

# **Ben Ricketts Environmental Preserve**



Scentless rosewood *Synoum glandulosum*

## **Plan of Management**

5<sup>th</sup> November 2006

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## Plan of Management

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Approved by the  
Board of Ben Ricketts Environmental Preserve Pty Ltd  
on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2006

## **Description of the area**

The properties are situated within the Kiama Local Government Area (LGA) on the Illawarra Escarpment south west of Jamberoo. The properties are known as Ben Ricketts (30.66ha), Trisha (1.08ha) and Duncania (3.48ha). They are 7.7 km along Jamberoo Mountain Road from Jamberoo Road. Jamberoo Mountain Road runs through the Ben Ricketts property. Ben Ricketts also adjoins Barren Grounds Nature Reserve. The altitude ranges from 300 to 600 metres above sea-level.

## **Geology**

The properties reach to the top of the sandstone cliffs of the escarpment which are composed of Hawkesbury Sandstone and below these are the shales and sandstones of the Narrabeen Group. These sedimentary rocks were laid down in the large Sydney Basin during the Triassic Period. Beneath this is a thin band of Illawarra Coal Measures which have layers of shales, sandstones and coal. The Minnamurra Latite, basic volcanic rock, outcrops as benches because it is more erosion resistant than the sandstones and shales.

## **Soils**

The upper slopes occur within the Hawkesbury Soil Landscape which has steep slope gradients of 25 – 70%. Boulders and cobbles cover up to 50% of the ground surface. The lower parts of the property occur on the Cambewarra Soil Landscape which has very steep hills with broad benches on latite (basalt). Both soil landscapes have high erosion hazard. The soils are generally of low fertility with patches of highly fertile basalt derived soils.

## **Vegetation and Fauna**

The vegetation consists generally of regenerating rainforest, tall moist forest, heathland/open forest and open grazed patches. The arboreal mammals are diverse including ring-tail possums, greater gliders, sugar gliders, feathertail gliders and mountain brushtail possums most of which depend on the tall eucalypts to provide food and roost hollows. Swamp wallabies, wombats and echidnas are present. With the mix of eucalypt and rainforest species and open grassy areas birdlife is prolific and the property provides habitat for a number of species of conservation significance. There is a rich diversity of invertebrates including a large red-footed snail and a worm that squirts. A red alga (*Batrachospermum antipodites Entwisle*) in the creeks indicates good water quality.

The main vegetation on the properties are *Southern Escarpment Wet Sclerophyll Forest* dominated by *Eucalyptus fastigata* and *Northern Warm Temperate Rainforest* characterised by lilli pilli, coachwood and sassafras. We appear to be on the southern limit of this type of forest.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keith, David *Ocean Shores to Desert Dunes* 2004

There are two rare plants on the property and they are *Sphaerocionium lyallii* (a ROTAP<sup>2</sup> species), a very small filmy fern occurring on wet rocks and cliffs and *Hymenophyllum rarum* (a regionally rare species), a small filmy fern occurring in cool moist rainforest around Barren Grounds.

The Illawarra contains the main southern concentration of rainforest in NSW and is therefore very significant.

## **Creeks**

There are several creeks running through the property. The main creeks running through the property, Goathouse Creek and Swamp Creek are permanent. They contain the red alga mentioned above and freshwater crayfish. The water quality is high and these creeks are not used for any water supply purposes. The creeks on the property are the headwaters of Kings Creek, a tributary of the Minnamurra River.

Jamberoo Mountain Road before it was sealed caused a lot of sediment to enter the creeks on the property. This has now virtually stopped due to the sealing of the road.

## **Reason for conservation**

The aim of the Company is to preserve the natural ecosystem and to regenerate degraded areas while at the same time preserve the traditional recreational aspects of the land.

It is important to conserve large areas of the escarpment rainforests to allow the movement of native birds and other animals between the heathland at the top of the escarpment and the forests below it and to conserve the native animals that live permanently and occasionally in the forest. There will be more pressure to develop along the escarpment due to the area's proximity to Sydney and Wollongong.

As far as possible all plantings outside the Garden will be locally indigenous species. It is recognised that there are some planting of non locally indigenous species that do have some historic value. These will be monitored and managed as necessary.

## **Land Use**

### **History - Aboriginal**

The Tharawal people inhabited this area. The two men who resisted the landing of Captain Cook were Tharawal men.

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<sup>2</sup> Rare or Threatened Australian Plant

There is evidence that the local aboriginal people used the Barren Grounds and the rainforests. There are artefact scatters at the top of Paddy's Pass, art in caves on the Barren Grounds and there were tracks up the escarpment, probably through the area near the western end of Ben Ricketts.

On Barren Grounds there are also open camp sites and axe grinding grooves and around the escarpment there are shelters with midden deposit as well as art, and a rock engraving site. The land falls within the area of the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC).

## **History - European**

The general area was logged for red cedar and other timber in the 1800s. It is believed that George Ricketts was the original holder of the land (1841) and that he named the area Ben Ricketts (using the Gaelic term "Ben" for mountain). Some parts of the land were later cleared for grazing. Heavy grazing continued until the 1940s and then gradually declined. Ben Ricketts was not as heavily grazed as adjoining properties due to the steep slopes, poorer soils and numerous creeks. The adjacent Duncania property was cleared prior to being purchased by Frank and Anice Duncan and has substantially regenerated since.

### **History, photos, art, letters, stories etc**

In 1945 Peter Page returned from the Second World War and no longer wished to work in the Bank of New Zealand as he had previously. Peter and Ray Page looked and found the Ben Ricketts property with the help of friends including Alex Colley.

The property was previously owned by Charles Cameron, Alex Colley's father's cousin. On Charles Cameron's death it was left to his daughter and was then purchased by Nellie (Ray) Page.

The Pages initially lived in a house built by Miss Colley while their house was built. Miss Colley's house was on the adjoining property now owned by Richard Darke and Susie Ellicott (previously by Don Gazzard and Christine Godden)<sup>3</sup>. The first of the cabins was also built at that time (No1 Harpers) by Les Harper, a bushwalker friend, on the understanding the Harpers could use it and Ray and Peter could let it out at other times. The Colley house was purchased with the intention of moving it onto Ben Ricketts which turned out to be impractical, but some of the materials were used for cabins 2 and 3. Before moving in to their own house (the existing house) they erected two army tents where cabins 2 & 3 are now standing. These tents had gravel floors and wooden walls about 60cm high with a little swing gate for entrance.

Several bushwalking friends including Frank and Anice Duncan, Paddy and May Pallin, Alex and Hilma Colley, Dorothy Hasluck and Ray and Jean Kirkby purchased adjoining properties. Consequently a small conservation/bushwalking community developed. The Colleys sold their land

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<sup>3</sup> As at July 2007

to John and Grace Noble, Dorothy Hasluck to Paddy and May Pallin and Christine Kirkby sold her land to Trisha Dean. All are members of bushwalking families.

There was a community spirit amongst these families and those staying in the cabins. Regular singsongs and other cultural activities, bushwalks and trips were organised.

Electricity was connected to the mountain in February 1961, which ended the use of the romantic but smelly kerosene lights and stoves.

**Art works, photos, letters** will be assessed for relevance. Those resources retained may be used in the cabins or house. An attempt will be made to trace all articles and find their creators. There will be proper storage for valuable items or items of particular historical significance.

Stories will be collected and recorded as possible. Any relevant films and tapes will be recorded and stored. Copies of materials could be available for distribution. A library will be established to conserve and share cultural, historical and natural history references.

Records will, where possible, be stored in the State Library of NSW and copies kept on site.

Binoculars, hand lens and reference books will be available for borrowing.

## ***Usage and Management***

### **Pest Species**

**Plants.** There have been many garden escapes from Ray's garden and other gardens in the area. Weeds have also been moved by road management practices on Jamberoo Mountain Road. The main weeds are wandering jew (*Tradescantia fluviensis*), ginger lily, arum lily, plectranthus, mist flower, crofton weed, montbretia and lantana (*Lantana camara*).

The main weed infestations are in the area around the old goathouse and upstream of the swamp in Swamp Creek. There are infestations of mist flower in Maries Glade and the Potato Patch.

Most of these are not spreading except for the *Tradescantia fluviensis*. There is a current successful bush regeneration program especially in removing the arum lily, ginger lily and mist flower.

A weed management plan may be prepared by the Natural Areas Management Committee.

**Animals.** Foxes, cats, rabbits and deer have all been seen on the property. These are generally at very low levels but will need to be managed in cooperation with neighbours and the Rural Lands Protection Board.

## Domestic Animals

Domestic animals will only be allowed for management purposes. Grazing animals will be grazed in the area around the cabins and house, Maries Glade and the Potato Patch. Neighbours may allow continued grazing on parts of their properties. Grazing animals will as much as possible, be kept out of the natural and regenerating areas. Fencing needs to be assessed and upgraded as necessary.

## Pets

Dogs and cats and other domestic animals will not be allowed on the property. The Board may approve the Caretaker to keep a domestic animal subject to conditions as the Board sees fit.

Personal assist animals (guide dogs) will be allowed with prior arrangement.

## Cabins

There are four cabins on the properties. All are supplied with tank water.

### **No 1 cabin (Harpers)**

This cabin is a weatherboard clad cabin with one main room, a bathroom, a kitchen and a veranda along the front. It was built in 194?. It has four single bunks and a slow combustion stove.

### **No 2 cabin**

This has one main room containing three single bunks, a small room containing two single bunks, a bathroom and kitchen and a small veranda.. Built early in the 1950s.

It is weatherboard clad. This and No3 cabin used windows and weatherboards from the Colley house.

### **No 3 cabin**

A fibro clad building with two bunks in the main room, a bathroom, a kitchen and a veranda. Built early in the 1950s.

### **Duncan cabin**

A weatherboard clad building with one main room, a loft and a lean-to kitchen. Existing toilet facilities are not functional. It was built in 1950.

The cabins will primarily be for the use of the members and their accompanied guests. However, when the cabins are not being used by members and their guests they may be hired to non members. The arrangements for bookings will be decided by the Board and may be changed from time to time to best suit members needs.

The cabins will be refurbished in a way that makes them comfortable and energy efficient but retains their character. The west and northern walls of cabin 3 have been replaced with non-asbestos fibro and have been insulated.

Subject to council approval, the cabins may be replaced over time with more suitable buildings, but the character of the place will be kept.

A plan for refurbishment or replacement may be prepared by the Building Management Committee for submission to the board.

Members will always have first priority for the use of the cabins and other accommodation. Each member will have the right to stay in the accommodation/cabins for five weeks per year at a nominal rent to be set by the Board. Non-members will have access to the cabins at a market rate, as assessed by the Board after the members' priority. All Bookings will be according to the Booking Procedure as decided by the Board.

### **The house**

The house is a one bedroom fibro clad house with a closed in sun room, lounge room, bathroom, kitchen, store room and verandah. It has a double carport and a double garage with laundry and outside toilet attached.

The house will be either used as a permanent or occasional caretaker's residence, as further accommodation or both. The house will be assessed for structural changes and repairs needed by the Building Management Committee. It will be made more comfortable and energy efficient while retaining its character.

The house had been used for gatherings for visitors staying in the cabins. This is an important part of the social interaction that has occurred in the past. If the house is no longer available for gatherings there needs to be some alternative proposed and will be the subject of further discussion.

### **Trees near the buildings**

Trees near the buildings will be managed to minimise risk to the buildings and to the occupants.

### **The Garden**

The garden was used by Ray to produce flowers and vegetables. She sold the flowers to the pubs in Jamberoo and Kiama. She was virtually dependent on the garden for all vegetables. The goats provided milk and cream as well as fertiliser for the garden.

The garden may continue to be used to grow vegetables and flowers if there are interested members. Potentially invasive plants will be carefully monitored and removed if shown to be propagating outside the garden. Any plant identified as invasive and or noxious by State or Federal Legislation will be removed.

If there is sufficient interest a covered garden will be considered to stop the lyrebirds and bowerbirds damaging the garden and spreading seed. This will allow some garden plants that would otherwise be considered invasive.

## **Camping**

Camping has been a use of the property since the late 1940s.

The first accommodation was army tents before the building of the cabins. People have camped on Ben Ricketts and Duncania using either the existing toilets or providing portable toilet facilities.

Camping will be allowed in certain areas. Possible areas are The Cabin Paddock, Maries Glade, Potato Patch or Duncania Paddock. Bookings may need to be made especially during school holidays. The Board will arrange any booking system.

Members who express an interest in camping on the property will be responsible for selecting the site, deciding facilities and management in consultation with the Natural Areas Management Committee.

A simple open shed with water tank, a table and seats, gas barbecue and cook top and a composting toilet may be built. A shower may be constructed.

The camping area will be mown or grazed as necessary to facilitate camping.

It is intended that camping would only be allowed for Members and Friends of Ben Ricketts and their guests.

## **Special events**

Members can use the properties for special events such as parties, weddings that need extra facilities or larger numbers of people only with the permission of the Board. The board may impose conditions as it sees fit.

## **Walking Tracks**

It is not intended to construct tracks as such but to mark negotiable routes through the properties.

Some clearing of fallen timber and rerouting in the case of erosion may be necessary and will be ongoing.

Walking tracks may be marked and kept walkable within a plan approved by the Board in consultation with the Natural Areas Management Committee.

## **Firewood and Fires**

Firewood can only be collected from around the cabin area and areas approved by the Board on the recommendation of the Natural Areas Management Committee. Cut and split firewood will be supplied to cabins.. Hand saws and log splitters will be available for use by members and Friends.. Chain saws and axes will not be supplied and may only be used by people who consider themselves competent and who can demonstrate that they understand how to use them safely. (See Chainsaw Operations Manual: State Forests NSW)

Fires and fireplaces in the cabins need to be managed to minimise smoke and build up of tars in the flue.

## **Water**

Drinking water will be collected in rainwater tanks. No drinking water will be collected from creeks.

Water may be collected from the creek for non-drinking purposes such as toilets washing and stock watering. As far as possible, stock will be denied direct access to creeks. Stock watering points will be provided away from the creeks. Drinking water and other water will be reticulated in separate systems.

## **Bush fire**

Bush fire is a rare but possible event in the area. Visitors will be encouraged to ensure there is no escape of fire during danger periods and no external fires will be allowed during total fire ban periods.

The fire trail to the Potato Paddock will be kept trafficable to 4WD vehicles. Potential erosion is unlikely to occur as the trail is mainly grassed or covered in native herbs.

Vegetation around the cabins, house and other structures will be managed so as to minimise damage in the event of a fire. Necessary fire fighting equipment will be installed and checked annually. There will be instructions in each cabin and in the house and at camping areas on action to take in the event of fire.

## **Natural Areas - weed control, feral animal control**

A Natural Areas Management Committee will be set up to coordinate management of Natural Areas and report to the Board. This will include weed mapping and bush regeneration, feral animal control and advising on use of timber for firewood, walking track construction and vehicle tracks.

Any new weed infestations will be dealt with as a priority. All weeds will be treated with the intention of eventual elimination.

## **Built Structures – Construction and Management**

A Buildings Management Committee will be set up to coordinate construction and management of built structures and report to the Board. This will include any possible new structures, such as at the camping area, replacement buildings, upgrading and maintaining existing buildings.

Before any alterations to or demolition of any built structures they will be assessed for heritage value. The Burra Charter will be used as a guide to assess buildings. At the least they will thoroughly recorded before any action is taken. Photos and other records will be kept in the library.

## **Energy**

Electricity will continue to be provided to the house and cabins. The use of gas or solar power for water heating and gas for cooking will be investigated.

All buildings will be insulated as funds are available to ensure comfortable conditions with minimal energy use.

Electricity will not be provided to the camping areas away from the Cabin Paddock or Duncania. Gas barbecue and cooker may be provided for campers.

## **Sewage**

Septic tanks will continue to be provided for all the Ben Ricketts cabins and the house. These will be checked regularly to ensure they are working properly and that they conform to all necessary regulations. They will be monitored and may eventually be changed to composting toilets.

Composting toilets will be investigated for the camping area and for Duncania.

## **Fencing**

Fencing and gates will be kept in good order to ensure the domestic grazing animals are kept in their designated areas. Other areas will only be fenced as necessary to control unapproved access onto the property.

Fencing will generally be simple electric fencing. Gates will be constructed as necessary for vehicles and pedestrians. Grids will be considered for the main entrances.

## **Solid Waste & Recycling**

All users of the property will be required to dispose of their own solid wastes and encouraged to recycle.

## **Cleaning**

All cabin users and campers will be expected to leave the areas used in a clean and tidy manner. Any breakages and repairs necessary should be reported to the Caretaker. Users may be charged for breakages and damage.

The Board may decide to charge a cleaning fee, which is only refundable to users if a cabin or camping area is left in a state that is considered reasonable.

## **Safety**

First aid kits will be supplied with instructions suitable to the local hazards.

## Decision Making

All substantive decisions which involved the expenditure of more than \$5000 or are considered to change the character of the place will be decided by the shareholders at a general meeting of shareholders<sup>4</sup>. The Board of Ben Ricketts Environmental Preserve Pty Ltd may rely on the advice of the following specialist committees for advice on matters relating to the management of the property:

- a. Natural Areas Management Committee  
Functions: To advise the Board on the management of the conservation areas so that they are protected from harm
- b. Building Management Committee  
Functions: To advise the Board on the management of the physical structures on the Preserve and any necessary improvements.
- c. Accommodation Committee  
Functions: To advise the Board on the management of the accommodation services and any necessary improvements.

The Board may establish such other Committees as it thinks fit. Examples may be a Library and Archives Committee and a Wildlife Research Committee.

The Members Deed will override this plan of management where they are in conflict.

## Maintenance

It will be necessary to have occasional working parties on the cabins and the natural areas.

These will be organised as necessary by the Building Management Committee and the Natural Areas Management Committee. These committees will be open to all Members and Friends subject to ratification by the Board.

Members, Friends and others will be encouraged to attend these working parties and the Board may offer limited free use of the property, or some other means as the Board sees fit.

## Caretaker

For security and maintenance reasons it is desirable to have a caretaker living on site. This may be on a roster system or a caretaker may be appointed for a set period.

How this will be arranged and the responsibilities of the caretaker will be a decision of the Board.

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<sup>4</sup> Shareholders' Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006

