

Heritage Tracks within Kosciuszko National Park

A proposal to the National Parks and Wildlife Service from Robert Green, author of *Exploring the Jagungal Wilderness*.



The photograph shows the old track between Daveys Hut and the Burrungubugge River which was revealed after the 2003 bushfires.

Introduction

The intent of this report is to apprise the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) about heritage tracks in Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) in the Jagungal region. Tracks that were used for over 100 years and which are part of the cultural heritage of the region are being lost due to fire regrowth and the passage of time. Some of these tracks warrant preservation. The cost is minimal and the work will give other benefits as well.

Contributors to this report include well known authors and heritage consultants. Our concern is that if something is not done soon some of the heritage values of the region will be lost.

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Heritage Tracks within Kosciuszko National Park

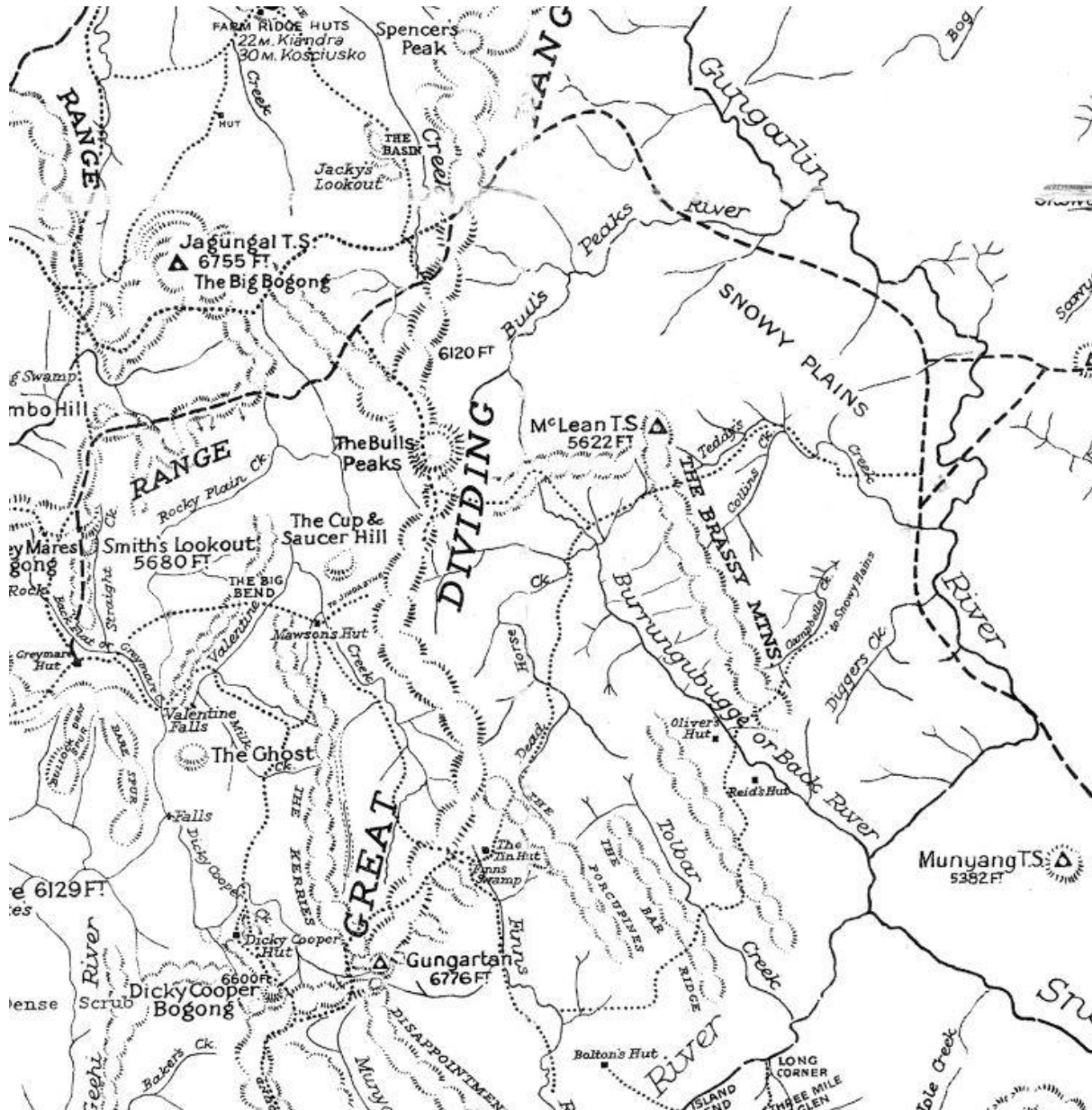
Robert Green
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Executive Summary

1. For millennia Aborigines visited what is now Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) on a seasonal basis.
2. For over 100 years the region was home to a variety of mostly European and Asian residents who were there for purposes as diverse as grazing sheep and cattle, building homes, digging for minerals, escaping the law, and building the nation.
3. They created foot tracks, bridle tracks, stock routes, and roads to get around. Those tracks help explain who they were and what they did.
4. Apart from Management tracks like the Grey Mare Fire Trail, almost all of the old tracks have disappeared. Because of regrowth and the passage of time what is left will soon disappear unless something is done.
5. This report proposes that to maintain some of that cultural heritage, and for other good reasons, there is a need to conserve sections of those tracks which remain.
6. This proposal is that one small section of track be conserved by clearing a narrow path, wide enough only for walkers, along the line of an historic route. This can be done by volunteers, under NPWS supervision, using minimal machinery with all costs paid by the volunteers. There will be minimal or no cost to NPWS.

1 Where were the old tracks in the Jagungal area?

The following map is a portion of the NSW Department of Lands 1945 “Snowy Mountains Kosciusko and Kiandra Districts” map. It shows some of the historic tracks within the region.



David Scott is a conservation architect who has been engaged by NPWS on conservation projects such as Grey Mare Hut. He has amassed a great number of records concerning pastoral runs, leases and grants of land, permissive occupancies, snow leases, mining leases and other mining records, records relating to early graziers and records relating to the activities of the Snowy Mountains Authority (SMA).

Included in those records are many maps prepared by the Lands Department, the Mines Department, the SMA, the Australian Army and other State mapping authorities.

From those sources Mr Scott prepared the enclosed maps showing many of the tracks and routes which were used by the early graziers and miners, and others which were used by the SMA.

One of the interesting historical aspects of these tracks is that they were logical routes, and were used in turn by aboriginal people, graziers, miners and the SMA. They are still the logical routes to access parts of KNP today.

2 The route through Kalkite Gap and Snowy Plains

Before Europeans used the route through Kalkite Gap and the valley of the Gungahlin River, it had been used by aboriginal people who visited the high country on a seasonal basis. (Source: Heritage Action Statement for Botherum Plain.)

Mt Jagungal itself was also known as the Big Bogong and in the region there are numerous geographical features which have Bogong in their name, all of which indicate a connection with the earliest inhabitants.

The route through Kalkite Gap, then along the valley of the Gungahlin River to the area named Snowy Plains, was subsequently used by graziers to bring stock into the Jagungal region. Very likely they simply followed the existing Aboriginal tracks.

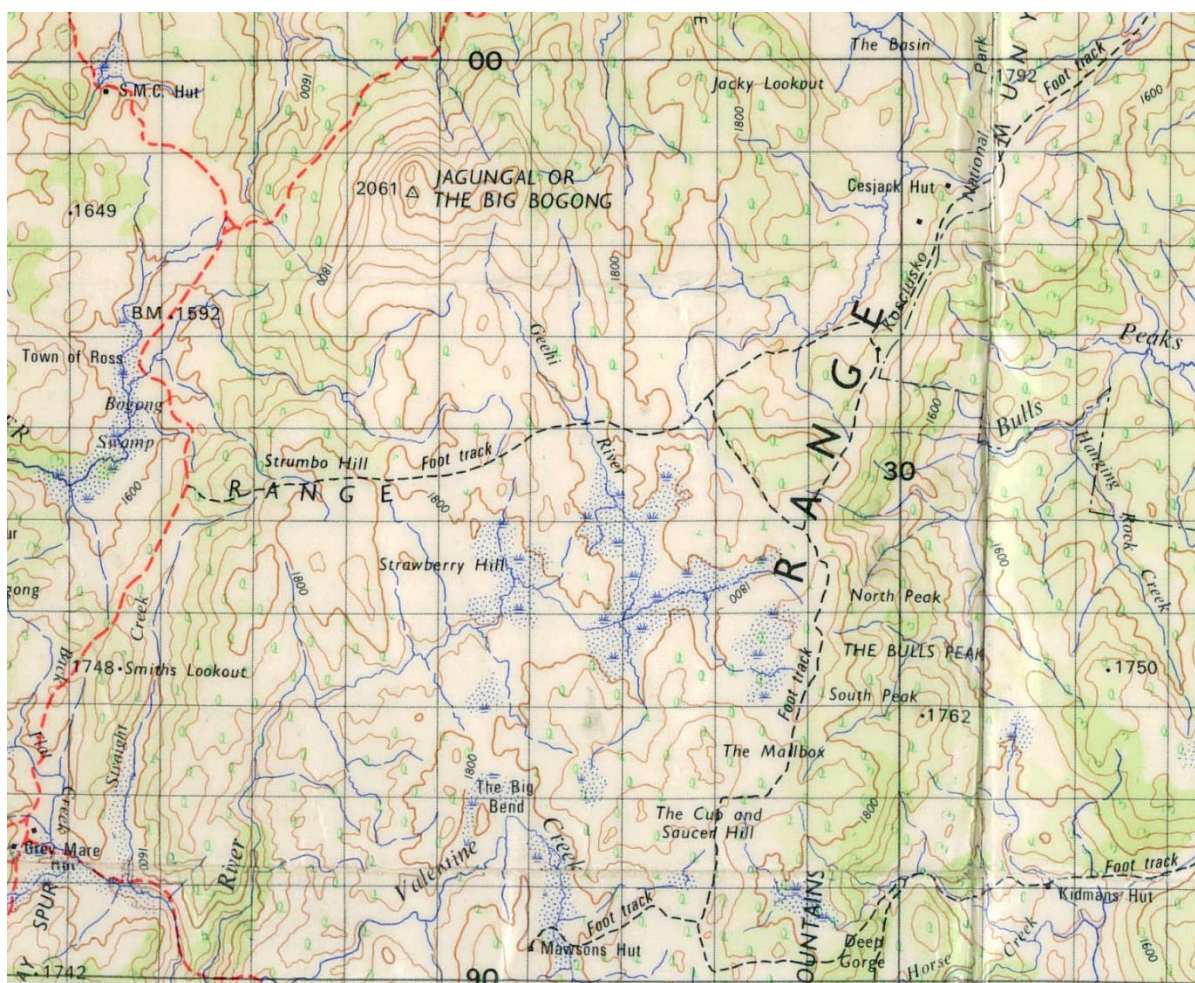
Once in the Gungahlin valley, secondary tracks branched off to other destinations, such as to the Boltons' and the Reids' lands on the Finn and Burrungubugge Rivers, to Kidman's land on the Upper Burrungubugge and to a number of pastoral and mining properties at the head of the Gungahlin River.

In the early 1900s, an offshoot of this route, namely, the track between Daveys Hut and the Burrungubugge River, was not only a stock route but an important social link between the families living near the Burrungubugge River, (including the Reids and some of the Boltons), and those living on Snowy Plains (including other Boltons, Hedgers, Campbells and Napthalis). The social centre for the district was the Napthali homestead on Snowy Plains and it was to that property that the families living in the

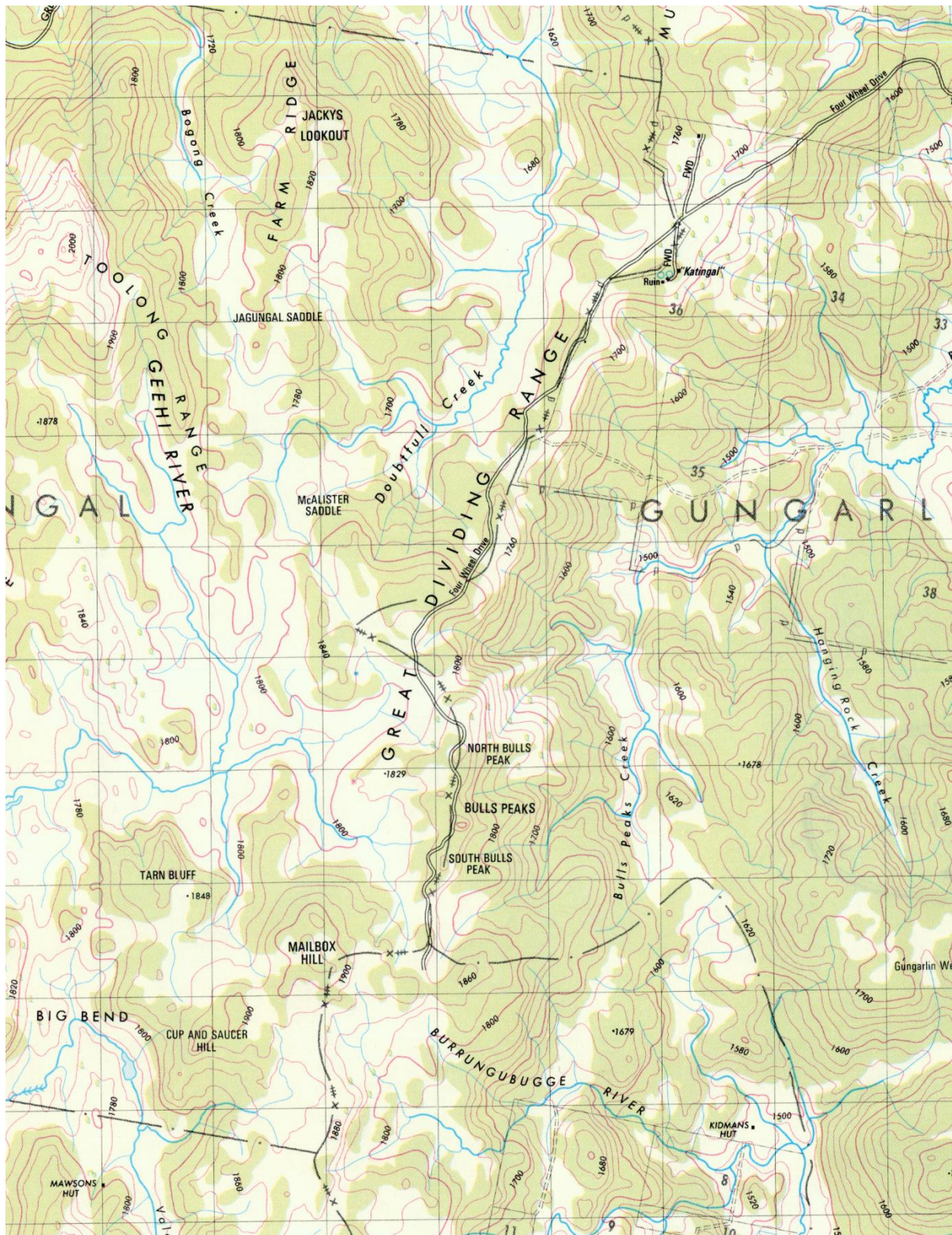
Burrungubugge area would travel via a commonly used track to join in activities with their neighbours. Later this track was graded and used by the SMA.

Elsewhere, the track to Kidmans did additional service by providing a means of access to take materials and visitors to Tin Hut and to Alpine Hut.

The route from Kalkite Gap through Snowy Plains was not simply a stock route but also provided the route along which mining machinery was taken to Grey Mare Mine. Still later that same route was used by the SMA and, near Mt Jagungal, was called the Strawberry Hill Fire Trail.



Another early route, used by graziers, ran along the top of the Great Dividing Range, which itself was a boundary between the early stock runs and snow leases. Mailbox Hill was a place where mail was left for graziers. This route was also used by cross country skiers and runners to set speed records from Kiandra to the Kosciuszko area. It was later used by the SMA and was called the Bulls Peaks Fire Trail.



3 The Jagungal region today

The maps show that there were once many tracks. The 2003 fires revealed quite a few of them and enabled their routes to be recorded.

But, partly as a result of the vigorous regrowth caused by the fires, they are now disappearing. Very few of those which were visible, even as recently as 30 years ago, are still visible today. Most have now gone.

In all likelihood, within a few years the remainder will disappear completely and with them the heritage they represent.

A brief list of some of the tracks which were visible 30 years ago and which are no longer there is as follows:

Tracks which were west of the Grey Mare Fire Trail

- Both of the tracks through Ryries Parlour have gone.
- The Strumbo Range Fire Trail west of Grey Mare Hut has been overgrown.
- Pretty Plain Hut is no longer on a circuit route and the track to it along the Tooma River has faded.
- Many of the SMA tracks have gone, such as the Theiss Village Trail, routes to Cool Plain and Quarry Road.

Tracks which were east of the Grey Mare Fire Trail

- Almost none of the historic tracks remain.
- The track from McAlister Saddle along the Strawberry Hill Fire Trail to the Grey Mare Fire Trail has largely gone, as has the track down Strumbo Hill.
- The Bulls Peaks Fire Trail which once led to Mailbox Hill has all but disappeared.
- The route to Kidmans is now difficult to find from Teddys Creek to Little Brassy Gap. Beyond that point it has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. After the 2003 fires, and, no doubt, in response to a perceived need, the RFS was given permission to clear this route as far as Little Brassy Gap, yet 10 years later the route is now impassable.
- The routes from Kidmans to Alpine Hut, Tin Hut and Mawsons no longer exist.
- The route from Cesjacks to Crooks Racecourse has gone.
- In the Diggers Creek area, the old track between Daveys Hut and the Burrungubugge River has largely gone, as has the track from the Burrungubugge

River, past Reids Hut, to Boltons on the Finn. The track beside the Burrungubugge River is also disappearing.

Summary

Apart from the Management tracks like the Grey Mare Fire Trail, almost all of the old tracks have disappeared or are about to. There is a pressing need to conserve some part of the nation's cultural heritage while it still remains.

4 Best Practice Guidelines for Cultural Heritage Management.

1.1 In 2001 the Australian and New Zealand Environment Conservation Council (ANZECC), carried out a study into Best Practice in Cultural Heritage Management. Its members were the departments responsible for the management of Australian national Parks and New Zealand's Department of Conservation. The study was initiated and partly funded by the NSW NPWS.

<https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/aec0f6de-6182-43b7-b7f8-60478640b72c/files/chm.pdf>

1.2 At page 4 its report said

“The management of cultural resources on reserved land is an important aspect of the management of parks and protected areas. In most states and territories it is a statutory requirement that government agencies responsibly manage cultural heritage assets.

The management of cultural resources within parks and reserved land has often been 'site driven'. This can limit an understanding with(in) agencies of the wider historic themes represented in their protected areas and the way in which these themes contribute to the conservation of the state/territory or national heritage.”

5 “Conservation” in the context of Cultural Heritage Management?

The ANZECC Report also identified “Key Processes” in the management of Cultural Heritage, one of which was “Conservation”, defined, on page 24, as follows,

“Conservation is the safeguarding of a cultural resource, retaining its heritage values and extending its physical life. It includes all work undertaken to remedy and mitigate deterioration in the condition of cultural resources, In this context

conservation includes not only preservation but more interventionist work, such as restoration or adaptation as reflected in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter definitions.”

6 The conservation of cultural heritage in NSW National Parks

On its website NPWS, at [http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/con ... onal-parks](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/con...onal-parks), says

"The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is dedicated to the conservation of the state's heritage sites through restoration, preservation and ongoing maintenance. NPWS works in partnership with other government agencies and communities to identify, protect and promote the heritage of NSW."

"NSW national parks not only provide areas for social and recreational use, they also preserve biodiversity, heritage sites and Aboriginal culture."

In recent years and especially since the 2003 fires, there has been a realisation by NPWS that the cultural heritage of the National Park, even within "Wilderness" areas, includes its European heritage and that that heritage also needed to be conserved. Six huts have been rebuilt in recent years and huts which were formerly marked as being allowed to decay have received works which will prolong their lives. This process began even before 2003 when NPWS replaced Constances Hut with the Burrungubugge shelter.

On some other sites in the Jagungal Wilderness, such as at the Boltons and Napthalis Homesteads, and the CSIRO "Rabbit" Hut, it has erected explanatory boards which explain the history of the site.

The Management Tracks within the Park have also been upgraded especially the Grey Mare Fire Trail. In 2008 the Rural Fire Service was allowed to clear part of the track into Kidmans as far as Little Brassy Gap.

Heritage "sites" like the huts should not be seen in isolation. The tracks which led to them are also part of our heritage. In fact, as "The Bundian Way" makes clear, some of the tracks were undoubtedly used by Aborigines living on the South Coast to visit the higher peaks on a seasonal basis.

Other tracks and huts record not only the grazing history of the area but also its mining history and the work of the Snowy Mountains Authority.

What it all means is that the Park needs management to meet all of these needs and in recent years NPWS has done a good job with limited resources. As part of this it has called on volunteers to help meet some of its workload. In an attempt to eliminate Orange Hawkweed it called for volunteers who were used to look for the weed in sections of the Park. As a result of that program it seems likely that the spread of the weed has been checked.

What is clear is that NPWS in recent times has managed KNP, including the Jagungal Wilderness, to meet not only Wilderness values but also cultural and heritage ones as well. On this basis, some track maintenance, possibly done by volunteers, is consistent with the conservation of heritage within a National Park.

7 Heritage Tracks which warrant conservation

Each of the following tracks is part of an historic theme of the region and warrants consideration.

7.1. Strumbo Hill, east of the Grey Mare Fire Trail, for about 700 metres. This is an old route, and was used, at times, to give grazing access to Snow Leases, and to take mining machinery to the Grey Mare Mine. It was later used by the SMA.

7.2. The Bulls Peaks Fire Trail south of Cesjacks Hut up Smiths Perisher for about 500 metres. This is the logical north-south route along the Great Dividing Range. It was the route taken by skiers and runners to set speed records from Kiandra to Kosciuszko.

7.3 The track up a specific ridge west of Kidmans Hut from the Burrungubugge Gorge to the top of the Divide for a distance of about 500m. This was the old graziers' route using the Burrungubugge valley to give access from Snowy Plains to the Kidmans/Mawsons region. It passes by an old stockmans' camp site discovered after the 2003 fires.

7.4 The track from Grey Mare Hut west along the old Strumbo Fire Trail gives access to the Pretty Plain region.

7.5 Arsenic Ridge. This track was part of a goldminer's route which ran through Doubtful Gap, along Diggers Creek, across the Happy Jacks River and via Arsenic Ridge to the Kiandra diggings. It later became a Travelling Stock Route.

8 The sort of work which needs to be done

Some relatively minor work could make a significant difference for several of the tracks. It would not require much in the way of machinery. In some cases the use of hand tools may suffice. There would doubtless be enough volunteers to do much of the work, minimising the cost to government.

9 Additional reasons for carrying out the work.

For a number of reasons the tracks which have the highest priority are the track down Strumbo Hill and the old Bulls Peaks Fire Trail. That is because the benefits of working on them extend beyond heritage reasons.

There are also advantages for park management.

Fire control is one factor.

Today, there is no longer any vehicular access to the high country east of the Grey Mare Fire Trail. Undoubtedly there will be fires in the future and it is likely that access to the high country will be needed at some time.

After the 2003 fires the Snowy Plains Rural Fire Service cleared the Kidmans Track as far as Little Brassy Gap, but ten years on that route is now impassable for vehicles. Likewise the Bulls Peaks Fire Trail, which was an extension of the Snowy Plains Fire Trail and which was once regarded as a necessary route for fire management, is also impassable.

The use of these two tracks might also help **management of feral animals and weed control**. For instance, the dog trapper uses the Bulls Peaks Fire Trail, but regrowth limits his range south of Cesjacks, and the hawkweed program was assisted by the fact that the contractor could get access to affected areas.

There are also benefits for park users, such as bushwalkers and skiers.

10 A pilot project

A pilot project is suggested. To see how this may work a good place to start would be the Strawberry Hill Fire Trail down Strumbo Hill to the Grey Mare Fire Trail. The overgrown track could be cleared to a width sufficient for one person. The work could be done by the use of hand tools and could be done by volunteers.

The distance is about 700 metres, with moderate, but thickening, vegetation and the work would have minimal visual impact on the surrounding area.

A number of ANU Mountaineering Club members have indicated that they are willing volunteers and it seems likely that there would be no shortage of other volunteers, either from ANUMC or elsewhere.

If the use of equipment was limited to hand tools such as bow saws, pruners and the like, it would minimise the amount of training the volunteers would need and would also give a chance to assess the scale of work which can be done that way.

11 A procedure which might be followed

The work could be done in two stages.

The first stage would be for two or three persons to visit the site to mark the alignment of the old route, which, fortunately, is still discoverable.

The next stage would be for a group of six or seven volunteers to remain on site, or nearby, for four or five days during which the actual work would be done. The experience at Hannells Spur suggests that the task would be completed within that time.

12 Cost and other factors

It is fully appreciated that NPWS has limited funds and that the cost of training and supervising volunteers is an issue. For this reason it is proposed that the use of hand tools will limit the time taken to train volunteers and reduce the cost of supervision.

It is also proposed that any other costs to NPWS, including the cost of supervision, be identified and that those costs be paid, in advance, to NPWS by the volunteer group.

Safety, communication and other issues would also be handled in a manner directed by NPWS. Perhaps the OH&S issues could be handled by a process similar to hut

caretakers completing a Workparty Proposal which, inter alia, addresses possible safety incidents, emergency communication and first aid. As in hut maintenance, NPWS supervision need only be minimal.

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Robert Green (author of Exploring the Jagungal Wilderness)

PO Box 9482 Deakin ACT 2600

02 6282 2667

0402 647 040

The following persons have been consulted and/or given their support in connection with this proposal.

Klaus Huneke

Matthew Higgins,

David Scott, Heritage Practitioner & PhD Researcher (Kiandra Goldfield)

Graham Scully, KHA Huts and Heritage

Stef de Montis (member of ANUMC)

ANU Mountaineering Club