



#36 2008

# news from the alps

“It’s unusual for a bright idea, back in 1986, to still have legs 22 years later.

The point Peter Jacobs\* is making might seem obvious to anyone working in and around the Australian Alps, but even so, it’s worth breaking it down to explore why the Alps national parks Memorandum of Understanding, and, perhaps more importantly the strategic plan which drives it, keeps on working.

## LATEST VERSION OUT NOW

“It’s through the support it enjoys at every level: Ministerial and agency, especially staff at the grass roots. It has always been a case of top-down and bottom-up commitment from those who’ve been a part of Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) – the body which formed to facilitate everything the MOU stands for. And with funded support for the AALC, there’s someone in the engine room at all times, someone who isn’t distracted by other responsibilities. It’s a different approach, from managing a landscape in the field. Instead you tend to look at things more widely.”

Twenty-two years ago, when the MOU was signed by the Federal government and the three State governments over which the Alps stretch, there was a sense of hope that it would be a success. The blunt truth is that there are probably very few other, if any, multi-lateral government agreements on protected area management in Australia that are as enduring or effective. Not only that, but it has an international reputation for being a good practice example of cross-border co-operation for conservation and people. Park managers from around the world have visited Australia to better understand the Program, and our staff have presented to meetings of those involved in managing mountain and transboundary protected areas elsewhere in the world.

Apart from strong support on every level, there is another key aspect which has helped not only to keep the MOU’s legs on over the years, but also increase its relevance and effectiveness - ongoing maintenance, some of which has just taken place.

Every three years the strategic plan is refreshed, refining its ability to achieve the MOU’s objectives. “It started simply as a cross border approach, bringing everyone together to co-operatively manage a single bio-geographic unit. Along the way this has become more complex, which is obvious when you look at the eleven priority issues in the latest plan.” This new strategic plan looks to be the most powerful and empowering version yet. So what makes it different and what do we think of it?

According to Peter Jacobs, there are three key points of difference. Firstly, the need to focus even more on the bigger picture. “Where we’ve had working groups developing projects which involve some of these issues – fire, water, climate change – this latest approach will help us consider them more effectively. Secondly, while we’ve benefited from 22 years’ worth of the agencies working together to get things established and consolidated, it’s now time to involve stakeholders more closely - local government, tourism organisations and others in the Alps community. Together we’ll achieve a more unified focus. And thirdly, there’s the shift from working groups to reference groups, to focus on the bigger issues, provide expert advice and to take a leadership role; recognising that staff these days find it difficult to commit time to project delivery.”

In a way, it is these reference groups which best illustrate the latest shift within the strategies. Gone are the hands on, project-based working groups, where various agency staff have had to deal with the





WELCOME

...to another issue of news from the alps, a magazine which we aim to fill with a wide range of news and interesting information for all those associated with the Australian Alps.

In this issue we look at survey work carried out in the Upper Cotter River as well as the ongoing race to gather captive husbandry knowledge of the threatened Corroboree frog. There's an in depth look at the importance of international relationships, like those forged between the Alps and Bhutan; and updates on the Australian Alps Walking Track, the Keep Winter Cool campaign and National Landscapes initiative.

Most importantly, we explore the anchor-point of the Alps Program itself, taking a timely look at the strategic plan which supports the Memorandum of Understanding signed 22 years ago and still going strong. Take a look at our lead feature and you'll soon appreciate how this latest version of the plan is different - and more effective.

And don't forget, if you've come across a great Alps story, it's a simple matter of an email or phone call. We'll do all the hard work - you just have to tell us the story so that others can benefit from and enjoy it.

Happy reading until next time.

Rod Atkins program manager & editor

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“It's also important to realise that the profile of the Australian Alps is becoming much more significant on a global scale, so it makes sense to change the way we've been doing things...”

responsibility of their existing roles and the concern over their capacity to deliver within the working group. Instead, reference group members are being sought for their knowledge and expertise alone. For example, when looking at the effect climate change may have on alpine weed populations, a reference group will look at it from an Alps-wide perspective, pull in whatever expertise is available and nut out what needs to be done. In other words, it's no longer the group's responsibility to deliver, but rather to offer a suggested methodology to be put out into the field. “This is important, as the group will not be frightened about the how, but rather focus their expertise on what needs to happen. Of course where members of reference groups have the capacity and are willing to get involved in project delivery, that will still be welcomed.”

While Peter Galvin\* agrees that the working groups' duties had become demanding - “The new approach does take the onus off a small number of people who have to design and deliver a project which, at times, can be hard to get together and have it implemented” - he is concerned about delivery under the new format. “While it's good to have great reference material, it's no use unless the agency implements it on the ground. The ideal would be to provide the agencies with information which they can easily link to their existing programs and budgets.”

“Looking at what we are doing day to day with our own twelve month action plan, we'd be looking for parallels with what we already have in place, and then incorporate what we're offered to improve things. We all want to work out how to sink our teeth into something in more detail - perhaps the reference groups will give it to us. We'll then be able to take this, discuss it with the expertise in your own agency (some of whom will probably have been part of the reference group) and develop plans based on this.”

In some ways this is what has been happening but in a slightly less logical way. Take fire for example. Following recent fire events, each of the state agencies tackled the post fire process independently then gathered to share and disseminate information before reporting back to their own agencies. The new approach will provide, at the outset, an opportunity to share the challenge as well as the input and guidance offered by a new fire-specific reference group. “It's a case of beefing up the Alps Program process, not that things were horribly wrong before this refinement.”

Arthur Willis\* has just recently returned to working in the Alps after many years working in other parts of the NSW parks system. He's looking at the revised strategies in the context of staffing numbers, something which affects the ability of many agency staff to deliver day to day. “That a lot has been achieved by the Program already is amazing, but in our particular situation at present, if someone has a great idea in the shower, we just haven't the resources to do it. Yes, everyone wants more information and the new reference groups might be building a body of it, but the reality is there are fewer people to get out there and do things.”

Looking at the other key strategies, Arthur supports the need for greater consistency and cohesive identity - “We need to get the community to understand what it's all about”; he believes World Heritage Listing is vital - “especially if it helps raise the profile of the Alps as a bio-region”; and feels that an expanded gathering of experts for the reference groups is important. “It will be interesting to take it all on board; it'll be helpful to learn where to network to find the information we need.”

Monica Muranyi believes the latest version of the strategic plan is quite different to what's been done before. She also believes this fresh new approach and direction reflects the dynamic changes facing the Alps and its land managers.

“Over the last 20 years, we've changed how we go about managing the parks. Rangers are busier than ever juggling their work loads while dealing with events such as fires and floods. As a result, we have less time to devote to the Alps projects. Over the last 22 years people passionate about the Alps have joined the working groups and then, sooner or later, they burn out and move on. The new strategies have addressed this - by changing the working groups to reference groups. Previously working group members would need to deliver every aspect of the project, however the new reference groups won't necessarily be as labour intensive, and this will give greater scope to tackle the big ticket issues such as climate change, fire management & water.”

“It's also important to realise that the profile of the Australian Alps is becoming much more significant on a global scale, so it makes sense to change the way we've been doing things. We can get more input and advice from the greater pool of knowledge on Alps issues - after all, the efforts we make should be the best we can possibly do to leave a legacy for future generations.”

Having said that, Monica agrees that the challenge will be to take this global support along with the recommendations of these reference groups and get them into action on the ground.

“It's about knowing what you want to achieve, and determining the steps to do it. It's about bringing our partnerships to the forefront as no project will succeed without them. It's about understanding what is already in place to ensure continuity of purpose.”



## THE PRIORITIES - FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

- 1 Aboriginal Peoples' Involvement** - acknowledging the contribution of, and encourage further leadership by, Indigenous people in the co-operative management of the Alps.
- 2 Climate Change and Adaptation** - supporting increased scientific research on the effects of climate change on the natural values of the Alps, enabling effective adaptive management, and leading to the development of appropriate programs - particularly in regard to impacts on biodiversity, fire management, catchment protection and tourism.
- 3 Community Awareness** - enhancing community awareness of the Alps' significant values and the advantages of co-operative management, with expanded communication to a wider external audience.
- 4 Fire** - developing improved approaches to understanding fire regimes and their management, particularly under the influence of climate change.
- 5 Invasive Species** - diminishing the impact of invasive species on natural systems, including consideration of climate change effects.
- 6 National Tourism issues and National Landscapes** - managing the tourism values of the mountain landscapes to recognise it as a unique national and international destination of great importance to the regional economy; incorporating the Commonwealth's initiative, National Landscapes, into the program.
- 7 One Alps Landscape: one park in name, not law** - recognising that the three States will manage the conservation reserves of the Australian Alps as though they were a single national park with complementary legislation, complementary management plans, seamless promotion and marketing and respect for the cultural heritage of the Alps.
- 8 Recreational Patterns** - developing a better understanding of trends in recreational patterns and use including how climate change will affect this.
- 9 Science / Management linkage** - promulgation of the results of scientific research to assist managers to make evidence-based decisions.
- 10 Stakeholder and Community Engagement and Partnerships** - formalising partnerships with neighbouring and local communities to enhance the conservation of natural and cultural values, recognising that the mountain landscapes exist at a regional scale and extend beyond the park.
- 11 Water and Catchments** - restoring damaged mountain catchments and managing them to maximise the potential for natural mountain systems to store and release water from the vitally important Alps catchments, with consideration of the effects of climate change.



Climate change research on the Bogong High Plains. Climate change is one of the key areas of focus under the new Alps Strategic Plan.

## THE NEW REFERENCE GROUPS

Replacing the working groups with the new reference groups is based on a simple philosophy. It's about mixing specialist with on-the-ground expertise. Add to this an improved connection with the Alps Operational Group (the group of field managers whose role is to maintain an overview and direction for the Program) and you have a solid recipe for success. The new reference groups are:

**Climate Change.** Contemporary approaches to planning; responding and adapting to climate change; determining needs and mechanisms for further research.

**Cultural Heritage.** Improved understanding of and respect for the Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage values including sites, places and landscapes; incorporating these values into effective conservation and management programs; identifying and promoting opportunities for the involvement of Indigenous people in the management of the parks.

**Natural Resource Management.** Taking a contemporary approach to pest plant and animal species management, through supporting best-practice principles for research, identification and control and, where possible, eradication, of new outbreaks and species, and appropriate responses to pest species problems exacerbated by climate change; similarly with fire management in ways that are compatible with conservation, research, planning and control, and appropriate responses to fire problems exacerbated by climate change.

**Stakeholder Engagement and Communication.** Ensuring stakeholders from all relevant groups and interests are aware of, and have access to information about the unique mountain landscapes and catchments; the natural and cultural values of the parks; the actions and behaviour needed to protect these values; and the objectives and achievements of the co-operative management program. Above all encourage them to be appropriately involved in achieving these objectives.

**Visitor Experiences and Marketing.** Presenting the superlative and unique Australian Alps visitor experiences identified through the Brand Australia National Landscapes Initiative, and implement contemporary approaches to sustainable visitor management in mountain protected areas.

**Water and Catchments.** Implementing contemporary approaches to management and restoration of catchments in mountain protected areas; through supporting good practice philosophy and principles for sustainable use and minimal catchment impact, to yield sustained supplies of high quality water both for uses external to the protected areas such as irrigation and domestic consumption, but also for flow regimes to sustain ecosystems dependent on water both within the Alps and downstream.

\* Peter Jacobs is Chief Ranger, Alps with Parks Victoria and Convenor of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee. Peter Galvin is a District Manager in ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands. Arthur Willis is Area Manager, Alpine, Snowy Mountains Region, NSW NPWS and Monica Muranyi is a Senior Ranger in ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands



## DATA DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

If you didn't know what was really going on, you might think that a couple of blokes wading around the upper sections of the Cotter River were just there to have a good time. Of course they do have a good time, but these aquatic ecologists don the waders as Ben Broadhurst explains, to "try and make a difference."

Over the last two summer seasons, Ben, together with Jason Thiem, Rhian Clear and project leader Brendan Ebner, (as part of a larger National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality funded project aimed at determining responses of large biota to environmental flow releases), have been surveying sections of the Cotter focusing on large riparian fauna - those that depend on a water course to complete a large part of their life cycle. And while data like this is always valuable, this study has a sense of urgency about it, given plans in 2011 to increase the capacity of Cotter Reservoir to meet Canberra's water needs. The new reservoir will take up a significant part of the river between the dam and a road crossing five kilometres upstream, reducing and isolating river access for the only remaining self-sustaining population of Macquarie perch (*Macquaria australasica*) in the ACT, but it's not all grim news...

"As part of the surveys we collected data around a rock-ramp fishway built at the point of the road crossing. Basically we wanted to see if Macquarie perch are using the fish-way to gain access up stream. And they are."

Not only were fish detected above the road, but in the time between the first and second field visits, they've moved further upstream. "We sample the river at three kilometre intervals, and it seems the need for habitat has encouraged them to leap further each year. We were all very excited – our management intervention has produced results."

**We were all very excited. Our management intervention has produced results...”**

Methods used to survey fish include electrofishing (armed with a battery in a backpack and a pair of waders) and fyke netting; and bait trapping to target spiny crayfish (*Euastacus* spp.). "There are limitations associated with each method so we make use of the best combination." Platypus are picked up in the funnels of the Fyke net (a wing set across the stream that directs fish and sometimes other fauna into a funnelled net) and frog call recorders are set at each location.

Apart from confirming that Macquarie perch use the fishway, the survey has produced other valuable information, some good and some not so good: an increase in sedimentation has slowed the flow sufficiently to create habitats more suited to exotic species (goldfish, mosquito fish and oriental weatherloach) that were previously confined to Cotter Reservoir. Post 2003 bush fire sediment has also filled in the rocky habitat of the two-spined blackfish (*Gadopsis bispinosus*) in the Cotter's lower end, forcing the species to move upstream. In the upper sections of the Cotter River (where the influence of people on the catchment is less), fish communities are in better shape and are somewhat as they were before the fires.

But anyone living or working in the Alps knows of the tradeoffs between human use and human impact on the environment. In this case, aquatic ecologists have been studying the direct and indirect effects of fire, drought, dams, road crossing and catchment use (in the case of forestry) on the river. What they discover will be used to inform the release of environmental flows (water released from dams) in the Cotter River catchment, and to restore and maintain fish habitat. Important ongoing goals include ensuring there is enough water to enable Macquarie perch spawning migrations and flushing sediment to maintain rocky habitat for threatened two-spined blackfish.

## PEOPLE KNOW CC=LESS SNOW

When Prasan Sharp, a then third year student of the University of Western Sydney, walked out onto the 2005 snow fields with her clipboard in hand, she had no sense that she would find such a willing group to be surveyed.

In a way this small fact hinted at the results she would present at the study's end – that 77% of respondents expressed concern about the future of snow-based activities as a result of climate change; and that 90% believed community actions and information campaigns could help.



## GREAT PEOPLE PRODUCE GOOD PROJECTS

Great days are always worth reporting about, and this was one of them. The weather was beautiful, and the faces who gathered to mark the end of a wonderful project hailed from all over...



"The snow fall was very bad that year, which may have worked to my benefit. People were asking themselves, "Where is the snow?" I thought people wouldn't care about global warming, however they do and so they were very interested in answering my questions."

The survey's aim was to gauge perceptions of climate change, the focus being on ski resorts and alpine ecosystems. Most importantly, it collected data on what people do or would be prepared to do to off-set their own energy consumption and hence reduce green-house emissions. "People are aware of the impact they have – they are prepared to turn off the lights, to recycle, to spend less time in the shower. What they didn't understand was why, if climate change was so serious, that the government wasn't doing more about this issue."

Over 500 surveys were collected, 30 per cent being conducted face to face. Those interviewed included local residents, visitors, staff and the CEOs of the ski fields in the Kosciuszko National Park. Prasan initiated the study, and Dave Woods, Environmental Liaison officer Resorts Section supervised the project which sits within the aims and objectives of the ongoing Keep Winter Cool campaign launched in the 2006 winter season.

The fact that Prasan collected so many responses reflects her determination to do something. "I was worked up because I know the potential impact – not in my lifetime but in my children's. I believe climate change is a very, very slow death."

For more detailed information on results, contact David Woods, Environmental Liaison Officer, Department of Environment and Climate Change on (02) 64505 616.

...among them parks people from the ACT and NSW, members from the Canberra Alpine Club who played an integral part, and the students and lecturer from the University of South Australia's School of Architecture and Design. The morning tea (with home made jam and scones) preceded speeches which were followed by a sausage sizzle.

This was the perfect means of marking a wonderful outcome following the loss of the Mt Franklin Chalet to bush fires in 2002-03. In her speech to officially open the new Franklin Shelter in the Brindabellas, Karin MacDonald, MLA for Brindabella, acknowledged all those who had been connected with the former Chalet and spoke of the wonderful partnership which produced the new shelter. Designed and built by students under the guidance of lecturer, David Morris (brother of Bernard Morris, Ranger-in-charge, Namadgi National Park), the winning design was produced by student Alex McCarthy. To those who visit the shelter, it's obvious a tremendous amount of thought went into the design, from the brief which defined many uses, through to the way the building helps people appreciate the site itself. First and foremost it is a shelter, but it is also an interpretive centre and, when necessary, it will provide park managers and emergency services personnel with a base to conduct search and rescue operations or act as a forward command post in the event of future bushfires.

But perhaps most significantly, the roof and leaning rail form a subtle partnership to seduce visitors to pause and look out and up towards Mt Franklin.

# AROUND THE ALPS

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

## from Victoria:

Work has begun on the Hotham to Dinner Plain Multi-purpose Trail (a partnership project between the Alpine Shire, Mount Hotham Resort Management Board and Parks Victoria). Once completed, it will link Mount Hotham Resort with Dinner Plain Village (approx 12km) traversing the Alpine National Park in between offering walking and cycling access in the summer and cross-country skiing in winter. Stage One, Dinner Plain to JB Plain, is being implemented this season with the remainder to be constructed following winter.

Managing the cultural values linked to the alpine huts continues: the Roper's Hut rebuild following the 2003 fires will be completed by the end May, thanks to the efforts of the North-East Freemasons Task Force and members of the Victorian High Country Huts Association, Parks Victoria staff and members of the Roper family. Similarly, Bluff Hut will soon be completed, while planning has commenced for the rebuild of Weston's Hut in the West Kiewa Valley and Ritchie's Hut in the Howqua Valley.

The Bogong High Plains looked spectacular this summer, prolific growth, fantastic wildflower displays and good summer rains. Sealing of the Bogong High Plains Road has begun in accordance with the highest environmental engineering standards, and volunteers from Bushwalking Victoria and the Victorian National Parks Association have assisted Parks Victoria staff with removal of both willow and grazing fencing on the Bogong High Plains - thousands of Grey Sallow Willow (*Salix cinerea*) have been hand-pulled or poisoned and approx 6kms of fences removed. Members of the Land Rover Owners Club Mobile Landcare Group have also assisted with hut clean ups and rubbish removal on the Bogong High Plains.

Thick post-fire regrowth and a good growing season have meant a lot of hard work for crews working to clear walking tracks. Tens of kilometres of track, on Mount Bogong and Mount Feathertop along with parts of the Australian Alps Walking Track, have been cleared using brush-cutters, chain-saws and rake-hoes over many weeks.

As for weeds, thanks to the efforts of contractors, Parks Victoria Staff and volunteers, the control and survey program for orange and King Devil Hawkweed (*Hieracium spp*) has been a success with many new infestations found and treated and few seeded plants found. This program is now at a critical stage where every effort needs to be focused on detection and control before these highly invasive plants take off across the high plains and beyond.

A new walking track (due to open next spring) to Fainter Falls on the Pretty Valley branch of the East Kiewa River is nearing completion. The 700 metre long walking track will provide fantastic views of the River and Falls and complement the recreational opportunities close to Mt Beauty and as part of the touring route for the Bogong High Plains Road. The project has been community driven and funded through Regional Development Victoria and managed as a partnership with the Alpine Shire, Parks Victoria, and the Mt Beauty Chamber of Commerce.

Post fire activity continues around Mt Buffalo. Assessment of the built assets is now complete and planning has begun to prioritise and schedule works. Both Grant's and Bryce's toilets have been completed while work is in progress on the Pinnacles facility. Walking track clearing and the reinstating of various signs, lookouts and visitor facilities is also continuing.

Restoration of PV drainage on 80% of Mansfield and 50% of Heyfield roads is complete; contracts have been awarded for Kelly Lane, Dingo Hill, Moroka River & Wonnangatta River bridges and or culverts; the Wabonga and Paradise Falls bridges are complete; the key walking tracks to Powers Lookout, Paradise Falls, Mt Skene, Bryce's Gorge and Mt Koonika have all been reopened including sections the Australian Alps Walking Track.

As part of the Indigenous Post Fire Program, the Project Management Committee met with both the Project Reference Group and representatives from the Victorian Alps Indigenous Reference Group in February to recommend those areas to be surveyed and finalise arrangements. The successful contractor and project manager have completed the first stage which has involved desktop assessment, engagement with Indigenous communities and establishing a survey schedule. Survey fieldwork began in April.

Rangers assisted by volunteers from the Friends of Baw Baw National Park and members of the Strzelecki Bushwalking Club have just completed major clearing works to a 15kkm section of the Australian Alps Walking Track. This popular section of track on the remote Baw Baw Plateau hasn't been cleared of scrub for over 20 years and volunteers contributed over 340 hours to this project, including two weekend camp outs and the use of a helicopter to fly crews and equipment into the more remote sections. The first 30km section of the Track - from Walhalla to St Phillack (Baw Baw Village area) - has been cleared, repaired and upgraded, work that has involved sign installation, drainage, bridge repairs, track resurfacing, track widening and vegetation clearing.

The Willow (*Salix cinerea*) control program continues. Following on from last season's achievement (993 willows treated at 301 locations), work is about to begin on this year's program, specifically targeting another 60 willows across the Baw Baw Plateau.

Work has commenced on the re-development of the Aberfeldy River Campground in Baw Baw National Park, following the devastating fires and floods of 2007. Facilities will be implemented over the coming months at a cost of approximately \$150,000.

Joel Deenen has just joined the Latrobe team as a Field Services Officer based at Traralgon, assisting other Latrobe staff to implement and maintain park programs in Baw Baw National Park and playing a key role in winter management activities at St Gwinear.

The Hon. Tim Holding, Minister for Tourism and Major Events, launched The Great Walhalla Alpine Trail at East Tyers Campground in Baw Baw National Park in January. The Trail, a

two day guided walk through Baw Baw National Park and the Walhalla Historic Area (both Parks Victoria managed areas) is run in partnership between the Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort and Walhalla's Star Hotel. This fully guided walk is aimed at the international tourist market and has been extensively promoted in Europe, Asia and the U.S. Not only will it raise Parks Victoria's profile but it is a working example of a collaborative development of successful local tourism product.

## from New South Wales:

There's been a lot of interest in the building of 'Australia's Highest Dunny' at Rawson's Pass. While the official opening will be at a date still to be set in spring, in March the Channel 10 weatherman Tim Bailey broadcast the weather live from Rawson's Pass. The publicity was invaluable as always: a special thanks goes to NPWS Snowy Mountains Tourism Manager Steve Redden.

The opening of Paton's and Delaney's Huts have been extremely well-received with hundreds attending the openings in April. Mountain families have been reconnected during the rebuilding of these historic huts that were burnt down during the 2003 fires. Jean Woodhouse from Wagga, who attended the opening of Delaney's Hut, remembers camping outside the old hut with her father Leigh Chalker during the 1950s when her family held the leasehold and Jean would help muster the sheep. Seven more huts are scheduled to be rebuilt with works to begin once again next spring.

As expected, the draft Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan which was put on display by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service last year has generated a lot of discussion. The plan does not aim to remove all the horses from the park, but only control numbers. The best way to do this is being defined through public consultation. Submissions have now been taken on board with the final plan to be released soon.

Two visiting government officials from the country of Bhutan graced Australia's shores in January and were most welcome visitors to Kosciuszko National Park. The Director General of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change,

Lisa Corbyn has said the close conservation relationship between Australia and the land-locked Himalayan country of Bhutan has been strengthened by the visit to Australia by the Hon Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Dasho Sherub Gyaltshen and the Director of the Department of Forests, Karma Dukpa. An agreement of Friendship and Cooperation between the Royal Government of Bhutan Department of Forests, Nature Conservation Division and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change Parks and Wildlife Group was signed in Bhutan late last year. (For more on this, see page 16.)

A quiet fire season was welcomed by the NPWS, which has been working hard to finalise its draft Fire Management Strategy for Kosciuszko National Park. The Strategy went on public exhibition in March to gather feedback. NPWS Southern Director Alistair Hinchman defined one of the main objectives of all NPWS fire management strategies as the protection of life and property. He said the strategy included a number of new initiatives including the determination of Asset Protection Zones. The strategy also sets out key areas, classed as Strategic Fire Advantage Zones where overall fuel hazard will be regularly monitored and appropriate fuel management programs will be implemented.

Since the discovery of orange hawkweed in Kosciuszko National Park in 2004 NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service scientists have been working to stop the threat it poses to Alpine Grasslands in mainland Australia. It was first thought that the plant was introduced by walkers from New Zealand or Tasmania, however it is now thought the infestation may be up to 50 years old, originating from the Snowy Mountains construction site and village at Ogilvie's Creek. While the 2003 fires created a significant grassland disturbance that allowed Orange Hawkweed to spread rapidly NPWS staff are now hopeful that the ideal weed germinating season experienced this summer has allowed all potential seed and plant sites to be discovered. A detailed recording process now being undertaken will allow all known sites to be rapidly and easily relocated and checked and it's hoped this weed can be contained although extensive site monitoring will be needed for years to come.

Rebuilt and opened Delaney's Hut.



## from the Australian Capital Territory:

The most exciting news from the ACT must be the finding of an Eastern Pygmy Possum in Namadgi National Park in early March. Staff were surprised to catch a female Eastern Pygmy Possum, (listed as vulnerable in NSW), while carrying out a small mammal trapping project in the Orroral Valley. The possum, caught in an Elliot trap set to catch antechinus and native rats, is the first recorded in the park for 16 years and only the fifth one ever found in Namadgi. The find is an indication that Namadgi is on the road to recovery following the devastating fires of 2003 that burnt 90% of the Park.

This year's ACT National Parks photographic competition took the theme Namadgi Through Your Eyes. Over a hundred photos were entered and the result displayed in the recently completed, and highly adaptable Visitor Centre. Visitation increased to view the final collection which included images taken by staff members Andrew Morrisson and Dave Whitefield.

The Hon. Peter Garrett, Federal Minister for the Environment and member of the Australian Alps national parks Ministerial Council, visited Namadgi National Park in April where, surrounded by media at the Visitor Centre, he announced a significant funding boost to Australia's National Reserve System through the Caring for our Country initiative. The Reserve System is one of the six priority areas for national investment through the initiative and has been highlighted as a vital tool in the fight to protect our biodiversity from the impacts of climate change.

A simple but effective new display has recently opened at the Tidbinbilla Visitor Centre. It features the endangered Northern Corroboree Frog, giving members of the public an opportunity to view these astonishingly beautiful, and surprisingly tiny creatures. Interpretive materials help to explain their

status, the factors which have contributed to this, and the work currently being carried out at Tidbinbilla and elsewhere to develop informed husbandry skills.

The annual Tidbinbilla Extravaganza, a community festival run by the Community Engagement Unit and staff at Tidbinbilla, has once again been a fantastic success, with this year's focus being the opening of the new Nature Discovery Sanctuary. Hundreds of people flocked to the Extravaganza where many experienced for the first time the upgraded Vet's Centre where the treatment of sick and injured animals is on view and the water-level boardwalk through the wetlands.

More community members, this time those who had lived or who have family connections with two homesteads repaired and upgraded following the fires, gathered at the opening of Rock Valley and Nil Desperandum. Chief Minister, and member of the Australian Alps national parks Ministerial Council, Jon Stanhope, officiated on the day which acknowledges the cultural value embodied in these homes.

Dave Whitfield continues to work extremely hard restoring and monitoring Namadgi's spectacular Sphagnum bogs and key to the success so far has been the ongoing vertebrate pest management. The annual pig program, horse monitoring program, and rabbit surveys are all high priority for Namadgi staff. And as expected, weed management is ongoing with an encouraging reduction of nodding thistle and St John's wort over the past three years.

In people news, Sharon Lane, a former Alps working group member whose background is interpretation, has been appointed to the position in which she has been acting for some time of Manager of Research and Planning with Parks, Conservation and Lands. And Namadgi welcomes three new rangers to the ranks - Louisa Roberts, Mitch Jankuloski and Andrew Morrison.

# INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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

Whether we believe it or not, five years have passed since the 2003 Durban World Parks Congress and we are just five years from the next Congress. This half-way point has traditionally been used by WCPA to assess how well the Congress Action Plan has been implemented and to commence preparations for the next Congress. So, as I prepare this report, I'm also preparing and packing for my departure to Cape Town South Africa for an IUCN Steering Committee. Later in the week, I'll attend the 'Durban plus 5' meeting along with many other WCPA international representatives.

So why is this meeting important? The ten yearly World Park Congresses play a pivotal role for protected areas around the world. Historically, they've helped transform a good idea - to permanently safeguard nature and heritage as protected areas - into an internationally recognised land use implemented by more than 188 countries on Earth.

The first World Parks Congress was held in 1962 in Seattle Washington, and by the second, held in Yellowstone National Park in 1972, there were 1823 national parks worldwide reserving 217 million hectares. By the fifth World Parks Congress in 2003, more than 11.5% of the surface of Earth had been reserved as protected areas which included more than 100,000 individual protected areas. It has been one of the great land use transformations in the history of humans on Earth, and it has been achieved peacefully\*.

The World Parks Congresses have helped to achieve this. They've had agenda setting roles and they've helped with the transparent debates and policy development that necessarily comes with a land use concept which works for a great majority of nations. International Conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity recognise well managed protected areas as one of the principal tools for conserving biodiversity. Such recognition has brought with it an action plan (and international funding) for establishing and effectively managing protected areas, and the action plan was one of the substantive products arising from the 2003 Congress.

How does this relate to mountains? Well, specific recommendations were developed for mountain areas and

mountain protected areas in 2003. In addition, the work the WCPA Mountains Biome is currently undertaking on landscape scale connectivity conservation in mountains had some of its genesis in Durban. This work responds to a number of issues including the threat of climate change; the need for landscape scale conservation of natural lands that interconnect protected areas (achieving benefits to protected areas beyond boundaries); and the need to work more closely with people and sustainable land use. We will be reviewing our progress for such initiatives in Cape Town.

This work is particularly relevant to the Australian Alps national parks. The Alps Liaison Committee has developed its strategic plan for the period 2008-2011. The Alps Agreement and its implementation are seen as a leading approach internationally, however there are real benefits for the Liaison Committee to consider international mountain protected area management imperatives and how they relate to our Australian Alps. Insights into new and emerging issues; feedback about new management approaches, and opportunities for international leadership roles would emerge from such insights. Potential leadership initiatives (and even partnerships) resulting from such an analysis could be demonstrated at the next (6th) World Parks Congress in 2013 to the benefit of thousands of the world's leading protected area practitioners. The analysis would be a very useful exercise to complete and I'll certainly provide feedback about the Cape Town meeting for the next issue.

\* If you want to explore this topic further, I would recommend that you read IUCN's 2006 book, which also provides a brief summary of the outcomes of the 2003 World Parks Congress. The book is: Lockwood, M., Worboys, G.L. and Kothari, A. (2006). Managing Protected Areas: A global guide. Earthscan. London.

Further details can be obtained from IUCN WCPA's website (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/>); our WCPA Mountains Biome Website (<http://mountains-wcpa.org>) or by contacting Graeme Worboys by email at [g.worboys@bigpond.com](mailto:g.worboys@bigpond.com)

## TOURISM UPDATE

A fair amount has been achieved since we last looked in on the Australian Alps' bid to be selected as one of Australia's premier destinations for international 'experience seekers' - a bid that has come through with the goods.

Firstly progress has been made on two fronts with the support of external consultants and funded by Tourism Victoria. The first audit has produced a report on all that is unique and wonderful about the Alps, a list of products and providers and the experiences they offer. At the same time, another study has gathered input from the Alps community to flesh out the brand itself. As Peter Jacobs (Convenor of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee) explains, "We've identified our potential audiences and we know what experiences we can offer. What's key to all this is that we've identified what's missing." Things like the need for experiences with increased Indigenous content, improved pre-visitor information, and something as basic as better transport links.

And the effort has been worth it - the Australian Alps' bid was declared successful at the Australian Tourism Exchange in June. "It's great to see that all the hard work over the last 12 months or so has paid off for the benefit of everyone in the Australian Alps Region. From a park management perspective, it's helped to clearly define what we're offering our visitors. Already it has drawn together the partners who are part of delivering that experience, and given us all a framework to work within."

**a bit of background...** The National Landscapes initiative ignores tenures, land classifications, local, regional or even state borders in its quest to help develop exceptional and sustainable tourism destinations. Its Reference Group is co-chaired by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia, and its aim is to assess proposals and support the development of Australia's significant destinations for international experience seekers. Other National Landscapes are Kakadu, Australia's Red Centre, the Great Ocean Road, the Flinders Ranges, Australia's Green Cauldron (Mount Warning/Tweed region), Australia's Coastal Wilderness (SE Gippsland/Merimbula region) and the Greater Blue Mountains.

Eastern Pygmy Possum with Mark Jekabsons, photographed by Andrew Morrisson.



# HEY FROG!

Given populations of both the Southern and Northern Corroboree Frogs (*Pseudophryne corroboree* and *P. pengilleyi*) are, as Murray Evans puts it, “perilously low, and with little chance of recovery if left on their own”, it’s probably best not to wait too long between updates on the work being done to prevent extinction.



Southern Corroboree Frog.

Murray, who hails from the ACT’s Parks, Conservation and Lands and Dave Hunter whose focus is across the border on populations in Kosciuszko National Park, are both part of the recovery team – a team which extends beyond park and state boundaries to include the Amphibian Research Centre (ARC, Melbourne) and both Melbourne and Taronga Zoos. The team’s work – a mix of monitoring and captive husbandry – is in response to a significant drop in population numbers. The projected point of extinction? An estimated five to ten years.

There is plenty to report, some encouraging and some daunting. For anyone not familiar with the story so far, suffice to say that in the days when both the northern and southern species were still considered to be one and the same, their numbers were bountiful. In the era of Ross Pengelly’s PhD studies his notes describe them as being virtually everywhere, literally crawling around, even during the day. In fact, he considered them to be the highest vertebrate biomass in the sub-alpine bog ecosystems. Twenty years later another PhD student, Will Osborne, carried out his own observations at Ginini Flats, the largest pristine sphagnum bog on mainland Australia, recording somewhere between 500 and 1000 calling males. By 1996, recorded numbers had fallen to less than 100, and in 2002 only ten.

“That’s not to say there are only ten males left in the wild”, explains Murray, “but it’s indicative of the bigger picture.” And the picture is the same for both species. There’s no argument that numbers have crashed or that the most significant factor in this is the introduced Amphibian Chytrid Fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*). “The fungus, which is carried by the Common Eastern Froglet initially only affects the mouth parts of the Corroboree tadpoles. However, when they metamorphose into frogs, it spreads to their skin – and

they’re dead.” Drought and bush fires have put further strain on already battered populations to produce the present situation.

But no-one has rolled over and called it a done deal – yet. In the ACT, with government and Natural Heritage Trust funding, a program has been established to monitor and collect wild eggs. “We sourced two specially fitted refrigerated shipping containers from the Amphibian Research Centre, which, luckily, were delivered after the 2003 fires came through Tidbinbilla. In each of these we’ve created artificial quarantined sphagnum bogs, into which we put the eggs. We only collect in good seasons, taking a third from each nest, and by doing this, we’ve boosted the survival rate from 10 to 90 per cent.”

There are now around 1,300 frogs in captivity, some approaching breeding age. “Attempts to breed these frogs in captivity – here at Tidbinbilla, at Taronga or in Melbourne at the ARC or Melbourne Zoo – have as yet been largely unsuccessful. But we’re sharing what we’re learning and hope that we’ll have more success at the frogs mature. If we don’t breed successfully we won’t be able to maintain our own captive population, we’ll not be able to build numbers for release, and we won’t be able to boost the wild population’s resistance. (See Stop Press opposite)

Following last season’s monitoring, one very important and positive result has emerged: a reasonable proportion of the captive reared Southern Corroboree Frogs, released back to the wild in 2006 as four-year-olds, have successfully bred. This is encouraging – it demonstrates that once the captive breeding program has been established, it will be possible to use the progeny to re-establish wild populations.

And the latest update: while male calling numbers are so low it’s not possible to collect wild eggs at present, conditions for breeding in the wild have improved.

**Why, Hey Frog?** The story goes someone discovered the call-back response of some frog species when they slammed a car door beside the road and a frog in a ditch called back. Corroboree frogs are among those species which are happy to call out when they hear a loud noise, and armed with this information, scientists were quick to start wandering around the bogs shouting “Hey. Frog!”, and waiting for a reply. To give it even more credibility (after all, it does sound a little dodgy) the method even has an official name – it’s known as the shout-response technique.



Above: Rows of ‘artificial bogs’ in the quarantine facility at Tidbinbilla. Right: ACT Parks Conservation and Lands staff Geoff Underwood and Meg Doepel prepare eggs for the program.



## STOP PRESS

Despite the fact that the captive Northern Corroboree Frog population at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve has barely reached maturity, there has been a surprising development. At the end of the summer breeding season, 180 fertile eggs were discovered in our ten artificial bogs. For the northern corroboree frogs this is a first, with around 20% of the adult females breeding, though as Murray Evans explains, “...we really need to get this proportion much higher both to have enough frogs to maintain the captive population and also to release.”



## FROG FACTS

**good looks:** partly because of its black and yellow good looks, but also because of its plight, Corroboree frogs have been adopted as the emblem of the Australian Zoos – the Year of the Frog. There is evidence that, like other ‘showy’ frogs elsewhere in the world, their colouring may be a warning to predators that they taste pretty awful.

**habitat:** these frogs are confined to the higher elevations, the sub-alpine and alpine areas (around 900 metres) of the Brindabellas (ACT) and the Fiery Ranges (NSW) of the Australian Alps, living in the around the sphagnum moss bogs

**breeding:** eggs are laid just at water level in ‘terrestrial nests’ within the bogs. The presence of water affects the timing – frogs may lay their eggs in summer with the tadpoles overwintering in the pools under ice and snow, or they may produce eggs later in the season to overwinter in the snow covered nests before hatching in the spring melt.

**stats:** this alpine species has a slow metabolism which affects the speed which it reaches maturity at around four years when females begin laying sets of only 25 eggs; their estimated life span in the wild is between eight and ten years.

**water:** water is everything as its presence appears to be crucial to egg laying and hatching. Rainfall is key to maintaining this, along with snowfall and later snow melt; and a healthy bog environment (unaffected by fire or erosion), where water movement is slowed, is essential.

**threats:** damaged habitat and low rain or snowfall do play a role, but it’s a supporting one to the main villain, the introduced, skin-melting Chytrid Fungus. the future: there will be none without support in the form of captive husbandry and breeding – producing enough captive bred frogs to restock wild habitats in the hope they will, over time, develop a resistance to the Fungus.





Above: At Mt Jomalhari with travelling companion, Kelzang Tshering. Below right: At Dochu La, a culturally significant mountain pass in the Royal Botanical Park.

The three weeks which Dan Nichols and Pat Darlington spent late last year in Bhutan was due to the wonderful relationship which exists between the Bhutanese Department of Forests, Nature Conservation Division and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change Parks and Wildlife Group. Like all good partnerships, this one is based on give and take.

## TRAVEL = SELF REFLECTION

Dan and Pat's visit was among the most recent to-ing and fro-ing between Bhutan and Australia – some sixty people have travelled between the two countries since 2000 - and though the two Kosciuszko Education Officers' aim was to make a contribution to Bhutanese interpretive materials, as always, everyone came away from the visit with much more.

As Dan explains, "The process of developing a plan for their interpretive materials makes you have a look at what we do here in Australia. Some of the ideas that have been developed for Bhutan could be adapted for use here."

Dan and Pat's first two weeks of the visit were spent touring the country to gain background and a cultural perspective. Says Pat, "Bhutan is a world biodiversity hot spot, a meeting point of Asian, European and high altitude species

and possibly the only place in the world where snow leopards and tigers share the same habitat. With habitats ranging from 150 to 7000 metres above sea level it's a country where people live in the national parks; grazing yaks and cattle, growing rice, and harvesting wild resources. The Bhutanese culture includes a respect and reverence for living things, and our visit has allowed us to learn from that philosophy, that there are alternative ways to tackle management of parks."

Not only are the Bhutanese people part of the parks landscape, but management of these spaces is based on a middle road – finding ways to maintain a balance. In Bhutan this may mean providing a stud bull so that the quality of the herd is increased, not its size (reducing the potential negative impact); or metal roofing may be promoted over wood shingles



to reduce pressure on forests; or improved seed varieties planted to give bigger yields in the same sized fields.

Looking closer to home, Pat and Dan believe we should consider this type of approach, especially in respect to Indigenous people and their traditional interaction with the Australian Alps, gathering bush tucker and medicinal plants, for example.

As for Bhutan, following two weeks travel in the company of Kelzang Tshering and Sharap Wangchuck a further week was spent at the site which was the focus of this visit - the Royal Botanical Park. The report which Dan and Pat have since supplied is helping in the creation of interpretation at the Park which will be opened as part of the celebrations to mark Bhutan's evolution from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy.



### PAT DARLINGTON

"Bhutan is a tiny but very special part of the world. It has managed, through wise leadership of its kings and the strong Buddhist traditions, to maintain its rich biodiversity and its strong cultural identity. The 4th king decreed that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product". The 'four pillars' of Gross National Happiness have been identified as maintaining the country's rich culture, protecting the natural environment, encouraging sustainable economic development and good governance. The practical implementation of these objectives is reflected in every aspect of Bhutanese lives so national park management aims to preserve a living culture while protecting the natural environment and increasing the living standards of park residents.

When Dan and I stepped off the plane in Paro we were immediately immersed in another land and culture. We were surrounded by steep forested hillsides, traditional houses, rice paddy fields, religious buildings, colourful prayer flags and bright red chillies. People everywhere were wearing traditional clothes – the men a knee length 'gho' while women wear ankle length dresses called 'kira' with beautiful blouses. Our guides took us straight from the airport to a Buddhist blessing ceremony at a Nature Conservation Division (NCD) friend's family traditional farm house. What an auspicious start to our visit with juniper incense burning outside, monks chanting and playing horns, drums and cymbals in the temple room while we sipped traditional tea and discussed Bhutan's politics and the work of the NCD in the small room next door.

It is refreshing to visit a country where the natural environment is so highly valued by the country's highest decision makers. National parks have been connected by a network of designated biological corridors for many years and there is strong cross-border co-operation with national park authorities in India. It was an honour to be invited to be involved in the planning of the information and interpretation at a new park that is immensely important for the conservation of world icon endangered species such as the red panda, Bengal tiger, leopard, Himalayan black bear and Monal pheasants. While in the Royal Botanical Park we spent a wondrous day walking on a very narrow ridge with spectacular views through spruce, larch, hemlock and fir forests. We followed tiger and bear footprints for several kilometres along the walking track, we passed a small clearing where red pandas had been feasting on bamboo and we avoided stepping on leopard droppings. We look forward to revisiting Bhutan's Royal Botanical Park one day and seeing the completed visitor centre in its full glory."

# DIARY

National Landscapes Steering Group meeting  
Jindabyne, 26 June

Inaugural Alps Indigenous Reference Group meeting proposed for July 2008

AALC/AOG meeting to approve the 2008-09 work program late July 2008, venue and dates tba

Since 2001, the relationship between Bhutan and the New South Wales Department of Environment and Conservation has been building, supported for more than half a decade by a Memorandum of Understanding. In October last year, two Australians - Alistair Henchman, (Director Southern Branch) and Dave Darlington, Regional Manager, Snowy Mountains Region - travelled to Bhutan where an Agreement of Friendship and Co-operation was signed, taking this very special relationship to another level.

## FRIENDSHIP AND VISITS

Through this Agreement many common aspects of park management are being explored and methodologies shared – from planning and implementation of management plans to education strategies and species conservation. However, it's what each country has to offer the other which is really interesting. Dave Darlington explains.

"Take Bhutan's approach to planning sustainable development and conservation. Our protected areas are often quite separate and we're relying on major programs to re-connect these. As for Bhutan, they were working to establish long-term ecological security, through developing biological corridors, nearly twenty years ago."

Also worth noting is Bhutan's park management structure where each park office has a research and monitoring section to measure the impact people and programs have on parks. "There are strong links to the people living in the parks through community officers who support sustainable development programs."

On the flip side, "We've been able to show our Bhutanese colleagues that there are simple ways of doing things particularly when it comes to infrastructure development. It's a case of what can do the job and continue producing a good outcome in ten to twenty year's time with basic maintenance. We've sometimes made mistakes where we have built inappropriate infrastructure, and the Bhutanese are keen to see what works and what's not appropriate for their parks."

And in January, we welcomed two Bhutanese government officials - The Hon Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Dasho Sherub Gyaltsen and the Director of the Department of Forests, Karma Dukpa who, along with Australia's Alistair Henchman signed last year's Agreement. Says Dave Darlington, "Both these senior officials are new to their respective roles and they were keen to visit Australia to gain an appreciation of what can be learned from our experience. Wherever they were taken, they asked probing questions; they wanted to understand the whys and hows of the decision-making processes. It was great that we could share ideas."

In many ways, this first exchange visit under the new Agreement was an example of what the Agreement stands for - the chance to learn from each others successes and failures, and the opportunity to foster an increased understanding of each others different, social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

people working together for the Australian Alps



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



Formalising the exchange of knowledge and skills, Sherub Gyaltsen, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Royal Government of Bhutan and Alistair Henchman, (Director Southern Branch, New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change).