

NEWS FROM THE ALPS

NEWSLETTER

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.

ISSUE #51, September 2015



Missy at work (above), the first dog to be trained to detect the dreaded Hawkweed.

TIPS, TRICKS & TWISTS

Across the Australia Alps, wherever you are and whichever body has you on the payroll, chances are you're facing a similar to-do list when you're out in the landscape. Of course most field staff operate with similar methods and a common tool-kit. But it gets interesting very quickly when you start to ask a few questions: clearly everyone has their own twist, trick or handy tip. Here are just a few...

DOGS AND DRONES: This must be everyone's dream for when you have remote, difficult-to-access areas and potential weed infestations. An eradication program is currently underway in Kosciuszko National Park, where you'll find the only known infestations of orange and mouse-ear hawkweeds (*Hieracium aurantiacum* and *H. pilosella*) in NSW. Looking for weeds, then dealing with them is standard practice, but involving drones and dogs is new and, let's be honest, pretty exciting. The dog and drone combo is actually a trial by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service where scent-detection dogs, specially trained to distinguish hawkweed from other plant species, are being used to locate infestations on the ground. In the air, surveillance at the broader scale is being boosted by the use of drones (unmanned aerial vehicles). The drones initially captured high resolution images which were used to develop machine-learning algorithms that can reliably detect orange hawkweed flowers. The drones then make surveillance flights, capturing images which can then be put through the algorithm which in turn highlights the areas with a high probability of orange hawkweed presence. It is early days but the process will be further refined in the 2015/16 season with everyone's hopes on a tool with greater detection accuracy and at a lower cost. Who knows what other applications the

approach could be applied to?

A THISTLE IN TIME SAVES NINE: According to Annie Leschen, a Parks Victoria Ranger based at Mansfield in the Western Alps, “There are times when I think it’s good to fall back onto simplicity.” Annie’s not talking about large projects which necessarily involve many layers and players: planning, budgets, and specialist contractors. The point she makes is that some tasks can be highly effective if carried out a bit at a time, in the moment, literally chipping away at what needs to be done. “When I’m out in the park I like to fall back onto a simple approach with thistle control. A lot of our budget and resources is focused on the priority weed species – hawkweed, blackberry, willow and broom. So when I’m going along a track on foot, I take my hoe with me and chip out thistles. As an alternative, I could record them when I see them, log them when I get back to my desk and after a bit of time they’d be scheduled for some attention. But I know there’s no specific thistle budget so I tackle them on the spot.”



Annie admits that she finds it very therapeutic and surprisingly effective as a means of control. “We can overcomplicate things.” In the same vein, she carries herbicide around in her pocket in an old shoe polish dispenser. When she’s cut the rogue plant, it’s easy to paint the cut surface.



And continuing along that theme Annie says, “I always keep a notebook in my pocket.” And by notebook Annie is describing an old school paper version. “I know I’ll always be driving past things

that I can't do at the time, so I make a note using my GPS so that I can get back to it some time down the track. I also keep pocket field guides in the glove box because if they sit on a shelf in the office, you can't use them when you need to identify something in the field."

BIG BROTHER IS YOUR FRIEND: in some ways, this is the flip-side to Annie's approach (above). Anthony Evans, Area Manager based at Jindabyne is very much enamoured by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service's Asset Management System – AMS to its friends.

"For about the last five years we've been using this new system across the state. All our national parks' assets – right down to every step, every sign and every bollard – have been recorded and are in the system. Now, not only does AMS shows us what we have, it helps us manage maintenance of these assets: maintenance that might be planned as a project, a cyclical event or a reaction to an event."

In the last few years AMS has been expanded to include all operations, including fire, pest and weed management, accurately tracking the finances of virtually every operation carried out by NPWS. Most recently, 200 iPads with an AMS app have been rolled out to the primary users of AMS. "The iPads mean we can access the AMS remotely; we can enter data and photos when on site, then as soon as we're in phone range (or wi-fi now at most offices and depots) the data can be uploaded onto the system." So if someone spots a new outbreak of weeds, 1. the info goes straight into the system, 2. which is then picked up by the Senior Field Supervisor, 3. who creates a work order. 4. The work order sets out what is needed to deal with the outbreak – machinery, chemicals and personnel – 5. and this info is then allocated to a Field Officer to action the work. Once actioned, it is 'signed off' in AMS. This Big Brother is everyone's buddy.

TRACK-BUILD TIPS: If Richard Koch, Senior Ranger at Namadgi National Park (ACT) was to limit himself to one fat hint about track work, it would be this – know what the difference is between a step and a waterbar. In his view, anyone who is about to site a new track or maybe fix a few problem spots along an organically created one, needs to know this. They each have their role to play, but as Richard points out, they are very different things and when they become blurred, things can get problematic. "There are times when you're out on a track and you can see that someone's put something in but also that they weren't sure if it should have been a waterbar or a step."



These (above) are steps; and below is an example of a waterbar where, if you look closely, you can see evidence of water being effectively directed away.



Steps hold back surface material and help the walker negotiate changes in gradient whereas waterbars direct water off the track's surface. But they benefit from some thoughtful construction to stay relatively maintenance free, at least for a while. Here are some time tested tips used by many a craftsman track builder, courtesy of Richard...

However it's constructed (a two or three sided box or perhaps a wedged board across a natural gully), **a step sits straight across a track**; it contains and holds back fill or sediment; it should have drainage, and this is often achieved with a crowned surface or a slight fall across its surface.

A **waterbar** lies angled across the path, where it doesn't stop the flow of water but instead deflects it; if poorly sited the water will not be able to move fast or far enough to take the sediment with it, and this sediment will build up behind the bar, reducing its capacity to do its job; thought needs to go into designing a track or retrofitting waterbars to an existing track so that there is somewhere for the water to be deflected to; a sediment trap (a pit at the end of the waterbar's drain) is an option to catch sediment, and it's easily cleared with a shovel during routine maintenance when any material gathered can be shovelled onto the downhill side of the waterbar. **The siting** of both a step or a waterbar depends on the landscape and the needs of the walker; thoughtful consideration of these factors helps to position these elements to create a track that is comfortable to negotiate, engaging and easier to maintain. Sometimes it's a good call to re-route a track when it's just too steep or the lay of the land means there just isn't anywhere to deflect the water to; siting a new track is a rare luxury, it's more likely that you'll be fixing an organically formed one where people's line of desire has taken them straight up a slope. In the end, **it all comes down to water**, and the power it has to unravel the best intentions of any track builder. "It's a good idea to inspect a track on a wet day to see where the water is going. (You can do this in the dry if you know what you're looking for, but it's easier to spot in the wet.) It's also good to go out with someone with experience – then you'll come away knowing what needs doing."

BACK TO BUSHCRAFT: For anyone working in the field, some bush craft skills come in handy. This is especially true when dealing with feral animal pest control, if you were every able to watch Rudi Pleschutschnig, a Parks Victoria Ranger based at Mount Beauty at work. Reading the following tips on wild dog trapping shows what a specialized skill it is, and perhaps the first tip is simply to start by tagging along with someone who knows their stuff.

Rudi's initial training (at a reluctant eight years' of age) came via his grandfather, William Bamford who was a trapper, shearer and wheel of death motorbike rider. Trapping could almost be described as a black art, which, as Rudi explains, is brilliantly complemented by the latest technologies – satellite tracking and movement-sensor cameras. Complex as the subject is, here's a seriously simplified guide.



Training your eye is key: here is evidence of wild dog tracks at the base of a tree.

Setting a humane trap for a dog involves working out where to place it. “From Chihuahua to wolf, there is one key behavior to appreciate – every dog scent-marks to show the status of the animal. Knowing this, you need to start to look at the landscape from the view-point of a dog.” Cresting the brow of a hill, Rudi will look out for the first thing he sees at the side of the road that’s about 30cm high. What he spots has probably been selected by wild dogs to mark with their urine.

The aim is to make good use of this high traffic point to set a trap. First he’ll examine the site more carefully. “If it’s a smooth bark tree I’ll look for evidence of possum scratch marks because I don’t want to have a possum set off a trap.” Not only is this a wasted event, but it educates the target species – the wild dogs – so that they become trap-shy and much more difficult to trap in future. Rudi also makes good use of his piss hound (genuine term), Bundaberg. “I watch how he reacts to a site that I think looks promising.”

Once the site is confirmed as promising, Rudi, who deliberately avoids cologne and scented soaps when he’s working, rubs his hands through Bundaberg’s coat to mask the smell of human. He then digs a shallow depression about eight inches from the scent point, and lays the humane trap into it. This is covered by a piece of fiberglass screen which lets rain through but keeps the covering soil and leaf litter from clogging up the mechanism. Bundaberg then scent marks the spot as an inviting challenge to passing wild dogs, something he does without setting off the trap. Finally the mulch litter is carefully arranged to look as natural as possible and the anchor log artfully tossed to one side giving no hint it’s attached to the waiting trap. “Trapping is about deception. It’s about making something look like it’s not there.”

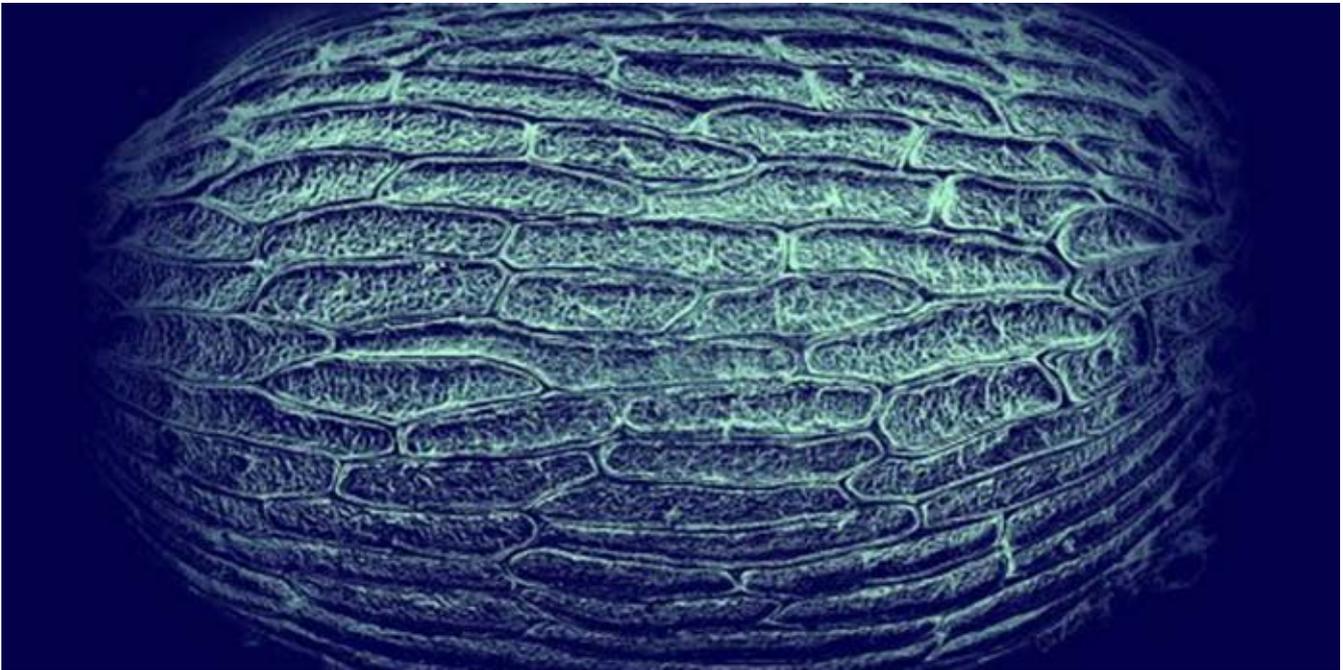


The dynamic duo: Ranger and dog, Rudi and Bundaberg.

snippets



SNOW BIKES SPOTTED NEAR MT. SELWYN IN AUGUST: In issue #50 we saw the enthusiasm ACT parks staff have for mountain bike exploration of their estate. With the spotting of these specialised bikes near Mt Selwyn in August, it looks like seasons hold no barriers for such endeavours, though we're yet to see a Namadgi ranger patrolling on one of these.



MYSTERY OBJECT: This image is of the seed of *Epacris paludosa* (Alpine Heath) by Australian National Botanic Gardens' volunteer group The Seedy Volunteers, and it has been ranked as 'highly commended' and is in the top 10 published on the 2015 New Scientist Eureka Prize for Science Photography website. Much like discovering another planet, imaging can reveal the intricate form of tiny plant seeds. <http://australianmuseum.net.au/image/another-planet-epacris-paludosa-alpine-heath-ericaceae-eureka-prizes>

WISE WATER WAYS: The North East Catchment Management Authority are hosts of this year's Wise Water Ways workshop during late October in Beechworth Victoria. The first WWW Workshop held in 1999 followed a visit by internationally recognised fluvial geomorphologist, Dr Robert Newbury, who led a hands on field training program into water ways management. The Wise Water Ways Workshop has been held annually ever since and is now in its 16th year, delivering programs and shared knowledge with around 800 participants. If you're a keen Alps protected area manager with a particular interest in catchment management this could be for you. More info here: <http://www.wisewaterways.org.au/index.html>

NEW CHIEF FOR PARKS VICTORIA: Late last month Bradley Fauteux was announced as the new Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria. Bradley is currently the Managing Director of Ontario Parks and a Board Member at the Canadian Parks Council with extensive experience in park management, environmental issues and stakeholder relations. He's also developed and implemented digital technologies which have played a vital role in transforming the communication of park experiences for Ontarian park users. His experience will be an invaluable contribution to the Australian Alps national parks Cooperative Management Program.

STAFF ON THE MOVE: Adam Henderson has started as the new ranger in Brindabella/Bimberi, taking over from Scott Seymour who recently departed to the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. And Andrew Dickson has also commenced as Queanbeyan's new Senior Field Supervisor. Parks' Victoria's Mike Dower recently welcomed Sarah Dodd (former Ranger Team Leader Southern Peninsula) to the Southern Alps Team. Sarah comes to Heyfield with a wide range of skills across land and fire management and along with her family will now call Central Gippsland home. Sarah will immediately step into the role of Acting Heyfield Ranger Team Leader while Dannica Shaw has some leave and focuses on some district priority projects. Meanwhile, Wayne Foon has left Heyfield (Alpine NP) to arrive at Mt Buffalo National Park - a loss for Heyfield but a gain for Michelle Doherty and the Buffalo team. And Tim Schwinghammer is being welcomed as the new ranger at Omeo: Tim looks forward to roaming the East Alps over the next few years.

PROPOSED EXTENSION TO LOWER THREDBO VALLEY TRACK: The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service proposes to extend the recently completed Thredbo Valley Track, taking the shared use track which runs alongside the Thredbo River and extend it approximately 18 kms downstream from Bullocks Flat to the Thredbo River Picnic Area or to Gaden Trout Hatchery. The Review of

Environmental Factors is on public exhibition until 03/10/15

on engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/consult and at the following locations during their opening hours: Queanbeyan - Parks & Wildlife, Snowy Region Visitor Centre, Tumut Visitor Centre. Submissions are encouraged and the project is subject to approvals and funding.

ADVICE & IDEAS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE: A new publication by IUCN aims to help transboundary conservation practitioners and those intending to become involved in initiating, managing and governing transboundary conservation programmes. The main collaborating institution in the development of the Guidelines was the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). The Australian Alps Program is proud to have a nexus with this international partnership. Anyone with an interest in co-operative, cross-boundary landscape management should take a peek at http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_news/?21369/New-global-guidance-on-transboundary-conservation

News from the Alps (in magazine and newsletter format) is published by the Australian Alps national parks. Program Manager and Editor: Andrew Nixon: Parks Victoria office, 46 Bakers Gully Rd, BRIGHT Vic 3741. Andrew.Nixon@parks.vic.gov.au For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps Web Page: www.australianalps.environment.gov.au Thankyou to those who have made time to be interviewed; and to the photographers for their images. Without this support, *News from the Alps* would not be possible.

