our Red Index, audits NSW wilderness areas, identifies threats and formulates site specific protection remedies. There are now 2,100,000 ha of protected wilderness in NSW. However, many beautiful and environmentally highly significant wilderness areas are not protected, such as the Pilliga and Goonoo on the north west slopes, the Deua Valley on the South Coast and the Tabletop and Main Range in the Snowy Mountains.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has had a long and successful history. From its foundation in 1968 until 1975 it was the fighting force that prevented limestone mining and the destruction of native forest for pine plantations in the southern Blue Mountains. The Foundation not only played a leading role in realising Myles Dunphy's plan for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park, it pushed for its World Heritage listing, as well as the reservation of a Border Ranges National Park and Kakadu National Park. It has initiated successful campaigns for the protection of over a million hectares of wilderness in NSW. The realisation of Myles Dunphy's vision of a comprehensive system of national parks with protected wilderness areas remains the primary objective of the Colong Foundation.

Now, more than ever, the Foundation needs your support. Well financed and powerful rural interests, miners, loggers, resort developers, as well as four wheel drive enthusiasts, horse riders and others, have greatly increased the threats facing Australia's wild places. Only with your help, through continued membership and donations, can the Foundation continue its campaigns for the preservation of the natural environment and effective nature-based national park management, and by concentrating on wilderness, these rare areas can be kept safe from development and misuse.

## THE COLONG FOUNDATION

SENDER: THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR  
WILDERNESS  
Level 2, 332 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000



### PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE COLONG FOUNDATION

- CELEBRATING WILDERNESS** 60.00   
*Edited by Ian Brown, this spectacularly illustrated book with 46 full-page colour wilderness photographs by Rob Jung, David Neilson, Rob Bakers and Ian Brown is essential reading for wilderness supporters (120pp)*
- WILD PLACES** 27.50   
*The meticulously researched, beautifully written book on wilderness by Peter Pirneas with photographs by Henry Gold (285pp)*
- BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE** 50.00   
*Alex Colley and Henry Gold's description of the 67 year campaign culminating in World Heritage listing. (136pp)*
- SUSTAINABILITY** 20.00   
*Alex Colley provides his vision on a sustainable future. (90pp)*
- REPAYING MY DEBT** 30.00   
*A Conservationist's Tale. Geoff Mosley's memoir*
- THE GARDENS OF STONE VISITORS MAP** 10.00   
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*by Adam O'Neill (107pp)*