



The Mounts

The Community Newsletter of Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine



April 2014

Welcome

Autumn is always a busy time in the mountains and two planned events reinforce this. The generous opening of the *Dennarque* gardens as a fund-raiser for the RFS is sure to be a very popular choice for both visitor and resident. Much work has been undertaken over recent years in a historic and graceful property that is seldom open to the public.

The inaugural Mt Wilson Autumn Fair also offers an interesting smorgasbord of attractions that will provide many options for the most discerning attendee. The Market Fair at the Village Hall has attracted a broad range of stall holders with a tempting array of quality goods, whilst the Evening Concert presents a most eclectic line-up of musicians and singers. The wine tasting and 'Meet the Author' sessions ensures that the task of entertaining visitors this Easter has never been easier.

The lack of reliable mobile telephone coverage in our area has been an on-going bugbear ever since the first mobiles were the size and weight of the Sydney phone directory. A local working group has been busy analysing and researching this issue. There appears to be no immediate and easy answers—this may be a case of an irresistible force meeting an immovable object—but if anyone can advance the cause, it is this group. No pressure though

Tim Gow Tel. 0412 133 559

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Community Calendar

April	Fri 11th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Wynne Reserve	Sun 13th 3.00pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Thu 17th Bushwalking Group— Wollangambe and Joe's Canyon	Fri 18th 9.00 am Good Friday Church Service
April	Sat 19th & Sun 20th Dennarque Open Garden for the local RFS Brigade	Sun 20th 3.00 pm Easter Day Church Service	Sat 26th Mt Wilson Autumn Festival Various venues	
May	Sun 4th 9.00am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Fri 9th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Wynne Reserve	Sun 11th 3.00pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Fri 16th Bushwalking Group— Water Nymph Dell & Minnehaha Falls
June	Sun 1st 9.00am RFS Training Mt Wilson Shed	Sun 8th 3.00 pm Mt Wilson Church Service	Fri 13th 9.00—12.00 Bush Care— Silva Plana	Fri 20th Bushwalking Group— Radiate Plateau & Megalong Head

2004 MOUNT WILSON AUTUMN FESTIVAL PROGRAMME



Market

Village Hall 10am-5pm

Stalls include Garden Ornaments and Tools, Antiques, Woollen Goods, Arts & Crafts, Cool Mountain Plants, Home Produce and much much more!

Tour Of The Turkish Baths And Church

Tour Leaves From The Baths at 11am
Cost \$6

This will include a talk on the history of the Baths and Church.

Wine Tasting

Marquee outside the Village Hall at 4:30pm
Cost \$6

Come and taste some of Dry ridge Estate wines. Wines are available for purchase

The Mount Wilson Autumn Festival is an event supporting the development of the Mount Wilson Village Hall.

For further information contact Diana Landsberg
02 4756 2167

Meet The Author

Marquee Outside Village Hall 2pm Cost \$5

Hear how our local authors came to write their books, the problems they had and the pleasure they got from them. Books will be available for sale and the authors will be happy to autograph the books you already have.

Alison Halliday (with Joanne Hambrett)

“A Passion for Place: Gardens Of The Blue Mountains”

Michael Pembroke

“Arthur Phillip: Sailor, Mercenary, Governor, Spy”

Joe Landsberg (with Richard Waring)

“Forests In Our Crowded World”

Rachael Kohn

“The New Believers: Re-imagining God”

“Curious Obsessions In The History Of Science And Spirituality”

Ian Brown

“Wild Blue—World Heritage Splendour Of The Greater Blue Mountains”

Wendy Holland

“Ceramics Of Fred Mann”

Evening Concert

Village Hall 7:30pm Cost : \$25 (Family \$50)

Louisa Billiter (Soprano)

Je Te Veux – words by Henry Pacory, Music by Erik Satie

The Lord is my Shepherd – psalm 23, Music by Howard Goodall

Ave Maria – words by C Gounod, Music by J.S. Bach

O for the Wings of a Dove – Words by W. Bartholomew, Music by F Mendelssohn

Joe Blansjaar (Bass/Baritone) and Gerry Foley (Piano)

Walking my Baby – Nat King Cole

Night and Day – Cole Porter

My Favourite Things – Words by Julie Andrews

Autumn Leaves – Words by Kosma, Music by Prevert

Chattanooga Choo Choo (Piano solo) – Mack Gordon and Henry Warren

Perhaps Love – John Denver

Oh What a Wonderful World – George David Weiss and Bob Thiele

That Lucky Ol’ Sun – Frankie Lane

The Holy City – Traditional

Tony Perrian (Vocals & Guitar)

Collection of Folk and Australian Songs

“When Mother Comes to Visit”

Ben Palumbo (Tenor), Ann Laszlo (Strings) and Paul Laszlo (Strings)

Bacchianas Brazilianas/Chilquilin – Villa Lobos/Piazzola (Brazil/Argentina)

Sous le Ciel – Hubert Giraud (France)

Treasures – Ann Palumbo (Laszlo) (Australia)

Halyatok – Trad (Hungary)

MOUNT WILSON PROGRESS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE NEWS

General Meeting

This was held on Saturday, 22nd March, 2014 and was well attended. The President, Richard Beattie presented a comprehensive and illustrated report explaining the many and varied activities in which the committee has been involved in recent months. In particular, he spoke of the joint submission with the Mount Irvine Progress Association and the RFS to the Federal Government for its Mobile Coverage Programme that will provide support funding for areas with poor or no mobile wireless voice or broadband data service. The Committee acknowledges the time and effort that the working group of Richard, Graham Tribe, Brian Carrigan and Henric Nicholas has spent on this project. Advice from Telstra on steps that can significantly improve reception in areas that do get some signal can be found in another spot in this newsletter.

We are grateful that Roza Sage, State MP was able to attend. She commended everyone in the community for the wonderful job done during the fires, a time when she herself was involved in the lower mountains, at Springwood and Winmalee. Roza continues to liaise with District RFS regarding Bowens Creek Road and bridge and is assisting with the process of the transfer of land for the RFS shed extension with the Department of Lands. She advised how the Village Hall Committee might be more successful in applying for a grant for the new toilet block for the hall. The minutes of the meeting can be read by members of the Association on the website under MWPA Administration.

Village Maintenance

Work has been done on the Waterfall Track and in Silva Plana. Work will be done to restore the area around the War Memorial now that the hot dry weather of summer has ended. New soil will be spread and seeded so it should be looking good in time for the Remembrance Day Service in November.

BMCC Maintenance

- All roads in Mount Wilson are now sealed with well constructed drains and gutters in sections where required. It won't be long before leaf litter and dirt help the new surfaces blend into the environment.
- Jefferson Bridge over Waterfall Creek has been repaired

Other projects that the Committee has requested of Council are:

- replacement of the elms with Green Beech Trees in the Avenue. These should be planted in August.
- repainting of faded lines along Mt. Wilson Road
- repair road edge washaways especially in The Avenue below Church Lane and at the War Memorial
- improve drainage outside the Village Hall
- secure the Council dump area at the bottom of the zigzag with a gate
- more frequent toilet cleaning during the busy autumn period
- more garbage bins to provide for the busy seasons

New Members

We welcome two new members, Deidre and Michael Wren, residents of *Linden*.

All residents and property owners are eligible to join the Association. Please contact me on 4756 2162 or rm.green@bigpond if wish to become a member.

Moira Green (Secretary)

Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine – Mobile Phone Black Spot Areas

We are all aware of the difficulties using mobile phones in Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. Recently the Australian Government through the Department of Communications has made a \$100m national funding package available to improve mobile phone coverage in areas which have poor or no coverage and experience natural disasters, where coverage along major highways can be improved and where there are large seasonal tourist numbers which could benefit from improved mobile phone coverage.

A small local working group of Brian Carrigan, Henric Nicholas, Graham Tribe and Richard Beattie have been working to determine the most influential contacts and to put together submissions to these contacts and to the Department.

The Department is approaching this project in several steps. The first is to determine the criteria they should use in their requests to the telcos – Telstra, Optus and Vodafone – to bid for the funding. We have made a submission which is focussed on the importance of improving communications during natural disasters and along the Bells Line of Road. This is because our small population alone will not support the cost of erecting a new mobile phone tower in our area.

We have been told the next stage will be to invite the telcos to bid, and we will be given the opportunity to provide a further submission on communications and technical issues faced by our communities with poor or no mobile coverage.

Richard Beattie has made contact with the Department of Communications, state and federal politicians, local councillors and Blue Mountains City Council. He has also sent our submission to the major telcos.

We recently had Andrew Bogg, Area General Manager, Sydney West, Telstra visit with one of his engineers. This was a most interesting visit and one which brought home the commercial realities for communities such as ours. Several points were made which will help our submissions greatly.

Firstly, the cost of a new mobile phone tower is approximately \$400,000 with the tower, six transmission panels, power connected and any cabling required. To cover the cost before making a return Telstra needs an average of about 400 mobile phones logged on or polling the tower at any one time. For this to happen in our area we would need to have a large number of vehicles with mobile phones on the Bells Line of Road to supplement the 70 or so local residents and contractors who might have their mobile phones on at any one time. Since it is unlikely this number of vehicles would consistently be travelling along our section of Bells Line of Road, a significant government subsidy would be required to make the tower viable for a telco.

Telstra made it clear they were willing to share the tower with other telcos which would also help financial viability. So they could make a joint submission with another telco.

The tower needs to be in the highest location to make sure it covers the largest possible area and as much of the Bells Line of Road as possible. This means locating the tower at one of the fire stations is not feasible since the coverage would be less.

Secondly, we are a heritage area which will increase the cost for investigations and approvals of any installation, and there is often community resistance to towers in prominent or sensitive areas.

Thirdly, they spoke of the leading role our Federal Member of Parliament, Louise Markus had taken leading to the establishment of the Mobile Coverage Programme and government funding.

For those areas of our community with some mobile phone coverage, they had some practical suggestions for each of us to implement.

The first was to buy a phone with superior signal strength. These phones are designed so they will outperform other phones in coverage and perform better in poor coverage areas. That is, they will hold onto a signal further than other mobile phones. Telstra assigns these phones a Blue Tick to identify them. Blue Tick simply means that it is recommended by Telstra for regional and rural usage

The next was to install an external aerial similar to a TV antenna on our houses which could be used to improve reception of the mobile broadband signal for internet use, and with a repeater could be used to give much improved mobile phone coverage inside a home.

For improved internet access, a Yagi directional antenna, which is connected to a mobile broadband modem will give better internet service into a house. This can then be transmitted to computers around the house using a WiFi wireless network or an ethernet cable (the standard blue network cable). But it does not give mobile phone coverage inside the house.

Before buying and installing a Yagi antenna, they recommended using a TV antenna installer to test if it would be effective, the best location and to install it. There is also the issue of making sure the antenna installed is suitable for the transmission frequency of the service. The total cost for the antenna and installation they thought would be about \$700. In addition, there is a cost for the mobile broadband modem which needs to be added.

When using a Yagi directional antenna you need to ensure that it is pointed in the direction of the nearest mobile phone base station to operate effectively.

To obtain good mobile phone coverage inside a house using the Yagi antenna it is necessary to add a Telstra Smart Antenna. This takes the phone signal from the antenna and retransmits around the house. This device costs around \$760. Optus also has a similar device available.

Therefore to obtain good mobile broadband coverage, plus good mobile phone coverage in a house in a remote area like Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine totals about \$1500 plus the cost of the mobile broadband modem.

For those of us who are unsure about our mobile phone signal strength, they recommended having a TV antenna installer come and test the signal strength. Not all TV antenna installers have the equipment to check mobile phone signal strength, but several do.

Poor landline service?

The Telstra advice was offered with the qualification they didn't want to be seen telling how to suck eggs but apparently many people with poor landline service have not reported the problem to Telstra FAULTS (132203). Mr Bogg said that if Telstra customers did not get good service *after* reporting the problem to Faults he would be pleased to do whatever was possible to ensure the problem was fixed. Graham Tribe and Richard Beattie can put you in touch with him.

The Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine submission can be viewed on the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine website via the menu **Mt Wilson Progress Association > About Us > Submissions**

Graham Tribe

Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade***Pile Burn Procedure***

If there is one thing that your brigade noticed during the State Mine Fire it was how much easier it is to defend a property that is properly prepared. We have numerous instances now of fire stopping as it reached open cleared spaces but continuing to burn if it met undergrowth, leaf litter and mulch. The bushfire season is now over and we have the opportunity, in cooler weather, to maintain our properties and dispose of dead vegetation through pile burns.

Strangely enough, what concerns the authorities is not the risk of fire but the risk of pollution and the restrictions that are now placed on the burning off of garden waste are mainly an attempt to control that pollution. In the Blue Mountains this is the responsibility of Blue Mountains City Council and generally pile burns are not allowed.

After community consultation, the BMCC has granted certain outlying areas (including Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine) approval to conduct pile burns as long as certain conditions are met. Oversight of this process has been handed to the Blue Mountains District Office of the NSW Rural Fire Service in Katoomba. It is vitally important that these conditions are abided by as failure to do so could see the withdrawal of this concession.

During the non-bushfire period (usually 1 April to 30 September) the process, in brief, is as follows:

- Give your neighbours and District Office (4784 7444) at least 24 hours' notice of your intention to light up. District Office hours are 9.00 am -5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. Please remember this if you plan to burn at the weekend. You can advise District Office of up to a week of days if you are unsure of exactly which day will be the most suitable for a pile burn.
- On the day of the burn, advise District Office that you are lighting up and when you have put out the pile burn (do not burn overnight). These calls can be made at weekends as volunteers staff the phones at this time. There is a requirement for a responsible adult to be present at all times, an adequate water supply to be available and the pile must be 20m from the nearest residential building.
- Ensure that your pile burn abides by the document *Standards for Pile Burning*, available from www.rfs.nsw.gov.au, District Office or your Brigade Community Engagement Officer. In brief, material must only be vegetation from your property, the pile should be no greater than 2m in length or width and must be no greater than 1.5m high, material must be dead and dry and no logs over 150mm in diameter.

Your local brigade will do their best to protect properties in the event of a fire but they cannot be everywhere and there is no guarantee that crews from other areas will arrive in time. You need to give your property the best chance of surviving on its own and being able to protect you and your family. Even if your brigade can get to your street, if they have to choose between properties, crew safety dictates that they will have to choose the better maintained and safer property to protect.

So, please:

Give us a break – along your boundary, around your house and water supply and through your property entrance

Mt Irvine Draft Community Protection Plan

Last year members of the Mt Irvine community painstakingly walked fire trails and properties taking GPS coordinates of trails and the bush/house interface at Mt Irvine. This data was given to RFS Head Office and along with other RFS data has resulted in a draft of the Mt Irvine Community Protection Plan.

This Plan was reviewed by the Brigade Executive which has recommended some changes, largely resulting from the State Mine Fire. Once approved by the Blue Mountains Bushfire Management Committee it will be presented to the Mt Irvine community for their consideration and comments. The Plan contains three maps:

- Brigade Operational Map (for Brigade only) – provides brigades and other fire fighting agencies with important operational data such as fire trails, water supplies, community assets, helipads, communication towers, neighbourhood safer places etc
- Bush Fire Preparation Map – provides information for land managers, fire agencies and the community on details of existing and proposed bush fire risk treatment works for the community. It shows past and planned hazard reduction works
- Bushfire Survival Map – the most interesting map for residents as it provides vital information for preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan such as indicating the possible impact on your property of a fire by direct flame, radiant heat or embers or if it will be completely safe.

The Bush Fire Survival Map shows the effects of a fire when the Fire Danger Rating is 'catastrophic' and fire is coming from all directions.

This is an extreme case and one not yet experienced here (since white settlement). Nevertheless, bushfire conditions do not need to be 'catastrophic' for fires to destroy properties and lives.

The Fire Danger Rating at the outset of the 2013 State Mine Fire was 'extreme' and that fire destroyed 2 properties and numerous sheds, fences and equipment and came close to burning all round Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.

The map is extremely useful for showing you the worst case scenario for your property as well as last resort options.

At the moment it is planned to meet with the community on Easter Sunday.

Kathleen Oakes
Community Engagement Officer

Book Review: Something to get stuck into...

The English publisher *Reaktion* has been steadily producing a wonderful series called simply 'Animal'; there are now over 40 separate titles with more to come. Animals from the mundane, cats and cows, to the exotic mosquito and lobster are found among the mammals, insects, fish and birds.

The one with special appeal for our community is *Leech*; an animal described by the authors as one of 'humanity's oldest and most enduring, albeit peculiar, companions'. This fact filled little book is packed with information and illustrations (many in colour – for full impact) as the various roles of the leech are explored: natural, medical, capitalist, mechanical, wild, horror (did you see them used as agents of prophecy in Game of Thrones?) and biomedical.

The science is solid and clearly expressed, and a detailed index welcome; you will know more about leeches than you ever thought possible. While our reaction may be a heartfelt 'yuk', the leech and our use of it makes for a fascinating study. I have also enjoyed *Sparrow*, *Bee* and *Giraffe* in this series.

Alison Halliday

***Dennarque* Garden Opening**

Easter Saturday 19th April from 10am to 4pm

Easter Sunday 20th April from 10am to 3pm

This is the first time *Dennarque* has been opened to the public for many years

All profits will be donated to the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade



This beautiful 24 acre property was established in the 1870s by Edward Merewether who engaged Charles Moore from the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney. It was extended by William Maston under the guidance of Phil Harris in the 1970s. Bill and Lata Moss bought the property in 2003 and have planted many more maples and have created a Japanese garden. Autumn is spectacular as the colours of the maples, dogwoods, giant sequoia, flowering cherries and walnut trees are highlighted against the conifers, many of which date back to the original plantings by Merewether.

On Easter Sunday from 3pm to 5.30pm Bill and Lata Moss have generously offered a special opening for the Mount Wilson and Mount Irvine communities.

Entry to the garden \$12.50, under 18s free

Wine and cheese will be served in the Conservatory.

House guests welcome

RSVP by 13th April to Lesley Wilson : lesley@stacklaw.com.au

If you previously visited *Dennarque* during the weekend, and would like to attend after the Church Service on Easter Sunday, simply show your entry ticket at the gate

An extraordinary journey

I have often thought that an organised bike ride for Mounts residents would be a great way to raise funds for the Fire Brigade or the Village Hall. A Sunday ride to Mount Victoria or Bowens Creek would surely be very appealing.

The harsh light of the logistic challenges then begins to dawn: that trip would be pretty long and the weather invariably be either too cold, too wet, too windy, too hot. Some of the hills are dauntingly steep. The RTA, police and Council would probably need to be engaged. And of course we would need to have the local First Responders on stand-by with bottled oxygen. And besides, everyone is aware of the aging population of the villages.

What then are we to make of Vic Zhukov's truly remarkable four and a half month bike trip around Australia between April and September last year?

The details are mindboggling—13,200 kilometres at an average of 96 kilometres per day. It was virtually a non-stop ride, save for a two day break in Kingaroy staying with a friend, one day in Halls Creek waiting for spare parts and another day at Broome for some urgent dental work.

The bike itself was very modest: a \$450 Avanti, fitted with a wire shopping basket at the front and two panniers at the rear, purchased from St Vinnies Katoomba for \$4.50.

There was not an accompanying rider, no support staff, no sponsorship deals, no fundraising goals and, most certainly, no lycra.

And, by the way, Vic celebrated his 72nd birthday three months before he set off from *Lindfield Park* on a trip that had no reason other than "it was always something I wanted to do".

Accommodation was definitely not four-star: it involved finding two stout trees and setting up an Army fly over a hammock. A sleeping bag with an inner and outer skin was such that it could be used in combination in all weathers from the humid north to the freezing desert. Once a week, Vic found a country pub or roadhouse to spend the night, have a shower and catch up on some washing.

Food was generally not a problem with IGAs or roadhouses invariably found every two or three days to keep his hunger at bay. This was augmented by a steady stream of grey nomads kindly offering him a very welcome cup of tea and cakes.

A far greater problem was water: he needed to carry 8 or 9 litres that, in the hot north, often lasted only a day and a half. The main 4 litre keg mounted under the top tube of the bike was supplemented by a couple of plastic bottles on the frame and other containers in the panniers. Many times the only source of water was from bores, the salt content of which closely resembled seawater.

The very viable alternative - beer - was often exorbitantly priced at \$7.00 a stubbie or \$11.50 a schooner along the more isolated stretches. Little wonder then at a winery on a dusty back road just outside Mildura, with the certainty of far more reliable water supplies and the realisation that he was on the "home leg" (a mere 905 kilometres to go), Vic emptied the 4 litre container with a decidedly uncharacteristic flourish and refilled it with \$4.00 a litre port. This extravagance caused the total costs for the whole trip to blow out to just over \$20 per day.

The bike performed heroically, given its lineage and the demands of hauling the 30 kilograms of equipment. The pedals needed replacing at Katherine whilst at Halls Creek, replacement tyres were sent up from Broome on a bus as the extreme heat was literally melting the rubber. Six tyres need to be replaced along the trip whilst the can of WD40 could miraculously resolve just about any other emergency.

Vic had no great previous history as a keen bike rider other than his time in Hanoi many decades ago where they were mandatory city transport. Things changed dramatically in 2008 when he was talked into doing a fund-raising bike ride with former Army colleagues from Enoggera in Brisbane to Victoria Barracks in Sydney. Not wishing to show his lack of experience and training on that trip, Vic in his inimitable way decided the only way to get into shape was buy the aforementioned bike and ride the 1196 kilometres from Mt Wilson to Brisbane via the New England Highway. The return trip was easily made.

Energised by this, in 2009 he then undertook the well-known cycle route of Mt Wilson - Melbourne - Adelaide - Mt Wilson. He found himself in the middle of the famous red dust storm whilst on the Hay plain. That stretch of road was so flat and so devoid of interest that he staved off sleep by reading and then trying to memorise an anthology of John Keats poetry whilst pedalling.

Vic airily dismisses these journeys as being particularly noteworthy: "anybody can do things like this if they put their mind to it. They are available to everybody who wants to do something with this miracle called Life. I just can't understand why some people sleepwalk through their existence".

The conversation then gently drifts to some other trips that make the cycle trips pale into insignificance such as trek in New Guinea in the 1960s over the Owen Stanley ranges and along the Bulldog Trail through country then inhabited by KuKuKuKu tribe who were fierce pygmy cannibals. Or his Hobart - Port Davey - Queenstown - Hobart walk where survival at one stage literally meant eating solidified bags of flour and rusted cans of bully beef stored at a long deserted whaling station in 44 gallon drums left over from World War II. Or his walk from Canberra to Melbourne; his three month tramp around New Zealand with his infinitely patient partner Anne; his bi-annual ritual on three-week solo walks in the alpine back country around Mt Kosciuszko.

Or, on a completely different plane, his ongoing work of translating Indonesian novels or Russian short stories or Vietnamese poetry into published English works ("all available from Amazon or on Kindle"). Currently he is searching for a suitable Italian drama for translation.

All of these remarkable ventures are quietly spoken about with great humility and modesty, yet overlaid with understandable pride by a man who has found a simple peace.

Anyone up for a bike ride to Mount Victoria?

Tim Gow



Ask the Neighbours

It's an ill wind that blows....somewhere. I can't remember just where, Tim. But you get what I mean. We at RAATS¹ HQ had the PERFECT plan. John Le Carre would have been proud of us. You remember: Step 1: Recruit desperate, water starved leech as double agent – see my last column for details. Step 2: Pay with regular water rations -left in unmarked plastic saucers at secret drop points - and blood meals (by the way: thanks to all the volunteers who rolled up their trouser legs and took one for the team. Tim, I'll speak to you later about why you missed your appointed times, twice). Step 3: Insert double agent back into the field (literally). Step 4: Wait for the highly valuable intelligence to come flooding in.

Well, all this rain has certainly put paid to that OR it would have, if we hadn't been clever enough to video those clandestine meetings with our double agent, code named "Sol". No, that isn't short for "Solicitor", Tim. Show some respect. He can't back out now no matter how much rain we get. Sol is now back in play and already worth his weight in...blood.

Sol has been able to verify one of our other intelligence sources too. Seems that the leeches have been so emboldened by their dreams of world domination that they are now entering houses and positioning themselves for sneak attacks. One of our operatives² has advised of finding one of the little suckers on a toilet seat, just waiting to hit where we are most vulnerable. The swine! Not that pigs would do such a thing, Tm. In my experience, they are actually quite nice – especially with scrambled eggs.

But I digress. Sol has confirmed our worst suspicions. Having attended training camps in desert conditions with the Antechinus (i.e. before the rains), the leeches are, in fact, taking the fight to us; into the sanctity of our own homes (especially, the bathrooms). Times have never been so tough. We have to rally the troops, Tim. Time to get out Winnie's Battle of Britain speeches. To quote him (with the greatest of respect) "... We shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender". It will be black out curtains and RAATS night patrols soon, Tim.

And, of course, Tim, as part of our war effort we have to become more productive. The Boss and I have been doing our part. I am pleased to report recent crops. Sweet, juicy peaches– a whole kilo of them - all from our one little tree planted last year. See picture below. What a harvest! The walnuts, whilst delicious, have not been as plentiful this year as last. On the up side, those gang gangs are looking suspiciously well fed. "Is there a connection?" I hear you ask, Tim. Then there are the olives – they're coming along well. We haven't quite opened the gin and vermouth yet for the martinis, but we are very stirred up about them (not shaken at all). And the figs – in the grand tradition of self-sufficiency, we have enough fig leaves to clothe a number of small children very comfortably – or two adults in more racy fashion. And last weekend, whilst considering what haute couture garment to fashion for winter, I spotted some teensy weensy little figs. At least, I hope that's what they are. Otherwise, it's a very nasty looking infestation.

That's it for this edition, Tim. Remember Neighbours, keep vigilant wherever you are.

Elizabeth Montano

¹Rural Anti Antechinus Training Service (for anyone who hasn't been paying attention)

² No names, no pack drill, Ja...oops. Almost let the cat out of the bag there, Jane



Suggestions, comments or contributions warmly welcomed!