

HOW BLUE GUM FOREST WAS SAVED FROM THE AXE

(excerpt from the article by Tom Herbert – 5th President of SBW 1934-6)

In 1931 Mr. C. Hungerford, a farmer of Bilpin, obtained a Conditional Purchase Lease in the valley of the Grose River (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Gum_Forest) which included what is now Reserve 63,521. On the Eight-Hour Weekend he started to ringbark the trees on that flat, but, fortunately, a small party of bushwalkers was camping in the Blue Gum Forest that weekend (*led by Alan Rigby*). Some of them were members of the Mountain Trails Club and some belonged to the Sydney Bush Walkers. On hearing the chopping, they approached Mr. Hungerford, and succeeded in getting him to stop ringbarking and to agree to sell them his rights in the area for £130, provided it was paid by 31st December, 1931. At that time there was no N.S.W. Federation of Bush Walking Clubs (it was formed in July, 1932) so, from the members of the Mountain Trails Club, the Sydney Bush Walkers and the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia was formed the Blue Gum Forest Committee.

The arrangement with Mr. Hungerford was confirmed at a meeting the Committee had with him in the Blue Gum Forest on 15th November, 1931, at which Mr. J. C. Lockley (AKA “Redgum” of the Sydney Morning Herald) was present. On the way up Govett's Leap Creek on the return journey to Blackheath, Mr. Lockley commented on the great, rocky —pylon on the left, which was later officially named —Lockley Pylon. The Sydney Morning Herald gave valuable publicity to the purchase of the Blue Gum Forest by bushwalkers and other nature lovers, and their gift of it to the community for a recreation reserve.

The Wild Life Preservation Society donated £25, bushwalkers and tree lovers gave £25, and Mr. W.J. Cleary (*a bushwalker, then head of the NSW Railways and subsequently chairman of the ABC*) lent the Committee £80 free of interest for two years, so Mr. Hungerford received his £130. The Blue Gum Forest Committee then arranged with the Lands Department for the dedication of the area as a Reserve for Public Recreation, and advised Departmental officers of the surrounding areas that were suitable for reservation. By further appeals and donations, as well as the proceeds of various entertainments they arranged, the bushwalkers raised the £80 and on 1st December, 1933, repaid Mr. Cleary's loan.

This was a very significant sacrifice by the Bushwalkers, given the straitened economic situation of the times. The land was subsequently donated to the people of NSW. Through the efforts of these Bushwalkers the trees and land were saved, and the area is now an enduring National Park for the benefit of current and future generations.

<http://www.penrithweb.com/panorama/pan-bluegum.html> From the collective experience of these original bushwalkers, a nascent club was invigorated and endures to this day as our SBW.