

Grand Strzelecki Bush Telegraph



Blackwood Forest - Duff Trail –Photo by Steb Fisher

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Autumn 2015

From the Editor

Welcome to the second edition of the Grand Strzelecki Bush Telegraph.

With good rain and overall mild conditions through the spring and summer, the bush and rainforest are looking fabulous. It should be a great season for fungi, for those interested in studying this fascinating subject or capturing some stunning photos. The best time is May for most fungi, so come and enjoy!

The prolific growth of vegetation this season has caused us some issues with maintenance, as some sections of track became choked with stinging nettles, fire weed and thistles. This has placed a strain on our maintenance budget, with some sections like Billy's Creek and Macks Creek needing more than one pass to keep them usable for walkers. We apologize to anyone who encountered difficult conditions along their walk. We try to minimize use of herbicides for environmental reasons and to maintain a green carpet which is more visually appealing; however a more proactive approach and a wider range of control strategies may be needed to reduce our maintenance liability in future. We really appreciate the contributions from our supporters including Latrobe City Council, Wellington Shire Council and Bendigo bank, without which we could not keep the tracks open.

Several sections of track have needed to be re-aligned around forestry operations in the last year, especially in Macks Creek. This will create a more pleasant experience for walkers in future as the track passes through more native forest and regenerated areas and less operational plantations. Corrections needed to the mapped alignment of the track in some places have also been identified whilst plotting the GPS positions of numbered markers installed by our Friends Group for emergency use. Although we use signage where necessary to avoid any navigation problems, we realize the maps need to be updated over time to keep them current. To this end we are now offering our existing stock of souvenir edition walking maps at half price through the website and making individual section maps available for sale, whilst considering options including printing an updated edition and producing geo-referenced PDF versions that can be used for navigation with commercially available smart phone applications. Watch the website for developments.

A new group called Tarra Territory Tourism (TTT), recently formed in Yarram, has taken an interest in the Grand Strzelecki Track and proposed establishing a link from Macks Creek Hall to Yarram via the free campground at White Woman's Waterhole and Won Wron State Forest. This lowland forest area is quite different to anything else to be found along the GST and would add many features of interest to walkers including sites of Aboriginal and European cultural heritage and seasonal displays of rare and unusual orchids. The proposed route has been scouted out and does not require a great implementation cost because much of it follows existing tracks and easements. Nevertheless there are permissions to be sought, processes to be followed and funds to be obtained before this becomes a reality. A second stage of TTT's proposal is to link Yarram with the Great Southern Rail Trail through South Gippsland via the existing Tarra Trail to Alberton. We are also aware of other proposed extensions and connections which will greatly increase the contiguous network of trails for both walkers and cyclists. You are invited to check out the TTT Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tarra-Territory-Tourism-Inc/293118554214971>.

With support and enthusiasm from the wider community to promote and further develop the Grand Strzelecki Track, as well as great events such as Duncan's Run Hundred (read on), we are increasingly confident of a great future for this project. Towards that end we are actively pursuing all funding options to give us the means to provide better facilities and maintain the tracks to a higher standard. We encourage all those who love the Strzelecki experience, enjoy bushwalking or have an interest in tourism within our region to get behind us and help out any way you can. We always need enthusiastic members for our management committee and Friends Group and appreciate any kind of support from word of mouth and comments on social media, to sponsorship and donations. Please visit the Grand Strzelecki Track website or Facebook page.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

THE DUNCAN ORR RUN

Intro

The second annual Duncan's Run Hundred ultra-running event was held along the Grand Strzelecki Track on December 20th 2014. The event is in honour of local athlete Duncan Orr who lost his life in a tragic accident in New Zealand. Duncan originally had the idea of using the Grand Strzelecki Track for an ultra-running event and his wife (Anna), family, friends and team mates banded together following his death to make it a reality.

On this occasion the entire track network was open and well prepared for the event, including the challenging Macks Creek Loop. Other sections included the Mount Tassie Loop, the Tarra Valley Loop and Traralgon Creek. With perfect weather conditions (compared to heavy rain the day before), the event allowed full appreciation of the beauty and challenge of the Grand Strzelecki Track to the 93 entrants and their support teams from Australia and overseas.

The Duncan's Run Hundred showcases the Grand Strzelecki Track around Australia and internationally and fits perfectly with the GST charter to encourage the enjoyment of low impact recreational activities which foster appreciation of our unique natural environment, so we strongly support the event and are overjoyed that it is set to continue in years ahead. Visit <http://www.duncansrunhundred.com/> for more information.

We thank Latrobe City Council for their financial contribution towards setting up the event, DRH sponsors GDF Suez, Traralgon Harriers and Aura, Parks Victoria for use of the Visitors' centre, Balook and District Residents Association (BADRA) for provision of equipment and volunteer labour, Tarra-Bulga Guest House for hosting the awards breakfast and putting in the long hours catering to all who attended, Hedley Range Services for an heroic effort on track maintenance to make it safe and enjoyable for runners and all individuals from GST Inc., the DRH committee, friends and family who volunteered large amounts of time and effort to make it a success.

Below is a personal account of the event by Race Director Travis McInnes and a summary of results from a survey of participants telling what they thought of their experience

Duncan's Run Hundred 2014 – Trav's Race Review

When people ask me how Duncan's Run Hundred went in December, my answer is this: "It was a massive success!" And honestly, from all accounts it really was. I could not have hoped for a better race. We set the bar pretty high with the 2013 event, but I think it is safe to say that in 2014 it was even better.

Back in January last year, as we sat around the table at a bistro in Traralgon discussing who might be our race director for the 2014 race, I patiently waited for someone to jump in and volunteer. The silence was deafening. It seemed that we may be without a race director, and therefore without a race. Back in 2013 I was just a helper, but even then it was a huge challenge. I remember being thrilled and exhausted after it was all over, and also really proud of the achievement. I really did not like the idea of cancelling the 2014 event, so I volunteered to be the race director. Everyone thanked and congratulated me. I smiled nervously. On the way home that night I wondered whether I could do a decent job. Only time would tell.

Pulling a committee together turned out to be super-easy. We had a sensational committee in 2013 with Anna at the helm, and the same group of legends put their hands up for more fun in 2014. With all of the key positions filled, the planning started. If I'm totally honest, I don't recall having any serious issues with the event planning. It was busy of course, but the hurdles were overcome with ease due to the level of experience and professionalism in the committee (and I'm not talking about me!). Meeting after meeting, everything seemed to be falling into place nicely.

The week leading up to the race was pretty full-on, with quite a bit of course setting work and track maintenance on the go. A big thankyou goes out to Kevin and the guys from Hedley Range Services for doing such a great job on the trails. After suffering about twenty million stinging nettle stings on a recce run, Crossy and Trav W. were soooooo grateful to see the tracks clear on race day. According to Crossy, his legs were still tingling on race day! Meanwhile, I had a very busy week, employing all of my motorised toys to good effect: whipper-snipper, chainsaw, ride-on mower, dirt-bike.... Everything was employed to make sure that the trails were in good shape for the big day. One particularly memorable moment occurred when I was marking the return leg of the 25km loop on my dirt bike. I had stopped for a sandwich at a gorgeous spot looking across the valley towards Mt Tassie when my phone rang. It was Mark from ABC Radio asking for an interview about the run. No problem!

I was flat out that week, but the excitement of it all kept me out there in the bush working. And I have to admit, it's a gorgeous place to spend your days, so I didn't mind too much.....

...and before we could say "Caballo Blanco", it was race day!

With 93 entries the field was a good size. A good proportion of the entrants went for the solo 100km and solo 50km races, which was fantastic. A scan through the starting list revealed a

few very competitive names, including last year's 100km outright winner David Overend. And in the 28km race, the field consisted of some very strong local runners, some interstate travellers, and quite a few less experienced punters out to try their hand at a less-than-comfortable distance. After swapping emails with so many of the entrants, I was really looking forward to putting faces to names.

The bleary-eyed travellers were all very friendly on that cool morning in Balook. It was all very quiet and subdued in the wee hours, but I was buzzing. We had successfully vaulted the last few hurdles, and it looked remarkably like we were ready to host a race! Woot! And then I remembered that, not only was I running a race, but I was also running in that race. With all of the course prep and other planning shenanigans I hadn't been for a run in over two weeks. Eeek! Oh well, I wasn't going to win anyway, so I might as well just go out and enjoy it.

Back in 2013 I completed the 36km course in the inaugural Duncan's Run Hundred, and it was an extremely memorable race for me. Unofficially, Dunc was my running coach, so I had Duncan's voice in my head urging me on all the way. I took opportunities during the race to chat with other runners about things that Dunc was passionate about, like his dedication to achieving good running form, and his strong belief in the benefits of low offset shoes and the like. If not for Dunc's influence, I definitely would not have been out there at all. When I eventually crossed the line I was in tears, thinking that Dunc would have absolutely loved the course, and so sad that he wasn't there to share it with us.

That race was memorable for some other reasons too. One might describe it as an unmitigated disaster, but that would probably be talking it up. I stuffed up my hydration, I stuffed up my nutrition, and my race plan was a bit of a joke, looking back now. But the most amusing catastrophe happened at about the 20km mark, when I took a wrong turn. Now I am sure that we have all done it at some point, but this particular little navigational error will haunt me until the end of my days, because I took a wrong turn... and I was the guy that made the course maps! I know... Even I can't believe it.

Fast forward to the 2014 race and I was feeling a little bit more seasoned, but only just. We all took off from the start line after some hearty slaps on the back and good wishes. This was a super-exciting part of the race. The trails around Balook are spectacular and an absolute hoot to run. Swooping trails through dense temperate rainforest, thick with tree ferns and leeches! Of course I went out pretty hard, caught up in the excitement of it all. I didn't really have much of a race plan, but I knew I had to save some energy for the last part of the course. You see, I'm not much of a runner, but recent experience has shown me that I can climb. My favourite race of the year is the Four Peaks Alpine Challenge. For some reason I am able to punch above my weight, and the steeper the hills are, the better. Looking at the elevation profile of the 28km loop in DRH14, the last part of that would suit me to a tee.

And I wasn't too far wrong. Despite popping FIVE salt pills during the race, I was suffering mild cramps after about 10km, and then severe cramps at around the 20km mark. But this didn't slow me too much on the big climb out of Macks Creek. And when I say big climb, that doesn't really do it justice. Other international races have similarly named features, but I think our hill is suitably brutal, so I am going to call it "The Wall". I hit it running and went into a heart-bursting walking cadence that hauled me past quite a few weary punters.

Overtaking is always good for morale. ☒ Hitting the big hill also meant that I was well and truly on the home stretch, so all I had to do was keep up a decent pace and it looked like I might make it across the line in under 4 hours. All I could think was "GO FOR IT!!"

The mind was willing, but the body was weak. After the long outward journey and then the punishing hill, the best I could manage was a walk-run routine on the steady climb back to Balook. Nevertheless I continued to motor on, passing a few more people in that last 2 or 3km's. A finish time under four hours was looking possible, and then I realised what time it was... Nearly 1pm. If I was quick I might just make it back to Balook in time to sample some of Tubby's famous barbecue specialties! GO FOR IT!!!

I eventually crossed the line with a time of 3hrs 46 minutes, which was sensational!! I honestly thought that it might take me five hours to cover the distance, so I was pleasantly surprised. And thankfully this year, I could still manage something resembling a normal walking gait. Crikey did I suffer last year! In 2013 I think it took me 20 minutes to walk 200m across to the Balook Guest House for a shower. This year I felt good! I had a quick tub and checked in with Anna to see how it was all going.

I was delighted to hear that we hadn't lost anyone, and that generally things were going very well. A couple of people had taken wrong turns, but I think that's par for the course. Thanks to the good folks from WICEN (Wireless Institute Civil Emergency Network) we had radio communication to all of our marshal points, which made it especially easy to keep track of our competitors.

At this point I have to give a shout out to Brett Easton who demonstrated an amazing amount of spirit. Brett took a wrong turn and effectively ran most of the 28km loop twice. Despite this significant setback, when he eventually arrived back at Race HQ to start the final 25km loop of his 100km race, he was all smiles. What an attitude!!! We can all learn from that man.

And so the day went on without a serious incident. Our 100km outright winner Steve Rennick crossed the line with a blistering time of 10 hours and 24 minutes. He honestly looked as if he had just come in from his warm up, still with great form and posture. Impressive!

Our last 100km runner crossed the line just after 1am after a gruelling 19-plus hours. Well done John Salton. I don't care how you split it, that's a solid day's work. We had a good chat after he crossed the line, and he was more than happy with his result. John is relatively new to long-distance running, having decided to become a runner not more than 12 months ago! Talk about setting yourself a serious challenge.

And so, in the wee hours of Sunday morning it was all over. We had our winners, and most importantly we had everyone safely home to Race HQ.

Before, during and after the race, I really enjoyed hearing about people's race highlights. Some were gob-smacked by the stunning views out over 90 Mile Beach, while others got a kick out of the white "daisies" that carpeted the trails out on the 50km loop. The daisies were lovely, but not my personal highlight. For me, the best thing about this race was the warm and inviting feeling that seemed to be putting smiles on people's faces at Race HQ. It

was a gorgeous afternoon, and the super-friendly atmosphere really made it a joy. It seems that good races attract good people. ;)

Dunc was always up for a challenge, and he would have been rapt to see many people setting themselves a new challenge and going after it. Dunc inspired me to run further than I thought I could, and I am so proud to be part of the team that put this race together in his honour. We created a fantastic race, and in doing so we helped people to conquer their own personal challenge.

*So when people ask me how the Duncan's Run Hundred went, my answer is: "It was a massive success!" It all came together so well because we had people willing to help out in all sorts of amazing ways. Dunc was always a willing volunteer, and it seemed that we all took a leaf out of Dunc's book and gave it everything that we could for this race. He wasn't there to share it with us, but the memory of his enthusiasm and his willingness to make every day memorable spurred us all into action. **Thanks for taking the lead again Dunc.***



Thank you to all of the beautiful people that helped to make the Duncan's Run Hundred a success. Especially, thank you Anna, Helen, Ray, Giddo, Crossy, Liz, Robbie, Kathryn, Mattias, Kylie, Jo, Ollie, Pam, Richard, David, Kevin, Stu, Brett, Tina, Tubby, Bill, Lavila, Ron, Chris, John, Jimmy, and all of the other helpers that made it a fantastic day. I can't wait to do it all again, and I am very excited to announce that we are planning to host the next Duncan's Run Hundred on the 19th of December 2015! Put it in your calendar folks. It's too good to miss!



100k and 50 k start - 2014

Duncan's Run Hundred 2014 Survey (conducted through Survey Monkey)

There were 50 respondents to the survey including 48 runners; 21 ran the 28km event (Macks Creek Loop), 11 ran the 50km event, 12 ran the 100km solo, and 4 ran the 100km relay.

Q. What factors influenced your decision to participate in Duncan’s Run Hundred?

Some of the responses:

- Ran it last year and really enjoyed the course scenery, the three loop concept and the organization.
- Date, location, distance and UTMB points.
- Friendship team and to honour a mighty fine fellow.
- All of the above plus the cause (in memory).
- Friends, location, course and cause.

Q. Feedback about the course

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	N/A	Total
Entry system	38	12	0	0	0	0	50
Start / Finish area	29	19	1	1	0	0	50
Course	33	14	2	1	0	0	50
Distances on offer	33	15	2	0	0	0	50
Support at Start / Finish areas	35	11	3	0	0	0	49
Post-race food and drinks	33	11	3	1	0	2	50
Prizes post-race	16	6	7	3	0	18	50
On the day presentations	6	4	6	1	1	30	48
Breakfast and presentation the following day	12	3	0	1	1	32	49

Q. To what extent do you agree / disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Reasonable entry fee	28	22	0	0	0	50
Course was scenic	38	13	0	1	0	50
Clearly marked course	16	22	9	3	0	50
Adequate food / drink stops	14	22	8	5	1	50
Timely presented results	21	25	3	1	0	50

(A great endorsement of the scenic values of the GST)

Q. Overall, how would you rate the event?

Answer choices	Responses
Excellent	39
Good	10
Fair	0
Could be improved	1
Poor	0
Total	50

Some of the comments associated with this were:

- Several of us all went the wrong way at the same point down Callignee South Road junction.
- Course was a little unclear at times, due to use of older tape.
- The Balook Visitor Centre was not well supported and there wasn't anywhere for my wife / support person to buy water or food, so if you were not running, you had to provide everything yourself which we did not know about, so it is unlikely she would support me on this race again.*
- First time running in this area and it didn't disappoint.
- Had issue with fellow runner wearing earphones and hearing trail bikes roaring down a track toward us. A close call.

(*FYI the Tarra Bulga Guest House and cafe was open all day from 6:00am until late serving hot food and drinks, 200m from the staging area at the Visitors' Centre.)

Q. Do you plan to run Duncan's Run Hundred again in 2015?

Answer choices	Responses
Yes	41
No	6
TOTAL	47

Some of the comments associated with this were:

- Pending family availability so close to Christmas.
- Out of country.
- Liked the small field of runners and the friendly event staff etc. plus the course.
- Probably not the 28km was probably a bit rough. Worried about getting injured.

Q. Would you recommend Duncan's Run Hundred to a friend?

Answer choices	Responses
Yes	48
No	2
TOTAL	48

Some of the comments associated with this were:

- I've already told the Surf Coast Trail Runners Facebook Group that they should come en masse in 2015?
- If they were prepared.
- Only if they don't take my spot as stated before. The appealing thing to me is having a small field.
- But would tell that it is a hard core race.
- Absolutely, I'll do my best to promote and spread the word to my trail running friends to get on-board.

Q. What suggestions do you have for future Duncan's Run Hundred?

Some of the responses:

- Really like the way it was run. Would suggest that 500mm water is insufficient for the 2nd lap of the 100km relay if it's going to be a hot day. Slightly sorry the track doesn't go right to the monument on top of Mt. Tassie. Enjoyed that twice last year so missed it this year.
- More detailed course maps with kilometre markings and clear contour lines and/or detailed course notes. Particularly helpful for interstate / international runners not familiar with the area. More consistent and accurate course markings, particularly in the final legs of the 100km. The Sutton Road left hand

turn confused at least three 100km runners as the course marking was placed on the right hand side several metres beyond Sutton Road. This caused myself and two other runners to continue running straight ahead. Combined use of laminated signage and flagging tape will make markings more visible. Facility to pre-purchase 100km breakfast tickets with online entry to make things easier for runners, organisers and catering staff.

- Nothing comes to mind – I found the course markings easy to follow.

Q. Do you have any other comments?

- I love these small community events, particularly the Duncan's Run Hundred which symbolizes so much for Duncan's family, friends and Traralgon running community. The passion and enthusiasm was evident, and I hope this event continues to flourish. Time of year presents a challenge to most families, however I appreciate the significance of the chosen weekend. I greatly appreciated the headbuff being posted to me – that was a nice surprise! And all other giveaways were very generous and unexpected for such a small community event. Well done!!
- I look forward to the 2015 event!
- Talking to friends. I think more local Harriers would do the event if there was a shorter individual distance.



Mosses - Duffs Trail - Photo Steb Fisher

The theft of our Great Forest

The following are extracts from an article by “Selector” in the 19th Century publication “Australasian” and reprinted in the Euroa Advertiser on June 6, 1884:

*Lying intermediate between the sea on the south and the line of railway from Melbourne to Sale on the north, Westernport, and extending thence easterly to a line drawn from Rosedale to Port Albert, there is a remarkable tract of country to which yet no comprehensive name has been allotted, but which I take upon myself to designate **the Great South Gippsland Forest**. The whole of this tract characterized, more or less, by trees of gigantic size, which rear their lofty heads high above a thick, sometimes almost impenetrable scrub. Owing to this latter circumstance the term scrub land, which is applied in Gippsland to land of this kind, would convey to the mind of a stranger an imperfect impression of the character of the country so named there.*

It is true that the greater part of South Gippsland is a forest country; but the Great Forest has distinctive features of difference to the remainder of the country. Its geological information is different, its vegetale productions are different, and wherever the axe of the selector has allowed the rays of the sun to reach the ground, the soil discloses a remarkable fertility....

In going from Melbourne to Sale the Traveller, when he is about Pakenham, has the western extension of the Great Forest on his right hand, a few miles to the south of the line. Its northern boundary runs nearly parallel with the line of railway from the station just named to Traralgon. The railway engineers kept scrupulously clear of the engineering difficulties of the Great Forest. In Gippsland, with the exception of the rich deposition of deep soil along the lower concourses of its extensive river system, the rest of the fertile lands are almost exclusively rangy or sharply undulated....

The settlement and clearing of the Great Forest was thoroughly documented in the 1920 publication “Land of the Lyre Bird: A story of Settlement in the Great Forest of South Gippsland.” The following is a sample from one chapter of this book, “The Scrub”:

*The scrub country then- sometimes called **the Great Forest of South Gippsland**- started within a few miles of the east coast of Westernport and extended eastward for some sixty or seventy miles with a varying width of thirty to forty miles: covering an area of roughly two thousand square miles of rangy fertile country....*

None of the big timber had any taproot, but a great spread of laterals below the surface, and when a tree uprooted it tore up a mass of earth like the side of a house. The blackwoods and lightwoods, however, had very pronounced taproots. The quantity of big trees to an acre varied from practically none in the sapling country to a hundred or more in some of the musk and hazel country to the eastward. But a large proportion of the country would average from ten to twenty trees to an acre. Strangely to say, in the big timber country there was no eucalyptus growth between the very old trees and comparatively young saplings.

Coming now to the scrub itself, that tremendous jungle forty to sixty feet in height that filled the spaces between the great trees, a wonderful variety of flora was to be found in it: and often all the species many times repeated could be found on a square chain.

Entering the scrub for the first time, what impressed one most was the wilderness of thin saplings all around. Then the size of the big timber would strike you. It looked larger in the scrub, where it compared only with saplings, than on the clearings where trees compared with one another. Often

you could only see one or two of their immense trunks at a time looming up through the scrub, as any object was hidden from view at a chain or less away.

These accounts of the Great Forest are entrenched in the history of Gippsland and the term itself- *Great Forest*- is very much a part of our folklore. The giant Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) that grow here are the tallest hardwood trees and the tallest flowering plants on earth. They may live for 400 years and many specimens in this area exceeded 100 metres in height, 7 metres in diameter and 22 metres in circumference. In 1885 the Thorpdale Tree was measured at 114.4 metres on the ground after it was cut down. It would have been the world's tallest tree.



Giants of the Great Forest were felled for sawmilling and settlement.

Where the Thorpdale Tree stood, there is now just potato farms and grassy paddocks with nothing more than a sign indicating where the world's tallest tree once stood. Clearing for settlement and sawmilling for timber to build Melbourne took barely one generation to reduce this Great Forest to less than 20% of its original extent, with much of the remainder degraded by selective logging, weed invasion and frequent, intense fires. The western Strzelecki Ranges are now more reminiscent of the rolling green fields of Merry Old England than a towering, impenetrable wilderness.

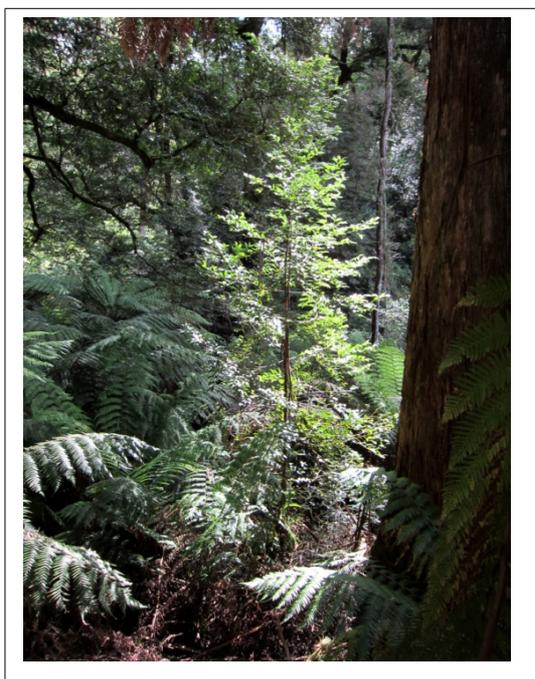
The eastern Strzelecki Ranges, however, are different. The steepness of the terrain made farming far more difficult. Although dozens of sawmills operated until the 1950s cutting and extracting the giant trees, some remote stands of timber were difficult to access and only selectively logged or barely touched. After the fires of 1939 and 1944 swept through different parts of the range, large areas of regrowth forest emerged from seed scattered by remaining trees or contained in the soil from earlier logging. Reforestation of abandoned farmland then took place from the 1960s onwards, resulting in the predominantly forested landscape seen today. In addition to 38,000 hectares of native forest under private conservation management, 20,000 ha of which is permanently protected on title, the eastern Strzeleckis now encompasses significant sized public reserves. These are Tarra-Bulga National Park, Morwell National Park, the Gunyah Reserve with its nationally significant rainforest and the 8,000 hectare 'Cores and Links' Reserve which will link Tarra-Bulga with Gunyah 30 km to the west. In this prolific environment where the 1939 and 1944 regrowth forest is already 50 metres tall, the Great Forest is not lost, it is alive and regrowing. Take a walk on Scenic Track in Tarra-Bulga and you don't have to imagine what it was like; it's there to see. Our Great Forest is still an inspirational part of Gippsland and will become an attraction of international proportions in decades and centuries to come as it regains much of its former glory.

But now our Great Forest faces another threat, this time to its very identity. This threat has the potential to undermine the recognition of Gippsland's exceptional natural heritage which so many of us have strived to retain and restore. It threatens to divert the accolades of the Great Forest away from Gippsland and with it the potential visitors that will attract, as our forest giants regain their monolithic scale. Our Great Forest identity is being stolen!

You may have noticed in media and on the internet a push by the Wilderness Society to create a Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands, extending from near Kinglake in the west to Erica in the east. Their main strategy to solicit public support for their proposal is to promote the fact that the new park will be on the outskirts of Melbourne and a major recreational and tourist drawcard that will bring millions of visitors and dollars through the big city. Already attractions east of Wilson's Promontory can't compete with the Melbourne marketing juggernaut that channels most interstate and overseas visitors towards one of the destinations within easy reach- the Great Ocean Road, the Yarra Valley, Phillip Island- yet we have world class attractions here that are barely recognized. As a recent group of Melbourne-based walkers who 'accidentally' discovered the Grand Strzelecki Track remarked, "we can't believe this amazing place is here and only 2 hours from Melbourne, yet nobody even knows about it!" Other visitors from Canada who spent 2 months touring all the big ticket attractions Australia has to offer and spent the last 10 days of their stay at Balook walking and exploring the 'Secret National Park' (Tarra-Bulga) described their Strzelecki experience as 'the best part of their holiday', yet on their last day spent in Melbourne before returning home they could find nothing in the tourist information centres to take back and show their friends. That sums it up in a nutshell. It isn't surprising, when we can't find an outlet for our brochures and maps in the City even amongst the backpacking outfitters who for some reason have no interest in stocking them. The last thing we need, then, is for our very history and identity as the land of the *real* Great Forest to be stolen and marketed as someone else's. Hands off our Great Forest!

The good news is, the lucky few who do discover this special part of the world- despite the best efforts of many to conceal it- are in for a special treat. Here you can discover a forgotten land of forest giants and ancient rainforest once dubbed 'The Heartbreak Hills', where nowadays people come to have their hearts uplifted! You can lose yourself amongst rampant emerald greenery and be swept away by the extraordinary symphony of birdsong all around you in a constant feast for the senses. You can contemplate a forest once almost lost but now reborn and experience somewhat of a rebirth yourself!

Being off the trodden path of the tourist masses ensures you often have the place entirely to yourself with peace and quiet to contemplate what it was, is and will be. We give you the *real* Great Forest experience and we're proud of it!



Tarra-Bulga National Park, present



Privately managed old growth forest near Balook, present day.



The Gunyah Tree (circumference 22 metres) still stands in a privately managed conservation area near the Gunyah Reserve, Strzelecki Ranges. There were much bigger trees than this when white settlers first arrived.



White-browed Scrubwren

We hope you have enjoyed reading our second 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 runner/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.



Our Logo - The Echnida