When it comes to managing the Australian Alps, some challenges haven’t changed since first ever Superintendent of Kosciusko State Park, Neville Gare stood at Cowombat Flat, in 1962. See story, a man who cared… (Gare Collection: Reproduced with the permission of Joan Gare).

welcome and happy birthday

Welcome to this latest issue of the news from the alps. Most readers will know about this e-mag’s source, the Australian Alps Program – why it exists and what it achieves. But some might not realise that without the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding thirty years ago, there probably wouldn’t be the intelligent, sharing, co-operative management of our Alps that exists today. The MOU underpins the Program, and the Program supports everyone who works towards a resilient, healthy mountain landscape. So we’ve decided to celebrate both the re-signing of the MOU and the launch of a new three year Management Program here in this bumper edition. It’s only a snapshot – but it shows the Program’s effectiveness (then, and now) thanks to everyone who works together day-to-day towards the same objective, a healthy Australian Alps for generations to come.

But first, some housekeeping. For the past three years, the Program has been in the capable hands of Andy Nixon. It’s been a pleasure getting to know Andy over the past month as he’s gradually handed the job over to me. He tells me it’s a challenging role but the rewards are great. Or to quote the man himself, he had a “bonza time”. Towards the end of Andy’s tenure, he completed a new Strategic Plan and had the Memorandum of Understanding re-signed by Heads of Agency. Talk about leaving on a high. I’d also like to acknowledge the hard work
Now it’s over to me. For the next three years, the Alps Program will be focussed on delivering practical outcomes in line with the MOU and Strategic Plan. We will also be aiming to better communicate the achievements of the program through the website, social media and a squadron of specially trained carrier pigeons. It is, in the end, all about supporting best practice management of the Alps region through co-operation and knowledge sharing.

John McRae
(New) Program Manager, Australian Alps national parks Co-operative Management Program

how we built the Program

Many steps led to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding that has allowed the Australian Alps to be managed co-operatively through the Program. By no means complete, what follows is a quick sketch of who did what, and together, how these ordinary – yet extraordinary people - made a difference.

There is no question that by the early to mid 1940s, concern over the health and protection of the Australian Alps was popping up in different quarters. Baldor Byles - an early government research scientist - advocated for the protection of the Snowy Mountains and his report led to the establishment of the NSW Soil Conservation Authority. This was followed by similar efforts in Victoria, forming the Soil Conservation Authority of Victoria in 1940.

Conservationist Myles Dunphy had proposed a vast interstate wilderness between the Cobberas mountains in Victoria and the Grey Mare Range north of Kosciusko. The proposal was revised in 1943, now proposing that the area to be managed separately by state, but as a jointly recognized area.

In 1942 the then Premier of NSW, Sir William McKell, took an eight-day horseback inspection to establish a view of the Snowy Mountains – surely a sign of what was of popular concern. This was a trip reminiscent of those undertaken by John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt in the early part of the 20th century. There is no substitute for seeing something with your own eyes.

In Victoria, Professor John Turner was working with ecologist Masie Fawcett to undertake a
A wide-ranging botanical survey which involved setting up the famed grazing-exclusion plots in the mid 1940s. They, like many scientists since, aimed to provide data upon which good landscape management decisions could be made.

Also in the mid 1940s Judge Leonard Stretton oversaw the Royal Commission into the condition of the mountain catchments. The report alerted the government and the public to the need for immediate strong action in their defence. And Alpine ecologist Dr Alec Costin and Baldor Byles acted as the public’s conscience during the early years of the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

Then in 1944, Kosciuszko State Park was established, grazing was eliminated from the park in the mid 1950s, and in 1963 the Kosciuszko Primitive Area was declared. This was also the year that the Commonwealth Government investigated the possibility of extending Kosciuszko into Victoria, though nothing came of this suggestion for a bi-state national park.

In NSW, the western fall off the main range in Kosciuszko (now) National Park.

But the notion of a contiguous protected landscape persisted. The Australian Conservation Foundation developed its Statements of national conservation concern, the first being ‘The High Country’ (1969). The ACF recommended the creation of national parks in the Victoria Alps, with an ultimate goal being a contiguous national park across the high country of Victoria, NSW, and the ACT. Ten years later, the Victorian Land Conservation Council recommended the formation of five major alpine parks. Five years on, in 1984 Namadgi National Park was formed, followed by the Victorian Alpine National Park in 1989.

At this point much had been achieved. Great chunks of the Alps were now protected by national park status in two states and one territory, but there was still a fair way to go in establishing co-operative management between the government agencies that were each responsible on a day-to-day basis. Enter the individuals who together effected a miracle – the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 1986.

Beginning with the park managers - Neville Gare, Superintendent of Kosciuszko National Park and Don Saunders (Victorian National Parks Authority). Along with various district managers, they could all see the benefits of joint patrols. Then there was the Kosciuszko Group, an informal group of visionary alps managers – Bruce Leaver, Roger Good, Alec Costin, Neville Gare, Ian Weir, Andy Turner and representatives from the Australian Conservation Foundation who collectively aimed to do things better. Some of the action items that can be traced back to the Kosciuszko Group include: co-ordinated management
identified as having value in the Kosciuszko National Park management plan (1982); the Australian Alps as the topic of the first Fenner conference (instituted by the Australian Academy of Science, 1988); much lobbying of politicians; and soon-to-be Prime Minister Whitlam making a 1972 policy statement about establishing a national park across the Australian Alps.

With the elephant in the room now named – co-operative management – the pace picked up. In 1982, NSW Minister for Planning and Environment Eric Bedford supported the idea of contiguous national parks across the Australian Alps to form a major national asset, writing to his Victorian counterpart Minister Evan Walker seeking his support to explore the possibility of establishing a system to cooperatively manage the alpine national parks. Officers of each agency were nominated to draft a framework for co-operative management, and they met in February of 1983. This was followed in 1984 by a three-day inspection of Kosciuszko National Park by 14 Victorian members of parliament, and this in turn led to an agreement – to establish an inter-governmental working group to develop cooperative arrangements for managing adjoining parks in the mountainous region of Southern-Australia. In a perfect stroke of opportunism, the inclusion of ACT’s Namadgi NP was also suggested.

And in Victoria, Giants Playground, Mt Buffalo National Park.

NSW Minister Bob Carr and ACT Minster Gordon Scholes continued to promote the initiative during early 1985 and in July senior agency representatives gathered to decide the way forward - the how to - in establishing a formal cooperative program of management. By October park managers and senior agency reps were at the necessary workshops nutting out the detail, followed by more meetings in early 1986 with all the key players and long established champions.

It all came together with the signing of the MOU on July 4th 1986, by ministers Gordon Scholes (Commonwealth Territories), Bob Carr (NSW), Joan Kirner (Victoria) and Barry Cohen (Commonwealth Arts, Heritage and Environment). Once the MOU was in place, the collaboratively drafted way forward – the hands on how to manage the Australian Alps co-operatively – was launched and the rest is history. The Alps are protected, and the Alps are managed co-operatively. And this is achieved day to day by people with passion and expertise who share the same aims. It’s a brilliant outcome on every level. No wonder the Australian Alps Management Program is so well respected around the world.
the Program gets us together…

… at the Frontline Forum. Originally know as ‘Alps All Over’ workshops, the first of these was in 1992 and renamed Frontline in 1994. Perennially popular, all have seen a gathering of folk who work in the disciplines of tourism, commercial tour operators, education services, visitor information centres. These are the people at the front, staff who deliver quality park information to visitors.

…at the Heritage Huts & Building Maintenance Skills. Since late 90s, skilled park staff have been sharing their cultural knowledge and very hands-on skills with enthusiastic volunteers from the states’ huts associations. These workshops have achieved so much in protecting not only these alpine icons but the knowledge store necessary to keep the process ongoing.

…at the Science-management Forum, which has run since 2006. This forum is a masterstroke, bringing park managers together with Australia’s foremost alpine ecologists. The planning that has emerged over the years through these Forums has been highly beneficial, eye-opening and cutting edge – all necessary given alpine ecosystems are challenged by current and imminent climate change challenges.

… at the Australian Alps Walking Track meeting. The Track physically links the people and the places across the Alps. Passionate mangers and Track fans gather every two years to review current issues and needed actions for the tracks and track walkers well-being. It’s co-operative management of the Alps, via the Track.

… at the Field Operations Workshops. This is where the fundamentals are aired and solutions are shared. The field troops get together for a bit of programmatic insight and ‘dirt-under-the-nails discussions: on pigs, deer, dogs, broom, willow and other weeds, water, policing, fire, bags & fans and toilets.

… with international experts. The Program is well respected overseas to the point where the Australian Alps Program hosted an IUCN (United Nations) workshop. Twenty-two trans-frontier practitioners gathered for a 10 day across the Alps travelling workshop, learning all they could about our cross border, co-operative management of the mountains. And then 80 more international mountain experts gathered in the Australian Alps to mark the 2002 International Year of the Mountains. This was a conference to celebrate and share their collective expertise here in Australia, and there have been other conferences held overseas where our experts have taken part to share their knowledge of the Alps Program.

random Program stats and facts

Since the MOU was first signed, it has been re-signed and committed to six times: in 1986, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2003, and now in 2016. Covered by that first MOU were eight parks (six national parks and two nature reserves): Namadgi, Kosciuszko, Cobberas Tingaringy, Bogong, Wonangatta-Moroka, Snowy River national parks; Scabby Range and Bimberi nature reserves. By the time the MOU was signed the second time, Cobberas Tingaringy, Bogong and Wonangatta-Moroka, had become the Victoria Alpine National Park. As of the latest MOU, the line up is: Namadgi, Tidbinbilla, Kosciuszko, Brindabella, Bimberi, Scabby Range, Alpine, Snowy River, Mount Buffalo, Baw Baw, Avon Wilderness and Lake Mountain. Between them, these twelve protected areas comprise over 1.6 million hectares.

The vision of the Program is to achieve excellence in conservation land management through an active program of cross border projects. Parties to the MOU agree to maintain a liaison committee comprising a senior officer from each agency. This committee oversees development of a strategic plan which is reviewed and renewed every three years. The current liaison committee comprises: Brett McNamara (convenor ACT), Roger Fenwick (Victoria), Mick Pettit (NSW) and Ben Phillips (Commonwealth). John McRae was recently appointed Program Manager for the next three years to oversee, co-ordinate and implement an annual works programs aligned to the strategic plan. The MOU also provides for each jurisdiction to take turns hosting the program. As of 1 July 2016, the ACT has taken over the
Records from 1992 identify roughly 300 Program-initiated or supported projects, in areas of natural resource management, invasive species control, fire management, visitor and community services, aboriginal cultural heritage, and post-European settlement heritage. Looking back, it each project has felt unique: there have been books published, brochures released, conferences (both local and international) held and field guides created. There have been tapes, videos, CD’s and web pages created, manuals put together, many meetings held (including annual field gatherings), reports published on countless research projects, signs and displays designed and put into place, and many useful workshops held. Funding all this has always been a challenge. Beginning in 1987 the combined funding contributed by the four partner agencies was $400,000. Thirty years later it is just $315,000. Over that time, the cost of delivering projects has risen markedly. To some extent, improvements in information and communication technology have been able to offset budget pressures, as have lessons learned by successive program managers that contribute to productivity improvements. This program will always be as reliant on the passion and enthusiasm of agency staff as it is on future agency financial contributions.

the Track
Across the Australian Alps lies the thread that ties everything together – the Australian Alps Walking Track. Roughly 650 kilometres long, it’s there for anyone seeking their own mountain experience. How did it come to be? How is it managed? Who walks it and why? Read on to find out...

when eight went out to Trek
In the 1980s the idea of the Australian Alps as a bioregion, lying across two states and a territory, was still a fresh concept. Yes, the Memorandum of Understanding had been signed in 1986, but three years had zoomed along and it was now time again for the four relevant ministers to recommit and re-sign. Which partly explains how something called The Great Alpine Trek came about. An event was called for, a newsworthy moment, something that would help remind everyone that the Australian Alps region now officially existed and that it was, and still is, priceless.
“There were eight of us”, explains Deirdre Slattery, one of the people who were gathered together to be the focus of the Trek. Along with Deirdre (who was at that time described in press releases as a mother and environmental educator) there was Harry Hill (a grandfather and retired school principal), Carrie Steffen (a marathon runner from the Australian Institute of Sport), Bob Wood (an electronics engineer from Monash University), David Jones (a recreation officer from the then Department of Conservation Forests & Lands), David Campbell (a Canberra fisheries economist), Sue Feore (a teacher and ski instructor) and Sally Ferry (an experienced bushwalker, cross country skier and mountain bike rider). Together they would spend the month of November 1989 zig-zagging their way across this significant Australian mountain landscape, traversing sections of the Australian Alps Walking Track. With the media documenting the Trek, everyday people would be able to see just how many different ways there were to interact and enjoy this landscape. “At a time when there was still concern that declaring a parcel of land to be a national park was to lock people out, this was a way of showing that it was being opened up – that there were opportunities being created.”

So off they headed, the intrepid eight. Firstly mountain bike riding their way from Parliament House Canberra, with the MOU packed amongst their gear in the two support vehicles, to the ACT’s Namadgi National Park and on into Kosciusko National Park in NSW. They stopped to go caving at Yarrangobilly; they leapt into 4WDs to check out Kiandra’s historic gold digging past; a combination of walking and cross country skiing brought them to Thredbo Village; then more walking helped them cover the ground to where NSW and Victoria meet at the head of the Murray River. In the days that followed there would be walking, bike riding, horse riding, white water rafting and 4WD-ing until they reached their journey’s end at a celebratory MOU signing.

“We were camped the night before on the Snowy Plains and the weather wasn’t good. Even so, we didn’t appreciate how bad it had been – 90 kmh winds, so that after all the work that had gone in to setting everything up the day before, there was a mad scramble to get one marquee up and functioning in the aftermath of the storm.” But it all went well. Everyone official was there who needed to be including the walkers’ families. Interested parties – both for and against the idea of National Parks and their co-operative management across a landscape – were there too. And two key items on the landscape conservation agenda were sorted. The MOU was resigned. Tick. And Victoria’s newly created Alpine National Park was declared and welcomed officially into the embrace of the MOU, making the Australian Alps even more precious.

Did the media take note and come? Yes. They were there at every turn. Filming the walkers who’d been helicopter lifted up to the Cobberas. Snapping photos whenever an Environment Minister caught up with the walkers en route – the ACT’s Ellnor Grassby resplendent in a cream safari suit; NSW’s Tim Moore serving cream cakes up at Charlotte’s Pass; and Victoria’s Kay Setches popping up all over the place and especially at the grand finale. Some journos even came along for sections of the Trek. And The Great Alpine Trek made the front cover of three great papers: The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and The Canberra Times not to mention many others. Tick.

the nitty gritty on the Track

In the beginning the Australian Alps were criss-crossed with a network of paths, taken by the Traditional Owners as they went about the business of life. Much later, some of those paths were then travelled by European settlers. By the 1970s, bushwalkers had established a long-distance route through the Victorian Alps to the New South Wales border: they called it the Alpine Walking Track and marked the route with a yellow flattened diamond. In 1986 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by environment ministers from Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and the Federal Government – an MOU that
brought together the Australian Alps as a bioregion and set up a Program for its co-operative management. In 1989 these existing protected areas within the bioregion were significantly boosted when Victoria’s Alpine National Park was created. To mark the moment, eight people representing the various parties involved, banded together to walk through this new, protected, co-operatively managed Australian Alps on a Great Alpine Trek. The route they followed is now known world-wide as the Australian Alps Walking Track.

Everyone can have their own experience of the Australian Alps Walking Track - it's never the same. Below, a Scout group from Melbourne take a rest stop at Pole 333, the very centre of the Bogong High Plains in Victoria: while above two walkers are at roughly the same spot having a different experience.

Since then, many have followed in their footsteps, the majority of walkers picking sections which appeal most. Others walk the Track in its entirety, but these walkers are more rare. This is one of the Track’s great assets; it’s capacity to “provide people with the opportunity to make their own experience.”

These are Kevin Cosgriff’s words. For a decade now, he has been part of the collection of park agencies staff that work together to make the Track what it is. Thanks to co-operation of Parks Victoria, the New South Wales Parks & Wildlife Service and ACT Parks and Conservation Service, anyone can head out into areas of priceless natural beauty. “You might go for a short walk from the car park, or head out overnight, or whatever. When we come
across people on the Track they are happy and they often rave about the experience they are having, even when it may be challenging.”

Apart from physically maintaining the Track, a major effort is made to not only mark it consistently throughout, but to provide interpretive material at key locations along the way to help walkers understand the stories behind the landscapes they are walking through. Backing this up is a chunky set of resources for anyone planning to walk the Track, all to be found on the Australian Alps National Parks web site - theaustralianalps.wordpress.com. Why not take a look?

**she’s just walked the Track**

Working in the Namadgi Visitor Centre at the northern end of the Track, Michelle Jenkins often meets people who are doing the big walk. It may be a section or it might be the whole length, but the exposure to these bushwalkers planted the seed of an idea. “I decided I was going to do it”.

Each person has their reasons for taking on the challenge of the whole Australian Alps Walking Track. Michelle’s was a complex mix wrapped around the nugget of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stemming from an incident during Victoria’s Black Saturday bushfires. “I knew the walk would be a physical challenge: I also knew I would be walking through the areas that had been affected by those fires, and that I would find it difficult.” On the physical side of things, Michelle was a bushwalker and considered herself to be reasonably fit. “But I’d never camped overnight. I’d never carried a pack with everything I’d need for those 37 days.” To make the walk a success Michelle decided to be as prepared as possible. “I got a lot of good advice from agency staff about equipment (it all comes down to weight), and I asked a woman who had walked the entire track for her advice.” Very fortunately that woman, Jean Hammond, had an inkling of how Michelle’s PTSD might affect her. The information-gathering session soon turned into a planning meeting for a walk that they’d do together.

As it turns out, Jean’s fears that things wouldn’t go smoothly were proven right, almost immediately. Fatigue and the fear of being a long way from home and work – Michelle’s safe places – quickly wore down her defences. “I walked into camp that first night and I cried.” Day two wasn’t too cheerful either following a fall on the Track. “My father was driving the support vehicle, so the three of us regrouped and I was ready to pack up and come home.” Michelle doggedly endured a week of this until she worked out that it was the PTSD that was giving her the grief. Thanks to the support of both Jean and Michelle’s father, along with a call to her
husband and a series of encouraging notes from friends and staff that Jean had put together before the walk, Michelle worked out what she wanted to do and how she’d manage it. “Just by understanding what was happening, and by reducing the number of kilometres per day and it became possible. It was still a challenge but I love challenges. It went from “I don’t think I can do it” to, “Let’s give it a go”.

For the next few weeks Michelle describes a wonderful rhythm. Walking each day and the vistas walking brought. Setting up camp; getting dinner sorted and doing a bit of hand washing; exploring the areas around the camp site; then playing cards till bed time. “I didn’t have the responsibilities of work or family.”

Then it was time to walk back into their lives. Michelle’s work colleagues, members of her sponsor organisation, Picking Up the Pieces, and her family formed a very special crowd waiting at the Namadgi Visitor Centre. “My 72 year old father (who’d probably walked about a third of the Track over the past weeks), and two of my children and one grandson walked with us on the last day.” And when all the fuss had died down, there was one more surprise waiting for Michelle: her daughter had given birth to a baby boy earlier that morning. “When I spoke to her she told me not to worry about having the first shower in 37 days, but to just come straight in to see him.”

Michelle walked the Track for her own reasons – as everyone does – arriving at the end of her journey to a wonderful welcome from colleagues and family. Just a few of the crowd who gathered: (L to R) Richard Woods, Nathan Barnden, Kirsten Tasker, Mark Elford, Jess Enge and Michelle holding grandson Kayden.

Looking back on it all Michelle remembers, “It was exciting to come home, but disappointing as well.” And some advice for those thinking of doing it. “I’m a large lady, a former smoker. I had practiced walking the last 15 kilometres before the walk and struggled. Coming down at the end of the walk I did it in record time. Two weeks into the walk my 27 kilo pack had become as light as a feather. Yes it’s a long trek but it’s the best therapy. You can do it – mental health issues or not – just get out there and deal with it.”

the manager’s perspective
There have been managers* for the Program from early on - passionate experts who’ve been recruited from the ranks of parks agencies staff to become the generator
and focus for all things co-operative, Alps-wide. Each person has roughly three years to make their contribution. It’s a nifty arrangement that gives Parks Victoria, NWS and ACT Parks and the Commonwealth the opportunity to add their perspective to the mix. Here we ask three program managers to tell us about their experience in the role...

Looking at their expressions, the role of Program Manager is a great one: (L to R, and in order of office) Janet Mackay (NSW Parks), Neville Byrne (Parks Vic), Brett McNamara (ACT Parks), Virginia Logan (NSW Parks), Gill Anderson (Parks Vic), Rod Atkins (ACT Commonwealth), Anthony Evans (NSW Parks), and most recently Andrew Nixon (Parks Vic).

One of the first (Andre Mayne from the ACT set up the role), was Janet Mackay who, as a senior ranger with the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service, spotted the advertised Alps-wide secondment in the early 1990s. “I was really committed to the concept of cooperation across the Alps, and could see huge opportunities. It looked like a great challenge, I was keen to start to coordinate the progress, and it was an exciting thought to be in at the start.”

Janet stepped into a role that was still to be formed. She did have the pleasure (and no doubt, pain) of bringing it together to form the Program we’re familiar with today. “Working with the Liaison Committee I set up much of the approach, I got the working groups started and working effectively, set up training and networks programs, and then worked on some specific projects. I also introduced the newsletter and other forms of regular communication.”

Apart from the structure and the administration, the role was, and still is, ambassadorial. It’s about getting everyone to understand the value of pulling together to co-operatively manage this landscape. These days the Program is an old friend, well known, highly respected and valued. Back at the beginning, it was understandably unknown and unproven. “Many people were unsure about the benefits that would be achieved. They were concerned that they had to do Alps work on top of their normal workloads. Some saw it as the brainchild of a few scientists. It took a lot of hard work to engage the broader staff and get them involved.”

The Program’s early days may have been a challenge but the results justified the effort. “I felt we really engaged staff through effective working groups, and it was a delight to watch rangers and other staff start to contact their counterparts across the borders as a matter of course - to share knowledge and ask advice. I watched this culture change over my period as Program Manager and it was very satisfying.”
As for the highlights, in Janet’s view, “It was very exciting to have the Australian Alps Program recognised by IUCN as a highly effective trans-border arrangement that saw us host a ten day travelling workshop attended by people from 21 countries.” And on a more systemic level, “I’ve watched an ‘Alps culture’ of cooperation and sharing across borders become part of organisational culture and of normal management and daily life.” Co-operative management of a shared landscape through workshops and get-togethers had its benefits. “We all developed great friendships and shared memories.”

Now running a global sustainable tourism development consultancy Janet has one thought for the future of the Program and the Alps. “It is an amazing and successful concept – support it. But even better, let’s have no borders and instead, one Australian Alps National Park.”

When Brett McNamara looks back at his era as program manager, his sense was that his tenure put a focus on operations. In other words, over his three years, the Program looked to support the efforts of those in the field. “Prior to taking up the role I was a ranger, based at Namadgi, living at Bendora Dam with my wife and new son. I’d been exposed to the Program through being involved with one of its working groups – and could see its value.”

Which is probably why the tenor of Brett’s time was built around the practical aspects of managing the Australian Alps. His three years were to be about adding value through the work of field staff. It was also about building on the relatively new view of the Alps as a bio-region. “It was not about borders or individual agencies. It was about staff being land custodians and providing them with the necessary tools.”

This was around the time that the phrase, Sharing the Knowledge began to be used. “There were lessons being learned in the field that we felt would, and could, have relevance and a positive impact elsewhere in the Alps.” The program set about making sure as many people as possible were able to do just that – tell others about what they were doing and why. One of these moments focussed on working out the best ways to manage wild dogs. “Rob Hunt from NSW Parks had sourced what was then a new baiting technique from Utah. The results were good so the Program helped spread the word, sharing the knowledge about the M44 injectors.”

Sometimes the knowledge sharing was not about new tech, but highly efficient low tech. “We held a human waste management workshop which attracted the usual jokes. The fact is, every ranger has to deal with human waste management and though there seemed to be a lot of technology out there ready to treat and manage waste on site, the reality was that systems that could break down waste in sub zero temperatures were limited.” The result of the experiences shared at that workshop meant that it was decided to keep it simple: the robust pump-out method captures and seals waste so that it can be carted away to be treated off site.

Taking a longer view-point, Brett can see that there has always been a trend of shifting themes as various Program managers bring their own slants. “There were times when the emphasis was on science & research, indigenous engagement, or international connections.” Luckily for everyone, the knowledge-sharing under such as breadth of areas has helped to strengthen and enrich not only the Program but everyone associated with it.

If co-operative management is the core philosophy behind the Australian Alps Program, then continuity is a valued cousin. The fact that previous Program Manager Andrew Nixon* worked with the very first Manager, Janet Mackay, back at the very beginning, is gold for the Program. “As a young ranger I was seconded from Parks Victoria to sit on one of the first working groups and manage several projects.”
Those projects set up the basis of what we take almost for granted today. “We put into place back-country recreational standards across the Alps for canoeing, ski touring, mountain biking and walking. Alps-wide studies and trials were made on erosion control, and monitoring was begun on impacts and usage of the walking tracks.”

Fast forward to 2013 as Andrew steps into the role of eighth Program Manager. With a career full of valuable experience behind him, he returns to carry forward a few of what he calls the current big ticket items: “…feral horse impacts and climate change, which have both maintained a high profile in the Program.” His agenda has been to move these issues forward, bit by bit. “The aerial feral horse population surveys and quantitative assessment are providing numbers to support decision making by managers. And in terms of climate change, I believe that it will affect our alpine landscapes, more than any where else in Australia bar the Great Barrier Reef.”

So for the past three years, the focus has been on these themes, often through forums. The best alpine ecology and climate change minds in Australia – scientists and park managers – were brought together to share their knowledge, debate the science and make a way forward. Fire, alpine bogs & fens, governance, snowfall, feral plants and animals, and more have all been on the table.

“I’ve been in a position to facilitate and moderate these moments, and it’s a joy to work with these clever, dedicated, passionate people.” Looking back, Andrew is surprised that despite the role being “pretty much a sole operator”, he has never had so many people listed in his phone, and in his corner where it comes to the future of the Alps. These are people from the communities, agencies, Traditional Owners, tourism bodies, research institutions, lobby groups, catchment management authorities and more. With so much support Andrew is looking forward to watching the Program continue to play it’s vital role for another thirty years. And if he has one tip to offer future Program Managers, “We need to get in there an lobby the politicians. We need to help them understand the value of this landscape and those factors which are placing stresses on it. With their active consideration we can better manage the future Alps.”

*Andrew Nixon has handed over to John McRae from ACT Parks & Conservation Service; see the welcome for more.

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**we have global fans**

Not that we need the rest of the world to point out that we do a good job protectively managing the Australian Alps …

… but it’s a fact that we’ve enjoyed a good reputation internationally for some time now. Back in 1990, a International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) publication declared, “…one of the best examples of border parks between adjacent states comes from Australia… the Australian Alps which comes from 10 protected areas and falls under four management agencies in the states of New South Wales and Victoria as well as two Federal bodies. In 1986 a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperative management of the park system was signed by the four Ministers involved. This example is highlighted as it is the most advanced operating border park now in existence.”

There’s also been more than just recognition: there’s been a healthy exchange of expertise across oceans. Among many Australian’s with local Alps experience, Graeme Worboys and Peter Jacobs have played their respective roles in an international sharing of knowledge. Both were Alps rangers early in their careers. Both now have an extraordinary level of
expertise and breadth of vision concerning protected areas management in mountainous regions.

Graeme is about to step down from his IUCN Co-Vice-Chair of the Connectivity Conservation and Mountains network, and Peter is stepping up to Chair one of the network’s two spin offs, the Mountains Specialist Group. These networks sit within the IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas, and the fact that two Australians, both from the Australian Alps, are serving the IUCN consecutively says a great deal. “We’re quite privileged – these jobs are shared around the world,” explains Graeme Worboys. “I believe protected area management in Australia is highly regarded which is why Australians are well represented in these international roles.”

Long before his IUCN chair, Graeme began his connection to the Australian Alps in the early seventies as a Kosciusko National Park ranger, pictured here (at right) with alpine ecologist Alec Costin as they assess the degree of downward cutting present in this stream near Schlinks Pass, Kosciusko National Park.

Looking back over past decades, there is ample evidence to support the world’s long term and ongoing interest in the Australian Alps Program. Various Australian Alps faces have been invited to gather alongside the rest of the mountain protection community in Hawaii, Canada, the United States, Ecuador and Nepal. We’ve also welcomed the international contingent here where they could take a look at things first hand. As well as this, over the years the Australians have constantly presented and published, sharing with their colleagues every detail, from various view-points, of the Australian Alps Program.

Says Peter Jacobs, “We were an early adopter of cross-boundary management even though ours was based on state boundaries rather than international jurisdictions. This is why our Program Managers and others were invited to speak internationally – so others could learn how the Alps Program was run.” For example, Peter spoke at the 2006 Peace Park Conference in Canada where he spelled out the lessons learnt by the Program over its then twenty year life-span. “I remember one key point being the need for a top down & bottom up approach. For something like this to work you need the support of staff and other stakeholders on the ground as well as active government backing through ministers, endorsed through legislation like our MOU.”

This and other lessons are now almost commonplace in current trans-boundary conservation. And this body of knowledge and experience underpins the approach Peter and the new Mountains Specialist Group will take in their current task: “We’re looking around the world at
important areas of mountain biodiversity that aren’t protected, and advocating on behalf of these landscapes.”

Graeme sums up, saying, “The Alps have punched above their weight in terms of their participation, partly because of the representation on the world mountain conservation stage, but also simply because the Alps Program is a good story.”

Peter Jacobs on the trail with rangers in Bhutan looking at ecotourism plans.

**a man who cared about the Alps**

**Neville Clifford Gare (August 3, 1929 – May 7, 2016)**

Neville Clifford Gare was appointed as the first ever Superintendent of Kosciusko State Park. The now-named Kosciuszko National Park, at 673,542 hectares, is one of Australia’s largest and greatest national parks together with the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and Uluru. Kosciuszko’s magnificent mountain scenery, glacial lakes, summer wildflowers, crystal clear mountain streams and winter snowfields are loved by all Australians, and as part of the Australian Alps national parks and reserves, the Park has achieved the pinnacle conservation status of our country as an Australian Government listed National Heritage Place. It is a conservation legacy for all Australians that Neville Gare contributed to significantly.

It could have been very different. Many people sought to exploit and modify these lands. In the history of our country, the establishment, protection, and wise management of Kosciuszko State Park since 1944 is a story of courage, vision and perseverance by many remarkable Australians including Sir William McKell, Myles Dunphy, Sam Clayton, Alec Costin, Bulder Byles and their many supporters. Neville (Nev) Gare was also one of these great conservation leaders and it was he who established and transformed the conservation management of Kosciusko State Park.

Nev Gare was a Forester. After the early death of his father he had worked as a young child on his mother’s farm, and later, as a teenager he worked on his stepfather’s farm at Galston, NSW prior to being awarded a forestry cadetship to study at Sydney University. He finished his training by completing his Diploma of Forestry at the Australian National University in
1950. Nev’s NSW forestry work was based at Bermagui, the Styx River and Bondi State Forest until 1959, when he applied for the Kosciusko State Park Superintendent’s position. In correspondence between Nev and State Park Trustee Baldur Byles, Baldur stated that “he would have to perform the labours of Hercules” in the position of Superintendent. He also supplied Nev with “a list of 50 tricky tasks awaiting his attention”! This was like a red rag to a bull and in a 1996 interview with the National Library of Australia Nev talked about his decision to take on this tough job.

“I thought of how I’d jumped when the chance came in 1958 to resign from my safe job in the Forestry Commission and the Public Service to take up that job at Kosciusko. To show that a professional forester could manage the country’s biggest national park and main snow-fed catchment for outdoor recreation, catchment protection and wildlife conservation (...)

Nev was a pioneer. He was one of the first professional protected area managers for Australia and though his forestry training and practical field experience equipped him to undertake the role, little other protected area management guidance was immediately available. A lot of his work was based on intuition but he also turned to the United States National Park Service (USNPS) as one of the few sources of information and guidance. Established in 1916, the USNPS had long experience in national park Master Planning concepts and other matters. Nev applied its principles and slowly achieved order from an otherwise chaotic demand for use of the Park.

Gare at work facing parks management challenges that are common today. The desk-top environment does look a little different. (Gare Collection: Reproduced with the permission of Joan Gare)

Nev also wanted to ensure that the people of Australia and other visitors could share and enjoy Kosciusko State Park, its natural beauty and its environments. His park planning followed this approach. He foreshadowed a basic vehicle access system in the Park; a system of walking tracks; he provided planning for the ski resorts; and, he planned an intense public relations effort to interest people in coming to Kosciusko. The development of an information centre at the Park entrance and visitor facilities such as picnic grounds, fire places and shelter sheds followed this planning. Today we take these facilities for granted, but there had to be a start. His park planning also recognised large zones where natural areas of the park were to be kept intact.

All of this work took place when his employer, the Kosciusko State Park Trust had little money; there were few staff; skiing was “taking off” as a new tourism industry; there was a
proposal for a gondolier up the western face of Kosciuszko; there was an intense debate over the future of grazing in the Park and illegal grazing was occurring. In addition, there was a politically charged showdown between scientists, conservationists and the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Authority about proposals to build hydroelectric scheme aqueducts in the summit area. These engineering works would have redirected water from the Main Range glacial lakes to a proposed new dam at Spencers Creek. The new Superintendent had stepped into a whirlwind of formidable issues. Thankfully, the Main Range aqueducts were never built, the summit area is still intact and the dam was never built. Neville Gare (and many others) had played a key role in this conservation outcome.

Nev’s deep love for the mountains, his commitment to protect their catchments and his fearless energy and commitment to the “national park ideal” are legendary. This “ideal” was new to many, but was underpinned by concepts of protecting nature and then carefully providing opportunities for people to experience and enjoy grand scenery, magnificent wildlife, outstanding natural phenomena and for keeping wild areas wild. The first ever World Parks Conference held in Seattle, USA in 1962, reinforced this emergent ideal internationally, including at Kosciusko.

The conservation success of the Kosciusko State/National Park through the 1960’s can be directly attributed to his professional leadership. Nev’s work also influenced the (then) Minister for Lands and Chairman of the Kosciusko State Park Trust, the Honourable Tom Lewis MP, and Kosciusko provided Lewis’ exemplar national park for his new 1967 *NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Act*. Tom Lewis’s initiative established a single professional protected area agency to manage all of NSW’s national parks and reserves and his actions had national flow-on effects.

Following NSW’s lead, government protected area organisations were established or refined in Victoria (1971); Tasmania (1971); South Australia (1972); Commonwealth lands (1975); the Great Barrier Reef (1975); Queensland (1975); Western Australia (1976) and the Northern Territory (1977). The professional protected area management of Kosciuszko, led by Nev Gare, had provided confidence for, if not inspired a 1970’s transformative conservation governance outcome for all states and territories of our country. It had also inspired formative professional protected area management for Australia. Nev Gare stands tall as one of the great, transformational professional protected area managers in Australia’s history and was a person that helped to capture the public’s imagination and support for the “national park ideal”.

In 1971, Nev finished his formal conservation contribution to Kosciuszko after accepting an assignment in Papua New Guinea to establish its protected area system. Later, he worked as the Deputy Director of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) with part of his ANPWS time being as a member of the formative Australian Alps Liaison Committee with Nev working back in his beloved mountains. He also served as the Director of the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Nev Gare passed away suddenly on the 7 May 2016 at the age of 86 following a short illness. He loved his family dearly, he spoke of them at all times during his career and he always understood that the burden of managing Kosciuszko had been a burden that they had shared. He was deeply appreciative of this enduring support. He grieved at the loss of his oldest son Johnno who predeceased him. Neville is survived by his loving wife Joan and children Suzee, Lindy and Pete and grandchildren Jack, Cinta and Tim.

Dr Graeme L. Worboys, Adjunct Fellow, Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University, 9 June 2016 (prepared for the Canberra Times)
great stories live on

*News from the alps* has sharing stories about all types of goings-on in and around the Australian Alps for almost as long as the Program has been alive. From bogs to huts, fire and pests, traditional owners and post settlement culture – this publication has proven that there are many different ways to look at this landscape, let alone manage it. Over the years, *News from the Alps* has certainly helped share carefully gathered data, and publicised expertise and on-the-ground methods. Which is why all those back issues are a fantastic readable resource. Grab a coffee and a few spare minutes and check them out online [HERE](#).

Find out more about the Alps-link to the Apollo Missions in issue 38 and see how the Corroboree Frog was being managed back in issue 36 (below).

Or get an overview on search & rescue in issue 45...
…or the latest fire management methods being trialed (above), issue 44.

*News from the Alps* is published by the Australian Alps national parks. Program Manager and Editor is John McRae, ACT Parks & Conservation Service, Namadgi National Park, Naas Road, Tharwa ACT 2620, [John.McRae@act.gov.au](mailto:John.McRae@act.gov.au). For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps web page, [https://theaustralianalps.wordpress.com/](https://theaustralianalps.wordpress.com/). Thank you to those who have made the time to be interviewed, and to the photographers for their images. Without this support, *News from the Alps* would not be possible.