

SUTHERLAND BUSHWALKERS NEWSLETTER

September 2024



President's Ponderings

Each year the club holds a luncheon for our Activity Leaders, offering them an opportunity to share experiences, ask questions and generally learn from one another. The success of our club rests with its volunteers, and it was very encouraging to discuss leading with such an enthusiastic group of members.

Among the many topics that were discussed was "How do we inspire others to lead, and what are the obstacles to getting people involved in leading?" Several suggestions were proposed, with one idea catching my attention. The club is holding a "Learn to Lead" bushwalk in the Royal on Saturday the 23rd of November 2024. This walk will be an easy grade 3 of about 10 km and will be led by 3 or 4 experienced leaders offering the opportunity for members to come along, ask questions and receive some training and tips on leading a walk! If you have ever thought about leading an activity, or even if you would just like to come along to find out what it entails, this is a great opportunity. See the Q4 program for further details.

One other topic of interest to all members was the rewording and streamlining of our current walk grading guidelines. Some excellent suggestions have been incorporated, and the final product will be published after the committee endorses the changes at the next meeting.

The club continues to improve its processes, and we are currently investigating software that will streamline many of the processes for members. While it is unlikely to be in place for 2025 membership renewals, it promises to make life easier for leaders, members and committee.

Speaking of renewals, you may have noticed that new membership is now \$35.00. Yes, the cost-of-living issue has also impacted club finances. After much discussion the 2025 renewal fee for current members has been set at \$25.00. Still a bargain, and less than we charged four years ago.

Our annual Christmas breakfast is being held on Saturday the 7th of December. This affords all

members the opportunity to enjoy each other's company in a social setting, in the Royal National Park. I hope to see you there.

Cheers

Ken

Mill Creek, Dharug NP

Car Camp 27 - 30 June 2024

A group of eight from our club had an enjoyable three-night car camp and walks staying at the Mill Creek Campground in the Dharug NP near Wiseman's Ferry and close to the Hawkesbury River.



The start of the adventure

After setting up on the Thursday we checked out our surroundings and did the 3 km Mill Creek walk with lyrebirds calling as we went along.

On the Friday it was a day for our early convict road building history, so we did a 13 km walk taking in Devines Hill and the Old Great North Road. This heritage listed section of the original road was full of history about the convicts who built it between 1826 & 1836. It was designed by Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell and extended for 240 km. There were plenty of examples of fine stonework to be seen in the buttresses, culverts and bridges.



Remnants of an old bridge

Our return was via Finchs Line, another convict-built road (now track) that was abandoned due to it being too steep.



Great place for a rest

On the Saturday, another great day for walking, we did the Eleven Kilometre Circuit, a loop walk up and down through forest with views as we got up on the peaks.

Much to our surprise, being mid-winter, lots of campers arrived for the weekend. The nights were cold but very social around a warm fire sharing plenty of travel stories. A mid-week return to Mill Creek campground in the warmer months for more exploring is worth considering.



Social time around the campfire

Thanks Leonie, for organising a very enjoyable visit to a new area and for entertaining us with your nightly quizzes.

Shaune Walsh

Walking the Laugavegur Trail

Iceland: June 2024

Months ago, Kay Manning sent me a text asking if I would like to go on a hike in Iceland!!! Not knowing WHAT I was letting myself in for, I said, 'YES!', as did 6 others! This is my journal from some of the most challenging 6 days of my life!

Day 1

White snow, Black basalt, Steep mountains: 12 km

After a four-hour bus ride from Reykjavik we arrived at Landmannagur, the start of the Laugavegur Trail! There was snow everywhere but we found a shelter to have lunch together then started the daunting trail. Day 1 had the steepest climb - almost 1000m in elevation, through 5+ kilometres of snow - step, crunch, slip - step, crunch, slip! We experienced spasmodic sunshine, stinging sleet, soft snow, icy wind, gentle rain, dark ominous clouds, black obsidian rocks juxtaposed with sparkling white snow, boiling water gushing out of rocky caves sending steam floating across the landscape.

For kilometre after laborious kilometre, we climbed up, up, up and up, stopping occasionally to address a blister, chapped lips, take photos, eat a snack or drink a sip of water. All the time we were stunned by the spectacular views everywhere - softly sloping hills covered in smooth white snow, dotted with pitch black sections of exposed rock and lava with the occasional glimpse of tiny tough pink flowers or a red plant.



A lot of snow walking

The hut - what a welcome sight! We signed in and found our bunks in the 18-person room. The hut had a well-equipped kitchen, a drying room for all our wet gear, and was hot, hot, hot inside - heated by water from the hot springs. Many different nationalities worked shoulder by shoulder cooking up delicious meals or adding water to unappetising dehydrated food! There was a great feeling of camaraderie! Everyone was in bed by 9.00, trying to sleep despite the hard beds, human night noises and the intense heat! Frequent night trips (in broad daylight) to the outside toilet helped us cool down before heading back to the sauna!

Day 2

Yellow and Green Mountains, lots of MUD! 12 km

Surprisingly most of us slept OK and woke to sun coming in the window and the busy commotion of getting breakfast and packing for another day of walking! All nations have gathered here to be challenged and overcome with awe at the unique landscapes!



Walking in a very different landscape

Weather forecast 0° to max of 1°! So we piled on our warm and wet weather gear and walked several kilometres in snow, up and up and up to

spectacular views of yellow snowy mountains - so different from the black and white hills we climbed yesterday!

Once again, we experienced sun, sleet, rain, SNOW, wind, cold weather - all alternating throughout the day!



A slippery slope for walking

Lunch was enjoyed looking over stunning views of green, yellow and snowy mountains. Then the MUD started! Yellow mud, brown mud, blue mud and white mud - slippery, gluggy and at times a bit dangerous mud! None of us escaped without thick mud spattering our clothes and shoes, some worse than others! Our long descent brought us down to green moss-covered landscapes - and our first serious river crossing - shoes off and a frigid tentative rock hopping in the river, grasping a rope to stop us being swept off by the current! Feet dried and socks and shoes back on, it was an easy but long walk to the hut. A 5-minute HOT shower (for \$10!) was enjoyed by all before our freeze dried meals were consumed and we had an early bed - mattresses lined up side by side, 15 in a room!

Day 3

Long Flat Black Basalt Plains: 18 km

An early morning trip across the boardwalk to the loo brought the unexpected surprise of delicate pink clouds after the 2.30 am sunrise! Breakfast, packing, donning many layers of warm and waterproof clothing - and we were ready for today's walk! Not much further on, the first dreaded water crossing was made - shoes off, socks off, gaiters off, pants rolled up above the knees and we were off with a yelp at the glacier cold water and unsteady rocky surface. We finally reached the shore and proceeded to dry off and put our footwear on!

We reached a hut which had rocky circles showing where to pitch one's tent then crossed a bridge over a gorgeous thundering waterfall flowing into a

strong current river. The weather continued as in previous days - soft snow, horizontal sleet, biting winds, occasional sunshine, pouring rain...!



Stunning views

A short walk brought us to another toe curling, hypothermia inducing freezing river crossing. BRRRRRR!! Footwear back on and we started the long slog across flat glacial plains covered in black basalt sand with volcanic rocks scattered everywhere!

We found a large outcrop of rocks to shelter behind for a much needed rest and lunch. Then it was on for several more kilometres across the black dusty plains.

Just before arriving at the hut, we put our backpacks down and took a detour out to an awe-inspiring steep walled canyon, featuring red rocks, green moss, stunning waterfalls and a thundering river far below - such an amazing experience, especially after the long black plains.



A spectacular deep-walled canyon

Our arrival at the hut was a shock - 20 hikers squeezed into a tiny room, with narrow mattresses side by side on bunks, around the kitchen and eating area! Very cosy!!!

Day 4

Sunshine, Mountains, Rivers and Birch trees! 18 km

After a surprisingly quiet night we woke up to a glorious sunny morning surrounded by green hills and sparkling snow-covered mountains and glaciers! Packing away our wet weather gear, we set off for our final day walking with our heavy packs!

The day continued - steep uphill climb, steep downhill clamber, river crossing - repeat three times! Some river crossings involved shoes off, and others we walked across with wet shoes!

Morning tea was had on the top of a mountain, basking in sunshine and enjoying spectacular views of glacier covered mountains, green lichen covered hills, rocky gorges and the occasional brave clump of flowers peeking out of the harsh ground to greet the sun.

The next section of the walk was along a black dirt glacier plain and when we stopped for lunch on a grassy knoll, we found we had mobile reception!!! Very unusual! Another steep climb up and then a rocky clamber down ended in a wide and fast flowing freezing wide river crossing - the coldest so far!



Trees for a change!

And then a dramatic change in scenery - BIRCH TREES, hillsides of blue lupins, buttercups, purple and pink flowers! Such green beauty all around! These had all been planted in the last 100 years to prevent erosion on the barren landscape - truly a miracle! Finally, we reached the hut for the night - and were delighted to find we had a dormitory to ourselves! And wine, beer and snacks were available for purchase - to the great delight of many of our group!

Day 5 'Rest' Day: 18 km

This walk has been the most physically and emotionally challenging thing that I have done! However, I am really enjoying the time spent in these amazing and unique changing landscapes!

We are staying two nights at this hut, so today was our 'rest' day! We woke to glorious sunshine flooding the room, so five of us set off to explore a walk high in the mountains! Setting our sights on the flat mountain near the glaciers, we walked through pretty birch forests dotted with brightly coloured flowers.



Another change in terrain

Then the steep climb started - up, up and up - 450 metres elevation in 2 hours! The view from the plateau was amazing - three glaciers at eye level, several waterfalls, snow-capped mountains and stunning green-sided gorges with the river winding through the bottom of them. At the top of the mountain, the Iceland weather hit - cold winds, rain etc!



Impressive views of rugged terrain

Then the descent started - a steep traverse across loose gravel, zig zagging down the steep slope - for many kilometres! With hearts in our mouths, it took

intense concentration to stay upright and walk across the narrow, hard to see track, crossing bubbling glacier-fed streams, down steep mountain sides and finally arriving back in the delightful birch forests! That was the hardest most challenging walk most of us have ever done! The \$10 hot shower back at the hut was very welcome!

Day 6 REAL Rest day!

After a leisurely breakfast, we had several hours to fill in before the bus came to pick us up and take us back to Reykjavik! So, we wandered the 1.5 km walk over to the next campsite, Volcano Huts, which advertised a sauna, hot springs, and a restaurant! A perfect 'pick me up' after a hard few days! However, the sauna and hot springs were not available, but we did enjoy the warmth of the restaurant and their hot lamb soup (Icelandic specialty), hummus and bread rolls - a delicious change from dehydrated food!



Glorious colours of sunset

Back at our campsite, we collected our backpacks (a little lighter than when we set off 6 days ago!) and boarded the bus for the 4-hour trip back to Reykjavik! We were dropped off at our apartment in Reykjavik for the night and celebrated with pizza and red wine - and each person received a personalised souvenir of the walk, made by my brother. Tomorrow is the start of another series of adventures!

Deirdre Bowie

Guula Ngurra National Park

We have attempted to get this walk done 3 times this year - each time it has had to be cancelled:

18 May - unfortunately due to personal reasons it had to be deferred.

1 June - unfortunately there was very heavy rain that week, so trip was deferred.

3 August - unfortunately both the leaders contracted Covid, so trip was cancelled again

Guula Ngurra (meaning Koala Country) comprises three areas - Mount Penang, Little Forest and Tugalong. We planned to do 2 walks, one in the Mt Penang area, and the other in the Tugalong area, with great views down to the Wingecarribee River. The Tugalong area is currently open on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month between March and October.



Wingecarribee River

The park is accessed from the Illawarra Hwy near Moss Vale - one takes the continuation of the Illawarra Hwy, known as Canyonleigh Rd, for approx 18 km then turn right onto Tugalong Rd - a dead end road, finishing at the former Tugalong Station - this Station was privately owned and used as a cattle/horse station. It was purchased in February 2019 with the aim of converting the whole area into parts of a new National Park to aid in Koala Protection - this is now the Tugalong Area. The area is significant as its location adjoins the confluence of the Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Rivers. Since 2019, the NPWS has cleaned the site up and established some sheds to use as a base for rangers and visitors.

The NPWS shows 3 walks on their website, one of which, the Mt Penang loop walk, was in our plans. This is a 3 km loop walk. The second walk we had planned is in the Tugalong Area, approx. 5 km return down to some stunning lookout over the Wingecarribee River.

We will try again one day ... in the meantime, this would be a good site to explore!

Barry and Irene Mann

A 'Great Walk' at our Doorstep

In June 2021, the NSW State Government announced the Great Southern Walk, a 67 km walk that extends from Kurnell to the Illawarra. The (new) proposed completion date of 2025 means that we will soon have a multi-day walk from Kamay National Park at Kurnell, through the Royal National Park and on to the Illawarra Escarpment State Conservation Area.



Whale watching at Kurnell

We have probably all noticed that a lot of work has been done upgrading the Coast Track through Royal NP and possibly the work on the escarpment behind Stanwell Park. I would assume that a lot of the funding for this has come from the Great Walk proposal and it is going to produce an outstanding, multi-day trip, with some breathtaking views and varied terrain.

The first section follows the rugged cliffs of the Kurnell Peninsula from Cook's Landing Site, past Cape Baily Lighthouse through to Cronulla via Boat Harbour and the Cronulla beaches. The Cronulla Ferry will drop walkers at Bundeena for the long trek south through the Royal, with highlights of stunning coastal views, heathland with its multitude of flowers and birdlife, littoral rainforest through Palm Jungle and some beautiful swimming spots.



Looking north from Little Marley

Proposed campsites at Wattamolla and Garie are expected to have camping platforms, basic hiker huts, amenities and a camp kitchen. Both sites have water with sewage treatment systems upgraded in 2018 to cater for the existing high day visitor demand in these sites. This will add to the

existing camping area at Bonnie Vale but interestingly there has been no mention of North Era as a camping area and it remains closed 'until further notice'.



Where is this waterfall along the track?

The new track that was built between the hang-gliding area on Bald Hill down to Stanwell Park will provide the link between Royal NP and Illawarra Escarpment SCA, effectively joining the Coast Track at Otford to the Wodi Wodi Track. From Stanwell Park, the Wodi Wodi Track will take you up the escarpment to join the Forest Walk that will take you to Sublime Point. The Forest walk has spectacular coastal panoramas looking across the Illawarra coast to Wollongong and Bass Point near Shellharbour. The walk on the escarpment passes through a variety of vegetation communities and is a beautiful walk, dotted with lookout opportunities. A campground with basic hut accommodation is proposed to be built in the Maddens Plains area of the Illawarra Escarpment SCA. Some land on Maddens Plains was owned by coal companies and was 'gifted' to the State Government (nothing is free, right? - sorry for the cynicism) and is now administered by National Parks.



Looking south from the end of the walk.

The walk finishes at the Southern Gateway Centre at Bulli Tops. I am not sure that this is a great finish point, as transport options are greatly limited but at least you can get a nice ice-cream at the end!

Into the future, I expect that the Sublime Point stairs to Austinmer will reopen and a train from the end will be the best option to get home. There are also other options that have been proposed, including the extension of the walk further along the Illawarra escarpment to Mt Keira and Mt Kembla. This addition is unlikely as it would involve high costs for a pedestrian bridge across Bulli Pass (or two bridges for upper and lower escarpment tracks). They could include the ferry from La Perouse to Kurnell, which would link the walking areas of the Eastern Suburbs and perhaps create a walk all the way from Palm Beach, potentially a 200 km walk.

John Hughes

The Royal National Park has received its first health report!

For the first time we've combined survey and management data for national park decision-making 🌲 🦉

What was found 📌

🦉 Krefft's glider & yellow-bellied sheath-tailed bat spotted here for the first time

🦘 45 native mammal species found, including the eastern pygmy possum

🌿 488 native plant species identified

🌊 70% of waterways rated 'very good' or 'good' in water quality.

[NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service](#) is already using this new information to improve conservation management. We have increased fox baiting and deer control and are looking at new ways to address myrtle rust. Also, our fire management is better informed than ever 🙌

July General Meeting

Catherine Reynolds, Cooper Riach and Scott Dovey from the Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (SSEC) were our speakers at the July General Meeting. They gave us an overview of the various campaigns, awards and other activities run by the SSEC, with particular emphasis on those which impact the natural environments your members would be most familiar with, such as the

Royal and Heathcote National Parks and the bushland areas between Heathcote Rd and the Georges River.



Ken introduces the speakers from SSEC

The SSEC is an independent, not-for-profit, community organisation actively involved in a wide range of projects aimed at maintaining the natural beauty and character of our Shire, surrounding waterways and parks.

Catherine, Cooper and Scott gave a compelling presentation about 'Coal waste pollution, the Royal National Park, and Peabody's Metropolitan Colliery' and 'Coal mining underneath Woronora Reservoir - our drinking water'.



Oily residue contaminates a creek near the colliery

Many people don't realise the pit top workings of an active coal mine are located just next to the Royal at Helensburgh. This coal mine is owned by an American multinational, Peabody Energy. Peabody has released polluted waste material into a waterway, the Hacking River, which flows through to the heart of the Royal on numerous occasions in 2022.

In March 2023 the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) reviewed the mine's license, but this has failed to prevent further damage to the park. In August 2023, the embankment of the mine site next to the adjacent creek collapsed, coal waste material again spilled into the creek, and from there into the Hacking River. Through this

whole time no effective emergency management procedures were put in place to stop the coal waste polluting the river.



Evidence of pollution in the Hacking catchment

Our speakers also talked about the damage to the Woronora Reservoir catchment because of longwall coal mining by Peabody Energy. Peabody is currently mining directly underneath Woronora Reservoir, and they intend to expand their mining operation with even more longwall mines directly beneath Woronora Reservoir. Running approx 450m beneath the surface these mines have already caused serious damage in the Woronora 'Special Area' catchment. WaterNSW has noted the impact of the mines with 'Unexpectedly high levels of surface cracking (along the creek and at pool / rockbars) and consequent drying of a large proportion of pools.'



Dry and damaged creek beds in the Woronora catchment

According to the SSEC, swamps that filter and clean our water have also shown signs of drying out, with groundwater levels not recovering many years after completion of mining. WaterNSW is particularly concerned that increases in iron, manganese and possibly aluminium and other substances will impact on water quality delivered to Sydney Water, aka our drinking water.



Dubious water quality

In addition, over 20 independent scientists have questioned the ‘science’ that has been applied to justify the mining. They have called for this mining to be suspended “until the cumulative impacts and consequences of mining to date can be reliably assessed and quantified.”

SSEC continues to actively lobby the NSW Government and other interested parties to raise awareness of the environmental damage to the Royal National Park and the Woronora catchment area. The EPA is currently reviewing the coal waste discharges, determining how much the company should be fined. However, pollution events continue to occur.

For more information visit the SSEC website: www.ssec.org.au

We will be inviting the SSEC back in 2025 to continue learning about their projects, including their ‘Koalas and Sutherland Shire wildlife corridors’ campaign.

Annette Mathews

Some resources from the RFS

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW have produced two ecological resources pertaining to the Heathcote community.

These contain information about the local biodiversity, vegetation types, threatened species and appropriate fire intervals based on the Heathcote area.

[NCC Heathcote Site Story](#)

[NCC Vegetation Tables Heathcote](#)

These link to the club Dropox and there is no need to login or create an account with Dropbox.

Thanks to Janice McLeod

Safety Tips

We always think nothing’s going to go wrong but sometimes it does. Do you carry an EMERGENCY INFORMATION sheet in your pack?

This is an optional form for members to use and record details of medical conditions, contacts and permission for others to drive your vehicle in an emergency situation. You may leave blank anything



you do not want to disclose.

It is suggested that you keep the form in your First Aid Kit.

You can find the form on our website: use the Forms & Information tab, click on [Personal Emergency Information Sheet](#) to download the form.

Save the App that could Save your Life

In an emergency, time and location accuracy are critical. It is recommended that members have the **Emergency Plus App** on their mobile phones to call 000, SES or Police Info Line.



The Emergency+ app is a free app developed by Australia’s emergency services and their Government and industry partners. The app uses GPS functionality built into smart phones to help a Triple Zero (000) caller provide critical location details required to mobilise emergency services. Please note that while this app will use any phone network in an emergency it doesn't work without an active phone network.

Download the Emergency Plus App from the Apple Store, Google Play or wherever you get your apps.

Shared by Annette Mathews



Blue Mountains at its best - photos by Allan Bunt



A warm welcome to our new members:

Melina	AMERASINGHE
Brian	BURGESS
Julie	CHALKER
Mick	DAVIES
Elaine	FISHER
Richard	GIDDINS
Michelle	HUTCHINSON
Julie	JONES
Adam	LONG
Susan	OWEN
Howard	WITT
Kerry	EDGECOMBE

We look forward to seeing you out on the track, on the water or on the road soon!



Falls and Pools, Kangaroo Ck - photo by Shaune Walsh



City walks with Di Turner - photo by Carol Weston



Lunch at Barrangaroo - photo by Marilyn Fooks



An iconic Blue Mountains view - photo by Gina Holloway

Q1 Club Activity Stats (Apr, May, Jun)

Sutherland Bushwalking Club now has 371 registered members and we participated in 53 club activities during Q2 2024.

Activity Type	Number of Activities	Number of Participants
Day Walk	42	371
Paddle	4	27
Multi-day Walk	1	??
Bike Ride	0	0
Multi-day Trip	3	33
Track Work	3	39



The new bushwalking fashion! - photo by Marilyn Fooks

(Data from Activity Organiser's Trip Reports)