

Mount York, Blue Mountains, NSW

A BLUE MOUNTAINS PROTOTYPE FOR RECREATION MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING?

The Blue Mountains and Lithgow City Councils have appointed Gondwana Consulting to prepare a Plan of Management for Mount York Reserve. The reserve covers virtually all of the cliffline resources that have so far been used by climbers operating in the Mount York area. The Plan will be integral to the development and implementation of BMCC's Nature Based Recreation Strategy.

The Mount York Reserve offers a range of scenic and recreational resources which are, in a sense, reasonably well understood. But the area also holds natural and heritage values that presently are only partially understood and documented. Gondwana Consulting has commissioned fauna and flora mapping studies to gain a better understanding of the true biota value of the area and to allow assessment of those species perhaps at risk and or in need of special consideration or protection.

Records of early European explorations of the area have undergone extensive research over the years but the information has still not been fully 'reconciled with the ground' and sadly even less is presently known about indigenous connections with, and use of, the area. This too is a field that will be subject to further data gathering and research in an effort to protect possible cultural and heritage values of the area.

Whilst our knowledge of Mount York's heritage and natural values may be incomplete it is easy to observe and measure present day use of the area. Recreational use of Mount York encompasses activities such as tourism, sight-seeing, picnicking, bird-watching, nature studies, photography, bushwalking, cycling, rockclimbing and abseiling. Each user group makes a reasonable claim for access to the reserve and the planners' task is to find a balance between the recreational demands and the sustainable integrity of the site.

As part of the early information gathering phase of their project, Gondwana Consulting convened a meeting at Mount Victoria on 19th April 2006 to provide an opportunity for stakeholders and interested parties to become involved in the process, discuss issues or concerns, and make suggestions as to how the reserve might be managed in the future. A number of climbers attended the meeting and spoke of the significance of the reserve's climbing resources and its climbing history that goes back around 40 years.

There will be further opportunities for interested parties to contribute to, or comment on, the Plan as it evolves. When completed, and approved by both Councils and the various government agencies, the Plan of Management will become a legally binding document providing a clear direction for the management of the site for the subsequent five years.

When it comes to balancing the competing interests of natural and heritage values with the recreational pressures arising from the expectations of a vast diversity of user types Mount York presents a considerable challenge. If the planners can develop a workable solution for *this* reserve then solving the problems at other sites within the two Councils' jurisdictions will be simpler by comparison.

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