

**National Landscapes Forum  
Blue Mountains Cultural Centre  
July 24<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**Talk by Wyn Jones  
Topic suggested by Randall Walker -  
“What the World Heritage Area Means to Me”.  
Or “The Blue Mountains – My Home”**



**“Ah Brother I am searching for the sites sacred to you,  
Where you walk in silent worship and you whisper poems too.  
Where you tread like me in wonder and your eyes fill up with tears,  
As you see the tracks you've travelled down those fifty thousand years.”**

This verse out of the poem “Sacred Sites” by my dear departed friend Denis, Denis Kevans, tells us all about the wonder of places natural and our relationship to them. For when I look out at the Blue Horizon anywhere in these the Greater Blue Mountains, I see the reason for World Heritage and the work and effort that has got us to this present day, a great untouched landscape of the others. All those others, non human others.

It tells me about many relationships to these thousands of species of plants, birds, the rocks and the soils and the wombats, indeed as you have seen in the short video a relationship to me. To be in this relationship is to feel the sense of wonder that inspired Haydn Washington to write the book of that name, a “Sense of Wonder”. For it is from this very essence of feeling, of sensing the natural environment that enabled the Kooris, the traditional owners, to survive, and live and love in these landscapes of the Blue Mountains. And so it is that modern humans engage with this place and feel the same about the world of the others.

For it is when you are IN this place, this great natural experiment of nature that you feel the most human, that you feel the qualities of humanity that enable you to live, and to live a life to the fullest expression of relationship to the planet, and to your truth.

And so I am as requested, to share with you a personal story about my magnificent obsession – This Blue Mountains. To take you for a tiny, albeit brief look inside the lives of the others, of nature's society in these mountain places, in the wild spaces and places and races.

Just take yourself along the tracks into these many spaces – sensing, seeking, using all your faculties of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, your senses and your imagination. Let us go then into these places the **BUSHROOMS OF THE BLUEYS**, yes **rooms in the bush**. If you were to take this space we are now in ( the Katoomba Cultural Centre Foyer), it's about the size of a large room or small home, say 20 by 20 metres, 400 square metres. There are about 30 million of these spaces in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, each one different and unique.

Bushrooms are different, unique and changing over hours days, years, and over eons.

You might be in a rainforest bushroom, or a dense heathland or hanging swamp bushroom, or one of the ragged rock pagoda bushrooms in the Gardens of Stone National Park. And when you are in them IMAGINE, yes pretend if you like that you are one of the many species of plants or animals within the room. What is your story now? Imagine you are the others, a plant an ant and anteater. looking at you the human. What stories! And yet there are so many stories, all interlinked and woven through the webs of life. Webs of life of 400 animal species, over 2000 plant species, and a

100 gum tree species, 13% of those gums in Australia. And yet there are some 40 million individual gum trees in the World Heritage Area, each one an individual, unique . . . like you.

But before we go further on this journey “Where are we?” Come with me and stand at Echo Point. Have you been there during this visit yet? Well 3 million tourists come to the Blue Mountains a year and many of them, most of them, at some stage go and stand at Echo Point, And what do they see? They look out to the Blue Horizon and a long way off they see Mt Colong and the deep landscape slashes of the Kowmung River Gorge, the Nattai, and nearer Mt Solitary just a few kilometres over the rainforests of the Jamison and Kedumba Valleys.

To the west your gaze rests on Mt Guouogang, the tallest of all, MY mountain. Why do I call it my mountain? Because I love it there and I feel myself, and at peace with all the others. THAT is true wonder. Can't be explained in number.

Go over to the other side, to the north of the explorers byway the main settled ridge of the towns to Blackheath and look down from Govetts Leap into the Valley of the Grose, to the Blue Gum Forest where modern conservation began, but where the traditional owners spent time, each year for over 20,000 years. Then look over the basalt mountains of Mt Banks, Mt Hay, Mt Tomah and beyond to the northern horizon where the names Gaspers Mt, Mt Coricudgy and Mt Coriaday alongside Mt Pomany ring in your ears and command your vision. These are the peaks above the Colo River, Colo which means Koala and where not a week ago a friend of mine tells me they saw a Koala, and we are wondering where they have been all the past years, in a valley of their name. Into the Colo runs the Wollemi, the name of the biggest National Park within the World Heritage Area. Wollemi which is aboriginal for “Look out! Watch and your step!” And indeed in the Wollemi, a land of slipping stones and ragged rocks, you have to watch your step or you will never come out. What? And leave that lovely, wild place?

And Wollemi of Wollemi Pine fame. As we wonder at these names, many of them aboriginal, we can only begin to imagine the lives of the traditional owners in this landscape. Truly a walk in this place is to ask Denis's question, “Ah Brother I am searching for a site sacred to you”. Well you are in it. Look no further.

And that search has occupied most of my life. The Big Blue, the Blueys, has been in my life since birth. Yes my father was a Welsh migrant who came out to Australia in 1927. He came to Lithgow, arriving in Sydney town on the Ocean Liner the “Oronsay” which was sunk in the second world war. He arrived as a boat person, as his father was seeking black gold, coal, in the Blue Mountains and he sank the State Mine on the edge of the Newnes Plateau underneath the Pagoda rock sculptures where I would later discover a rare daisy. Its funny, ironic really that my dads dad, Grandfather John Jones was the last of the family to mine coal. The rest of them and us their kids sort riches in other directions and vocations.

Dad told me that I was taken to Jenolan Caves at 15mths old, I was walking then, through the Grand Arch of the Caves a vision that remained forever with me. Like the Jenolan Caves the sandstones of the Blue Mountains are littered with caves, though they are really are overhang caves, open to the air sky sun and stars.

From this early beginning I was taken on journeys both here in the Blue Mountains and elsewhere in NSW country. Dad was always trying new routes and definitely not those of the three explorers, Blaxland Lawson and Wentworth. Even in towns dad would often drive down dead ends only to say “oh well that was interesting, just curious.” And so he passed on the genes and genius for adventure.

SO I guess that was where it all started. I developed the same waywardness, wanderlust,. . . . and

wandering. I learnt very early to ask “WHY” and “HOW IS IT SO?” and to seek the answers myself.

I conquered the fear of heights at age 13 on the Giant Stairway of the 3 sisters, or more correctly the seven sisters.

And my eyes sort . . . “THE LONG VIEW”. To LOOKOUT to the “BLUE HORIZON.”  
For the Blue Mountains are the NOT mountains, but a Blue Plateau cunningly dissected and sculptured into valleys, dells, gorges and deeps.

Rapidly thereafter I adopted the seeking of a curious naturalist . . . “YOU WILL SEE NOTHING IF YOU WALK IN A STRAIGHT LINE.”

Fast forward and you find me into youthful, but naïve bushwalking. Energetic exploring physical abilities to cover long distances, long times, long climbs. Seeking view after view into the recesses, crevices and forest corridors of the Blue Plateau and its deep riven valleys, lofty heights and forested slopes.

After this period I indulged my senses, and science and started studying the wild things in the Blueys.

But there was an interlude which changed my whole sense of the Blue Mountains and gave new meaning to the places I had walked here. This was the Save Colong Caves campaign of the 1960's and the Boyd Plateau Rescue from Pine Forests in the early 1970's. That long view to the southern horizon from Echo Point would have been destroyed for ever by the scars and scares of humans if mining and logging had not been stopped. Today that view and the sense of otherness is owed to a few, led by Milo Dunphy of the Colong Committee now the Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

But soon I was deeply engrossed in studies of birds and mammals. From Bathurst to the Coast, from the Victorian to the Queensland borders. But always are the Blue Mountains.

They, these mountains became home, hearth and haven, reference and reverence.

Is that true love I asked?

What was happening for me was recognition, relation respect and reconciliation and responsibility.

So to about 1983 and more science.

And a challenge!

The then boss of NPWs in the Blue Mountains Graeme Worboys said, “go find all the records”, so I did, and compiled the base biological data from Museum, CSIRO, Herbarium, published and personal records of the plants and animals, geology and geomorphology for what was to become later, the GBMWA. How lucky and how privileged it was to be there at the time, and to be asked to do this. Graeme's vision was a long distance dream for the Blue Mountains, an area covered by several national parks that was one huge Grand Natural Experiment. A place that would showcase what is a truly Australian Naturalness to the world, a place that engenders in us, a Sense of Wonder.

I realised that it was easy to study plants, they did not move, well as fast as animals. And having compiled the records I had found out that the Upper Blue mountains contained the most number of rare and vulnerable species of plants for the entire area of over 1 million hectares. That is still true today even though we have surveyed much of the area in details for plant species. And even though that great enigma, the Wollemi Pine, does not occur in the Upper Mountains.

So I turned my attention to the rare not always “beautiful” plants, and they turned out to be my gold mine.

And so my journey went from discovery to rediscovery, to recovery. From discovery of more Little Pines, Yes on these very waterfalls off the edge of the southern cliffs to the left and right of Echo

Point where a million people visit each year, There, in crevices and cracks well watered by the falls and swamps above is the Microstrobos, or Dwarf Mountains Pine a relative of the 35 and 40 metres Wollemi Pine to the north.  
Little Pine and Big Pine.

But the story must be told and the mountains must be walked, not conquered.  
So in 1992 my own dream came true. For years I had envisaged how to bring communities together in recognition of this place. A place that had lost its original peoples, sadly, temporarily. I had decided that we had to Walk for World Heritage – and so we did, and the Greater Blue Mountains Heritage Walk was done. From north to south, joining people, place, Wild and built, through 6 national parks, from the Goulburn River, the Wollemi, the Blue Mountains, Kanangra-Boyd and the Nattai to Mittagong. A 110 people came and went, I walked the lot in 52 days and over 457 kilometres.

It's all about celebration and our relation to the wild things and places.

When, in miracle of miracles we achieved World Heritage for the Blue Mountains in 2001 we celebrated again by Walking Country, spreading word about the wild, educating thousands especially the kids.

During the 2001 walk bushwalkers carried specially turned gumnuts that my friend Colin and I produced to carry the coals of the campfires all over the World Heritage Area and especially through Blue Gum Forest where the Conservation Battles Started all that time ago in 1932.

Where to from here you might ask” Walk On I say. The mountains call you and you must Walk On. Walk on through the GUMS. Don't hurry absorb all you can and the spirit of the land. For it is here that you can see all 96 species of gum trees that make this land so important and so very Australian. It is here that you can see 13% of the species of gums in Australia. From cliff mallees , dwarf trees, to ridge woodlands and giants of 100 years old in the tall forests. Giants towering 70m over the clear, crystal symphonies of the mountains creeks and brooks.

Tall forests such as the Blue Gum Forest, deep in the Grose Valley; in a place we call the Cradle of Conservation, it is there meaning takes shape as the people recognise their place . . in nature finding:  
- recognition  
- relationship  
- respect  
-responsibility.

For 10,000s of years traditional owners had paid respect to the land for living there, for survival, for sensations and symbolism and understood their relationship to it.

The new chums, the settlers had feared the land and its otherness.

Indeed famous bushwalker Paddy Pallin said in his book “Never Truly Lost” that one should fear the land. I think he really meant respect.

Yet in 1932 a small band of conservation pioneers found their feet and their relation to this land by saving Blue Gum Forest from the axe. It was as if the Landscape of their Minds came awake.

Then last year, 2012, 80 years later we the “people of the little tents” celebrated that event in the Blue Gum Forest. We constructed a giant gumleaf out of little tents, one that the CIA satellites did not find.

Conservation battle after battle it does become weary. I ask you, “Do we always need impending doom to stir us into action?”; When the Blue Gum was burnt in 2006 my own response was to go and measure and photograph all the 2000 trees in that forest as if they were going to disappear tomorrow even though my logic told me different. Yet experience also tells me that fire could

happen again and again, and the result for the trees would then be catastrophic not to mention the catastrophe of the heart.

Yet our human response is so much about the Blue Horizon, the aesthetic. The Greater Blue Mountains is World Heritage because it is an INSPIRATIONAL LANDSCAPE. It inspired humans from early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to paint it and write it, and this continues and will continue. Before written word the traditional owners had their own stories about this place though many of them have been lost.

Not long ago poets such as Kendall and Lawson sensed this landscape beyond the small town settlements and echoed their feelings in verse. If you go to the lookouts and close your eyes and listen to these words from the year 1889,

“BY channels of coolness the echoes are calling,  
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling;  
It lives in the mountain, where moss and the sedges  
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges;  
Through brakes of the cedar and sycamore bowers  
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers.  
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,  
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.”

**You get that timeless sense, in these layers of time.**

And once more open your eyes to the Tall fire Sensitive gums of the gullies, as seen by Lawson in these lines from 1900,

“Above the ashes straight and tall,  
Through ferns with moisture dripping,  
I climb beneath the sandstone wall,  
My feet on mosses slipping.”

Much later my friend Denis Kevans who sought emotional refuge in the mountains, while walking the nature trail near Wentworth Falls, called on us all to see it like this,

“Have you seen your own Blue Mountains  
That put galleries to shame,  
Galleries of art and sculpture  
That are proudest in their fame?  
For the art of fern and flower,  
And the sculpting of the stone,  
Is an art no skill can master  
But the Mountains’ skill alone.”

Words which purely express the value of this natural place, a value beyond economics.

The scenic grandeur of the World Heritage Area inspired painters soon after the commencement of European settlement. From the first painting of the Blue Mountains by Westall in 1802, many others followed. The names of Lewin, Conrad Martens, Howard Ashton, Lloyd Rees, Arthur Streeton, Cossington Smith, and Fred Williams ring in our ears and grace our vision.

Go see their works and stand where they did and feel like I feel.

Eugene Von Guerard visited the area in 1859 and his masterpiece of Wentworth Falls called Weatherboard Falls shows this Scenic Grandeur, but is at the same time notable for its detail. These painters all saw more than just the view, they looked out into the view. Von Guerard's paintings of the mountains inspired comments such as this "I should imagine this scenery can scarcely be surpassed in any part of the world" : said James Smith an art critic at the time.

Photographers continue to find inspiration in the Blueys. From the early days of photography when Robert Hunt captured the Blue Gum Forest in 1859 during a survey of the Grose Valley for a railway line. Another attack of progress on the wild places which fortunately failed.

Harry Phillips from 1873 -1944 produced 100,000 copies of his book "Blue Mountains Wonderland 81 Views" which must have inspired many people. Contemporary photographers among them friends Ian Brown, Henry Gold and Rob Jung as well as Leo Meier produce outstanding images for books, magazines, periodicals and conservation articles.

The aesthetic viewpoint is central to conservation campaigns such as the Colong Campaign, the Wollemi National Park, Gardens of Stone and the Blue Mountains for World Heritage Campaign.

Many benefit from the works of a few.

Myles Dunphy who I knew, once said of this place, "Great peaks noble in their grandeur, arose above all, the hubs about which the ridges and the rivers were ordered. I was amazed with the wonder."

Truly he had a Sense of Wonder, of the Blue Mountains.

But as we look back from this Wild Place we can see the edges of our so called civilization, the urban creep along the ridges and cliff tops, the smoke and noise, and at night the increasing brightness of the city lights to the east. It is ever more important to look after this place in the face of the irreversible changes wrought by the blind rush for progress . The wild places have a breaking point and can sustain only so many humans.

Once again Denis Kevans recognised the irony in the two edge swords of our modernity, a culture in two minds.

"Ah, Brother I am searching for a site sacred to you",

addresses the very need for us to walk with the kooris hand in hand.

To take on the responsibility for the landscape passed onto us in such good order.

These words express a meaning of place with or without world heritage.

But it is this recognition, this inscription which is critical.

**What it means to me no money can buy. It is not a transaction.**

Blue Mountains has all the Layers of Conservation, National Park, Wilderness, World Heritage, National Landscape. These are necessary to keep the Grand Natural Experiment of the Blue Mountains working, to keep the ecosystems and their webs of life operating. To keep the "OTHERS" in full view so that we the humans may take on the responsibility through recognition, relation, and respect.

So it has been the FEW, the Dunphys, Alex Colley now still alive at 105, the Rigbys and the Darks. Keith Muir, Blue Mountains Conservation Society and others that made sure we had the National Parks, the Wilderness Declared, and World Heritage.

It was they who put the spirit and feelings into action in the modern world.

Those layers of Conservation from Recreation Reserves, through National parks and Wilderness to World Heritage and National Landscape;

**What an Honour.**

The land is not alone , not any more, It is not a melancholy land.

Then Scientists came and provided the Great Modern Toolkit to maintain the land. From 1983 to now from 1000 of records to 10s of thousands, yet it is not enough to understand these great gum tree ecosystems.

For we have only studied four trees, little pine, Big or Wollemi Pine, The Blue Gum and the Camden White Gum.

They don't need us to survive, or do they now?

We need them to live.

And we need them to really live.

For our humanity to survive, to conserve those deep human qualities to appreciate the beauty of the others,

to maintain the relationship with the others, and OUR INTEGRITY.

OUR PLACE IS IN NATURE.

Our place in the Blue Mountains, my HOME.

I give you this poem written for the 1992 Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Walk;

From the mountains  
Come the wraiths of song

Sharing stories  
In places wild  
Sharing lives and loves  
Where earth and sky meet,  
Lines of song  
Making ways through the bush  
Like the waves that follow the feet

Crossing and meeting  
Taking and giving  
Swapping truths, alive or buried Stories,  
stories, stories  
Hand me downs of experience  
Hand me downs of show downs

It is a show , It is a giant stage  
Where we celebrate,

WHERE we perform the ritual of  
Many Millenniums.

What we have taken  
we give back FOR, EARTH RE-BIRTH.

A PLACE, what does it mean to you,  
and between you and you  
Does it mean A thousand things  
Does it mean A thousand songs  
Does it mean A thousand belongs  
to which belongs A thousand songs.

You might be high on Gospers Mount  
Or deep in Wollongambe  
Sleeping warm atop a peak  
Of Wild Dog Range  
You dream up a meet.

Are you dancing Pomany on high  
Sipping tea in Colo Gorge,  
Are you resting up in Colong Caves  
Or sliding down the Wollemi?

a PLACE what does it mean to you,  
and between you and you  
Does it mean A thousand things  
Do you hear A thousand songs  
Do you feel A thousand belongs  
to which belongs A thousand songs.

How many peaks have you climbed today  
How many creeks were crossed  
How many lives and loves were shown  
By the Blueys spirits we've lost.

Where is the melody to your song  
Where is the rhythm and beat  
Look with your heart to horizons long  
Feel the earth sing with your feet

Then shout them out  
From yonder peaks  
The echoes yell the story  
Then shout them out  
Songlines to tell  
Of this Blue Mountains Glory

A PLACE what does it mean to you,  
between you and you what does it mean?  
Now you know A thousand things  
Now you sing the thousand songs  
And you feel A thousand belongs  
to which you sing the thousand songs !

Then . . . .  
Sing your line your line of song  
Sing your song  
Where you belong  
Sing your song, your line of song  
You songliner,  
You songliner

I Thank you from the Bottom of Kanangra Deep, **and for all the others!!**