



#37 2008

news from the alps

Serious recognition of the Australian Alps' worth is coming in thick and fast. Most of us who live and work in and around the Alps have appreciated this landscape's priceless value for many years, but 2008 will be remembered as the year that this iconic Australian landscape was given not just one, but two significant pats on the back. And in the big picture, these two 'pats' are more like two good whacks because they both carry serious clout.

ALPS GETS NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTING

The first came in June when the Alps region was declared one of Australia's iconic destinations under the banner of the National Landscapes conservation/tourism initiative. The Australian Alps joins other iconic landscapes such as Kakadu and the Red Centre as a destination to appeal to international experience seekers. And being part of the initiative has brought with it all the resources on offer – especially support for the Alps as it works to develop its own strategic tourism plan as part of the initiative.

And then came the second lot of big news. In early November the Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, announced National Heritage Listing* for the Australian Alps National Parks, an area of over 1.6 million hectares spanning Victoria, NSW and the ACT. Said Peter Garrett, "the listing of the Australian Alps National Parks recognises the outstanding natural, Indigenous and historic values of this iconic landscape."

Peter Jacobs, Convenor of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee explains. "The National Heritage Listing gives the Alps national significance. The listing is made under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, and it ensures those special values which have been noted in the Listing will also be protected at a Federal level."

Having said that, not a great deal is likely to change in the day to day management of the Alps, for all the right reasons. "Park managers are very careful: we already manage the national parks with a high level of protection within highly regulated state systems. The key here is the fact that there is a list of nationally significant values (see see the list on page 2), and those values are to be also recognised and protected at a national level."

Both the National Landscapes Initiative and the National Heritage Listing recognise the iconic nature of the Australian Alps. As Peter Jacobs puts it, "There is a great synergy between the two – they fit hand in hand". But they are also quite distinct. One's strength is as a strategic but rather organic marketing initiative based on strong community partnerships, and it takes in the entire sweep of the Alps combining national parks with all the landscape that's tucked in and around the mountains. The other is a statutory device to specifically recognise the national significance of the national parks within the Alps region. Working alongside one another, they should prove to be a formidable duo.

*More information about the National Heritage Listing is coming soon in a special edition of news from the alps.





WELCOME

...to an issue of news from the alps which carries some big news items.

Firstly there's Federal Minister, Peter Garrett's, announcement: the Australian Alps National Parks now have National Heritage Listing (see cover story). For everyone associated with the Alps – who lives, works within and values this landscape - the Listing supports us all at a Federal level and is itself backed by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999. So congratulations to all those who've helped this moment come to be.

Then there's a report on the first meeting of the Australian Alps Indigenous Reference Group – formed following an idea born from that historic First People's gathering in 2005. Already the members are guiding co-operative projects right across the Australian Alps national parks; working together, caring for country(see page 3).

There's news on other fronts too: high altitude evidence of Aboriginal occupation and unexpected results in the three-year study of wild dogs. We've also introduced a column called – news, page 4 – filled with snippets big and small about Alps-based projects, people and events.

Please enjoy this issue, and if you know of a great Alps story you think we should tell, do get in touch and we'll take it from there and do all the hard work. Similarly if you're not already on the mailing list, let us know and we'll get that organised.

Happy reading, until next time.

Rod Atkins
program manager & editor

Published by Australian Alps national parks, Program Manager and Editor: Rod Atkins. For editorial contributions, or mailing list updates contact Rod, 500 Cotter Road Weston ACT 2611 T: 02 6205 2487. M: 0429 618 308 . email Rodney.Atkins@act.gov.au

For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps Web Page. www.australionalps.environment.gov.au

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SOME OF THOSE VALUES WORTH LISTING

The National Heritage Listing recognises the numerous and unique natural, Indigenous and historic values of the Australian Alps including:

- the remarkable concentration of landforms developed under peri-glacial processes
- the alpine wildflowers and other unique alpine species like the mountain pygmy possum which is found only in the high country
- the role the mountains play as a key habitat for the migratory Bogong moth in the early summer months
- the spectacular wildflowers
- the importance as a place of gathering for Aboriginal people
- the opportunity for recollection in a landscape once traversed by stockmen, gold prospectors, pastoralists, migrants and botanists
- the many huts associated with early grazing, recreation and hydro-electric development



Members of the AAIRG and Alps staff gather at Cooeee Cottage, Tumut for the second meeting of the AAIRG.



As Uncle Ernie Innes puts it, “They were the first conservationists. They understood biodiversity and sustainability, flora and fauna, geology and fire management – all in caring for country.”

CARING FOR COUNTRY

These words from Uncle Ernie, a member of the Taungurung clan in central Victoria, describe the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Alps, a sustainable rhythm over a cultural Alps-wide landscape, that existed for thousands of years before European settlement.

And now that relationship is being re-acknowledged, a process which began with those historic two days in April 2005 when more than 100 people – Aboriginal elders and traditional owners as well as staff from various government agencies – met at Mt Hotham-Dinner Plain for the “First People’s Gathering” to talk about the best ways to manage the Alps as a whole from Aboriginal peoples’ perspective.

One of the key recommendations from the Mt Hotham-Dinner Plain Meeting lead to the formation of the Australian Alps Indigenous Reference Group – whose brief is to help guide co-operative projects right across the Australian Alps national parks. “The knowledge and understanding of the Australian Alps by the first peoples of the mountains and the rivers – the traditional owners speaking for their country – is what is being brought to the management of the Alps.”

The first meeting of the new Reference Group was held at Namadgi, and it brought together nominated representatives from each of the state Indigenous reference groups.

In a deliberate move, state affiliations along with Aboriginal nations have been kept low key so that the emphasis can be Alps-wide. As Uncle Ernie puts it, so that the Reference Group members can “...speak with one voice over country for the whole of the Australian Alps.”

Parks Victoria’s Peter Jacobs, as Convenor of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, is Co-chair of the Group. “The role of the new Reference Group is clear. It’s about taking a landscape view – of how Aboriginal people see themselves in this landscape – and taking advice from this perspective as we manage the Alps.”

Business at the first meeting centred on agreeing to the terms of reference to give everyone a clear understanding of the role of the Group and its members. “It was also an opportunity to talk about the Alps program and the sorts of things we do. We described the works program, and at future meetings would expect to discuss what we’re planning with the Group to get advice on how to go about it.” It was also decided that while the new Group collectively represents the interests of the Aboriginal people across the Alps, it does not specifically represent the many traditional owners. In other words, any topic involving traditional owners speaking for Country will be handled at the state level. “Some topics, as they arise, may in fact be handed to the state groups from the new Reference Group.”

Worth seeing is the Group’s terms of reference. For a copy, contact Rod Atkins (see inside front cover for details).

“This is something that has not happened before – all the traditional owners sitting down and speaking with one voice. It is such a different approach, working in unity throughout the Alps. It’s a real beginning.”
– Uncle Ernie Innes.



The new Group will...advise the AALC on a range of things including how to engage Indigenous people in relevant key co-operative management activities, projects and decision making;

the development of Australian Alps-wide capacity building programs such as cross cultural skills training including the identification, survey and monitoring of cultural heritage and interpretation;

and mechanisms to improve communications and understanding between Australian Alps national parks managers and the broader Indigenous Community.

NEWS

big or small on Alps-based projects, people and events

conserving rock art

Thanks to those people who took a day out to take part in a workshop held in early October, a rock art conservation project underway in Namadgi National Park has been placed on a strong footing. The workshop helped to define the issues critical to the conservation of the four main rock art sites within the Park, a necessary step given that while there is a great deal of historical and management information on these sites, important questions about their long-term preservation needed to be addressed. Participants from three ACT Aboriginal organisations, as well as members of the ACT Heritage Council and staff of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, identified around 100 issues that were then grouped into themes to assist the conservation planning process. Most important were those associated with the acknowledgment, involvement and training of Indigenous custodians in the conservation and management of the Namadgi rock-art sites. Issues relating to the interpretation, significance, management and physical conservation of the sites were also canvassed.

One of the participants - Euroka Gilbert, Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the ACT Heritage Unit - was impressed by the high priority that the participants placed on community consultation, both with the Aboriginal community and the wider community. And in practical terms, "Some of the different approaches to the removal of lichen were new to me - I always knew you could brush it off, but had never considered the option to burn lichen off with high-powered ultra-violet lights."

The next phase of the project will involve further consultation with traditional owners and the establishment of a working group - to play a central role in the training, planning and implementation components of the project over the next few years. Watch for more on this topic as Mem Wilson and Nicholas Hall reveal further information about the events and milestones associated with the project...

getting out and about

Getting staff out of the office on a regular basis is a great way to help everyone become more familiar with the range of cultural heritage places on the ACT's Heritage Register. Here members of the the ACT Heritage Office are snapped on a visit to the Brindabellas: soaking up the sunshine on a glorious spring day while checking out both the amazing views from the site of the former Mt Franklin Chalet (destroyed in the 2003 fires), and the recently constructed Visitor Shelter and interpretation at the site. From L to R: Gerhard Zatschler, Can Ercan, Euroka Gilbert, Jennifer Dunn, Jennifer O'Connell, Sophie Collins, Linda Roberts and Graham Brading.



a new mountain movie

Since late September, visitors to the Snowy Region Visitor Centre at Jindabyne, Tumut and Khancoban have been able to gain a sense of the spectacular Alps landscape through a new information and educational DVD being screened. The film, Spirit of the Snowy Mountains has been produced by acclaimed filmmaker Sorrel Wilby of Getaway and Australian Geographic fame in collaboration with staff from Kosciuszko National Park. It replaces Kosciuszko Reflections, which has been entertaining visitors for more than ten years.



Top: Pictured at Babylonia studios in North Sydney on the final day of editing are L to R Sorrel Wilby- Wildside, Serge Lacroix- Postop Group and Rod Mason- NPWS, Aboriginal Education Officer. Above: Rod Mason at Babylonia studios in North Sydney doing final voice over work for the DVD.

350,000 trees

It's ambitious, even with the support of two large private sector partners - Transgrid, a power transmission utility and GreenFleet, a carbon emissions abatement company. The plan is to plant out almost 300 hectares within two years, and a start was made in early October when a group of 50 people gathered on the foreshores of Blowering Dam (south of Tumut in Kosciuszko National Park) to put the first of what will be close to 350,000 trees into the ground. It's all part of a long term plan to return native vegetation to a remnant of former agricultural land that ran along the Tumut River in the days before the dam was constructed and the park established. Always a management challenge, until now it has relied heavily on the support of local residents on annual tree planting days. Achieving the goal is now only two years away and the result is key to the overall environmental health of the area. Without native vegetation on the foreshores weeds and soil erosion are an issue. Rehabilitation, will encourage the return of a diverse range of native wildlife which in turn will help to mend an ecosystem which has long since been disturbed.



Bendora Hut, circa 1940.

last one left standing

Back in 1928, the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau (then known as the Forestry and Timber Bureau) began planting trees in arboreta to discover more about which species were potentially suitable for timber and paper forest plantations in Australia. By 1969, thirty-four arboreta had been established in the mountains and lowlands of the ACT; and after the 2003 fires took their toll, only one upland arboretum was left standing, the Bendora Arboretum in the Brindabella Ranges of Namadgi National Park.

Most of the 52 different species planted at Bendora are conifers: larches, spruces, firs and white pines. None of the hardwoods grew well but other trees thrived, but by 1974, the ACT arboreta had fulfilled their primary purpose; the Monterey pine *Pinus radiata* had been confirmed as the best species for most sites in cool temperate southern Australia.

Given Bendora's cultural significance, and the fact that it's the last one left standing, it's not surprising that the arboretum has its supporters. Friends of the ACT Arboreta (FACTA) along with the Kosciuszko Huts Association are caretakers of nearby Bendora Hut, built in the 1940s to shelter those working to establish the arboretum. More recently FACTA have also worked with Parks, Conservation and Lands

One of the 350,000 trees being planted at Blowering Dam.



to develop the Bendora Arboretum walking track and install new interpretive signs. Together, the new signs and the track will go a long way to enhance the walks and talks currently offered by rangers and members of FACTA.

pigs on the river flats

Having a dedicated (in more ways than one) pest animal officer is paying off for Parks Victoria. Targeting locations where pest animal programs are a high priority, Rudi Pleschutschnig has been developing programs with input from the landholders surrounding the Alpine National Park - a logical move given their local knowledge. "My role in a nut shell is to research and control pest animals, including wild dog trapping and baiting, feral pigs, fox control and a large component of mapping and survey work to better understand which areas are affected and under threat by pests." Pigs in particular are a cause for major concern as the region's small but highly mobile populations have been starting to move into new areas of the park.

Take the trapping of a 136 kilogram boar for example. Travelling through the Mitta area of the Park, Rudi's scent dog Bundy helped spot two to three acres of uprooted ground and wallows caused by pigs. He put out a trap and commenced feeding that day and continued daily for 14 days until the pig was caught. Pigs are intelligent creatures and encouraging the pig to enter the trap was done slowly but surely and with great patience. The capture generated a fair amount of interest amongst the locals of the nearby community of Omeo with landholders indicating this was the furthest north east a pig capture has been recorded in the local area. It also appears this may have been the only pig at that site, and yet it caused a phenomenal amount of damage.

As well as having someone like Rudi dedicated to the task, the drought has proved a bonus causing animals to move down onto the Snowy River flats in search of water. "Usually pigs feed and then move on fast, covering great distances. Down on the flats the trapping has proved much more effective with 46 pigs caught in five weeks.

No guesses why trapping is needed - feral pig damage typical of that found along kilometres of the Snowy River.



four down, and four to go

Following on from last season's successful building works to four Kosciuszko National Park huts, the pace is being sustained to tackle four more this season. Nineteen huts were damaged in the 2003 bushfires – some partially while others were burnt to the ground, and three were reconstructed soon after the fires. Following changes in heritage conventions, a new approach, to assess each based not solely on its fabric but also on its social significance, nine were identified to be rebuilt from scratch and another four, partially standing, will be reconstructed. (This decision matrix now exists to help decisions in the future.) Interestingly, to conform to modern building codes, building works are being carried out with a few modifications. "Our aim", explains Megan Bowden, whose task it is to pull together all the pieces – the people, the budgets, the materials – "is to capture the significance of the original. These huts look the same, but to meet today's standards we've incorporated steel piers, concrete footings and tie-down rods. We don't want maintenance issues." Last season saw the rebuild of Broken Dam, Delaney's, Paton's and stage 1 of the Opera House. This season O'Keefe's, Brook's, Sawyers and Boobee huts are on the work sheet. "It's a fantastic thing to do. We had over 100 people at each of the openings, and often they haven't been back to the mountains for a while. It's about re-establishing the social links as well as rebuilding the huts." And if you look at those people who are involved in the building it's obvious others feel the same way. Full-time and temporary parks staff drive the building process and are joined by volunteers from the Kosciuszko Huts Association as well as others including family descendants of those who've had connections with these huts over many years.

For more information: contact Megan Bowden, 0428 294685

getting the name right

The title 'Alps to Atherton', used to describe the national proposal to develop a conservation corridor linking the Australian Alps near Melbourne with the Atherton Tablelands in Far North Queensland is no more. Market testing using a series of focus groups in locations along the proposed corridor found that the Alps to Atherton title, also known in its abbreviated form A2A, wasn't working with the broader community. Too many people recognised 'Alps' as being European and many had never heard of 'Atherton'. The program's new title is now the 'Great Eastern Ranges Corridor', something which was found to resonate with those attending the focus groups, and it describes both the Great Dividing Range and the Great Escarpment. Names aside, the initiative itself has moved along in leaps and bounds over the past year with strategic partnerships having been established in priority areas: Kosciuszko to Coast, Slopes to Summit (ie Albury to Kosciuszko National Park, Southern Highlands Link between Morton and Nattai national parks, Upper Hunter between Wollemi and Barrington Tops national parks and the Border Ranges in far northern NSW.

The crowd at the opening of Paton's Hut, March 2008.



“The key is to step outside of what we do every day. After the forum I took a look at the park again as if it was the first time I’d ever seen it - looking at how I could improve the visitor experience.”

MANAGING WITH SCIENCE

In his former role as convenor of the Recreation and Facilities Working Group, Kevin Cosgriff (Ranger at Mount Beauty) helped to pull together this year’s Science Management Forum. And having seen his comment (above) it’s not too surprising to learn that the Forum explored the Australian Alps national parks from the visitor experience perspective.

Over three days at Thredbo in the Kosciuszko National Park, around 60 people explored the topic from every angle. Dr Graeme Worboys set the scene, explaining the value of management and researchers working together, then a feast of information began, from: Associate Professor Catherine Pickering (International Centre for Ecotourism, Griffith University); Frances Gertsch (Head, Visitor Activities & Services, Parks Canada); Janet Mackay and Charlotte Prouse (Planning for People and The Brand Coach respectively); Dr Tracey Dickson (University of Canberra); Grant Dixon (Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service); Dino Zanon, (Parks Victoria) and Dr Sue Moore (Murdoch University); Dr Rosemary Black (Charles Sturt University) and Professor Betty Weiler (Monash University).

Workshop sessions tackled a range of related topics and the results were then brought back to the main group. Notes taken at all stages along with speakers’ papers were then made available to all - “to take the science and put it on the ground.”

Catherine Pickering is just one of the many scientists who brought new information to the forum. “I’ve a long-term interest in mountains and work in the relatively new field of recreation ecology – looking at the ecological and social interaction between people and parks and how they can be best managed.” Catherine’s aim was to support everyone’s efforts to prepare for the future, bringing information from North America, Europe and New Zealand, for example, the direct and indirect effects of climate change. “With less snow and warmer summers, there have been changes in the response of ski resorts and visitors, including displacement of winter visitation from lower to higher altitude resorts, and where water is available, greater snow making by resorts. Also there is greater promotion of summer visitation to spread the visitation year round.”

Another trend worth noting is the per capita decline in visitation to parks which has been linked to an increase

in hours of screen-based activities. “It appears people’s conservation motives are strongly influenced by exposure to nature as a child. If so, it’s in the interests of park managers to encourage school and family-based visitation to ensure the values associated with long term conservation are maintained.”

Given the Forum is designed as an open exchange between all present, there’s no surprise that that’s what took place. From Catherine’s perspective she picked up a fresh take from both her fellow scientists and the park managers. “Frances Gertsch had great insights in how to work together with cycling groups to better manager increasing use of parks by people on mountain bikes; Grant Dixon had what must be the best data in the world on monitoring the quality of walking tracks; Dino Zanon gave a clear picture of who visits the Victorian parks and what they want to get out of it; but Sue Moore emphasised that we still need better, consistent data about who comes, where, when and to do what.”

But one aspect emerged to sit on top of the pile: that we need better mechanisms to get research information to the park managers. As Catherine heard someone say, another 100 page report just doesn’t help. What’s needed is formal and informal dialogue – perhaps getting scientists out and about. “I have absolute respect for the common sense and knowledge of people in the field; I understand that the most active management is taking place in the mind of the manager. But there’s a lot of information that managers may not be aware of, and which they need to factor into their decision making.”

Another participant, Jane Easthope from the ACT’s Parks Conservation & Lands, was struck by the notion of one of the roles of parks being a venue. “Frances Gertsch believes that while parks managers were not responsible for creating the experience for visitors, they are responsible for managing the parks as venues where visitors are free to interpret their own experiences. In other words, we may be the manager of the intricacies of the natural and manipulated landscape, but it’s up to the visitors to interpret it, especially since our view of nature may not be that of our park users.”

But perhaps most importantly, “The Forum is a reminder that while we may be mature enough to have a number of roles and experiences behind us, we need to remind ourselves of the benefits of reflection to re-invigorate our thinking.”

what’s the aim? The Science Management Forums are an initiative of the Australian Alps national parks and the IUCN WCPA (Mountains Biome). Held once a year, participants are gathered from two camps - scientists and park managers. Working within the scope of a set topic, the discussions are kept deliberately fluid, encouraging the exchange of information, ideas and expertise. Keep a look out for the next Forum which is usually held around May each year. Definitely one for the diary.

Researchers and park managers together at Kosciuszko Lookout during the Forum.





Now that the Alps has been accepted as one of Australia's National Landscapes, work is underway on importantly – an Alps specific tourism master plan.

TOURISM UPDATE

Over the next few months, work will begin on identifying the primary journeys, the precincts and the potential experiences that make the Australian Alps region a major attraction for visitors known as experience seekers. The master plan will also identify whatever is needed in terms of infrastructure, product and marketing to improve the sustainable image and profile of the Alps region, especially to international visitors seeking unique and special experiences, however the value is not just to the international market.

In addition to this fundamental work, The Australian Alps National Landscapes Steering Committee recently co-ordinated support for the filming of a DVD together with a fold-out colour map for inclusion in an edition of

Australian Geographic to be published early in 2009. The planned feature will set out the key journeys for driving, walking and riding, based around visiting the more accessible historic alpine huts.

As Peter Jacobs (Chair of the Australian Alps National Landscapes Steering Committee) explains, "This first piece of Alps-wide marketing specifically targeting experience seekers, ensures the Alps National Landscape approach gets a good kick-off. Overall, the challenge remains to have our partners gaining the bigger picture view – appreciating that it's about promoting the Alps as an overall experience rather than simply a list of individual destinations, activities and accommodation options."



a bit of background...The National Landscapes initiative ignores tenures, land classifications, local, regional or even state borders in its quest to help develop exceptional and sustainable tourism destinations. Its Reference Group is co-chaired by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia, and its aim is to assess proposals and support the marketing and development of Australia's significant destinations for international experience seekers. Eight National Landscapes are now identified including the Red Centre, the Flinders Ranges, the Great Ocean Road, Australia's Wilderness Coast, Greater Blue Mountains, the Green Cauldron (Mt Warning rainforest), Kakadu and the Australian Alps. For more information about National Landscapes visit www.tourism.australia.com/nationallandscapes or for the Australian Alps in particular, you can subscribe directly via email for information on developments by sending your email address to Neville Byrne at hartbyrne@ozemail.com.au.

Top of the heap sits the Australian Alps national parks Memorandum of Understanding. Driving it along is the Strategic Plan, refreshed every three years, and looking very dewy at the moment. Then there are the groups, formed around various topics to break the action down further and link it to the ground. Last year, these groups were known as working groups. Post release of the latest Strategic Plan they've been re-formed and re-named the Reference Groups. It's early days yet, but we've asked a few members to explain what that means...

GETTING GOOD PEOPLE TOGETHER

Megan Bowden is in a position to compare the old with the new, the Cultural Heritage Working Group with the new Cultural Heritage Reference Group. She admits the new group's name may lack originality but that it reflects the fact that the Group's role is similar - but with one very significant difference. "Now when we're discussing something that's proving a bit of a challenge, we can pull in the people we need - the experts, members of the community - to help us." The new reference group format has this flexibility deliberately built in, so that those best suited to help come up with ideas or develop projects can be involved from time to time. This is especially important in the scope of this particular group's work, where both Aboriginal and historic cultural values are being meshed together with the day to day conservation and management programs of the parks.

Having worked in and around Gippsland and the Alps for 25 years, Peter Lawrence describes the things which interest and motivate him most in his job as environmental management and its application to public land, climate change and Indigenous cultural heritage issues. Not surprisingly, he was a member of the former Cultural Heritage Working Group, and he's now one of five who make up the new Climate Change Reference Group. Following the 2006 fires, ("which burnt almost all of our unit at the southern extension of the Alpine district and over 1.2 million hectares of the State") and the subsequent floods the following winter, Peter says, "Climate change has been occupying a lot of my thinking both professionally and privately. For us here in the Victorian Alps it has been so much in our face, so to speak. When I started making some comments on the subject, 'They thought I'd be a good person to put up for the new Reference Group. I see it as a venue for making some progress on this issue.'" With only one meeting under their belt, the group is still firming up how it should proceed, but according to Peter it's likely to involve supporting others who come to the group for information and resources and hopefully will lead to the development of a number of projects that will help Alps managers in understanding and living with climate change.

Anthony Evans is the Regional Operations Co-ordinator with NSW National Parks in the Snowy Mountains Region. Finance, fire management, education and pest control are among his daily concerns, for which the ability to keep an overview is crucial. And it's this skill which he's bringing to the Visitor Experiences and Marketing Reference Group. "It's important that we're able to take a step back and take a

look at the Alps as a whole - we won't be talking about the colour of the signs." Anthony also points out that the Group needs to be closely aligned with the National Landscapes Program (see page 9 for more). "We'd like to set up a means by which we can offer input, especially since we've a mix of expertise - from marketers to operational managers." Not that the new Reference Group will be hanging of the skirts of the National Landscapes Program. "We're taking a good look at various projects, some of them ongoing and handed over to us from the former working groups; making sure that they're not duplicating something which exists already, or heading off in a different direction. We also expect to come up with new projects, where the Group's expertise, put together with relevant topics, will help develop projects." Significantly, the main difference with the new reference groups as opposed to the old working groups is that the focus is on providing input and expertise rather than carrying the burden of labour intensive projects which are difficult to complete over and above members' day jobs. In this way the skills and energy of the group can be spread further.

And lastly, Rod Atkins, Australian Alps Program Manager. "The time it has taken to form the new groups has been an asset - it gave those who were interested in joining a chance to think about the implications for their own existing roles. There's also been opportunity to think through where their talents lie and what the various reference groups are responsible for. As a result we've a good paring of people with specialist skills and a genuine interest in their chosen group and what it will aim to achieve, and by default, a genuine interest in the Australian Alps Program and what it aims to do."

Look who's a Reference Group member... Climate Change - Keith McDougall (NSW), Ken Green (NSW), Peter Lawrence (Vic), Murray Evans (ACT) Cultural Heritage - Dean Freeman (NSW), Megan Bowden (NSW), Alice Williams (NSW), Mick Douthat (Vic), Colleen Nagle (Vic), Chris Smith (Vic), Jennifer Dunn (ACT), Adrian Brown (ACT) Natural Resource Management - Geoff Robertson (NSW), Josh Bean (NSW), Pam O'Brien (NSW), Rudi Pleschutschnig (Vic), Charlie Pascoe (Vic), John McRae (ACT), Margaret Kitchin (ACT) Stakeholder Engagement and Communication - Gaylene Harris (NSW), Stu Cohen (NSW), Andy Gillham (Vic), Lois Padgham (ACT), Lisa McIntosh (ACT) Visitor Experiences and Marketing - Anthony Evans (NSW), Steve Redden (NSW), Gill Anderson (Vic), Kevin Cosgriff (Vic), Dave Foster (Vic), Jane Easthope (ACT), Lea Durie (ACT) Water and Catchments - Genevieve Wright (NSW), Graeme Enders (NSW), Zarni Bear (NSW), Dannica Shaw (Vic), Tamara Boyd (Vic), Stefanie Straub (ACT), Dave Whitfield (ACT), Darren Roso (ACT)

"Now when we're discussing something that's proving a bit of a challenge, we can pull in the people we need - the experts, members of the community - to help us."

It's both a quirky way of looking at things and a straight call on how the recent 'dogs in space' findings shake down. In the words of Dr Andrew Claridge (Research Scientist with the National Parks and Wildlife Service) – "There's been no change in what the dogs do, we're just better at finding out what's happening."

WILD DOG TRACKS



Above: Detail of the weekly movement patterns of a single wild dog tracked in the Long Plain area of northern Kosciuszko National Park – convoluted but within a defined home range. Diagram by Douglas Mills.
Below: Ready to be released from the restraining board, this dingo has been fitted with a satellite-tracking collar to gather movement information that ultimately may help in the management of wild dog populations. Picture: Andrew Claridge

Gone is the previous picture based on a mixture of anecdotal information and obsolete tracking technology. Instead, the satellite system employed over the study's last three years has, "...opened windows to a view we couldn't possibly have had before..." and the view is surprising.

"When we began we didn't know a great deal about the movements of wild dogs: about their range, preferred habitats, time spent within the parks and outside, and if all this formed a stable, regular pattern or not."

The study moved across the Alps, gathering animals with a leg hold trap, making use of a restraining board ("they become very placid and compliant once they're strapped to the board"), then collecting information about the condition, sex and age of each animal before fitting them with a tracking collar prior to release. The collar, which included the tracking

device and battery pack weighed in at 270 grams, "...a low percentage of the animal's body weight." A release mechanism was also part of the system so that each animal was able to be caught and held only once – the collars were later dropped remotely and retrieved.

With the results now in hand, the previous belief that wild dogs in south-eastern Australia typically had home ranges of between 1,000 to 3,000 hectares has had to be seriously readjusted. "The satellite technology shows us that the range of most animals is closer to 10,000 hectares and in some instances 25,000 hectares and up – in other words, much, much larger." The study results also show that the dogs are not nomadic and that they occupy stable ranges. "They have a fidelity to an area and there were very few occasions where our study animals interacted with surrounding agricultural land."

Gathering information is one thing. Getting it out to those who can best make use of it is another, but already the wild dog 'road show' has been to various workshops, management committee meetings, radio interviews and individual briefings. It has also been written up as a fact sheet and scientific papers stemming from the work are in process.

"In terms of managing wild dogs in vast forested landscapes it's a difficult balancing act. Given the potentially large area that the wild dogs may range over, management efforts should be blind to tenure and focus on protecting agricultural assets – with diligent control efforts at the perimeter of national parks to ensure that stock loss is as low as possible."

With this approach, within the core areas of the larger parks, it may be possible to maintain wild dogs as important functional components of natural landscapes. Happily the Australian Alps provides a geographically large enough area to consider this possibility. For more information: contact Dr Andrew Claridge on (02) 6229 7000 or via email andrew.claridge@environment.nsw.gov.au.



dog DNA. The animals studied included pure bred dingoes as well as hybrids with a high proportion of dingo ancestry. As part of the study, as each animal was collared, a small tissue sample was collected to be assessed by a geneticist for purity. The results showed that roughly one in 15 animals was in fact a pure dingo, and the remaining hybrids contained mostly dingo genes.

techno collars. The study made use of two different types of satellite tracking systems. The first was a platform transmitting terminal or PTT, the location of an individual collared dog being established via transmission to a low-level orbit satellite system that was then relayed to a ground-based processing centre. The second system used conventional Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) technology that relied upon the reception of GPS signals from high level (20,000 km) satellites. Location data were then stored on the collar unit attached to the animal. For both types of collar the operational life was primarily determined by the size of the battery that could be carried by the wild dogs; deployments lasted from three months to over two years.





Rhonda and Norm.

Six hundred and fifty kilometres long, the Australian Alps Walking Track has definite appeal to – well almost everyone. A challenge of a wonderful stroll – it's everything to everyone simply because you can choose the section or length of track to suit yourself. For the past 14 years, Rhonda and Norm Aquilina have been sitting at the southern end of the Track at Walhalla running the town's general store. No surprises then that they've so many Track related stories – as Rhonda is happy to tell...

STORIES FROM THE TRACK

One of my fondest memories is of the 60 year old German gentleman who left Germany one January when it was minus eight, and arrived in Walhalla in a taxi and walked out of town on a very hot, total fire ban day. He became ill when he was about a week into the walk and returned to Walhalla. He had it in his mind to catch the train to Sale then the coach to Canberra and walk back, which he did over five weeks and within the year he'd returned to Australia and walked from Walhalla to Canberra. Originally he found it hard to deal with the Australian conditions but he was introduced to an Australian walker who gave him some hints. They have become firm friends and often walk together when Franz is in Australia. When I asked him why he wanted to do the walk he replied, "I read about the walk in the Lonely Planet and wanted to walk at my own pace away from the European crowds".

Another German tourist set out just before Christmas, leaving his business card with us. Early one morning we received a telephone call but it kept dropping out – all we could hear was, "It's Reimer here and I need help". We made a decision to call the police who tracked his mobile and sent in a search party. Apparently he had been bitten by a snake which caused him to become very sick. He spent a few days in hospital before returning to collect his possessions from

the police station. He emailed me to thank us but told us he'd wanted help not a rescue however the police said he was very lucky to be found when he was.

Then there was the young guy with dreadlocks and a didgeridoo who headed off. A fit well prepared guy who I believe completed the walk. Imagine the sound of the didgeridoo in the high country – magic.

Two guys walked into Walhalla from Canberra and, looking to get to the coast, we offered to drop them off at the train station in Traralgon 48 km away the next morning when we went for the newspapers. They agreed, and we helped them find accommodation for the night and meal. The next morning when we collected them from the hotel, we laughed when they told us they hadn't been able to sleep in a bed after camping out for six weeks so they'd rolled their swags out and slept on the floor.

And for anyone who completes the entire walk, progressively in sections or all in one go, they are presented with an official certificate. Walkers call and let us know their intentions and some leave an itinerary so I can email Lisa McIntosh at the other end and let her know their ETA to have a certificate ready.

When archaeologist Josephine Flood explored Yarrangobilly Cave in Kosciuszko National Park around the 1970s, it had appeared, “apparently barren” despite the fact that it seemed ideal an place for human occupation. Happily she found what she was looking for at Cloggs Cave, Buchan, and the excavation which began in 1971 lead to dated evidence of Indigenous presence in the Alps dating back 17,000 years.

EVIDENCE AT 1100 METRES

In some ways, Yarrangobilly has slept on like Sleeping Beauty, full of promise but with little evidence found – until now, and to some extent, by accident. Fred Ford, of the CSIRO Australian National Wildlife Collection explains what happened.

“Ken Alpin and I had been doing work in December 2005 on the original faunas of the Yarrangobilly area; excavating to provide a deeper context for the change from pre- to post-European faunas.”

Digging in a cave several kilometres from the tourist area, we spent hours of crow-barring through solid calcite to get as deep as possible, then carrying out the 15 – 20 kilo bags of material for the sorting and dating of what was expected to be purely faunal remains. “But in the course of sorting through this material, Ken noticed fragments of silcrete and burnt bones indicative of occupation of the site almost 9,000 years ago.”

The significance of this is huge given that, until now, there has been an unsupported (in one way or another) belief that Aboriginal occupation of caves at this altitude– the excavated cave at Yarrangobilly sits at almost 1100 metres above sea level - was unlikely although high altitude campsites are known, high on the Ramshead Range and elsewhere. Not that Fred or Andy Spate share this view, though both are careful to state that there are others more qualified to comment. Says Fred, “The notion that people didn’t use the caves seems ridiculous. The caves are warm, dry and located next to the hunting grounds.” And Andy, “This find adds to the growing body of evidence which questions the notion that Indigenous peoples didn’t go into caves. We know they did: harvesting flint and water kilometres into caves in the Nullabor; making use of caves as disposition sites for ancestors; possibly even harvesting calcite for medicinal use.”

Steve Horsley, the parks agency’s Regional Manager, took the findings to the Northern Kosciuszko Aboriginal Working Group which represents an area around Yarrangobilly, Tumut and Brungle, and in terms of Aboriginal nations, the Wiradjuri and Wolgalu. Says Steve, “There was a lot of documented evidence of Indigenous occupation back 3,000 years, and skeletons discovered out at Blue Waterholes which were dated at 1,500 years, but to find evidence of 9,000 years was thrilling.”

And that may just be the beginning. According to Fred Ford, “There are unknown potential depths to the deposit, and the possible future significance of the site, and region, is quite exciting. Obviously we’ll not be continuing work on the dig until heritage issues have been sorted out, and the archaeologists have had a chance to take up the offer to



Ken Alpin (CSIRO) hammering through the solidified cave floor using a large chisel.



alps’ caves. Forty years ago, the Indigenous occupation of Cloggs Cave at Buchan was scientifically confirmed, but in the time-frame of the cave’s human history, forty years is barely a blink. And that’s because archaeologists have confirmed occupation dating back 17,000 years. Regardless of its age, Cloggs Cave provides us with a sense of many lives lived. “It’s a ripper of a cave both in terms of shelter and location. Being there you get a real sense of the history”, explains Dale Calnin, Ranger in Charge at Buchan. “You can see where people lit their fires, made their tools. Looking out over the river flats you know why they chose this particular location – to spot the animals to hunt.” The cave also sits within a valley which served as a major corridor for people travelling up into the high country to harvest Bogong moths *Agrotis infusa*. As they journeyed they’d be taking shelter in the limestone outcrops and caves. Not surprisingly, there are many known (and who knows how many unknown) shelter sites in the Alps, and among them, the oldest yet dated – New Guinea Ridge with occupation confirmed at 23,000 years ago. “This cave sits in an unbelievable location - a hundred metres from the Snowy River with a permanent creek running through. There would have been fishing in the river and fresh water in the cave.”



Gaining a deeper understanding of the Alps is what the Frontline Workshops are all about.

Sometimes you can be so immersed in what you're doing and why that it's easy to lose track of the fact that others might not be as up to speed. In essence, this is what the Frontline workshops are all about – spreading the message about why the Australian Alps are so precious.

AT THE FRONTLINE

But not in a random fashion – no. A fair amount of strategic thinking has produced a format used a number of times previously, but not since Victoria in 2005, and New South Wales during the same year. The formula is simple and effective: gather together a group of people who have frontline contact with visitors to the Alps and expose them to the many dimensions that make up the Alps. Mary Green, with the Parks and Wildlife Division (NSW Department of Environment & Climate Change) explains.

“The Frontline Workshops are held over two days with presentations covering topics such as: the geology of the Alps; alpine plants and animals; European and Indigenous

cultural heritage. Our aim is to have more people understanding firstly that the Alps is one bio-geographic unit. We want them to have a sense of where they are on many different levels, and then be able to communicate these values to others. The result should hopefully not only be more effective support of the management of the Alps, but an improved visitor experience.”

As well as the broader concepts, the Workshop is designed to address current happenings. Previously, post fire recovery was a feature. In the future, the hot topic could well be gaining an understanding of the National Landscapes Initiative (see page 9 for more on this).

Given that it has been three years since the last Workshop, not surprisingly the wheels are again in motion to organise another. More information will be sent out via email. Keep an eye out for notices to be sent to visitor information centre staff and those in the tourism industry in the coming months.



COLOUR CODING 4WD TRACKS

Across Victoria, there's a project afoot which aims to classify all the publicly-open four wheel drive tracks (4WD) on Crown land which is managed by Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Using a four-level classification system (similar to that used for alpine skiing), drivers will be able to plan touring routes based on track conditions, experience and skill level. In the Alps - The Snowy River and Alpine national parks together with adjacent State forests – this system will provide a range of different touring routes from beginner and 'soft-roader' users to the more serious and skilled users in well-equipped dual range vehicles.

Of course the success of the project depends on the support of the participating 4WD club members who are

being trained to assess track conditions, the aim being to produce consistent assessment against three major criteria - gradient, track profile and track stability. Data collected will be incorporated in the State's roading database and will be available to map makers and satellite navigation software companies.

Not only will 4WD enthusiasts gain from all this, but regional communities around the Alps are expected to be major winners, as 4WD users spend more time in the region while enjoying the variety of touring routes in the local area.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

As this issue of News from the Alps goes to press, the Barcelona World Conservation Congress will have drawn to a close. The 6,000 or so people – decision makers in protected areas, sustainable development, from governments, NGOs, business, the UN and academia – will have completed the ten days helping to shape the activities of the IUCN. Having been exposed to a volume of information offered by leaders in their fields, and on the basis of what they've seen and heard, this diverse group will have voted on the resolutions put forward – framing the IUCN's actions on the ground for the next few years.

A regular update from Dr Graeme Worboys, Vice Chair of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (Mountains Biome). Many Australian Alps staff and supporters are members of the IUCN WCPA Mountains Biome - a network of technical, scientific and policy experts dealing with mountain protected areas globally.

At this Congress one of the topics concerned connectivity conservation and the importance of maintaining large interconnected natural areas of biodiversity between core protected areas. In the Australian Alps we already have an understanding of the climate change-induced biome shift and its negative effects. We appreciate its impact, particularly on fauna where there is no opportunity for movement between fragmented islands of national park – and this is why the Australian Alps was so well represented at the Workshop.

As master of ceremonies of this Connectivity Conservation Workshop, Sally Barnes, (Head, NSW Parks and Wildlife Group) launched the World Premiere screening of a documentary on connectivity conservation for the whole east coast of Australia along the great eastern ranges. The vision is to keep these 2800 north-south kilometres between Atherton and the Australian Alps (A2A) natural and as unfragmented as it has been for the last 80 years. This launch was followed by a presentation by Bob Debus, Australian Government Minister for Home Affairs and former NSW Environment Minister on the A2A Corridor (Also known as the Great Eastern Ranges). To round out the topic and to achieve a global perspective, other presentations explored connectivity conservation in the Mesoamerican biological corridor and Yellowstone to Yukon corridor.

Connectivity conservation is one global response to the threats of climate change and biome shift, and we should be proud that our very own Australian Alps took such a prominent profile at such an important International Forum.



***IUCN? Who? The International Union for Conservation of Nature helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. It supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world and brings governments, non-government organizations, United Nations agencies, companies and local communities together to develop and implement policy, laws and best practice. It's the world's oldest and largest global environmental network - a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. Visit www.iucn.org/ to find out more...**

THANKS AGAIN

If you've ever wondered who has worked to carry out the vision (and mission) of the Australian Alps Program since its inception, well here they are. Heads of agencies, working group members, and the members of the AALC itself : these are the people who've made a rewarding contribution to a bio-region valued from so many different points of view...

Adrian Brown, Alastair Grinbergs, Amanda Carey, Andrew Harrigan, Andrew Tatnall, Andy Murray, Angie Jenkins, Anita Brady, Ann Jelenik, Bart Smith, Ben Wallace, Bill Logan, Bob Jones, Brett McNamara, Brian Gilligan, Brian Martin, Brian Terill, Bruce Gall, Bruce Leaver, Bryan Walters, Charlie Pascoe, Chris Rose, Christian Hampson, Colin Adrian, Colin Griffiths, Colin Killick, Craig Hore, Craig Kelly, Craig Richardson, Craig Smith, Daniel Catrice, Daryl Burns, Dave Burton, Dave Darlington, Dave Foster, David Dwyer, David Phillips, Dean Freeman, Deb Bourke, Debbie Argue, Dennis Matthews, Dianne Garood, Dierdre Slattery, Don Fletcher, Don Saunders, Elizabeth Fowler, Evan McDowel, Felicity Brooke, Fiona Colquohn, Frances Murray, Frank Inverson, Gary Crosten, Genevieve Wright, Geoff Vincent, Geoff Winnett, Geoff Young, Georgianna Fein, Gill Anderson, Gillian Lee, Glenn Bellchambers, Graeme Enders, Graeme Worboys, Graham Yapp, Greg Fraser, Greg Hayes, Gregor Manson, Greg Plummer, Greg Tedder, Hilary Sullivan, Ian Foletta, Ian Garvan, Ian Pulsford, Ian Weir, James Eldridge, Jane Lennon, Janet Mackay, Janice Cawthorn, Jennifer Dunn, Jenny Bolwell, Jim Weston, John Feint, John Henry, John Williams, Josh Bean, Julia Stuart, Juliet Ramsay, Karen Civil, Karon Beaton, Kathryn Maxwell, Kathy Tracey, Keith Twyford, Ken Heffernan, Kim Robinson, Kris Rowe, Lee Thomas, Linda Webb, Liz Avis, Liz Wren, Lois Padgham, Lyn Nelson, Malcolm Forbes, Maree Miller, Marg Wade, Margot Sharp, Mark Armstrong, Mark Butz, Mark Hallam, Mark Lintermans, Mark Stone, Mary Green, Maureen Ellis, Maxine Cooper, Meg Switzer, Megan Bowden, Michael Howes, Mick Ivill, Mike Young, Monica McDonald, Monica Muranyi, Murray Evans, Neil Shepherd, Neville Byrne, Nigel Watts, Odile Arman, Pam O'Brien, Pat Darlington, Paul Boretta, Paul Davies, Paul Stevenson, Penny McLennan, Penny Spoelder, Peter Bray, Peter Bridgewater, Peter Cochrane, Peter Cullen, Peter Hann, Peter Jacobs, Peter King, Peter Lawrence, Peter Taylor, Peter Windle, Phil Boot, Ray Supple, Rob Hunt, Rob Saunders, Robert Moore, Robyn Kruk, Rod Atkins, Rod Gowans, Roger Good, Ross McKinney, Ross Scott, Russell Knutson, Russell Watkinson, Sharon Lane, Simon Allender, Simon Tozer, Stephen Hughes, Stephen Alegria, Steve Cathcart, Steve Redden, Stuart Cohen, Sue Feary, Theo Hooy, Tony Corrigan, Tony Fleming, Tracie Brauer, Trish Macdonald, Virginia Logan.

(Of course the danger of listing everyone is that someone may be left off by accident – forgive us if we have.)

DIARY

(see page 7 for detail on some of these events)

February 2009, Victoria
Meeting of the AALC

Late February 2009,
Canberra
National Landscapes
Steering Group meeting

16-17 March 2009,
Kosciuszko National Park
Heads of Agencies meeting

March 2009, Victoria
Third meeting of the Alps
Indigenous Reference
Group

Autumn 2009, Bogong
High Plains area, Victoria
Indigenous Heritage
Landscape Assessment
Skills Training

Autumn 2009, Bogong
High Plains area, Victoria
IUCN/Australian Alps
Science Management
Forum – Alpine and
Sub-alpine Wetlands

April 2009, venue tba
Timber Working
Workshop

May 2009, Tidbinbilla,
Birrighai, ACT
Frontline Workshop

Late May/early June 2009
venue and precise dates tba
AALC/AOG meeting to
approve the 2009-10 work
program

people working together for
the Australian Alps

Many of you would have had the opportunity to meet Bruce Leaver over the years. At the end of June 2008 Bruce stood down as the Australian Government's member of the AALC and Head of Agency rep to make way for Peter Taylor and Peter Cochrane (respectively) from Parks Australia.

FAREWELL TO BRUCE

Bruce has been involved with the Alps program from its inception when he occupied the equivalent of what is now the position of Director Southern Branch NSW DECC at Queanbeyan back in the mid 80s. After stints in South Australia and Tasmania Bruce returned to Canberra as the Head of the Heritage Division of, what is now, the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts where he kept the Australian Government actively involved in the Alps Program.

We all wish Bruce well for the future but we don't think this will be the last we see of him as we hope he will become a member of the Alps Senior Advisors Group which we hope to set up.

While we wish Bruce well we also look forward to working with Peter and Peter (this will get confusing with Peter Jacobs on the AALC as well) who are no strangers to the Alps with Peter Taylor having been on the AALC many years ago and Peter Cochrane having worked at Kosciuszko National Park and previously being the Commonwealth Head of Agency rep.



Bruce Leaver is "farewelled" by those attending the Alps Senior Advisors' discussion at Albury in August. From left to right, Peter Jacobs, Dave Darlington, Roger Good, Bruce, Peter Taylor, Bob Jones, Graeme Worboys, Brian Martin, Nev Gare.



Australian Government
Department of the Environment,
Water, Heritage and the Arts