



The Mounts

The Community Newsletter of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine



December 2015

Welcome

Well, yet another year has come and almost gone. I'm not exactly sure where that went, but I suspect I am not the only person to wonder about that.

I think it is fair to say that it has been a year of solid year of achievement for the Mounts.

Great news has been gratefully received about the long over-due upgrades to both the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Village Halls.

The Autumn Festival and Spring Art Festival both proved to be events that generated invaluable funds for village and local RFS brigade improvements as well as being a celebration of all that is good about our small part of the world. It would not of course been possible without truly heroic efforts from a wide cross-section of the community. Valuable lessons have been learnt with fine tuning and refinements being applied by the two separate organizing groups that will undoubtedly serve well for future events.

The villages are of course looking forward to improved mobile telecommunications with the June announcement of the construction of a new mobile tower at Mt Tomah. Even some small green shoots have been visible in the long-running saga of the restoration of the Mt Irvine to Bilpin fire trail.

Thanks again to all who have so enthusiastically contributed to this newsletter in 2015 and to those in the community who have proffered suggestions and feedback.

Wishing all a very Happy Christmas and a fulfilling New Year.

Tim Gow Tel. 0412 133 559

e-mail: timsgow@gmail.com

Community Calendar

December	Sun 6th 9.00 am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Fri 11th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Wynne Reserve	Sun 13th 3.00 pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Fri 18th Bushwalking Group— Dargan Arch & Xmas lunch!
Sun 20th 7.00 pm Mt Wilson Church - Carol Service	January	Sun 3rd 9.00 am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Fri 8th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Wynne Reserve	Sun 10th 3.00 pm Mt Wilson Church Service
Fri 15th Bushwalking Group— Mt Wilson Ramble	February	Sun 7th 9.00 am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Fri 12th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Cathedral Reserve	Sun 14th 3.00 pm Mt Wilson Church Service

Village Hall Jottings

Our Melbourne Cup Lunch was lots of fun, especially with Michelle Payne's wonderful victory and no-nonsense speech. Thanks to everyone who came and to the helpers who made it such a success.

As you will all probably have noticed, the renovations have finally started at the Mt Wilson Village Hall. These are the long awaited (since 2002) - new toilets, storeroom, opening up of the foyer with a bay window and moving the front door to align with the path.

BMCC has appointed a contractor to do the work and his estimated time for completion is late February 2016.

Sadly the old doors, which are very solid and made from lovely timber, cannot be used for the new entrance as the standards have changed. If anyone would like the doors please let me know.

Judy Tribe

2015 Spring Art Festival - Cafe thank you

Hey !! You know who you are !!

Thank you, thank you

*To all the bakers, baristas, cashiers, lime growers,
Pie warmers, sandwich makers & sassy sales folk !*

*We couldn't have run the café and stall without
YOU & YOUR EFFORTS!*

See you next year

Lesley Wilson

MOUNT WILSON PROGRESS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE NEWS

Western Sydney Airport

Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine will be affected by the flight paths proposed in the environmental impact statement for the new Western Sydney Airport recently released by the federal government. Aircraft arrival plans for the airport were in sharp focus at the Committee's last meeting of the year on 13 November. Details of where to find out about the EIS and how to lodge an objection submission are at page 8.

Sign of progress on the Bilpin to Mount Irvine fire trail

There was a small sign of progress following the community letter writing campaign outlined in the August edition of *The Mounts* for the development of a fire trail for emergency vehicle use between Bilpin and Mount Irvine. The Hawkesbury City Council in November put in writing that it is "continuing discussions with Blue Mountains City Council to carry out the necessary steps to enable the route to be formally classified as a fire trail, to enable grant funding to be sought." Blue Mountains City Council passed a resolution in October to reach out to and work with HCC to make a joint bid for state and federal funding for the necessary repairs to have the route made into a fire trail. Maybe the wheels have started to turn, albeit slowly. The Premier, Mike Baird, and the senior ministers responsible for finance, roads and emergency services have all been alerted by MWPA and community members to the vital importance for safe access to our villages and to remove the "one way in, one way out" disaster hazard faced by residents and visitors in the event of bushfire or other potential natural calamities.

Disappointing response from Endeavour Energy on street trees

Endeavour Energy senior management wrote to MWPA in October confirming the electricity supplier will not consider undergrounding or placing its power lines bundled overhead to protect the avenue of golden elm and copper beech trees in Mt Irvine Road. Libby Raines put in many hours surveying, drawing plans of the current and an alternative power line route and writing information for the Endeavour submission. The utility essentially says it has to comply with regulations and safety standards in lopping the trees. We copied all the relevant federal and state politicians, BMCC councillors and management, the electricity authority chairman and Endeavour senior management with our proposal for a half-way, lower cost solution to undergrounding – bundled cables. The only solution suggested again by Endeavour is that the community engage a private electrical contractor to do the work at the community's own expense. We will obtain an indicative cost from a contractor as the next step.

Coal waste discharge into the Wollangambe River

A spill of coal waste and salty water from the Clarence colliery near Lithgow into the Wollangambe River is believed to have been caused by the collapse of a coal waste dump on 2 July. "The cause of the incident is still being investigated but the Environmental Protection Agency is obviously very concerned about any impacts on the Wollangambe River, which runs into the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area approximately two kilometres downstream of the mine," EPA South director Gary Whytcross said in a media release at the time of the spill. "This is a very sensitive environment." The Committee will investigate the current situation and consider whether there could be any useful role for the MWPA advocating for steps to best maintain the water quality of the river that flows below the village.

Blue Mountains Planning Changes

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is opposing the removal of environmental and heritage provisions that currently protect the Blue Mountains towns, villages and the World Heritage National Parks with a state government "one-size-fits-all" local environmental plan. Information about the plan and an alternative plan supported by BMCC and the Society is available at <http://www.bluemountains.org.au/aboutus.shtml#>.

Public toilets in Mount Wilson

Increasing visitor numbers to Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine, especially in autumn, highlight the very poor provision there is for public toilets here. Two toilets were removed from Cathedral Reserve this year and not replaced. The toilets, their construction, maintenance and cleanliness is the responsibility of BMCC. The limited and inadequately cleaned facilities are not enough to prevent dreadful messes being left nearby in the bush together with dirty tissues. At the fire station during this year's Autumn Festival, volunteers had to regularly clean the two toilets messed by visitors unfamiliar with how to use them properly. In a submission to council last month asking for wholesale improvements and additions to the existing facilities we included these pictures.



Above: A sign recommended for Mount Wilson public toilets and the Silva Plana flush toilets with one door locked, no wheelchair access and a shabby, temporary appearance.

Caring for our beautiful avenues of street trees

As you are probably aware the MWPA is responsible for the planting, pruning and general maintenance of the trees in the streets and avenues of Mt Wilson. These trees form one of the striking features of our mountain landscape and are visited by thousands of people every year.

As part of what arborists term formative pruning, the younger trees require "lifting" so that they grow tall and straight, leaving the necessary headroom for people to walk under them when mature. This pruning is done once a year and we are very fortunate to have trained horticulturist Micah Baker (pictured right) doing this work and keeping a watchful eye on the trees. You may well see him working around the mountain so please talk to him or to any committee member of the MWPA if you have any concerns about our trees.



Young trees are also protected by stakes or trees guards and are fed once a year in late winter.

The mature trees do not really benefit from mulching but they do need to be protected from root compaction due to car parking; this is done in the busiest areas using log barriers.

The suckers at the base of some of the older trees are also removed on an annual basis, as well as any dangerous or weakened branches. Some of the smaller street trees such as the maples

outside the school house are fed annually.

Traditionally, avenues have no planting other than the existing trees, and grass where it will grow. Obviously as the trees reach maturity they create a shady canopy which means that the grass may be sparse. The grass is mowed occasionally and not too short. Grass growth is also stunted by invading weeds such as ivy and jasmine, both of which can weaken and ultimately kill even large trees.

Unfortunately there is little room left on suitable verges to plant more trees, and we are in ongoing talks with the electricity supplier to try to reduce the damage to existing trees by over-enthusiastic pruning. We hope that one day all the electricity wires will be bundled as they already are in many places.

Signage restored

Committee member Peter Laving arranged for a contractor to take away, clean up, re-paint and replace the wooden street signs about the village.

At Silva Plana the sign has been changed to encourage visitors to use the ground as a picnic area as well as a sports field, and to take pressure of Cathedral Reserve and its toilets.

Peter also organised for the Reserve's big stony centre bare patch to be covered with many tonnes of soil and seeded. Battering the roadside edges on The Avenue outside *Breenhold* will make mowing possible, smartening up the area. And have a look at Silva Plana – Peter Raines's new mower is making the ground look better than ever.



Cotswold seat – a grant from Toyota

Settled quietly a little higher and back from the Mount Wilson War Memorial is a new Cotswold seat made possible by Keith Ralston of *Coolangatta* who works with Toyota. Keith applied successfully for a Toyota community grant that has allowed us to buy the seat. With at-cost-work a builder, Brett Moon who has done work for Ted Griffin, poured the concrete slab and had the seat permanently welded in place.



Mount Wilson & Mount Irvine Contractors and Suppliers

There are now eight pages updated on the Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine website with names recommended by members of the community along with contact details of contractors and suppliers willing to come to the villages. Please contact our secretary, Sue Woolfenden on 4756 2046 if you would like to have a copy of the list and are unable to access <http://www.mtwilson.com.au/index.php/community-information/recommended-contractors.html>. To access the list it is necessary to be a MWPA member and use your login password.

2016 General Meeting

The MWPA General Meeting will be held on 7 May next year rather than at the usual time in late March. What with the end of the construction work on the hall due in February, Easter Saturday on 26 March and the Autumn Festival on 16 April, the change will reduce demands on people's times earlier in the year.

Christmas party

Carols, choirs and community singing brought the sound of Christmas to the Mount Wilson fire shed last Saturday as Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine people got together for a first and wonderful night in the new location.



The fire shed was a great alternative to the village hall which is currently inaccessible as construction progresses on the new facilities there. The choirs were mixed, changing, admittedly small, but full of enthusiasm and strong voice as the members looked over each other's shoulders to read the one page of words. Diana Landsberg played the electronic piano with great aplomb. There was no screen with the words as there has been in the hall meaning loud singing by the more that 60 present for the familiar carol and Christmas verses then quiet reliance in the cavernous shed on the little choirs to hear the un-memorised lines.

The abundance of fine food from a side of smoked salmon to an extraordinary range of plates brought along with delectables of cold and hot canapes and good wines made for a truly fun night. Many commented that the way the night went with much mingling and catching up the fire shed is an excellent venue for the annual party.

Have ideas or comments for the Committee?

Committee members are always pleased to receive input on how the Progress Association can help maintain and improve Mount Wilson. Please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Richard Beattie, President

landrbeattie@bigpond.com

0400 190 909 or 9252 6440 or 4756 2070

Alison Halliday, Vice President

alisonhalliday@gmail.com

9389 1848 or 4756 2060

Libby Raines, Treasurer

merry.garth@gmail.com

4756 2121

Sue Woolfenden, Secretary

secretarymwpa@gmail.com

4756 2046 or 0435 359 628

Lorraine Barrett

lorrainebarrett@bigpond.com

9362 8874 or 4756 2018 or 0447 647 748

Nancy Fox

nancyfox@gmail.com

9960 2969 or 4756 2106 or 0411 251 743

Ted Griffin

tedgriff@bigpond.net.au

9300 6628 or 4756 2102 or 0417 088 879

Peter Laving

peter.laving@kumahira.com.au

4756 2004 or 9904 9344 or 0425 263 503

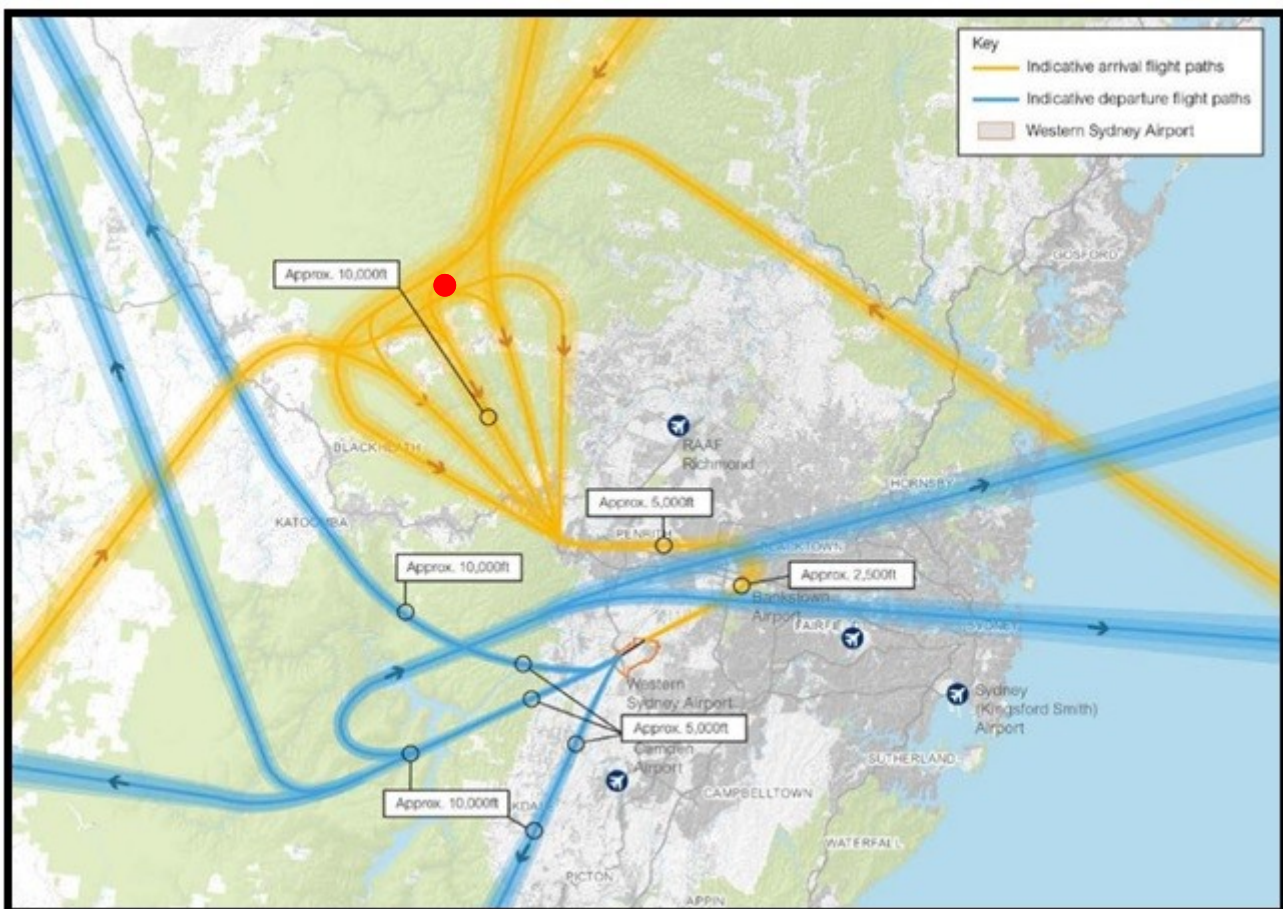
New Members

All property owners, their children 18 years and older, residents and former owners with five years residency or more are eligible to join or continue membership of the Association.

Please contact Secretary Sue Woolfenden as above if you are not members and wish to join. The more members we have the better we can represent the community.

Richard Beattie

Proposed Western Sydney Airport flight paths over the Blue Mountains



The two maps provided by Airservices Australia show indicative flight paths for Western Sydney Airport with the approximate position of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine marked with a red dot.

Yellow lines mark the arrival and blue lines show the departure flight paths when the landings are from the south-west and take-offs are to the north-east.

Although these paths are referred to as 05 Mode (first map), the EIS states that the operating mode (05 or 23 – the second map) will be determined by the prevailing wind conditions. Mode 23 is for when aircraft are landing from the north-east and taking-off to the south-west.

The federal government corporation Airservices Australia recently released indicative flight paths for aircraft landing at the new Western Sydney Airport to be built at Badgerys Creek. The arrival flight paths are over the Blue Mountains and if confirmed then in the years ahead there will be a constant stream of jet aircraft over Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine at the height of about 10,000 feet. (This is too high to be officially a noise affected area despite what will be the constant 24-hours-a-day sound of aircraft above the villages and throughout what are now quiet wilderness valleys.)

"Airservices Australia assessed airspace implications and air traffic management approaches for Sydney region airspace associated with the proposed Western Sydney Airport (WSA)," the government's environmental impact statement says. "Airservices Australia's analysis indicates that there are no apparent physical impediments that would prevent safe and efficient operations for aircraft arriving at or departing from the proposed airport. On the basis of this analysis, Airservices Australia developed indicative flight paths to inform this draft EIS."

Immediately on learning of the release of the EIS, the Mount Wilson Progress Association wrote to the general manager of the Blue Mountains City Council: "We are concerned about the potential for noise disruption to our community and the effect the proposed plans will have on the whole of the Blue Mountains . . . it would appear appropriate for an expert whole of Blue Mountains submission be made. Council might be the best entity to take up this idea . . . once a submission is available [it would be good] to have as many residents as possible write individually supporting a less intrusive development over the mountains." Submissions must be sent in by 18 December.

BMCC joined with other western Sydney councils to commission an expert report to assist with its submission to Airservices Australia. BMCC has long opposed the development of Badgerys Creek as the second Sydney airport. However, there is now bipartisan state and federal government support for the airport.

BMCC Mayor Mark Greenhill said on 26 November following the release of the expert report council remains strongly opposed to the impacts on the City of Blue Mountains including "excessive, intrusive noise for residents 24/7, air pollution and emissions affecting public health, loss of the tourism economy, the threat to the World Heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains National Park, and the danger to Sydney's drinking water catchment."

An extraordinary meeting of the council on the WSA issue will be held on 15 December at 7.30pm at the Springwood Community Hub to consider the BMCC submission on the draft EIS. The community is being strongly urged to attend. The draft of the council's submission to Airservices with information from the expert consultant should be available a week before the meeting on council's website:

<http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/yourcouncil/councilmeetings/2015meetings>

The Mount Wilson Progress Association will be putting in a submission during the week before the 18 December deadline. Many individual submissions are the most effective way of achieving policy change.

Among the issues for our communities are:

- Aircraft arrivals and departures should not despoil the quiet and solitude of the UNESCO World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park
- Should there be changes to the proposed flight paths, the much noisier departures should not be directed over the Blue Mountains
- There should be a curfew as enjoyed by Sydney residents.
- No 747s or similarly old aircraft be allowed to use WSA.
- Only modern aircraft without fuel dumping technology be allowed to use WSA.
- Only aircraft manufactured after a certain date, i.e. with the quietest engines, be allowed to use WSA.

The map showing the location of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine and information about the EIS flight paths is available at page 235 at http://westernsydneyairport.gov.au/resources/deis/index.aspx#anc_toc

Information about making a submission that must be in by 18 December is available at:

<http://westernsydneyairport.gov.au/resources/deis/submissions.aspx>

Email submissions to: WSAsubmission@infrastructure.gov.au

Mail submissions to: Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Western Sydney Airport Submission, Western Sydney Unit, GPO Box 594, Canberra ACT 2601.

The Expert Report comments on aircraft noise in the Airservices Australia EIS

The EIS has the following table including the airport busy hour aircraft arrivals and departures ranging from 21 in the early stage to 85 long term – a very busy airport.

Table 3.2 Summary of activity forecasts

	Stage 1 (c. 2030)	First runway at capacity (c.2050)	Long-term (c.2063)
Annual passengers (arrivals and departures)	10 Million Annual Passengers (MAP)	37 MAP	82 MAP
Busy hour passengers (international and domestic)	3,300	9,500,	18,700
Total annual aircraft traffic movements (ATM) (passenger and freight)	63,000	185,000	370,000
Total busy hour ATM	21	49	85

Source: Commonwealth of Australia (2015) Draft Airport Plan

The expert report states the EIS makes clear that the flight paths presented in the EIS were determined based solely on operational and aviation safety considerations, and that minimising noise impacts was not a consideration in establishing the flight paths presented (other than the fact that the proposed flight paths were then subject to noise impact assessment).

"Specific issues associated with the uncertainties around flight paths . . . include location of the merge point at Blaxland," the report says. "Currently Blue Mountains City Council and Penrith City Council are very affected by aircraft noise associated with this merge point, however, this is also only indicative. Lack of consideration of alternative flight paths including greater consideration of Kingsford Smith, Camden, Richmond and Bankstown airports. In particular it is thought that the impacts on Bankstown airport have not been fully addressed. The draft EIS lacks sufficient detail in airspace architecture including a detailed description as to what the underlying principles were, how it was developed and any alternatives which were considered. The draft EIS did not look at any scenarios beyond the normal/scheduled operation of the airport such as queuing in the event of unscheduled interruption. Further analysis of the proposed fleet mix is required. It is not considered suitable to adopt the fleet mix used from Kingsford Smith Airport and that further analysis of the preferred fleet mix at the Western Sydney Airport should be undertaken. A detailed discussion to determine whether a curfew is required. We recognise that this is a substantial political issue, we sought to investigate the level of night time impacts that might provide a clear basis for the need or otherwise for a curfew. Based on current information, there is not enough information to determine if a curfew is required (from the perspective of compliance with noise standards for sleep disturbance) or not.

"The draft EIS presents information to evaluate the potential impacts of aircraft operations on the acoustic amenity of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA). The assessment indicates the potential for a large number of audible aircraft events within the GBMWhA. The preservation of quiet areas and tranquil landscapes has been a topical subject of research and policy consideration in Europe and the US. For example [there has been] research and US legislation (National Parks Overflight Act of 1987) concerning the effects of aviation noise on parks, open space and wilderness areas. [However there is no] definitive guidance on assessment techniques, but [reports] highlight the complexity and importance of assessing aircraft overflight noise in sensitive wilderness areas. While the noise levels in the draft EIS are predicted to be relatively low (below 50–55 dB LAmax [sound level]), aircraft over flights would be expected to be audible and represent a significant and widespread impact for a World Heritage Area where natural soundscapes are likely to be a valued feature of the areas amenity. The complexities and sensitivities of this area warrant further consideration in the draft EIS. Specifically, the assertion within the draft EIS chapter concerning the GBMWhA that noise levels below 50 and 55 dB LAmax are 'not significant' is not considered to have been sufficiently justified, and the assessment may therefore not adequately reflect the potential impact to the values of tranquillity within the World Heritage Area."

Under the heading "Mitigation measures and residual noise impacts", the expert report says "The draft EIS noise modelling is based on an indicative proof-of-concept air traffic management design which does not present a comprehensive airspace and final air route design. Given the uncertainties concerning the final form of the airspace design, the final form of noise mitigation measures to be implemented is not yet known. Accordingly, the mitigation measures that have been referred to in the aircraft noise assessment are generic in nature."

The expert report prepared by the consultants WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff is available at

<http://www.clearbluesky.info/#!eis-info/r3oq3>

Richard Beattie

Mount Wilson Remembrance Day 2015



**They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning
We will remember them.**

Under overcast sky and threatening rain the 2015 Remembrance Day service held at Mount Wilson was a particularly special day for the families of Mervyn Owen Wynne and Colin Smith whose names appear engraved on the War Memorial.

Irene Wynne from a farming property at Bingara, near Inverell, drove with family members to attend the service and deliver an address in the Village Hall about her father-in-law. Irene married Mike Wynne, the second son of Merv and Lesley Wynne. Lesley Wynne and members of her family attended the service and talks.

Merv grew up at *Wynstay* with his brother Ron and sister Jane and Irene told the story to a full hall of Merv's young life, enrolment in the Army in 1943, discharge in 1946 and subsequent years on the land. He died in 2008 and his ashes lie in the Mount Wilson churchyard.

Alison Halliday, as she has for a number of years following in the footsteps of the late Arthur Delbridge, worked with Irene who wrote the account of Merv's life's experiences. Alison also did extraordinary research on a name on the War Memorial, C. Smith, whose connection with Mount Wilson was not now known to anyone locally and presented a formidable task – there were more than 8,000 "Smiths" in the Australian forces in World War II and no indication of whether he or she had been in the Army, Navy or Air Force.

Deep research uncovered Colin Smith who served as an airman and had spent happy time at Mount Wilson. Colin Smith's nephew – Colin – and his sister, Robyn, and other members of the family attended the service and talks too.

The addresses delivered by Irene and Alison will be published next year in the *Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine Historical Society Newsletter*.

The memorial service, his first at Mount Wilson, was conducted by the rector of St George's Church, the Rev Tim McIver.

Marilyn Laving, Jane Mayne, Beverley Thompson, Libby Raines, Diana Landsberg, Michael Sweeney and Anne Piggott were the members of the choir. Their singing drew the attention of a young satin bower bird that wandered out of the bush to join in the chorus with its two-note whistle, hissing, buzzing mimicry before quietening when it found a bite to eat.



War Memorial Alterations

The history of people whose names are on the Mt Wilson War Memorial has now been part of 11th November Remembrance Day for some time. While doing the research some errors of what is written have been found. Some of these cannot be altered but some can.

This year we happened to find an error for both the service men who we talked about. Merv Wynne's name has the initial 'C' instead of an 'O' for Owen, and C Smith was killed in action but his asterisk has never been gilded.

I had felt rather dubious about altering what is a historical monument but then I spoke to historians, people in the RSL and an archivist/curator at the War Memorial in Canberra. This last person said that when an error in the list of names is pointed out to them, and proved, they take down the plaque and re-cast a new and correct version. So please let me know what you think about amending our War Memorial.

Alison Halliday

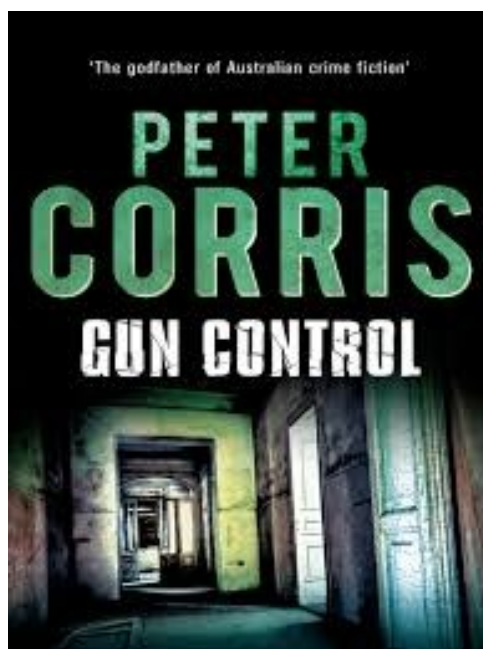
Book Review

Cliff Hardy returns in Peter Corris's *Gun Control*. Hardy is older and slower physically but his wits are still sharp and he is prepared to play with dangerous men and women in order to get at the truth.

The truth is kept close to everyone's chest with deception and duplicity surrounding all the action – and there is plenty of that. Nothing is what, or who, it seems in this bleak view of the corruption in a big city. The bikies are not all bad and the cops are not all good.

Weaving between them is Hardy trying to find who killed the son of his client; and Hardy does not quite trust him either.

This new adventure for Hardy is rather more bloody than some and there are plenty of guns to be found, often in the wrong hands at the wrong time. However Corris has a tight hand on quality control and there are lots of the usual twists and turns, all set in the underbelly of beautiful Sydney.



Alison Halliday

Mt Wilson Autumn Festival - April 16, 2016

We have already kicked off the planning for the next year's Autumn Festival and look forward to seeing you all there.

This year we will have 10 gardens open - with some surprises that have not been open for years as well as the traditional favourites.

The markets will also be open with cool mountain nurseries, garden goods and local artisans. More details to follow.

For information and market stall enquiries, please call Nancy Fox on 0411 251 743.

Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade

Spring Art Festival

Once again, our Spring Art Festival was extremely enjoyable (the photographs, art works, jewellery, gardens, talks, walks and food) and very profitable. We raised just over \$12,000 for the brigade. A special mention should go to our inspirational opening night speaker, Caitlin Hughes, who in spite of losing everything - home, business, artworks, children's toys - in the 2013 bushfires remains upbeat and, through the gift of her art, has been able to move on and take new paths in her work.

There are so many others who also need to be thanked for their contribution and I hope I have remembered you all:

- Bev & Phil Woodman plus Judy Tribe for their organization of the event
- Tony and Lorraine Barrett, Keith and Libby Raines, James and Annemie Stein and Graham and Beverley Thompson for opening their beautiful gardens. 28% of our profit was raised by them!
- Lesley Wilson & the catering team
- Linda Raines who set us up on Facebook and Trybooking
- The volunteers who manned stalls and garden gates
- Susie Hope and Graham Tribe for handling the finances
- Gary Hayes, Elisabeth and Tom Karplus and Di and Ian English for their fascinating and very practical photography hints and bird walk

Next year's 'Spring Art & Garden Festival' (new name!) will be held on September 24 & 25 with lots of new ideas. Lock in the date!

Research

After the 2013 fires ('Red October') several Mt Wilson residents along with residents from Bilpin and the Southern Highlands were interviewed and surveyed concerning their bushfire experiences. Another paper based on those interviews has been published recently looking not at the usual topic of staying and defending or evacuating, but rather at residents attempting to return home to rescue or defend property, pets and loved ones as the fire threatened.

Official bushfire planning advice and indeed the planning, if any, that most residents consider for bushfire survival relies on the entire household being at home when bushfire is imminent. However, over half the respondents advised that they were either absent or only some of the family was home or, even if they were absent, pets or stock were still at home. Residents thought they would be able to return home easily and were surprised at the speed of the fire and the presence of roadblocks which meant that many attempted to return home via unofficial back roads.

The reasons for returning home included the need to make 'last-minute-tune-ups' to properties, to grab valuable and important items before evacuating (often not yet packed or even decided upon), to join family members (usually wives and children) in property protection and to rescue pets and stock. The latter could often only be achieved with the assistance of neighbours. There is obviously some confusion on paper and in practice over what constitutes being 'well prepared' for bushfire. Practical household preparation tasks need to be completed on a regular basis, checklists of jobs to be done and items to be packed need to be compiled in advance of the bushfire season and on days of high fire danger it makes sense to take with you, if you will be absent, any precious belongings and important documents. Bushfire survival plans need to be discussed with all family members, friends and neighbours (especially if you have pets or stock) and all possible scenarios considered.

Official advice will always recommend against 'unnecessary travel' (recent deaths in cars in fires in Western Australia and South Australia sadly confirm this).

Residents need to understand the likely benefits and costs associated with attempting to get home in uncertain and dangerous conditions and create contingency plans for the possibility of being absent, having the family split or pets and stock left on their own.

Start a Conversation.....Are You Qualified to Live in Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine?

Professor David Bowman, Environmental Change Biology, University of Tasmania, has commented recently on the under preparedness of Australians for bushfire. There are two key concepts in bushfire survival planning:

- creating a defensible space around a house so it can survive a bushfire
- deciding on a well thought-through trigger as to when you should leave an area because of bushfire threat.

Professor Bowman considers many homes have a grossly inadequate defensible space and (especially older homes) lack features to prevent embers entering the building and have inadequate water supplies. The level of preparation of homes also influences the trigger for people to evacuate their homes. Under Catastrophic fire conditions all residents in fire prone areas are advised to leave hours before any threat. Even under less dangerous fire ratings (Extreme, Severe and Very High) the decision whether to stay or leave will depend on the mental and physical capacities of residents and how well their properties are prepared. Residents will also require situational awareness using a wide variety of information (websites, media) and cues (smell of smoke, strong winds, high temperatures) as the unpredictability of bushfires and their potentially rapid escalation means that official warnings may not be provided or provided when it is too dangerous to leave. Residents need to make their own informed decisions about when it is safe to leave.

Nonetheless, Professor Bowman considers that there is a disconnect between official advice and bushfire preparations by residents possibly due to a combination of time pressure, economic costs, misjudging the threat, and a naïve belief it will work out.

Professor Bowman suggests that one solution may be to introduce training for people living in bushfire-prone areas to help them work through the decision-making process inherent in prepare-act-survive policies. Ultimately, if bushfire weather conditions continue to deteriorate under climate change, he considers ***it may be necessary to introduce licenses for people living in fire-prone landscapes, much as we do for people driving cars!***

If you had to have a license to live in Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine, would that make it more onerous or more exclusive to live here? If you had to have a license to live in Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine, would you qualify?

Kathleen Oakes
Community Engagement Officer

Mt Irvine to Bilpin Bowens Creek Fire Trail

Since the last newsletter, we have had some progress in our campaign to have the route between Bowens Creek and Bilpin restored as a fire trail:

- Blue Mountains City Council (which owns Bowens Creek Rd down to Bowens Creek) has passed a Resolution to work with Hawkesbury City Council (which jointly owns the Bridge over Bowens Creek with BMCC and owns the route from there up to Bells Line of Rd at Bilpin) to make a joint bid to the State and then onto the federal Governments for funding to restore the route as a fire trail. We've had support from local Councillors and the Mayor in the past (for which we're grateful) and the road down to Bowens Creek has been maintained by BMCC (for which we are also grateful!). However, this is a significant development which formally commits BMCC to engage with HCC.
- Community letters have been written to all relevant MPs and Councillors. So far, we've had a mixed response from recipients with some responding that this is a "roads issue" (it isn't – it's about emergency services access) and referring the letters onto the Minister for Roads whilst others have assured us that the issue is being looked into!
- You may have seen posters around the place asking visitors to write too.
- Our friends at the Bilpin Newsletter have run articles in their November and December editions giving information about the issue and asking the people of Bilpin, Berambing and Mountain Lagoon to write to HCC, their State MP (Minister Perrottet who also happens to be the Finance Minister), Hawkesbury RF District and others to demonstrate that this is important to the people of the Hawkesbury too.
- We've been working with Brigades in the Hawkesbury area encouraging them to make their submissions to their RF District and HCC and providing them with material they can use in their submissions.
- Representing the Mt Wilson/Mount Irvine RF Brigade, David Howell and I will be making a presentation to the Blue Mountains Bush Fire Management Committee on 17 December to continue our efforts to have it formally support a joint bid by BMCC and HCC.

To continue to show that this is an issue which is not going to go away, we need more letter writing! So, if you haven't done so, can you please look at the feature article on the Mt Wilson website (or back to the October edition of The Mounts), get out those keyboards, ink and quills, thumbnails dipped in tar... whatever your writing medium is – and show the people who make the decisions that this is a real issue for us, the many thousands of visitors who come to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine and the nearby communities in the Hawkesbury.

If you have written – thank you! If you can, would you let us know who you've written to and the responses you've received? We'd really like to have an estimate of the number of letters written, so we can reference that in our continuing work. Our research shows that, unlike national or State wide campaigns on wide reaching issues (which can attract large numbers of signatories), individualised emails and letters, even if very short, have a greater impact than petitions for grass roots campaigns. Like every Vote, every e-mail and letter counts.

And where you've received a "this is a roads issue" response, we're keen to write back and correct that. We've already done so in one case with the Office of Louise Markus MP advising they're taking up the issue with the Premier's Office. If the response is "we're working on it", please let us know that - as we're following up on them too!

Another fire season – another chance that we'll really regret not having this fire trail. Let's keep on this, folks!

Elizabeth Montano – on behalf of the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine RFS Brigade

Ask the Neighbours

Dear Readers,

You should have seen the reams of butcher's paper ideas we workshopped following our decision to include eating those garden pests as a plank of the RAATS' Manifesto. Such a pity you were ill for it, Tim. I told you not to eat that leech and legume log. On the bright side – it did improve your sprint times.

While our RAATS' cookbook, catchily titled "RAATS in the Rotisserie" won't make it to the bookshelves in time for Christmas, it's still sure to be the biggest seller for 2016.

And speaking of 2016, it's that time again, Tim. No, not talking about the leech and legume log: it's time to pause and reflect on the year which is fast ending. And then, to get out those old New Year's Resolutions – dust them off and have another go. It's the ultimate in recycling. And sometimes you succeed.

One of my New Year Resolutions was to get this column back on track, Tim. To rise above the political hurly burly of everyday life in RAATS and remember what this column is all about: asking the neighbours. So, let's recap on what we've learnt from our neighbours this year.

Firstly, Image matters: the new RAATS uniform (leopard print safari suit, form fitting shorts and knee length socks) has caused such a stir. Visiting coach tour buses are always honking their horns at us - in heartfelt appreciation - when we're out on patrol.

Loyalty matters too: Members robustly defeated the treacherous moves of BRATS (the Blackheath Rural Antechinus Togetherness Society) to engineer a hostile takeover.

Menus matter: especially when they serve two functions – adding variety to one's diet and reducing the garden pest problem.

And finally, my personal favourite: whimsy matters.

So, thank you to all you loyal "Ask the Neighbours" fans who so kindly indulge the fantasy world of RAATS.

Have a fabulous Summer with family and friends and see you again in the New Year when we unveil the new and improved **ATN** – the blockbuster column of 2016 - which will break new ground in Australian amateur journalism with daring reveals, emotional in-column breakdowns and nerve biting endings.....

Elizabeth Montano

Suggestions, comments or contributions warmly welcomed!