

colong bulletin

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Conservationist and publisher – Vale, Patrick James Marius Thompson

BY KEITH MUIR

COLONG Foundation stalwart, Pat Thompson, died on March 11th aged 72, following a six-month struggle with cancer. I will remember him as a charming man who always had a cheerful word, and

was able to land on his feet no matter what life threw at him.

I first met Pat in late 1984 on a trip down the Kowmung River with Milo Dunphy and the then Environment and Planning Minister, Bob Carr, now our Patron. Early on in the trip Milo said that his friend Pat had work commitments

on Saturday and would join us later. So at about 9.00pm that night, with an after dinner billy on, who should miraculously appear striding down the spur but Pat, unperturbed but ready to share the tale of his adventure down Gingra Range and Brumby Mountain in the dark to our camp at Orange Bluff. Not a big deal for old hands, but at the time it seemed so to me. Pat knew how to make an entry and it was on that trip that he broached the subject of a NSW Wilderness Act with Bob Carr, who needed little convincing, as the Kowmung had already cast its spell.

Pat engaged conservation causes as a teacher, publisher, environmental advocate and writer, with a primary focus on the protection and good management of natural areas. He joined the Colong Committee in 1971, to help protect the Colong Caves in the southern Blue Mountains from mining, by helping to construct a diorama depicting the impact a limestone mine would have on this now famous wilderness.

In 1973, Pat gave up his teaching career to establish Trekaway, which conducted group tours in national parks, mainly in Australia and New Zealand. This was a pioneering business of its kind, which he ran for about twelve years.

Around the same time, the Colong Committee became the Colong Foundation for Wilderness and from 1982, Patrick was consistently re-elected to the Colong board, for his ongoing sound leadership and support. He served as honorary chairperson from 1994 to 2007 and as Vice-Chairperson for a further decade. Whilst a director,

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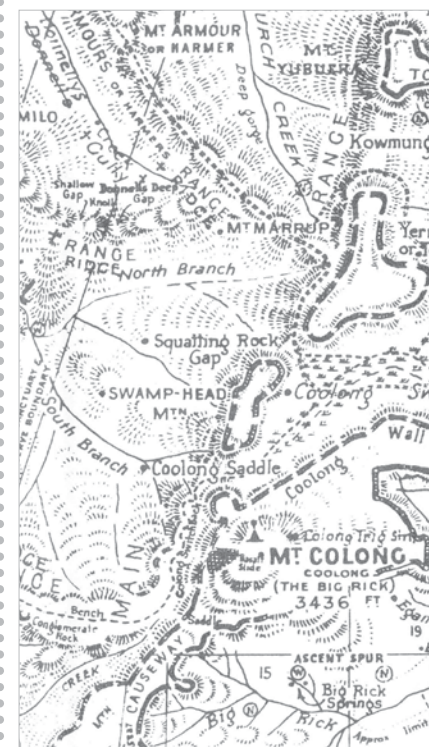
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Colong stalwart Pat Thompson, beside the Six-Foot Track on the centenary of Dunphy's Kowmung Adventure (2014). Photo: Ian Brown



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Message from the Chair

BY BOB DEBUS AM

WHAT AN HONOUR to be the incoming Chair of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

I have worked with Colong in one role or another for over forty years. One of the most powerful memories is of the ceremony at Govett's Leap, Blackheath in the year 2000 when I, as then Minister for Environment in NSW, was able to pay tribute to the decades long campaign by Colong to secure the inscription of the Greater Blue Mountains on the World Heritage List.

The largest single component of the Greater Blue Mountains is Wollemi National Park and it is fitting to remember that veteran conservationist, and our incoming vice-chair, Haydn Washington, was a key activist in the successful campaign for its reservation in 1979.

And, into the bargain, the iconic

conservation movement figure Rob Pallin is our Treasurer. So, it can be guaranteed that we won't be forgetting the illustrious history of Colong!

Yet our Board is preoccupied with the formidable challenge of the future.

There now exist two interwoven crises of the Australian and the global environment. Climate change on the one hand, and runaway species loss and extinction caused by habitat destruction and disease on the other, working together to accelerate ecosystem collapse.

It is generally understood by scientists that if we are to limit cascading, climate change-induced catastrophes, even greater than those with which we are now becoming familiar, we must reach a target of zero net carbon emissions by 2050.

At least one third of the necessary emissions abatement can be achieved through the protection and restoration of natural systems. However, if you

destroy an existing carbon-dense natural system now — a wetland in Kosciuszko National Park or a mature forest on the North Coast of NSW — it is not physically possible for its carbon fixing capacity to be restored before that critical year 2050.

So, the most important single environmental action we can take now, and for the critical thirty years ahead, is to preserve existing forest and woodland and the carbon they will absorb in ever greater amounts as they continue to grow and mature.

There has never been a time in human history when the conservation of our forests and wilderness has been more important to our very survival.

Bob Debus
Chair

Right: Incoming Chair of the Colong Foundation, The Hon. Bob Debus AM



Vale, Pat Thompson

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Patrick also worked as the editor of the *Colong Bulletin*.

In 1990 Pat proposed the Red Index of threatened wilderness areas. The *NSW Red Index* became a published record of the efforts of environment groups to protect wilderness areas that now cover over 2 million hectares.

In 1986, Pat compiled the text and illustrations for *Myles Dunphy – selected writings*, detailing the first Patron of the Colong Foundation's decades-long efforts laying the groundwork for the NSW national parks estate. In 1988 he suggested the Colong Foundation publish its World Heritage proposal for the Blue Mountains, and in 2004 assisted with the

publication and distribution of the Foundation's lavishly illustrated book celebrating the inscription of the Blue Mountains as a World Heritage property.

Patrick's publishing company, Envirobook is an independent Australian publishing house specialising in natural science, travel, Aboriginal themes and Australiana, which has produced over a hundred titles on a broad range of environmental subjects. It also distributes other publishers' Australian natural history books to non-book trade accounts, such as national park visitor centres, outdoor shops, and art galleries.

From 1987 until he became ill this year, he produced and edited the *New Bush Telegraph*, a newsletter of the Shoalhaven

region with a strong interest in environmental and social issues. The *New Bush Telegraph*, now online, wasn't Pat's only venture into newspaper publishing. In 1997 he launched a new national weekly newspaper, *The Republican*, which ran for about a year, but was unable to gain an adequate market share to secure economic viability.

Pat Thompson's passion for nature was in his blood. Apart from *Trekaway* and his publishing interests his conservation efforts were entirely voluntary. His devotion to wilderness and the natural world has ensured an enduring legacy. Patrick is survived by siblings Fred, Annette, Peter and Phillipa, daughters Sarah and Charlotte, granddaughter Sienna and partner Jenny. ■



Pat chairing a session of the Fifth National Wilderness Conference in 2006 at which he launched a lavishly illustrated coffee table book of the conference proceedings Photo: Keith Muir

THE COLONG FOUNDATION FOR WILDERNESS LTD

2/332 Pitt Street Sydney NSW 2000 (ABN 84 001 112 143)

TELEPHONE: (02) 9261 2400 EMAIL: foundation@colongwilderness.org.au WEBSITE: www.colongwilderness.org.au

PATRON: The Hon. Bob Carr, BA (Hons), Hon. LittD. • DIRECTORS: Chair: The Hon. Bob Debus AM; Vice-Chair: Dr. Haydn Washington B.A., M.Sc., PhD; Hon. Secretary: Alix Goodwin; Hon. Treasurer: Robert Barri Pallin; Directors: Janine Kitson BA, Dip Ed, M Ed, Dip TEFL, MA, M Ed (Hons); Emma Spencer; Dr. Kylie Cairns PhD; Sierra Classen BA (Hons); Joel Daniel Robinson.

HON. MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Alan Dixon

WILD RIVERS CAMPAIGNER: Harry Burkitt • NATURAL AREAS CAMPAIGNER: Wilson Harris, B.A., M.A.

HON. PHOTOGRAPHER: Henry Gold, O.A.M. • HON. FIRE OFFICER: Ian Brown, O.A.M., BSc. • HON. BULLETIN DESIGN & TYPESETTING: Jenni Gormley

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A wilderness life

BY KEITH MUIR OAM

IN MY COLONG career I've been lucky to have stood on the shoulders of conservation giants who permitted me to seize the advantage whenever opportunities presented. The successes we've had were achieved through persistence, working as a team with other conservation groups, and applying an agreed plan of action. I have enjoyed this work because of its challenges, and for the diversity of wilderness we were striving to protect.

Early days

It began for me in 1985, when as a refugee from the Northern Territory public service, I returned to the Total Environment Centre. I say returned because as a uni student I had volunteered there trying without success to develop a traffic management plan to replace cars with a tourist bus service to Kanangra Walls. To encourage me, the Centre's director, Milo Dunphy, invited me on lovely wilderness bushwalks to the Kowmung River.

My first major project was to stop urban sprawl in the headwaters of the Hacking River, the principal stream that flows through Royal National Park. I firstly organised a coalition of environment groups under the banner, the Friends of the Hacking River, and wrote *Royal National Park, southern extension and environment protection* in 1986. It was inspired by Myles Dunphy's 1933 Garawarra proposal, and addressed the diversity of urban threats to the unprotected public forests south of the park. Political opportunity came when local member Rex Jackson got into trouble with the law, and I volunteered for Jim Powell, a community conservation candidate in the January 1987 Heathcote by-election.

In our 'Don't Spoil the Royal' awareness campaign, eighty per cent of people in the electorate expressed concern for the environment. The Greiner Opposition



Out-going director, Keith Muir, on a recent 'bludge' bushwalk to MacArthurs Flat on the Nattai River after the Nattai Wilderness was expanded by 50% in 2014. Photo: Wendy Au

was gaining strength and had developed a strong environment platform, while the Unsworth Government was desperate for an election win. In no time there was bipartisan support for a new Garawarra reserve, with the Liberals being more in favour of some urban expansion.

A dramatic brochure by Bob Carr then forced the Greiner Opposition to guarantee that if elected it would not log or mine national parks. Mr Powell intended not to issue preferences but at the last moment lodged three different how to vote tickets with the electoral commissioner, and the politics got messy, but the brinkmanship paid off. Not only was Garawarra State Conservation Area reserved, but the Hacking Valley was placed in an Environmental Protection zone. Rainforest and the Illawarra Escarpment benefited from an escarpment taskforce and a \$3 million acquisition fund, urban sprawl was stopped, Helensburgh and Otford were connected to the

sewer, the leaky Helensburgh tip was patched up and nightsoil dumping stopped. Local Federal member, Robert Tickner, added funding for Armco fencing to stop cars being dumped off Bald Hill, and a grant for bush regeneration. It was not a bad first shopping list.

Appointment to the Colong Foundation

My hard work caught the attention of the Colong Foundation who in 1986 offered me a part-time position to write a Nattai National Park proposal, which again had a connection with Myles Dunphy through maps and reserve proposals.

In the lead up to the March 1988 state election, environmental issues were again running hot, and in response to a campaign spearheaded by The Wilderness Society, the Greiner opposition promised regular reviews of wilderness areas outside national parks. In this context it was easy to secure support

for a Nattai National Park from the National Party member for Goulburn, Robert Webster, and future Premier, John Fahey. Things would have gone smoothly but for Coal Seam Gas!

The Nattai wilderness actually became the first new area declared under the Wilderness Act, due to Dr Terry Metherell, then Education Minister, who was frustrated with the lack of progress on conservation and decided to take matters into his own hands. He became an independent in the Lower House and held the balance of power with a majority of one. At Milo Dunphy's suggestion, he prepared a Nattai National Park bill that was quickly adopted by the Greiner Government to minimise further political embarrassment.

Enter AMOCO who possessed a CSG exploration licence over the future national park. It threatened to advise Moody's that political instability in NSW was impacting its operations,

and place the state's AAA credit rating was under threat. Under pressure, the company retracted their claim, and the Nattai legislation passed in December 1991.

Exploiting this balance of power, the Labor opposition introduced Endangered Species (Interim Protection) legislation, after legal action by the North East Forest Alliance required all logging ensure the protection of threatened species. To guarantee old growth logging continued, in early 1992 the Greiner Government tabled a Timber Industry (Interim Protection) Bill. In his last act before exiting Parliament, Dr Metherell inserted provisions into this Bill for wilderness assessments and logging moratoria over selected forest areas. This required the exhibition of eight threatened forest wilderness areas through the process promised in the Heathcote by-election.

Becoming Director of the Colong Foundation

In view of these successes, Hon. Secretary, Alex Colley, moved in 1992 that I be appointed the Colong Foundation's director. In the following year, as exhibited wilderness proposals piled up for determination, the Premier, John Fahey, announced on December 23, a 350,000 hectare Wilderness Christmas present – celebrations were quickly dampened though by a rural backbench revolt. A hastily commissioned reassessment process under the NSW Surveyor General then led, after another round of public consultation, to just 113,000 hectares of wilderness being protected.

This embarrassing outcome enabled Opposition Leader, Bob Carr, to censure the Fahey Government for failing to deliver its wilderness promises. Yet despite being dogged by controversy, the NSW Coalition declared 650,000 ha of wilderness between 1988 and 1995 – a good result, although no threatened forests were

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Chairperson's Farewell

BY JOHN ROBENS

IT WAS 2013, I'm not sure how the Colong Foundation for Wilderness found me or figured out that I would be a valuable member of the board. Keith introduced himself and suggested that I should nominate. It wouldn't be a big commitment he said, but the areas we could work to protect would be substantial. I enjoyed walking in the Blue Mountains and Wollemi regions, wandering through canyons and stumbling upon mind blowing natural places. I was also a bit of a chump. I understood that a lot of these places didn't stay protected by themselves and that there were a lot of people who had fought long and hard for them. I figured it was time to give something back.

I practise technical programming and web development, and my education is in economics and computer science. I thought I made a strange choice for Colong, as I had with no real experience in natural sciences or campaigning, although at times I had been employed in a marketing or campaigning role. I don't consider myself political or a 'greenie'.

The Foundation's technology base needed updating. Albert Renshaw was treasurer and had a very thorough bookkeeping system with payments still processed manually. Based on previous work I quickly provided a new website for taking donations online.

Renewal

The renewal phase of 2013/2014 was a deliberate effort to bring down the average age of the board. My addition reduced it to maybe 60. The addition of Alex Allchin and Sierra Classen at the same time introduced deeper generational change. I took this goal seriously and brought 2-year old Jasper along to board meetings, doubling up with child minding time. Jasper has since made environment a personal subject, although at school

there is a lot of competition in this regard.

Renewal planning was accelerated in 2014. At my first session, Keith's retirement was on the agenda then – two Prime Ministerial eras ago!

Colong was perceived by many to appeal to a shrinking cohort of 'nostalgic' bushwalkers and its most frequent campaigning tool, involvement in policy development via the submissions process, was becoming less effective. The NSW Coalition government came into power with initial efforts by ministers to communicate with environment groups such as the Colong Foundation. Over time the Foundation felt that promoting nature via the political policy system was increasingly difficult. Funding to support conservation in National Parks has been cut; the rate of nomination of protected areas has dropped dramatically; and the tension between exploitation and conservation of natural areas has shifted towards exploitation. In earlier times the Colong Foundation seemed to have more impact on policy, regardless of the political party in power. Now more than ever we need creative thinking to progress the conservation cause.

Supporting natural areas isn't easy

Aside from preferring to be apolitical, I consider myself to be adverse to confrontation. When having conflicting goals with people, I've always preferred to empathise and try to identify a collaborative rather than adversarial approach. I don't know how Keith has dealt with his trips into the lion's den at Lithgow advocating for the Gardens of Stone. Presenting about new mining proposals in front of a hostile audience takes courage. Social media provides a cover for continuous knockers, and outright threats, making it difficult to maintain a positive outlook. Keith has really demonstrated that he cares about wilderness.

Getting the Invincible mine



View north over the Gardens of Stone at Hecate's Canyon with John Robens, son Jasper in a carry pack, partner Chuin Nee, David Graham, Vanessa Hunter, Yuri Bolotin and Daisy Barham of the Nature Conservation Council. Photo: David Noble

rejected is the most direct 'win' during my time at Colong. We knew that the area had significant natural values and should be preserved in perpetuity. As conservationists you either eliminate a handful of jobs, or the development's economically unfeasible and problematic in other ways. Proposals rarely die. The Invincible mine seems to have had biannual proposals to reopen it, such as Manildra's plan to ship 'nut coal' to Bomaderry. Protecting the iconic Gardens of Stone never ends.

Meetings

The irony of sitting inside discussing wilderness rather than experiencing it is never lost. Involvement with the Colong Foundation has mostly involved meetings, but not entirely, and it is the chances to experience wilderness that stand out. The Dunphy Kowmung walk was an epic re-enactment of Myles Dunphy's original 1914 trip. It was organised by Alex Allchin who even dressed in period costume and carried the traditional swag. I joined a couple of sections, bringing the 'epicness' down a few notches by carrying a toddler in a backpack. The trip down the Wollangambe to investigate the mess caused by coal fines escaping from an emplacement was another outdoor adventure. On another trip we entertained Graham 'wind turbine syndrome' Lloyd from The Australian, and his wife and photographer on

the Capertee divide. Expertly guided by Keith, they produced a nice expositional article that brought out the beauty of the area. There isn't a journalist around who will completely ignore the counterpoint of stepping over a 'bottomless' crack while touring the magnificent formations of the Gardens of Stone.

The Colong Bulletin is published five times a year. I figured that bulletin posting meetings were often where real Colong Foundation decision-making occurred. Highly civilised, with tea, cake and wilderness chat. Preparing bulletins involved labelling the front and precisely putting two pieces of tape on the sides and one on the top. I couldn't do this with precision.

Research

For meticulous research and independent thought Colong has been a powerhouse. Thoroughness and exactitude have ensured that the Colong Foundation is not easily dismissed when making submissions. Pat Thompson's recent successful Australia Day Honours application demonstrated this eye for detail, each milestone in a lengthy environmental record carefully documented.

The Colong Foundation has a knack for independent 'takes' that put wilderness front and centre. Snowy-2 is a controversial example where Keith was one of the first to point out that it would severely damage Kosciuszko

National Park. The push back was immediate and fierce, it's renewable, how dare you get in the way, being the response. This month the Commonwealth is reviewing the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) and once more the Colong Foundation submission shows insight.

Volunteers

The Foundation has quiet, self-effacing people on the board, who are very effective. It's not easy to realise how effective their impact is. Reference Janine Kitson, running courses and organising events to support the Gardens of Stone. Henry Gold was a member of the committee and its Hon. Photographer for 50 years, always quiet, gentle and unassuming, but on-point every time there was an important stand required.

The Foundation has depended on these very generous members. Keith has in the past given his time at a very insubstantial rate, and deserves every accolade received. The Foundation has thrived on the generosity of those who may not be the wealthiest in the community, and for whom supporting the Foundation involves real sacrifice. Understanding this, and using a bushwalker's natural thrift, the Foundation has been effective without a major focus on fundraising – a bushwalker can make a block of chocolate last 20 days!

Past Board Members

Pat Thompson was a long-term member of the board until late last year but and will be sadly missed.

Eugene Fernandez is a change facilitator. Eugene generously helped with the 2014 strategy meeting, and again in 2017 when the Foundation engaged in generational transition. He generously joined the board for the last year, a time where the Foundation needed to get a grip on changes within. We needed this calm, methodical support.

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A Wilderness Life

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saved, bar 740 ha at Diamond Creek in the Deua region.

To improve its conservation standing for the March 1995 election, then Environment Minister, Chris Hartcher in November 1994, reserved a clutch of new national parks over 70,000 hectares, including a large tract of the south east forests and 12,000 hectares in Gardens of Stone. To achieve the latter outcome, I advised Minister Hartcher that he could reserve that part of this spectacular region without upsetting the National Party or the mining lobby by omitting areas with coal resources. Despite this, NSW Labor pulled a political stunt and opposed the reservation to make a symbolic stand on mining jobs to support its local member, Mick Clough. Shortly after election, Labor gazetted the Rocky Creek section of the proposal by discretely adding it to Wollemi National Park.

Wilderness rescued

For the 1995 election NSW Labor developed strong forest and wilderness policies to implement the National Forest Policy, where the Federal Government would exit from forest industry regulation, provided that conservation outcomes were delivered. Little did I realise that a suggested wilderness list of sixteen new areas and additions would lead to many rounds of public exhibition of assessment reports. Tens of thousands individual submissions were made over the next decade or so, as each area was strongly supported by the community.

By the late 1990s, the NSW Forest Policy process was coming to an end, so the Colong Foundation developed a *Wilderness 2000* campaign that was backed by many NSW environment groups and based on the evidence in its 1999 Red Index of threatened areas. This built a strong case for additional areas which was more successful in northern NSW than in the south, reflecting the political make-up of these regions.

Currabundi is the most recent new area, protected in 2011 by Frank Sartor, who

A special thanks to Keith Muir

Keith Muir, departing Executive Director of the Colong Foundation, gave an extraordinary presentation on his 35 years of advocating for the protection of wilderness, following the AGM on 29 April. It was fascinating and informative. If you missed it, you can access the recording on the Colong's website.

AGM attendees had some special words for Keith to thank him for his work with Colong and all he has done to protect our wild places.

Steven Ridd: I will always remember and honour Keith Muir, Director Colong Foundation for Wilderness. I send my conservation respect and love to Colong's Keith Muir. Wilderness forever!

Wilson Harris: Keith, it's been a pleasure and a privilege to have worked with you and enjoyed your mentorship for the past 2 years. I have been lucky. I look forward to exploring wilderness with you for many years to come.

Sierra Classen: It's hard to find the words to say how much you have inspired me over the years with your hearty dedication to wilderness.

Pip Walsh: Keith - this is a wonderful testament to the value of tenacity - fuelled by love for the places you are protecting.

Caroline Druce: Thank you for keeping the flame going for so long Keith and all of your singular and team achievements.

Kylie Cairns: Keith, what a fabulous lifetime of dedication and determination fighting for our wilderness. Thank you!

Madi Maclean: What a wonderful career and legacy Keith

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness thanks you for a magnificent career protecting some of the most magical natural landscapes imaginable.

has never camped out in his life, but ably managed round-table negotiations, including for nature conservation. The area was built from five small reserves through the voluntary acquisition of private land using the Dunphy Fund created by Bob Carr in memory of Milo Dunphy. The Fund had acquired 70,000 hectares of land improving the boundary configurations of many areas, particularly the Guy Fawkes and Macleay Gorges areas. The last large addition increased the Nattai wilderness by half and was achieved by Robyn Parker in April 2014. It was done quietly over water catchment land where public access is restricted.

The NSW Wilderness Estate comprising 51 declared areas extending over 2.1 million hectares is a truly great, bipartisan achievement which NSW can be proud of, despite its imperfections and urgent need for better management.

The World Heritage campaign

Milo Dunphy, who helped build the NSW environment movement into an effective campaign force, once described the late Alex Colley as a 'god'. Alex was tireless, working for

Colong until he was 98, and donating generously to the cause. From 1984 onward, he pushed for the inscription of the Blue Mountains onto the World Heritage list, and in 1988 commissioned Dr Geoff Mosley to write the proposal, with me acting as research assistant. After many independent, expert reviews, it was proven that Geoff had, in his report, correctly identified the values most likely to be listed.

The World Heritage cachet has already helped save wilderness, reserve Nattai and the Gardens of Stone and secure removal to Winmalee of sewage from the upper Blue Mountains towns. There was bipartisan support for the listing, and in 2000 the Howard Government saw it listed, despite some international opposition. Images by our Hon. Photographer, Henry Gold, helped convince doubters, as did a James Woodford article in the *Herald* about Charles Darwin's visit to the Blue Mountains, published on the day of listing in Cairns. Given the array of experts supporting our proposal, a French UNESCO critic claimed that experts will support anything, so my reply to him was that Australia had the famous

founding father of the Royal Society (as well as its current President-elect) supporting our proposal, so perhaps it would be wise not to argue with the dead!

World Heritage listing, together with the overwhelming support of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and local community, also helped fight off John Walmsley's plans for a fenced-off wildlife sanctuary in the Grose wilderness, and the *Stealth* war movie entourage.

The final battle

Mugii Murum-ban State Conservation Area over the Airly Mine was lucky to be reserved just before the Keneally Government was swept from office in March 2011. This part of the Gardens of Stone is like a heritage 'Luna Park', with many values crammed into a small area. It demonstrates conservation management can be achieved in high value areas despite an operating coal mine.

Too much of my time has been spent on 'trench warfare' over the Gardens of Stone. It is the 'Somme' of all campaigns. Now with a coal transition in the wings, and Environment Minister Matt Kean as the area's champion, perhaps it's not a question of if, but when it will be reserved. Lithgow can become the new Katoomba, with all the benefits that go with it, but for this to succeed, the NSW Government must fund visitor management and restoration as outlined '*Destination Pagoda*', another Colong production.

Of course, this story is incomplete. I've only played a small part in wilderness protection, as I said, by standing on the shoulders of giants - like Alex Colley, Jeff Angel and Milo Dunphy. Any success I achieved was through conservation alliances, with the support of inspired politicians of all persuasions, hard work by public servants, and of course the endurance of my friends who put up with me. I now plan to conduct wilderness investigations, and promote wilderness through my adventures and stories. The wilderness is calling, and it's calling me... ■

Chairperson's farewell

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Ian Tanner is also stepping back. He is another person who has been active within the Colong Foundation for a long period - 14 years as treasurer and director. Ian has been a stalwart, always in the background advocating for the protection of natural places and the built environment of the lower North Shore, particularly Chatswood.

As membership secretary, **Alan Dixon** has made sure that this process runs smoothly. He is stepping down from the board, but will remain on a committee and continue this work. Thanks to **Tim Vollmer**, the greatest wit in conservation. **Stephen Allen**, I'm sure that the Gardens of Stone region that you love will be protected soon. Thank you Ian, Alex, Tim, Stephen, Eugene and Alan. Thanks to the continuing board members. I've enjoyed enormously working with you.

Keith is retiring, and fittingly I'm leaving the board too. We are in a period of disorder, with the recent bushfires and continued habitat destruction making the preservation of natural places even more critical. There is plenty for the Foundation to do. For me the Wollangambe River is still unfinished business. It's still polluted and still has an enormous emplacement perched above it. It's also a shame that mining is still being ramped up in the stunningly beautiful Gardens of Stone. That even more waterfalls and swamps are likely to be deprived of water. I also would have liked to have taken a crack at a Federal Wilderness Act.

We truly have generational change. Harry and Wilson are full of drive and passion, ready to be unleashed in the name of protecting native ecosystems.

I'd like to say thank you to all the very genuine people that are part of the Colong Foundation. I've connected with a lot of you during my time at the Colong Foundation for Wilderness. Once the bush has recovered from the recent devastation, I plan to do some quality bushwalking. May I meet you out in the wild places. ■

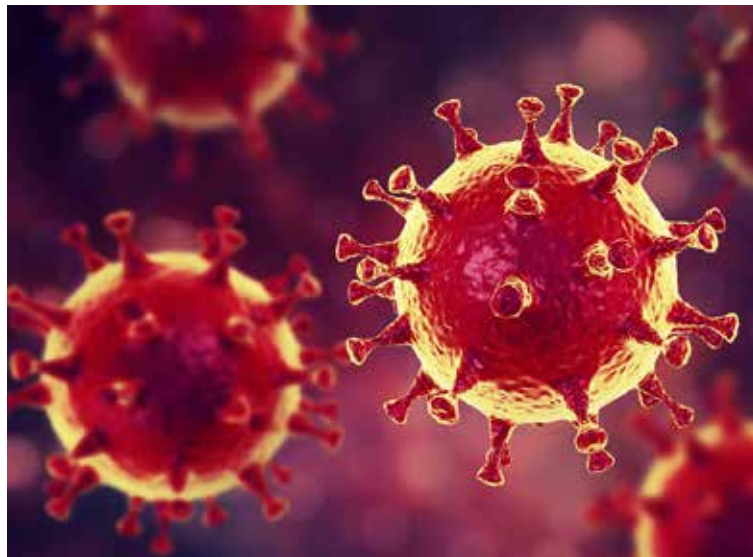
The Virus

BY WILSON HARRIS

LIKE THE HORRIFIC bushfire season of 2019/2020, the evolving Coronavirus pandemic has captured the attention of the entire world. It has increasingly dominated politics, the media, conversation, our parlance, and people's lives. It seems unlikely that 'normality' will be returned anytime soon.

One of the key non-health impacts of the pandemic we are already seeing, is the start of a massive economic downturn. We have already seen share markets slide significantly, global trade falter, and the breakdown of supply chains which support our previously integrated systems. A global recession seems all but certain to wreak havoc on Australia, with unemployment expected to get close to 10% in the coming monthss.

On a micro level people are staying at home, and not spending money on service-based industries like hospitality and retail. Income for non-government organisations (and even government bodies and



Perhaps the most recognisable virus in human history, COVID-19. Photo: Shutterstock

organisations) has dried up. Grants from major corporates will be pulled back to recoup costs in what will undoubtedly be a tough 2020. Charities like the Colong Foundation which rely on donations to function, will face an indefinite period of austerity, given the expected reduction in financial support during this time. We appreciate and acknowledge that we have many members and regular donors who are either on the

pension, or have low incomes, and who do it tough even in 'good' economic times. But the future will be harder across the entire socio-economic spectrum – it's only when the economy is thriving that many consider giving to charities.

The pandemic may hold a silver lining for nature though. While it is still unclear how long it will last, it looks likely that emissions for 2020 for will be the lowest for

decades. Similarly, the virus has thrown a spanner in the works for a number of major, environmentally-destructive projects underway or in the pipeline. Projects like Adani's Carmichael Mine will face huge challenges to get off the ground, given its survival so far has been dependant on generous government subsidies. Fracking in the Northern Territory has been postponed for a year. Various government departments and agencies have closed up shop and are working (unproductively) from home. Large construction sites face shut down. Face-to-face meetings and approvals have become increasingly complicated. In the case of the proposal to raise Warragamba Dam wall, the virus will see additional delays to the release of the Environmental Impact Statement, which was due twenty months ago!

When the pandemic is over, nature could face renewed and even greater threats. Increasingly labelled as a job killer, it is likely that 'green tape' will continue to be

further eroded. In a time of large-scale unemployment, jobs will be seen to take precedence, a matter that will be happily accepted by both major political parties.

Those with vision, however, recognise that the breathing space the virus has given us could be a turning point for the world. There are more jobs in genuine earth care and sustainable environmental management than continued planetary rape and pillage. The huge shift in the way we are being forced to live our lives, and the relative ease with which some countries have slipped into it, provides a glimmer of hope for the future. Are we seeing the early days of the transition we desperately need?

During the coming months, Colong needs your support more than ever. We are well set up to weather the storm, but it is crucial your patronage continues in these difficult days. Hopefully this will be a time for us to get the upper hand in many of the campaigns we are working on, as we keep striving for good outcomes for nature and wilderness. ■

NEW COLONG EDUCATION INITIATIVE:

Wombats, Wattle, Wilderness, World Heritage & Wellbeing

DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE

COLONG BOARD DIRECTOR, Janine Kitson, has just completed writing a discussion group course for the Colong Foundation. This distance education course is available through the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Sydney.

The course titled 'Wombats, Wattle, Wilderness, World Heritage & Wellbeing' (WWWWW) highlights the importance of wilderness and World Heritage.

WWWWW is one of the many WEA's Discussion Group courses that range from 'Anglo-Saxon England' to '400 years of women artists'. WEA Discussion group courses can be studied by anyone, anywhere in NSW.

WEA courses are an ideal solution to combat social isolation – a way to learn while ensuring you stay safe during the challenge of our current health crisis. Group discussions can easily take place



Wombats are commonly found in the Gardens of Stone Stage Two Reserve proposal, along with 67 other native mammals. Photo: Yuri Bolotin

via teleconferencing, zoom, or skype.

All that is required is a minimum of six people to study the course. On enrolment, the course booklet is posted to the group, who then decide when

and how they wish to meet to discuss the questions at the end of each unit. There are no assessments. Instead the Tutor, in a collaborative learning style, gives feedback on the group discussions.

WWWWW costs \$68 per person to enrol and is available at: <https://www.weasydney.com.au/course/D243> For more information contact WEA, Sydney – Ph: (02) 9264 2781 E: info@weasydney.nsw.edu.au www.weasydney.com.au

Course highlights wonders of Wilderness

'Wombats, Wattles, Wilderness, World Heritage and Wellbeing' is now available through WEA, Sydney.

Not only does the course highlight the importance of wilderness and world heritage, it also connects with wildlife, native plants, and human health. Its core message is that we cannot survive without healthy and resilient, protected

natural environments.

WWWWW highlights the brutality of land clearing that has devastated vast numbers of wombats, and other wildlife. Agriculture and pastoralism have literally eaten wombats out of 'house and home', destroying the landscape and habitat they need to survive on.

The wattle or Acacia, is one of Australia's most popular flowering plants, with its yellow-golden colours worn by Australian Olympians. The wattle was chosen as Australia's national flower because it grew everywhere – from the coast to arid outback. Wattles have superbly adapted to Australia's droughts and floods – they regenerate and restore the soil health, which is particularly important after bushfire, enabling other plants to

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Returning to our roots: Corporate campaigning

BY WILSON HARRIS &
HARRY BURKITT

FOR THE FIRST time since the late 1960s, the Colong Foundation will be targeting company boardrooms to save nature and wilderness. In March, Colong's GIVE A DAM campaign successfully filed a shareholder resolution with the QBE Insurance Group, asking the company to develop a policy to protect World Heritage sites. To do this, we recruited over a hundred QBE shareholders to lodge the resolution on the company's upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) agenda.

The Colong Foundation's successful, formative campaign which saw Australian Portland Cement Manufacturers (APCM), a subsidiary of London-based Blue Circle Cement, being prevented from mining limestone in and around the Colong Caves in the NSW Blue Mountains, was the first example of corporate campaigning in Australian activist history, occurring decades before corporate activism was widely adopted by environmental activists.

Colong's targeting of Portland Cement AGMs began in 1969 and would occur over four consecutive years. Jim Sommerville's knowledge and skills, and the financial backing of Sam McMahon (brother of Prime Minister Billy McMahon), gave activists the ability to buy shares and distribute them to pugnacious supporters, bypassing the costs and barriers of individual shareholding. Over 100 Colong supporters attended at the



Milo Dunphy explaining the Colong Caves issue on-site to a gathering of bureaucrats and politicians in 1970. Photo: Colong archives

1969 meeting, with activists protesting outside the event calling on the company to ditch its plans to mine the Colong Caves. It was also at these meetings that Colong pioneered the use of banner-drops off large structures – a common tactic used today.

Colong Committee members put forward a motion at the 1969 AGM requesting the company to:

"reconsider its decision to mine Colong Caves because –

(a) The company's previous investigations of limestone near its Maldon works is not now 'comprehensive' and

(b) This company may suffer a loss of trade due to the growing unpopularity of its mining intentions."

Unfortunately, like most shareholder resolutions, the motion was comprehensively defeated by 18,808,142 votes to 88. Motions that were moved at the following AGMs also

that the coal mine will destroy these rare desert springs. And what about the impact of vibrations on the wombats' subterranean burrows?

Wombats highlight Australia's shameful history of land clearing that has led to the worst mammal extinction record in the world, something that is too easily ignored, forgiven and forgotten. Despite knowing the dire consequences

necessary".

The 1972 AGM in Sydney finally broke the company's will to pursue the unpopular and increasingly well-known proposal. The late Pat Thompson played a key role in making this meeting the most farcical of all.

APCM's board had devised a plan to distribute voting cards to 'real' shareholders only, with the aim to exclude proxies, as many conservationists present at the AGM were attending by proxy. It has been said that a man, who looked strikingly similar to Pat Thompson, rushed to the usher handing out these cards and grabbed a large stack of them. They were then distributed to all conservationists at the event by abruptly throwing them in the air. This led to the first (albeit short-lived) conservation victory at the AGM – the first vote was annulled and a new vote requested by the meeting's Chairman.

The proceedings of this meeting were dominated and dictated by supporters of the Colong Committee. To top off what had already been a raucous affair, Pat Thompson led the crowd in a chorus of "Happy birthday" followed by "For he's a jolly good fellow," after the announcement of the recent birthday of a Director. It was becoming clear APCM were fighting a losing battle, against opponents who refused to give up.

Following the 1972 AGM, the Chairperson of Blue Circle Cement was made aware of happenings in Australia. The public embarrassment and disruption for the company was not worth the pain involved in pursuing mining at Colong Caves. The Colong Caves were saved, and the majestic beauty of the southern Blue Mountains wilderness lives on.

So why is Colong now going after QBE Insurance? What have they done to undermine the beauty of our wilderness?

The insurance industry, represented by its peak body the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA), have been the most vocal advocates for raising the Warragamba Dam wall. They chase the Colong

Foundation around Parliament, lobbying various politicians we talk to, attack us in the media and downplay the views of highly-esteemed experts who say the project doesn't stack up. The ICA is made up of three main members, the Insurance Australia Group (NRMA), Suncorp Insurance and QBE Insurance. Put simply, their agenda is immoral, and is out of step with many of their own environmental and Indigenous policies.

Unless these companies change their tune, the coming months will see the Colong Foundation and its growing number of supporters putting forward more resolutions to insurance company AGMs, picketing their offices and highlighting the cultural and environmental destruction these companies want to impose on our wild Blue Mountains and their Traditional Owners.

A time of change and continuity

Colong is undergoing a significant period of change. The cumulative impact of Keith Muir's retirement as Executive Director, and the stepping down of a significant number of long-serving board members is resulting in generational change within the organisation. This being so, Colong is as strong as ever with an experienced and active board of directors (young and old), and a dynamic group of young leaders emerging from the organisation.

There is a poetic timing to the coincidental revisiting of Colong's history. During a period of great change and some uncertainty, it is a timely reminder that Colong's legacy is ever present in the minds of staff, board members and volunteers. Its history, and great activists who dedicated their lives to wilderness conservation, such as Myles and Milo Dunphy, Alex Colley and Jim Sommerville, have left a mark on the organisation that will ensure the values and goals of Colong will be etched into the very fabric of the Foundation for generations to come. ■

Wombats

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grow and survive.

The northern hairy-nosed wombat is one of Australia's rarest animals, with the last remaining ones living in the pocket-sized Epping Forest National Park, close to Doongmabulla Springs where the Carmichael Adani mine is proposed. Scientists worry

of land clearing, it continues to this day as Federal and State governments continue to pursue destructive dreams of mining the landscape.

It is Henry Gold, the Colong Foundation's Honorary Photographer, who continues to remind us with his stunningly beautiful photographs that we have more to gain from protecting the environment than destroying it. ■

THE COLONG FOUNDATION

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 2020
(NB Membership application covers Bulletin subscription)
- Colong Bulletin Subscription (\$15) to 31 December 2020 (non members only)
- Membership renewal to 31 December 2020 (\$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)

ADDRESS

P/CODE

PHONE

SIGNED..... EMAIL:..... DATE:.....

AMOUNT

Payment by credit card. Mastercard Visa Expiry date _____

Card # _____

Payment by EFT. Account: The Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd. Bank: Westpac Mortdale, BSB: 032 268 Account number: 26 0221

Please include your full name to help identify your payment. So we can mail you an official tax deductible receipt, and for our accounting purposes, please also inform us when you have made a payment by emailing your name, address and donation details to foundation@colongwilderness.org.au

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.

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



PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE COLONG FOUNDATION

CELEBRATING WILDERNESS

Edited by Ian Brown, this spectacularly illustrated book with 46 full-page colour wilderness photographs by Rob Jung, David Neilson, Rob Blakers and Ian Brown is essential reading for wilderness supporters (120pp)

60.00

WILD PLACES

The meticulously researched, beautifully written book on wilderness by Peter Pirneass with photographs by Henry Gold (285pp)

27.50

BLUE MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE

Alex Colley and Henry Gold's description of the 67 year campaign culminating in World Heritage listing (136pp)

50.00

SUSTAINABILITY

Alex Colley provides his vision on a sustainable future. (90pp)

20.00

REPAYING MY DEBT

A Conservationist's Tale. Geoff Mosley's memoir

30.00

THE GARDENS OF STONE VISITORS MAP 10.00

A full colour double sided touring map and guide to the attractions of the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal

THE BATTLE FOR THE BUSH

Geoff Mosley's account of the genesis of the nature conservation movement and saving of the Blue Mountains environment (174pp)

27.50

MYLES DUNPHY (SELECTED WRITINGS) 39.95

CLASSIC BUSHWALKING MAPS by Myles Dunphy

(Gangerang and Kowmung Maps) 10.00ea

LIVING WITH THE DINGO by Adam O'Neill (107pp) 19.00

WAYFARING IN WOLLEMI by Andy Macquoen (352pp) 40.00