



NEWSLETTER

Working together for a better community

May 2007

EDITOR'S NOTES

We have been overseas visiting friends and relatives so have been away for much of the time since the summer newsletter. Travel is all very well, but it's tiring, even when everything works: weeks of airports and English traffic and living out of a suitcase left me ready to sit down in this quiet place for a while. I feel slightly out of touch with life and events at Mt Wilson, but it seems things have been rolling along much as usual, which is reassuring. It was good to get back to the last of the autumn colours—and, of course, the piles of leaves that follow from them. It was also good that our wet February (we had more than 300 mm at Withycombe) wasn't the last of the rain, so presumably there has been some refilling of the ground water tables up here.

While I was away I was 'in the loop' of a series of e-mails between Brian Abrahams, Bill Ryan, Barry Freeman and Graham Tribe about pile burning. We seem to have regressed somewhat from the policy negotiated by Graham and Susie Hope, a few years ago, which allowed us (at Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine) to burn piles of dead and dry material provided we notified BMCC, RFS and (introduced later) NPWS. We had to observe a list of regulations (the yellow sheet), but it wasn't a matter of obtaining permission. It seems that Mr Chris' West, of BMCC, who originally opposed the policy, has alleged that it has been abused (no-one seems to have been given evidence of this), and all open burning is now being assessed on a case by case basis subject to application. Brian has provided a note about the situation. (At a personal level I have to say that, while I recognise the need for regulations to ensure that our complex society runs OK, I react very badly to this sort of petty bureaucracy and the power that is, apparently, vested in minor officials. Commonsense—whatever that is—and personal responsibility don't seem to be important factors in the way we run things.)

I noted in the newsletter of July last year that Council had allocated \$25,000 for the new toilets in Cathedral Reserve. Before we went away Diana, on behalf of the MWPA, had managed to get undertakings from Council that these would be installed before the autumn season. Council also undertook to install cat's eyes in the Avenue and to modify the Mt Wilson sign on Bells Line of Road (on the Bell side) to indicate that the turn is 500 m from the sign and not up the dirt track where the sign is located. Nothing has happened about any of these yet. (Why am I not surprised?!)

I also noted, in that July newsletter, that Peter Raines had organised with Ryde Agricultural College to carry out a program of tree pruning along the Avenue. It was scheduled to start in November but didn't because of the Grosse Valley fire. However, we are told the work will start on June 15 (see Moira's note).

I'm sure we have all had problems, at various times, with European wasps. Wendy Holland has provided a useful article on these pests and how to deal with them.

Joe Landsberg
Tel. 4756 2167

e-mail: jlandsberg@netspeed.com.au

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MOUNT WILSON PROGRESS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE NEWS

Audio-Visual Equipment

The Mount Wilson Progress Association now owns the new audio-visual equipment that is installed and functional in the Village Hall, as was witnessed by those who attended the last RFS Pig and Horn social evening. Many thanks to those who generously donated money towards it and to the Village Hall Committee which instigated and arranged the acquisition. The MWPA paid the balance of money owed, about \$4,000 so that it could be purchased and used now. Representatives from all village associations will be invited to a demonstration so that they might learn how to use it. Graham Tribe, Barry Freeman and Ron Green have compiled a list of procedures to follow in setting up and using the equipment so that even the least technically minded people can use it.

Garbage Bins at Happy Valley

It has been noted that these three bins are unsightly on the roadside, particularly as they are sometimes knocked over and rubbish is left outside the bin. Council collectors do not collect rubbish outside the bins. It has been decided that two of these will be relocated to Cathedral Reserve to get them off the roadside. If you are accustomed to use the bins at Happy Valley, please continue on to Cathedral Reserve.

Trees Along The Avenue

The long awaited pruning of the trees outside 'Withycombe' and along to Founders Corner will be done by the students of

Ryde Horticultural School on 15th June. This is essential for the preservation of these beautiful old trees.

War Memorial

The regilding of the gold lettering on the War Memorial has commenced. This is funded by a grant from the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Phone Book

The Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine Phone Book has been completed and delivered to all letterboxes. If you didn't receive one or do not have a letterbox, please let me know and I will get one to you. Each household is entitled to one free of charge but if you want more they are available from me at a cost of \$2 each. This book like most publications when committed to print is immediately out of date, so if and when your contact details change, please let me know so that I can begin the next version.

Fallen Timber

Winter is almost here and many residents are in need of firewood. If that is you, bring your chain saw and trailer to Silva Plana where timber that has fallen on some Reserves will be relocated. You are welcome to take what you need.

Moira Green

On the matter of firewood, a tree came down at Wynne's Reserve and the wood from that is also available to anyone who wants it

Word games

The Washington Post's Style Invitational asked readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting, or changing just one letter, and supply a new definition. Here are some of this year's winners:

- Bozone (n.): The substance surrounding stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking down in the near future.
- Foreploy (v): Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of getting laid.
- Cashtration (n.): The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period.
- Giraffiti (n): Vandalism spray-painted very, very high.

MOUNT WILSON VILLAGE HALL JOTTINGS.

Since the last newsletter, stage 1 of the landscaping of the front of the Hall has been completed with the planting of three advanced *Acer japonica* 'Vitifoliums' (Full Moon Maples) to match those in front of the study Centre. The grass is coming along well and is being mown, subject only to a cranky mower.

We are now in full swing organising the Yulefest for the first Saturday in July (7th) and we promise you an even better evening than last year. More people are involved in organising the event and there will be welcome surprises in the program. Have you written the date in your diary? Have you contacted your friends? We expect the pamphlets to be out during the week commencing 21st May and the tickets to be available from Milba after that date. Remember, numbers in the hall are restricted to 100 and it will be first in first served for ticket purchases.

The Committee has spent a great deal of time over the last six months trying to get the plans for Stage 2 of the Hall Restoration work finalised. After two public meetings, the last being on Saturday 19th May, we are in a position to prepare a sketch plan which will differ a little from the Design 5 plans (circulated recently). The main changes will be less work on the front of the Hall with both the Toilets and the storeroom being in one new block on the left (east) side of the Hall where Design 5 has the new toilet block.

When that plan is available it will be distributed through the mountains and any objections will be considered. After that, Council will be asked to have working drawings and specifications prepared. Then we only have to convince Council to spend the money on the project.

Last Pig & Horn night some idiot (read "Committee Chairman") left a black vinyl covered notebook in the Hall. If you have it would you please give me a call and I will collect it.

Ron Green.

PILE BURNING 2007

Last year, under the then pile burn system, according to BMCC 'severe abuses' occurred, the most common being burning green material, but apparently the abuses did extend to burning old car tyres.

Under the present policy, the initial requirement is to apply in writing for 'a permit to maintain an open fire'. Such permit will be issued after a BMC council officer completes an inspection, to ensure that the pile is composed of 'dead and dry vegetative material' - the wording as in the state act.

These rules apply to the many rural and semi-rural areas of the Blue Mountains, which is quite extensive.

A number of people on the mountain have successfully pile burnt so far this year.

As last year the pile size allowed is 2 cubic metres.

Brian Abrahams

Application forms for open burning are at

<http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/download.cfm?f=54D42A82-423B-CE58-A29CDB95DDF50F9E>

EUROPEAN WASP - *Vespula germanica*

In N.S.W. the European Wasp is a declared pest under the Plant Diseases Act, making it the responsibility of the owner or occupier of the land to destroy nests.

Here is what I have learnt from experience, and various other sources, about this pest.

Apart from their repeatable, nasty sting, these feral insects pose a serious threat to the Australian environment. They are opportunistic scavengers that decimate native insect populations and compete for nectar and fruit with native birds. Even parrots risk being attacked and stung in the eyes.

In their native habitat the natural predators of these wasps are badgers and bears. If unchecked in warmer climates, their activities can create enormous colonies containing vast numbers of insects.

Wasps are attracted to human habitation and exploit the conditions we supply - compost, pet food etc. They need quite a lot of water. Nests are usually in banks or sloping ground, but are also found in tree hollows (pushing out birds), roof and wall cavities and retaining walls.

Nests are constructed from wood fibre, which is collected from old fences, dead trees, and bark, mixed with saliva and chewed to a pulp. A new nest may be only the size of a tennis ball with very few workers flying in and out, so it can be hard to spot. By the time you see or hear a nest it may be second or third generation with a noticeable, noisy flight-path of insects coming and going. The queen (or queens) might be a metre or more deep inside. Wasps are very sensitive to movement and will attack if disturbed, or if you obstruct their flight-path.

Life cycle

Spring - Fertilized queens emerge from hibernation to start a new nest, usually after minimum night time temperatures reach 14/15 degrees C. for 2 to 3 weeks. A queen can fly up to 30 kms in search of a suitable nest site. She constructs a few cells and lays an egg in each. These first larvae are reared by the queen until they pupate and emerge after a few weeks as sterile female workers.

Summer - These workers enlarge the nest and rear the next generation of larvae, leaving the queen to continue egg-laying.

Autumn - Larger cells are constructed in which the next generation of queens will develop. Fertile males are also reared at this time. They will mate with the new queens outside the nest, then die.

Winter - The founding queen dies, the nest begins to disintegrate and the newly-fertilized queens find shelter for winter. In warmer climates these daughter queens can be recruited straight back into the original nest, expanding it and laying eggs without hibernating. Nests have been found 3 metres in size, one with 25 queens.

Treatment

1. Permethrin powder (a synthetic pyrethroid), readily available, kills by external contact but is highly repulsive so that contaminated insects may be driven away and sacrificed. It is recommended by the Department of Agriculture because it is the least toxic option.

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European wasps (contd)

The Hortico cardboard sprinkle container is inadequate for reaching well back into a nest. It is more effective to decant it into a squeezing sauce bottle, making the hole bigger. A plastic applicator meant for liquid nails can be used to extend the nozzle.

Apply the insecticide in the late dusk or at night when wasps are quieter. Wear suitable clothing and cover your torch with red cellophane¹ or cloth. The wasps will not necessarily all be back in the nest - on warm nights, some may stay out all night. That's unimportant as it's the queen that is targeted. Squirt the powder as far back into the nest as possible. If possible, cover the entrance with a rock or something that will overlap the edges. If many workers survive, they can burrow their way in or out beside an inadequate cover or make a second entrance if there is not already one there. Larvae that are still alive will continue hatching over the next 5 to 10 days and if the queen is still alive she will continue laying eggs. With only one worker she can start building up the colony again.

Check the nest every 2 to 5 days for about 3 weeks and repeat treatment if any signs of life reappear.

2. Carbaryl (pet flea powder) with no added sulphur (as in tomato dust). Kills by ingestion, but is accepted back in the nest where they clean each other. Concentrated liquid is not recommended by the Dept. of Agriculture as it is more likely to aggravate wasps and just soak into the nest structure. Carbaryl may be taken off the market soon because it is environmentally unfriendly.

3. Unlit kerosene or petrol fumes when poured into the nest will also kill wasps.

4. There is a pressure can of wasp killer (from Mitre 10) containing phenothrin and al-lethrin. This is difficult to accurately direct into the back of the nest so is ineffective.

All these chemicals are toxic and remain active in the environment. They should not be used near water courses or where they can end up in creeks or groundwater. The ideal solution is a wasp specific bait they will take back into all nests. There is one available in New Zealand (Rentokill Wasp Bait) where wasps destroy 10% of beehives, among other economic impacts. The N.S.W. Dept. of Agriculture does not consider European Wasps a threat to primary industry so they are not at this moment interested in eradication. B.M. City Council have no advice or policy - ultimately it is a Federal Issue. You could write to the Minister ! Considerable success has been achieved with fireants. Why not eliminate the wasps before they have wreaked irreversible damage to Australian ecosystems? Maybe when the cane toads reach us, they will eat them.

Wendy Holland

¹ Insects can't see infrared light. Light through red material is largely in those wavebands so they won't respond to it. **Ed**

Another option: I was advised by the Dept of Agric pest control people to use Baygon Dust—available in a squeezable container. It only needs to be squirted into the nest once—use plenty. Apparently it has a long-lasting effect; insects going in and out carry it into the nest and it seems to kill them all, at least in the nests I have dealt with (possibly they were quite small). **Ed.**

Most of us in these parts are getting along a bit. Do we relate to this?

An elderly gentleman had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor and the doctor was able to have him fitted with a set of hearing aids that allowed the gentleman to hear 100%. The elderly gentleman went back for a check after a month and the doctor said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The gentleman replied: "Oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to the conversations. I've changed my will three times already!"

MT WILSON AND MT IRVINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Notice of mid-year General Meeting

Saturday 9 June; 10.30 for 11.00

A warm invitation is extended to all members and friends to come along and meet your neighbours. Guest speaker will be Joe Landsberg

'Winds of change through Africa: perspectives of a white African'

COMMUNITY DIARY

St Georges Church **Monthly services** on the 2nd Sunday of each month at 3 pm
June 10 July 8 August 12 Sept 9

Garden Day at Merry garth: Sat. Oct. 6, in aid of the church

Yulefest: Sat July 7 (see 'Village Hall Jottings')

Bush walks Friday **June 15** (Mountain Lagoon or Mt York area). Friday **July 20** (the one not done in June). Friday **Aug 17** (Evans Crown Reserve at Tarana). Friday **Sept 21** (Megalong Valley/Cox's River)

Bushcare Second Friday of each month. Friday June 8 at Wynne Reserve to remove weeds

It would be nice to have made some (or even one!) of these remarks:

"I feel so miserable without you, it's almost like having you here." Stephen Bishop

A modest little person, with much to be modest about." Winston Churchill (about Clement Atlee)

"I've just learned about his illness. Let's hope it's nothing trivial." Irvin S. Cobb

"I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure." Clarence Darrow

"He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary." William Faulkner (about Ernest Hemingway)

"I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it." Groucho Marx

I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it." Mark Twain

"His mother should have thrown him away and kept the stork." Mae West

"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go." Oscar Wilde (Have we all had dinner guests like that?)

"He loves nature in spite of what it did to him." Forrest Tucker

"He had delusions of adequacy." Walter Kerr