



Wollombi Valley Landcare News for April 2011

STRESSED? TIRED? BORED? HUNGRY?

QUESTIONING LIFE'S MEANING?

**PERHAPS YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO A
LANDCARE EVENT FOR A WHILE?**

ENJOY A DAY AT WOMBAT VALLEY!

Saturday 16 April 2011 at 2:00 pm

at Louise Hicks & Chris Jackson's property, "Wombat Valley".

On Saturday April 16 journey out along the Finchley track to Wombat Valley - a property owned by Chris Jackson and Louise Hicks who are using regeneration techniques in trying to restore the natural bushland. Hear how Chris keeps his spirits up in the battle to rid the once oft-mowed property of the dreaded *Ricardia*. Enjoy the emerging *Melaluca* forest and *Backhousia Myrtlefolia* in the creek. Admire and identify the new native growth appearing amongst the bracken. Join the debate as Chris puts the positive view for retention of Black Wattles and others regale us with horror stories of this maligned or admired local plant. Disbelieve Chris when he tells you how little Louise helps with these land-based activities (there IS a good woman behind every regenerator).

See wombat treatment in action! Wellnot really..... they only come out at night but you can see the holes and the burrow flaps!

It is also the AGM - but come anyway! The Honourable The President is a stickler for keeping the formalities to a minimum - and aren't you a LITTLE curious about how much money we have in the bank?

If you would like to come early why not bring your lunch to enjoy amongst the Arcadian surroundings. If we are lucky Louise may buy (please not bake!) a cake..... Tea and coffee will be provided.

Everyone is welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

For more information contact Jane Mowatt on 4998 8158 or Louise Hicks on 4998 8660.

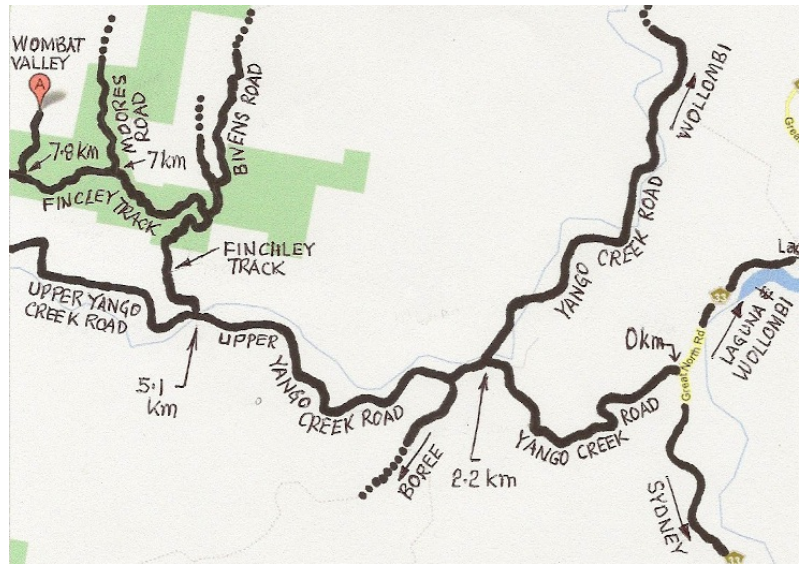
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Inc, or any other Landcare agency or government department, but are presented to promote discussion about and the practice of sustainable land use and environmental responsibility.

DIRECTIONS TO WOMBAT VALLEY

250 Finchley Track,
via Upper Yango Creek Road
LAGUNA NSW 2325
Tel: 02 4998 8660
louisehicks@bigpond.com

Turn off The Great Northern Road about 1 km before Laguna (if you are travelling from Sydney) or follow Wollombi travel south about 1km past Laguna and turn into Yango Creek Road.

You could set the odometer here - it is 7.8 km, and about a 15-20 minute drive.



1. Drive along Yango Creek Road for about 2.2km (there is a short stretch of sealed road going down the hill). Continue left on this road for 50 metres, (you will pass a turn-off for Boree on the left) and instead follow the signs to Yango Park House.
3. At 3.7km, there is a sign **Wildlife Crossing - Slow Down**
4. At 5.1km you will cross a small bridge.
5. Just after this bridge, at the bottom of a big hill, there are signs for Mellow Wood, private property and 25km speed limit. Keep going up the hill (it's not a private road). Near the top of this hill, there are two/three dips in the road, about 10 metres apart – need to slow right down.
6. After the dips, curve around to the left, and pass a large sign on the left indicating Yengo National Park. (Do not turn right into Bivens Road.)
7. At 7km you will come to a fork in the road with a sign saying Moors Road. You need to take the left fork for Finchley Track. (Not the right fork into Moors Road to Yango Park House or Yanguna.)
9. From here it is 700-800 metres to Lot 174 (250 Finchley Track). The turn-off to the Wombat Valley is almost at a right angle and on the right hand side of the track. There will be a Landcare sign
10. Follow the driveway down the hill 500m to the house.

Earth Hour 2011 success is just the beginning

On Saturday March 26, the global community rallied to show it is united in its commitment to a sustainable future, with hundreds of millions of people, in more than 5,000 cities, in 135 countries and territories across the globe taking part in Earth Hour 2011.



And it doesn't stop when the lights came back on. This year, Earth Hour was asking people to take the next step and go beyond the hour, by committing to ongoing action for the planet.

It is not too late to join the growing numbers and sign up to Earth Hour www.earthhour.org. Hear some of the best stories from around the world of people who took part in Earth Hour beyond the hour and marvel at some of the stunning photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/48230950@N03/favorites/show/>.

Of course there were a few letters in the newspapers dismissing Earth Hour for achieving nothing. Sure the savings over the hour might not have been great, but they missed the point - this event is to raise awareness and it achieved that on a significant scale.

Graham Taylor

Presentation by David Edwards on La Nina and Recent Extreme Weather Events

I found this talk by David Edwards at our last meeting, on 19 February, a valuable addition to my current understanding of El Niño and its alternatives. In one way it is comforting to discover that the science is finally getting to grips with long range weather forecasting in the southern hemisphere. On the other hand, the intricate relationships between air temperatures, water temperatures, air pressure and water height reinforce the concern generated by knowing that we are changing some of these factors without having the faintest idea of all the consequences.

David's vivid graphics illustrated the sensitivity of this weather system to changes that we are only now beginning to measure. i.e. the difference in ocean temperature between the east coast of Australia and the west coast of South America. He traced through the sequence of effects that result from the El Niña phase to the generation of increased cyclonic activity over Queensland. It is all very logical when laid out in front of you by somebody who understands it as well as he does.

I found the placing of our current climate in a geological context interesting. We are in an unusually stable period, apparently, but before you start feeling comfortable you are reminded that the whole of human civilisation has developed under these "stable conditions". The earth can be, and has been, very different and we wouldn't be at all happy if it changed by what is historically speaking a very small amount. No ice caps at either pole anyone? No glaciers anywhere?

Despite all this extra knowledge, we still don't know what triggers the oscillation from La Niña to El Niño. We do know that if we stay in one or the other for too long our climate in Australia becomes very difficult to live in.

Upsetting this delicate balancing act by human actions is a terrifying possibility.

Perhaps we should try and persuade David to come back in five years and tell us what is happening by then.

Jane Mowatt

The Paxton Wastewater Treatment Works

At our last meeting on Saturday 19 February, Greg Bone, Manager Systems Planning & Lachlan King, Project Manager from Hunter Water gave a presentation on the new improved Paxton Sewage treatment works. It is undoubtedly a larger plant capable of treating the higher volume of sewage predicted from the addition of Ellalong, Millfield and the proposed new developments in the area.

It was interesting to hear about the process used to treat the sewage so as to produce two results: 1. solids 2. liquid effluent.

It was good to know that the solids are being used in mine reclamation work since this should reintroduce the nutrients into a productive and stable nutrient cycle providing for the growth of plants, stabilisation of the ground surface, production of oxygen, etc.

The liquid effluent, on the other hand, was of direct interest to us since a considerable proportion is to be released into Congewai Creek that flows into the Wollombi Brook above Wollombi and thence through the village and up to Broke. We were assured that the *E.coli* count would be under safe limits (i.e. no danger of disease) but the levels of nutrients were not so comforting.

Questions from the audience concentrated on this issue. The consequences to natural waterways of increasing nutrient loads especially nitrogen and phosphorus are well known to us. We will get whatever they release at Paxton running through our town. Increased nutrients will exacerbate the *Salvinia* problems, decrease populations of native fish and invertebrates, and, in times of low flow, increase the probability of algal blooms.

The issue of what will happen during droughts or "non flow periods" with the treated effluent from possibly 700 houses on town water entering the creek undiluted by any water in the creek was of particular concern.

There did not appear to be any contingency planning for this situation that is bound to occur. We were assured that the effluent is suitable for native tree plantations and some crops e.g. olives. In fact, a healthy stand of *Eucalyptus regnans* is thriving as a result of being provided with a small proportion of the currently produced effluent.

Unfortunately the rest of the Hunter Water land cannot be used similarly because it supports an Endangered Community that would be adversely affected by the increased nutrient levels.

However, in a farming area where lack of water and nutrients is frequently the limiting factor to production it is very difficult to believe that better use couldn't be made of this liquid than to flush it into the nearest creek to cause eutrophication problems downstream. It is also regrettable that the current residents of Millfield who have stand alone recycling of their sewage on their own blocks are going to be encouraged to connect to a centralised sewage system with the resulting unnecessary increase of nutrients in Congewai Creek.

It was clear from the presentation that however improved the engineering aspects of the treatment works the ecological consequences of centralising the sewage from these three villages have not been fully addressed. We await the Hunter Water's review of "new reuse opportunities" with interest.

Jane Mowatt

President's report for 2010-2011

It has been another fairly mild year climatically with disasters to the north and south but an absence of bushfires, cyclones, earthquakes and floods in our valley.

Trees planted last year are growing well although an absence of heavy rain is leaving the dams a bit low.

We started the year with another Burrealong walk in April. Once again I enjoyed leading an interested group through the different vegetation types behind Lesley and Graham Williams' house.

In June, at the Tennis Clubhouse, we had the very successful talk on bats with an introduction to some live individuals and a discussion of the change in distribution that is

being observed at the moment. Habitat destruction or climate change?

August saw us at Graham and Sue Taylor's property for a discussion of landform in the Wollombi Valley and vegetation communities on their block. Some of their earlier plantings are becoming very well established.

In October, some of us had a busy day attending the Propagation Workshop at Evelyn Bloom's place followed by the Bugwatch Survey along Wollombi Brook.

We were back at the Taylors' for a talk on mange treatment of wombats and the Christmas Party in December.

The reports on our February talks on the Paxton Wastewater Plant and David Edwards on El Niño and La Niña are elsewhere in this newsletter.

Finally we look forward to meeting at Louise Hicks & Chris Jackson's property for more information on wombats and a wander around their property on the way to Finchley.

The other main activity this year was attendance at the Laguna Market each month - attracting new members and liaising with the community on various issues of interest e.g. weeds. Attendance at both days of the Community Fair in Wollombi also netted us several new members.

Graham Taylor continues his good work producing this newsletter every two months.

I have carried out several visits to properties either to poison Tree of Heaven (with variable success) or to view the native vegetation. One particularly interesting result was the definite confirmation that the endangered *Melaleuca groveana* occurs near Wollombi. Similar looking paperbarks found on another property may well be the same species. So if you have a small papery barked tree edging a heath or large rocky area I would be happy to identify it for you.

Thank you to all of the executive and members for your help this year. See you at the April Meeting.

Jane Mowatt

Rally Against Coal Seam Gas Mining

The public rally held in Sydney on Sunday 20 March was intended to be a wake up call to the voters of New South Wales and Australia that we demand our elected governments take control away from the mining industry and stop them turning our country into a clapped out quarry.

We cannot continue ignoring what is being done to this country in the name of profit. Balance must be brought back into government, acknowledging the true costs of allowing the irrational development of gas fields and coal mines throughout the State. The scale of these developments has reached monstrous proportions. Just look at the devastation caused by open cut mining in the Hunter Valley and realise that there are plans for 36 more mines just like that, with all the resulting sickness and loss. Coal seam gas fields will introduce a new dynamic of depleted water tables, poisoned rivers, atmospheric pollution, invasion of private property, widespread industrial development with little or no controls.



Look at what is happening now in Queensland where mining companies are allowed to dump vast quantities of toxic water into their river systems, where great tracts of precious farming land are being taken over against the wishes of the landholders, where, according to the Federal Department of Environment, the Great Artesian Basin is going to take more than 1,000 years to recover from the affects of draining aquifers by the coal seam methane gas industry. The majority of the profit will be taken offshore by overseas investors. It is a crime and as good as a declaration of war.

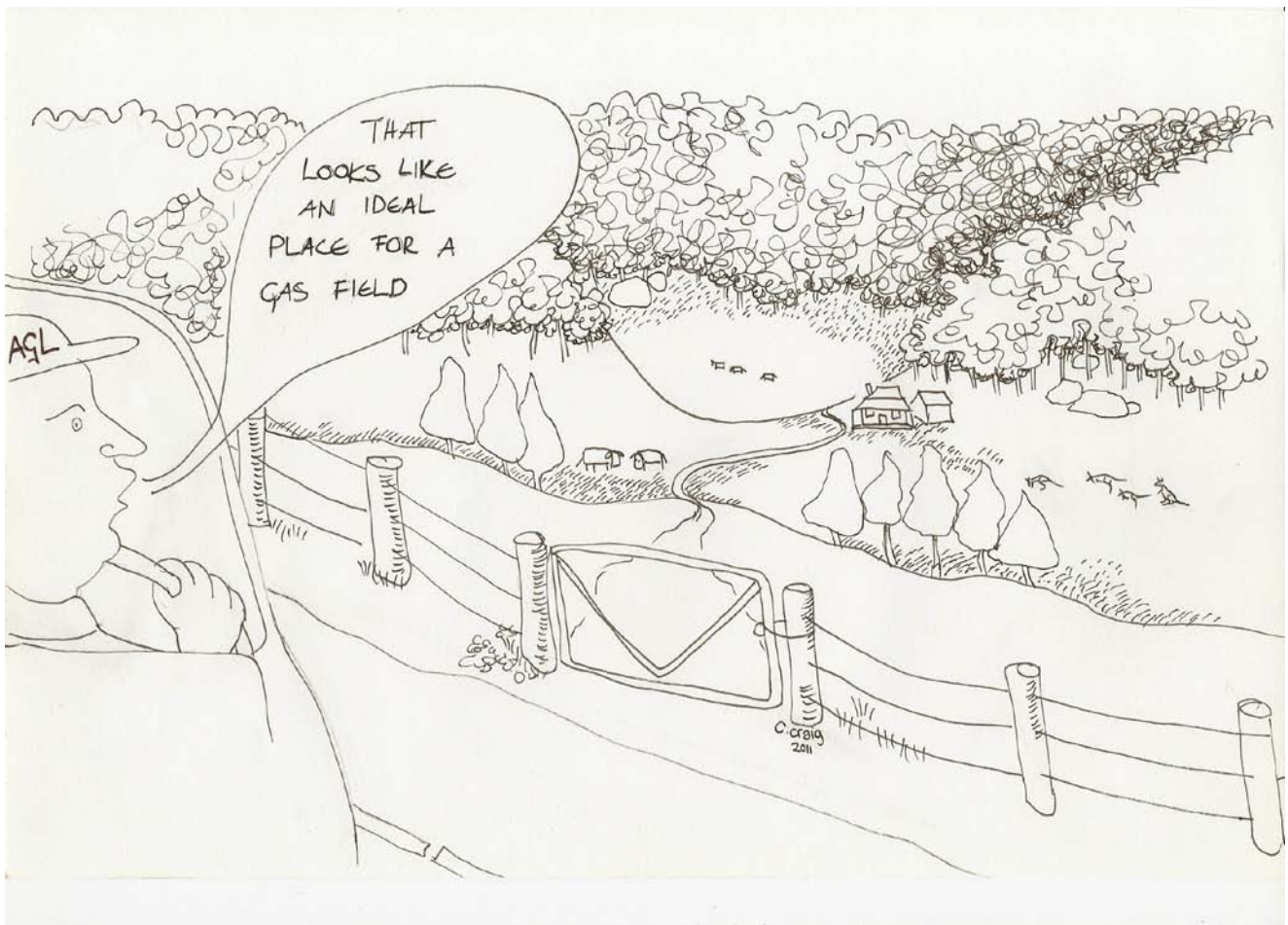
Sue and I joined about 40 people from Wollombi who travelled down to Sydney by bus on Sunday to attend the rally against coal seam gas mining held in Martin Place.

It was a miserable day with heavy driving rain (heaviest rain in March in 27 years) and strong winds, but despite all that there was an enthusiastic crowd of about 1000 people from all parts of NSW, Hunter Valley, Mudgee, Liverpool Plains, Murray-Darling Basin, Bylong Valley, Sydney suburbs and the Southern Highlands - all under threat from coal seam gas exploration and mining. There were a number of speakers who had been affected by coal seam mining and several members of parliament, Rob Oakshott (Federal Independent) and Cate Faehrmann (NSW Greens).

We all know what AGL is doing in Broke and now the former state government has given approved for AGL to drill 90 wells near Gloucester together with a central processing plant and a pipeline down to Hexham. [ABC News website 10 Mar 2011]. Where next???

Well the elections are over with a resounding win by the Liberals and National Party. It remains to be seen if they have heeded the concerns by so many of their constituents.

Graham Taylor



Climate Change Rally in Sydney



Many of you will have seen the reports on TV of the 'pro' and 'anti' Carbon Price rallies which were held simultaneously but at different venues in Sydney on Saturday 2 April. Graham and I attended the 'pro' rally that was held in Belmore Park near Central Station.

The weather was good, unlike the day of the anti Coal Seam Gas rally which many from the Wollombi/Congewai/Broke area attended a few weeks ago and were thoroughly drenched for their trouble. The surprisingly large crowd of mainly young people, young families and a good representation of oldies like us were happy, relaxed and the mood very upbeat. The crowd responded positively and enthusiastically to the several speakers, including Simon Shiek of "GetUp", whose messages, broadly, were that while a Carbon Price is clearly not the only or the best way to deal with Climate Change, its clearly time for our government, indeed governments everywhere to DO SOMETHING - ANYTHING to get the ball rolling in dealing with this critical and increasingly urgent issue.

Sue Taylor

Information on a two free workshops coming up in Ellalong

Saturday 16 April 2011 Ellalong 9am – 1pm (finishing with a light lunch)

Rural Living Workshop: An Introduction to Property Planning for Smaller Landholders

RSVP: By 13th April 2011 to 4993 4239

- Assess your property's natural resources
- Identify any risks and vulnerabilities from your land management
- Reduce your impacts on wildlife and biodiversity
- Select appropriate native species for revegetation or conservation projects
- Find resources and information available to help you

After expressing your interest Council officers will compile the following resources for your land:

- historic aerial photographs
- vegetation mapping
- bush fire
- flooding
- topography

These resources will assist you to make your own property plan.

Saturday 7 May 2011

Ellalong

9.00 am - 4.00pm

Managing horses on small properties with Jane Myers

To register or find out more contact:

CMA Lower Hunter Community Support Officer Susan Morley on 4938 4924 or email: susan.morley@cma.nsw.gov.au

Renowned horse expert Jane Myers will present a free one-day workshop in the Cessnock area in May to promote sustainable horse management. Jane Myers has taught horse riding and management for 25 years and is the author of the CSIRO publications *Managing Horses on Small Properties* and *Horse Safe*, and a co-author of the second edition of *Horse Sense*. Throughout the workshop Jane will demonstrate how best practice land management can reduce illness and injury, reduce feed bills, increase the value of a property, and improve the environment.

Topics covered through the workshop will include:

- property design
- water protection, conservation and supply
- manure management
- trees and plants
- pasture establishment and management
- grazing management
- horse facilities

The workshop is presented by the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority with funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Program and the NSW Government's Catchment Action Program.

Sustainable Horse Management field day. The field day includes a presentation workshop and a field session in the afternoon.

OHS: Participants are required to wear a hat, long sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes.

For more information contact:

Susan Morley

Lower Hunter Community Support Officer

Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority

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Items for newsletter: Graham Taylor - 9981 6317/4998 3326 wollombi.landcare@gmail.com

The success of our Landcare group relies on the input of members, and particularly the committee. Have you thought of joining the committee and contributing your ideas to the future success of the group? The committee meet about once every two months for an hour or two and also help out with arranging future meetings and the setup of the meeting, so the demand on your time is not great. It also is an opportunity to meet others and learn more about Landcare.