

Last Meeting of AFA including AGM. The meeting was held at the Araluen Hotel 27 August 2023. Before the AGM commenced our Guest Speaker was Craig Thomas. Craig is Chairman of the peak 4WD Clubs body in NSW as well as three or four other significant organizations and has an intense interest in maintaining public access to the bush.



Terry Hart, Garry Gowen, Hugh Hodgkinson and Craig Thomas addressing the meeting.

Craig spoke at length on many issues of interest to us. Craig is in a unique position to inform us on the current government thinking on the proposed transfer of public land (particularly ALL national parks in NSW) to local Aboriginal Land Councils, having been personally appointed to a Select Ministerial Committee to advise the Minister on the subject. Obviously, detail of confidential discussions could not be revealed, but he was able to make the following points:-

Ownership of several National Parks have already been transferred out of public ownership, including Mootwingee and Stockton. The government now recognizes a "One Plan Fits All" approach across the state will not work. Every area is different. In many cases, the local Aborigines do not want the responsibility of taking on the freehold of the NP in question- too much work. In other cases, the NPWS are only lukewarm about giving up the land. Often Aboriginal delegates on the Advisory Council do not turn up.

GOVERNMENT PLANS: The Government plans are not well known throughout the community but the prospect of loss of public ownership is causing dismay and concern amongst the few who have become aware of these plans.

NSW politicians have long range plans to transfer **ALL National Parks to Aboriginal ownership.** This represents 10% of the

state! The current document can be found on our website. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/park-management/community-engagement/aboriginal-joint-management-model-consultation>

Part of our charter is to maintain Access for All to our National Parks, and in the past AFA has worked hard to establish close relationships with senior National Parks' personnel and lobbied government members and ministers. We can claim some success with access to our bridle tracks, but we are now faced with a bigger issue.

It's Already Started-The following is from news reports and serves as an indication of what we should be concerned about. Last October, Mt Warning (renamed Wollunbin) was closed permanently to everyone except Aboriginal people by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) after it declared the mountain to be 'a place of sacred ceremonies linked to traditional law and custom,' particular to the Bundjalung nation.

Mt Warning in Northern NSW is one of the biggest shield volcanoes in the southern hemisphere and is surrounded by breathtakingly beautiful scenery, which has drawn visitors to it since the mid-1800s. Since then, bushwalkers who have made the difficult climb to the summit have been rewarded with superb views of subtropical forests and the coast.

The NSW Government has announced that the future management of Wollumbin National Park will be guided by cultural beliefs. The Wollumbin Consultative Group which represents the local Aboriginal custodians claims public access to the summit is not aligned with their cultural values. The claim is that Wollumbin is considered sacred and interconnected to a broader cultural and spiritual landscape, including creation stories and men's initiation sites.

However, there are conflicting indigenous claims. Before she died in 2007, Marlene Boyd, an elder of the Ngarakwal people, gave an interview in which she stated that Mt Warning (Wollumbin) had nothing to do with the Bundjalung nation but rather the traditional custodians of Mt Warning (Wollumbin) were the Ngarakwal/Nganduwal people. Confusing/conflicting?

What is more, she was very happy for everyone to climb the mountain, stating emphatically that, "I do not oppose the public climbing of Mt Warning [Wollumbin]- how can the public experience the spiritual significance of this land if they do not climb the summit and witness creation!"

Understandably, the banning of non-Aboriginals from this area of outstanding natural beauty has not gone down very well at all with the general public. Significant numbers of whom have continued to climb the summit with admirable impunity.



There is a group **Re-open Mt Warning** with 4,700 members on Facebook. On Australia Day the group in defiance, accompanied by an indigenous man made the climb to shoot a video. Reference Daily Mail.

Acts of rebellion, however, have so angered NPWS bureaucrats that they hired a private security firm to ensure that not one single non-Aboriginal Australian should ever be able to enjoy the view from that summit again. It has come to light that the agency has been paying security guards \$7,000 per week to keep people away, having spent a total of just over \$100,000 since April. A taxpayer-funded government agency has been using tax-payer dollars to keep taxpayers from climbing the mountain.

The Minns government has adopted the policy of the previous liberal government that is to give all the NSW parks to Aboriginal groups that live within the vicinity of those parks, including land titles and management rights. The Government has further stated that it expects to have handed everything back in the next 15 to 20 years. Indeed, the recent handing over Sydney Harbour's Goat Island to Aboriginal groups to the tune of \$43 million is a disturbing portent of things to come.

The question is how many of our National Parks will become out of bounds for the general public?

SPEEDY RECOVERY: We send our best wishes to Jenette Hindmarsh, a stalwart of AFA. Jenette suffered a stroke and is in rehabilitation in Canberra as we go to print. We are expecting her to have a full recovery. John and Jenette have contributed much for the formation and continuation of AFA and what we stand for.

WEBSITE: Peter Kneen reports the website is operational after being severely hacked and used by approximately 15 different shady groups. It's looking good again and well worth the visit. There is lots of information, much more than can be included on a newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS: Family \$20.00. Pensioner \$5.00. Individual \$10.00. Corporate \$100.00 includes GST. Many memberships lapsed during Covid. We have reached out for re-newal. It is intended to issue Renewal Notices in June for 2024-5 and we look forward to your formally rejoining us at that time.

FUTURE NEWSLETTERS: Will be emailed to save time and postage. However, many members have not provided an email address. In these cases, you will receive your newsletter by post. In any case, please provide your email address to info@accessforall.asn.au. By doing so you will also receive updates as events unfold.

NOTE: NEXT MEETING: 28 April Braidwood Services at 10am, Changed as the previous date turned out to be Easter Sunday.

ABOUT ACCESS FOR ALL inc. The Access for All ("AFA") Association is a Not for Profit Association located in SE New South Wales - Braidwood to Bega region.

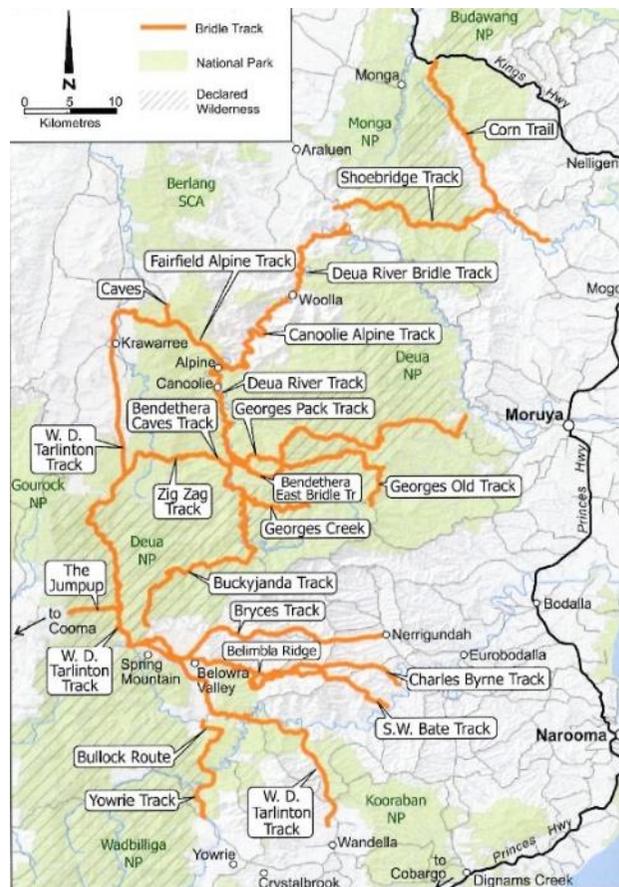
Access for All is concerned that the public has responsible access to our National Parks and into areas that have important "Bush Heritage" values.

Access for All was formed some 25 years ago after many parts of SE New South Wales were declared "Wilderness Areas". This was done without recognition of heritage within these areas - such as the numerous historic Bridle Tracks - that would no longer enable all people to enjoy Access to our important Bush Heritage.

"Access For All" has gained Trademark Registration status for "Political Lobbying services for the purpose of environmental / public land use."

This registration is under Class 35 and follows on from earlier work with the registration under Class 16 of our "Printed materials; books, pamphlets, calendars, instructional and teaching materials." It means that we are entitled to use the ® symbol.

Access for All has maintained a close relationship with National Parks (NSW) in the SE NSW region and has assisted in maintaining several of these historic Bridle Tracks.



Map of some of our bridle tracks from *Tracks in the Wilderness* prepared by NPWS. It illustrates the co-operation between our local NPWS and Access for All. Although *Tracks in the Wilderness* is out of print it is available as a PDF on our website.



ACCESS FOR ALL®

To National Parks and Wilderness

NEWSLETTER

2024 AUTUMN EDITION

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