

GRAMPIANS UP-DATE

Management plans

New managements plans being drafted for two Wimmera parks are due for public release before Christmas.

A draft management plan for Tooan section of the Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park will be the Tooan area's first management plan.

A draft management plan for the Grampians National Park will revise and update the park's existing management plan.

Department of Natural Resources and Environment Wimmera chief ranger John Harris said yesterday people would be able to comment on the draft plans when they were released.

Mr Harris said the Grampians draft plan would include measures to protect the rare and endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby, which researchers had confirmed still survived in a remote part of the Victoria Range.

He said measures would include on-going research and monitoring of the colony. The colony's remoteness would help minimise human disturbance.

I tried to see if the Draft Management Plan for the Grampians had been released yet. After finding that the NRE shop in Victoria Parade was moving and that I would have to wait a few more days I finally found that it would be a further 2-3 months before it will be published. Ah well!, it may become a Christmas prezzy yet, the introduction of any rock wallaby inspired climbing bans will be some time off yet.

Keith Lockwood sent in the clipping on the right from the Wimmera Mail-Times of 3/10/97. He has written a letter to ARGUS (see letters to the editor) mentioning the contact he has had with chief ranger John Harris, regarding the proposed bans.

By the way if you see any references to DCNR or CNR they should be replaced with DNRE or NRE as they are no longer Conservation and Natural Resources but Natural Resources and Environment, it appears that conservation is no longer a major part of their vision statement!

GIBRALTAR PEAKS (A.C.T.) CLIMBING BAN!

It has come my attention that the National parks authority has received advice from the ACT Attorney Generals department to close Gibraltar peaks climbing crag.

This closure involves possibly cutting all the bolts that are currently at the rock. And our interstate friends will note that this is a granite crag with virtually no natural protection possible.

This action was prompted by a local(?) climber who replaced some of the bolts on one of the climbs and took the old, worn bolts down to the Ranger station to complain. After being told that they had dangerous climbs on which people could get hurt and that they should go and replace all the bolts before somebody got hurt and tried to sue them they said "Oh, is there climbing up there?"

After having been warned emphatically that they could be sued for something they had only just 'learned' about they contacted the Attorney Generals department for their legal situation. It seems that if they had been left in official blissful ignorance there would have been no problem but now that somebody had dragged the situation into the beauracratc light they had no choice but to cover their butts.

This is a national newsgroup so I was wondering if anybody who knows about the legal situation as perceived by towns like Nowra, where there are a large number of bolted limbs, and Natimuk, next door to



Letters To The Editor

Dear Sirs,

Concerning news that the VCC is appointing an access officer; well done. The club should get right behind this move.

Those of us who climb closer to Melbourne are running out of room and any sincere attempt to improve and maintain access can but help in this regard. Perhaps we should look at leasing some areas for several weekends a year; it almost happened with North Western Outcrop once.

Here is my draft list of problem areas; Is it complete?

- * Cumberland River
- * Mooruduc Quarry
- * Werribee Gorge
 - North Side
 - Junction Hole
 - Pyramid Rock
 - Falcon's Nest (part year)
 - Is there a problem after 5pm?
- * Hanging Rock
- * Lal Lal Falls
- * Jackson's Creek Organ Pipes
- * Doncaster outcrop in park
- * You Yangs
 - Big Rock (Sundays and public holidays)
 - Flinders Peak area (Fig Leaf? and further east)
 - North Western Outcrop (private)
 - Granite Road Outcrop (owner worried about claims)
- * Wilsons Promontory
 - Cleft Island (Skull Rock)
 - Other areas (changing rules from year to year)
- * Grampians
 - Camp of the Emu Foot (excessive climbs fenced off)
- * Plenty Gorge
- * Rolling Stone Wall (access via private land prevented)
- * Mt Cole - The Cave (reports about area closed)
- * Staughton Vale (part year bans from time to time)

Yours in climbing,

Iain Sedgman

EDITORS NOTE: I am not familiar with the North Victoria Range but the list below indicates the potential loss of cliffs if the Wallaby bans are introduced as hearsay would imply. However things may not seem as bad as first thought, see the following letter from Keith Lockwood.

Camp Of The Emu's Foot

- ◆ Emu's Foot
- ◆ Gondwana Land
- ◆ Red Sail
- ◆ Eureka Wall
- ◆ Eureka Towers

◆ Lost World

Red Rock Road

- ◆ Muline Creek
- ◆ Generation Gap
- ◆ Emu Rock

◆ Hollywood Valley

- ◆ Hollywood Bowl
- ◆ Mt Fox area
- ◆ Mt Fox
- ◆ Loose Rock-Candy Outcrop
- ◆ Corner Crag

- ◆ Pellant Pinnacle
- ◆ The Gallery #1
- ◆ The Far Pavillion
- ◆ Valley Crag
- ◆ Canyon Crag
- ◆ The Grandstand
- ◆ Crag X
- ◆ Picasso Block

- ◆ Queensland Crag
- ◆ Eagle Rock

Buandik Area

- ◆ Buandik Boulder
- ◆ Mother Buttress
- ◆ The Studio
- ◆ Buffoon Block

- ◆ Pinnacle of Achievement
- ◆ The Lego Blocks
- ◆ The Sheltered Workshop
- ◆ The Gallery #2
- ◆ Quartz Bluff
- ◆ Rain Wall
- ◆ Cultivation Crag

Dear Bill

I agree with James McIntosh that there must be give and take on the rock wallaby issue, i.e., climbers should realise they don't have a god-given right to endanger a rare animal, but on the other hand the parks service should not close down a vast area of the western Grampians without valid scientific justification.

With these thoughts in mind I rang chief ranger John Harris and was encouraged to hear that our worst fears would not be realised. He did not spell out full details of the forthcoming management plan, but indicated there would be no blanket lock-out of the area in question. He said the draft plan would contain protection measures for the colony, including research and monitoring.

My feeling after talking to John (and knowing him well through the Mt. Arapiles advisory committee) is that if the climbing community disagrees with aspects of the draft plan for the Grampians, we will gain a sympathetic ear if we debate the issues calmly and rationally, rather than in a spirit of hysteria and antagonism.

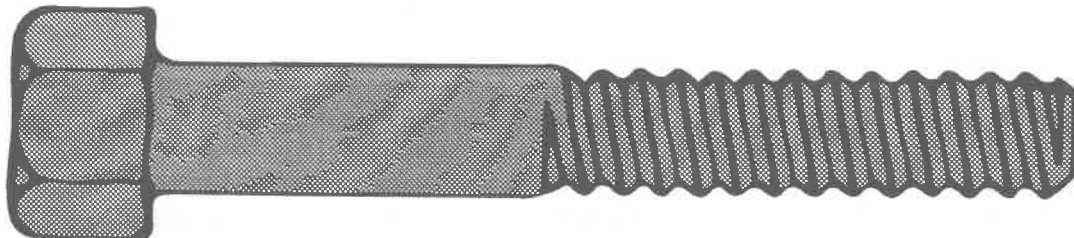
If you don't believe me, just consider how effective has been the 4WD fraternity's lobbying/wooing of park management.

Cheers

Noddy Lockwood



What will the next big issue to affect climbing be?



V.C.C. ACCESS

This month I'm highlighting some of the areas that have management plans and a couple that don't. First is Hanging Rock which is "non-state" owned, the latest word on the Grampians/Gariwerd management plan and something on one of the more esoteric areas in country Victoria.

HANGING ROCK

Have things changed? I thought that they had when I first caught a glimpse of a brochure put out by Macedon Ranges Shire Council. It didn't take long to realise that nothing has changed. Their "definition" of climbing is somewhat different from ours (see panel on right).

It would appear that climbing is still banned here.

5.2.7 Rockclimbing and abseiling

Rockclimbing and abseiling have taken place on a north-facing rockface off Easter Creek Track. The level of usage has been low and access is relatively difficult.

The endangered Langi Ghiran Grevillea occurs on this rockface, and rockfaces in the Park are an important habitat for Peregrine Falcon. There are alternative sites for rockclimbing and abseiling in the nearby Mount Cole State Forest and Grampians National Park.

Aim

- Protect endangered and vulnerable species within the park.

Management strategy

- Prohibit rockclimbing or abseiling within the Park.

Things to do, things to see...

The Reserve at Hanging Rock caters for a wide range of activities from the racecourse, ovals and tennis courts to wide expanses of lawns. There are coin operated barbecues and picnic areas provided for visitors' use throughout the Hanging Rock Reserve. Cook on one of the barbecues or spread your picnic lunch on one of the many tables provided, then enjoy your meal while you watch the activities going on around you; or take in the magnificent views of The Rock.

EXPLORING AND WALKING

There are numerous walking paths and trails which allow you to explore the Rock and the Reserve at your own pace. Whether you take a casual stroll or embark on a more purposeful walk, the fresh invigorating air is sure to recharge your batteries.

CLIMBING

If you follow the walking paths which ascend the Rock, you will be rewarded by a panorama which extends from Mt. Macedon in the south to the Cobaw Ranges to the north. Along the way you will pass through some interesting rock formations and the view from the top is magnificent.

LANGHI GHIRAN STATE PARK

CLIMBING AND ABSEILING BANNED

You probably know where this park is if you regularly travel the hypnotic delights of the Western Highway between Beaufort and Ararat. Some climbing has been recorded in this area (see ARGUS, May 1992) and that is about as far as it should go.

See the panel on the left which is taken from the Management Plan published in June 1996.

GRAMPIANS/GARIWERD

February is the possible release date for the Draft Management Plan. Until then it must be assumed that no bans are in place, BUT it would be a good idea to voluntarily limit climbing activity in the Muline Creek/Red Rocks areas until some definite proposal has arisen.

Continued on page 15

ROCK WALLABY RESTRICTIONS

I basically agree with what James McIntosh had to say about the proposed access restrictions in the Victorian Range. The rights of climbers do not take precedence over an endangered species.

I do object to the process. The previous management plan mentioned community education as a major ingredient in protection of the rock-wallaby yet this has not occurred. The possibility of wide-spread closures has simply been dumped on us without warning. Notice of the possible closures has been through completely informal channels (e.g. the Natimuk Pub). We now have to wait for the official draft plan to be published in order to respond.

So much for public education/consultation.

At the same time we have scientists proposing to trap a Rock Wallaby. Why? They have finally managed to capture one wallaby on film after years of effort. Why do they want to catch it in a cage? What if the shock kills it?

About the only thing we know about this species is that it is extremely rare and very shy. Rule one is to protect it and gather information with minimum interference. From this aspect it's reasonable to restrict all access to the crucial areas. It is also important that study efforts are minimum-impact. When more details of the population size, range and viability is known it may be appropriate to adopt intrusive techniques such as trapping. The numbers are important. If the Victoria Range population is less than a dozen individuals, trapping one is a high-risk strategy.

Really the Department has to get serious about educating user groups. So far all we have is hear-say about the extent and rationale of climbing restrictions. It sounds as though climbers are being treated as scapegoats and unfairly treated compared to bushwalkers and other day visitors. We've had hints that things might not be as bad as we have heard but we won't know until we see the detail.

I'm pretty pissed off that so-called consultation seems to have gone by the board on a major issue. Word seems to have got out by accident. If ever we need an Access Officer, now is it.

Kieran Loughran

BOLTING PROBLEMS IN THE GRAMPIANS

Dear Bill,

This titbit of climbing info is in regards to the climb shown in the picture on page 13 of the most recent Argus. The climb is labelled Bede on Blue Sky Mining. The climber is on a new route of mine put up in January 1995 and is called Sprung (grade 21)

Now for a story

Having visited the Wall of China on a number of occasions I thought there was a potential new route between Sacred Ground and Blue Sky Mining. A couple of attempts to lead the climb on natural gear ended in ground falls after the pockets snapped and the gear ripped out of the pockets.

lice, the Australian Defence Force and the State Emergency Services all use the Park for rock climbing and associated activities.

Most climbing occurs in the Hollow Mountain area, and at the Watchtower, the Grand Canyon, Mount Rosea and The Bundaleer. There are only a few sites in the Park suitable for instructional use, and so these sites are heavily used, particularly Summerday Valley in the Hollow Mountain area. Over 40 commercial tour operators are permitted to conduct rock climbing tours in the Park but less than one quarter of them use the Park regularly.

Use of sites is resulting in adverse impacts on access tracks and around the base of climbs, including damage to vegetation, soil compaction and erosion. The use of bolts and other devices to assist climbing has increased in the Park in recent years. Other deleterious impacts on park values result from the use of chalk, wire brushing, and the creation of new tracks.

Rock climbing poses particular threats to Aboriginal rock art and archaeological sites. Rock shelters have been used in the past as base camps for climbers and there is potential for unintentional damage to occur.

Significant vegetation and fauna are also threatened. The rare Skeleton Fork-fern, which favours crevices in rock faces, can easily be dislodged by climbers. Peregrine Falcon nesting sites, found on rocky escarpments, require protection during the breeding season, and in the west of the Park the only remaining Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby population in the region must be protected from all disturbance.

Few climbing sites have facilities. Some, such as those in the Wonderland area, adjoin key walking tracks. A walking track has been provided to the main climbs in Summerday Valley, and terracing has been installed, with the assistance of volunteers, at Summerday Valley and the Watchtower. The Rosea and the Hollow Mountain campgrounds are regularly used by climbers. Facilities in the Hollow Mountain area are inadequate for the number of different user groups accessing the area (sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3).

A rock climbing strategy is being developed for the Park in conjunction with the climbing community, to identify sites used by climbers, the various groups using sites, the impacts on sites and a range of actions aimed at providing sustainable climbing opportunities which do not conflict with other park users.

Aim

- Allow rock climbing and abseiling in appropriate areas, consistent with the protection of park values.

Management strategies

- *Permit rock climbing and abseiling in the Park (other than in Reference Areas).*
- *Encourage a minimal impact approach to climbing and abseiling.*
- *Liaise with the rock climbing community to avoid impacts on park values from climbing in sensitive areas.*
- *In conjunction with the rock climbing community, consider, and as appropriate,*
 - *further develop Summerday Valley for rock climbing.*
 - *close climbs that conflict with Aboriginal cultural sites, significant flora and fauna or other park values;*
 - *encourage the use of clean climbing techniques and the appropriate use of temporary bolts;*
 - *regulate commercial tours;*
 - *restore degraded sites;*
 - *develop access and facilities;*
 - *increase environmental awareness in the climbing community.*
- *Consider the potential for fee collection, in conjunction with the rock climbing community, and propose collection of fees if appropriate.*

Other stuff of interest from the Draft Management Plan.

On page 13:

Priority will be given to the rationalisation and development of facilities and services relating to the following activities:

- orientation, advisory information and
- interpretation
- scenic viewing
- short walks
- rock climbing
- camping
- bush walking
- picnicking.

Pages 18/19:

Of the more than 40 mammal species recorded for the Park, five are rare or threatened (appendix 5). The Heath Mouse and Brushtailed Rock-wallaby have been sighted in less than four sites across the State and depend heavily on the Park for providing suitable habitat to support their survival. Of particular note is the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby colony on the western side of the Grampians which, because of declining numbers, requires active management to ensure its survival.

The above are most (but not all) references that affect climbing, there are things like walking track and road issues as well. Buy it and go through it with a fine tooth comb.

**The report is available from the NRE Information Centre,
8 Nicholson Street (cnr. Victoria Parade) for \$8 each.**

Buy a copy and respond.

**The more people that respond, the greater our chance of being
heard and listened to.**



Here are some edited bits from tight!rope. Read them and consider the future: The first lot is from the **BLUE MOUNTAINS and KANANGRA BOYD NP DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLANS.**

The Management Plan for this latter park, proposes the closure (to climbing) of *"any cliff line immediately above a constructed walking track"*

Also under consideration are limits on group sizes on the basis of the activity, i.e.; 8 persons for abseiling, 12 persons for canyons not involving abseiling, 4 persons on individual rock climbs.

The plan advises that management strategy will incorporate codes of conduct for abseiling, rock climbing and canyoning to include (among other things) *"the exclusion of new bolts from wilderness areas, canyons, and established rock climbs"*, *"control of bolting in other locations"* and *"acceptable bolting techniques, including the exclusion of power drills"*.

"Rockclimbing routes which are established outside approved climbing sites without prior consultation with the Service may be closed."

"Bolts which are placed in contravention of the provisions of this plan and the codes of conduct, which are no longer required or which are leading to unacceptable environmental or safety impacts may be removed following assessment of safety issues."

V.C.C. ACCESS

And here is the news:

Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby and climbing access in North Vic Range

Grampians rangers have a proposal for a voluntary moratorium for all park users to stay out of the territory of the last Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies known in the Grampians. Read on, then let me know if you have violent objections or want to suggest other approaches.

The Brush-tailed Rock wallaby is one of the most endangered mammals in Victoria.

Historically, a number of colonies have been known in the Grampians, most in Vic Range but extending up to Stapylton area. Some reports from locals say that they 'used to graze on the flats, but have been forced into higher country'.

In the 70's, 20-30 individuals were thought to be based near in the Red Rock Ck/ Muline Ck area. In summer, this group may retreat to reliable water, perhaps along Muline Creek. More recently, photos have been taken with a laser-operated camera installed in the bush.

Possible scats (or shit) have been recently found at the base of Mt Fox. These have been sent off to an expert at Monash for positive identification (yes, it is pool!).

The major predators are thought to be foxes, and possibly feral cats. The fear is that human activity creates paths for foxes to move more easily around the area. Extensive baiting is going on along the park boundary and in the area. The hope is that this will allow the population of BTRW to recover.

PV is proposing a voluntary moratorium on public access for any purpose (publicised through VCC and FWWC and elsewhere) to Emu Rock, Hollywood Bowl, Muline Crag and the more remote Generation Gap and Far Pavilion. Research access (to change film and batteries on the camera) would be restricted to one visit per month. This moratorium would remain in place while further information is collected about the numbers and the success of predator removal and would be reviewed regularly in the light of new data.

The status of Mt Fox under this arrangement would await confirmation of the recent possible scat find. If scats are confirmed, PV would want to include this cliff in the moratorium. We could argue for at least partial access, as the return of the critters to the most actively used cliff in the area may suggest success in the fox-baiting program.

Rangers suggest that scat identification information be printed in Argus and elsewhere, as the rock-wallabies may be more widespread. More finds would ease anxiety about survival of the Muline Ck population.

Harrops Track closed to make bridges safe!

The big 'risk management' broom through Parks Victoria is sweeping across all structures 'over one metre high' and making them safe. A lot of money is being spent and you may find some disruptions on the way to the crag. All the sites that need 'immediate action' are likely to be closed for a bit so nobody does themselves a mischief and then heads for court.

Here are a few examples that have come to our attention. Let us know of any other strange 'no go' signs and we can investigate and let you know what's up.

Bridges on bush roads are sometimes over one metre high and three in the western Grampians are getting special new railings so we, the park users, don't fall off. These are on Harrops Track between Buandik and the Chimney



Pots Road, two have been done, and the last, at Mosquito Ck is waiting for some dry weather, some approvals from Head Office and about two weeks to finish the job, so it should all be open for spring.

The other one is the Rosea walking track. 'Track Closed' signs have appeared at the car park because the steps on the Giant Staircase (where the walking track goes up the cliff) have been earmarked for repair. This may take a while as there are a few design problems, but the rangers don't mind climbers using it so long as you don't sue!

'Official' bolts not likely

There is not much likelihood of Parks Victoria getting involved in bolting, either for safety or environmental protection, in the foreseeable future. They also don't appear to be losing much sleep over the presence of bolts that are already there.

With Mark Poustie, I recently met with senior Parks Victoria staff to discuss the latest developments in the law on the 'duty of care' for land managers and current Parks Victoria risk management program.

The 'take home' message is that they aren't going to put climbing bolts under the same scrutiny as their bridges and other structures (see above). At the desks of head office the policy remains the same: they 'accept the use of safety equipment but use of fixed equipment will be actively discouraged in favour of clean climbing techniques'.

Hanging Rock: talks to start

Robin and I will be meeting the Hanging Rock Advisory Committee soon to talk about their fears about allowing climbing. More news next month.

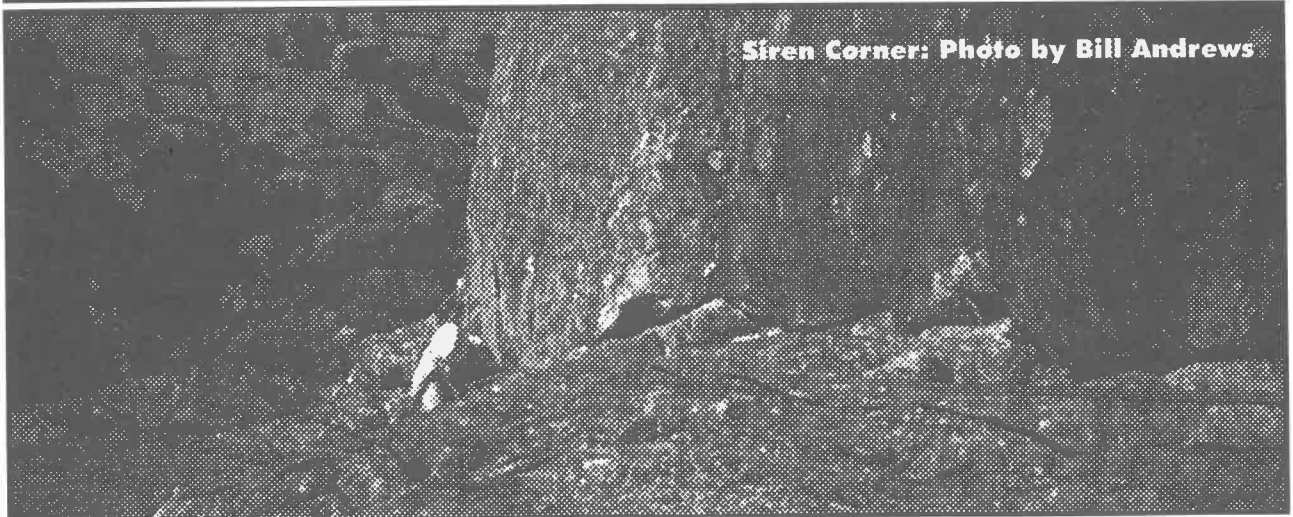
Works in Summer Day valley

The Cup weekend climbing and work trip will be to Summer Day Valley. If you have ideas for what is needed, or the brawn to shift rocks around, sign up now. (Should clash with the clubs annual dinner quite nicely. Ed.)

John Stone

ARGUS WILL NOW GO TO ALL RANGERS IN NATIONAL PARKS WHERE CLIMBING OCCURS.

Because of this, the shops that don't provide a discount will no longer receive a free copy each month.



Yarra Ranges

- No problem with continued climbing at Ben Cairn

Werribee Gorge

- Repair erosion at Falcons Lookout with help from user groups
- No mention of bolts

Black Range

- Prohibit bolts and drill holes (no comment on existing gear)
- Potential for closures at some aboriginal sites

Education and information distribution to climbers

We should be looking at expanding our efforts to talk to the climbing community. I want to look at the surveys already done to see if they help us work out what are the best ways to get to climbers now and in the future.

Erosion control and other repair work

I suggest we work out a program of activities for next spring and summer, and see if we can find people willing to take on the job of liaising with PV and other climbers groups to do publicity and to work out what specific repairs we should do.

Priorities might be:

Finishing Camels Hump

Arapiles - in conjunction with Friends group

Werribee - possibly also works to stop erosion before it occurs at new cliffs?

Cathedrals.

How much can we take on?

Other things

Interstate contacts: I have been talking to Mark Baker and others about developing some national co-ordination on access issues.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Submissions in by 31 JULY 1998

Submissions should be addressed to:

Graham Parkes

Ranger in Charge

Grampians National Park

PO Box 18

HALLS GAP VIC 3381

7.2.7 Rock climbing and abseiling

Rock climbing and abseiling are major recreation activities in the Park. There has been a dramatic increase in these activities in the Park in recent years. There are 67 climbing sites with over 2000 recorded climbs in the Park. Individuals, climbing clubs, commercial tour groups, youth groups, schools, adventure training groups, the Victoria Po-

ACCESS REPORT

Land Managers everywhere prefer to liaise with an organised body (or Peak User Group in the vernacular) rather than many disparate groups, thus *Cliffcare*, and Sydney Rock-climbing Club, are in a position to provide an effective focus for local climbers' interests and input.

Climbing is very individualistic and anarchistic by nature, so it is seldom possible to organise its adherents to present a united front on issues. Increasing bureaucratic control of our chosen activity requires climbers to get organised, NOW !

From issue 17, September 1998 of **tight!rope** is a good argument (left) for an active access officer.

John Stone has had his contract extended and to help defray the cost of his wages, the money that goes into the access fund from the sales of the Arapiles guide book has been doubled. A portion of the sales of the other guide books also goes into the access fund. This won't be enough to cover all the costs associated with access issues and "fund raisers" may be held during the year.

John has already established many lines of communication and he now will be able to build on these to help ensure rock climbing is a recognised recreation in National, State and other Parks.

Rock Wallabies and a proposed moratorium

The VCC is about to receive an official request from the Grampians rangers asking the club to help protect the last colony of Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies in the Grampians. The rangers will ask the Club to support a voluntary moratorium on public access for any purpose (to be publicised through climbing and bushwalking groups and elsewhere) to the rocky slopes between Muline Creek and Red Rock Creek. This would mean no climbing at Emu Rock, Hollywood Bowl, Muline Crag and the more remote Generation Gap.

The feedback I've had suggests that most climbers are happy to give the Rock Wallaby a chance. If you've got an opinion one way or the other – let me know.
Use our new phone or email today! [0419 563 733 or vicclimb@iaccess.com.au]

The Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby is one of the most endangered in Victoria. Human activity can directly disturb the wallabies. But, more seriously, we create paths for foxes, the main wallaby predator, to move more easily around the area. Extensive fox-baiting is under way to help the population to recover.

If you still have the Baxter mega-classic, *Twentieth Century Fox*, on your hit-list, don't panic. Mt Fox would remain open as it is not thought to be in Rock Wallaby territory. A recent scat (shit) find at Mt Fox, that may have been Rock Wallaby, has turned out to be a deformed possum poo.

Access by researchers (to change film and batteries on a remote camera used to record the presence of the wallabies) would be restricted to one visit per month.

The moratorium would remain in place while further information is collected about wallaby numbers and the success of predator removal and would be reviewed regularly in the light of new data.

Tongue Point

As mentioned in the last issue, positive negotiations have begun to get the cliff on the list of 'approved' climbing sites in the park. Said, by some, to be Victoria's best sea-cliff, this little crag at Wilsons Promontory has always been officially off-limits.

A recent site-visit with the ranger responsible for track works revealed that the biggest problem is how to stabilise an access route to the cliff top through fragile coastal vegetation.

The ranger agrees that this can be done 'in principle'. But, building a new track requires surveys to make sure that rare plants or important aboriginal sites won't get wrecked. I'll be making sure the wheels keep turning on this in coming months, working with a new ranger who will be developing climbing policy for the Prom.

The park staff are already planning to do some work to repair erosion damage on the existing tourist track to the Point. The idea is for the climbers track to be considered at the same time.

Aboriginal Sites

The Horsham aboriginal community has a few concerns about climbing near some rock-art in the camping cave at Black Ian's climbing in the Black Range and the Grampians. I'll be meeting some of them on-site before the next club meeting. I will also be finding out more about possible implications of a recent native title claim which covers Arapiles and the Black Range.

Publicity push on membership and access and environment issues

The VCC is about to launch a new push to get information out to climbers. We have developed a poster display featuring a stunning pic of HB on Passport, donated by Glenn Tempest. The display will have space for a newly designed membership leaflet and up-to-date information on access and environment issues and will be offered to gyms and gear shops. No more will VCC info be relegated to the back notice-boards with the dog-eared secondhand ice-axe ads.

Limited numbers of the poster will be available for sale.

JOHN STONE

FIXED GEAR BANS IN AMERICA!

There are things stirring in America that deserve scrutiny. Firstly, the US government agency, the US Forestry Service has banned the use of fixed anchors on land it controls which includes such places as Tahquitz and Suicide, Mount Whitney, Cirque of the Towers in the Wind Rivers etc. Secondly, in Yosemite, the National Park Service after years of planning to return the valley to more of a wilderness state is planning to build three three-storey buildings adjacent to Camp 4 to accommodate employees and visitor accommodation close to Swan Slab.

ACCESS REPORT

1. Rock Art sites at Black lams

I had a very cordial meeting at Black lams with Alan Burns, the ATSIC Cultural Officer from Horsham and Ben Gunn, an archaeologist who is doing a management plan for the cultural sites in the Black Range for Aboriginal Affairs.

They pointed out a number of artworks in the camping cave and elsewhere along the cliff-line. To protect these, they are trying to get some government money to clean off the charcoal graffiti and the climbers chalk from the cave and put up a small interpretative sign. They don't plan to put the art in a cage.

They asked for VCC support for maintaining and publicising the ban on fires in the camping cave, and for climbers to stop bouldering in the cave and to avoid the three routes that go through the cave ('No Rest for the Wicked', 23, 'Jumping for Joy', 23 and 'In the Cooler', 24). As part of their clean-up work, they would chop the common bolt (a dodgy Claw effort) high up on these routes and one or two 'practice' bolts in the cave.

They would also prefer that climbers used the left-hand variant (the cracks about a metre left of the cave), to start 'Travesty of Justice' and 'Malicious Intent', and that we periodically clean the chalk off the jug at the start of 'Legal Aid'. We intend to print a sticker with this information to put in the Black Range guide.

2. Native Title Claim

The people I met at Black lams are involved in the native title claim that has been made on some areas of public land in NW Victoria, including the Black Range and Arapiles.

I have registered the VCC as an interested party to the claim. As I understand it, the Kooris making the claim do not necessarily expect to win, but will use the case to establish which groups they need to negotiate with in the future over possibly competing uses and interests.

3. Thanks to all who joined in Arapiles work party

About 15 people put in a solid morning's work, over the Cup Day weekend, to fix eroding sections of the descent track below Ali's. The repair was done by concreting in local rocks in similar fashion to the Organ Pipes Gully descent, which is standing up very well after seven or eight years.

The next task for Arapiles, suggested by the ranger Peter Hawker, is tree-planting after the autumn break. Peter will also be supervising a Green Corps (work-for-the-dole) crew to do various restoration projects over the summer.

The next planned works will be at Summer Day Valley, probably during the Labour Day long weekend in March next year. We have applied for a Parks Victoria grant to help pay for track repair work.

4. The VCC's new poster

The new poster and membership brochure featuring a stunning pic of HB on Passport, donated by Glenn Tempest, will be launched at the next club meeting.

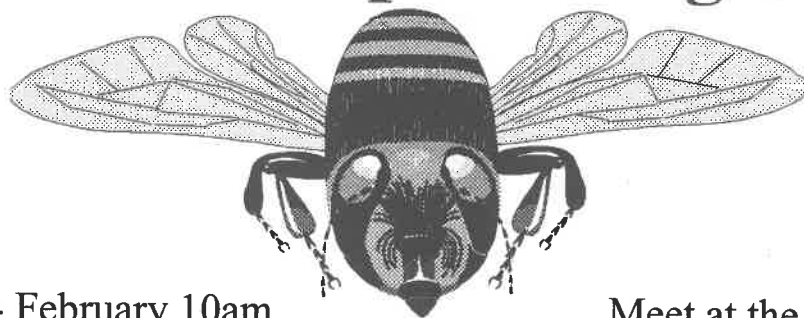
Limited numbers of the poster will be available for sale for \$12 with proceeds going to the Cliffcare Fund.

We have changed the name of the Access Fund to Cliffcare, to match the name used by the very active Blue Mountains group. A common name will make it easier, over the next few years, to develop a national fund to get contributions from manufacturers and others in the outdoor industry. The new name is also in line with our moves to establish a fund to allow the VCC to offer tax deductibility to people who make donations to our environmental repair work.

John Stone

ACCESS REPORT

Camels Hump Working Bee



Sunday 14 February 10am

Meet at the car park

The main task is to barrow in gravel to surface the new access track.

BBQ afterwards to celebrate the completion of a major VCC undertaking -
over 60 person days of work!

To join in, call John Stone on 0419 563 733 - we need to know numbers
so we can organise enough wheel-barrows.

Rock-wallabies: where you shouldn't climb and why

To help the survival of the Grampians only known Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby colony, Parks Victoria have asked the VCC to support a 5-year moratorium on climbing in a small area in the northern Victoria Range (see letters and map).

The VCC committee accepts the need for these access restrictions on the basis of the evidence gathered from PV staff and independent wildlife ecologists and the willingness of Parks Victoria to take an inclusive and open approach.

Which cliffs are in the exclusion zone?

The exclusion zone covers access for all purposes, not just climbing. Exemptions will exist for monthly visits by researchers and climbing will be permitted at cliffs near the edge of the exclusion area.

Under the agreement, we ask you not to climb at:

- Muline Crag
- Emu Rock
- Wall of the West Wind
- Hollywood Bowl
- Cub Wall

Cliffs where climbing is permitted are:

- Mt Fox & 3-Corner Crag
- Red Rock Pinnacle & Pellant Pinnacle
- Red Rock Gallery
- The Far Pavilion
- Valley Crag

Only two of these – Mt Fox and Red Rock Pinnacle – have much attractive climbing, you might want to stay away from the others.

Why have an exclusion zone?

Unfortunately, it is not possible for ecological research to provide complete certainty about what may cause the extinction of a species. So, we have to go with probability and a precautionary approach. In the long run, the survival of the Rock-wallabies is more important than our desire to climb on these particular cliffs.

Researchers, both inside and outside Parks Victoria, know very little about the habits of the BTRWs. It is a very elusive critter. No successful trapping technique has been developed in the Grampians, and no individual has been seen for more than 10 years. In over 10 days of intensive effort last year, no wallaby was trapped. Without an effective technique, financial constraints mean that research will rely on remote cameras for the time being. A growing number of photos taken in the last year, together with track and scat evidence, allow a guess that the population is somewhere between 4 and 12.

All this means that the Grampians BTRW is perched on the brink, though it is possible that other colonies still hang on in more remote corners of the Park.

The future

With the balance so finely hung it would only take one fox or cat, or some unpredictable consequence of human activity and the show would be over. With so little knowledge and such high stakes it is not possible to reach any agreement with Parks Victoria about what conditions would allow a return to climbing in the area. We'll just have to keep track of future developments in the research.

Understanding what is known about BTRWs is the first step. In addition to what Craig Reid mentions in his letter, here is a summary of what seems to be the state of knowledge about BTRW habits, the threats, and the efforts to prevent extinction:

Numbers, location and habits

There are possibly only 50 Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies remaining in the wild in Victoria. Outside the Grampians all known populations are in the dry country on the East Gippsland border. The Grampians colony is based along the cliffines of Muline Crag and Emu Rock on the rocky hillside overlooking Muline Creek.

From what is known about other species of Rock-wallaby, it is likely that the BTRWs have a home range in a radius of about 500m from a central cave site. But, unlike other species, the Grampians colony has been known to disappear from its main home for several months at a time, travelling perhaps as far as 2 km for some unknown purpose.

Known history of decline connected with foxes

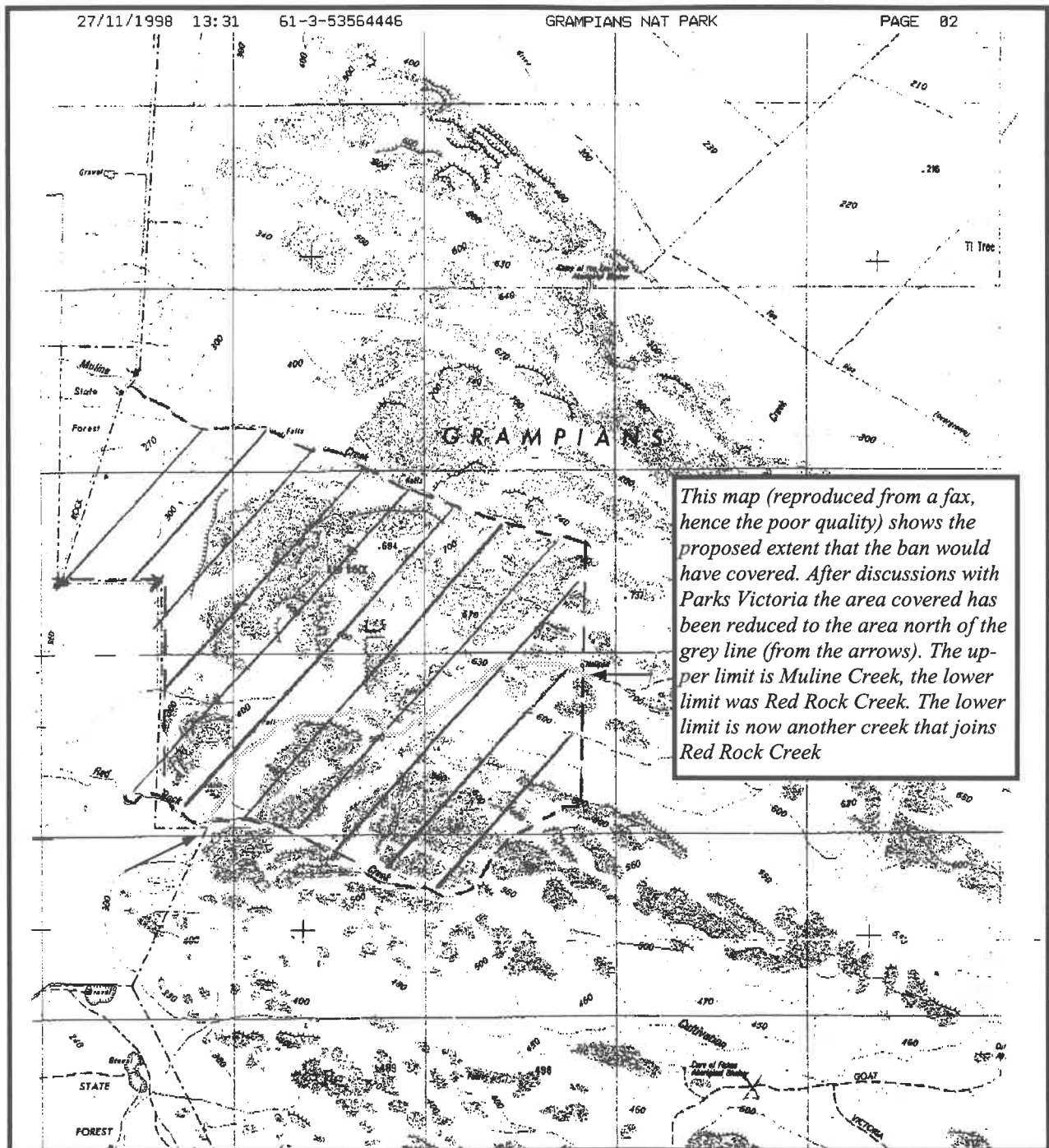
The BTRW were widespread along the Dividing Range in the early 1900s. Their decline has been linked to the spread of foxes. There appears to be some evidence that tracks made by humans encourage greater fox movements when compared to similar areas with no human presence.

Fox-baiting

The main activity to protect the Rock-wallabies is fox-baiting. Over the past few years, rangers and local cockies have been baiting along a 42 kilometre perimeter and have achieved substantial reduction in fox numbers.

At the same time, analysis of fox and cat scats has established baseline data on predator diets before the introduction of the Rabbit Calicivirus. This is to allow for observation of possible shifts towards greater numbers of native animals in fox and cat prey as rabbit numbers change. With so few BTRWs, even a tiny shift could be a problem.

EXTENT OF BRUSH TAILED ROCK WALLABY NO-GO AREAS



Captive breeding program

In 1996, Healesville Sanctuary began a captive breeding program for BTRW. This is having only mixed results as the adults are from a small and ageing colony in East Gippsland. At least one young wallaby has been produced. The plan for the future is for young wallabies to be removed from their mothers pouches at a very early age and raised by surrogate mothers of other species. The female BTRW, it is hoped, would then produce another baby: with luck, up to seven per year instead of one.

From the Ranger-in-charge, Grampians National Park to the VCC President:

Dear Robin

Thank you for the opportunity to promote measures that will assist in the conservation of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby colony in the Victoria Range in the Grampians National Park. This is the only known population of rock-wallabies in Western Victoria, and one of only a handful of sites in the state.

We are keen to gain climber support for a voluntary rock climbing exclusion area in the Red Rock area, south of Muline Creek, north of Red Rock Creek, and west of the helipad. With the support of the VCC we would like to establish a five-year moratorium on climbing in this area. (See map.)

The moratorium is being proposed to minimise possible interference with the rock-wallabies and reduce the potential for foxes to be encouraged to enter the site. We believe that the population may consist of a few animals only, and would like to ensure that the rock-wallabies have the maximum opportunity for survival.

Our proposal is for there to be no climbing at sites at Muline Crag, Emu Rock, Wall of the West Wind, Hollywood Bowl, Cub Wall and Generation Gap. The exceptions within the exclusion area would be the climbs on Mount Fox and those located along Red Rock Creek.

Through the VCC we would like to promote an awareness of the conservation efforts at Red Rock, and provide regular updates on the progress of the Brush-tailed Rock-Wallaby Recovery Program.

The ranger in charge of the Recovery Program, Craig Reid, will be pleased to provide further information about the rock-wallabies to any of your members. Craig is available on 03 5356 4381.

Yours sincerely

Graham Parkes
Ranger in Charge

From Craig Reid, ranger responsible for the Rock-wallaby Recovery Program:

YOU CAN HELP SAVE THE GRAMPIANS BRUSH-TAILED ROCK-WALLABIES

Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies are believed to be Victoria's most endangered mammal, with only an estimated fifty animals in the wild in Victoria. The majority of these animals are along the Snowy River in East Gippsland. The Grampians National Park has only one remaining known colony. Its geographic isolation and very low population numbers make this colony extremely vulnerable.

Parks Victoria in association with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Victorian Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby Recovery Team are endeavouring to protect and conserve this species here in Victoria. Park staff greatly appreciate the VCC's support for a voluntary moratorium on public access for any purpose between Muline Creek and Red Rock Creek.

Human activity within this area could affect the wallabies range and also provide scent trails that foxes may follow up to the colony site. An extensive fox-baiting program is in place around the foot of the Victoria Range and over the Goat Track. Park staff also limit their activity to one visit a month to check remote monitoring equipment.

Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies were known over much of the Grampians in the early 1900's, however searching has found only the one extant colony site and 59 extinct colony sites. They are very agile and move with ease around very rugged and rocky cliffs and take refuge in fallen boulder jumbles. Possible places they may still exist are the Victoria Range and Mt Difficult Range.

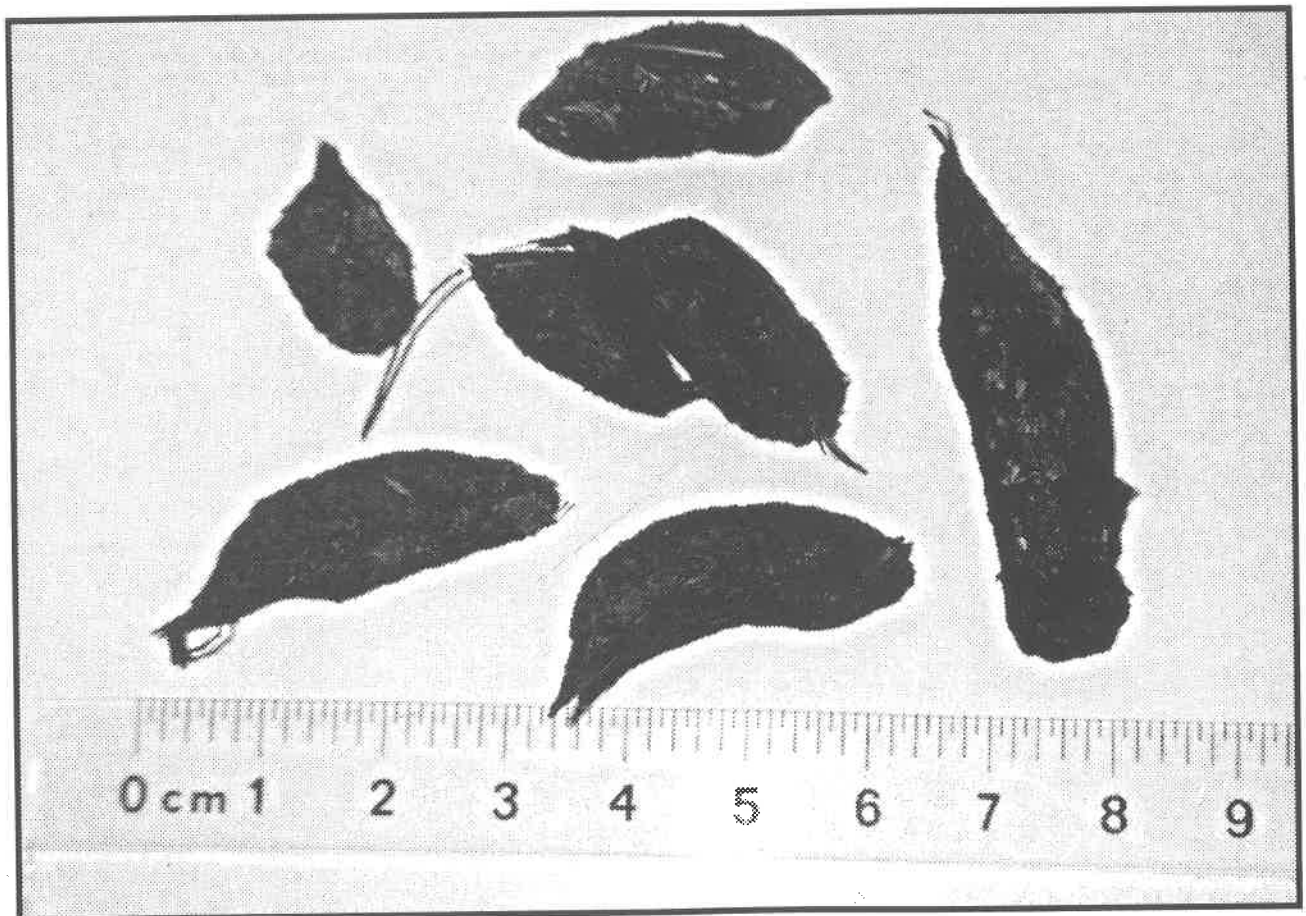
very rugged and rocky cliffs and take refuge in fallen boulder jumbles. Possible places they may still exist are the Victoria Range and Mt Difficult Range.

Park staff would greatly appreciate the assistance of anyone who believes they have seen a BTRW or if they find scats. BTRW's weigh only 6 to 8kg and are not much larger than a Brush-tailed Possum. Scats are somewhat variable in size but always have a tapered tail, are roughly cylindrical and slightly crescent shaped. The scats contain fairly coarse fragments of plant material. Brush-tail Possum scats may be found in similar areas but are more regular and cylindrical in shape, contain finer plant material and often smell of eucalyptus.

Parks Victoria Ranger, Craig Reid is responsible for the BTRW Recovery Program in the Grampians. Any scats collected should be dried and stored in a paper bag or envelope, accurately labelled as to where they were found and sent to Craig at PO Box 18, Halls Gap, Vic 3381, for identification.

If you have any questions or information regarding BTRW's, please contact Craig Reid on :

- ◆ Ph. 53564381;
- ◆ Fax 53564446; or
- ◆ E-mail cjreid@parks.vic.gov.au.



The photo above gives you an idea of what to look for, you could say it is for the more scatter brained of us (sorry, I couldn't resist it).

The photo above right is a reproduction of one of the photographs taken by the remote camera. To minimise human interference this camera is checked only once a month



NEXT WORK DAY AT SUMMER DAY VALLEY

We have changed the date for the next Summer Day Valley work party to Saturday 13 November.

This will have to be a big one as we still have a lot of rock to get onto the site so that the stone-mason can build retaining walls and other erosion protection for the fragile sands on the floor of the valley.

GET YOUR FRIENDS ORGANISED. PUT IT IN YOUR DIARY NOW!!

Thanks to everyone who helped out on the September election-day work party.

Remember to 'carry in a rock' any time you go climbing at Summer Day Valley. See the sign in the Quarry for details.

APPLICATION FOR WERRIBEE WORKS FUNDING

I have put in an application for a grant from Parks Victoria for a restoration project at Werribee Gorge. This would include track restoration and repair of the erosion and vegetation loss at the top of the cliff.

If you want to take on any part of the co-ordination and planning, just give me a call. If we are successful with the grant, the project will start early next year.

NEW TRACK TO THE GALLERY, THE GRAMPIANS

The Gallery, near Buandik in the Grampians, has been called 'Victoria's premier sports crag', but aspiring crankers will need to watch out for changes to the access track.

Parks Victoria have identified a problem at the Billimina aboriginal rock-art shelter: one of the most important Grampians art sites. Walkers and climbers using the current Gallery access track are causing erosion and siltation as increasing numbers walk through and past the shelter.

To fix the problem, PV are putting in a new access track for climbers. From mid-October (they hope!) you will find a signposted track junction about 400 metres from the car park.

You will need to take the left hand fork and follow a newly-cut track which will skirt around to the left of the art site and meet the old route just downhill from the 'low angled slab' shown on p. 216 of the Tempest & Mentz 'Grampians Selected Climbs' guide.

ABORIGINAL ART AT ARAPILES

Surprising to many climbers, a few remnants of aboriginal art have survived the mayhem of the Frontier Wars and the many years of neglect and ignorance since traditional aboriginal ways were practiced by the Djurite Balug at Mt Arapiles.

The Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-op from Horsham have been keeping an eye on one art-site, near one of Arapiles' most popular climbing areas. Over the past year they have noticed that chalk and boot rubber are further damaging the already faint motifs. The Co-op, along with Parks Victoria, have received a \$20,000 grant to clean off the chalk, move some boulders to create a barrier to prevent accidental disturbance and put up a small interpretive sign. There are no plans for obtrusive cages!

Look out for it later this year and be glad that something has survived from the first climbers and residents of the Mount.

A good introduction to aboriginal life at Djurite can be found in an article by Andy Long in Louise Shepherd's guide.

(Continued on page 11)



ACCESS REPORT

Arapiles Native Title Claim

A lot of people appear to be vaguely aware that native title claims have been made for Arapiles and other climbing areas around Victoria. The legal process is starting to grind into gear on the Arapiles claim. So, it seems like a good moment to let you know what I think might unfold and ask you to have your say.

There are several Native Title applications on the go in Victoria. But, the Mt Arapiles claim is likely to be the one which will set the scene for future interactions between indigenous people and the climbing community. This is because climbing is the predominant activity in the Arapiles State Park, and because of Arapiles' central place in our hearts.

Mt Arapiles is part of a wider claim by the Wotjobaluk people which covers crown land and waterways south from the Big Desert and Wyperfeld to Arapiles and the Black Range. (The Grampians National Park is not part of this claim.)

In early September, the Federal Court referred the Arapiles application to mediation. This is the first case in Victoria to go to mediation under the new Native Title Act which emerged from the John Howard 10-Point Plan. We can expect a tortuous process with two main strands. First, a mediation process will attempt to clarify what indigenous people want and whether their needs can be met. Second, if the mediation fails, as I expect it will on some of the big questions like min-

ing, the legal argument will need to be heard.

The VCC has been accepted into the mediation process and will at some stage meet directly with the claimants. We will have legal representation in this process. Costs are currently being met by the Commonwealth.

There is no clear idea yet of what the claimants may want in relation to Arapiles. But, I don't think that general access to climb at Arapiles will be threatened by the process.

Under existing National Parks law, our current right of access to climb is conditional on protection of the environment and culturally-important sites. Other conditions, reflecting acknowledgement of prior occupation of the land and the injustices of dispossession, may be suggested during the mediation. For example, aboriginal communities might want to get some percentage of camping fees or have some role in the management of the park. Whatever comes up, previous land rights negotiations suggest that the outcomes are usually practical and in the interests of all parties.

The Committee will come back to you with any proposals emerging from the mediation through Argus and through Club meetings. Stay tuned!

But, while we will enter the process in good faith, we shouldn't ignore the bigger picture: the game played out with governments, the mining companies and the farmers' lobby.

On this score, the Commonwealth government has made its distaste for Native Title pretty clear. The position of the new State government is unknown at this stage.

From the aboriginal perspective, there are many complicating factors. Howard's 10-Point Plan removed some rights held by indigenous people under the original native title law, and so some of the good will for the process will have evaporated.

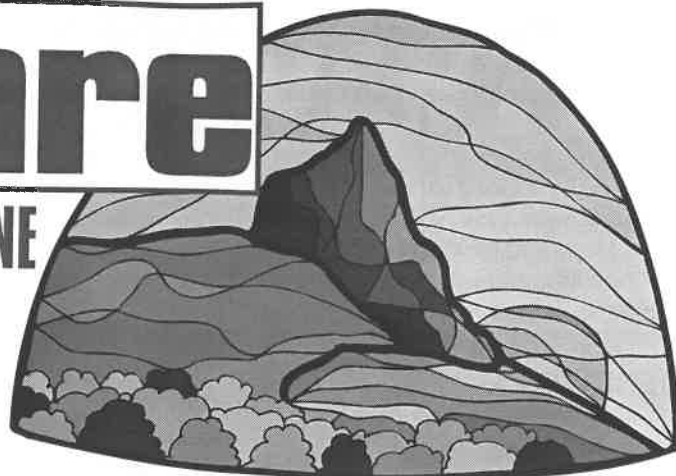
In addition, current native title law presents big obstacles for the people of SE Australia who were dispossessed several generations ago. To win, native title claimants need to prove continuous occupation of a claim area. The Yorta Yorta claim, for land around Barmah on the Murray, was thought to be the most likely to succeed and the claimants assembled a big team of lawyers, anthropologists and historians. The initial judgement summarily dismissed the claim and a major appeal has been launched in a climate of some acrimony. Any further outcomes in this case will affect the process of the Arapiles claim.

So, we are entering the minefield which is the politics of reconciliation and indigenous rights. I reckon it is an important thing to be part of. What do you think? Send your views to Argus or direct to me ...

JOHN STONE

CliffCare

REPORT BY JOHN STONE



CLIMBING ILLEGAL ACROSS NSW?

A REAL threat?!

In National Parks across NSW, "a person must not in a park carry, possess or use any equipment that is required for abseiling, base jumping, bungee jumping, rock climbing, caving, parachuting, white water boating, paragliding, parasailing or hang gliding." Maximum Penalty: 30 Penalty Units (currently \$3,300).

This is a draft regulation proposed by the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service that was leaked to climbers and others early in September.

The regulation is apparently the result of litigation and liability fears among senior bureaucrats.

You may remember a regulation that came into force in 1995, outlawing adventure activities in NSW National Parks without permission. The 1995 regulation led to great controversy and promises that any changes would be done with full consultation. But, this new draft has appeared from nowhere.

The office of the Minister for the Environment has told the Sydney Rockclimbing Club that the draft is not current and that the 'real' proposed regulation should not be a cause for anxiety. But, as Argus goes to press, copies of the 'real' draft regulation still aren't available.

You can send your protest message, or ask for a copy of the draft regulation from the office of the Minister for the

Environment: bob.debus@parliament.nsw.gov.au or the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Head Office: info@npws.nsw.gov.au.

Check out the latest information at the Blue Mountains Cliffcare web-site at www.cliffcare.org.au or follow the link from the VCC site.

Planning a trip north?

The current situation under the 1995 regulation (which bans adventure activities without permission) sees very little real restriction on climbing in NSW National Parks.

In the Warrumbungles, for example, the rangers have given blanket permission to anyone who wants to climb. In the Blue Mountains, the Management Plan approves of climbing in specified locations and says that it is "*neither desirable nor appropriate for specific consent to be required for every instance of persons undertaking (rockclimbing) in the park.*"

So, keep climbing! It remains to be seen if park staff would ever enforce anything as mad as the proposed regulation, should it ever become law.

But, send off your protest now. With luck, and a good bit of noise from climbers, we can stop this silliness before it goes any further.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Originally taken from Newcastle University Mountaineering Club Journal and reprinted, unattributed, in Thrutch November/December 1970

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand is a large collection of national parks surrounded by a thin strip of habitable land. It is dedicated to the raising of pale coloured animals which the natives call sheep but which were readily identified by Imants as woolly pigs. Apart from this purpose the occupied land is needed to provide access to the National Park system.

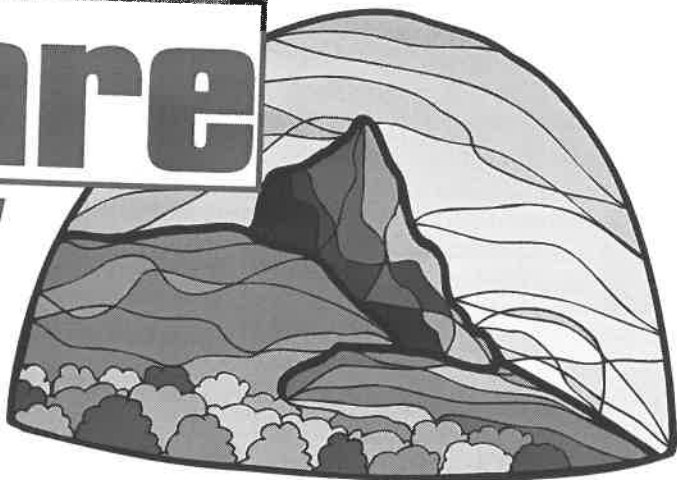
New Zealanders are lucky to have such a large amount of useless land to spare. They are the envy of the civilized world,

but the N.S.W. Government would pity them for their lack of exploitable resources like limestone caves, beaches, pine forests, coastal lagoons and so on.

The eager mountaineer finds the Parks packed with ranges of rocky peaks complete with mighty scree slopes and glaciers which are furiously melting to keep the rivers at their normal uncrossable height. Visiting the mountains in summer is like watching an accelerated film showing of the processes of erosion. Meltwater streams run everywhere, carving at glaciers, burrowing at their banks and setting off minor landslides as they undermine tons of ice. Rock slides rattle down everywhere. I felt that we had just arrived in time, that in a year or two the mountains would have reduced themselves to sea level. Our efforts helped to make a bad situation worse. On the moraine wall, every step would send down a hundredweight of unconsolidated rubble onto the glacier, a slow-moving conveyer belt for ground up mountains. Progress

CliffCare

REPORT BY KAREN FRY



MT BUFFALO

Parks Victoria, in collaboration with Bright Police, have installed a Rockclimbing/ Abseiling Intentions Book near the Chalet. The following release from Mt Buffalo Ranger Darin Lynch, outlines its purpose and instructions for use.

'Mt Buffalo National Park provides some fantastic opportunities for rockclimbing and abseiling in a natural setting. Some of the climbs are world class and very difficult, while others are perfect for beginners.

Parks Victoria has recently installed a Rockclimbing / Abseiling Intentions Book (specifically for these activities) at the information shelter in the Gorge carpark. The Gorge carpark is found in front of the Mt Buffalo Chalet and is an area frequented by climbers and abseilers because it accesses many of the well-known rock faces in the Gorge.

The intentions book will record your parties details and the route and destination of your climb / abseil, as well as departure and estimated return date. In case of an emergency this information will help rescuers make informed decisions and speed up potential Search and Rescue operations.

Please understand that the intentions book will not be checked on a regular basis to ensure people have returned on time, it will only be called upon in the case of an emergency. All park visitors intending to rockclimb or abseil in the park should also leave their trip intentions with a friend or relative. The Victorian Police have trip intention forms that can be filled out and left with the nearest Police station to your intended trip.

Parks Victoria encourages all visitors to Mt Buffalo National Park, intending to rockclimb or abseil, to use the intentions book at the Gorge carpark and hope that your visit to the park is enjoyable.

For more information regarding rockclimbing and abseiling at Mt Buffalo please contact the park office on 03 5755 1466.'

GRAMPIANS

The Cliffcare Trust has recently been successful in an application for a grant from Parks Victoria to repair and contain the bush campsites and carpark in the Bundaleer/Mt Rosea area. The project will be undertaken in

this financial year and kicks off in August with a meeting between Grampians Rangers and Cliffcare committee members. I'll be rustling up help over the next couple of weeks. If you climb and/or camp in the Bundaleer/Mt Rosea area and would like to see the sites in better shape, give me a hoi. I'll be looking particularly for landscaping assistance.

BOLTING

My first month in the job and I've already had to juggle that political hot potato – bolting. However, pretty much everyone I've spoken with, especially in Parks Victoria, are keen to see some sort of fair, workable and climber-friendly resolution of the issue. It's early days but discussions are being planned. I'll keep you all posted on developments. In the meantime, if you have any plan, idea, episode or whatever that could contribute to discussions in a positive manner, please keep me posted.

BURNLEY

Progress is being made! However, the original plans for the new site encountered problems with Melbourne Water (I won't go into details but it had to do with the 100 year flood). Parks Victoria and the VCC are working on a new plan and whilst this will delay works, enthusiasm from Parks Victoria remains strong as does their commitment to Public Liability support. If you'd like to join the Burnley Email list for updates, let me know.

SUMMER DAY VALLEY

Do you climb regularly at Summer Day Valley with a group? Do you organise groups to climb or abseil there? If so, I'm eager to hear from you; in fact, from *any* group users of Summer Day Valley. I'm gathering information that could lead to a plan that could make everyone's experience there just a little bit better. If you'd like to be involved, please contact me.