

FRIENDS OF KATOOMBA FALLS CREEK VALLEY- BUSHCARE GROUP

A HISTORY

THE FRIENDS OF KATOOMBA FALLS CREEK VALLEY BUSHCARE GROUP is one of the two oldest bushcare groups in the Mountains (the other being the Fairy Dell Bushcare group in Springwood). Both groups formed around the same time in 1989, before bushcare became fashionable, when Council's environmental services were rubbish collection and spraying for blackberry!

While our initial reason for forming were issues of inappropriate development and uses of the Upper Kedumba River Valley (previously known as the Katoomba Falls Creek Valley) the threat of a major development mooted to flood the valley to create an artificial lake by Milemark/ Highmark in 1988/9 and regular car races, but especially the Bob Jane picnic races 1989, complete with continuous helicopter "joy flights" turning the Valley into what seemed like a combat zone in Vietnam, galvanized us into action.

With the guidance of Neil Stuart we formed in 1989 to fight inappropriate development and car racing. But from the start it became obvious that the Valley was a highly important piece of land environmentally – it was the source of the famous Katoomba Falls and Neil has consistently argued that it needs to be treated as a whole entity from Shell Corner to the Falls and that piecemeal development was and still is, a major threat, a concept few of our councillor's have ever understood. We also realised that the catchment was under threat from weeds: Privet, Scotch Broom, Holly, Cotoneaster, Monbretia, Blackberry, Cherry Laurel, Pines, Ivy, Periwinkle and a host of others and was used like a lot of urban bushland – a place to dump household rubbish especially after Council privatised the tip and users had to pay to dump their rubbish.

One of the first problems we tackled was tyres – we had hundreds of them, built up over the years from racing and the two tyre sellers on Bathurst Rd and Cascade St. Beginning in December 1990 one Sunday morning a group of us including : Neil Stuart, Des and Sue Barrett, Marysia Kreisler, Carol Probets, Ross Davidson, Les Peto, Rosemary Brister and others including several members of the Friends of Old Catalina, who hold valuable memorabilia of the racing days collected well over 100 tyres from small to large tractor tyres in a morning's hard work and placed them on the racetrack – where Council, after they were contacted had the Katoomba Tyre Service come and remove them. This was followed up in February 1991 with another similar haul on the inaugural Clean Up Australia Day.

To their credit the Katoomba Tyre Service took responsibility for their rubbish and built a high fence to stop further encroachments and the problem has abated. We have participated in every Clean Up Australia Day since, removing dozens of tyres, trolleys, whitegoods, builder's rubbish and other rubbish all around the Valley. Initially there was lots to do. Each year we filled up

a large skip with the rubbish. One year we even had a complete double bed with base, sheets, pillows and doona all soaked and heavy after rain. Each year for the first 10 years or so we more than filled a large skip. The last 3 years our volume of rubbish has shrunk to the point where we have to scavenge hard to find much even picking up small items we would previously have ignored. We've even taken to removing weeds to fill in the time and the small skip. Clean Up efforts have paid off for us over time. Rosemary Brister has co-ordinated our Clean Up efforts annually over this time.

In 1990 we began to work on a Management Plan for the Valley, getting a federal grant and hiring consultant Fred Bell, who compiled The Bell Report. Input was from locals like Carol Proberts, who was compiling a bird list for the Valley, Neil who did a plant list, while archaeologist Val Attenbrow investigated for signs of Aboriginal habitation and found tools, grinding grooves and other things – this was well before aboriginal matters, stolen generations etc became trendy, recognised and understood. Council under Ralph Williams dragged its feet and refused to recognise our efforts, though after he was dropped they became enthusiastic to the point of claiming ownership of The Bell Report. As usual our efforts have been ignored or belittled.

In 1990/91 we began to work on the weed problem, which was and to a lesser extent still is huge. Our initial site was at the bottom of Buti St. where Wells St. starts. A group of enthusiastic volunteers including Neil, Des and Sue Barrett, Carol Proberts, Marysia Kreisler, Ross Davidson, Rosemary and Les and others worked to remove weeds. About this time Virginia Bear was appointed as Council's first bushcare officer and although it was uncertain what her actual responsibility was, she supplied us with some tools, (loppers, saws etc) most of which we still have including 2 by now antique, Lithgow Small Arms loppers! Few of us had much of an idea of how to tackle the problem – though we did tackle it with gusto: Scotch Broom; Privet; Holly; Cherry Laurel; Periwinkle; English Ivy etc all without much if any poison! Carol Proberts co-ordinated and kept the tools in her shed. We knew nothing about follow-up so it was not done and gradually the weeds have returned.

We also weeded in the swamp and near the ornamental lake. We began to rehabilitate and replant the area inside the racetrack on the eastern side. We removed woody weeds and mulched them with the council supplied mulcher which mysteriously vanished sometime before 1996. We planted natives – Hakeas, Waratahs, Banksias and E. oreades seedlings, the latter from Neil's backyard, though not all were sourced locally! However most are still growing strong some 15 years later!

In 1995 Les Peto and Rosemary Brister did the Bush Regen Certificate with Eric Mahony at Katoomba TAFE, still in Parke St and in December 1995 Les took on the role of co-ordinating the Friends' Bush Regen activities.

In 1996 Eric mahony joined B.M.C.C. as Bushcare Officer and became our co-ordinator, supplying us with tool- belts, poison and saws. Two of our longest serving members: Naomi Estelle and Terry Vaughan joined at this

time. Through 1996 we worked on sites below Mission St and that western area below Valley Rd and the racetrack. We worked on the badly scoured area above the race track and the western toilet block, using mulch from the racetrack and brushmatting – but it has been slow to recover. We also worked in the swamp and in McRae's Paddock in the area below Waratah St. in the recovering shrub swamp.

In 1996 Les began compiling a plant list for the Valley which now has over 200 species of plants on it, including the rare *Persoonia acerosa* and a rare pink flowering form of *Cassinia aculeata* known only from a site at Mt Wilson and in Tasmania.

Our first major project, suggested by Eric was among a stand of *E. oreades* between 10 Lower Wells St. and Gundar St., an area threatened by broom and most of our other weeds. Les and Rosemary had used broom for kindling (it even burns when it's wet!) so had pushed it back from the house and Carol Proberts had done some work in this area in 1995-6. Through 1997-8 we got some money through an Urban Run-Off grant to grow seedlings, spray and jute mat the bank, then plant it out. We collected seed and passed it on to the Lithgow Community Garden , who did an excellent job growing them on. The work was completed and has come on well and has had follow-up work done on it. Through this time Eric was working on the Urban Run-Off Programme Grants, set up by Bob Debus, and through the end of 1997 Joel Russell replaced him as Bushcare Officer until January 10th , 1998 when Nathan Summers joined us as Bushcare Officer with Council. Apart from work days in the swamp, at the Falls and McRae's Paddock this site would involve us until about 2002.

We then moved to the other side of the houses, where we again got a grant thanks to Katie McPherson, who got the information from Catchment Management and Rosemary who submitted it with Nathan's help. It was about \$4000 and involved the removal of several pine trees. The work was done at the end of 2002. We also weeded, prepared the bank with jute matting and planted it out.

In 2004 we moved into the area below (and below the wells), an area of basically good bush, but with an invasion of weeds. 2005-7 we moved into the area beside and below we nicknamed "Hollywood", for obvious reasons. It was completed at the end of 2007. 2008 has seen us in "Hollywood 2-the sequel", now pushing up the western side, a moist, south facing hillside. There are still hours, in fact, years of work left in this area. We are due again to do some follow-up in these areas.

Besides "Hollywood" we have done significant hours behind the kiosk at the Falls in the rainforest. We have done the woody weeds and the ivy in a large area along the walking track, up to the kiosk. We have also worked at the Cascades and along the creekline to the top of the first drop of the Falls, doing follow-up to work done by A& S Bushcare in 2000 (mainly *Monbretia* with some woody weeds.) About 20 bags of corms have been removed from this area alone in total. But it is still growing and more work will need to be done.

In 1998 A & S Bushcare got the contract in the Urban Run-Off Programme to do a vast area of Frank Walford Park. The funds were obtained by Bob Debus and let by Eric Mahony on behalf of Council and involved about \$300,000. A huge area below Shell Corner , Bathurst Rd and the Emergency Services Centre to the swamp in the centre, was mostly hand weeded of woody weeds and miles of ivy and included the removal and mulching of a number of huge pine trees. At one stage in this area we were getting 26kg of Monbretia corms per sq metre! It was completed in early 2000 and has been recovering extremely well, the weeds now replaced by a stand of E. oreades saplings, now 10 years old. An historic part of North's Siding including a railway cutting was unearthed. These date back to the 1890's and the coal mining days.

Bushcare days have from the start been social events involving boiling the billy and eating cake,(only when we've finished of course!). these days we have a simple lunch of soup or salads, coffee, tea, some cake and a bit of healthy socialising and discussion, making it a fun day. Over the last 20 years we have put in over 5,000 volunteer hours : at a modest \$20 per hour that comes to \$100,000 we have saved Council! Those of us who have been involved for a long time can see changes (there is much less broom about than there used to be), but there is still much more to do.

Since 2005 we have added a new feature in that we have begun compiling a fungi list, which keeps us busy in autumn. It now has over 200 species of fungi on it. One day perhaps, we'll also investigate the mosses, liverworts and lichens of which we also have many. Steven Ridd has been doing Streamwatch keeping an eye on the condition of the creek, even picking up a \$1000 prize in 2006. And there's still much to do....

Below is a list of people who have worked with us at some stage over the past 20 years: a few for the whole period, some for a very long time, some for a short time and a few only once or twice. A few have passed away, some have moved to other areas and one or two have moved and then come back later. Those with an * are currently working and dates indicate when some individuals first started.

1989- 1995 - N. Stuart*
D. Barrett*
L. Peto*
R. Brister*
M. Kreisler
S. Barrett
R. Davidson
C. Probets

1996 N. Madden
H. Schmidt.
H. Fletcher.
L. Thomas.

	D. McKendrie N. Estelle *(10/8/96) H. Esamie E. Mahony (Bushcare officer)
1997	I. Baird* (12/4/97) H. Carse J. Chantler. T. Vaughan* (13/9/97) J. Russell (Bushcare officer)
1998	N. Summers (10/1/98) (Current Bushcare Officer) B. Evelyn*
1999 – 2000	J. Ball E. Gould K. Creighton G. Hood. M. Watson L. Sannon* S. Ambler* K. Perrin E. Wilkinson M. MARTIN
2001	R. Green. C. McPherson* (9/6/01) S. McGilchrist* (9/6/01) J. Janosi Sarah ? M. Rock Ilsa ? M. Lebreton R. Mertens E. Nicholson.
2002	I. Jeray.* (8/6/02) M. Weir A. James
2003	A. Oliver. T. McLean. Lazuli S. Ridd* (12/7/03) G. Rattray. A. Munro. Jill ?
2004	H. Kozelj. J. Curtain

C. Semmler
K. Reid.* (6/3/04)
N. Lavelle
Y. Milosh.

2005
L. Marchant.
M. Chard.
L. Clough.
D. McNally*(9/9/05)
C. Barker.

2006
C. Jones.
D. Rich.* (5/3/06)
Margaret ?
G. Harris* (5/3/06)
J. McDonald
J. Stephens.
G. Appleton
C. Southwell
D. King
Dave?
J. Mathieson* (13/5/06)
E. McAndrew.
J. Yonetani.
H. Stewart* (11/11/06)
J. King.

2007
G. Murphy.

2008
M. McDermott.
L. Sullivan.
M. Henson.
R. Ley
C. Love*
J. Young*
R. Schipp*