

The Bushwalker

North East Split,
Rock Island, Wollemi NP

Volume 39
Issue 3
Winter 2014

Wouldn't you like to be here?



Pagodas in the Ben Bullen State Forest. Photo: Emanuel Conomos.



Seal Rock, Ben Bullen State Forest. Photo: Brian Fox.

From the editor's desk. . .

In June I was the guest speaker at a meeting of STEP, an environmental group affiliated with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW. The requested subject to be addressed was 'Coal Mining and Bushwalking in the Ben Bullen State Forest and the Gardens of Stone National Park Stage 2'.

This subject is dear to my heart but it is also one that raises questions of the expropriation of Public land, the appropriateness of Government policy in respect to our natural heritage and the relentless pursuit of profit by a minority interest group, the coal mining industry.

I started the presentation with a summary of the tyranny of Sydney Basin geology that has both blest and cursed NSW with the world's finest pagodas and accessible coal inextricably bound together.

The 2013 defeat of an application by Coalpac to destroy 1000 hectares of the Ben Bullen State Forest and its unique flora was a pyrrhic victory. Even the timely insolvency of the company gives little joy. Conservationists and bushwalkers are now faced with fighting the battle again as phoenix like, the company has reincarnated, with Energy Australia, a Chinese owned company, pledging publicly to buy Coalpac if it is successful in securing a reduced lease over the coal deposit in the Ben Bullen State Forest.

Hydra headed, there are now three applications to fight. I suspect that even if these three battles, are awarded in our favour, the mining industry will not go away. It will be Bulga vs Rio Tinto again.

There is one tenuous ray of hope. The NSW State Labour Party has embraced a policy of adopting and declaring the Gardens of Stone National Park Stage 2, should it win office. Whilst this is laudable and possibly achievable, I suspect that the mining industry will work to overturn this policy if there is the remotest chance of it becoming enshrined in law.

This issue of the *Bushwalker* contains quite a few articles about coal mining and bushwalking. Hopefully bushwalkers who read these articles will be motivated to act and continue to defend our ever diminishing natural heritage from the predations of coal mining.

Articles for Publication

We are always happy to receive pictures for the Inside Front Cover. If you would like to see yours published, send them in. In particular, little 640x480 photos and, little photos from cheap phones are just not good enough: they simply do not print well enough at 300 dpi. We need the full-size originals, straight from the camera and uncropped and unretouched, so we can set them up for the printing process.

Apart from that, please keep those bushwalking articles rolling in. We need them. If you are describing a walk somewhere, it would really help if you could give the reader (who may be from far away) some idea of where the walk is. We don't need GRs, just a general idea. We need suitable photos for most every article, so please include a few. Once again, note that little, cropped or shrunk photos will rarely be accepted. If you want to include a DOC file or a PDF (in addition to the mandatory plain text file and full-sized photos) to illustrate how the photos fit into the text, please do so as well. That can only help.

However, photos embedded in DOC or PDF files are not accepted by themselves, and neither are scans of standard photographic prints - with the possible exception of historical items where the print is all that exists. Finished DOC and PDF articles are not suitable by themselves either: we often have to rearrange the text to fit on the page with ads or other changes. Plain text plus original photos!

Finally, the opinions expressed by authors may not represent the official opinions of the Confederation or of any Club. The Editor's opinions are his own, are subject to change without explanation, and may be pretty biased anyhow.

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Bushwalking NSW Inc represents approximately 66 Clubs with a total membership of about 8,700 bushwalkers.

Formed in 1932, Bushwalking NSW provides a united voice on behalf of all bushwalkers on conservation, access and other issues.

People interested in joining a bushwalking club may write to the Bushwalking Administration admin@bushwalking.org.au for a list of Clubs, but a far more useful on-line list is available at the Bushwalkers NSW Inc website www.bushwalking.org.au, broken up into areas. There's lots of other good stuff there too, including the Australian Bushwalking FAQ.



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Front Cover: North East Split, Rock Island, Wollemi National Park. Photo: Brian Fox.

Back Cover: Climbing up to Bockarscharte Col. The climb to the famous nick in the Allgäu Alps is rugged, steep and physically challenging, but also impressive and exciting. Photo: Roger Caffin.

Planned Destruction!

What part of our heritage will be destroyed next by the coal industry?

This is an account of a walk in the south western corner of the Newnes State Forest. It is an area that few bushwalkers have explored, yet it contains some of the best examples of platy pagodas, some significant Aboriginal heritage together with an insight into European use of the area in the 1950s.

Current applications by Centennial Coal, if successful to expand underground mining activities of the Springvale Colliery and the Angus Place Colliery could result in irreversible damage. This story is about what is at stake if the Springvale application succeeds. It is a fair summary of what four bushwalkers discovered on Monday 16th June 2014.

It was the first real day of winter weather for 2104, a brilliant crisp sunny day with the only visible cloud not moving from the far western horizon. Occasional winds were very cold. The temperature ranged from 3 to 9 degrees.

The area explored is subject to an application by Centennial Coal, for an extension of underground long wall mining at the Springvale Colliery that will impact on 1,860 hectares of Newnes Plateau forest in Stage Two of the Gardens of Stone National Park reserve proposal. The proposed mining will unacceptably impact on cliffs, pagodas, 41 nationally endangered swamps, including 11 shrub swamps and the headwater catchments of three creeks causing reduced stream flows and water pollution*.

Brian Fox in discussions with Danny Whitty, a long time local resident of the Wallerawang – Lidsdale area revealed that in the 1950s, and prior to the damming of Sawyers Swamp for a fly ash dam for the Wallerawang power station, it was common practice for families to visit the valleys and ridges between Angus Place Trail and Beecroft Firetail for picnics and outings.

Michael Keats,
The Bush Club

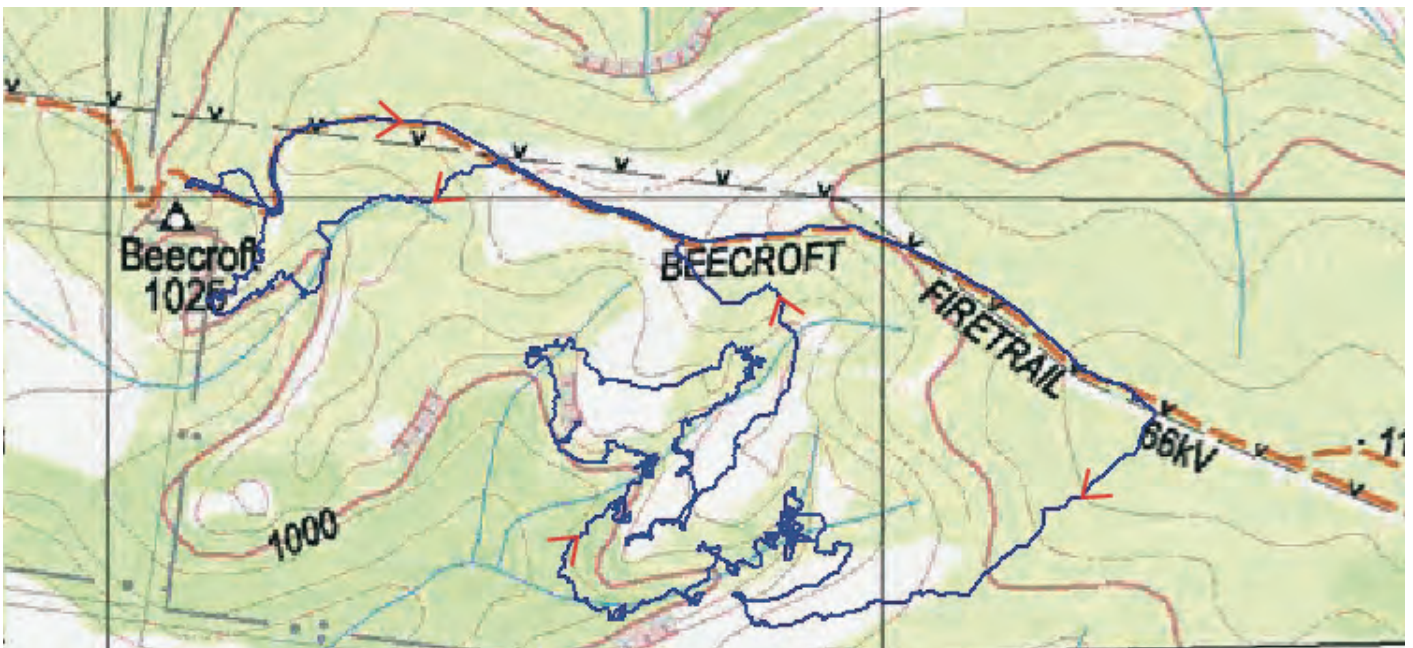
We were all keen to be walking, everyone was early at meeting points and we were parked, discussed the major elements of the walk and were in the bush before 0830. At approximately GR 310 035 we headed west through thinning forest that soon reduced to a straggly, *Leptospermum* dominated brush. This brush is unique surviving on very thin soils that are covered in lichen, (*Cladonia sp.*) and as the plateau edge is reached there are increasing areas of weathered sandstone until it becomes a totally sandstone environment. Here under residual rock slabs colonies of ants, small invertebrates and occasional skinks such as the Copper tail, *Ctenotus taeniolatus*, can be found.

At 0845 we stood high on a pagoda perched above the cliff edge, GR 308 035. The sunlight cast amazing shadows creating a luminous landscape that only clear, brilliant winter weather can produce. From this pagoda we moved down the cliff edge a further few metres, climbed another pagoda and looked down into an almost vertically sided ravine. The immediate cliff walls were more than 30m high and non negotiable.

Determined to get down into the floor of the ravine we sidled along the cliff edge to the north east testing every few metres for an opportunity to make a descent. As we moved upstream the cliffs diminished in height and the angle of slope from changed from vertical to a more negotiable 60 degrees. At 0901, we dropped down a level and entered a slot system that as a minimum promised a closer view of a magic forest that we could tell was essentially huge Brown

Barrel Gums, *Eucalyptus fastigata* with an understorey of ferns. The slot descent ended as a crescentic balcony, still tens of metres above the valley floor. Yuri tested the northern end of the balcony and without his pack was able to crawl across a dubious shale ledge to a much easier rock shelf that looked as though it might provide a route.

After passing his pack and then the other packs we each squeezed over the exposed shale shelf and emerged on the other side. Then followed some upright shelf walking, some scrambling, some controlled sliding and presto! we were down in a valley whose cliffs were full of caves. It was now 0915 and we were feeling very satisfied with our accomplishment. Looking around we noticed a lot of cut stumps. No surprise, this is Newnes State Forest. The cut logs would all have been dragged out



Plot of our route overlain on the Cullen Bullen topographic map. Prepared by Chris Sterling.

downstream to the Wolgan Road. Looking at the nature of the cuts to the stumps, these were all done using chain saws, so at the earliest this area would have been logged post WWII.

We now set about a systematic exploration of all the caves. At 0911 in a large overhang cave with a dry level floor, we found graffiti (not decipherable) and most importantly at least three Aboriginal hand stencils executed in red ochre. One of the stencils appeared to be a pair of hands together. This is unusual. Also as we walked around John found an ancient shovel with an improvised cut branch handle. So here in this cave we had evidence of Aboriginal occupation and evidence of European use possibly 1946 – 1950. This was at 1029m. The cave is more than 30m across the mouth and up to 20m in height. It was 0934 before we left this site and moved on to explore more of the secrets of this protected gully. We decided to call this The Valley of the Caves. Four more large caves in the area we visited but none had the right set of factors to be attractive for easy occupation and use as the cave with the stencil art work.

A cavernous space some 100m downstream was noted. All around this narrow ravine like valley are heavily dissected cliffs. At 0959 a sunny spot was chosen for morning tea. Eleven minutes later we were on the go again as there was much to see and explore. Given the number of observed cut stumps and the size of the trees taken for logging it was no surprise to find the remnants of an old road. This was just below the nose of a narrow pagoda ridge that was on our 'to explore' list. For the moment our energy was to investigate the ravine / valley next west that could contain a similar set of

caves and items of interest.

At 1021, we were exploring a ledge system in the next valley. The aerial photos showed that a canyon like structure possibly existed in the upper reaches although it may not be accessible from the bottom. Moving upstream in the valley but hugging the base of the eastern cliffs we entered a large, dry cave complete with a fireplace. The northern end of this cave coincided with the outfall of the suspected canyon above. A 5m drop of very slippery rocks and mosses put paid to any idea of climbing up. We made a mental note that if we had time we would try and enter this canyon from the top and then explore it down to this drop. It looked very narrow and exciting.

Moving west we followed the cliffs seeking a way up. A slot was peered into but it terminated after about 30m. A high level chock stone was out of reach as an anchor to attach a rope. We moved on and at 1058, a possible slot up became an actual ascent point. The view from the top back into the valley was an adrenalin rush. We had climbed so high so fast. After a quick pagoda climb to take pictures and a discussion about our options, we headed back east to drop down into the canyon that we could not climb up from the bottom.

By 1120 the lip of a descent point was reached. We dropped down or correctly slid down to find we had lobbed into yet another habitation cave. This commodious cave over 5m deep and equally wide, was organised with cut poles dividing it into sections, why we have no idea. There were many old rusting tins including several that looked as though they once held condensed milk. Graffiti on the back wall had clearly the initials 'KW' in charcoal. There were a lot

more but time had rendered them illegible. The hearth of the cave revealed an interesting item, a cast iron rake with shaped end tines. It was very heavy. It was similar to kit used in a blacksmiths forge setup. Also in the cave found a glass bottle fragment with the letters ?HESTER around part of the base. We suspect the full word was Chester. [Chester (Cheshire, UK) drinks manufacturers - mainly from about 1880 to the mid century.]

This cave was only a few metres from the start of the creek that in 50m became the canyon. As I was walking down from the cave I saw a shining metal disc perforated with three holes. This appeared to be an aluminium cooking pot that had found use later as a shooting target. The stream shortly after became very steep and started to narrow, then unexpectedly developed into an almost tubular cavern.

What a place to choose for recording your name. Unfortunately the walls are wet a lot of the time and much is lost forever. There are three legible letters, 'DAN' that could be part of Danny or Daniel. After pushing through a scrubby section of the creek we emerged onto a widening rock platform on the eastern side. This platform enabled us to look down into the narrow slot of the canyon that suddenly was metres deep. It also enabled us to walk to the edge and look down into the gully directly above the unclimbable section we had looked up at 1032.

This ledge was more than a viewing platform, in that it morphed into a platy pagoda and a way of climbing up onto the stub ridge between the two valley ravines. There was minor exposure but that is the nature of exploring in this country. By 1150 the canyon was below us and the crest of the ridge was ours. We now made our way along an ever narrowing ridge where the views were stunning, particularly to the south and south east where the pagodas were numerous and so decorative. After a prowl to the end of the high rocks, and taking lots of photos a spot protected from the wind was found at GR 307 036 where lunch was top priority.

Over lunch it was planning time for the afternoon. We would explore an interesting ridge to the west and the old now decommissioned Beecroft Trig. By 1236 good progress had been made heading north through open ridge country and then dropping down into a shallow ravine. This crossing of the ravine is actually the northern most tributary of the canyon explored earlier. Then it was pushing through timbered country to the crown of the ridge. Unintentionally, we broke through the bush and landed on the Beecroft Firetrail. The trail was then used to make rapid progress to GR 305 041 where we headed south west and down into a ravine.

We had been spoilt in the morning by seeing so much in a short time. The ravine whilst interesting just did not grab us and



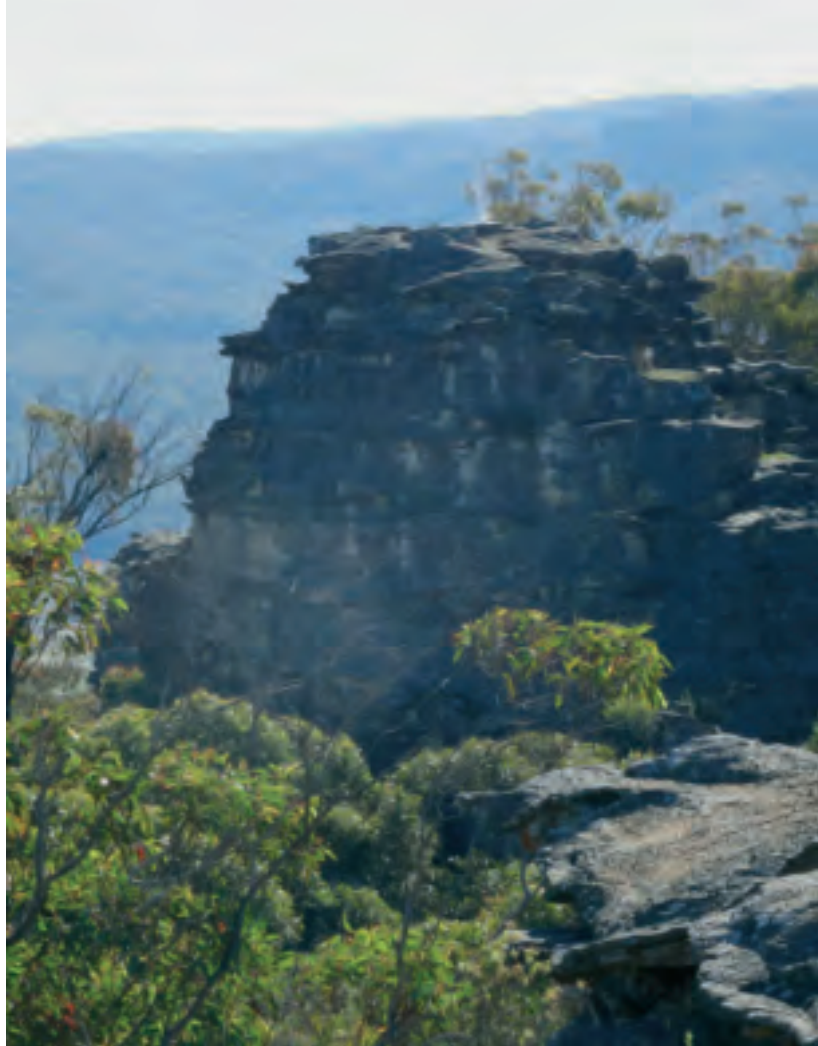
Michael in the tubular section of the canyon just before it drops several metres. On the wall are many sets of initials. The most readable being VFN. This could have been executed by a member of the Newbeck family. Photo: Chris Sterling

Walk Safely—Walk with a Club

a cave we thought held promise was a bit of a disappointment. We kept walking along the base of the western cliffs of this ravine checking various slots as possible exit options. At 1315 a complex set of slots formed by a collapsing stack right on the end of the ridge was examined. To go down was not attractive. To go up was technically possible. Yuri did a quick reconnoitre and pronounced it doable. There were many foot and hand holds, a good log to bang your head on and quite a bit of air below (read exposure). It was a good climb and once on the top you could look down in amazement at where you had come from. Somehow in a very short time (it was now 1321) we had gained about 40m.

Three or four pagodas away was the Beecroft Firetrail once more. This was reached at 1330. Now it was time to visit the old Beecroft Trig. We spent a bit of time following the Beecroft Firetrail north instead of going west. This was soon corrected and at 1343 we climbed the trig, GR 301 040.

By 1409 the road walk was behind and we were back at the vehicles. Already it was cold and cooling down rapidly. Total distance walked 10.2km. Total ascents 447m. A Ring Tail Possum was encountered on the drive out. It seemed disoriented and allowed close up pictures. It did not get off the road until gently prodded on the back. ♦



The Beecroft Trig is the white pillar at the top of the pagoda

* Colong Foundation for Wilderness, submission to NSW Department of Planning & Infrastructure – Springvale Mine Extension (SSD 12_5594) dated 26th May 2014.



COMING EVENTS

13/14 September - 15/24 hour, Lithgow area

16 November - 6 hour, Sydney area

www.nswrogaining.org

Miners put Gardens of Stone under siege

Keith Muir, Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

In the last few months three major coal mining proposals in the Gardens of Stone region have come forward, plus a minor modification that seeks to lock regulators into intensive underground mining on Newnes Plateau. So now the fate of this outstanding region, which is part of the original 1932 Greater Blue Mountains National Park proposal, largely rests with these mining plans.

Coalpac has proposed to restart its Cullen Valley and Invincible mines, and Centennial Coal has proposed major expansions of underground longwall mining at its Angus Place and Springvale collieries.

The Colong Foundation's submissions to all three damaging proposals are below.

Coalpac back from the dead

The Coalpac proposal has come back after rejection of previous mine expansion plans due to a second amendment in the Department of Planning and Infrastructure's original refusal. The Department reluctantly accepted that there 'may be merit in allowing a smaller extension that avoids the most sensitive parts of the site.'

While under administration Coalpac has secured enough funds to prepare and lodge two modification proposals to mine 315 hectares.

Centennial Coal puts the Newnes Plateau and drinking water supplies at risk

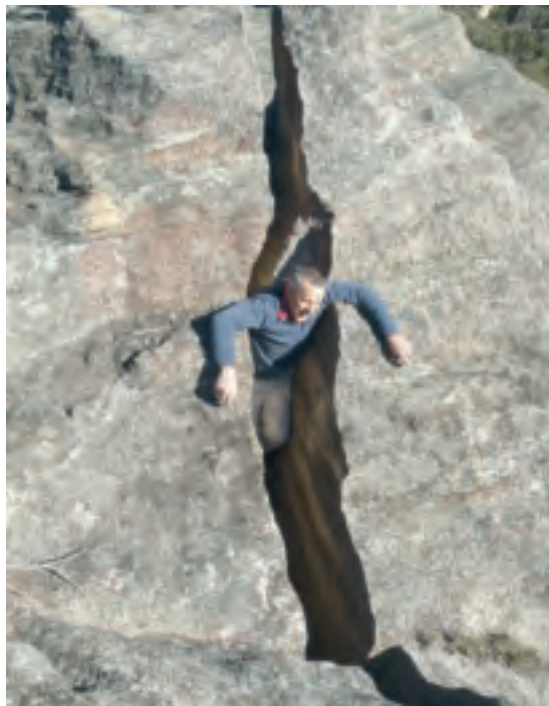
Centennial Coal plans two massive longwall projects that would pollute Sydney's drinking water supply and undermine 4,500 hectares of forest and pagoda rock formations in the Newnes State Forest. Centennial plans to pump, untreated, up to 43.8 million litres of

contaminated mine effluent, releasing 30 tonnes of salt into a day into the Cocks River which is part of Sydney's main drinking water supply. Angus Place has also made a further modification proposal that seeks to establish the intensity of its longwall mining in the sensitive Carne Creek catchment before the Planning Assessment Commission has looked at these proposals.

These mines will put at risk 17 shrub swamps and 46 hanging swamps, all of which are nationally endangered. The swamps are damaged when the coal mining by longwall machines fractures the underlying sandstone rock. Once the surface sandstone rock is fractured the swamps dry out, collapse and die.

The Colong Foundation is working with the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Lithgow Environment Group to reserve 40,000 hectares of the Gardens of Stone in a state conservation area, and will continue to fight to stop the damage to this outstanding natural area. ♦

Brian Fox illustrates just how big the cracks are.
Photo: Michael Keats



Wallerawang Power Station, oh so close.
Photo: Brian Fox



Open cut mining encroaching on Ben Bullen State Forest. Photo: Brian Fox

Disrupted watercourse after heavy rain, Ben Bullen State Forest. Photo: Emanuel Conomos



Exploration of old mines in the Medway area

Coal mining has a longer history in NSW than organised bushwalking. The following brief notes and photographs graphically tell the story of several small historic mines in the Wingecarribee River Gorge and the Medway Rivulet area. Exploration of these old mines west of Berrima in the Southern Highlands of NSW was carried out in May 2014.

Our professional correspondent records that he

- Found and descended the ladders built in 1872 so miners could access the Rockroof Colliery in the Wingecarribee River Gorge. The Ladders are made of Iron rails and are in pretty good condition.
- Found the Rockroof Colliery and explored it.
- Returned to the plateau and located the top of the Loch Catherine Colliery incline, and descend to the adits (and explored several of them)
- Descended to the Medway Rivulet and explored it upstream as far as the waterfall.
- Found that there is a pass from the 1860's Cataract Colliery to the plateau.
- Climbed the pass to the top of the waterfall and noted the remains of the old wooden ladder from the 1860's in the pass.
- Walked an old miner's road from the top of the waterfall to Medway village.

Few others are likely to ever to have the opportunity to venture into this country and experience the wonders of this historic infrastructure.

These historical notes were prepared by Stephen Imrie.



Medway Rivulet Waterfall



Coal Mines on Medway Rivulet

The mine below the waterfall has had two names.

- The Cataract Coal Mine from the early 1860's to at least 1867. (This mine predates the NSW Mines Department)
- Brereton's Coal Mine was reported as idle in 1876 and not at work in 1878. (Mines Department Annual Reports)

The Loch Catherine Mine

1923 to 1959. (NSW Mines Department Annual Reports)

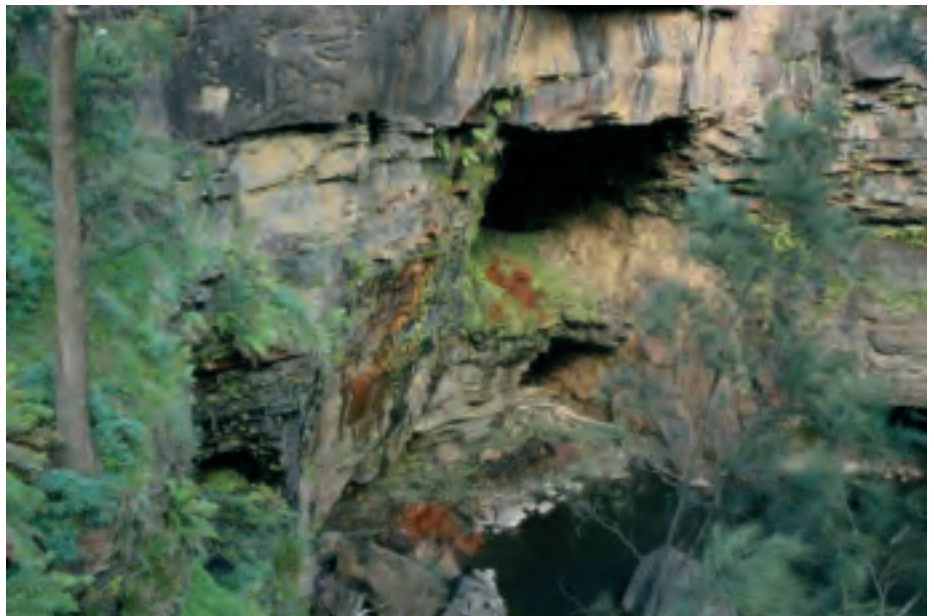
Supplied coal to the Maldon Cement Works.

Flying Fox Colliery

Prior to 1926. Information from Jim Galloway. (Does not show up in the Mines Department Annual Reports).

Belanglo Colliery

1930 to 1931. (Mines Department Annual Reports)



Bushrangers cave, with fortification walls (middle top) and Cataract Coal Mine (lower right).

Rockroof Cloolery,
1872 ladder



Loch Catherine Colliery



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Coal Mines on the Wingecarribee River.

The same reserve of coal has been mined from two separate entrances and under several different names. (Mines Department Annual Reports)
The first entrance has had several different names:-

Rockroof Colliery

1872 to at least 1875 and idle in 1876.
The Berrima Coal-Mining and Railway Company 1880 to 1882.

Berrima Colliery

1882 to 1886.

Great Southern Colliery

1887 with the last entry in the Mines Department Annual Reports in 1896.

The second entry is upstream from the first and was in use until the mine was placed on care and maintenance in 2013.

Medway Colliery

1924 till 1931.

Berrima Colliery

1929 till 2013. The Mines Department referred to this mine as both the Medway and Berrima during the period 1929-1931.

Both the Medway and Berrima supplied coal to the Berrima Cement Works.



1872 Rockroof Colliery Adit



Wingecarribee River



Cataract Coal Miners Pass and Ladder (1860s)



Wingecarribee River Gorge.
Miners ladders and Rockroof Colliery are on the right.

Coolah Tops

Beyond the "Black Stump"

Margaret Harrison
U3A Endeavour Happy Wanderers.
Photos: Geoff Hodgson.



U3A Endeavour Happy Wanderers does a trip every year to explore a different part of the state. This year's trip was scheduled for May. One of our members suggested the Coolah area, not for its long walks, but to explore the area. Coolah is being promoted as the gateway to the Warrumbungles.

We stayed at the Coolah Valley Hotel. This is an old style pub with bathrooms down the corridor. Our group of 20 was made very welcome. We were given exclusive use of a common room upstairs.

Coolah is one of several towns to claim bragging rights as the home of the legendary Black Stump. It was here that the colloquial saying 'Beyond the Black Stump', meaning 'beyond the limits of civilisation', is said to have originated. Supporting Coolah's claim is a document showing land boundaries declared by Governor Darling in 1826. This boundary line passes through the centre of a property known as 'Black Stump Run'. The local Aboriginal Gamilaraay people were said to have called the area

'Weetalibah-Wallangan', meaning, 'the place where the fire went out and left a burnt stump'. In 1905, a fire engulfed the Black Stump Wine Saloon which was the said to be the location of the original black stump.

In 1826 Governor Darling proclaimed "limits of location" or boundaries "beyond which land was neither sold nor let" no "settlers allowed". This boundary was located in 1829 as being the northern side of the Manning River up to its source in the Mount Royal range, then by that range and the Liverpool Range westerly to the source of the Coolaburragundy River, then along the approximate location of the Black Stump Run, then in a south-westerly direction to Wellington. Land north of this location was referred to as "beyond" and the use of the word "beyond" can be found on the Government Gazette of the 18th January 1837.

However, settlers did not strictly adhere to the governor's proclaimed boundaries and often let their stock graze

"beyond". Thus in the Coolah area, to avoid detection by officialdom, the location of these pastures was vaguely described as being "beyond the Black Stump". The expression caught on quickly.

Coolah Tops National Park was dedicated in 1996 and covers 12,117 hectares on a narrow plateau of the Liverpool Ranges, 30 kilometres east of Coolah. Here the Warrumbungle Range joins the Great Divide and the Liverpool Range. Rich basalt soils and a high rainfall support a wide variety of wildlife.

Coolah Tops National park is within the homeland of the Kamilaroi Aborigines and there are scattered examples of their presence throughout the park. European settlement in the area began in the 1830s following the discovery by Alan Cunningham in 1823 of Pandora Pass, the way over the Warrumbungle Range and onto the Liverpool Plains. In 1824, Ludwig Leichardt crossed, "the Tops" when he



Canyon below Norfolk Falls



The Drip Gorge



Norfolk Falls

surveyed the Liverpool range and Plains. Between 1941 and 1995 the area was selectively logged, mostly for railway sleepers, fencing and packing timber. The present road into the park was built in 1947 to provide access for forestry operations.

To get to Coolah Tops is a drive of 30 km on a dirt road along a ridge overlooking the valleys as we go. We watch for wildlife and note the various livestock along the route. Our first walk was to Bundella lookout. Here there are spectacular views over the Liverpool Ranges north to Mt Kaputar and the Nandewar range. The sheer cliff to the valley has a height of 40 metres and like all of the Coolah Tops, is composed of basalt formation with wonderful examples of columnar basalt.

At the rear of the lookout, in front of the car park, is a naturally cleared area of several acres. At one time it could have been an aboriginal bora ground. The grass is kept cropped by wallabies and kangaroos who do not seem to mind us being there.

We followed the walking track to the Pinnacle Lookout, an almost sheer narrow basalt outcrop with spectacular views to the north and west to the Warrumbungles. The weather was clear with wonderful distant views over the plains.

We followed the track towards the Basalt Caves a short way, but did not reach Rocky Creek, where we understand, there are several small caves and one large one which goes back over 100 metres.

We lunch at Bundella Lookout, calmly enjoying the sunshine and watching the wallabies.

We followed part of the Racecourse Track. The vegetation of the plateau consists generally of mature stands of tall open eucalypt forest with a grassy understorey. The main species are silver top Stringybark, forest ribbon gum, snow gum, black sally and mountain gum. We meet a red-bellied black snake which is as surprised as we were to meet. The track is well defined and the walk easy.

Day two, we return to Coolah Tops and view Norfolk Falls. The basalt formations around the falls are very interesting. There are viewing places both to view the falls from afar and the top of the falls. There was not a lot of water but the scenery wonderful.

We then did the Grass Tree Walk. Here there are giant wonderful examples of Xanthorrhoea. They are huge and bent into wonderful shapes. The imagination goes riot. Every turn there is another group of Grass trees, each more grotesque. We did spot a few wallabies but generally did not spot much wildlife.

We followed the path to Brackens hut through the eucalypts and back to the cars. There is quite a variety of fungi and small flowers in the park and our members stopped to note the variety of shapes and colours.

Day Three for a change we drive towards Ulan to The Drip Gorge. After morning tea at the car park, we walk into The Drip Gorge through a lush riverside forest, past sculptured sandstone caves,

Willis's Walkabouts

The wet season is SPECTACULAR!!

Don't believe what you see on TV weather reports. Weather symbols designed for temperate climates don't work for the tropics.

January, our wettest month, is far from the hottest. Most rain comes in short, sharp bursts. Sydney gets more 35° days than Darwin. We average sunny skies 45% of the time, almost as much as Sydney's 50%.

Don't believe it? The met bureau links on our wet season information page will let you judge for yourself. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml

Our **What to Expect** page tells you even more. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet2.shtml

Once you know the truth, think about coming along and finding out why many local people think this is the best time to go bushwalking. **Easy, hard and everything in between**, we offer trips to suit every bushwalker.



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honeycombed rocks and archways beside the creek. The bush track can be rough in places and involves some rock hopping. 'The drip' or 'Great Dripping Wall' is a towering sandstone cliff-face dripping clear spring water into the clear pools of the rocky river bed. The walk is along the river bed past rock, sand and peat, past weeping ferns and bottlebrush adorning the rocky cliff crevices. The weather is crisp and clear. On returning to Coolah we were told of the Brett Whitely rock paintings. There is also a women's cave. This is a special place with a cathedral-like atmosphere.

After lunch we drive back towards Coolah to Hands on Rock site.

The Hands on Rock site is 600 metres from the car park, easy for about 400 metres; then it slopes up steadily to the rock cliffs. There are steps along the way, but some loose stones towards the end of the path require a little care, particularly on the way down. It is a scenic walk through sparse vegetation up to the sandstone cliff with the artwork.

The sandstone cliff has been fenced off to preserve the art. These stencils of hands were made by the Wiradjuri people, using a spray of ochre mixed with liquid. The Wiradjuri occupied most of the central west of what is now New South Wales, and were one of the largest of Aboriginal language groups. They probably numbered about 12,000 at the time of white settlement. The site of 'Hands on Rock' is at the eastern end of Wiradjuri lands, at the edge of the Great Dividing Range.

One of the features of the walk is the relatively unspoiled forest that surrounds the area. It is typical of the vegetation that once covered this part of the ranges. We paused and looked around. This is little different from the land that was seen by the owners of those stenciled hands. The unique atmosphere of this site imparts a sense of respect for the traditional people and their land.

We can see the beginnings of interpretive signage at both sites which will enhance the walks.



The view from the top of the national park is worth the effort

We all did our walks around the town which has a wonderful community spirit of a small country town. While we were visiting, New South Wales Governor Marie Bashir officially opened The Octagon Auditorium at Coolah, recognising a community project in the pipeline for about seven years. The Octagon forms an extension to St Andrew's Anglican Church and will act as a community cultural centre for music, art and entertainment among other activities.

After wonderful generous country style dinners and quite a bit of wine and beer, at the Coolah Valley Hotel and gatherings on the upstairs verandah and our common room, we returned to the "Big Smoke". ♦



Red Bellied Black Snake



Open gum forest



The party dwarfed by giant xanthoreas

Book Reviews . . .



Finding Australian Birds

A Field Guide to Birding Locations

Tim Dolby & Rohan Clarke

CSIRO Publishing
ISBN 9780643097667
\$49.95 rrp

This was not quite what I had expected at first. It is not a book about birds per se. Rather, it is a very comprehensive book for bird spotting, or 'twitching'.

To explain: in a bird book you would expect to find descriptions of lots of birds, most likely sorted into major classes such as parrots, water birds, raptors and so on. You would expect a photo of each bird, a guide to its behaviour and its calls, and some indication of where the birds may be found - their ranges.

Well, in this book that is all tipped upside down. The book is first sorted into States, then into locations in each State. There is special emphasis on all the different National Parks, but other locations are not skipped by any means. Ku-ring-gai Chase NP is there, Barrington Tops NP is there, but so is the Capertee valley and Lake Cargelligo area, as examples in NSW. And for each of the areas listed, the book tells you what sorts

of birds you might expect to see there. The book also suggests multi-day tours for seeing lots of the best bird-spotting places in a general locale. In short, this is a book for twitchers.

There are lots of colour photos of both places and birds. The photos of places, or the bushland found there, include a commentary on what sorts of birds like that sort of country. Spend enough time reading the photos and you will learn more about birds.

Despite the sub-title, this is not a field guide so much as a reference guide in my opinion. You might carry it in your car, but not in your pack. It would be great for planning a twitching tour though. Suggestions for accommodation at the different places are included, which is nice.

How relevant this book will be in 20 years time, with the progress of global warming and climate change, is another matter. I don't know. I live on a farm on the outskirts of Sydney, and over the last 30+ years we have noticed a significant change in what birds we see around the farm. Why the change? I do not know: climate change, or population change maybe. But this book may help to document the changes as well.

Roger Caffin



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The Gardens of Stone National Park and beyond

Book 5: Bushwalks in the Ben Bullen Ranges; and Local Place Names

Michael Keats and Brian Fox

ISBN 978-0-9870546-4-7
Price \$50 rrp

Well, Volume 1 of this series was a slim and manageable book, but the size of the offering has grown with each successive volume. This one is 680 pages and 37 mm thick: a tome. But the contents will keep you delving for ages.

The book starts with the usual chapters, as found in previous volumes, but there is more. As Michael and Brian acknowledge, they could not have managed without contributions from so many other people, many in *The Bush Club* but many also from outside, and short biographies are given for all these people. A huge range of talent there.

After that we get to the country itself. There's a short section 'defining the area', with considerable mention of all the hazards facing the area: trail bikes, unexploded ordnance from World War II, and underneath all the threat of longwall mining and massive widespread subsidence, which would devastate the almost unique pagoda land and the

hanging swamps of the national park. Yes, we know the companies are supposed to comply with environmental restrictions, but a long experience with this tells us they won't give a damn. Their claims that there won't be any significant subsidence are simply knowing and blatant lies. They are only interested in their short-term profit. The politicians are as bad. Sigh.

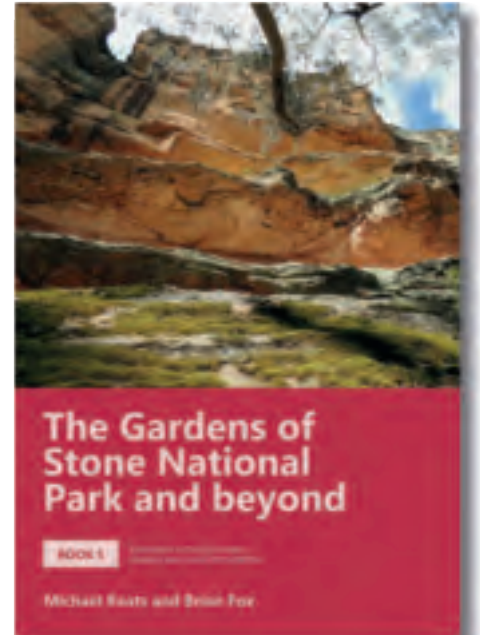
More interesting perhaps (and a lot more cheerful) are the 24 detailed maps of the area, showing all the descriptive (sometimes fanciful!) names which have been given to the strange and wonderful features in the area. But fear not: there are 220 pages of explanations for all these names! The grid references and map number are given for each feature too. Overload anyone?

Finally we get to the walks themselves. You need to remember that this is not a 'guidebook' per se. The 26 Walks are recorded the way Michael wrote them up for the Bush Club after each trip, telling the reader what the party did. Rather idiosyncratic, but very alive. Yes, grid references are given here too.

Of course, none of the above covers the photos which grace the pages. I don't think I was able to open the book anywhere and not find at least one beautiful photo. Of course, it's drool country anyhow, but the photos are wonderful.

There are several indices - details, details.

Roger Caffin



Bockkarscharte Col

Roger and Sue Caffin bring the Aussie influence to the Algae Alps - see back cover.

This col had been a bit of an adventure. We had left Weissenbach am Lech (885 m) to cross this col in the Algae Alps to the Prinz-Luitpold Haus Refuge in a light shower, hoping it would fine up.

Most morning showers did. However, by the time we started up the Schwartzwasserbach valley it had become obvious that today was not going to fine up. OK, we thought, we will just get wet; the exercise will keep us warm. However, by the time we reached the headwall of the valley at 1200 m it was starting to become clear that rain was not going to be our problem: there was thick swirling fog above us and the rain had turned to snow. All signs of any tracks were going to vanish fairly soon. A bit of a worry.

Sue and I were just a little way up the headwall discussing what to do when the farmer from Obere Lichtalp (just above us) appeared coming down the track. He had all the alpine grazing in the upper valley. He was very polite and did not want to tell us what to do, but he did his best to make it very clear that he did not think we should continue up the mountain! In fact, he felt so strongly about it he offered to give us a lift in his car (which we had just passed at the head of the valley) to Reutte, where he was going shopping for his family. Before I had a chance to comment, Sue had accepted with thanks and was headed

back down the hillside after the farmer at high speed. Ah well, conditions were a bit rough up there, with 200 - 300 mm of snow (or more). Yeah - just a summer shower - which the farmer said was desperately needed for water for the cattle.

We got to Reutte a bit cold: wet clothes sitting in a car, then standing around in the rain, so we quickly found a small hotel. (No Refuges in towns, but the hotels know all about walkers.) The next morning we could still see lots of snow on the mountains around us, so we washed and shopped and ate and waited for the snow to melt. It was summer, after all! The Europeans are not big on deserts, but Reutte had this fantastic 'ice cream desert' shop called Gelatissimo. The servings of fruit salad and ice cream (and whipped cream) were huge.

Sue was a bit round-eyed at what they gave her, but struggled heroically with it.

The next day was fine, sunny, and there was very little snow left on the hills. We left early, taking the bus down the dead flat valley this time to the start of the (not flat!) Schwartzwasserbach valley at 910 m. We passed the farmer's house *Obere Lichtalp*: he was not home but we saw him up tending his cattle on the hillside. Up and up we went - the col is at 2164 m. The back cover photo shows us right near the col.

This might have been a bit difficult with half a metre of snow and us in joggers?

Over the top and down some distance to the Prinz-Luitpold Haus Refuge.

They had a place for us. We were now just one day from Oberstdorf: the end of our 2 months walk.



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Climbing up to Bockkarscharte Col.

The climb to the famous nick in the Allgäu Alps is rugged, steep and physically challenging, but also impressive and exciting.