

The Federal election has been decided although the counting may not be finished. For the environment, there may well be no winner. As I write, the Howard Government continues to champion the uranium miners, the coal industry, the woodchippers and the white-shoe brigade. Sadly, the best we have so far from the Beazley Opposition is a bunch of platitudes and half-hearted promises; the worst is ALP support for the appalling forest agreements in Victoria and Tasmania, as well as the complementary Federal forest legislation now awaiting the resumption of Parliament to entrench the rights of the big woodchip companies.

### State elections

In NSW the manoeuvring for the March 1999 election is already under way. Two major factors give us cause for concern about the Carr government, which was elected in 1995 on the conservation vote. The government is increasingly trying to distance itself from conservation issues – from being seen as too green – under pressure from the timber, transport and mining unions, the ALP right wing, the NSW Farmers Association and One Nation. It has a half-baked idea that it could win more regional seats in rural NSW than it would lose in Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle if it plays dead on the environment.

The second factor is its poor performance on urban planning matters and its non-delivery of vital 1995 election promises on the natural environment. Many Sydney conservation voters are wondering where the government is going. It has absolutely failed to curb the RTA's roadbuilding in Sydney – indeed it has championed several more tollways – and done little more than talk about improving air quality and building a light-rail network.

It has changed the planning legislation to favour developers over community rights; and failed the tests on the protection of East Circular Quay, Walsh Bay wharves, St Patrick's Estate on North Head, Strickland House at Vacluse, the St Mary's ADI site and many others.

With less than six months to the election, heading the list of undelivered promises is

the new forest national parks. This has become hopelessly bogged down with the Carr government apparently trying more to please the unholy alliance of the timber union, the timber industry and the Howard government, rather than delivering its key promises to protect old growth and wilderness forests. None of the regional forest assessments has been decided; the critical South Coast forests have been set up as hostage to the government's re-election; and many promised wilderness areas remain undeclared.

There has also been poor performance on the marine national park promises with delivery of only a weak, multiple-use marine park framework. There is no chance that any marine park will be operational with clearly defined, adequate 'no take' areas before the election.

Other major concerns of NPA are the apparent abandonment of the explicit promise to add the intertidal zone area to all coastal national parks and nature reserves; the failure to transfer nominated Sydney Water and Hunter Water catchment lands to the national parks estate; and the non-appearance of legislation to protect wild and scenic rivers.

It must be acknowledged that the government has substantially completed its 1995 promises to create twenty-four specific new national parks and it has also created a number of significant additional reserves, including some interim forest parks in 1996. It has also begun significant reforms in protection of native vegetation and environmental flows for rivers, but these are already under pressure from farmers.

The NSW Opposition is uninspiring, even outright hostile, on many major natural environment issues, largely because of the National Party influence. Nevertheless, the Carr government must have a positive agenda and have clearly delivered on its key promises to be certain again of the committed and organised conservation support through which it won the last election.

There is still time – but only just – for Bob Carr to re-establish the necessary level of confidence in his government's commitment to the environment.

**Noel Plumb**  
Executive Officer

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# The South Coast Forests

Andrew Wong\*

The South Coast Forests of NSW run down the coast from Nowra to Narooma, and extend inland almost to Canberra. They are some of the most magnificent and most important forests in NSW, and yet they are also some of the least known. Consequently, the spectacular wilderness areas, cathedral old-growth forests, breathtaking rainforests, and marvellous biodiversity “hot spots” of the South Coast, are some of the State’s most politically ignored forests – and therefore some of the most threatened. These articles will take you on a journey through these forests, one that will reveal some of the best-kept secrets of one of the State’s favourite holiday destinations – the NSW South Coast.

If you have ever seen the beautiful spotted gum forests around Batemans Bay, then you have been to one of the few well-known forests on the South Coast. Chances are you were near Murramarang National Park, the most heavily visited coastal national park in NSW south of the Royal National Park. Stretching up from wide sandy beaches, these forests, with their cabbage tree palms and burrawangs, symbolise the beauty and peacefulness of the South Coast. Many such forests cling to the coastline around popular tourist destinations such as Sussex Inlet, Ulladulla, Batemans Bay and Narooma, and yet most people experience little of them except as a backdrop to a highway or a beach.

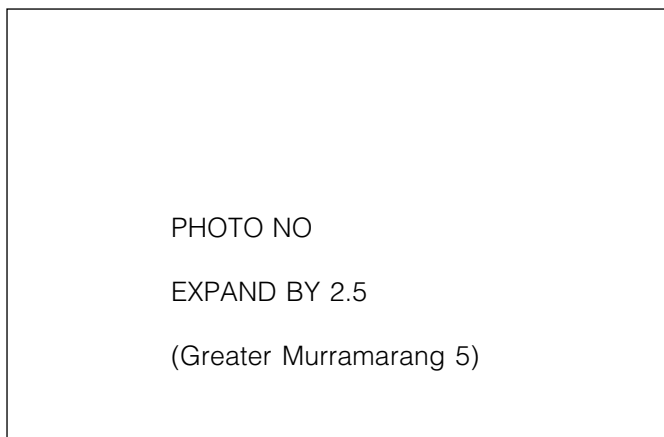
For those who are willing to further explore, the South Coast forests have a multitude of wonders to offer. Imagine standing beneath a giant eucalypt twelve stories high that would take ten

people holding hands to encircle it, which was three centuries old when Captain Cook arrived in Australia. Or walking through rainforests that are remnants from the time of the dinosaurs, with trees two thousand years old. You could be drifting along a coastal lake, with sea eagles circling overhead, a hundred black swans swimming lazily around you, and another two hundred species of birds waiting to be found. Or you could be bushwalking in a vast wilderness, surrounded by old-growth forest where animals sleep in towering trees that rise like apartment buildings from a sea of tree ferns.

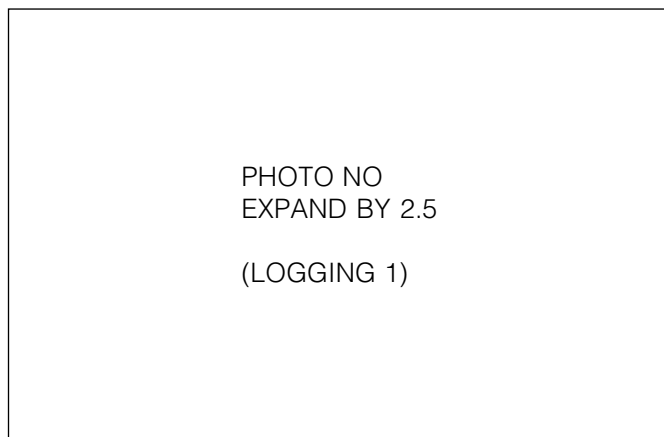
Perhaps as you did so, you would not realise that these forests are unprotected, and that a desperate campaign was being waged to stop ever-expanding logging, woodchipping and roading from ruining the natural values that surround you. Some of the State’s most precious forests are in the South Coast, but are not protected in the South Coast national park system; instead they are being handed to the logging and woodchipping industry to make chairs or crates or be pulverised for paper. Because most people have not discovered these forests for themselves, there are few people to warn about their loss, and little reason for politicians to worry.

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Rare coastal rainforest in the Greater Murramarang area



Log dump with logging machinery in the Greater Deua area

ANDREW WONG

Yet the conservation movement is working hard to change that perception, and to challenge the lack of political support for protecting the South Coast forests. Premier Bob Carr recently announced that he intended NSW to have the "best system of National Parks in the entire world." This bold vision will fail without the crucial unprotected forests of the NSW South Coast being added to the national park system, before pressures for logging and wood-chipping win out. If this happens, some of NSW's best kept secrets will be lost before they are truly discovered.

## Greater Murramarang

*One of the finest coastal forests in NSW*

Murramarang National Park stretches from Batemans Bay north along the coast to Bawley Point. It is 44 kilometres long, and yet is an average of only 366 metres wide – it clings to the coast in a narrow, discontinuous strip which fails to adequately protect the ecosystems and biodiversity of one of the best coastal forests in NSW. The current national park is not viable, for both ecological reasons and for tourism and recreation, and yet bordering it are the Benandarah and Kioloa State forests and Durras Lake, which contain forest and lake environments of enormous conservation value. "Greater Murramarang" is an extended Murramarang National Park which would encompass these State forests and the bed of Durras Lake to make it a truly viable coastal national park.

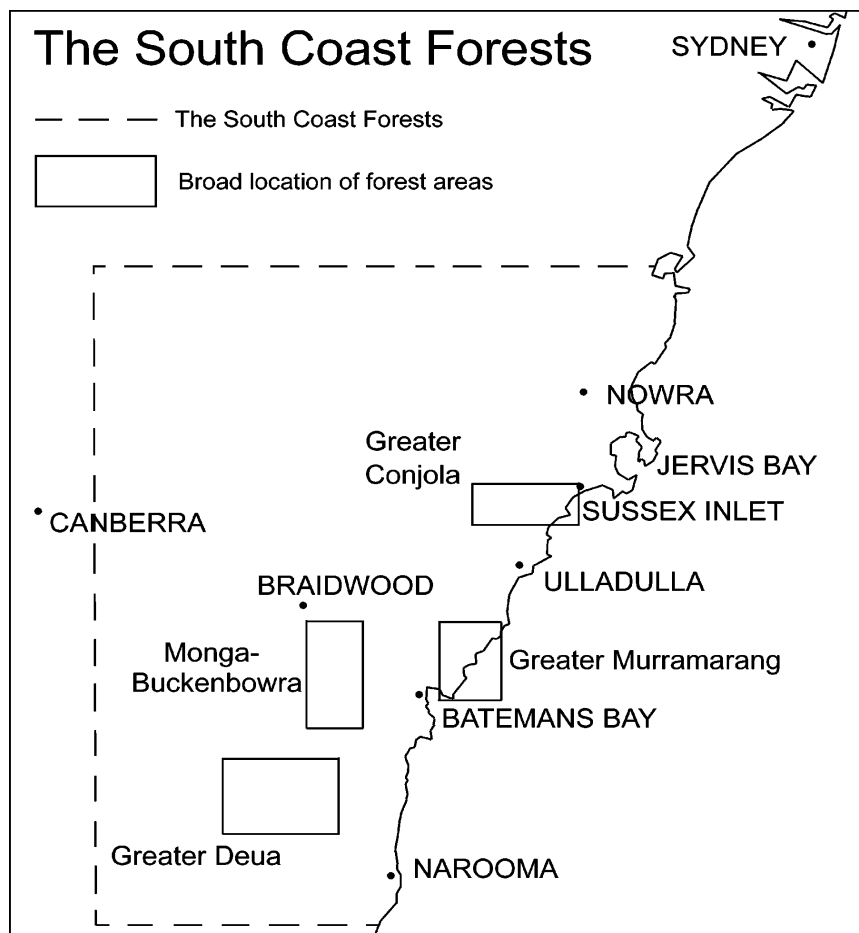
In Greater Murramarang, spotted gum forests stretch their smooth white trunks above burrawang palms to provide one of the most welcoming natural environments on the South Coast. Amongst these forests are a great diversity of plants and animals,

including some of the most significant stands of rainforest in the region. These warm temperate and subtropical rainforests are unique in their combination of maritime environment, rich basaltic soils, and sheltered aspects, which allow over twenty rainforest plants to grow at the southern limit of their range. The eucalypt forests and rainforests add to a rich complexity of environments which include dunes and beaches, saltmarshes and lagoon communities, surrounding the shallow, saline coastal lake of Lake Durras. Living within these ecosystems are 205 species of birds and 39 terrestrial native mammals; 27 of these birds and mammals are considered to be threatened species in NSW.

Durras Lake, which is periodically joined to the sea, is the most pristine coastal lake on the NSW coast between Kiama and Nadgee on the Victorian border. It supports an abundance of fish, bird and mammal life. The lake and forest environments of Greater Murramarang are listed on the Register of the National Estate, with three separate over-

lapping listings by the Australian Heritage Commission, in recognition of its exceptional environmental values. The significant Aboriginal cultural values in Greater Murramarang are also recognised – there are 392 Aboriginal sites recorded there, from middens and burial grounds to sacred sites.

As one of the most heavily visited national parks in NSW, an expanded Greater Murramarang National Park would ensure it was capable of more adequately preserving its recreational values for generations of holiday makers to come, in greater harmony with its environmental and cultural values. The local community have continued to put in a massive effort to protect their local environment, with the Friends of Durras having raised \$113,000 to help purchase crucial land beside Durras Lake, which has now been added to Murramarang National Park. Extending the park over the lake and State forests is the last step needed to create one of the finest coastal national parks in NSW.



# Monga-Buckenbowra

*A rainforest relict from Gondwana*

ANDREW WONG

PHOTO NO  
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(MONGA-  
BUCKENBOWRA 2)

Giant pinkwood tree in Monga forest

Monga-Buckenbowra rests above, on and below the Eastern Escarpment, halfway between Batemans Bay and Braidwood. Hidden within the valleys of Monga-Buckenbowra are the most significant stands of rainforest in the South Coast. Perhaps the most special of these are the pinkwood rainforests of Monga, a State forest on top of the Escarpment which borders Clyde Mountain, just 20 km from the tablelands tourist town of Braidwood.

Pinkwood rainforests are ancient relict communities, having survived the Ice Age fluctuations of the last two million years – they are direct descendants of the rainforests of the super

continent of Gondwana, over 100 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the land. These rainforests, perhaps completely unchanged for hundreds of thousands of years, provide a glimpse of our ancient past. Some ancient pinkwood trees

could be as much as two or three thousand years old – living things which may have been a thousand years old when Christ walked the Earth, and are still alive today.

Surrounding these rainforests are some of the best old-growth forests in Southern NSW. The brown barrel and mountain grey gum eucalypts - standing up to 50 metres tall and with girths of up to 12 metres - which dominate these forests, may be 500 years old. In these forests are 17 threatened species, including the extremely rare brush-tailed phascogale and golden-tipped bat. Finding their birthplace in these forests are two of the State's most pristine rivers – the Mongarlowe and Buckenbowra

ivers. The Mongarlowe is unique in that it flows for forty kilometres north along the edge of the Eastern Escarpment without dropping down it; instead eventually flowing inland to join the Shoalhaven River. This unique geographic feature makes Monga the wettest place in a huge area stretching from Kiama to southern Victoria and inland to the Snowy Mountains. Moist coastal air is forced up the Eastern Escarpment, forming dense clouds which sink into the Mongarlowe River valley and are captured by the forest canopy, making Monga a cloud-fed catchment, adding further moisture to the already extraordinarily high levels of precipitation.

These conditions provide a refuge for plant communities like pinkwoods, and for many species of animals which use fertile, wet places like Monga-Buckenbowra to survive times of drought and hardship. These conditions also allow a unique situation: two waratah species inhabiting the same place. It is an association found nowhere else in Australia, with a relict population of Gippsland waratahs (far outside their normal range) growing alongside the Monga waratahs along the Mongarlowe River.

Monga-Buckenbowra has many other values. It is largely

## 30 years and counting

Dear Reader,  
Wish you were here ... Lovely view of the forests on the other side, isn't it? Shame about the logging (so-called; I'd describe it as forest mining personally) that's so cleverly concealed behind the fringe of trees. Still, at least there's plenty of people (locals, city slickers & tree sitters) fighting for these forests. Maybe they really will make a stamp commemorating the 30 or so years of trying to protect them! Of course, there's been small groups of people working together for yonks (look at Durras), but the battle to keep the forests of southern NSW standing instead of being turned into woodchips has really drawn together a mega range of types (from big groups to baby ones). I just found out that the first report recommending national parks down here (written by a Scientific Committee, no less) came out in 1968. And did you know that the Forestry Commission (enough said) actually first agreed to supply Harris Daishowa in 1969? And that by now about half the forest originally made available has probably been cut? Oh, the struggles, the scars, the blockades, the arrests ... One person I know has been working to save these forests for over 20 years - you could say he cut his eye teeth on them! And all of this virtually with no

ANDREW WONG

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Conjola blockade

violence (by protesters, anyway). Of course, we do have more forests in national parks than we used to, but ... Well, enough of the gloom - back into the forests for another immersion while there's still time.

Regards,  
Glyn Mather, Editor, NPJ

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(GREATER CONJOLA 5)

Greater Conjola

identified as both wilderness and National Estate by the Commonwealth Government. Monga-Buckenbowra connects the largest national parks in the South Coast; Morton and Budawang national parks are currently separated from Deua and Wadbilliga national parks, with Monga-Buckenbowra in between, forming a crucial link in the region's reserve system. Adjoining the highway which runs from Batemans Bay to Canberra, it is easy to access and, with a little exploring, to discover the many wonders of Monga-Buckenbowra.

## Greater Conjola

*A biodiversity hot spot stretching from the mountains to the sea*

Greater Conjola stretches from the Budawang mountains in Morton National Park to the sea just south of Jervis Bay. It is a place teeming with life – a “hot spot” for biodiversity. In its rainforests, tall eucalypt forests, woodlands, heaths, dunes, swamps, beaches, lagoons and coastal lakes (a total of 18 vegetation communities are found here), it hosts around 500 documented plant species, along with 185 bird species, 27 mammal species, and 44 species of

terrestrial and epiphytic orchids. Known from Greater Conjola are 22 threat-ened fauna species, making the area crucial to the conservation of rare and endangered animals. Several threat-ened plant species are also known, such as the yellow bush-pea and the Opera House greenhood (an orchid).

It contains some of the best examples of the South Coast's myriad natural environments. Bordering the Budawangs Wilderness in Morton NP, the stunning George Boyd Lookout overlooks sweeping hinterland forests, with rainforest gullies, tall cliffs, and views across the ocean and Jervis Bay. Coastal heaths provide a great variety of birdlife, while the rainforests provide cool retreats and shelter pristine creeks that flow directly into the sea. The magnificent beaches and dune systems are as good as any along the South Coast, enclosing the mouths of three coastal lakes – Swan Lake, Monument Lagoon and Lake Conjola – which are of enormous conservation value.

Near Jervis Bay, most of Greater Conjola is within the lands of the Jerrinja Aboriginal people, and is rich in aboriginal sites and artifacts. Recent studies have found a total of 133 sites, now awaiting registration with the NPWS. These sites include artifact scatters, scarred trees, middens, middens with artifacts, burial sites, axe-grinding grooves, rock shelters and silcrete quarries.

## A failure of will?

The South East Forest Alliance had expected to negotiate the new national parks for the South Coast forests well before the end of 1998. However, in May this year the NSW Government finally admitted that its forest assessment process had fallen so far behind schedule that it was logistically impossible to complete the assessment for these forests before 1999. It has since refused to consider any new for-est national parks on the South Coast before the the elections next March.

NPA and other SEFA members consider this unacceptable for three reasons.

First, that these forests are clearly part of the fiercely contested forest areas, along with the north-east and Eden, on which Bob Carr based his 1995 election promises to protect old growth and wilderness forests. Second, that there is already sufficient information on which to decide core reserve areas to be protected before completing the full assessment next year. Third, that substantial new national parks were declared in 1996 as an interim measure in the other forest regions, but not on the South Coast. Instead, the industry was given up to 10-years' supply guarantees for 50% of the timber supposedly available, including on the South Coast.

Bob Carr looks set to fail on his promise to protect the forests if he leaves these areas as hostages to the re-election of his government. It is not acceptable to leave the core reserve areas of the South Coast open to the expansion of the giant Japanese woodchip operator, Daishowa. “Cutting back” Daishowa in the Eden forests will be futile if it is given the opportunity to destroy the magnificent wilderness and coastal forests of the South Coast.

**Noel Plumb**  
NPA Executive Officer

The area is so loved by the local community that when it was left open to logging in 1996 after a Statewide interim forest assessment, 200 local residents held a blockade – none of whom had ever been to a protest in their lives. They included many local timber workers, retired couples and school children, and they managed to halt logging for 17 days, until the NSW Government bowed to pressure and placed the area under a logging moratorium. Still potentially threatened by logging, and a major garbage tip which has been proposed for these fragile coastal forests, the community remains diligent in their long-running campaign, and are waiting for an outcome to their proposal for the area to be dedicated as national park.

## Greater Deua

### *One of the last great wilderness forests of the South Coast*

Greater Deua lies in the vast escarpment mountains behind Moruya and Narooma, bordering the Deua National Park. It contains extensive areas of officially Identified Wilderness, determined by the NPWS, within the Dampier State Forest. It also contains further areas nominated for wilderness by NSW peak conservation groups. Some of the longest-campaigned for wilderness forests in the South Coast, like Georges Creek and the upper Deua River, are still awaiting wilderness declaration in Greater Deua; without this protection they may become yet another wilderness area consumed by logging and woodchipping.

These wilderness forests contain some of the most extensive rainforests in southern NSW, including the largest area of pinkwood rainforest in existence. These pinkwoods may be over 2,000 years old, with multiple trunks growing from a base which may be more than five metres in

diameter, and covering several generations of stem growth. When the original trunk of a pinkwood tree dies, instead of dying the surrounding shoots continue to grow in a ring of new trunks, which eventually grow to a size equal to the original. When these die, each in turn forms its own ring of third-generation trunks, which continue the cycle of growth and expansion, until these trees are thought to potentially grow across entire rainforest valleys, with different trees passing through each other over the millennia in an eternal ballroom dance.

Five rainforest types occur in Greater Deua: dry rainforest, with species like grey myrtle, lilly pilly and rusty fig; warm temperate/subtropical rainforest, with pinkwood, creek sandpaper fig and black pencil cedars; warm temperate rainforest, with lilly pilly and water gums; warm temperate/cool temperate rainforest, with lilly pilly, sassafras and pinkwood; and cool temperate rainforest, dominated by pinkwood, sassafras, southern sassafras, and soft tree ferns.

Greater Deua also contains some of the most extensive tall wet old-growth forests in southern NSW, and provides a stronghold for many old-growth dependant animals. These include threatened species like the powerful owl, sooty owl, masked owl, yellow-bellied glider, tiger quoll and stuttering barred frog. Greater Deua also protects rare or threatened plants like the Deua tea tree and Jilliga ash.

Greater Deua is a favourite bushwalking destination, and declaration of its wilderness and protection of its forests is long awaited. Unfortunately, logging has continued to impinge on this great wilderness area, threatening to fragment significant sections of the Deua-Woila and Deua-Oulla wilderness areas. Time is running out for the Greater Deua wilderness as the woodchipping appetite of Harris Daishowa expands in the South Coast forests. Just as it has been one of the longest running struggles for conservation on the South Coast, so too is this exceptional natural area one of the most deserving of protection.

## A 3,000 year journey through our forests

In the cool rainforests of the South Coast, there is the story of the Three Thousand Year Caterpillars. In this story there are tree ferns that grow until they can be measured, from their height, to be hundreds of years old. When these ferns are four, five or even six hundred years old, they grow too tall to support their own weight, and gracefully and slowly bend to the ground. This leads to a forest full of strangely shaped ferns arching and curving through the darkness of the rainforest. Eventually the crown of the fern reaches the ground, and with its weight now taken, it does not die but curves back up and begins to climb again towards the light.

Then new roots form at the base of the crown where it now rests on the ground, and the tree fern starts to use these new roots instead of the old. Eventually the old trunk becomes redundant and rots away, leaving no trace of many hundreds of years of growth for the tree fern, which now stands several metres away from where the old trunk grew. The tree fern has moved, and it continues this cycle again, and again, and again.... each time growing, falling, and moving further away; each time cheating death, until it is thousands of years old. As they arch and fall through the centuries, moving along the ground as they go, these tree ferns resemble giant caterpillars crawling through the forest on a journey thousands of years long.

Excluding the effects of fire or predation, no one truly knows when the tree ferns will die . . . or where their journey will end.

Australia falls within the top 14 countries in the world for rankings of total diversity of higher plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Along with the USA, Australia is one of only two developed countries with mega-diversity. The tens of millions of years of evolutionary isolation of the Australian continent resulted in 80% of our species being unique. They do not occur in any other country in the world.

While we are blessed with biological wealth, we are leading the world in its extermination. Over the last two centuries, for instance, Australians have eliminated 19 species of mammals, 20 species of birds, 3 species of frogs and 76 flowering plant species from the world's biota.

Australia currently has 7.6% of its land area protected. For NSW this drops to 6% of its land area. Within Australia, it is the drier regions that are the most poorly reserved, though it needs to be recognised that the majority of our unique biodiversity is within forests.

It also needs to be realised that within Australia, the tropical forests of north-east Queensland and the forests of north-east NSW/south-east Queensland are the principle

centres of biodiversity for frogs, birds, mammals, insects and (along with south-west Western Australia) plants.

The threats to NE NSW/SE Queensland's outstanding biodiversity are compounded by the fact that these adjacent comprehensive regional assessment (CRA) regions have the worst forest reserve systems of any of the CRA forest regions. The consequences of the combination of high biodiversity and poor reservation is reflected in NE NSW having the highest number of plant species threatened with extinction in Australia.

North-east NSW's internationally significant species diversity, numerous endemic species, high numbers of threatened species, significant populations of species which have declined elsewhere in Australia and importance for

migratory fauna, identify it as one of Australia's major refuge areas with the best ability to maintain Australia's declining biodiversity into the uncertain future.

North-east NSW (north from the Hunter River to the Queensland border) currently has less than 10% of its land area in national parks and other conservation reserves. This is comparable to East Gippsland's 36% reservation and Tasmania's 24% reservation prior to their CRAs. The comparison is even starker when it is recognised that even if all the 600,000 ha area of State forest currently under moratoria (on the basis it is likely to be required for the reserve system) is indeed reserved, it will only increase NE NSW's reserves to 17% of the land area.

There can be no doubt that NE NSW encompasses one of the world's principal centres of biodiversity and thus deserves a world-class reserve system. However, to begin to approach the levels of reservation achieved in the completed regional forest agreements for East Gippsland, Tasmania and Central Highlands will require substantially more forests to be protected than those areas already under moratorium.

Both NSW Premier Carr and Environment Minister Pam Allan have committed themselves to establishing a world-class reserve system in NSW. In October they will be deciding the fate of north-east NSW's public forests. It is public pressure that is needed to enhance the political will to achieve the reserve system that north-east NSW rightly deserves.

\* **Dailan Pugh** is a coordinator with the North East Forest Alliance.

# North-east forests

*Dailan Pugh\**

## NE campaign

After more than 20 years of campaigning by the North East Forest Alliance, NPA and other conservation groups, a comprehensive forest reserve system for north-east NSW is finally in sight. New reserves are expected stretching from the Richmond Range on the Queensland border to the Watagan Mountains just south of Newcastle, traversing the New England Tablelands and the Great Escarpment.

But the negotiations will be tough and outcomes uncertain in the face of a combined timber union and timber industry both determined to minimise the conservation gains. More than 600,000 ha of forest has been under a logging moratorium since September 1996. But in the upper north-east the timber companies have long-term timber-supply guarantees roughly equal to all the available timber: before even a single new reserve is created.

A collision is looming with the timber firms. In the upper north-east there appears to be a shortfall of over 100,000 m<sup>3</sup> per annum of sawlogs if the required reserves are created in order to meet the agreed conservation targets, as well as fulfil the Carr government's promises to protect old growth and wilderness forests.

**Noel Plumb, NPA Executive Officer**

*Show your support for the north east forests and send the Premier the "forest creatures" postcard included in this Journal.*

# Genowlan Mountain

Who will save the Three Hundred Sisters? *Haydn Washington\**

Like islands lost in geological time, or the prows of ships rising above the stony waves, Genowlan Mountain and Mount Airly rise above the flat dry Capertee Valley. They are ships which have carried an amazing variety of plants and animals through to the present day, surviving the worst of aeons of weathering and the withering blast of ice ages. Genowlan Mountain and Mt Airly are majestic mesas that rise to over a 1000 metres from the Capertee Valley.

The years have carved the Genowlan mesa into a breathtaking wealth of hundreds of spectacular iron-stone banded pagodas, into gorges and into slot canyons. People make much of the Three Sisters at Katoomba, but on Genowlan one finds the 'Three Hundred Sisters', a host of spectacular rock formations that make it the 'jewel in the Crown' of the Capertee Valley. The names express the area's wonder ... City in the Sky, Valley of the Kings, Hidden Valley, the Great Wall of China. This is a landscape which cannot be beaten by any I have seen in more than 20 years of walking in Australia and overseas. And yet, the mesas themselves make up only around 1,300 ha, while the surrounding talus slope and valley woodland is another 2,000 ha. All of this is vacant Crown land.

The area is part of the 'Pagoda' National Estate listing, and was the

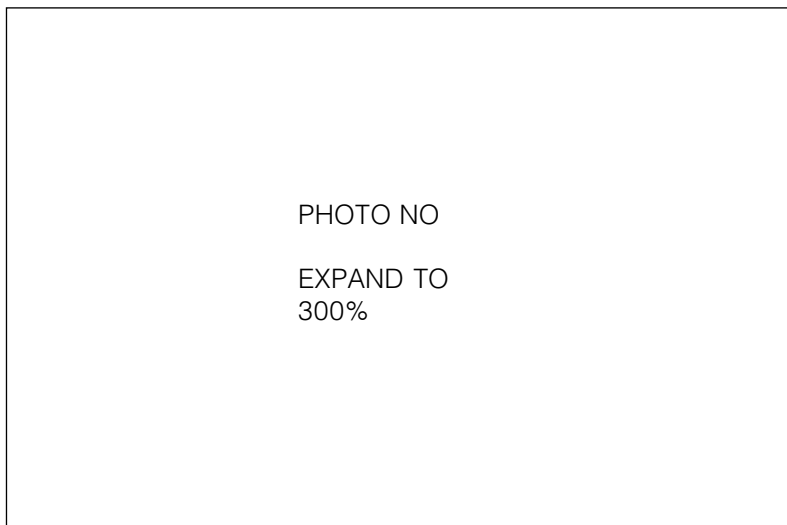
northern part of the Gardens of Stone National Park nomination by the Colo Committee, the Colong Foundation and the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs ... only missing out because there is mineable coal underneath them. Genowlan and Mt Airly have also missed out with the nomination for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area, since they are not within national parks. It now turns out that the botanical significance of these mesas is even greater than we thought - and we have only started to scratch the surface.

There are no less than 9 rare or threatened plant species on Genowlan (compared to 25 R&T in the whole of Wollemi NP). These include the vulnerable plants *Eucalyptus cannonii*, *Prostanthera stricta*, and a new species of *Pultenaea* on Genowlan Point, related to the vulnerable plant *Pultenaea glabra* (represented by a total population of only 51 plants). The unique dwarf *Allocasuarina nana* heathland on Genowlan Point contains at least two rare plants,

but also contains *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* at its southernmost limit and *Micromyrtus sessilis* at its eastern limit. Indeed this plant community is unlike any elsewhere in the Northern Blue Mountains. The new *Pultenaea* and the Genowlan heathland have been nominated respectively as an endangered species and community under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act*.

Yet all this seems to have escaped the Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC). A neighbour to the Crown land, Mr Ribaux (who once held a mining lease on Airly Turret), has taken his bulldozer onto the mountain and made new roads and regraded others, some with 'drop offs' for trail bikes. One new road on Genowlan Point had bulldozed through the rare plants *Banksia penicillata* and *Pseudanthus divaricatissimus*. DLWC Mudgee, when asked what right Mr Ribaux had to take a bulldozer into Crown land and destroy rare and threatened plants replied: 'well what right do you have to go there?'. In November the story got

even worse - the Colo Committee received a letter from the Regional Director of DLWC Central Region, Mr Martin, which stated that 'on some of the steeper sections, cross banks have been installed' (we could not see any) and 'where erosion is taking place, plans are in place to install additional cross banks ... discussions in this



Photos: Genowlan area

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regard have already commenced with Mr Ribaux, who will be constructing some of the works required to control track erosion.'

The only ray of hope on the horizon came in December from State Land Services, which is willing to consider the creation of a Crown reserve for the 'preservation of flora and fauna' in the area. The drawback is they do not want to manage it: they are willing to consider NPWS managing the Crown land, similar to what has occurred in the Abercrombie area. Now it is up to NPWS and its Minister to decide if they will rise to the occasion to help manage what should be national park. Alas, this proposal seems to have been bogged down by NPWS asking 'why should we manage what is not our land' rather than realising that this would be a good conservation outcome for an area of great value. The local NPWS ranger for the Gardens of Stone has confirmed that managing the area would not involve much extra work, as it is immediately north of the existing park.

Meanwhile, the coal lease that covers Mt Airly and Airly Turret has been sold by Novacoal to Centennial Coal (see box also). The 5 years of the original approval ended in April, yet the company has extracted no coal, only put up a couple of portable buildings, widened the road, and put in an earth dam.

The company fulfilled an agreement to carry out a flora and

fauna study of the mountain in the first year after development approval (that is, 4 years ago). However, there really should be a new Environmental Impact Statement carried out, especially in light of the discoveries of new species in the area, and the new plan to haul coal by road to Wallerawang (30 trucks a day) rather than by rail. It looks though as if the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning and the government will not require a new EIS and, despite commitments to reducing greenhouse gases, will let the mine proceed.

So what is our Minister for the Environment, the Hon Pam Allan, doing in regard to the area? In October the Minister's Policy Adviser stated 'while there is a valid coal lease over the area, it is not possible to consider the area for acquisition as a NPWS reserve ... in the event that the lease lapses, you can be assured that the NPWS will again investigate the possibility of acquiring appropriate areas for conservation purposes'.

In fact, the coal lease has lapsed in our view, but in any case only covers Mt Airly and Airly Turret - it does not include Genowlan Mountain and Genowlan Point (the site of many rare and threatened plants). These areas are vacant Crown land with no coal lease. Surely it is time for the Genowlan Extension to the Gardens of Stone national park? In the meantime, the new Minister for DLWC, the Hon Richard Amery, should intervene personally to create this amazing area as a Crown reserve for the 'preservation of flora and fauna'.

The Three Hundred Sisters are hanging in the balance - you can make a difference by writing to the Hon Pam Allan urging her to add the Genowlan Mountain area to the Gardens of Stone National Park and protect the remainder of the area in a Crown reserve for the 'preservation of Flora and Fauna', managed by NPWS.

\* **Haydn Washington** is a long-standing member of NPA and is also a member of the Colo Committee.

## The mine proposal

Extraction of coal from the fragile sandstone mountains in the Mt Airly - Genowlan area could result in cliff collapses and subsidences, which would destroy the unique geological heritage. Subsidence in the centre of the mountains would alter the hydrology resulting in water loss to the creeks and swamps, and devastation for the flora and fauna communities. There is already evidence of cliff and pagoda collapses from coal mines in the Blue Mountains.

In addition, water flowing from the mine would be loaded with sediment as well as acid contamination from the extraction process.

According to the development application (DA) for the first phase of the mine, the coal was to be moved by rail, with a rail loop to the Mudgee/Lithgow line. It appears that the company now intends to supply Mount Piper Power Station by road.

There are 200 million tonnes below the whole area. Over the first year 300,000 tonnes would be extracted, building up to 1 million tonnes per year. Twenty-seven tonne vehicles will be used. Assuming operations are 12 hours/day, 5 days/week, 50 weeks/year, this will result in one rig about every 5-7 minutes in both directions, through a number of townships and intervening rural areas. Public safety and the effects of noise and air pollution must be considered.

Centennial Coal - an Australian-owned company - already operates the following collieries - Berrima, Ivanhoe, Preston, Cook and Charbon - do they need another here? The wrong mine in the wrong place.

**Marion Hawley**  
Chair, Reserves Committee

# Letters to the Editor

USUAL  
PHOTO -  
see p 22  
August  
issue

Readers are welcome to respond by letter or e-mail to other letters or articles in the *National Parks Journal*, or to write in about any topic you choose. Preference will be given to short, concise letters. Other letters may be edited or not included, depending on space limits. Please be aware of libel and defamation laws! All views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared or endorsed by NPA.

## Wik & reserves

In his excellent article, *Land Rights at the Frontline* in the August Journal, Noel Plumb summarised the 1983 and 1996 NSW Acts which allow the transfer of publicly owned land to Aboriginal tribal groups, and touched on the conflict which is developing within the conservation movement over their management.

In addition to the two NSW Acts, we must also consider the effect on native title claims following the recent passage in the Commonwealth Parliament of the so-called Wik Amendments. The most important of these is the transfer of the responsibility for assessment and registration of claims from the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) to the Federal Court, thus relegating the role of the NNTT to mediation.

Claims can still be made over national parks and nature reserves, but certain tenures within them which were once freehold or leasehold are excluded by the amendments. Thus the current large claim by the Gundungurra people (NC 97/7) for all the Crown land between Katoomba and Goulburn must be amended to exclude such areas from the Blue Mountains and Kanangra Boyd national parks. In the case of preparation or revision of a management plan "intended to preserve the natural environment of an area" (Section 24JB), native title claimants and ATSIC must be notified and given the opportunity to comment.

Claims can still be made over national parks etc, but where the

park was proclaimed prior to 23 December 1996, the validity of that proclamation cannot be challenged.

The original requirement that claimants must be able to "demonstrate a continuing cultural affiliation" with the land will still apply, but this must now be proved to the satisfaction of the Federal Court, not the NNTT.

In the five years of operation of the Native Title Act, about 119 claims have been made over Crown land in NSW and the ACT and ten of these involve national parks etc. All of these ten will now be decided by the Federal Court. Apart from Claim NC97/7, the other large claims are:

- Claim NC 96/29 by the Wal-bunja clan covering Jervis Bay to Narooma;
- Claim NC 95/11 by the United Githabul Tribal Nation covering State forests and NPs on the NSW/Queensland border; and
- Claim NC 96/16 by the Bundjalung people including Bundjalung and Broadwater NPs.

The Darug Claim (NC 97/8), which includes Sydney Harbour, Blue Mountains and Wollemi NPs, has already been referred by the Presidential Member to the Federal Court.

Only one claim in NSW has been resolved (Crescent Head) and only one claim in Australia has been before the Federal Court - Yorta Yorta, involving 1130 square km along the Murray River, which ran for 18 months with 400 parties involved. A decision by Justice French is awaited.

**Jim Somerville**  
8 August 1998

## Forest terms

I've failed again. Noel Plumb writes that mechanised industrial logging is a disaster [Letters page, August NPJ]. But what is it - selective logging or clearfelling? Since practically most forests in Australia were selectively felled for nearly two hundred years the outlook for pristine mature-age forests seems grim.

Fortunately the forests of Western Australia which I know best were selectively logged for centuries and came to no permanent ecological harm.

**Vincent Serventy**  
**Wild Life Preservation Society**  
**of Australia**  
3 August 1998

I'd be interested to see your baseline data! **Noel Plumb**

## A Bushwalker's Dictionary

*Abseiling*  
Cruising on the River Abs  
*Backpacker*  
Put a bet on Kerry  
*Bushbash*  
Assault on an ex-President  
*Contours*  
A dodgy travel company  
*Cycle path*  
A weirdo  
*Great North Walk*  
An Alaskan dance  
*Mountaineering*  
Jewellery from the hills  
*Rogaine*  
Making up ground on a canoeist

**John Dennett**