



The Mounts

The Community Newsletter of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine



August 2011

Welcome

For very obvious reasons, the recent wind storm dominates this edition. Richard Beattie has compiled a graphic and detailed account of the storm and the logistics of the cleanup effort. Anne Mayall's evocative description of the impact on that dreadful Tuesday afternoon is echoed perfectly by Joe Lansberg's scientific explanation of the process of trees toppling in the wind.

The aftermath of the storm is plainly clear for all to see. However, despite the understandable shock and bewilderment and dismay, this event needs to be placed in context against the truly destructive and tragic recent events in the Lockyer Valley or at Marysville, or Christchurch or, indeed, parts of Blackheath. It was remarkable that there was no major damage to property here, nor serious injury—or worse—to either people or animals.

Undeniably, many historic and beautiful trees were smashed or unceremoniously uprooted. As Peter Valder notes in a separate article about the 1965 snow storm, the loss of a deeply loved tree often opens up areas in a garden and allows previously overlooked shrubs and trees to flourish in their place. In a way, the storm was an inevitable part of the inexorable cycle of Nature over which we have no control. Granted, it will take many years to clean up after the storm in some areas, but life will go on; the community will continue to respond in the same relentlessly optimistic and energetic way that has been its hallmark in the 130 years since this area was first settled.

The storm has left both physical and emotional scars; the village and its surrounds are battered and bruised. But if you believe this event has stripped the residents of their drive and their vision and their inventiveness and their good-humour, I can do no more than to invite the reader to peruse the following pages.

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The Mt Wilson storm: a devastating, frightening experience

The worst blow in 50 years! It did more damage than the huge snow storm in the '60s that snapped branches but didn't upend trees like this time.

That is the consensus view of long time Mt Wilson residents about the frightening hurricane force wind storm that hit the village on the afternoon of Tuesday 5 July and through the early hours of Wednesday morning.

The nearest weather station, Mt Boyce over the Grose valley, recorded a maximum wind gust on Tuesday at 7.15 pm of 139 kph, the highest wind speed recorded there since records began there in July 2003.

Anne Mayall at *Oreades* in Wynnes Rocks Road felt the full blast of the wind. "I thought of pictures of people facing a tornado in the US," she said. "The gusts from the west were very strong. Around 2.00 o'clock I felt calm but said to myself: 'Don't panic! Stay put. It's safest to be here'. It was a very strange, very frightening experience. My house is like a tree house as it's up on stilts. The glass in the new big windows was flexing and I had the sense that if I hadn't done the renovations the old house would have taken off and I'd have been like Dorothy somewhere over on the other side of the road. Severe gusts were blasting in. The Blue Mountains Ash were bending over almost touching the ground, and then springing back like someone was holding the tops of the trees, then whipping around backwards and forwards. And they fell all over the property. The wood shed was smashed but luckily they missed the new building and the water tanks. The trees dropped in slow motion. There was no noise but the wind when they fell. No vibration when they hit the ground."

The stately Blue Mountains Ash (*Eucalyptus oreades*) is among the tallest of the hundred-odd eucalypt species found in the Blue Mountains.

The local response to the storm began shortly after the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade was, coincidentally, called out at 2.00 pm to a pile burn that got away at Mt Tomah. However, the two brigade vehicles and five person crew couldn't leave the mountain because of a fallen tree across Mt Wilson Road near the bottom of the Zig Zag.

"At 2.30 pm the wind was howling and trees moving around dangerously so we just cleared one lane and went back up the Zig Zag only to find another tree down on the corner of Queens Avenue," Mt Wilson brigade Captain Beth Raines said. In addition to Beth in the response crew there was Peter Raines, Stephen Dean, Vic Zhukov and Peter Dempsey.

Meanwhile the Mt Tomah brigade advised they had their fire under control.

"The power was off all over Mt Wilson sometime before 2.00 pm," Beth said.

"A big branch fell so heavily across the power cables near the bottom of the Zig Zag they snapped a concrete power pole near its base. Later we realised there were power lines down everywhere.

"As we worked on clearing the tree at Queens Avenue a call came through for the first responders to go to Wendy Holland's home in Farrer Road West where an apprentice who had been working nearby with his boss had been taken with back injuries. A tree branch had fallen on him.

"With so many trees and power lines coming down including on Mt Irvine Road, Peter (Raines) and I had to take the brigade's Land Cruiser and the HiLux with the chain saws and the first aid gear through *Wynstay*, into Davies Lane, through Hillcrest Lane, down the power line right of way into Cathedral Reserve, across the road, up the unmade road on Lamb's Hill and around into Farrer Road West until we were blocked again by another tree. I walked the rest of the way to Wendy's house, provided pain relief for our patient and waited hours before the Lithgow four wheel drive

ambulance managed to get through. Two other ambulance crews were sent to support the emergency.

"Eventually the ambulances got away but became trapped when the huge elms came down outside *Withycombe*. Finally they were able to be driven through the *Withycombe* property and out onto the road about seven hours after the young bloke had been hurt. Luckily it turned out he suffered only severe bruising."

While the medical evacuation was under way, the Mt Tomah fire brigade and council contractors and machinery had arrived in Mt Wilson. They helped the local volunteers clearing roads long into the dark of the evening. A large excavator with heavy lift jaws able to grab as much as a whole ute load in one bite made road clearing and log lifting much easier than man handling the fallen timber.

"That machine was worth its weight in gold," Peter Raines said.

A terrible night

It was about 6.00 pm when a huge radiata pine with a trunk diameter of around a metre smashed down from Liz and Paul Gow's property across The Avenue near Hay Lane. Outside the old school a eucalypt fell over the road bringing down the power line and making the road impassable there too. Many conifers and eucalypts around and behind the war memorial were felled by the wind gusts.

No sooner than the crews had at least one lane on the roads cleared than more trees were falling so with the ambulances departed and only the light of headlights available, work ended for the night.

The three great elms downed in The Avenue outside *Withycombe* have left a gap like missing teeth in what has been the famous and beautiful entrée to the heart of Mt Wilson.

At *Wynstay* the wind brought down seven of the magnificent avenue of Monterey cypresses planted in the 1890s and pictured on the cover of Alison Halliday and Joanne Hambrett's recently published book *A Passion for Place: Gardens of the Blue Mountains*. Wendy Smart said how fortunate she had been that the only property damage from the trees falling was a fly screen brushed off by flying debris. Elsewhere, like at so many properties, fences were down.

Scott Leonard at *Sylvan Close* on Mt Irvine Road said the sound of trees breaking up came over like gun shots. "During the night there were incredible cracks as trees sounded like they were exploding," he said.

"It was a terrible night," Beth said. "No power. No light. Freezing cold. And the wind! I couldn't sleep."

At first light on Wednesday morning every road in Mt Wilson was blocked by fallen trees. And there was no power.

The Mt Tomah brigade was back in Mt Wilson on Wednesday and was joined by the Katoomba/Leura brigade under the supervision of incident controller Deputy Group Captain Peter Church from Blackheath. The visiting crews did a very big job clearing the Zig Zag.

Many Blue Mountains City Council workers and contractors worked throughout the village cutting away, moving aside, then collecting and dumping truckloads of smashed trees at the Silva Plana sports ground. The howl of chainsaws could be heard everywhere. They quickly cleared the roads. The council reported cleanup work being done in freezing temperatures with a wind chill factor of as low as - 16 degrees.

One of the scariest and most dangerous moments on Wednesday occurred near the little track at the bottom of Cathedral Reserve leading towards the Cathedral of Ferns. Vic Zhukov, Graham Tribe and four council workers with the aid of the excavator grab were clearing a huge tree that had fallen near the bend on Mt Irvine Road. They had just stilled their chainsaws. As the men stood back about 10 or 15 metres while the excavator moved in to shift logs, four eucalypts crashed downhill out of the Cathedral of Ferns and onto the area where the men had just been working. Luckily the excavator and its operator also narrowly missed being hit.

Peter Raines, Beth Raines, Graham Tribe, Vic Zhukov, Peter Dempsey, Stephen Dean, Peter Richey, Ricananda Daly, Tom Bassett, David Howell and Tim and Kim Gow were among Mt Wilson locals who worked tirelessly on the clean up. At the fire station food, a barbeque and drinks were provided for the brigade crews, council and contractor workers by Moira Green, Judy Tribe, Kathleen Oakes, Libby Raines, and Helen Freeman who also did rounds to ensure everyone in the village who might need help was OK. Suzanne Bassett also checked and assisted people caught at home without power or heating. Lashings of sustenance were needed and contributions were brought in by Sarah Howell, Maria Kelly, Elizabeth Montano and Minny Nicholas.

Elgas made urgent gas deliveries on Thursday to the fire station and customers who had had to rely solely on LPG for cooking and heating. As the contents of fridges and freezers gradually defrosted without power, barbeques saw a lot of cooking done throughout the villages. Generators proved a boon for homes fortunate enough to have one.

Devastation in private properties

In private properties large branches, huge trees and giant root balls some more than five metres across left devastation and a sense of terrible loss for people who in some cases have spent decades developing and nurturing gardens. Volunteers continued lending assistance for cleaning up at private properties over the weekend.

Explaining why some trees are more likely to fall than others in a wind storm, tree expert Joe Landsberg at *Withycombe* said that in general the depth to which trees put down roots tends to be associated with soil type, moisture and fertility.

"If the soils are good and water not a limiting factor, as is the case on the basalt soils at Mt Wilson, roots are not likely to go particularly deep," Joe said. "Most of the root mass is concentrated in the surface layers. They 'trade off' growing big healthy tops against the risk of getting pushed over – and sometimes they lose."

Fortunately only minimal property damage occurred with a corner of roofing torn off Paul and Mary Roberts' home *Brambil* in Mt Irvine Road and their ute had a tree branch fall on it. Liz and Paul Gow's little Fairy Cottage was also damaged along with much harm done to their prized gardens.

On *Yengo* the Pigott's Parma wallaby reserve on Wyndham Avenue was largely denuded of trees but fortunately none of the wallabies appeared to have been hurt.

Some of the line of Norway spruces on *Breenhold* along The Avenue came down on the power lines and over the road.

Mary Reynolds at *Donna Buang* in Church Lane said how fortunate she and her husband Ellis were with their property being partly protected down the hill, only losing three or four trees but finding no fun surviving five days without power, heat or water. Luckily their son John was with them and able to help. "The damaging snow storm of the 1960s occurred in 1965 and by today's standards it was very severe," Mary said. For information about earlier storms she contacted her former neighbour at *Nooroo*, Peter Valder, who wrote the account on page 8.

Mt Irvine was not affected nearly so severely as was Mt Wilson but Alan Gunn, with help from Peter Richey on the chainsaw, was backwards and forwards on his tractor clearing Mt Irvine Road

of tree debris between Mt Irvine and Cathedral Reserve.

At the time of the storm the weather bureau reported that there was a deep low pressure system southeast of Tasmania with an associated trough to the north both of which were moving slowly east. During the period of a few days, a series of cold fronts illustrated in the weather chart on the next page moved through the southeast of NSW maintaining very windy conditions. The bureau issued severe weather warnings for damaging winds and blizzard conditions for the Blue Mountains area and a sheep graziers warning was also issued.

“Natural disaster zone”

The state government on advice from the council declared Mt Wilson and other affected towns like Blackheath and Medlow Bath a “natural disaster zone” making possible state funding for the cleanup job.

“An excellent job was done by the council and contractor crews working with heavy machinery and large trucks seven days a week,” said Bill Ryan, president of the Mt Wilson Progress Association. “They removed many, many tonnes of fallen timber and leafy debris, chipped it making a huge pile in Cathedral Reserve, and then trucking the material to dumps near the fire station that remain available for collection for use in gardens and paths. Endeavour Energy also did a really great job restoring power by Saturday evening despite the extreme conditions their crews faced during the time they were in Mt Wilson.”

The cost to government of the cleanup throughout the affected areas of the mountains is expected to be more than \$1 million. Details of the council response are available at <http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/yourcouncil/mediareleases/>

Blackheath and the affected areas on the Great Western Highway with their much larger populations than Mt Wilson were the first priority for the major effort by power supplier Endeavour Energy. Endeavour was unable to dispatch the large crew numbers it did to Mt Wilson until Thursday.

Endeavour Energy’s General Manager Network Operations Peter Langdon, the utility’s incident controller overseeing restoration of the electricity supply, said all available resources were brought to bear to get the power back on.

“Supply to 100,000 customers was impacted after our network was hit by three storm fronts over two and half days with the winds causing unprecedented damage across the network,” he said. “Our initial emergency response saw six storm centres opened at Katoomba, Moss Vale, Kings Park, Picton, Windsor and Nowra to coordinate the efforts of our emergency crews on the ground. “From first thing Wednesday morning we had all available crews from Parramatta, Kings Park, Glendenning, Penrith and Windsor working in the Blue Mountains alongside local crews from Katoomba to commence the restoration effort. By Thursday, our own workforce in the Blue Mountains was complemented by additional crews from Ausgrid, Essential Energy and private electrical contractors.”

Mr Langdon said Endeavour’s crews worked long and hard to safely rebuild and repair its network in just four days, despite the prolonged, extreme weather conditions. Endeavour used both regular vegetation management crews and specialist tree climbing contractors to clear debris at Mt Wilson.

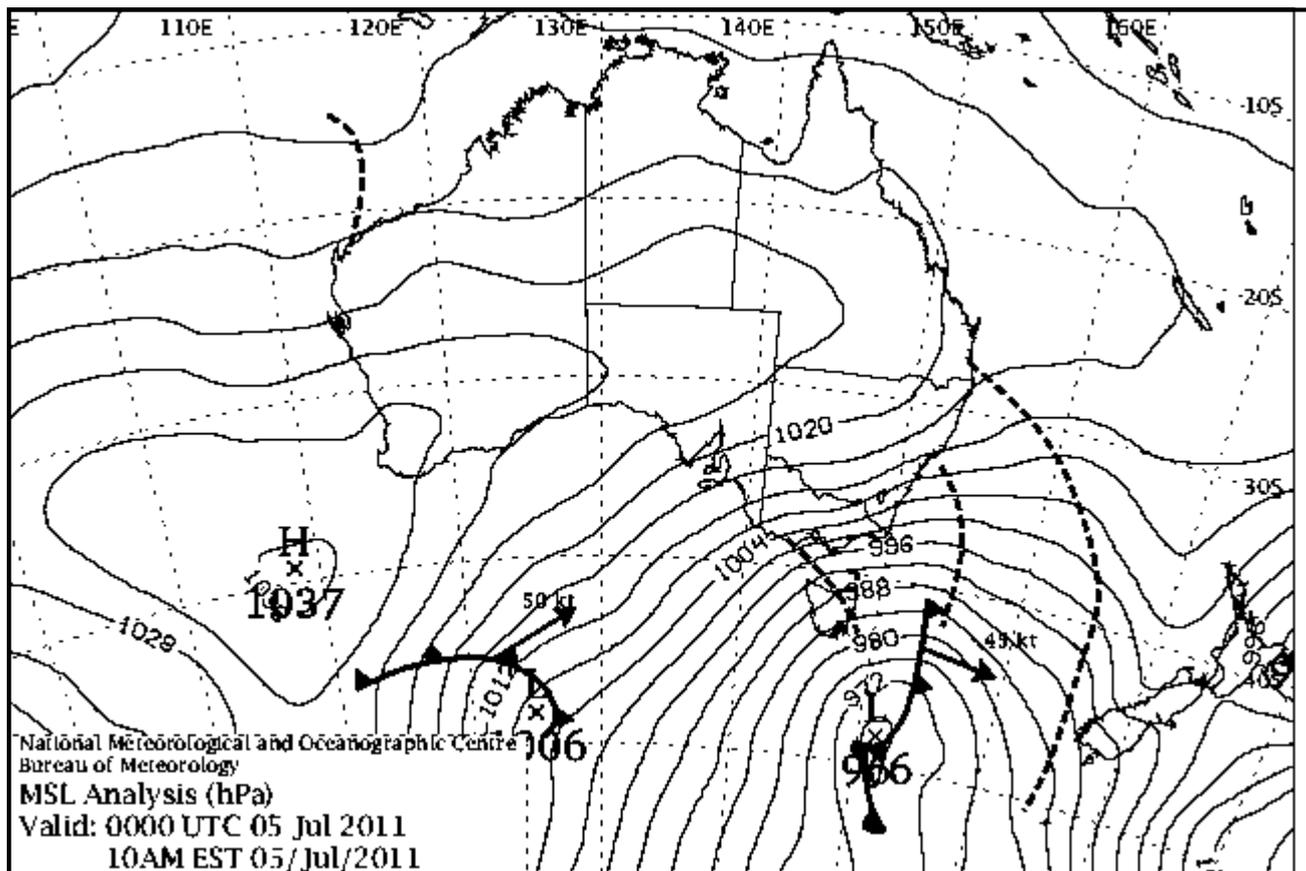
“The restoration efforts were hampered by the large number of fallen trees restricting access to fault sites on the network requiring a large excavator to clear a path for vehicles to undertake repairs,” Mr Langdon said. “Crews from Katoomba were in Mt Wilson on the afternoon and evening of 5 July to isolate and make safe fault sites. Conditions were very dangerous with trees and branches dropping around crews while they were working. Twenty five staff and contractors returned to the area after the damaging winds abated and repairs to the network upstream from Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine were completed. Due to the number of trees blocking roads, a helicopter was chartered to patrol the area and assess the damage.

"Once access was established, multiple line trucks, an all-terrain elevated work platform and a large excavator were used in restoring supply to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.
"Due to the inherent dangers of working with electricity, one of the main challenges was to ensure the safety of our staff and the community while working in bad weather and difficult terrain. The most difficult repair was the main high voltage supply into the area that could not be inspected for damage until the broken concrete pole was removed.
"Endeavour Energy appreciated the patience and perseverance shown by the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine communities while we worked to safely restore supply to all customers."

Telecom's exchange at the top of the Zig Zag lost power and automatically switched to emergency batteries as soon as the electricity was off in the village. However, the batteries were exhausted by Wednesday morning and it wasn't until that evening that phone and Internet services were up and running again powered by a generator Telecom brought in. No communications services throughout Wednesday made the response effort that much more difficult.

Beth Raines said she wished there had been an earlier opportunity to email a situation report to everyone on the fire brigade's contact list. However, with the intensity of the response activities, the Internet outage and few people available to assist it had not been possible to get a note out before Thursday morning as priority went to clearing roads and assessing damage to properties. Further email notes went out with updates on the clean up and power restoration.

Richard Beattie



Why some trees fall over in high winds, and others nearby don't**By Joe Landsberg**

Think of wind as fluid flow – which is what it is; the difference between wind and water is just a matter of fluid density. There is nothing smooth and uniform about fast-moving fluids, such as air or water, as they pass over rough surfaces. The result is chaotic turbulent flow. When air flows over uneven country (and the Blue Mountains are *very* uneven) it creates eddies and backflows round obstacles; flow rates are accelerated through gaps and up hills – or across pitched roofs – and decelerated downhill. Wind speed also increases with height (which has implications for tall trees) and even in relatively steady winds air speed at any point varies unpredictably. High winds also tend to be gusty: the gusts vary in intensity and may vary slightly in direction, even over short intervals.

So, the basic reason why some trees fall or break in high winds, and others don't, is that – except in very uniform plantations in flat country – all trees are subject to different amounts of pressure (force per unit area) from wind. It depends a great deal on where exactly they are in relation to other trees or structures that may shelter them, or cause higher wind speeds in their 'neck of the woods'. And trees themselves vary in the amount of foliage they carry and the way that foliage is presented to the wind, so (technically) the drag force exerted on different trees by a particular wind speed varies. Another variable is the way trees are anchored in the soil, which varies with root system size and soil wetness.

A further very interesting facet of this rather complicated story concerns gust frequency and its relationship with the natural elasticity of trees – i.e. the way they flex when pushed. Tall trees are much more likely to break or fall over when the frequency of gusts matches the natural elasticity – called the bending moment – of the tree. You can see it happen: the force of the wind causes a tree to bend. If the wind is reasonably steady, or the gust is sustained for quite a long time, the tree will probably swing back, even against a strong wind – they very seldom just keep going and break or fall over, unless the wind is *very* strong (up around hurricane force, for most trees). If the gust dies down at about the same time the tree starts to swing back, the arc of the swing is longer than it would otherwise have been and if the next gust comes along as the tree starts to swing forward again, the process will be repeated. If the frequency of a few gusts matches the trees' elasticity, the amplitude of the swings increases and there's a good chance the trees will break or fall over. It's the same principle you would use if you were trying to push a tree over. And it doesn't just apply to trees; it can happen to tall man-made structures. An astonishing example was the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows suspension bridge in Washington State in 1940. The so-called structural frequency and elasticity of the bridge were freakishly matched by the gust frequency of a strong wind and the structure was spectacularly destroyed as you can watch at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-zczJXSxnw>

It all adds up to a complex picture, classic chaos, and there's no way we can predict what will stand and what will fall.



Snow and ice brought down branches & power lines

By Peter Valder

The first storm disaster in my lifetime was the heavy snowfall of July 1965. My parents were away on a Bill Peach tour of the Northern Territory and East Timor (of all things) and I was unable to telephone anyone at Mt Wilson to find out what had happened or to go there as the road was closed for two or three days and, as in the recent disaster, the power was off for days.

The damage in 1965 was caused by the sheer weight of snow and ice on branches and power lines as the snow had fallen in windless circumstances and accumulated on the upper branches of trees which presumably had developed without ever experiencing such stress. These branches then broke off and fell on those beneath them which then broke off and so on. When I got to *Nooroo* it looked as if an atom bomb had gone off. Some of the small trees and shrubs were completely broken down, all the shade houses my father had built for his nursery were flat on the ground and out of sight beneath the snow, some of the gutters had been pushed off the house, the wisteria pergola at the back of the house was completely flat and so on.

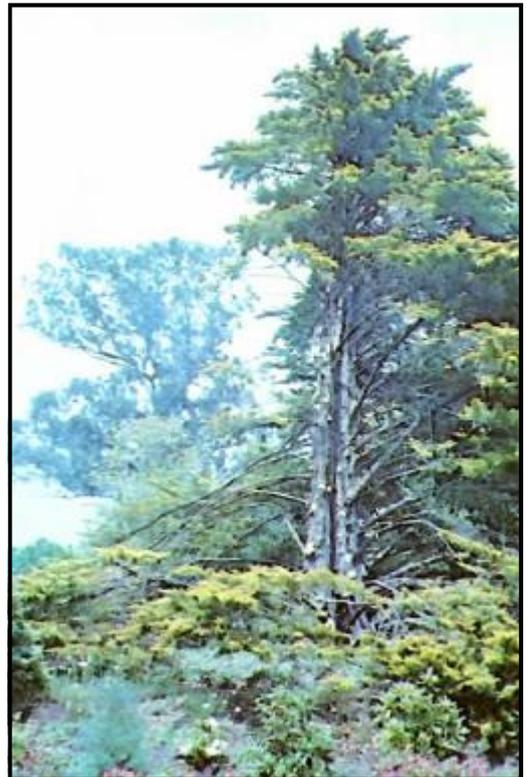
Eventually my father restored order, rebuilt his shade houses, including the one he had converted the old tennis court into, and cleared out all the wreckage from the garden. One benefit of all this was that we were able to open up the garden a lot as it had become crowded and overgrown. And in rebuilding his shade houses my father felt confident that such a snowfall would be unlikely to occur again in his lifetime. But in 1970 it did, though I can't remember in which month. This time the damage was not as bad though the shade houses were flattened once again. This time he rebuilt them so that the roofing covers could be removed in autumn and replaced in spring, a task he carried out each year until he died. Even though this proved to be unnecessary it gave him peace of mind. It was this second heavy snowfall, incidentally, that caused him to decide not to reroof the old tennis court and to allow me to convert it into a wisteria garden.

It was as a result of these two disasters that he installed a gas stove and gas heaters so that survival in relative comfort would be possible in times of lengthy disruption to the electricity supply. And he decided not to change the diesel pump on his dam to one powered by electricity. He was aware, too, of the wisdom of retaining the gravity feed system of providing water pressure for the house and garden that he had installed and expanded over the years.

In the subsequent 40 years there have been no heavy snowfalls though gales have repeatedly caused minor damage, occasionally uprooting the odd tree. The last severe gale I can recall was in September 1986, if the date on my photos can be relied upon, when a couple of the elms in the front drive at *Nooroo* were broken down though, like those in The Avenue, they were old and a bit rotten. I also have a photo taken at the same time of a huge old cypress at *Campanella* (at Mt Irvine Road and Davies Lane) which had been uprooted and tipped over.

As I see it, one of the problems facing Mount Wilson is that, in the settled areas, both the early plantings of introduced trees and the retained native ones are now elderly and so are more vulnerable to damage by storms of whatever kind.

(Pictured right: a badly damaged Golden Cypress at *Yengo*, July 1965. Copy taken from *Mount Wilson, New South Wales: Its Location, Settlement and Development* by C.H.Currey, 1968.)





It was difficult to get a sense of scale in photos—hence most photographers resorted to the time-honoured tradition of a reference point.

Clockwise from top left: uprooted trees at *Sylvan Close*, *Wynstay*, *Sefton Cottage* and *Killaloo*.

Incredibly, there was no damage to the War Memorial, or the adjacent historic road marker, once the trees were pulled away.



MOUNT WILSON PROGRESS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE NEWS

Village Maintenance

Mount Wilson has not been the quiet, sleepy village during recent weeks that many believe it is. The drone of chainsaws and wood chippers and the crash of falling timber has been a constant backdrop to village life since the "big blow". On behalf of the Committee and the community I would like to thank all those volunteers of the RFS, local contractors, and employees of the Blue Mountains City Council and Endeavour Energy, who worked tirelessly (many of whom are still doing so) to unblock roads from fallen trees and tidy up the debris. We can be thankful that under such extreme circumstances and with so many huge trees falling that there was so little injury and so little damage to houses sustained. During the week of the winds, the Federal Member of Parliament, Louise Marcus, and the State Member, Roza Sage, both made phone calls to inquire how the village was faring and whether more assistance was needed.

Prior to the wind storm, Council worked on the drainage and guttering outside the Village Hall, a longstanding problem we have been requesting to have fixed. Unfortunately, water still pools in front of the small gate so in wet conditions, please use the driveway entrance. We all complain about Council and how difficult it is to get things done but the presence of so many Council trucks and workers in recent weeks has been amazing and the difference they have made in a relatively small period of time is truly wonderful.

Coming Events

The Annual General Meeting will be held at 5.30 p.m. on 17th September, 2011 in the Village Hall.

Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine Phone Book

A new edition of the community phonebook has been placed in all letterboxes in Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine. If you did not receive one please contact me. Additional books are available for \$3 each. Please contact me for corrections and updates. Please note the following corrections and additions:

Peter Cudlipp – Mount Irvine number should be 4756 2058

Ron and Moira Green – mobile number is 0408 001 845 (Yes, the secretary made a mistake with her own number!)

Bob Korogiannis – mobile number is 0409 747 600 and email address is korogiannis@bigpond.com

Mount Wilson Leisure Library

The library is open every Saturday morning from 10.00 to 11.00 so do drop in for a browse through the bookshelves. If you wish to come at another time or have books delivered, please contact me on 4756 2162 and this can be arranged. If anyone would like to assist in looking after the library for one hour a month on a Saturday morning please contact me.

A recent addition to the library is "Water for Elephants" by Sara Gruen, a delightful and sometimes disturbing story centred in a circus in 1930's depression era in U.S.A. For other books in the collection check the Mount Wilson website.

Join the Mount Wilson Progress Association Inc.

If you are a property owner or reside in Mount Wilson you are eligible to be a member of the Association. If you are not a member and wish to join please contact me. Membership fees make an important contribution to the work of maintaining our village and providing contact with residents through the production of such things as newsletters, the phone book and the website. The more members there are, the more we can do for you.

Moira Green (Secretary)

Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigades

A lengthy profile of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade written by Mt Wilson resident Kathleen Oakes, appeared in the most recent issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin (the journal of the NSW Rural Fire Service). Thank you Kathleen for such a warm tribute to all members of our brigade and to our Captain, Beth Raines. The article is published in full in the following pages.

The Brigade held regular training on Sunday 5th June when we practised hose skills and house fire fighting. At the next regular training on Sunday 3rd July we combined training with Bell & Mt Tomah Brigades at Mt Tomah, checking how to respond to an emergency at the Blue Mountains Botanic Gardens – Mt Tomah (their new name). In addition on Sunday 19th June we held a Welcome Day where three new members attended and we signed up one new member. So far this year we have signed up six new members, some of whom have now completed the Safety Induction and then will go on to do the Bush Fire Fighting course to become regular fire fighters.

We have had a number of people attend RFS training this year so far. Members have been to Advanced Firefighter, Chainsaw, First Aid, Traffic Control, Aircraft Basic Knowledge, and Rail Corp training. In addition we have people doing their driving training and more people will complete training later this year.

On 18th September the Blue Mountains RFS West Sector will stage its annual combined exercise. It's an all day series of practice sessions to build skills and includes all the brigades in West Sector, from Medlow Bath around to Mt Tomah. This year the exercise will be held in Mt Wilson, Mt Irvine and Bell. In addition neighbouring brigades from outside West Sector are being invited, so we expect there will be about ten brigades and ten or more trucks included in the exercise. The RFS in the Blue Mountains has three sectors, East, Central and West. Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine is part of West Sector.

During all training sessions crews maintain their knowledge of the many different tools and systems available to meet the various types of incidents a brigade needs to handle. Every vehicle we use and every incident we respond to has different characteristics. Up to the end of July this year, the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine Brigade has responded to nine medical emergencies via the Community First Responder program, to thirteen motor vehicle accidents, three search and rescues, three fires, one oil clean up and of course, 12 trees down/storm damage events including the event in early July. So the brigade is responding to a number of differing events at the rate of about 3 events every two weeks. Some incidents last just a few hours and some last several days, or even weeks for a really large bushfire.

So it is critical all brigades increase their knowledge and skills and a combined exercise is an opportunity to do this while also learning to work together as a large team. It also allows our support teams to improve their assistance for the operating crews in the field. Managing more than ten trucks and making sure crews are safe and effective requires good coordination. Since most events have a lot of unpredictable behaviour, particularly bushfires, these exercises are organised so we have to respond to changing circumstances at short notice. A number of mock incidents will be organised at Mt Wilson, Mt Irvine and Bell and brigades will respond to these incidents in turn during the day.

The combined exercise will be controlled from the Mt Wilson Fire Station with support from people from District Office in Katoomba. Our local brigade has quite a large team of support people. Station Officers, who keep the station operating, organising replacement crews and ensuring supplies and communications for crews in the field, will be able to learn a great deal from observing and assisting the people from District Office. Other support teams such as catering and community engagement will be part of the exercise.

Therefore on Sunday 18th September there will be a large number of fire trucks in our local community and a great deal of activity around the Mt Wilson Fire Station.

Sarah Howell and Graham Tribe

BRIGADE IN PROFILE

Name of Brigade: Mt Wilson/
Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade
– First Responder
Year brigade formed:
Current Captain: Beth Raines
Current President: David Howell
District: Blue Mountains



Can you give us a brief history of the brigade?

In its current incarnation, the brigade was formed after the fires of 1957 when the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine brigades combined. At that time the Mt Wilson station was established as headquarters for the brigade. Documents in our local Historic Society archives indicate that a brigade at Mt Wilson was originally formed in 1939.

What are some unique parts of your brigade's history?

The first fire truck at Mt Irvine was a blitz, and the second was a 1945 Studebaker with a water tank on it. The Studebaker was sold in 1992. It still goes and its hoses are all in working order, in fact it was sold on the condition that it would be made available for firefighting if required. After it left our brigade the Studebaker went on to have a successful movie career. You may have seen it repainted as a Darwin Fire Brigade vehicle in the movie *Australia!*

In 2007 the brigade volunteered to be the first rural fire brigade in the State to join the Community First Responder (CFR) Program - a joint initiative of the NSW RFS and the Ambulance Service of NSW. Seven members of the brigade were trained to provide immediate emergency medical assistance pending the arrival of paramedics. Approximately one third of all incident calls that the brigade responds to are medical emergencies. Previous to the CFR program starting call outs were split equally between fire calls and storm damage/ trees down.

What are some recent milestones the brigade has achieved?

In the late 1990s a new building replaced an old two door brick garage as our new brigade headquarters at Mt Wilson. Later this year the brigade is planning to expand the building to house a larger number of vehicles. The Mt Irvine station is a single door brick building in which it is increasingly difficult to house the larger vehicles. The brigade has plans to enlarge this building as well.

There is no mains water supply at Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine so securing a reliable source of water is always a priority. Thanks to the generosity of residents five 35,000 litre tanks have been placed at strategic locations throughout the two villages and an Emergency Management Australia Grant, received in 2006, allowed the construction of two 120,000 litre concrete tanks, one beside each station.

An observant and quick thinking member secured an unused communications tower (almost for free) for the brigade. Both the NSW RFS and Ambulance Service of NSW have installed equipment on the tower which is vital in providing better communications, especially for canyon rescues in the surrounding rugged terrain and the brigade station will be ready to act as a Div Com (Divisional Command) in major incidents. The brigade has also installed its own weather station and aims to have current weather details available on the brigade's website.

What type of area do you cover?

Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine are isolated villages in the upper Blue Mountains surrounded by the Blue Mountains World Heritage Wilderness. They are on the remains of old volcanoes and their rich basalt soil results in lush temperate rainforest vegetation, a complete contrast to the surrounding dry sclerophyll vegetation of sandstone country. Mt Wilson developed in the nineteenth century as a 'hill station' (it is at 1,000m and two hours drive from Sydney), a place for wealthy Sydneysiders to escape the summer heat. Today it is still a weekend retreat and famous



for its European style gardens. Mt Irvine at 800m is more rural in character and is famous for its walnut and chestnut trees.

What types of incidents does your brigade attend?

As most emergency services are some distance from our villages, our local brigade attends to a wide range of emergencies – bush fires, structural fires, motor vehicle accidents on Bell's Line of Road, search and rescues, storm damage and medical emergencies. We also provide assistance to other brigades and states and sent crews to assist Victorian firefighters during the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria.

What vehicles do you have?

One Cat 11 Pumper, one Cat 1, one twin cab Cat 7, one Cat 9 Landcruiser and one Personnel Carrier Hilux (fitted out as a Community First Responder vehicle).

What type of training do you conduct and how do you go about doing this?

As most of our members are weekenders, we conduct training on the first Sunday of each month. Several of our regular training days are

devoted to joint training with other brigades in our sector. Occasionally, extra training sessions are provided. In late 2010 we provided training for volunteers working as station officers during a major incident. There was also a two-day Remote Area Firefighting Team (RAFT) exercise in our area. Of the 30 or so in the Blue Mountains RAFT team members, three are from our brigade. Community First Responder training is held on the first Friday of every month with the assistance of paramedics from Lithgow Ambulance.

What are some unique skills and features of your brigade?

In villages where the population largely consists of professionals from nearby Sydney, there is no shortage of management and strategic skills; but with so many weekenders, finding a crew mid-week can sometimes be a challenge. We are lucky to have a highly energetic and committed captain in Beth Raines - the only female captain in the District. Her leadership skills and great personal charm have ensured strong support for the brigade



ABOVE: We are lucky to have a highly energetic and committed captain in Beth Raines - the only female captain in the District. TOP: Willy to Billy: Our largest fund raising event is a 34km bush run from Mt Wilson to Bilpin. ABOVE: Our catering team are renowned for their home made cakes, slices and scones!

in the community. Her abilities are recognised throughout the District and she recently travelled to Lord Howe Island as part of a team of four to provide training and support for the local rural fire brigade there.

Community engagement is considered an important part of preparing the community for bush fire emergencies. Street meetings were held throughout the two villages last year covering all streets to advise the residents on property protection. Street coordinators have been appointed throughout the two villages to act as an information source in the case of a bush fire, thereby freeing up phones at the station and allowing the captain and station officer to concentrate on crews and managing the incident. As the villages are isolated, properties are large and most residents are weekenders, members are kept up to date via email and through the brigade's website.

The beautiful World Heritage Wilderness that surrounds Mt Wilson attracts many canyoners and bushwalkers.

The terrain is rugged and some of the fitter members of the brigade have developed skills and knowledge to assist in the rescue of injured and lost parties. A local group of NSW RFS volunteers regularly explore different canyons in the Wollangambe to familiarise themselves with the area – all hard work of course! We have been told that the other emergency services enjoy coming to Mt Wilson, not only for the professional assistance they receive but also for the hospitality. Our catering team are renowned for their home made cakes and slices!

What are some unique features of your community?

Between the two villages there are approximately 250 residents, 70 percent of whom are weekenders. A large proportion of residents are retirees. Of the approximately 75 permanent residents, only 12 are under the age of 50.

The peak times for visitors are Spring and particularly Autumn when the colours of the trees are so spectacular and the walnuts and chestnuts are

ready for harvesting! Visitors at that time of year bring the population up to 500 on weekends. The World Heritage Wilderness around Mt Wilson attracts many bushwalkers, canyoners and campers. In the warmer months their numbers can peak on weekends at 200 per day. The villages are accessed from Bell's Line of Road, a busy, largely two-lane road from Sydney to Lithgow. NRMA has declared this road: 'currently one of the most dangerous in Australia'.

What community events does your brigade participate in?

Our largest fund raising event is a 34km bush run from Mt Wilson to Bilpin (in the neighbouring district of Hawkesbury). The run is organised jointly by the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine and Bilpin Brigades and is colloquially known as the "Willy to Billy". Over 350 runners registered for the event in 2010 and it is one of the most popular in the running calendar. The run is renowned for the beauty of the scenery and the rural hospitality and friendliness of

the volunteers at the start, at the drink stations along the way and the barbecue at the end. This year the start was delayed 30 minutes which gave some contestants, according to comments on running websites, the chance to score a 'personal best' in eating scones!

Any final thoughts or comments you would like to make?

The brigade receives strong support from the community but with an ageing and largely non-resident population, it is always a challenge putting a crew together. Nevertheless, a core group of about 20 very active members led by a very committed captain, means that we always manage to acquit ourselves well. We can always be relied upon to provide support to other brigades and emergency services in the mountains and further afield.

Written by Kathleen Oakes, District Administration Officer - NSW RFS Blue Mountains District and Volunteer, Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine Brigade
Photos by Kathleen Oakes

BRIGADE IN PROFILE



What is a Community First Responder

The Community First Responders provide a quick initial local response to Triple Zero (000) calls to Ambulance Service of NSW by providing initial emergency care before the ambulance arrives.

Another vital part of the First Responder's role is to meet the ambulance and escort it to the patient to ensure no time is wasted. They are able to locate and operate all equipment on an ambulance to assist the paramedics once they arrive.

In a medical emergency the immediate response should still be to call Triple Zero (000). At the same time as the call goes out to the ambulance, First Responders will be paged and can respond to the patient immediately.

The Community First Responder program was devised as a practical solution to the health needs of remote communities where an ambulance can take half an hour or more to attend a medical emergency.

Community First Responders are accredited and operate under Ambulance Service of NSW governance and training. NSW RFS volunteers respond under a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the Ambulance Service of NSW.

The Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine Brigade was well placed to provide NSW first batch of First Responders already having a defibrillators and two oxygen resuscitation units purchased with community donations.

Why did you decide to take up the CFR program at Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine?

Our isolation means that an ambulance can take up to 45 minutes to arrive. On top of that, most properties are identified by names not numbers and there are several dirt roads and long entrance driveways making it quite confusing for the ambulance service.

The decision to join the CFR program was crystallised when a resident fell and broke their

leg. The ambulance couldn't locate the property and while they eventually got directions from a local, the medical assistance was quite delayed.

Now, we can provide the first response for any medical emergency in the area and directing the ambulance has become part of the service.

How many of your brigade are involved in the CFR?

Seven brigade members are trained and regularly participate.

Did they have previous medical experience?

Six of the seven in the team had no medical experience and one person was trained as a nurse but had not practised for many years.

What kind of training is involved?

Community First Responders receive intensive training from Ambulance Service of NSW officers and from Charles Sturt University trainers.

Successful graduates are known as Honorary Ambulance Officer – First Responder and are trained in the skills required to sustain life until an ambulance arrives.

First Responders are qualified to administer CPR techniques and defibrillation in the case of heart attacks, and to administer specified medications. They are able to deal with diabetic emergencies, anaphylaxis (severe and life-threatening allergic reaction), and monitor vital signs until the arrival of qualified medical assistance.

Once the First Responders are certified, each person is supplied with a personal kit and the brigade also has a kit kept at the Mt Wilson Fire Station. NSW RFS provided a Personnel Carrier vehicle for transport and the Ambulance

ABOVE: In 2007 the brigade volunteered to be the first rural fire brigade in the State to join the Community First Responder Program - a joint initiative of the NSW RFS and the Ambulance Service of NSW

The Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Community website

The website continues to develop and is providing a great deal of information for the community. It is becoming an important source of information about our local area. There are now over 200 pages directly accessible through the menus, 108 newsletters and articles, and 182 photos in the photo gallery. It is becoming a large website with a great deal of community information which can be searched.

During the last month or so, information and photos were added to the website regarding the wind storms and our response, historic postcards of Mt Wilson, local birds, art in Mt Irvine, a 'Brigade in Profile' article in the RFS Bushfire Bulletin and the on-line publication of the Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine phone book.

Wind Storm. The wind storms occurred mainly on 5th and 6th July with the initial response being to provide a single lane route for road traffic, then to clear the roads followed by a huge effort to clear up all the debris and re-store power. This is detailed more fully in other segments of this newsletter.

Immediately after the emergency, visitors to the website and the pages visited both peaked as people looked for news and pictures of fallen trees and the damage which was done by the winds each day (see adjacent graph). This awareness of the website as a mechanism for immediate dissemination to a large number of people of the latest status is viewed as one of the major learnings out of the incident.

The **Latest News** menu has an article with many photos and links to other photos which have been supplied by several residents. The **Photo Gallery** has photos taken before and during the cleanup which show some of the spectacular incidents.

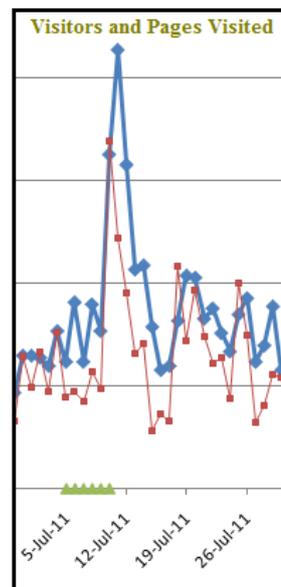
It is worth visiting the website to review these photos and to remind ourselves how lucky we were. Please go to the website and then **Latest News** on the top menu, and then the article about the storms and follow the links.

Brigade in Profile. Another big event in July was the recognition the local Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine RFB Brigade received through an article in the NSW RFS Bushfire Bulletin which goes to the 70,000 firefighters in NSW. We featured in a Brigade in Profile article. You can read this article in **Latest News** and follow the links; the article is also reprinted in full in this newsletter.

The article details the brigade and some of the volunteers who form the brigade. The brigade responds to '000' calls to the ambulance, to motor vehicle accidents, to search and rescue incidents and of course to major incidents such as bushfires and the recent storm damage.

Local Birds. We have been asked by a number of people to include a section on the website about local birds. A section has been added about local birds and it includes a description of each bird, technical information, a photo of each bird, and links to more detail about each bird. There is also a forum where local residents can add their information about birds they have seen or new species not already listed. To access the bird pages go to **Community Information > Birds seen in the Villages** and follow the links to either the details on birds or to the forum. There are about 90 local birds listed to help you identify which bird is which. One of the linked websites even has recordings of each bird's call. The list of birds has been supplied by a number of local residents including Diana Lauzi, Libby Raines, Ellis Reynolds, Michael Pembroke and others. We encourage interested residents to get involved and add to the information available.

A Village Forum has been added to the website which people can use to record information, sightings of birds or animals, or can be used want to record an event which might be of interest to others. You can get to the forum either through the bird pages or by logging in and using the menu item which appears in your User Menu when you login.



Usernames and passwords have been assigned to each resident and if we had your correct email address, you will have received an automated email from the website with these details. You can now login using the login panel on the Home page or using the **Members Area** menu item on the menu at the bottom of each page. So far, 251 residents have been assigned usernames and passwords. If you do not have your login details, then ask Tim Gow or Graham Tribe and we will get them to you.

Historic Postcards of Mt Wilson have been loaded onto the website and these comprise historic photos of Mt Wilson which are of great interest. They have been provided by the Blue Mountains Historical Society and there are many photos showing familiar areas as they were a century ago. To see these photos go to **Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society > Historic Postcards** and follow the links.

Art on the Mounts. A section listing the art by local artists, their galleries and how people might visit the galleries has been added to the website. This is for local residents and visitors to the villages. To see this section please go to **Things To Do > Have a look at local art ...** and follow the links. Currently the Ray & Kathy Harrington Gallery at Mt Irvine is shown, but others will be added over time.

An Oral History page has been added to the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society section of the website and on this page is a link to an audio recording of the opening of the Mt Wilson Turkish Bath Museum which was held on Saturday 17th September 1997. The guest speakers were Mrs Hazel Hawke, Ms Maggie Deahm and Miss Victoria Lynn. The occasion was hosted by Mr Raoul Wilson, Chairman of the Mount Wilson Historical Society. To get to this page, go to **Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society > Oral History** and follow the links.

The **2011 Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Telephone Book** has also been placed on line. Registered residents will have access to view the listings only after logging onto the site. To further protect privacy, and to restrict the unintended distribution of the directory, the Print, Email and PDF functionality of this page has been removed. Feedback about the on-line availability of the phone book has been very positive as it can be accessed from anywhere there is an Internet connection.

Additionally, John Cardy's Bushwalking Group monthly reports have been updated for 2011; visit **Bushwalking Group** and follow the links to either be reminded of the wonderful walks you have been on or understand what you have sadly missed. Either way, these are always beautifully written accounts of walks in our own backyard.

All of this activity has resulted in a sprawling menu structure. It is recognised that it may be difficult for users to easily find the page they are after, or to "surf" through the site (there are currently 161 menu items!). To help overcome this problem, a **Sitemap** has been installed—it is located at the bottom of the left hand menu column.

Click on **Sitemap** and a tree-like structure is displayed, reflecting all the web pages in a graphical form (a snapshot of a small section of the Sitemap is shown on the right).

Clicking on any of these pages will take you directly to the web page of your choice.

Have a look at the site map—there is an astounding range of content available.

Note that you will need to log-in to the site with your username to see all menu options; some—like the local telephone book—will not be visible to an unregistered visitor.

Graham Tribe

Sitemap

[Home](#)

[Information](#)

- [For the first time visitor](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Climate](#)
- [Maps](#)
- [History of the Villages](#)
- [Books about Mt Wilson](#)
- [Street Trees of Mt Wilson](#)
- [Photography](#)
- [Privacy](#)

[Things To Do](#)

- [Turkish Bath Museum](#)
- [St Georges Anglican Church](#)
- [Points of Interest](#)
- [Picnics](#)
- [Camping](#)
- [Have a look at local art ...](#)
- [Pick your own walnuts & chestnuts](#)

Meg Fromel Prints

Margaret (Meg) Gregson was born at Leura in 1927, the middle of three daughters of Edward and Margaret Gregson who were living at *Wyndham* when the girls were born. Meg's grandfather Jesse Gregson had come to Mt Wilson in 1878 and built *Yengo*, where two generations of the Gregson family lived until it was sold to Fred Mann in 1923. Meg and her sisters Helen and Troath enjoyed a happy, carefree childhood in Mt Wilson, learning about the bush, birds and animals and attending the small public school before going off to boarding school at MLC Burwood. Meg then worked in Sydney and studied art at East Sydney Technical College for a time before joining a bohemian art group and continuing with her painting and drawing.

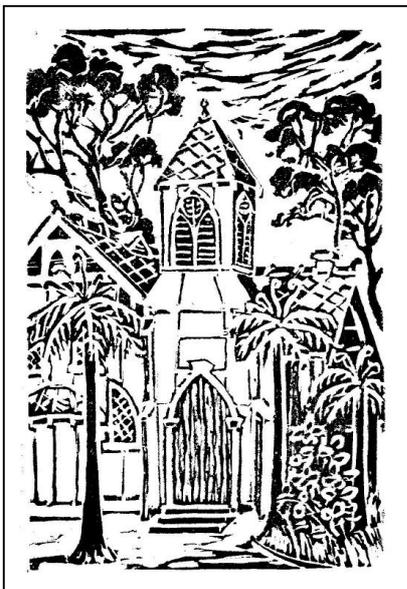
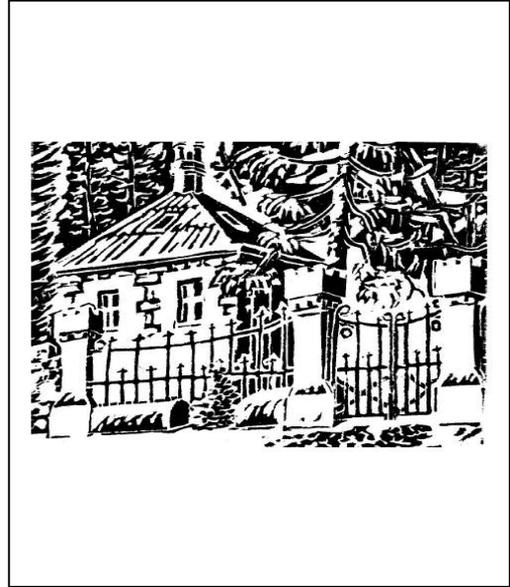
Meg married Chris Fromel in 1958 and they returned to Mt Wilson, building *Rimon* cottage on land purchased from Marjorie Sloan, of *Bebeah*. After Chris died in 1984 *Rimon* was sold and Meg lived for a few years at *Applecot*, in Wyndham Avenue. During her time in Mt Wilson Meg perfected her skill with lino cuts, creating many wonderful prints of familiar scenes along the Avenue, early houses, gates and vistas that are now to be available through the Historical Society.

In 1987 Meg moved to Killcare where her sister Helen Warliker was living nearby. Meg continued with her painting, and became an active member of the National Park Association, enjoying long walks, joining a local bird watching group and volunteering at the Bouddi National Park Visitors Centre.

Some years ago Meg presented the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society with the full set of her original linocuts from the 1960s. These linocut images capture scenes of the villages and homes of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine in a time capsule. Society member Nancy Fox has used Meg's familiar images in a new project for the Society. Prints have been made by graphic artist Roslyn Kean and have been reproduced as notecards. These can be purchased at \$3 each, or 6 for \$15, and are available at the Turkish Bath Museum or through the website www.mtwilson.com.au A4-sized prints are also available for \$40.00. Postage for both cards and prints is easily arranged.

Florence Smart





Clockwise from the top left hand corner:
The Avenue, Wynstay Lodge, the
Turkish Bath, St. George's Church and
Ferry Corner — snapshots of iconic
village scenes captured by Meg Fromel
50 years ago.

The Sefton Hall Gates are shown on the
previous page.

The full catalogue and ordering details
are published on the website in the Mt
Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society
section.

Village Hall Jottings

The Yulefest was a most enjoyable community event and lucky to be held just a few days before the villages were hit with such extreme and devastating winds. The Village Hall had a wonderful Christmas feel, thanks to Beth's decorations and the lovely pot plants on all the tables donated by Graham & Beverley.

Thanks go to Ron as MC, Tim for running the quiz, Beth, Moira, Milba, Julie, Helen, Margaret, Stephen, Kim and Graham for all their help in the kitchen. Thanks also to the Historical Society and Nancy for the wonderful 'Meg Fromel cards for raffle tickets' and everyone who donated goods for the raffle and Mib for the now traditional 'pudding auction'.

A highlight of the night for me was Alison Halliday's excited response when Kath Tucker announced she had made the highest bid for the 'Historic Horse ride' that Kath and Kathy Noble from the Comet Inn donated.

The night raised \$3,600, so a big thank you to everyone who came along and made the night such a success.

Judy Tribe

Calling all Patrick White aficionados

28th May 2012 is the centenary anniversary of Patrick White's birth date.

The Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Historical Society is planning an exhibition at the Turkish Bath to celebrate the occasion. Patrick White spent several years of his childhood at Mt Wilson; he was a frequent visitor to *Wynstay* for some time before his parents purchased *Withycombe*.

The exhibition is in the early planning stages and aims to explore the influence of Mt Wilson on his life and his work, and to highlight all written references to Mt Wilson. One unconfirmed, but tantalising, hypothesis is that the title of one of his books, *Night on Bald Mountain*, refers to Mt Wilson.

A small group is starting the process of defining the scope and shape of this exhibition. Anyone who has an interest in White, and his literature, is more than welcome to join. It is envisaged that some research work would be required; however, any skills relating to the staging of an exhibition are more than welcome.

The exhibition is scheduled to run at the Turkish Bath for 12 months from the anniversary date.

Willy to Billy Fun Run 2011

Saturday August 27th for a 10 am start at Silva Plana.

The 300 or so runners make their way along some of the most scenic trails in the Mountains, through Mount Irvine and down Bowen's Creek Road before that last hard slog up the other side to Bilpin. Hot showers and a barbeque await.

Helpers at the start and at drink stations at Mount Irvine are still needed for this event.

If you can help – just for two hours, please let me know.

Street Co-ordinators

The recent wind storms that literally shook the foundations of the villages brought us to a standstill – but not for long. Our resilience and self sufficiency was remarked upon – it was no easy task to keep houses warm and meals hot.

Those who could, lent a hand to others and kept an eye out for residents who needed extra assistance.

Many thanks go out to the RFS Street Co-ordinators who supported their neighbours and passed on information regarding properties, despite having much damage to clear in their own gardens.

Kim Gow

kimmgow@gmail.com

0403 171 174

Ask the Neighbours

This is the second edition of "Ask the Neighbours"...and they said we wouldn't last! To re-cap on our last (alright, our first) column... I posed some tricky questions about leeches. Ughh! Just saying that word is slimy. (Tim, you told me that writing about my leech phobia would help...well, it hasn't!) and, for you brave souls who don't mind a leech or two, I also asked some questions about what makes for good autumn colour.

You know the old saying that "quality is better than quantity"? Well, that certainly applies to the very thoughtful and, in one case, decidedly thought provoking, answers we received.

As to those leech (ughh! Can't help it. sorry) questions, we got three responses.

Yes, three – which, when you compare the readership of The Mounts Community Newsletter with that of, say, the Sydney Morning Herald, means we got a bigger proportionate response than Miranda Devine gets to a controversial column. Column 8: eat your heart out!

And what were these pearls of local wisdom you ask?

The ever knowledgeable Libby Raines advised:

"We have found with leeches that some cause a nasty reaction, maybe because they have been previously feeding on an animal like a wombat or wallaby or even a rat. However, with us, most don't affect us except for the itch especially for a few days after.

Some visitors to the garden have a lavender farm and they gave us some lavender oil which is very effective against the itch, especially if it can be applied quickly. I also used the creams listed below.

I do know that some people can have bad reactions to leech bites and I suggest (which they probably do anyway) to quickly apply an antiseptic cream like *Savlon* or *Bioactive Manuka Honey* or *Butesin Picrate* - and keep applying the cream regularly.

The leeches will drop off with salt but that does not really help Elizabeth's problem. I don't know what she uses on the bites but it would be worth experimenting with a few different creams and apply quickly and often."

Gee, thanks Libby. Although I'm very glad to know all this, the thought that a leech may have enjoyed a wombat as entrée before having me as a main course does not make me feel any better! But, thanks for the tip re the lavender oil. I will have some at the ready. I may itch but I'll smell pretty. Seriously, thank you for taking the time to share this part of your amazingly extensive store of knowledge.

Alison Halliday's offering shows that leeches are on more (and smarter) minds than mine. (see Tim, I have gotten through several sentences containing the word "leech" without "ughh-ing" once. The therapy is working!)

" I was listening to the garden show on ABC radio 702 on Saturday morning, 9 July, and I was delighted to hear an interview with the leech expert from the Museum in College Street, Sydney. He said that leeches are closely connected to worms, both have segmented bodies and both are hermaphrodites. They come in many sizes and the largest species are carnivores. They have jaws that are either 'Y' shaped or 'X' shape, with teeth. Both ends of the leech have a suction pad. After mating the leech lays an egg if s/he has taken on a female identity. These eggs lie in the leaf litter in the bush until hatching. They find their prey by detecting chemicals, and are quickly accustomed to finding the most profitable sites, congregating on paths where animals are likely to pass. He commented that they have a long and respectable history of medical use, now undergoing a resurgence. Today they are used when reattaching amputated fingers or toes where the leech is placed on the end of the reattached bit and the anti-coagulant that it puts into the site of the bite causes the blood to flow (and keep flowing) into the reattached bit.

The expert was asked how he removed them and he said he just

'pulled them off'! He added that there did seem to be one repellent that was effective, the active ingredient is commonly known as 'DEET'. He was given permission to name a combined insect repellent and skin protection cream, known as 'Avon'. He said that a bit of this put on the leech would cause it to drop off immediately."

Now I understand the source of my queasiness as far as leeches (ugggh! Sorry - relapse) are concerned. I am a lawyer, not a doctor. Hence, my inability to appreciate their therapeutic qualities AND my fear that someone will come up with a very funny "what's the difference between a leech and a lawyer?" joke.

No, dear Reader, that is not one of our questions for this edition's column.

And, a final word on the l.... question (I'm trying an avoidance technique now, Tim), comes from Peter Clymo. Peter writes:

"Dear Tim,

I like the idea of an "Ask the Neighbours" column.

I have some suggestions for Elizabeth Montano's plea for leech deterrent. Firstly, I *have* had success with *Aerogard* sprayed on socks & boot tops. However, my wife, Debra, found that while leeches can squeeze through the weave of socks they cannot penetrate the fine weave of stockings or tights. For us blokes, the choice is, wear stockings or endure the leeches?

Kind Regards

Peter Clymo"

Well, what can I say? Two things, actually. Firstly, thanks Peter – my first fan letter. And the second thing? Looks like it's stockings with a hint of eau de *Aerogard* all round. Just to ward off the leeches, mind you.

As Tim and I wouldn't want you to think that this is a column devoted to frivolity – although, one must ask what's the problem with that? – I also posed a series of "serious" questions last edition. As a long-time observer of autumn on the Mounts, I wondered What are the predictors of a "good autumn"? What determines how much the leaves colour? Do some species respond better to cold wet autumns than others? Conversely, do some like an "Indian summer" which goes on til May and then departs with a really cold snap? And, why do autumn leaves stay on the trees longer in some years than others?

Once again, Libby Raines came to the rescue with the following:

"We have found the leaves turn better if the season before it has been a good season and not too dry. The night temperatures should be cold - the colder the nights, the better they turn.

The wind is a factor of course and still days mean the leaves will hang on better. If it is very dry, the leaves often don't turn well and fall quickly.

On Mt Wilson, the soil factor is a big factor with some trees.

The *Acer Japonica* (maples) outside the Study Centre are in poor soil and turn very early with a very good red colour. The same variety trees in the Church grounds turn a little later, and have more oranges and yellow in the colour, and also are very good, but not as red.

The *liquidambers* on the Mount Irvine Road, and in the Cathedral Reserve, are growing in poor soil and colour extremely well, hanging onto their brilliant leaves for a long time. The *liquidambers* planted in good soil grow too quickly - they are very brittle and break in the wind and they do not colour very well. (A tree not to plant in good volcanic soil!) They are great on poor soil, growing slowly and well.

Certainly the *Elms* in the Avenue and Church Lane liked the damp conditions this autumn - they coloured beautifully and held onto their leaves well this year.

I think some other trees did not perform so well in the damp conditions.

The *Lindens*, some of the *Beeches* and some of the *Maples*, were not as good as they sometimes are.

None of this is scientific and is only based on observations over the years.

I don't know whether this is any help to Elizabeth or anyone else."

So, there you have it. I now know much more than I really wanted to about l....., and have a much better idea of why some autumns (and trees) result in more spectacular colour than others.

I hope you've found our Neighbours' generous answers as interesting as I did.

I was hoping to receive an avalanche, or at least a trickle, of questions from you, dear Readers for this edition. But, I suspect you've all been a little busy in recent weeks. So, here are this edition's questions.

Like everyone else, we've been counting the cost of the big winds. We've lost a few lovely trees and, frustratingly, had some trees damaged by other falling trees. So, without going into particular species (unless someone really wants to), are there some guiding principles as to when a tree will re-grow lost branches or tops? Do some families of trees survive damage better? And as for shrubs, I have personal experience with camellias which have survived over-enthusiastic "whipper-snipping", only to grow amazingly well. We also have rhododendrons which have survived to tell the tale of their encounters with hit and run drivers. But what other common Mounts' species should our readers be reassured will recover from the damage they received in the recent winds? Our family was lucky enough not to have to endure four days without electricity. But, I wonder what "survival tips" and clever ideas those people who did rough it that week may have for us? And on a decidedly different note, failing building an island in our dam, how can we attract ducks to it? We have had families of ducks raise their young in our dam paddock over the years, but haven't had any this year. Have they found more salubrious dams to hang about on?

And there it is, another "Ask the Neighbours" column. Once again, Tim and I welcome any and all feedback – if it's a complaint, address it to Tim. If it's a fan letter accompanied by, say, chocolates or a nice little bottle of red wine, then you know to send it to me (I can be trusted to share, really I can). Failing chocolates or red wine, a few juicy questions to "ask the neighbours" would also be most welcome!

Elizabeth Montano

Community Calendar

August	Fri 19th Bushwalking Group – Kanangra Walls	Sat 27th Willy To Billy Bush Run Race starts at 10.00am	September	Sun 4th 9.00am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed
Fri 9th 9.00am Bush Care— Sloane Reserve	Sun 11th 3.00pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Fri 16th Bushwalking Group – Coxes River	Sat 17th 5.30pm Mt Wilson Progress Association AGM	Sun 18th 7.00am RFS West Sector Combined Exercise
October	Sun 2nd 9.00am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Sun 9th 3.00pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Fri 14th 9.00am Bush Care— Sloane Reserve	Fri 21st Bushwalking Group – Asgard Swamp

Suggestions, comments or contributions warmly welcomed!