

The Mounts Spring 2026

Community Newsletter of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine



This photo, taken by Ken Ross (late of Shasta Lodge, Alison's father), shows the Mt Wilson waterfall in full flow. We believe it was taken in the mid to late 1950s. We welcome all readers to share other historical photos they have with us.

EDITORIAL

In any community there are people doing wonderful work as volunteers: working in established charities, looking after children and the elderly and just being the little engines that make a

difference, Here, on Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine, it is voluntary work that is the glue to hold our small communities together. It seems that almost everyone who can is a volunteer, and we all benefit from their hard work and generosity. Sometimes it is just a one-off help for a specific need but more often there is a real commitment to the fill the gap.

Volunteers do not just have one role; multiple tasks may be assumed, and roles change over interests and age. So, a heartfelt thank you to all who make cakes, sandwiches and run BBQs, to members of the fire brigade and all the other groups and societies that give so much to us all. Individual thanks to those offering specific expertise to those who are power-house backroom men and women. Volunteers turn up whenever they are needed, so thank a volunteer often and never take them for granted.

MUSIC TO SOOTHE THE SOUL PRESENTS WAVES AT PLAY

St Georges Church, Mt Wilson was once again the venue for an enthusiastic audience of local residents of the mounts plus a few guests and family members from further afield. The latest concert in the *Music to Soothe the Soul* series was dedicated to the memory of Mt Wilson resident, the late Maureen Ryan whose generosity enabled the series to continue once the original grant funding ended in 2023.

Long time collaborators, Jonathan Henderson (flute) and Alex Raineri (piano) presented a balanced program of classical composers and new Australian music. Opening with Australian composer, Sally Whitwell's *Road Trip*, the program was linked by a theme of movement. The six movements of Beethoven's *Serenade in D Major for Flute and Violin Op.41* showed the lighter side of Beethoven's writing, conforming more to 18th century salon music than the larger pieces he is well known for.



This was followed by Australian composer Anne Cawse's *as flower as fire* performed by Alex Raineri as a piano solo. In his introduction, Alex mentioned that he had learned this atmospheric piece during his time as Artist in Residence at The Old School in February 2025 and was delighted to be performing it again on St George's Steinway.

Jonathan Henderson rejoined Alex for Béla Bartók's *Suite paysanne hongroise* inspired by Hungarian folk tunes and dances. The final offering in the program was an arrangement by Jonathan of a piece composed for violin by American violinist and composer, Edwin Grasse, giving its name to the program, *Waves at Play*.

Audience members mingled with the musicians after the concert in the Mt Wilson Village Hall over drinks and delicious plates provided by MWPA and local residents.

Jonathan Henderson will return to Mt Wilson in January 2027 as Artist in Residence at The Old School.

Sarah Howell

MWPA PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

Spring is slowly showing herself off in the village with magnolias and the ornamental fruit trees bursting into colour. Bring it on!

As you would be aware, we are working hard to keep the pressure on the BMCC and NSW including some recent press coverage. I am writing this before our village meeting with BMCC. Let's hope this improves the quality of the information the villages are receiving and a shared understanding of the distress this long process is causing for not only the businesses of the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine but also the residents.

Please join us at the AGM on October 3rd at 5:00 and hopefully we will have more updates.

Nancy Fox, President

PS - The image to the right is for a program we have been asked to make readers aware of. The program is undertaking a trial until 30 June 2027 to provide transport to people so they can get to their place of study in addition, if they are an apprentice or trainee, to transport them to either their pickup points, closest public transport or to their workplace, so they can get there on time.

This program is only available for people living in the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains LGA.

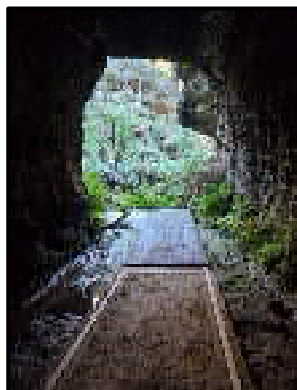
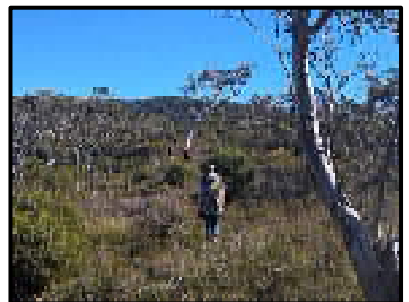
The cost of the transport is \$2.50 each way.



WINTER BUSHWALKS WITH UPPER MOUNTAINS BUSHWALKING GROUP – RECAP

June

Bruces Walk - Blackheath to Wentworth Falls - Western section, starting of Evans Lookout Road, into Grand Canyon and the Point Pilcher Track across the back of Katoomba, crossing Mt Hay Road and descending Wentworth Creek and finishing at Evans Street in Wentworth Falls.



July (right)

Mt Wilson to Water Trough Hill - Bells Line of Road - Off track walk, linking Mt Wilson with Mt Wilson Station (Bell), using a route on the ridges with one creek crossing (DuFaur Creek) - A route used by Gregsons as direct route to Bell.

August (left)

Glow Worm Tunnel walk, return via the Old Coach Road and Pagoda Track.

BUSHCARE NEWS

Even the most casual observer will be aware that Mt Wilson is in the bush. Bushland needs care, to help it resist all sorts of invasive weeds, creepers, climbers, and trees — yes, we mean you, ivy! The Mt Wilson Bushcare Group meets the second Friday morning of each month to give our bushland the care it deserves, as a small payback for all of the joy the bushland gives us. The program is sponsored by the Blue Mountains City Council, which provides gloves, secateurs, kneeling pads, and most of all, expert supervision and help.

Tracy Abbas has been our devoted bushcare expert for several years now, but she has just gone on extended leave. In her stead, we welcome Nathan Summers, Sean Moore, and Michael Smith from the BMCC. They are all quite knowledgeable, although a couple of regulars are also quite accomplished plantspersons (is that a word?). Those not so knowledgeable are more than welcome, on the promise that lessons learned at Bushcare will have practical application at the homestead.

For the rest of 2026, we'll be meeting at Sloan Reserve on Hay Lane, starting at 9 am. We take a break for tea or coffee — bring your own, but don't be surprised if a home-baked cake materialises out of the mist. We break at noon, although there have been some whispers about bloody marys once the BMCC officials are out of sight.

It's already noticeable the progress we've made, but alas, the weeds don't sleep. Come join us some second Friday morning — all are welcome! Call Bruce Arnold on 0412 365-247 if you have any questions.

P.S.: Not only is Bushcare Friday on our website's community calendar, but one can also find on the website resources to help identify and control weeds around the homestead. The MWPA makes the booklet available to residents in old-school (printed) form — Sue Woolfenden is the one to contact on 47562046.

Bruce Arnold

HOUSE WANTED

Former Mt Wilson residents Megan Wood and Tom Riddell who are still active in the local RFS brigade are looking to buy a property again in either Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine. If anyone is considering selling please contact Megan [via email](#) or call her on 0433 799 164.

BOOKS LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME

Vladislav (Vic) Zhukov is reducing his library, under attack by mice. He is offering readers free copies of his translations, some published by commercial houses, including university presses, others self-published. They include:

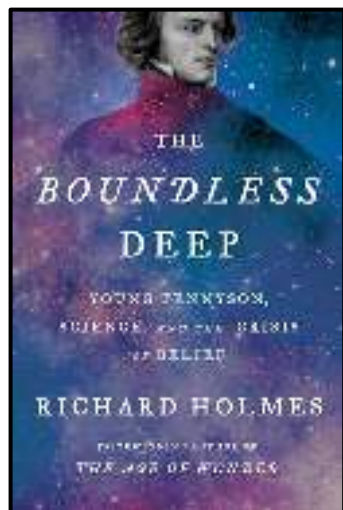
- From Bahasa Indonesia, Omar Kayam's *Javanese Gentry*. Considered by one reader in Mt Irvine to resemble a Javanese *Gone with the Wind*
- From Italian, Gabriele D' Annunzio's *Pescara Tales (1902)*. 'In a corner of civilised Europe ... a meld of barbarism and innocence.' The book was reviewed in 'The Mounts' by Alison Halliday some two or three years ago.
- From Vietnamese, *The Kim Van Kieu of Nguyen Du (1765-1820)*. Vietnam's foundation epic, recounting in 3254 verses a young woman's 'tale bedight in

romance.' Picaresque and tragic.

- From Russian, Yuri Kazakov's *Old Hunting Grounds and Other Stories*. In two volumes describing the lives of villagers in White Sea communities barely touched in the 1950s by decades of Soviet History.

If interested, get in touch with Vic by phone on 47562148 or [email](#) him.

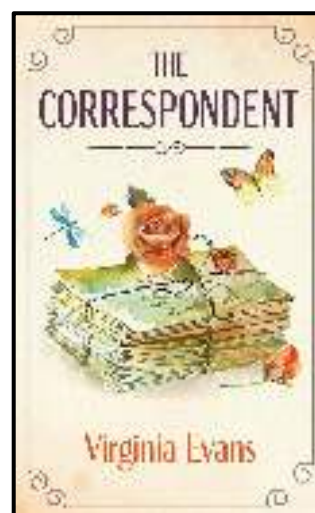
BOOK REVIEW



This winter has been full of wonderful books, a really eclectic mixture from crime to biography, novels to poetry. Here are two from the season's reading. Richard Holmes has written a lifetime of biography, his most recent effort is *The Boundless Deep* which explores the life of the young Alfred Tennyson, much loved and still read poet of Victorian England. Tennyson was a striking looking man, dark auburn hair, chiselled face, a strong tall body. His appearance fascinated many of his contemporaries. He epitomised what a poet should look like. But his poetry was more controversial as he grappled with the ideas of his time. He wrote with a seeming ease and expression and was very popular with both his poetry-writing contemporaries and the general public. However, beneath the poetry lay a continual grappling with new ideas of science and religion. He read widely, thought hard and talked obsessively about topics such as Darwin and the theory of evolution, geology and deep time, cosmology and the natural world.

He was determined to be a poet, and Holmes examines many of the early and middle poems, tracing the connections to the rapidly changing science of the time, before Tennyson became the poet laureate. Holmes also weaves in Tennyson's very troubled childhood, his social life, often inept, his need for isolation, and his deep friendship with Arthur Hallam. This is a fascinating portrait of a poet and it immediately makes you want to re-read the poems.

In complete contrast to a scholarly biography is *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans. The letter writer is Sybil Van Anterp, a retired judge's assistant. We first meet her as an opinionated retired woman. She writes obsessively and through these letters, and the occasional reply, we see her old certainties dissolve as she is thrown into new experiences and meets new people. From a life which becomes increasingly outside her control we trace a developing kindness and a willingness to accept that not everything, and everybody, is under her thumb. She is not very likeable at the beginning, but Evans does a great job in showing how Sybil changes and grows and accepts. She is surprised by much in her old age and we too are surprised by her. I did not think I would enjoy this book, but I ended up relishing the life and revelations of Sybil's time.



Extra reading – anything by Richard Holmes and especially his two quasi-memoirs *Footsteps* and *Sidetracks*. Both are delightful. If you enjoy Sybil's letters re-visit those in 84 Charing Cross Road, not a novel but a booklover's record of discovering a wonderful bookshop on the other side of the world.

Alison Halliday

DOGS OF THE MOUNTS – FRANKIE AND ROO – FARCRY FIDOS

Frankie, the frankfurter dog, came to us as a tiny puppy in February 2019. We share her with Janet's ex husband who purchased her for our kids at a time when our Sydney apartment didn't allow pets! Frankie soon saw that that rule was changed!

Like all dachshunds she rules the roost.

While she loves Mt Wilson, she's not a huge fan of the ocean!



Roo, on the other hand, an Australian Shepherd, is a working dog – ready to take on all challenges.

He is actually a very expensive 'rescue dog'. A family who purchased him at great expense realised he really didn't suit their lifestyle in Sydney so after seeing this adorable photo of a shy 4-month old and falling in love at first sight, we agree to take him off their hands for half the original purchase price.

Roo is the best behaved dog we have ever owned, but we can't claim the credit. He just gets it!

Roo loves nothing more than a ride in the Polaris to supervise Janet and Andrew's gardening work, or an outing on the boat.



While Frankie loves to give Roo a bit of gyp, which he tolerates like a saint, they are also the best of friends.

Janet Mc Donald



ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE AT THE OLD SCHOOL

At the beginning of July the Old School Committee had a wonderful discussion to decide which applicants to offer a residency. With comments from our assessors and a desire to have a mix of visual artists, writers and musicians, some established artists and some emerging artists we ended up with an exciting group.

During September Donovan Christie, an urban landscape painter, is our resident artist. Donovan was a finalist in the Wynne Prize this year, so we are looking forward to seeing his paintings in Mt Wilson, Mt Irvine and the surrounding area. Then for October Cathy Franzi, a contemporary ceramic artist who explores botanical and environmental themes. During her residency she plans to work on pieces for an exhibition in February at Sabbia Gallery. Lisa Walker, a photographer now also working with collage will be our artist in November.

Looking into 2027 we are fortunate to have Jonathon Henderson coming during January. He is coming to work on composition but hopefully he will play his flute for us for his community event. Then in February writer Nigel Featherstone, in March landscape painter Sarah Randall and lastly writer Eva Torrkola.

I hope you can go to the artist's community events to hear and see what they have been doing in Mt Wilson at the Old School and keep up with their activities here on our [Instagram](#).

Hosting an artist is a rewarding experience, if you would like to give it a go please contact Mandy Ballinger [via email](#).

Judy Tribe

A CENTURY OF ECOLOGICAL OBSERVATION

The Rainforests of Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine

Walk from an open paddock or eucalypt forest into one of the rainforests of Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine and the change can be immediate. The light dims, the air becomes cooler and the vegetation closes around you. Ferns replace grasses and the ground beneath accumulated leaf litter is often damp. Even on a warm day, there can be a sense of moisture quite different from the country outside.

It is part of what makes these forests so beautiful, but it also tells us something important about how they work.

Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine occupy a distinctive part of the northern Blue Mountains landscape. Their basalt-capped mountains rise above the predominantly sandstone country around them. Richer soils, elevation, rainfall, topography and shelter combine to provide conditions in which rainforest has survived while much of the surrounding landscape supports very different vegetation.

This is not a new observation. More than a century ago, botanists from the University of Sydney came to Mt Wilson to study its vegetation. In 1924 Patrick Brough, John McLuckie and Arthur Petrie published the first part of An Ecological Study of the Flora of Mount Wilson, appropriately titled The Vegetation of the Basalt. Their work continued through a series of studies examining the basalt vegetation, eucalypt forests, vegetation of the valleys and the relationships between plants and their environment.

What makes their work particularly interesting today is that they were not simply compiling lists of plants. They were trying to understand why different vegetation occurred where it did. They examined geology, soils, topography, water, light and other environmental influences, and the relationships between rainforest and the surrounding forests.

Among the rainforest vegetation they studied was the *Ceratopetalum/Doryphora* association, the Coachwood/Sassafras Forest still familiar in this part of the Blue Mountains. Their work records species including Coachwood, Sassafras, Lilly Pilly, Blueberry Ash, Blackwood and a substantial fern component. Botanical names and vegetation classifications have changed during the ensuing century, but much of the forest they were studying remains recognisable today.

There is something remarkable about being able to walk into these forests and recognise vegetation that scientists were systematically studying in this landscape a century ago.

One of the keys to understanding it is moisture. Rainforest creates a very different internal environment from open forest. A closed canopy shades the vegetation and soil below. Leaf litter accumulates on the forest floor. Evaporation is reduced and moisture is retained in vegetation, litter and soil. These cool, humid conditions support not only the trees and ferns we readily see, but also fungi, lichens, mosses and a multitude of less conspicuous organisms that contribute to decomposition, nutrient cycling and the functioning of the forest ecosystem.

There is a reinforcing relationship at work. Suitable rainfall, soils, topography and shelter allow rainforest to establish and persist. As the forest develops, its canopy and structure help maintain the moist conditions that favour continued growth and regeneration.

Disturbance can interrupt that relationship. Opening the canopy admits more sunlight and wind and can increase drying. Fire can damage rainforest vegetation and further open the canopy. Repeated disturbance can therefore alter the conditions necessary for rainforest succession.

This matters because rainforest and eucalypt dominated sclerophyll forest do not necessarily respond to fire in the same way. Many familiar Australian plants possess adaptations that enable them to survive fire, regenerate after it or exploit the conditions it creates. Rainforest can burn, particularly during drought and severe fire weather, but repeated fire can damage rainforest vegetation and favour more fire-tolerant communities.

A century after those early studies at Mt Wilson, new research has added an intriguing dimension to the story.

Eli Bendall, Vera Wong, Stephen Bell and Rachael Gallagher recently investigated rainforest communities elsewhere within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Their field work found substantial discrepancies between the vegetation growing on the ground and its official classification. Of the sites they surveyed, 65 per cent were in areas mapped as sclerophyll-dominated forest but had floristic assemblages consistent with rainforest. Across their broader mapping, more than 90 per cent of the putative rainforest they identified was mapped as sclerophyll forest. They estimate that rainforest within their study area may be three to four times more extensive than existing Plant Community Type mapping indicates.

Their study was not a survey of the rainforests of Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine, and its results should not be applied directly to them. What it demonstrates, however, is highly relevant: rainforest can exist on the ground where the map says sclerophyll forest.

That raises a simple question for our own landscape: how well do our maps describe what is truly here?

The answer matters for more than botanical accuracy. Vegetation classification informs conservation and land management. Bendall and colleagues point specifically to implications for fire planning and conclude that improved mapping and protection of remaining rainforest patches are needed.

None of this means that every area presently classified as wet sclerophyll forest at Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson or Mt Irvine should instead be called rainforest. Forest boundaries are complex and vegetation changes over time. It does suggest that classification should ultimately be tested against what is growing on the ground.

Nor does present vegetation necessarily tell us the complete history of a place. Clearing, timber harvesting, grazing, fire and the introduction and spread of exotic and invasive species can alter vegetation, ecological processes and forest boundaries. What we see today may therefore reflect not only the underlying environment, but the accumulated effects of past disturbance. A species now surviving mainly at the edge of rainforest, for example, need not necessarily always have been confined to that position. Its present distribution may partly reflect what has survived previous disturbance.

The early ecological studies are particularly valuable in this respect. They provide another point in time against which we can consider what we see today. They cannot tell us everything that existed before European clearing, but together with contemporary observation and modern science they allow us to ask better questions.

There is also a responsibility that comes with living among these forests.

We did not create them, rather, we inherited them from those who came before us, and in time we will hand them to another generation. Our individual periods of ownership or residence represent only moments in their history, yet what we do during those moments will influence what we pass on. Protecting existing rainforest, restoring it where appropriate and nurturing recovering forest until it can sustain itself are therefore parts of the same task. Restoration without continuing protection is unlikely to succeed.

There is also an additional benefit. The moisture that helps rainforest persist also influences its response to fire. Wet vegetation and damp litter require energy to be heated and dried before they can sustain combustion. Shade, canopy cover and a humid microclimate therefore matter. Rainforest is certainly not fireproof, prolonged drought and severe fire weather can allow it to burn, but a closed, moist forest presents very different conditions from vegetation that has been opened and dried.

This creates an important relationship. We protect rainforest from fire because repeated fire can damage it. In maintaining a healthy, shaded and moisture-retaining forest, we may also maintain conditions that make fire penetration more difficult. That is an additional benefit of protecting rainforest, not the reason for doing so.

The principal reason is the forest itself. For more than a century, scientists have been trying to understand the remarkable vegetation of this part of the Blue Mountains. The work begun by Brough, McLuckie and Petrie gives us a record of what was being observed here a century ago. New research reminds us that even today rainforest can be overlooked or incorrectly classified,

creating the risk that it may be burnt under fire management practices intended for sclerophyll forest.

Between those observations, separated by a century, are the forests themselves, still growing at Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine.

Perhaps the most important lesson from a century of ecological observation is a simple one. Before deciding how these forests should be managed, we should first understand what they are and then care for what we have been fortunate enough to inherit. Allen Hyde

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UPDATE FROM YOUR RURAL FIRE BRIGADE

Your Brigade has spent the last few months continuing to prepare for the upcoming fire season. Along the way, we've had a number of callouts to fallen trees, one motor vehicle accident and several for our Community First Responders.

As I've previously reported, last year we started the practice of conducting some of our monthly training sessions at local properties - pointing out their infrastructure, buildings, water sources, access routes and generally applying all the things we learn about fighting fires in practical settings. We've continued this approach this year with more properties volunteered as training venues in the coming months. At our July training, we visited several properties in Mt Wilson and looked at how to make a solar power system safe in an oncoming fire. At that property, we also ran a simulation where we fought a fire coming up from the Cathedral of Ferns Campground threatening properties on Hillcrest Lane.

At our August training we visited three properties at Mt Irvine taking the path that the 2013 State Mine Fire took as it destroyed two houses and a lot of infrastructure. We 'workshopped' how we would protect one of those properties, looking at its water supplies, location, type of services and how we would position a fire truck to make sure we keep our crews safe when fighting fires (hint – position your fire truck facing towards your exit so you can get out quickly with no need to reverse). We looked at how to traverse through properties from Danes Way through to Mt Irvine Rd via gates and existing tracks.



It's important that our crews know how to get around not only for when we're deployed but also to assist incoming crews in a major fire. We all need to know our own backyard.

We also took the opportunity while we were in the area to have a look at the new temporary home of one of our Cat 1s, now housed at Kookootonga in an old wool shed called (most appropriately) the Bales. It's safer there from the elements than its prior location at the Mt Irvine Hall. This is, of course, a temporary measure until the new fire station at Mt Irvine is built. As you know, we are regularly in contact with District Office to assist the RFS in getting the new station built and operational.

As usual, we've kept our twice monthly maintenance nights going with checks of all the vehicles and their equipment as well as work around the Mt Wilson Station.

We've had a new group of fire fighters qualify. Well done to them. We've had members do new courses and re-accreditations. And we've been helping new drivers to familiarise themselves more with the trucks, where water sources are and, importantly, how to drive our fire trails. They can be tricky!

We're continuing to work with District Office to inform the Local Emergency Management Committee on emergency services issues associated with the partial closure of Mt Wilson Rd and in the event that the road is fully closed.

Leg work continues on our advocacy to have the Telstra Tower at Mt Tomah deliver on its promise of providing better reception for Telstra mobiles along Bells Line of Rd and for communities at Mt Tomah, Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. With the Mt Wilson Progress Association, we've been testing signal strength in various parts of the Mounts so we can provide more factual material on our experiences with mobile phone reception. We also have the benefit of really extensive testing work done by our neighbours at Berambing and Mt Tomah. With that, we'll be going back to District Office to seek engagement by the RFS's telcos consultative committee.

Of course, complaints by individual community members as well as community organisations are needed to keep this issue from disappearing from the agenda. So, keep those formal complaints going. You would have recently seen media reports from the Telecommunications Ombudsman inquiring into the poor standard of mobile phone reception in regional and remote areas following a huge number of complaints in recent years. So, people power does work! As we've asked previously, it would be helpful if you could keep us informed if you do complain formally so we can be consistent in our messaging.

As we always, the most practical thing we can all do is make sure that our properties are as well prepared as they can be to withstand fire, whether it comes in a direct fire front or ember attack. Get ready now. Fire seasons are starting earlier and lasting longer. If you wait until there are fires around to get a new pump or have one repaired, you may be at the end of a long queue. If you delay clearing driveways, around your house and access points for fire trucks, you may not be able to dispose of cut vegetation easily. And refresh your bushfire survival plan. Will you go? Will you stay? All things to get settled before we have an emergency.

Since my last column, we've held our Brigade Annual General Meeting. We've given Beth Raines a huge sendoff as Captain – while still having all those skills and experience stay in the Brigade with her new role as a Deputy Captain (see photos following page courtesy of Rosemary Walsh).

Our 2026-27 line -up is:

Executive: Joe Montano – President; Mark Bancroft – Vice President (Mt Irvine residents will already have received fresh comms from him); Petula Martin - Treasurer; Robyn Scrivener – Secretary; Matt Mason (as Captain he is automatically on the Executive); Members: Sally Banfield, Elizabeth Montano, Beth Raines, Peter Raines, Graham Tribe and Rosemary Walsh.



Field Officers: Matt Mason – Captain; Joe Montano – Senior Deputy Captain; Deputy Captains are Beth Raines, Peter Raines, David Howell, Allen Hyde, Patrick Buckle, Keith Waters.

Other Officers: Rosemary Walsh - Catering, Janet McDonald – Community Engagement Officer, Mahn England and Geoff Hull - Equipment Officers, Sue Woolfenden - Senior Station Officer, Peter Raines - Fire Trails Coordinator, Sally Banfield – Training Officer, WHS Officer – Elizabeth Montano.

Elizabeth Montano, Member of the Brigade Executive, and WH&S Safety Officer,
AGM photos with thanks to Rosemary Walsh.



PICNIC TO MT. WILSON.

On Monday last the local Progress Association arranged a trip to Mount Wilson, for a private party of ten persons, in the charge of Mr. T. Morris. On arrival at Bell station, Mr. J. Hall had vehicles in waiting, and after a pleasant drive, the party reached Mount Wilson about 11.30. Mr. Hall had arranged for the party to inspect the well-known gardens of Wynnes, Manns, and Coxes, which, after the recent rains, looked their best, being radiant with blooms. The caretakers of the various establishments courteously allowed the visitors to ramble over the grounds, and the ladies of the party were handed specimens of the floral growth of this beautifully situated mountain resort. The party had luncheon in picnic fashion on the colonnade of one of the mansions referred to, and the caretaker, with thoughtfulness, provided a plentiful supply of fresh milk and cream, which act of kindness was fully appreciated by the party. The party left Mount Wilson for Bell about 4.30, where a train was caught for Lithgow at about 7 p.m. The party arrived home at a reasonable hour, loud in their praise of an enjoyable trip to a very beautiful place, and the courtesy shown by Mr. Hall and the caretakers at the establishments visited.

From the Lithgow Mercury, 16 November 1908.

A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR VERY OWN RECREATION SPACE, SILVA PLANA

From our archive of Mt Wilson Historical Society newsletters (September 1998) comes this interesting and well-researched piece about Silva Plana. Most recently the site for our annual Christmas Picnic and a relatively short-lived weekly dog play group, in its hey-day it was a place

of vibrant social gatherings, the location of our first village post office and the site of a locally-famous cricket match that took place the end of the 19th century. Spoiler: we were thrashed. Enjoy!

Mt Wilson was first settled around the 1870s. The subdivisions surveyed by E S Wyndham in 1868 were not bought in 1870 when put up for auction. However in 1875 these same blocks were sold with comparative ease. The land which was to become known as Silva Plana was no exception. Crosbie Blake Brownrigg was granted ten acres in this area in June 1875. Interestingly, he became an assistant to E S Wyndham after the survey of Mt Wilson was completed (C H Currey). He was also the son of Captain Brownrigg who was Superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Co from November 1852 to July 1856. Like many of the first land holders in Mt Wilson, C B Brownrigg did not undertake any building activities following his purchase, and no one has really been able to provide an answer to why so many first land holders, similarly, failed to stay.

In 1876, however, Edward Merewether visited Mt Wilson and reported that he had viewed land belonging to C B Brownrigg - "10 acres priced at 100 pounds but it will cost 15 pounds to 20 pounds per acre to clear it of big timber and undergrowth, leaving all the tree ferns". Thus we know Silva Plana was covered with forest. The name 'Silva' (wood) is, therefore, entirely appropriate. Edward Merewether, a Superintendent of the Australian Agricultural Co., purchased this land. Soon it was being called Merewether's Paddock, or when it was flooded, Merewether's Lake. As I recall, the last time Silva Plana was flooded was in the April of 1988 when Mt Wilson had over 500mm of rain. Merewether built a small house on this land for his immediate needs while what was to be his main house was being constructed on Dennarque Hill - eighteen acres which he had purchased from Sir Alexander Dean.

Englishman James Inglis, who in 1880 wrote about his 'Australian Cousins', provides us with a vivid picture of his visit to Mt Wilson as he reached the top of what we now call the Zig Zag:

On the brow of the hill we came to a clearing of some 10 acres belonging to my friend, on which had been erected a neat weatherboard cottage. All the tall timber has been cut down, but the tree-ferns have been left. Can you imagine ten acres of magnificent tree-ferns? Nothing else to be seen! - they are as plentiful as cabbages in a garden bed. The sight to me was as rare as it was surpassingly beautiful.

On the opposite side of the road, beside a rudely fenced paddock, and overlooking the bleak tumbled wilderness of distant arid hills, stands a rough log cabin of a primitive bush style. This is inhabited by a decent old Irish woman, who keeps a store for the accommodation of the parties of bushmen, sawyers, rail splitters and road makers that are at work on the various properties on the mountain.

... My friend [E C Merewether] has a magnificent mansion of hewn stone (Dennarque), with convenience of a first-class modern gentleman's seat, erected on one of the most lovely sites in the place. The cost of the house was over 5000 pounds! Other nice houses, though chiefly of wood are being put up in various parts of the mountain.

In 1886 Henry John Wynne, the only surviving son of Richard and Mary Anne Wynne of 'Yarrowa' (Wynstay), cleared, along with Herbert Merewether, a son of Edward Merewether, a section of Merewether's Paddock for a cricket ground, the pitch being near the small house built by Merewether.

Miss Helen Gregson described New Years Day, 1887 in the following way:

It became the social event of the year. A local team played against one got together by the postmaster at Mt Victoria. The visitors drove about seventeen miles in a four horse drag and lunch was served.

From the Lithgow Mercury of January 1898 there is a description of the match held exactly one hundred years ago [now, 128 years ago! Ed.]. Sadly, on that occasion the Mt Wilson team only managed one innings. We were soundly defeated by the Mt Victorians and Blackheathens (as they were so quaintly known):

There was quite a picnic on Wednesday at MT WILSON, when a combined team of Mounts and Blackheathens played a match against a team of Mt Wilson, Hartley Vale and others. Two coaches left here (Mt Victoria), one full of cricketers and the other of ladies. On the grounds a good lunch was provided and a 10 gallon keg of ale for the thirsty ones. A most enjoyable outing was experienced and all returned in safety by 8.00pm. Mt Wilson only enjoyed one innings. The Mount winning the toss and going in first won 21 runs in the first innings. Mt Victoria scored 57 in the first innings, Woodhead with 13 being the highest. Mt Wilson only put up 36, of which J.Barnett was highest with 9. In their second innings Mt Victoria got 89 - Woodhead 23; Hall 19 and Neate not out 15 and Goodire 12.

Meanwhile, a different form of activity, the ongoing struggle to gain better communications for this rather isolated and tiny community, was taking place, also on Silva Plana.

In December 1888 a dramatic change took place in the postal arrangements for Mt Wilson. Mrs Aida Elizabeth Mahoney was appointed to a receiving office in Mt Wilson which was, in fact, in the house on Merewether's Paddock. Tucked away in the Australian archives was a letter written by Richard Wynne which explains why Mrs Mahoney lived in that house - her husband worked for Edward Merewether. Richard Wynne described Mrs Mahoney as "fairly educated and trustworthy". Later in that same letter he stated that "Mahoney is living in a cottage of Merewether's rent free".

Between 1876 and 1888 there existed continued pressure to improve the postal service to Mt Wilson. Up to that time, it had operated from Mt Wilson platform (Bell Station). The appointment of Mrs Mahoney was a major advance. However, Richard Wynne had asked that this office be called Irvine as this was the name originally given to the parish of Mt Wilson by Sir James Martin's government. This proposal aroused the Honourable G H Cox (Beowang, now Withycombe) to protest against the change of name in the strongest terms. He stated that it was altogether against the wishes of the residents *"with the exception of Mr Wynne, all the other residents without exception Justice Stephen, Mr Merewether, Mr Gregson and members of my own family (E K Cox of Bebeah; J D Cox of Balangra now Sefton Hall) strongly deprecate the change of name which we trust will not be sanctioned"*. The Hon G H Cox's protestation over the change of name was successful and 'Irvine' was changed to 'Mt Wilson' on 9th January, 1889. The old office of Mt Wilson railway platform became Bell, which was also a suggestion of the Hon G H Cox. A postal service between Bell and Mt Wilson was established with John Hall (Holly Lodge, Bell) carrying the mail on horseback six times a week between October and April, and once a week for the rest of the year.

Mrs Mahoney, the ROK (Receiving Office Keeper) until January 12th 1890, left a note behind her one day which read: *"I don't wish to have anything to do with the letters ... "*. She went off to Sydney and, to the consternation of the residents, particularly Mr Richard Wynne, told neither the residents nor even her husband James of her plan to leave. This, in effect, ended the link

between the postal service and Merewether's Paddock. The Honourable G H Cox stepped into the breach and the postal service commenced at his property 'Beowang' (Withycombe) under the charge of his daughter Miss Lucy Cox.

Following the death of Edward Merewether in 1893, the land was bought by James Elliot Mann, and the small house on it was then named 'Silva Plana'. There is little doubt that cricket matches continued on New Years Day during his lifetime. Before long, James Mann's daughter, Esmay, realising the great community benefit that this land provided, gave four acres, two roods and two perches of it for community recreation after WWI, just as she gave land at the same time for the War Memorial.



A make-shift fabric slippery slide, Sports Day, ca. 1930s

It would seem that the idea for a sports day evolved after the establishment of the Country Women's Association (CWA) in Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine in 1929. At the first meeting of the CWA on 16 May 1929, Mrs Norman Knight Brown proposed that a sports meeting be held at Mt Wilson during the Christmas holidays. Mrs King seconded the proposal. In 1930 it was held on January 4th most successfully. But in October 1932 it was recorded in the minutes of the CWA meeting of the month that followed that residents such as Miss Helen (Nellie) Gregson and Mrs Draper were present. In this meeting Mr Valder (Nooroo), Mr Gregson (Yengo) and Mr Wilson were appointed to the Sports Committee to organise the program of races while Miss Gregson, Miss Sloan (Bebeah) and Mrs Draper became the Catering Committee. Miss Joshua was to conduct the soft drink and sweet stall. Precise gender lines were in place. The younger set were to clean the ground and make it ready for the races. The recreation area of Silva Plana was used throughout the 1930s, 1940s and the early 1950s for cricket matches, wood chopping contests, gymkhanas and of course the lively and versatile CWA Sports day.



Cross-cut saw competition ca. 1930s

Among items acquired by the Historical Society from the Huber estate of Windy Ridge in 1995 was a pamphlet announcing the day's activities. The details of this pamphlet record a colourful set of events at that time and also show the personality of Fred Huber. Fred was a remarkable gymnast, well known in the country of his birth, Switzerland, and in Sydney among the Swiss community. In Mount Victoria he established a gymnastic club. Here on Silva Plana he was able to demonstrate his skills and to bring an enthusiastic group together to participate in the experience.

In the 1951 program there was an exhibition of wood chopping and wood sawing arranged by Tom Kirk and his brothers. By that time Tom's name was legendary in the wood chopping world. He was later to travel to the USA where he was proclaimed world champion. It was fortunate that Tom, Peter (now 90 years of age) and Cecil (93 yrs of age) are still here to tell their stories.

Today we enjoy the return to our past which the annual sports days, recommenced in 1994. These add another dimension to our own experiences of Mt Wilson and provoke us to dwell more closely on those who played and laughed and established that sense of community in the century past and who enriched this very special place.

The Mount Wilson Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided with obtaining this information from the following sources: C H Currey (Mt Wilson); the Australian Archives; Mr Michael Mann; H Naylor; the Kirk family.



Above: Canine besties, India Pearl (Sefton Hall) and Obi (Withycombe) making the most of 'Merewether's Lake' (March 2022)



Left: Lake Merewether, originally Merewether Paddock except when flooded now Silva Plana (1891)

SCANDAL, MYSTERY AND INTRIGUE

Download the Historic Village Walk App Today!

With the streets of the village so blissfully quiet and daytime temperatures starting to lift, it's the perfect time to take a leisurely stroll back in time with our very own Historic Village Walk App.

Developed by the Society a few years back, the interactive App takes you on a fascinating and entertaining tour of over 20 historic sites around the village. A recorded spoken narrative by our very own Sarah Howell allows you to be guided 'head up' rather than 'head down' in your screen and includes plenty of lesser-known pics from the past, giving you a now-and-then glimpse into village life. Have you heard about...

- The rector's wife who occasionally tootled about the village perched on a garden chair in the back of an old Beford utility

- The two Melbourne Cup champion thoroughbreds owned and trained by one of our locals
- The Mt Wilson resident purported to be the illegitimate son of King Edward VII and from a lineage tracing back to Theodore I of Corsica
- The notable gentleman who suddenly fell ill, called upon his Sydney surgeons – only to find himself being operated upon on his dining room table!
- The mysterious inscription above the front door of one of the Foundation houses
- The secret meaning behind the window above the altar of the village church
- The self-proclaimed grand dame of the village whose dislike of the church prompted her to declare, “I burn it down... if it would burn!”

All this (and much more) for less than the cost of a macchiato!



And remember, if your idea of historic immersion is less about getting out onto the streets and more about settling down in your favourite armchair with a glass of red, fireside, then you can peruse the App and access all its fantastic content without stepping out the front door. Just sit back, relax and let the dulcet tones of Sarah’s storytelling take you on a surprising tour of the cast of characters who were so central to the village’s formative years.

Download the app onto your smartphone or tablet via the Apple or Android Appstores and you’re ready to go. Just search ‘Mt Wilson Historic Walk’ in your Appstore.

Any issues – [email us](#).

WINTER IN MT WILSON

A few winter photos from the archives of the Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Historical Society.



From the Kirk Collection, A snow man built by the Kirk children.



Trees covered with a heavy snow fall, with Windyridge in the background, some time in the 1960s



A snowy view to the north across Waterfall Creek from Windyridge, showing Applecot half down the hill. No other house in sight.

KARIJINI NATIONAL PARK CANYON TOURS

The cooler months can be the best time for bushwalking so it baffles me why the mounts are so quiet in winter (ignoring for now the road issue). But given that's the way it is, I took a three week working holiday in the Pilbara guiding canyon tours in Karijini National Park. Daytime temperatures were consistently 24 deg with nary a cloud in the sky, and nights were chilly, with dingoes sometimes sniffing around the tents for scraps.

It is such a different world to the Blue Mountains. The 2.5 billion year old red rocks, chock full of iron, have been around for more than half the life of the planet, and although the common plants are broadly recognisable (eucalypts, acacias, melaleucas, bush tomatoes, native hibiscus, and of course lots of spinifex) the species were all new to me which made for interesting days in the bush.

The canyoning was also quite different. Every day started with a descent of Hancock Gorge, yes named after Gina's dad, who left the odd piton embedded in the cliffs from his early days exploring the region with a rock-climbing guide, and ended at the start of Wittenoom Gorge, luckily upstream of the most asbestos-ridden area. The public access areas were quite crowded but given that they are spectacular and it's a short walk in with metal staircases in the tricky parts, that was not surprising. But the Class 6 areas (access by permit or licensed guide only) felt remote we saw not another soul, with just herons and ravens for company. It was a great change of scenery but I was happy to be back on the mounts again.

Andrew Mitchell



SPRING BUSHWALKS WITH UPPER MOUNTAINS BUSHWALKING GROUP

Walks are run with upper mountains bushwalking club, usually on a Friday, some in the Mt Wilson area and some exploring areas nearby. Good opportunity for locals and visitors to see and learn more about the area. If Interested email peter_raines@hotmail.com or look at [UBMBC | Activities Program](#) - Most walks run from about 9am till mid-afternoon, sometimes a bit of travel before and after.

Friday 25 September 2026

Victoria Falls to Pierces Pass, Plus Rigby Hill

This walk is the upper Grose Valley. From the end of Victoria Falls Road, descend to Victoria Falls, then on down Victoria Brook to Burra Korain at the junction with the Grose River and then downstream to Pierces Pass exit. Once at top of Pierces Pass venture out to Rigby Hill to take in the views. Vic Falls to Pieces Pass is about 8km.

Friday 9 October 2026

Wentworth Falls - Darwins Walk - Wentworth Falls - Rocket Point - Cliff Top Walk to Little Switzerland - Lincoln's Rock - Over Clif walk to Con Hut Via - Fletchers Lookout - Princes Rock - Breakfast Point Lookout - Lyrebird Lookout - Queen Victoria Lookout. About 10km

November - Weekend to be confirmed

Colo River Overnight Walk - Access via 4WD on Culoul Range walk to Hollow Rock & Crawfords Lookout, descend into Wollemi Creek, follow it to junction with Colo, explore Colo down stream to old water monitoring station, exit via Dooli Creel back to cars at Culoul Range. Mostly off track, very steep experienced off track walkers only.

FEEDBACK AND SUMMER EDITION

The Mounts is edited and compiled by Alison Halliday and Matilda Halliday. Your feedback and comments are always welcome, please send to themounts2786@gmail.com.

The closing date for the Summer edition of The Mounts is **Friday 13 November 2026**. Please send submissions in Word format to themounts2786@gmail.com. Images of local events, wildlife and flora are also welcome.

Contributions from members of the community are always welcomed – this is *your* newsletter. The email address for queries and contributions is themounts2786@gmail.com.