

LAST MEETING.

The last meeting of AFA was held at Araluen Pub. We extend our thanks to Steve and Elyse for their good fare and hospitality. The meeting was well attended and there was much lively discussion and interesting topics under review, ranging from bush fires to bridle tracks.



The new art gallery/meeting room provided some additional interest to the occasion.

Trials for Horse Riding Historic Bridle Tracks through Declared Wilderness

Patience! These things take time. It seems the process to lock up the land for ever is much faster than making a slight compromise.

Your committee has had ongoing engagement with senior management of the Far South Coast NPWS and we understand due process is nearing completion. They are bound by kilometres of red tape but it is their wish to complete the process as soon as possible and we believe they are doing their best. We have also had ongoing communication and direct discussion with Minister, Robyn Parker and our local members, Andrew Constance and John Barilaro who support the process. So, we just need to be patient!

There is a lesson for us here. We have learnt how difficult it is to institute even a small amendment on an Act once it has been passed by Parliament. Therefore we must stay vigilant and be prepared. We can be sure that sometime in the future there will be another push to restrict responsible access to public lands in the name of protecting the environment. We have to live with the irony that no group is more concerned with protecting the environment and maintaining our heritage while seeing the necessity to keep our land productive, than Access For All. It is our land after all.

Coastal Rights Association Inc.

Access For All wishes to express our thanks to member, Len Tompkins for a very substantial donation. Through Len, Access For All has been given the funds in the Coastal Rights Association bank account, amounting to \$1,521.85. Len tells us, *"About five years ago a group of us set up the Coastal Rights Association with a view to protecting the rights of recreational fishers against the NSW Government's intention to create the Batemans Marine Park. During the last five years we have had some successes, but have not done as well as we would have hoped, and our membership has now fallen to almost zero. As a result we have decided to cancel the registration of our association."*

AFA need to continue the struggle. It seems we sometimes fight hard and gain very little.

The Wog Wog Track

Members living on the South Coast and Tablelands will recall the fire in the Budawang National Park, last November, known as the Wirritin fire. It burnt for several weeks and spread over a huge area. Access For All members, Reg and Joan Webb, who live not far from the fire front became very concerned when they heard plans for a containment line were underway involving putting a bulldozer down the historic Wog Wog bridle track..

AFA wrote directly to Hon. Robyn Parker, Minister for the Environment and Minister for Heritage, expressing concern

and pointing out the heritage significance of the Wog Wog track. Without delay Ms Parker replied and acknowledged our concerns and the heritage value of the Wog Wog track. Other plans of attacking the fire had been put in place.

There are two significant points in relation to this matter. – The heritage value of the track has been recognised. - The Minister listened and acknowledged the input from AFA.

In the past, and in fairness under a different government, our correspondence and submissions seemed to be ignored. Ministers did not write back.

The Cooranbene Fire by Peter Smith

One afternoon in late January a severe lightning storm passed through the Far South Coast and Tablelands. Many fires started through the lightning strikes. In particular there was Coondella, Winbenby and Cooranbene Mountain, near where Robyn and I live at Woolla.

I rang in the fire and within an hour a helicopter arrived to survey the scene. The Coondella fire apparently extinguished itself and the Winbenby fire was put out over the next few days with helicopters and finally a Remote Area Fire Team (RAFT) crew were lowered to cut up a log and finish the job.

Over the next two weeks the NPWS put in a concentrated effort on the Cooranbene Mountain fire, which was four kilometres from our house. The fire started high on the mountain which peaks at 3,000 feet. Fires are a real problem in such remote locations, but fortunately they burn faster up than down and this was near the top of the mountain. Vehicle access to the fire front was impossible and pedestrian access extremely difficult and probably dangerous. If not controlled the fire could have gradually burnt down the ridges and then travelled to the coast or to the Shoalhaven Valley.

I must commend the NPWS for their prompt response and the way they conducted the fire fighting. Each day they had up to seven helicopters and 20 to 30 personnel at work.

Two helipads were cleared on the mountain by RAFT crews. They were then able to land helicopters and fire fighters to put in containment lines using hand tools while continuing water bombing with helicopters. A bulldozer was brought in, just in case they could not contain the fire on the mountain. They kept us informed on a daily basis. After about two weeks they declared the fire out and two days later the long awaited rain finally came.

In the past we have seen such fires being observed before any real action takes place. Often by that time the fire becomes uncontrollable and becomes a section 44 before it is finally brought under control, and then usually only after rain. On this occasion the NPWS put in resources without delay and maintained the effort with full force. From where we stand it was a job well done.

Whilst I have no reservations in commending the NPWS for their efforts and results I wonder about the financial costs. While we have the present system of fire prevention the Australian tax payer is going to be up for a fortune. There is an urgent need to review our whole fire strategy to prevent fierce, fast devastating fires before they happen. The Aborigines knew how to manage it and we should pay closer attention to their methods. They had plenty of time to get it right. There has been an excellent study on Aboriginal practices by Prof. Bill Gamage in his book, 'The Biggest Estate on Earth'. It's well worth the read.



The Cooranbene Mountain fire in the background.

THE PERPETUAL CALENDAR- featuring places of local natural beauty- Now available at \$15 each, from AFA and selected outlets in Braidwood and Moruya. This is a 'must have' for everyone who appreciates the beauty of the Australian bush.

THE DEUA RIVER TRACK BOOK- Available at meetings or and can be ordered through a Committee member, or by post to Access For All, Locked Bag 10, PO BRAIDWOOD NSW 2622. The cost is \$22 plus \$1.40 postage.

MEMBERSHIP: Family \$20.00. Pensioner \$5.00. Individual \$10.00. Corporate \$100.00 includes GST.

AFA WEBSITE: <http://www.accessforall.asn.au>
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NEXT MEETING: Saturday 29th March 2014, 10am at Cobargo Showground. Please make the effort to attend.

AFA 2013 – 2014 COMMITTEE

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**TO NATIONAL PARKS &
WILDERNESS**

NEWSLETTER

2014 AUTUMN EDITION

Volume 14.31

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