

colong bulletin

No. 270 | March 2018

Let's think about saving wild rivers...

BY HARRY BURKITT

IMAGINE yourself floating down a pristine wild river. Towering sandstone cliffs on either side, you haven't seen another human being for days. Fossicking platypus look for their next meal in the labyrinth of River Oak roots, unaware that you are passing through their 60 million year old home. Lyrebirds scuffle through the leaves of vulnerable Camden White Gums, attempting to outrun your progress down the cascading rapids.

This is what the NSW Government want to so mercilessly destroy – the pristine wild rivers of the Blue Mountains. The southern Blue Mountains and its wild rivers were the birthplace of the Colong Foundation in 1968. The wild rivers that were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000. The wild rivers that are the heartbeat of the Blue Mountains, its bush walkers and adventurers. The wild rivers that are home to hundreds of Australia's iconic plant and animal species.

Sometimes we need to remember why

it is we want to protect these places. We often become so transfixed by what it is we are trying to stop that we forget what we are trying to save. Be it stopping coal mines, roads, logging, or dare I say dam proposals, we don't passionately oppose such ideas because we don't believe the world should not change. We oppose them because they go about destroying the very places we love and cherish for future generations of Australians.

So when people ask us why the name of the campaign has changed – It's because we want (and need!) the public know the reason why the Colong Foundation is fundamentally opposed to the raising of Warragamba Dam.

On that note, I am pleased to announce that Australia's very best wild rivers campaigner, Dr Bob Brown, and former Environment Minister Bob Debus AM, will be launching the new, improved campaign at The Hub in Springwood on March 26 from 6:30pm. It will be a free and interactive event, with experts attending from a range of backgrounds.

Hope to see everyone there!

Annual General Meeting (AGM) is to be held on Wednesday April 18th, 2018 at 6.00pm at the Colong Foundation Office and will:

- Consider the minutes of the preceding AGM;
- Receive and consider the report of the auditor and annual report of the Colong Foundation for 2017;
- Elect a Board of Directors for the ensuring year, including Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and an Auditor, nominations for which should be received by Thursday April 4th 2018;
- Appoint and fix remuneration for the Auditor;
- Set the annual subscription fee;
- Consider any other motion received in the hands of the Hon. Secretary by Thursday April 4th 2018.

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Monthly General Meetings will be held at our office at Level 2, Fortuna House, 332 Pitt Street, at 6.00pm on the third Wednesday of the month on March 21st, April 18th (AGM), May 16th and June 20th. Members and visitors are welcome.

FLOODING OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS: A PUBLIC FORUM

WITH DR BOB BROWN & BOB DEBUS AM



March 26: 6.30PM, Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub, Springwood
wildrivers.org.au



Colong turns 50!

BY KEITH MUIR

THE COLONG FOUNDATION has a great track record. Guided by conservation giants Myles and Milo Dunphy, Alex Colley and Jim Somerville this should hardly be surprising. As Australia's longest serving community advocate for wilderness, our work has helped secure over two million hectares of wilderness in NSW.

On 29 May 1968, a meeting of fifty conservation-minded organisations convened by Milo Dunphy appointed the Colong Committee to prevent limestone mining near Mt Colong in the southern Blue Mountains. It was a desperate fight, as the mining leases were already issued, and the campaign methods developed had to be forceful and creative. Limestone caves were named after cabinet ministers, company meetings were swamped with shareholding conservationists while others abseiled down city buildings to



In 1977 Alex Colley presented Neville and Jill Wran with a book of Henry Gold's pictures illustrating a proposed 5,000 hectare Boyd Plateau addition to Kanangra-Boyd National Park. Photo: H. Gold.

grab media attention. This was to be a confrontation, between Blue Circle Cement, the world's largest cement company and a united conservation movement opposed to mining within national parks.

This multi-pronged battle helped gain widespread support for wilderness protection, and maintain media attention on nature conservation. It also led to the saving of eucalypt

forests on nearby Boyd Plateau from being razed for a pine plantation. Jim Somerville proposed a sensible alternative that was taken up by the Wran Government, which then banned destructive clearing of forests for pine plantations.

With Myles Dunphy as our first patron, the Colong Foundation was inspired to play a lead role in realising his vision of a Greater Blue

Mountains National Park, securing the Nattai National Park in 1991 and a Gardens of Stone National Park in 1994. A key part of our current work is to secure the last remaining element of that vision, a 39,000 hectare reserve for the pagoda landscapes centred on Newnes Plateau.

It was also the Foundation's campaign for a Border Ranges National Park that led to the battle to protect the State's remaining rainforests, a significant part of which were protected by Neville Wran who became our second Patron. Then in 1985, we gained support for wilderness legislation in NSW from Bob Carr and a program of wilderness reservations evolved in concert with plans for forest protection and World Heritage status for the Blue Mountains.

Our current Patron, Bob Carr, has protected over a million hectares of eucalypt forest wilderness. We also celebrate the contributions made by Coalition ministers,

particularly Tom Lewis who created the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Tim Moore, who gave NSW, Nattai, the first wilderness protected under the Wilderness Act and whose efforts secured 650,000 hectares of wilderness. There's still much more to achieve – protecting wilderness in Outback NSW and vast areas of northern Australia. These future tasks will extend over generations.

Improvements in highways and off-road motor vehicles, as well as lighter, better, camping equipment, means just about anyone can access wilderness. As Bob Carr said about the future of wilderness, "Wilderness areas will be precious to a degree we cannot now conceive." The campaigns to save wilderness helped to establish a ground breaking unity of purpose for conservation groups, and science-based laws to protect threatened species and eucalypt forests. In doing

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Thank you for your support!

Your financial support enables us to defend wilderness and continue with our conservation programs. The following members and supporters made donations to the Colong Foundation last year:

Paul Amaral, Debbie Andrew, Annabelle Andrews, Anne Arndt, Craig and Christine Austin, Suzanne Barr, Marg Beal, Dierk von Behrens, David Bell, Peter Bennett, John Benson, Tim Bidder, Rosemary Bilton, John Blanche, Peter Bonney, Martin Bouman, Ken Bradstock, Jeffrey Bridger, Keith Brister, Ian Brown, Greg Buckman, Harrison Burkitt, Club Bush, John Butler, Dennis Byrne, Susan Caffin, E Chapman-Wade, Kenn Clacher, Sharon Close, Coast and Mountains Walkers of NSW, Peter Cochrane, Garth Coghlan, James Constable, Peter Cook, Adrian Cooper, Phillip Cornwell, Andrew Cox, Les Coyne, Jenny Cullen, Sharyn Cullis, Graham Daly, David Dash, Caroline Davis, Denise Dent, Alan Dixon, Rosie Doyle, Sue England, Cotter Erickson, Margaret Esson, Arnold Ewald, Susan Fredrickson,

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O'Grady, Janis O'Leary, Peter Oliver, Kenneth Parkhouse, Hugh Patterson and Francoise Matter, Rosemary Pearson, People of Gardens of Stone Banner Event, Lidia Petersen, Martin Pfeil, Sybil Pliner, Robin Plumb, John Robens, Emma Rooksby, David Rostron, Chris Rothwell, Morag Ryder, Lynne Saville, Konstantin Seiler, Adrienne Shilling, Jenny Simons, Sandra Berry and Ian Smith, Richard Stanford, John Stephenson, Susan Stevens, Richard Stiles, James Stone, Bronwyn Stow, Catrina Sturmberg, Lyndal Sullivan, Celia Symonds, Ian Tanner, The Springwood Bushwalking Club, Ruth Toop, Euan Tovey, Alexa Troedson, Paul Vale, Peter Krinks and Vera Yee, Kim and Anne Wagstaff, Craig Wall, Timothy Walsh, John Watters, Mark Weatherley, Margery White, John Whitehouse, Craig Whitford, Geraldine Whitmont, Tommy Wiedmann, Meron Wilson, Alan Woolcott, David Worthington and John Wrigley.

The Colong Foundation appreciates the generous ongoing support of our donors.

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The Colong Bulletin • Editor: Bruce Diekman

ISSN 1325-3336 (print), 2207-6697 (online) • Printed by SpotPress, Marrickville

50th Anniversary Celebration Events



The Colong Foundation invites you to celebrate its Golden Anniversary with a range of events:

OPEN EVENTS: In keeping with Colong Foundation traditions to kick off our anniversary with a campaign launch!

■ **Public Forum on saving the Blue Mountains' wild rivers from the raising of Warragamba Dam wall:** Monday 26 March, 6:30pm at The Hub, Springwood – with Bob Debus and Bob Brown. Register at www.wildrivers.org.au

■ **Wild Light an exhibition of wilderness photographs by Henry Gold:** Tuesday 5 to Sunday 17 June at Bondi Pavilion with the launch at 6pm, Wednesday 6 June.

■ **Alex Colley Memorial Wilderness Lecture:** details to be posted later in the year.

BOOKED EVENTS: Unfortunately venue and site capacity will limit numbers for the May Dinner (80 persons), October camp (20 persons) and associated walks (8 persons per walk) so please RSVP via the Colong website, email foundation@colongwilderness.org.au or call the Colong office on 9261 2400 to book for these events.

■ **Colong Foundation 50th Anniversary Dinner:** Tuesday 29 May, 6pm at Club York, 99 York St, Sydney with Professor Bob Carr. Register at www.colongwilderness.org.au

■ **The "Colong Colossus":** a series of week-long bushwalks will herald a gathering at Batsh Camp over the October long weekend to celebrate the successful 1968 Colong Campaign. Experienced walkers only.

■ **Batsh Camp:** a gathering of the Colong tribe, Saturday evening September 29 - Registration will be provided at a later date. Limited numbers.

We welcome your participation in our 50th Anniversary celebrations!

Colong Turns 50

cont'd from p.2

these tasks the inspiration of wilderness has enabled us to make those most difficult first steps towards sustainability.

Our future will be about effective and positive communication of wilderness values and opportunities – and let's not forget the marvellous bushwalks. In this future, an area with wilderness values will merit inscription on the World Heritage list and be honoured

as part of the National Estate, a natural treasure that we will hold collectively, in trust, for posterity. Let's celebrate the inspirational spark that led to the passionate, first Colong campaign and obliged a multinational corporation to hand back its mining leases in an Australian wilderness. All we have to do to save wilderness is reawaken that passion within us all.



1979 Neville Wran and Milo Dunphy, Canoe Creek, Colo Wilderness

Victory comes to those who donate

Please renew your support for 2018

COLONG FOUNDATION MEMBERSHIP subscriptions always fall due at the end of the calendar year as this arrangement saves time and paperwork. The Foundation doesn't annoy supporters with streams begging letters, but reminds you that it is time for all our members, supporters and donors to renew their support and membership (only \$30).

This year will draw against our limited financial resources to maintain our basic office, where we monitor government activities and campaign for wilderness. The employment of the talented Wild Rivers campaigner, Harry Burkitt, places an extra strain on our finances.

This year presents serious challenges to save Blue Mountains wilderness again from flood inundation, to seek new approaches to the reservation of the Gardens of Stone region and generally advance the case for nature conservation.

The Colong Foundation's operations absolutely rely on the ongoing support of members and volunteers. Every dollar you contribute goes toward wilderness protection and nature conservation. There is no funding raising budget.

We look forward to our supporters renewing their membership. If you can afford it, consider making a tax-deductible donation to advance our valuable work, as along with our fellow stalwart conservation groups, we make a difference.

The hope is that the coming state and federal elections offer opportunities for better heritage protection for areas such as Sydney's water supply catchments and the Gardens of Stone region. With your support, there can be more great achievements from our hard work.

*Keith Muir
Director*

HON. TREASURER WANTED

After more than thirty years of service to the Colong Foundation, Albert Renshaw, our Hon. Treasurer has decided to stand down at the end of this financial year. Albert has done a seamless job and our accounts have always been in order. Thanks so much Albert!

To help keep our finances healthy, we seek a permanent, part-time Honorary Treasurer, with appropriate financial and administrative skills and experience. Our Hon. Treasurer maintains our income and expenditure records, ensures we comply with tax and government reporting requirements, pays our bills, and deposits cash and cheques. Time required is an estimated 20 hours per month; accounting literacy is essential.

The successful applicant will work with the Hon. Membership Secretary, the website manager as all income payments are recorded on-line, and with the Colong Foundation Board via its monthly meetings. It is, however, a job that can be managed from home.

The Foundation is a small, dynamic lobby group with a 50 year track record for excellence in environmental campaigning. If you have good accounting skills and wish to help save wilderness, then this job is for you!

BOOK REVIEW

Upland Swamps in the Sydney Region*

by Ann Young
144 pages, soft cover, 59 illustrations and 12 tables
RRP \$30 plus postage within Australia
Available from the Colong Shop

BOOK REVIEW BY KEITH MUIR

UPLAND SWAMPS OF the Sydney Region brings together recent knowledge of these ancient ecosystems. It is founded on the author's forty years of academic work in upland swamp research and sandstone geomorphology. It takes the reader on a journey that spans millennia from

when these swamps formed in the landscape all the way to Dr Young's experiences in the politics of swamp conservation and protection.

Ann is a swamp enthusiast, scientist and patriot, but a reluctant activist. Her book reveals the damage caused by longwall coal mining. Yet Ann says 'It is only in the past five years or so that I have seen and articulated clearly their [the swamps'] role as the 'canaries above the mines', with their loss of water indicating dehydration of the catchment surface generally.' Ann strikes this note while some in WaterNSW and the Office

of Environment and Heritage are speaking out against this damage, and decision-makers are toying with swamp protection measures.

The book explains that swamps are 'canaries' because they rapidly respond to any damage to the catchments they occupy. They have survived from the last ice age to record climates and fire regimes preserved in pollen and charcoal when their sediments were accumulating. Ann writes: 'Most of the sediment now found in upland swamps accumulated during the late Pleistocene and Holocene.' Their survival over millennia across a broad range of climatic conditions and fire frequencies is now being threatened by coal mining. But will this rapidly growing collection of 'dead canaries' curb further damage?

The diverse forms of upland swamps on Sydney's plateaus are all water-dependent ecosystems and Ann explains that under natural conditions the water table rises to near the surface following rain. When the rains stop, the water table gradually drops but usually a swamp does not fully dry out and the water table sits well above its sandstone base.

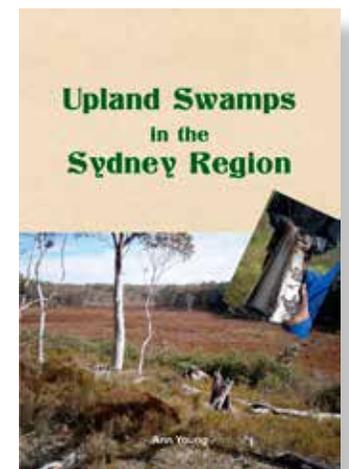
Due to longwall mining, swamps will quickly dry out after rain. Dryland plants like eucalypts and weeds move in and water-loving plants die

back. Rare plants can be lost and endangered animals lose habitat. The immediate drop in water tables after mining suggests that cracking of their bedrock base is the direct and most significant cause of swamp drainage. But it isn't the only damage.

Upland swamps are not only endangered communities – they ensure pure water flows during drought periods to support wildlife in pristine bushland catchments as well as slake the thirst of millions of Sydney residents.

Longwall mining damage to Sydney's water catchments, and in particular to upland swamps, threatens the enduring benefits of fresh drinking water of the highest quality that Sydney residents have assumed as their birthright for over 100 years. Ann reports that WaterNSW has estimated an 830ML/year loss of water from the catchment over the Dendrobium mine in the Illawarra equates to an annual \$1.6 million loss at current water value. Environmental impacts valued by offset bonds at Springvale mine are running at \$2 million increments for each swamp damaged at more than predicted levels. But these valuations are not large enough to stop the damage.

Ann Young's book is an excellent summary of the current science and



establishes an unequivocal case for protecting upland swamps. It brings together research funded by the \$1.45 million enforceable undertaking imposed on Centennial Coal for damaging swamps on Newnes Plateau. Critically there needs to be more research into water production from swamps.

My fear is that while the book enables upland swamps to be better understood, decision-makers will continue to disregard the precautionary principle and the lack of accurate hydrological modelling may become another excuse for inaction. What's at stake is not just precious swamps with their up-beat message of long-term climate survival, but a sacred resource, Sydney's pure drinking water, that can't be replaced. Funding an alternative water supply for Sydney will cost the earth.

*The Colong Foundation assisted with the marketing and publication of this book.

Drillhole Swamp collapsed in 1978 as a direct consequence of mine related disturbance. Photo: A. Young.



Australia needs a strategy for nature 2018–2030

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S new draft Strategy for Nature has been described as a 'global embarrassment.' If adopted, it would replace a currently unfunded policy of substance with airy statements..

Headings like – 'We must work together to care for nature' is followed with 'Caring for nature is essential if we want it to persist, to provide services for present and future generations and to

remain integral to our national identity.' No data, funding plans or projects to protect the natural environment back up these remarks.

Yet 'Strategy for Nature' is designed to replace the previous Biodiversity Conservation Strategy that has measurable outcomes and was once funded. Under the previous and current Federal Coalition Governments the funding and the public service administration of the projects went, but now strategy

is to be gutted. While the Coalition government allocated \$1.4bn to environmental funding in the 2013/14 budget, there was a 30.2% drop in the 2016/17 budget down to \$980m. It fell again in the 2017/18 budget to \$945m (Adam Morton, the Guardian, 13 Dec 2017).

The Federal Department of Environment and Energy is almost a shell. Programs like Landcare, Indigenous Protected Areas and the National Water

Initiative should be well funded. Identification and protection of World and National Heritage values must be accelerated. The National Reserve System needs to be strengthened and managed. The extraction limits established under the multi-billion dollar Murray-Darling Basin Plan must be enforced and adequate environmental flows secured using Federal constitutional powers. The Regional Forest Agreements must be scientifically reviewed

and replaced by a new deal that protects our remaining publicly owned native forests. The curtailment of land clearing which underpinned Australia's carbon concessions in the Kyoto protocol in 1997 must be reinstated. This minimal list of unsupported environmental policy reveals that our national environment program is now a shambles.

On all fronts Federal environmental management is being swept away.

Hello Lithgow!

A Banner Day in the Gardens of Stone

ON THE LAST Sunday in Spring 2017, 150 people gathered near Lithgow to celebrate the Gardens of Stone.

The welcoming address by

Wiradjuri Elder, Auntie Helen Riley, gave the right note for the event that sought "Respect for Country and People". These words were on one of the huge 30 by 3 metre banners

in Wiradjuri and English. Stirring songs by Peter Drinkall and inspirational pagoda poetry by Wyn Jones, also helped put us in the right frame of mind.

All participants received a "We Love Lithgow, Protect Gardens of Stone" bumper sticker and a small flyer that offered a program with 'Wild Cafés' on one side and a map of mysterious Sphinx Spur on the other.

Among those who had never seen the internationally significant pagodas before were three Sri Lankan women on the 8.15am train from Sydney who Janine Kitson had roped into the event with boundless enthusiasm. Janine also brought along John Koch, a retired CFMEU member, who is going to raise protection of the Gardens of Stone region at his next union meeting.

Informative lunchtime workshops under shady tarps outlined our hopes and

plans to save the Gardens of Stone, the Kowmung River and Radiata Plateau, and to develop community-based renewable energy in Lithgow. These 'Wild Cafés' were professionally facilitated by Dr Eugene Fernandez and others to uplift spirits and inspire deeper involvement.

Tim Harris, Dave Noble, Ian Brown and Henry Gold expertly captured by camera and drone our professionally produced banners, helping broadcast our message that Lithgow needs to reserve 39,000 hectares of the internationally significant Gardens of Stone if it is to nurture and expand its nascent tourism industry.

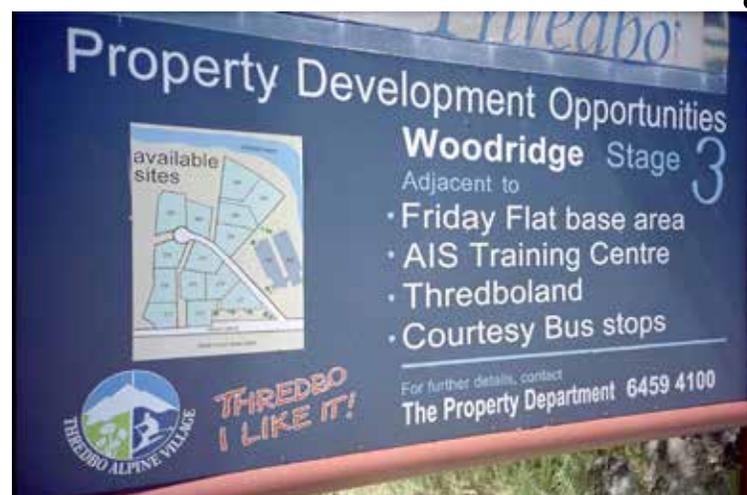
Left: Sphinx Pagoda with 30 metre Banner Photo: H. Gold



Austerity for National Parks golden anniversary

PENNY SHARPE, SHADOW Minister for the Environment, recently revealed an almost \$22 million cut to the National Parks and Wildlife Service's 2017/2018 budget. Since 2011, 49 permanent rangers have been lost – now national parks will lose 14 regional managers and 15 area managers (BMG 21/8/2017). Greens MLC Dr Mehreen Faruqi reported that 10 pest management officers will be lost, leaving only eight staff to manage weed and pest programs across the State (Hansard, 19/10/17).

In 2014/15 our national parks received 39 million visitations, up nearly 8 per cent from 2012, with a further one million people forecast to visit in 2015/16. According to the Public Service Association, \$121 million has been slashed from the NPWS budget in two



Having removed the NPWS leadership, is resort development next on the NSW Government's agenda for our National Parks? Photo: K. Muir

years. These budget cuts will mean staff have fewer resources to service the growing number of visitors.

According to Penny Sharpe more than 200 field-based staff have lost their jobs in the past 18 months. ... Critically

important pest and weed control programs have been discontinued; facilities such as picnicking and camping areas in national parks across the State are being decommissioned due to a lack of resources. ... The National

Parks and Wildlife Service is 50 years old. It should be celebrated, not slashed to the bone ... (Hansard, 14/9/2017).

Michael McFadyen who worked for the National Parks and Wildlife Service for 30 years reports that the number of rangers employed has dropped from about 300 to just over 200 under the Liberal state government – 300 rangers were already insufficient (SMH, 29 Jan, 2018).

Some perceive these cuts as a punishment, a stripping of its 'green berets'; those who saved our forests and wildlife on a daily basis, but the reductions are more accurately a reflection of the small government policy of the current Government.

The NPWS needs to become once more a stand-alone, independent Service and have direct access to its environment minister, to provide unfiltered

and fearless advice. National parks are here to stay and comprise a large and vital part of NSW estate. These important public assets require adequate funds and professional staff to ensure security for wildlife, wilderness and visitor experiences. Volunteers, donations and commercial development are no substitutes for government support. While there have been some recent reappointments advertised at lower pay and skill grades, much more needs to be done, including a vision for national parks.

Current short-term thinking on the environment could cost the NSW Government 2-3% of the vote at the next election. Not enough for a change in government, but perhaps enough to create a hung parliament in the upper house. It needs to rethink its priorities.

The future of coal and the Gardens of Stone

FOR OVER A quarter of a century the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal has been an unwanted 'orphan' despite presenting little threat to the coal industry because mining will still be permitted beneath it. Some conservationists want a national park, however, the state conservation reserve approach is necessary because there are mining leases and approved projects over most of the proposal area. For a government to buy back these rights to mine and own coal would cost many billions.

Unemployment in the Lithgow is high, following closure of several coal mines and the aged Wallerawang power plant. The community fears a transition to green energy and parents worry that there will be no jobs to keep their children in the region.

The recently successful Springvale court case played into these fears and laws were changed to permit ongoing mine water pollution of Sydney's drinking water supply.

Climate change, however, is the real threat to the mining industry as treaty mechanisms will force downward fluctuations in the export price for thermal coal.

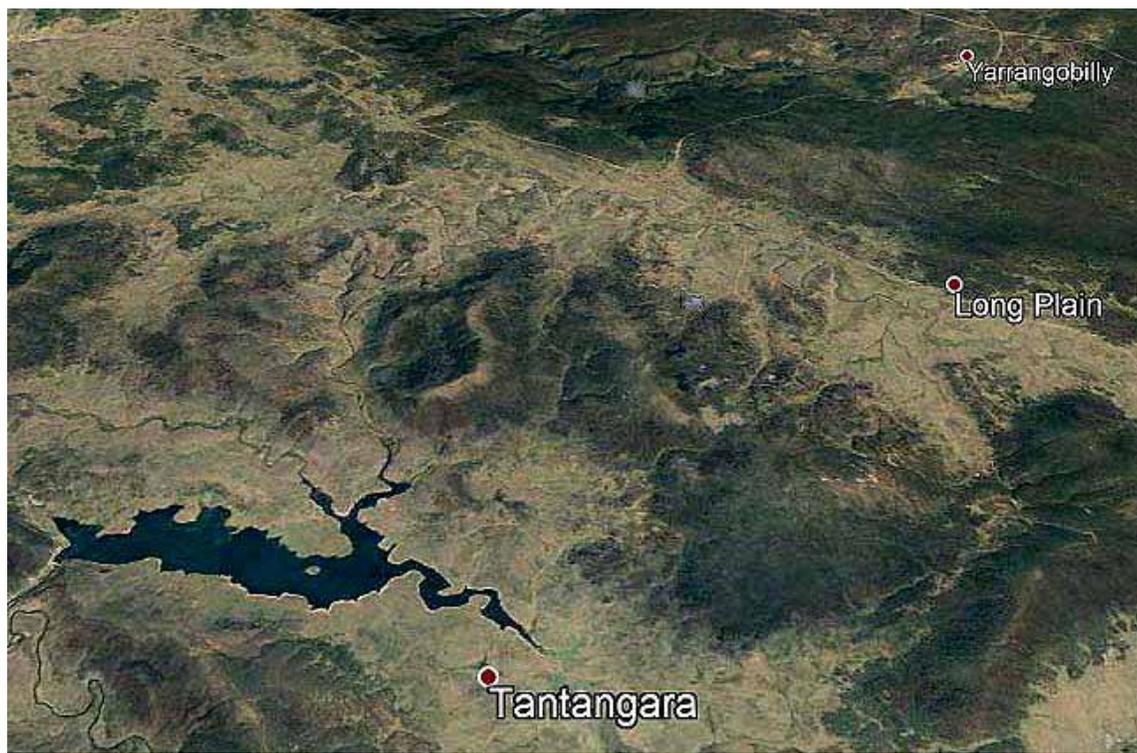
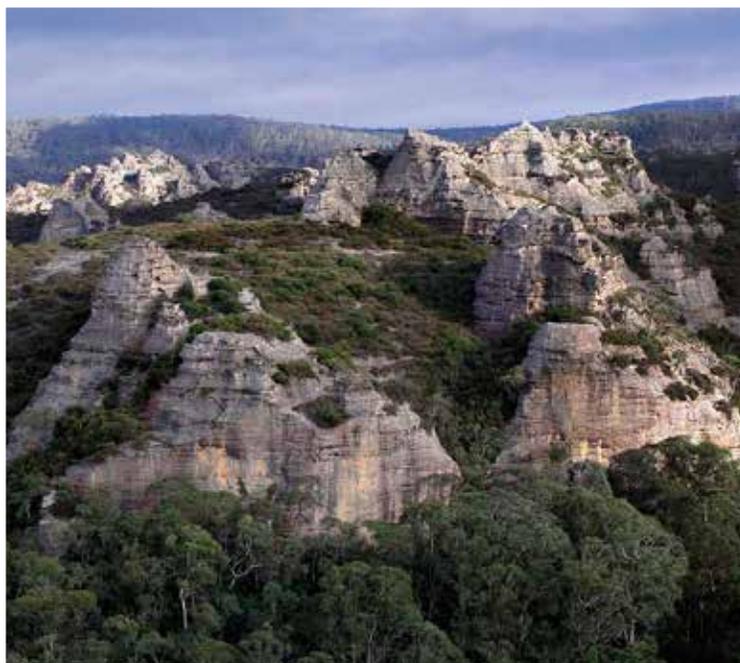
Add to this the tyranny of distance – Lithgow's distance from the nearest coal port at Wollongong imposes higher relative rail freight charges per tonne delivered, softening medium term export profits.

Without abandoning its industrial traditions, Lithgow can work toward a vibrant tourism sector. In this there is hope for Lithgow's economy and the Gardens of Stone region.

Reservation of a Gardens of Stone state conservation area will help Lithgow have a tourism economy like its neighbour, the Blue Mountains. Lithgow's internationally significant pagoda landscapes are the essential tourist drawcard. Pagodas are beautiful, accessible but fragile.

There is overlap in the interests of those who want a better future for their children, those who desire a broad range of visitor opportunities in the forests around Lithgow and conservationists who want effective management of the region's outstanding natural heritage.

Below: The Lost City, part of Lithgow's missed opportunities. Photo: H. Gold



Tantangara Dam is located just south of the tourist attractions of Blue Waterholes and the Coleman Plain. Hydro-electric development at Tantangara will have significant impacts on this core area of Kosciuszko National Park. Photo: Google Earth.

Snowy 2.0 will prop up the coal industry

SNOWY 2.0 is a pumped hydro storage scheme proposed to be located in Kosciuszko National Park. It is planned to have 2,000 MW of capacity and enough stored water to operate continuously for seven days when the Tantangara dam storage is full.

Snowy Hydro's website features a report by consultants Marsden Jacob stating that Snowy 2.0 "would improve the economics of coal generation" by "increasing the use of low-cost fuels" [i.e. coal] (page 113).

Furthermore, "The power losses during each pumping

cycle would increase electricity demand, requiring additional generation and consequently CO₂ emissions" and by ... "increasing lower cost coal-fired generation" (page 116).

Snowy 2.0 is a bad development in a national park propping up the coal industry. Side-deals (i.e. so-called environmental offsets), such as seeking catchment restoration, feral horse removal, environmental flows and rehabilitation of upland swamps to assist the recovery of endangered alpine species are in tricky political territory.

To transmit the power

generated by Snowy 2.0, swathes of eucalypt forest must be cleared for new power transmission lines that will double the capital cost of the operating project to \$8 billion dollars. This clearing will have serious impacts on Kosciuszko National Park.

National parks should be sacrosanct and major infrastructure should be prohibited.

Snowy 2.0 is emphatically *not* a modern engineering vision to reduce infrastructure impacts on, or improve the health of, Kosciuszko National Park while enabling a new green energy economy.



Illustration: ABC News

The Nattai – featured wilderness

BY KEITH MUIR

THE NATTAI IS a romantic landscape of massive sandstone escarpments, such as Grant Head and Golden Moon Bluff. Yet despite the towering cliffs, the Nattai is quite accessible and its recreation value is enhanced by its proximity to Sydney – the Starlights Trail and other access points into the Nattai Valley continue to be well used.

The wilderness lies within the uplifted south-west sector of the Permo-Triassic Sydney Basin south-west of Picton. East of the Wollondilly River, the Wanganderry and Nattai Tablelands of massive, 180-220 million years old Narrabeen and Hawkesbury sandstones cover the majority of the park. Permian sedimentary rocks are exposed below the sandstone in the beds of the Nattai, Alum, Little and Wollondilly Rivers. These tablelands and intervening gorges cover a wide range of climatic conditions, soil types and topographic habitats. The vegetation that has developed under these conditions is equally diverse, especially in the marked rain shadow to the west.

The Nattai Valley is renowned for its majestic River Oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*), a gallery forest which follows the river for most of its length. On the richer alluvial soils good stands of Deanes Blue Gum (*E. deanei*) have developed, and the rare Camden White Gum (*E. benthamii*) occurs along the Little River near its junction with the Nattai River.

The Nattai, reserved in 1991, was the fourth and last division of Myles Dunphy's Greater Blue Mountains National Park to be protected and is now enshrined in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Myles initially visited the area in 1916, the first bushwalker to go there.

In the mid-1920s conservation efforts began somewhat naively when Myles Dunphy wrote to the Forestry Commission suggesting that



The Nattai and Burratorang Rivers are at risk of being flooded if the Warragamba Dam Wall is raised. Photo H. Gold.

the tall forests of the 15 kilometre long Couridjah Corridor be protected. This spectacular canyon contains a Blue Gum forest and provides access without the effort of a major descent from its entry point downstream of Thirlmere Lakes.

The Forestry Commission lost no time establishing a sawmill crew in the Nattai and over the next ten years much timber was removed but since then the Blue Gum forest has recovered much of its majesty. Fortuitously the reservation of the Warragamba Water Catchment in 1942 offered a level of protection to the Nattai Division of Myles' Greater Blue Mountains National Park.

In the 1960s and 1970s the National Trust and the National Parks Association of NSW renewed calls for a reserve, while development pressures mounted and nearby coal mining caused a damaging 600,000 cubic metre cliff fall alongside Lake Burratorang. A hard rock quarry at Mount Flora to the south was first proposed in 1976 and urban expansion began to leapfrog villages from Thirlmere to Hilltop. In 1984 plans were being drawn up for

a Mittagong bypass over the Nattai River and a shooting range was relocated in 1986 to Wattle Ridge in the proposed park to make way for the freeway.

In response to these threats, the Colong Foundation and Total Environment Centre commissioned a Nattai National Park proposal just in time to be caught up in the 1988 state election. Endorsements for the proposed Nattai National Park were readily secured from two leading local NSW Parliamentarians – Robert Webster, the Member for Goulburn, and John Fahey, Member for the Southern Highlands.

While the campaign failed to stop approval of the quarry, it did strengthen community support for a wilderness national park and gained considerable political attention. In April 1990 Tim Moore announced that Cabinet would consider the Nattai wilderness proposal, and in May Opposition Leader Bob Carr, threw out a challenge by stating that the Nattai would be included in the next Labor Government's round of parks.

Milo Dunphy suggested

to Dr Terry Metherell who held the balance of power in the NSW Parliament in September 1991, that a new Nattai National Park should be the first issue on his agenda. Dr Metherell heartily agreed. Tim Moore enthusiastically developed Metherell's scheme and secured all the remaining public lands between the Nattai and the Blue Mountains National Park with a 65,000 ha Nattai National Park incorporating a 29,824 ha wilderness, and four new State Recreation Areas totalling a further 30,000 hectares.

Nattai was the first wilderness declared under the *Wilderness Act, 1987* and assessment procedures have since been refined. Wilderness additions were proposed in 2004 to bring Nattai up to current standards, and water supply catchment management of the proposed wilderness additions ensured there was little obstacle to this expansion. In 2014, Nattai was extended by 11,440 ha by Environment Minister Robyn Parker, continuing bipartisan support.

The Nattai exists due to the efforts of visionary conservationists like Myles

and Milo Dunphy, and behind the scenes stalwarts like Alex Colley. We are so lucky to have such precious wilderness areas, but they can vanish in a moment. Nattai is again threatened by flood inundation by a proposal for raising Warragamba Dam wall, originally rejected over twenty years ago, which has now been revived by the current NSW Government.

Unless the dam proposal is stopped, the 'special grandeur' of the Couridjah Corridor that Dr Metherell quoted from Myles Dunphy's journals when presenting his park plan to Parliament could become buried in sediment:

The bluewood smoke from our cookfires drifted in tenuous strata between the trees, the sunlight slanting down, mostly over the stream, made the place a fairyland ... It really was paradise. The constantly changing views in the narrow, gradually deepening canyon were marvellous. The strange fact was that very few people knew anything about the place. Only a few walkers like ourselves appreciated the striking beauty of this narrow strip of bushland and the line of canyons which contained it, or even the larger-scaled Nattai Valley itself.

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Now, more than ever, the Foundation needs your support. Well financed and powerful rural interests, miners, loggers, resort developers, as well as four wheel drive enthusiasts, horse riders and others, have greatly increased the threats facing Australia's wild places. Only with your help, through continued membership and donations, can the Foundation continue its campaigns for the preservation of the natural environment and effective nature-based national park management, and by concentrating on wilderness, these rare areas can be kept safe from development and misuse.

ABOUT THE COLONG FOUNDATION

The Colong Foundation, the successor to Myles Dunphy's National Parks and Primitive Areas Council, is Australia's longest-serving community advocate for wilderness. Its proposal for a Wilderness Act was accepted in 1987. To supplement this legislation, our Red Index, audits NSW wilderness areas, identifies threats and formulates site specific protection remedies. There are now 2,100,000 ha of protected wilderness in NSW. However, many beautiful and environmentally highly significant wilderness areas are not protected, such as the Pilliga and Goonoo on the north west slopes, the Deua Valley on the South Coast and the Tabletop and Main Range in the Snowy Mountains.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness has had a long and successful history. From its foundation in 1968 until 1975 it was the fighting force that prevented limestone mining and the destruction of native forest for pine plantations in the southern Blue Mountains. The Foundation not only played a leading role in realising Myles Dunphy's plan for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park, it pushed for its World Heritage listing, as well as the reservation of a Border Ranges National Park and Kakadu National Park. It has initiated successful campaigns for the protection of over a million hectares of wilderness in NSW. The realisation of Myles Dunphy's vision of a comprehensive system of national parks with protected wilderness areas remains the primary objective of the Colong Foundation.

Now, more than ever, the Foundation needs your support. Well financed and powerful rural interests, miners, loggers, resort developers, as well as four wheel drive enthusiasts, horse riders and others, have greatly increased the threats facing Australia's wild places.

Only with your help, through continued membership and donations, can the Foundation continue its campaigns for the preservation of the natural environment and effective nature-based national park management, and by concentrating on wilderness, these rare areas can be kept safe from development and misuse.

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