



Hunter National Parks

November 2002

Reeds in our wetlands

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Cover

Hexham Swamp. Reeds have become much more common following the construction of the Ironbark Creek floodgates. (Photo: courtesy Hunter Catchment Management Trust).

Contributions to *Hunter National Parks* are welcome. Send news, letters, articles and photos to the Editor, preferably on disk.

From the president

I'm writing this report two days after the Lower Hunter bushfires, one which occurred at the end of the road where I live. So I am ever mindful of being vigilant against this destructive force of nature, even if some are started by the hands of humans. If you see someone acting suspiciously in one of our magnificent national parks or reserves, please notify authorities. And if venturing out, try to avoid natural areas on the driest, hottest days—as we know, they can be a death trap.

Our lecture series has been most successful. In September, Mary Greenwood gave an informative outline on her research concerning reeds in Tomago wetlands (see page 4). More recently, Geoff MacFarlane spoke on threats to wetlands and how to monitor them. Unfortunately, some of the talks were not very well attended.

I urge you to come to our end-of-year Christmas get-together on 26 November, when we will hear Dr Russell Drysdale speak about the Huang Long World Heritage Area in China.

And most importantly, please try to attend our functions during 2003. Lack of attendance will lead to possible branch collapse. This must be avoided at all costs. NPA needs a strong voice in the Hunter Region, and we have a something unique to offer. This voice can only come from a healthy, well-attended group. This is particularly so given the upcoming State and local elections during 2003. We must push all candidates in the region for a better-managed and extended reserve system.

Cheers!

Rod Bennison Hunter Branch President

The National Parks Association of NSW Inc is a non-profit community organisation that seeks to protect and conserve the complete range and diversity of natural habitats, features and species as well as significant cultural items and landscapes. Members participate in a variety of conservation, recreation and social activities.

Will salt kill reeds*

Although the Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) is native to Australia and many other areas of the world, it is often classified as a nuisance plant. However, the species is often used as a bank stabiliser and in the treatment of wastewater, and has economic value in many European countries. Research into *P. australis* in the USA and Australia has mainly centred on the rehabilitation and regeneration of estuarine systems, including mangroves and salt marshes. In contrast, researchers in Europe have mainly been concerned with the protection of freshwater reed beds from pulse or press events, such as levee breaches and rising sea levels.

P. australis is a dominant freshwater wetland species within the Lower Hunter Valley area. During the past three decades, it has intruded into traditional saline areas, partly as a result of flood mitigation structures erected during the 1970s. Due to its aggressive colonisation strategies, *P. australis* has begun forming a monoculture within Hexham Swamp and, to a lesser extent, Tomago Wetlands.

The resultant loss of salt marsh habitat has led to reductions in the diversity of fauna that reside in or visit the wetlands (particularly birds). It is anticipated that both Hexham and Tomago wetlands will experience changes to hydrology and salinity regimes with the

impending opening of floodgates along Ironbark and Dunns Creeks (respectively).

When tidal conditions are reinstated within degraded estuarine systems, the most common response is an increase in the vigour and distribution of halophytes (salt-adapted plants), coupled with a corresponding decrease in glycophytes (plants intolerant of salt). The impact of tidal reinstatement on *P. australis* at Hexham and Tomago is questionable.

P. australis is known to be tolerant of tidal inundation and salt levels of 15 parts per thousand if occasionally supplied with fresher water. However, the long-term effects of exposure to increased salinity, including the possibility of mortality, are not known. Likewise, although salt stress has been shown to occur in *P. australis*, no long-term studies have been undertaken

to evaluate possible indicators of stress.

Whether regarded as a pest or beneficial species it would seem that a model of these effects on *P. australis* would be of particular benefit. The model would enable managers to make correlations between particular stress indicators and the time taken for mortality to occur due to a saline impact.

Whether the species will adapt or retreat from the wetlands due to differing salinity levels is the focus of a study that I am currently undertaking at the University of Newcastle. It is expected that preliminary results will be available by the end of 2003.

* by Mary Greenwood

Mary is completing this project with assistance from a NPA Scholarship.



Reed monoculture

Mary Greenwood

On a slightly chilly late August Saturday, John Simpson's band of followers met after lunch at Seahampton township. Fourteen of us, including baby Nicholas, headed off from the Stockrington mine area along the old railway corridor. With the current parched weather conditions, my recollection of having to dodge large puddles on the track seems of another world. But the trail bikes and 4WDs have taken their toll of the track, as is the case with so much of our bushland.

Not surprisingly, the gradient was very gentle, with the track passing through cuttings that now are vegetated with a fascinating mix of plants. Apart from the inevitable weeds, a couple of climbers, Clematis and Dusky Coral Pea, turned on a colourful show along the way.

The first highlight was one of three tunnels of the former Richmond and Pelaw Main Colliery Railway, which ran between Hexham and Richmond Vale. The tunnel is brick-lined, and the craftsmanship is outstanding. It is still in very good condition, and gently curves so that in the middle you are in almost total darkness. Fortunately, a couple of our band were well prepared and remembered torches. The tunnel creates an excellent photo frame for the shutterbugs among the group, as well as a thor-

oughfare for trail bikes – two came through while we were in the tunnel, and although they were considerate and slowed down, the noise and fumes were not pleasant.

Our next stop was at the creek just above its drop down adjacent to Jewboy's Cave. Here we had a quick snack while one of our party headed down to the cave to do some scouting. When the rest of us scrambled down and crawled into the cave, we were met by an eerie sight of a dozen candles burning brightly up on the ledge where the stalactites and stalagmites meet to form columns.

We then settled down to hear the story of Jewboy's Cave from the expert, Greg Powell. The cave is named after bushranger, Edward Davis (a Jew), who with his gang of six others, ranged through the Sugarloaf, Mulbring, Bolton Point and Rathmines areas in the 1840s. It's not proven that the gang used the cave, but folk history suggests that it did. It is a fascinating place, complete with a narrow opening high up the slope that enticed some of us to explore.

We partly re-traced our footsteps, taking a detour to the old mine dam, know as Burrenjim Dam. It is now dry as it has a pipe through the wall to prevent it from filling. Most walked across the top of the wall, just as the rain started to fall.

It didn't amount to much, unfortunately. We marvelled at several shrubs of delightful soft mauve—*Hovea longifolia*—that occurred just near the dam.

Then back to the cars to be met by a flock of large Brown Pigeons feasting on the fruits of wild tobacco. And the verdict on our walk—a most enjoyable trip, with fascinating history and some attractive plants. Thanks to John for organising the walk and providing explanations of the history and flora, and to our other expert commentators, Travis, Lisa and especially Greg.



Tunnel mouth

John Simpson

s & dam good fun

by Sharon Vernon



Travis Peake

Burrenjim Dam



Travis Peake

Dam wall



Travis Peake

Guess who?



John Simpson

Jewboy Cave

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) conducted community consultation meetings during August as part of the Barrington Tops National Park Plan of Management development process. Public meetings were held at Gloucester, Dungog and Scone. Approximately 30 people attended each of the Scone and Dungog meetings and about 60 people attended the Gloucester meeting. NPWS representatives presented information on the Plan of Management process and its background, changes to the Park and surrounding areas over the past ten years and some of the values and constraints of the Barrington Tops area before breaking into discussion groups. Groups were requested to provide feedback to NPWS on issues relating to park management and possible solutions to problems relating to these issues.

It was probably no surprise to anyone that the dominant issues raised related to park access, particularly in respect to recreational use. One of the problems faced by NPWS as a land manager is that the comprehensive regional assessment (CRA) process conducted over recent years has resulted in the NPWS acquiring significant areas of former forestry and Crown lands that are of high conservation value, or that are surplus to forestry needs. This has raised land management issues in a number of locations.

While consolidation of park boundaries is generally viewed as a positive step, some of the land acquired may not presently have high conservation values, and may present significant short- to medium-term management problems. Additionally, many users of surrounding areas (mainly crown reserves and forestry land) now find that much of this land is now controlled by NPWS, and that some recreational activities may conflict with traditional national parks policies. This is certainly the case for Barrington Tops, and it poses a dilemma for NPWS, which is rapidly becoming a recreational land management agency as much as a conservation land management agency.

Recent amendments to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* enable new reserve categories that accommodate a wider range of activities. Some of these reserve types are proposed for Barrington.

Interest groups represented at the meeting included four wheel drive, horse riding, fishing and bushwalking clubs. Each meeting was heavily represented by the first three interest groups. I found it somewhat disappointing, although predictable, that many of the interest groups focused heavily on what they saw as problems relating to their interests, rather than problems for Barrington Tops—after all everyone agreed that they visit the area for the same reasons. The main issues raised during discussions were grouped into the following categories:

- access for recreational use, fish stocking and emergencies
- access type, conditions and controls
- establishment and management of facilities
- weeds and feral animals
- fire management
- wilderness areas
- environmental assets and quality
- community education
- adequacy of management resources
- emergency and search & rescue response protocols.

Common themes in the issues raised included coordination and integration of activities and the use of expertise or resources from interest groups to assist NPWS with co-operative management.

The next step for NPWS is to compile the results of the consultation program, and to develop an issues paper for public comment. Following this, a draft plan of management will be prepared for public exhibition and review. The exact time frame will be dependent on the demand for resources during summer fire season, and the desire to address all of the issues in a workable Plan. The anticipated timeframe for release of the draft plan is in the first half of 2003, when further opportunities for input will be available.

* by John Simpson

10 Nov Sun Karuah Nature Reserve

Easy day walk along tracks., approx. 15km

Rex and Sue Filson 4994 9163

Visit newly declared Karuah Nature Reserve. See remnant vegetation adjoining lower catchment of the Karuah River, including mangroves, swamps and eucalyptus woodlands. Map: Clarence Town 1:25,000.

15 Dec Sun Wang Wauk State Forest

Easy day walk 12km

Rex & Sue Filson 4994 9163

Take a trip into the past along the Wootton Historical Railway Walk. Follow the gentle 1-in-20 grade through regrowth forests of flooded gum. Great family walk. Map: Wootton 1:25,000

25-27 Jan Sat-Mon Barrington Tops NP

Easy full pack walk (2 days) with base camp, 1 day walk

Rex & Sue Filson 4994 9163

A beautiful walk through Antarctic beech forests along the Gloucester Tops link track, camping at Wombat Creek. Next day explore The Big Hole, Junction Pools and Careys Peak, returning along the Link Track on Monday. Maps: Gloucester Tops, Barrington Tops.

See the Wollemi Pine

Forget Jurassic Park, the Wollemi Pine is coming to Newcastle! You can catch a glimpse of this Mesozoic survivor at the Glenrock Scout Camp on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 November, from 9 am to 4 pm. Free admission.

There will also be biodiversity exhibits and guided tours of the prize-winning native gardens, wastewater-irrigated woodlot, roofed worm farm, wall murals, regenerated woodlands and much, much more. For details, contact John Le Messurier on 4944 7041.

Activities Deadlines

Jan-Feb: 25 Nov Mar-Apr: 14 Feb

Send details to Phil Seccombe, tel: 4942 8373 or email: Phil.Seccombe@newcastle.edu.au

Stone gardens

How lucky we are to have such a good choice of activities listed in both *Hunter National Parks* and *National Parks Journal*. How does a member select from the many walks on offer? Recently faced with this dilemma, I settled on a 3-day trip to Gardens of Stone National Park led by Sydney Branch. My reason?—I hadn't been there!

Gardens of Stone National Park is located about 30 km north of Lithgow, and has an area of 15,200 hectares. It conserves spectacular pagoda-shaped sandstone outcrops, rare plants and unique habitats.

Saturday heralded a trackless ascent and exploration of Donkey Mountain, with great vistas to the Wolgan Valley. We think we sighted a Regent Honeyeater's nest on the slope. Sunday was a more casual walk around the ruins of the Newnes shale oil works, dating from 1906. This was followed by a refreshing dip in the Wolgan River. Whilst relaxing under a natural spa cascade we watched ant-like humans climb the sheer sandstone cliffs above the valley.

On Monday we climbed through Woolpack Gap and onto Woolpack Rock to enjoy the amazing rock gardens.

Hardy yellow pagoda daisies greeted us from thin layers of soil at the base of the pagodas. This area can be readily explored using nearby camping areas at Newnes as a base. During my 4-hour drive home I had plenty of time to reflect on my introduction to this magnificent area.

Remember—you can get more out of life by joining in NPA activities, either those organised by the Hunter Branch, or from other NPA branches.

John Le Messurier



John Le Messurier

End of year party - November

Our final Member's Night for the year will feature an interesting talk by Dr Russell Drysdale on China's Huang Long World Heritage and its fascinating karst (or limestone) scenery. This will be followed by our end-of-year party.

When: Tuesday 26 November 7.30pm

Where: Gallipoli Legion Club 3-5 Beaumont Street, Hamilton

Committee

Hunter Region committee meetings will be held on the following dates at the Gallipoli Legion Club (upstairs).

- Tuesday 26 November 6.30pm
- Tuesday 18 February 6.30 pm

Non-committee members are welcome to attend.

Member's Night - March 2003

The first Member's Night for 2003 is provisionally set for 18 March. Full details will be provided in the March issue.

BECOME A MEMBER



... and enjoy these benefits

- receive *National Parks Journal* six times yearly, for State-wide news and events
- receive *Hunter National Parks* six times yearly, for news and events within the Hunter Region
- regular activities and events program for bushwalking, camping, field trips, lectures and seminars
- access to a wide range of membership discounts
- help protect our national parks and other reserves.

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