

# Grand Strzelecki Bush Telegraph



Issue - No. 1

Spring 2014

Welcome to our first newsletter, which we trust you will find most informative and will encourage you to come and join us in the beauty of this iconic part of Gippsland, whether it be to visit or walk all or part of this track hidden away in the Strzelecki Ranges. We are only 2 hours from Melbourne and is easy to find with 4 entry points located 10 minutes to half an hour from the Gippsland towns of Churchill, Traralgon or Yarram. We have walks to suit everyone, regardless of your level of fitness. Just come and breathe the fresh air for yourself and enjoy our forests with their majestic trees, the many flowering native plants or our prolific wildlife including lyrebirds and our logo mascot the echidna. For more information on our track just visit <http://www.grandstrzeleckitrack.org.au>

## **Winter 2014 brings high winds and snow**

It seems every year now brings some sort of severe weather event, be it floods, extreme winds, snow or combinations of these and 2014 has been no exception. July saw a series of damaging wind events which brought down many trees, but nothing like the event on Thursday July 31<sup>st</sup> when wind gusts reached 140 km/hr in the Strzelecki Ranges. All roads quickly became impassable with dozens of fallen trees and limbs. Tourists on the Grand Ridge Road travelling between Tarra Valley and Balook were stranded and had to be rescued when trees fell in front and behind their car. It took several days to re-open some of the roads and repairing all the damage to infrastructure will take many months.

At the height of the storm most of the area was without power. The most extreme case was Tarra Valley township which struggled without electricity for 3 days before it was eventually restored. The last time there were such widespread and prolonged power outages was in 2005 when the Strzelecki's received its heaviest snowfall in 50 years.

Following the wind a cold air mass again brought snow to Mount Tassie and the Balook area. On this occasion it was only about 5 cm deep but freezing conditions every night and very cold days caused the snow to remain much longer than usual. On the Saturday there were numerous sightseers in 4WD vehicles enjoying the snow, despite the condition of the roads. The Tarra-Bulga Guest House cafe did a roaring trade that weekend.

We have not yet done an extensive inspection of the whole Grand Strzelecki Track network to determine how much damage has resulted but there will no doubt be many trees to clear. The Tarra-Bulga National Park Ranger, Craig Campbell, reported that the tracks within Tarra-Bulga are still open and although there were quite a few fallen trees, the track infrastructure within the Park has been lucky to escape serious damage. Hopefully the tracks beyond the Park will be easily repairable too. Our priority over the next several months will be to organize working bees and scheduled maintenance works but it will take some time to cover the entire network so please be patient and allow extra time for any planned walks.



*One tree fell right across the Traralgon-Balook Road/Grand Ridge Road intersection, taking out the Tarra-Bulga National Park sign on one side and the Grand Ridge Road tourist sign on the other.*

## Diaper Track tree planting day

Several years ago contractors undertaking weed control along Diaper Track came across a 2 ha infestation of Sycamore Maple that had obviously been growing for many years undetected. The infestation had originated from a single large ornamental tree planted on an old farm site, now part of the Tarra-Bulga National Park. Because the maples were about 100 metres off the track they had not been noticed by walkers or Parks staff. A big effort was put into felling and poisoning the many large trees and eliminating the large source of weed seed that would have enabled the Maples to spread even further into surrounding areas of Tarra-Bulga.

Once all the maples had been felled and the stumps poisoned, the site was quite a mess with a thick cover of logs and branches. The Friends of Tarra-Bulga applied for and received a Communities for Nature Grant to rehabilitate the site. The aim was to re-establish a Mountain Ash Canopy and allow natural regeneration of under-storey species.

Regeneration has been progressing well so far. Fallen Maple trunks have created spots ideal for ferns to self-propagate and regular follow up has ensured that newly emerging Sycamore Maple seedlings are quickly removed. A strategy to protect planted Ash seedlings from Swamp Wallabies by placing them among fallen branches was not successful, as no matter how well they were placed, determined wallabies managed to search for and consume the majority of seedlings not carefully protected by wire mesh guards.

Friends of Tarra-Bulga held a second tree planting day on August 9<sup>th</sup> which was attended by 7 enthusiastic volunteers. The site is rough and about 3 km of walking was involved just to get to it. Materials had been previously ferried along Diaper Track by quad bike, and then the volunteers carried them through the bush to the site. It took all day to plant seventy very well guarded Mountain Ash seedlings, which should manage to grow into big trees safe from the chomping of herbivore jaws.

Another planting day may be held next winter to fill any gaps in the site and ensure the project's success.



*Article courtesy of David Akers, Friends of Tarra-Bulga.*

## Duncan's Run Hundred on again for 2014

Following the huge success of the inaugural Duncan's Run Hundred ultra-running event last year, the event is being staged again on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014. There will be loops of 100 km solo and relay, 50 km and 28 km, all run along the Grand Strzelecki Track. This year's route will include the beautiful but challenging Mack's Creek valley which was closed for last year's event.

Registrations open in the first week of September, 2014. For further information visit <http://www.duncansrunhundred.com/p/entry-details.html>

### Call for new members

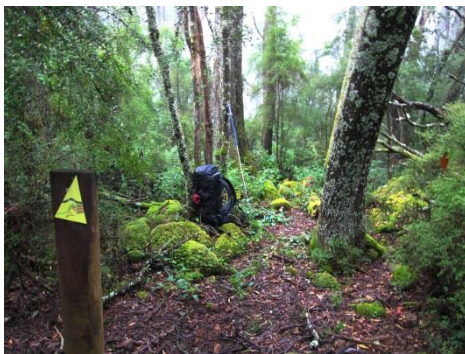
*Since its inception, membership of the Grand Strzelecki Track management committee has continued to dwindle to about half its original number, with no members remaining from the Billy's Creek/Churchill end of the Track. It is a tough call for the few dedicated volunteers left to run a project of this scale. We also don't have all the skills needed to realize the project's full potential. The Track supports local tourism businesses and although some of these are represented on the committee, we would like to see more current or retired business people who can bring with them skills in promotion, networking, project planning and coordination, fundraising, information technology and more.*

*Only one of our current members is a regular bushwalker and we would very much like to see more bushwalkers on the committee too!*

*If you are passionate about what Gippsland has to offer and want to help promote it, care about our small communities and the environment, or just want to get involved in something quite unique, we would like to hear from you. We normally meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 5pm at the Traralgon South Hall. Contact Pam or David on 51 966140.*

*New Friends Group members are also welcome. To register your interest, please email Michael: [hahaynes@bigpond.com](mailto:hahaynes@bigpond.com)*

### The story behind our Logo



For the first edition of our newsletter we thought it appropriate to include something about the subject of our logo, the fascinating and uniquely Australian echidna. The logo which you see on our website, merchandise and track markers was created by Gippsland teacher Dan Towb and was the winning entry in a public competition to create a logo for the Grand Strzelecki Track in 2010. As you can imagine, lyrebirds featured heavily amongst the competition entries and rightfully so, being such an abundant and instantly recognizable part of our mountain forests, but the lyrebird has been so often used on logos for so many things that we felt the echidna deserved a turn. Echidnas are such sturdy little creatures and ramble far and wide on their daily quest, which makes them an appropriate choice. We also really like Dan's design! On top of that, while deliberating over the various entries at the Tarra-Bulga Guest house one afternoon, a young echidna waddled up to the full length window on the front veranda and pressed his beak against it, peering in at us as if to say "pick me, pick me!" How could we refuse?

The article below reveals some fascinating insights into the life of the echidna most people probably don't know. It first came to my attention last year in the Binginwarri Landcare Group Newsletter, 'The Bingi Babbler'. Its local author, John McClumpha, is a knowledgeable and passionate field naturalist who strives to further our appreciation of our native fauna so it receives the consideration it deserves. He was only too happy to share this with us. John, we hope this helps the cause!

## ECHIDNAS by John McClumpha

I discovered the kindling stack in my wood shed spread across the floor one July evening. As I generally keep the wood shed door closed it was a mystery as to what had happened here. On entering the shed the next day I found the reason. An echidna was crossing the floor from the wood pile. I left the door open and it was gone that evening. Echidnas turn up in all sorts of places. I have a pile of bark mulch in which an echidna has burrowed for 2 consecutive winters. I had several bags of stable manure which I had mulched and stored in an open shed area. On spreading one bag onto the vegetable garden I discovered a lump – an echidna!



### Ex the stable manure venture with spines raised!

Echidnas often roam the area adjacent to my house and in the adjacent bush however they are not so easy to spot in the bush as they will partially burrow into the ground and form themselves into a ball on hearing someone approaching and remain very still which can make them difficult to detect. However it is easy to spot where they have been as they leave shallow diggings where they search for food.

These diggings are 10 to 20 cm deep by 20 to 30 cm wide, generally with a distinctive indent at the bottom where their beak has pushed into the ground.

Their defence mechanism is the cream coloured spines on their back which generally lie flat on their body but are raised when they sense danger. These spines are actually modified hair made of material similar to our finger nails. They are quite sharp and deter the majority of would be predators. The male also has a spur on each hind foot and although the spur has a venom gland this gland is not functional. It possibly was when they roamed with the dinosaurs.

The echidna is an egg laying mammal. They and the platypus are the only egg laying mammals in the world. There are 2 species of echidna. A long-beaked species which is confined to the highlands of New Guinea and the short-beaked species which lives in Australia and New Guinea. They are relatively common right across Australia but as they do not like the heat they are often only mobile at night during the warmer periods and in northern Australia.



### This is my corner of the verandah!!

The echidna is normally a solitary animal however during the breeding season, June to September, it is possible to see several males following a female, an "Echidna Train", which may last up to 3 weeks before one male triumphs and mates. At the beginning of the breeding season the female develops a small pouch and 22 days after mating a single egg is produced into the pouch. 10 days later the young echidna, using a temporary tooth on its muzzle, breaks the egg shell to start its life in the world. It remains in the mothers

pouch for 6 to 8 weeks at which time its spines start to develop. The young feed solely on its mother's milk until it leaves the nursery burrow. The female milk glands are like pads within the pouch which the young lick or suckle on. They do not have nipples as do other mammals. Young echidnas stay in the nursery burrow for up to 12 months before venturing into the outside world. Whilst in the burrow they are fed by the mother who returns every 5 to 10 days.

The echidna is equipped with very strong, long claws to allow it dig in soil, rotting logs and termite mounds. Its general diet is ants and termites but they also eat grubs, larvae and worms. It is equipped with a long, 15 cm, thin tongue which is covered with sticky mucous. By flicking the tongue amongst its prey's nest the prey stick to the tongue and is retrieved into the echidna's mouth where it is crushed between the tongue and the bottom of the mouth before being swallowed. Large grubs are squashed with their beak and then licked up. Due to the manner in which they feed echidnas consume a large amount of dirt which makes their droppings easily definable.

Some interesting facts:

- A young echidna is called a puggle.
- Puggles are about 1.5 cm long when they leave the egg.
- Echidnas are very good swimmers and is often used as an escape mechanism from a predator.
- Echidnas start breeding at about 6 years of age and only every 3 to 7 years after that.
- An "Echidna Train" of up to 11 echidnas has been recorded.
- Echidnas grow up to 50 cm long.
- Echidnas are territorial and live within an area of 40 to 70 hectares.
- The echidna lifespan is 10 to 15 years in the wild. However they have been recorded as living to 45 years.
- Echidnas do not have any teeth.
- Echidnas are able to fast for several weeks in areas where food is scarce.
- Echidnas do not have external ears, only 2 small slits on each side of their head.
- Echidnas have an excellent sense of smell which assists them when foraging for food.
- Echidnas are found in forests, grasslands, shrub lands, rocky outcrops and agricultural land.
- Echidnas have an extra long claw on each of their hind feet which is used for grooming.
- Fossilised remains indicate that echidnas were around at least 100 million years ago.

### **Nesting in the bark mulch.**



As the above demonstrates the echidna is a very unique animal and it has few natural predators. It is known that goannas will eat them and snakes will invade burrows and eat the young if their spines are not very developed. There are some introduced predators which we need to control; these are domestic and feral cats, dogs and foxes. We also need to ensure we do not destroy their food sources such as termite mounds, ant's

nests, rotting logs, bush litter or damage their burrows. They certainly do not have any road sense so if you see one on the road moves it into the bush or adjacent paddock. Despite their sharp spines they can be easily lifted using heavy duty gloves or a cloth such as a towel or jumper. Be careful not to drop them as their beak can be easily broken.

What are your experiences with echidnas? Let us know and we will share it in the next issue.

(John McClumpha, Hedley Range Road, Binginwarri, November 2011)

## From our President – Steb Fisher

Below is this year's president's report with some minor edits, but before that I would like to give some context. The GST passes through very special country. It gives us a glimpse back in time to the Great Southern Forest as it once was. It is a wild place and a peaceful place. The track rose out of the ashes of the 2009 fires as a community project and it remains community run, independent and yet dependent on the support of friends, of partners, like HVP and Parks Victoria and local and State Government.

We need that support. Each year the track requires year on year maintenance and each year there are larger repairs to be made after storms, fires and floods. We need revenue to support this and yet "commercialising" the track might endanger those wilderness values that are so precious to the GST.

So we have a balancing act: to attract people to support our local community, its businesses and the Track itself and at the same time maintain the track as a wild place - a lost world in which our visitors can connect with nature and nature alone.

It is a challenge we relish, we will keep you posted as we go and we will always welcome help.

### **GRAND STRZELECKI TRACK PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2014**

Over the last year the GST Committee has made significant progress towards some of the goals we saw in front of us last year. There is more to come.

The extra funds from Wellington Shire and Latrobe City Council (total now \$15,200 pa) are being put to good use. We also received more than \$85,000 from the State Government for flood damage remediation, which has allowed extensive repairs to the track. We have received our annual donation of \$1,000 from the Community Branch of Bendigo Bank in Mirboo North, for which we are most grateful.

Significant achievements this year include:

- Work on the track:
  - Reinstatement of Billy's Creek after the flood damage of 2012
  - Establishment of a well appointed rest area at Jumbuck.
  - The restoration and upgrading of the Mack's Creek section of the track, including re-routing around a recently logged HVP coup, just outside the Tarra-Bulga National Park.
  - Weed work and general maintenance.
  - Late spring slashing, maintenance and signage for the Duncan' Run 100.
  - The Friends Group, led by Michael Haynes, has done extensive track numbering to help with navigation and risk management along the track.
  - We have supervised Conservation Volunteers Abroad with erosion control and clearing in Jumbuck and Mack's Creek areas.
- Map sales continue steadily both directly and via the website and we have repaid Balook & District Residents' Association ( BADRA), who put up the cost of printing. We thank them for this.
- An updated version of the brochure, kindly donated by Wellington Shire, has been printed.
- The Friend's Group continues with working bees to maintain the track.
- Signage: Two new interpretive signs have been installed, one of which was on Cores and Links, HVP's agreement with the State Government to set aside reserves and link them together, at the start of Duff Trail.
- Duncan's Run 100: This was a great success and the Duncan's Run 100 committee has asked to run the event again this year. We also assisted with stewardship of the run. We received a grant from Latrobe City Council of \$1,350 to help with the costs and the Duncan Committee donated \$1,600 to the GST, for which we are most grateful.
- Trails Strategy: The President attended a workshop on the Victorian Trails Strategy 2014-2024. The strategy has just been published. It is not clear yet how this will benefit the GST as we were not mentioned in the Strategy.
- Tarra Territory Tourism Group: We are represented on this new group which aims to promote tourism in the Yarram region.
- We sold some merchandise at the Kaye St. Market in Traralgon.

Work for the future includes:

- Some more infrastructure on the track, which was not covered by the initial funding – for example improving rest areas and camping facilities for walkers.
- Ongoing maintenance requirements due to normal wear and tear, weed growth, fallen trees etc. and due to weather events such as fire, storm and flooding, which may amount to \$60,000 per year. Raising funds over and above our funding from the Shires remains a priority.
- The load on a volunteer committee continues to be heavy. While we are managing in the short term, to keep the track in good shape as an iconic experience for walkers, we still require a paid executive officer to manage to workload. This may be a part time position, but is likely to cost at least \$30,000 per year
- Balook School: We are in correspondence with the State Government to see if the site and it's buildings can be assigned to the community - GST/BADRA.
- The committee continues to look for long term funding for maintenance and management and for sources of income from related activities to support the Track.

There have been some changes to the committee over the year with some retirements and resignations.

- We thank Ken Harris who retired as treasurer just prior to last year's AGM. He remains a wise and grand source of knowledge about the Flora and Fauna of the Track. He has been awarded a life membership of the Friends Group.
- And at the last elections we welcomed Vicky Weston to the position of Treasurer. She is fulfilling this role with skill and accuracy.
- Bruce Campbell has moved to Leongatha and retired from the committee. We thank him for his always thoughtful service. He has been awarded a life membership of the Friends Group.
- Graham Ritchie has retired from the committee and we thank him for his kind service. He has been awarded a life membership of the Friends Group.
- Don Wellington has moved to Selby and has stepped down from the committee. His presence on the committee and friendly contribution will be missed. He has been awarded a life membership of the Friends Group.
- Chris Lord has just resigned at the time of writing - we will miss his experience and wise counsel. A Life membership will be put before the committee in due course.

I thank the committee for their dedication, their attention to detail and professionalism, which provides a solid foundation for future work.

Finally a heartfelt thank you is due to all those who have put in their time, energy and resources into making this a very special place in Gippsland, in particular to the committee, friends and many generous donors.

**We hope you have enjoyed reading our first Newsletter and have found some useful information about our iconic Grand Strzelecki Track. We would appreciate any contributions that you wish to make whether you are a member of the community or a walker.**

**If you wish to contact us to subscribe, unsubscribe, submit an article or change your email address please contact us at [bulga01@bigpond.com](mailto:bulga01@bigpond.com)**