

Grand Strzelecki Bush Telegraph



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BTAC Field Officer Report: 1st October, 2015

The Grand Strzelecki Track Committee, in conjunction with some members of their Friends group, have now surveyed the entire track (110 km) following winter, to ensure that it is in good condition for the fine walking weather. Some new infrastructure has been put in, including a new camp site at

Pattison's Rest area on Grand Ridge Rd, which complements the lovely camp site already in place at Jumbuk, off the Jeeralang West Rd. This camp site is fairly special as campers have the option of pitching their tents under cover if the weather is poor.



A new edition of the maps is now in the process of being produced, and should be available early in the new year. These will have some slight realignments of the track and be fully GPS



corrected. A phone app will also be available to assist walkers. In the meantime, the existing maps are still fully usable, and are on sale through the GST website. For those who like to have a base in Balook, from which to do day walks around the loops, the Balook Guest House has tent sites available for those who prefer a cheaper option than the rooms there.

What we now need are lots of people walking the tracks to keep them open.

Michael Haynes

GRAND STRZELECKI TRACK PRESIDENT'S

REPORT 2015

Over the last year the GST Committee has made progress with a limited budget. We have had loyal support from our two sponsoring Councils, Latrobe and Wellington and from the Mirboo North & District Community Bank, but State and Federal Government have failed to provide support and in some cases have not lived up to their agreements. We continue to provide access to our wonderful track in spite of these challenges. We will continue to press for funding for ongoing maintenance of the track and to press for the State Government to honor agreements to maintain their parts of the track.

Significant achievements this year include:

- Work on the track:
 - The Pattison Rest Area (Tarra Valley Loop) has been improved for the convenience of walkers.
 - Weed work and general maintenance.
 - Late spring slashing, maintenance and signage for the Duncan's Run 100.
- Map sales continue steadily both directly and via the website. We are in the process of reprinting the maps with revised and more accurate data and are in the process of making maps available via an "App".
- We are planning contingencies for future map maintenance due to the upcoming retirement of a member which will impact on free access to GIS support.
- Telstra Tower: We did not get one for the Tarra Valley to alleviate the 'blackspot' problem in this area, despite lobbying by our committee members.
- The Friends Group continues with working bees to do excellent work maintaining the track.
- We contributed to the State Government Trails Strategy last year. Our input was largely ignored. More recently a \$29 million project was announced for the Grampians Peaks walking track. It seems that the Government's focus is on specific high profile projects and not on the well being of tracks in general. We will continue to draw their attention to this until we get the modest support we need.
- Duncan's Run 100: This was again a great success and the DRH committee has asked to run the event again this year. We will again assist with stewardship of the run. The same routes are being used as last year with an additional 5km route. We are preparing to survey the track in time for maintenance works to prepare the track for the run.
- We have had a review of our sponsorship (\$1000/year) with the Mirboo North and District Community Bank. Sponsorship will continue at \$500 per year. We are very grateful for their support, which we have had since the inception of the track. Also as this goes to print, The Mirboo North & District Community Bank has awarded us a one off grant of \$1,950 for a new picnic table at the Pattison Rest Area.
- We have changed our bank account over to the Mirboo North and District Community Bank.
- We have made various attempts to secure the Balook School for the community and the GST, but the State Government has decided to put it up for auction. We await this process.
- We had a small Christmas in July celebration at the Balook Guesthouse again this year. Many thanks to Torben and Pam for an excellent meal.
- We continue to get positive and supportive feedback and suggestions from those who walk the track.

- We have published a Track Newsletter – The Grand Strzelecki Bush Telegraph, which has been well supported and well received.
- Letters to local and state politicians and State Government Ministers have so far failed to produce any tangible support for the track.
- Thomasin Bales has been supporting our fundraising efforts over the last six months, with the intention that she receive a management fee for grants won. We are very grateful for her help.
- The committee is smaller in number than it has been and we are approaching various potential new members.

Work for the future includes:

- As last year, 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. As last 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. We continue to look for appropriate funding for this position. Current grant opportunities seem focused on business processes and not on the actual work of an EO. The grants are also far too small and only “one off”.
- We are looking at two major extensions to the track, one to connect with the Gippsland Campus of Federation University (Churchill Campus) in the north and one to connect with Yarram and the rail trails in the south. If we can secure the funding for these, it will open up access to many more visitors.
- 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.

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

I thank also Hedley Range Services who continue to maintain the track, often, I suspect, at or even below cost.

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 our generous financial supporters.

Lastly and importantly we thank our walkers for whom we do this work.

Steb Fisher, President, Grand Strzelecki Track
19th August 2015

Duncan's Run Hundred

The third annual Duncan's Run Hundred (DRH) ultra running even will be held on the Grand Strzelecki Track and surrounding trails on December 19th 2015. Registrations are now open for 100km, 100km relay, 50km, 28km and 5km events. See the website for information and registrations: <http://www.duncansrunhundred.com/>

OUR FORGOTTEN RAINFOREST NOW RECOGNIZED FOR ITS IMPORTANCE.

Along the Grand Strzelecki Track, we are lucky enough to have two very distinct types of rainforest for walkers to enjoy.

Most people think rainforest is found entirely in very wet environments, hence the name. The term 'rainforest' is somewhat of a misnomer because some rainforest communities exist in quite dry environments. There is even a type called 'Dry Rainforest'! What all rainforests in fact have in common is that they are fire sensitive and exist in niches in the environment that rarely, if ever, experience intense fire. Of course this happens to coincide with high and constant rainfall in most cases, but it may also be a result of topographic protection, for example in the bottom of deep gorges where fire rarely penetrates.

The rainforest most people are aware of and come to the Strzelecki Ranges, the Otways, the Central Highlands and Tasmania to see is Cool Temperate Rainforest. It is a relic of ancient rainforests that covered much of the continent in cooler and wetter times. Many of the species found within it and nowhere else, evolved when the southern continents of Australia, Antarctica and South America, as well as New Zealand, were joined together in the southern super-continent of Gondwana. The dominant species in our Cool Temperate Rainforest, Myrtle Beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), has close relatives in all these places except Antarctica which is now under the biggest ice shelf on the planet.

Far lesser known is Warm Temperate Rainforest. Like Cool Temperate, it is fire sensitive but in this case exists in lower rainfall areas that are topographically protected, predominantly in gullies that are deeply incised and sheltered from winds that bring extreme fire weather in summer. Warm Temperate Rainforest occurs in Victoria in several distinct floristic communities in East Gippsland, Wilson's Promontory and the Strzelecki Ranges. The Strzelecki community, known as Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) 32-07 Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest, has recently been accepted for listing under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act due to its greatly depleted occurrence compared to its original extent and the degradation and ongoing decline of most remaining stands. Possibly less than 200 hectares of this rainforest remains. Before European settlement it would have occupied most of the sheltered gullies in the eastern Strzelecki Ranges between 80m and 240m elevation, especially on the southern side of the range. Unfortunately these areas were heavily cleared and settled, resulting in complete loss of most of the rainforest stands and degradation of those remaining by weed invasion, cattle grazing and increased incidence and intensity of fire. There are few intact examples which survived, mostly where slopes were too steep for clearing.

Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest is very different in ecology and species composition to Cool Temperate Rainforest found in the upper catchments. Its canopy consists of Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*) and Muttonwood (*Myrsine howittiana*) as primary species, with Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and eucalypts sometimes present. The presence of eucalypts is indicative of incursion by fire, at least low intensity ground fire, because most eucalypts require fire to regenerate. Secondary species such as Austral Mulberry (*Hedycarya angustifolia*) and Hazel Pomaderris (*Pomaderris aspera*) may form part of the canopy, which is characteristically entangled with vines including Wonga Vine (*Pandorea pandorana*) and Forest Clematis (*Clematis glycinoides*). Intact rainforest canopy is so dense that

little light reaches the forest floor and only the most shade tolerant shrubs, herbs and ground ferns occur there.



Photo 1: An intact example of Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest along Macks Creek

The Macks Creek section of the Grand Strzelecki Track passes through Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest starting below the boundary of Tarra-Bulga National Park and ending at Roberts Road. This stretch of creek is bordered by forestry plantations established on formerly cleared land and, in some cases, remnants of mixed eucalypt forest that normally occurs up-slope from the rainforest and provides some protection for it. In 2007 and 2008 a large restoration project was commenced along Mack's Creek, with the help of a \$211,000 grant from the Federal Government secured by the project partners HVP Plantations, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Parks Victoria and Monash University. Vast areas of invasive blackberry were removed from slopes too steep in some cases to walk on, using ropes to lower down crew and equipment. There were a few small patches of intact rainforest (photo 1) that clearly indicated that rainforest belonged in this valley. The remainder was either entirely missing or so degraded it was hard to recognize as rainforest (photo 2).

It can be difficult to recognize degraded or regenerating vegetation as Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest. One of the primary canopy species, Sweet Pittosporum, is not a good indicator by itself because it is readily spread outside of its natural range by birds and is even regarded as a weed in areas where it doesn't belong. In the early stages of regeneration following clearing or weed removal, there may be nothing but short-lived colonizing species present including Dogwood (*Cassinia* sp.), Daisy-bush (*Olearia* sp.), Kangaroo Apple (*Solanum aviculare*) or acacias such as Sticky Wattle (*A. howittii*) or Silver Wattle (*A. dealbata*), disguising the fact that the natural vegetation on the site may be rainforest. Only later when more sensitive rainforest species such as Muttonwood start to emerge and take over in the shaded and sheltered environment provided by these colonizers, may it be evident that you're dealing with a rainforest community. Vegetation with a canopy of eucalypts such as Mountain Grey Gum (*E. cypellocarpa*), Yellow Stringybark (*E. muelleriana*) or Blue Gum (*E. globulus*) combined with an under-storey of predominantly Sweet Pittosporum, may be either rainforest that has suffered incursion by fire some time ago, or Ecological Vegetation Class 29 Damp Forest which normally borders this rainforest and where Sweet Pittosporum has invaded due to long term exclusion of fire. The site

history is not always known, but the best indicators are the topography and the characteristics of any remnant vegetation found upstream or downstream nearby.



Photo 2: Degraded Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest along Macks Creek prior to the restoration project. Indicators of past disturbance are invasion by blackberry, occurrence of eucalypts (possibly resulting from fire) and presence of colonizing species (eg. *Cassinia*). Note a patch of intact rainforest canopy at far left.

In sites which have been previously cleared for pasture where little else remains but blackberry, scattered scrub or wattles, the presence of Muttonwood seedlings is a possible indicator. This species is also spread by birds but is sensitive to drought and frost, so the presence of healthy established seedlings is a sign that the microclimatic zone is potentially suitable for Strzelecki's Warm Temperate Rainforest. If you walk the Billy's Creek Track you may notice quite a lot of Muttonwood seedlings and small trees near the creek in the upper section of Morwell National Park and extending a few km above the Park boundary, where vegetation has been heavily cleared in the past. There is a very good chance the original vegetation here was rainforest and it does occur elsewhere in the Park. Grand Strzelecki Track Inc. has been applying for funding (so far unsuccessfully) to implement a restoration project, similar to the one in Macks Creek, along the Billy's Creek valley. It would be great to see the blackberries and open spaces along this section of the Track replaced with regenerating rainforest!

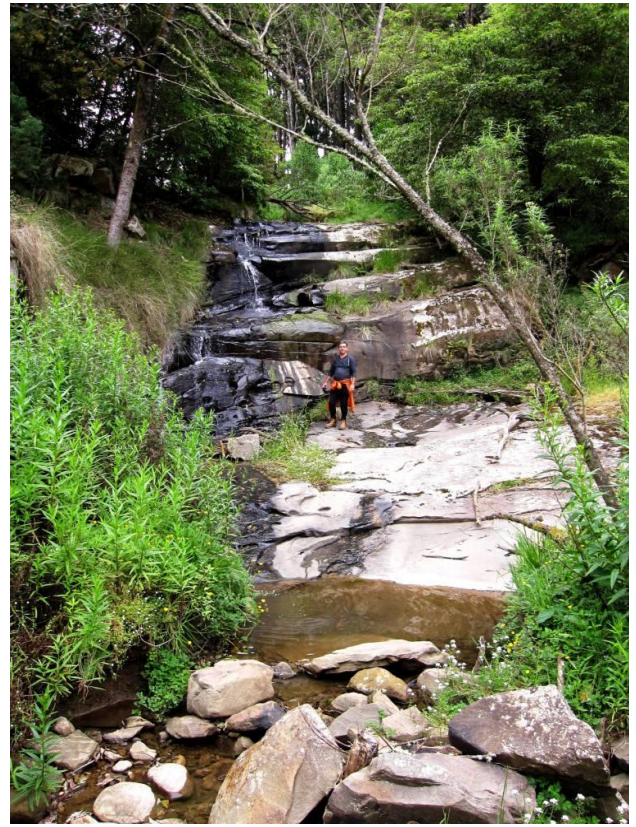


Photo 3: A section of the Macks Creek valley in 2009 soon after dense blackberry infestation had been sprayed out, resulting in vigorous regeneration of colonizing native species. Rainforest canopy trees will gradually re-emerge over decades. Research has shown that although supplementary planting of rainforest species may be beneficial where there are no seed sources nearby, it is not essential in this situation where birds carry in seeds which gradually establish themselves and emerge through the sheltering layer of short-lived colonizers.

The ability of this rainforest to repair itself following removal of invasive weeds is astonishing, but it is a very long process; not as long as it takes Cool Temperate Rainforest to fully recover after massive disturbance or fire which can be in the order of 1,000 years, but certainly many decades. Making sure it remains on course is a matter of conducting regular monitoring. Along Mack's Creek you may see steel posts with paint or coloured tape which indicate locations of permanent monitoring plots that were installed at the beginning of the project and continue to be assessed. Not only does this identify where additional weed control work is needed (blackberries are tenacious and can come back in any area open to sunlight, prior to full canopy closure), but it is yielding research information never before obtained as we believe this is the first such restoration project undertaken on this scale in the Strzelecki community of Warm Temperate Rainforest. Having the Grand Strzelecki Track running right through the site is a great advantage in that easy access is maintained for maintenance and monitoring, as well as providing a feature of interest and education for walkers with an environmental interest (and isn't that all of us?). In fact, it was while walking through the site in the early project stage and realizing the astonishing natural potential and beauty of the Mack's Creek Valley that the original idea for the Grand Strzelecki Track was born!



Photo 4: Project sign, Macks Creek.



Photos 5 & 6: Gardiner Falls after blackberry spraying and planting (2008) and in November 2012.

Richard Appleton
Grand Strzelecki Track Inc.



THANK YOU

Grand Strzelecki Track Inc. has recently been fortunate to receive further funding from the Mirboo North & District Community Bank through two different means; through an extension of its community sponsorship program and also through its community grants program.

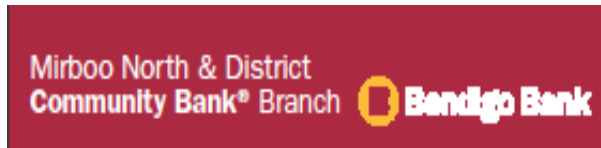
The community sponsorship program involves the bank signing us up in a partnership. The bank provides us with a regular funding source for activities that benefit the community, and we provide opportunities for the bank to spread its message: such as the fact that under the community bank model, 80% (!) of the bank's profits are fed directly back to the local community through its various funding programs. Banking with the Mirboo North & District Community Bank thus helps support local community groups, and increases the viability and vibrancy of the local community. Anybody conducting new business with the bank has further capacity to direct their funds towards us specifically, by asking that any relevant increases in sponsorship be directed to the Grand Strzelecki Track Inc. - if you're so inclined!

The community grants program is different in that it provides specific funds for specific projects that we present to the bank. We've been fortunate to receive a 2015 Community Grant for constructing a picnic table at the Pattison Rest Area, which has been set up at the end of a small detour track to provide camping, water and toilet facilities for those walking the Tarra Valley Loop of the Grand Strzelecki Track. The picnic table will improve the amenity of the Pattison Rest Area, and we are hopeful that improvement to the area's facilities will enhance the recreational value of the track, and encourage people to stop, rest, and spend more time on the track.

Grand Strzelecki Track Inc. would like to thank the Mirboo North & District Community Bank for its ongoing support.

We've also been fortunate to receive a Community Assistance Grant from Wellington Shire Council, which will fund a reprint of our detailed walking maps. Some differences between the path as it exists on the ground and as it is mapped have been found since the track's opening, due to circumstances such as on-ground conditions during track construction necessitating slight deviations in track alignment. Extensive ground-truthing works over the course of this year have allowed us to more accurately map the actual path of the track, and Wellington's grant money will be used to produce a new set of maps to better support the track's walkers. We gratefully acknowledge Wellington's contribution towards better health and safety outcomes for our walkers.

We also gratefully acknowledge the ongoing commitment that both Wellington Shire Council and Latrobe City Council have shown towards the track, providing a regular and vital source of funding towards maintenance of the track. Maintenance costs are a significant annual drain on the Grand Strzelecki Track Inc., who are tasked with keeping the track in a reasonable condition for walkers - a difficult task in the face of the ravages that the area's wet and windy weather can wreak on our extensive stretches of bushland track. We're always on the lookout for organizations and businesses prepared to sponsor our maintenance efforts, so if you represent such an organization, which might be prepared to join with Latrobe City Council, Wellington Shire Council, and the Mirboo North & District Community Bank in supporting us, please get in touch by emailing bulga01@bigpond.com and we'll talk!



Some enchanting “Spring Fern Photos” By Steb Fisher

