

BLUE MOUNTAINS
WILDPLANT RESCUE INC.

WILDPLANT PRESS

14 Oak Street
Katoomba 2780
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SEPTEMBER 05

From the Office

We finished the financial year just breaking even. We have spent quite some time seeking help from BMCC and our local member Bob Debus, to find more suitable premises and land to re-locate the nursery and office. The desirable location is somewhere within walking distance of a train station and in the Mid Mountains area. Such a location would make it more suitable for growing plants on in the cold winter months, relatively frost-free, whilst making access to the nursery easier for volunteers travelling by public transport. This is a project in progress. Both Lynn Godfree and Tanya McLean have been busy preparing submissions for various grants to ease our financial constraints and give more paid hours for them to devise structured training programs for volunteers and spend more time training. Because of more bush regeneration work up and down the mountains and into the Megalong Valley, seed collection has become a major component of our work. Contractors now want provenanced plants to ensure the best outcome for the environment and the success of the seedlings. The limited hours currently available only really allow for running the nursery and the rescues so the need for more paid hours is becoming a priority. We did receive one small grant from BMCC to contribute towards a digital camera to enable production of a corporate brochure and new information brochures about wildplants.

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Judy McLean.

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the exhibition did not disappoint, her "modern" representations of these beautiful plants, does them justice.

In this dry late Winter/Spring in our locality, the inspiration for these works are coming into bloom – the bush is a revelation of blues, mauves, purples and pinks. yellow, gold, cream and white. The floral palette is endless, and of course I'm prescribing a tonic for the end of season blues – go, get out there and visit your local remnant of bushland and when you chance upon a *Hovea lanceolata*, express a little cry of delight and bless the day!

Spring is a good time to plan and plant your garden and the Wildplant nursery is a must visit. However, it can be a little disappointing in that many of the plants do not have hundreds of flowers at the point of sale, because the nursery does not follow the Lolly Shop tradition of the garden centre. The stock of "rescued" and propagated local plants are nurtured naturally and carefully so that they are hale and hearty but it will be your stewardship that will bring on the "blooms". Visit the nursery but don't forget to bring your faith and imagination: the difference between beautiful art and K Mart.

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Lynn Godfree

SPRING TRIBUTES

Denis Kevans,

Our poet lorikeet (1939-2005)

By Jenny Rich

Denis Kevans, poet, writer, musician, conservationist and political activist will be sorely missed. He performed his wonderful songs and poems at the Parakeet Poets in Katoomba, Blackheath Folk, the Blue Mountains folk festival and many other festivals around Australia. Poets' Breakfast sessions will never be

the same. Denis had a wicked sense of humour and no rapacious developer was safe from his wit. I particularly remember the developers of the proposed sand mine at Newnes Junction having to sit through Denis's recitation of "Concreto" with the audience joining in with great gusto.

Denis had a deep love of Australian wildplants, our forests and the wild creatures that live in our forests. He came to live in the Blue Mountains

and his home was near the Valley of the Waters at Wentworth Falls. Our bushland inspired much of his writing.

Blue Mountains people will particularly remember his recitations of "Concreto", his songs such as "The Valley of the Waters", "The Wollemi Pine", "Milo" (Dunphy), "Moss's Gentle Fingers" and his wonderful poems such as "Ah white man...have you no sacred sites?" Hundreds of people attended Denis' funeral and wake. They mourned his passing and celebrated his life, especially the wonderful collection of works he has left us. It was very moving when many people placed pieces of wattle and other native plants on his coffin while the beautiful "West coast of Clare" sung by Andy Irvine was played.

There's a tree that's so rare,
Grows deep in the gorges out there
Deep in my heart I will sing of the Wollemi pine
No preaching words, no angry tones,
The Wollemi stands all alone
One hundred million years of passing time

Wollemi, Wollemi, Wollemi look around you
Keep your eyes open or look about you
Oh Wollemi, Wollemi, Wollemi look around you
Keep your eyes open or look about you

(words by Denis Kevans and Sonia Bennett,
music by Sonia Bennett)



A Tribute to Ernie Constable, Botanical Collector, with reference to Vere Gordon Child, Archaeologist.

By Colin Slade

Vere Gordon Childe was born in North Sydney on the 14th April 1892, the son of Rev. Stephen Childe and his wife Harriet (nee Gordon). Vere Gordon spent his early childhood in the Blue Mountains, his parents having owned and built "Chalet Fontenelle", now known as "Whispering Pines" at Wentworth Falls. Both Rev. and Harriet Childe are buried in the Wentworth Falls Cemetery. Vere Gordon was educated at Sydney Grammar, Sydney and Oxford Universities, where he graduated in classics. He became a noted archaeologist and in 1925 published "The Dawn of European Civilization". He was awarded an honorary doctorate of letters by Harvard University in 1936. In 1937 the University of Pennsylvania conferred upon him an honorary doctorate of science and in 1940 he was elected a fellow of the British Academy, in 1944 Childe became Professor of Prehistory European Archaeology at the University of London and later Director of the Institute of Archaeology. Childe returned to Australia after his retirement in 1956 and on a visit to the Blue Mountains in October 1957 lost his life by apparently falling off Govett's Leap at Blackheath. Vere Gordon Childe has been described as "the greatest prehistorian in Britain, perhaps the world". Some remains of Childe were found by an intrepid plant collector, Ernest Constable whilst he was searching for specimens of a rare plant, *Isopogon fletcheri*, which was thought to grow in the Govett's Leap area. This plant had not been sighted for nearly 60 years. The story of this plant has been well written by John Low, the local History Librarian at Springwood Library, in the book "The Blue Mountains, the Grand Adventure for All", edited by Peter Stanbury, pub.1988 and in an article in the Blue Mountains Echo, dated 14th November 1984. Ernie (as he was generally called) was a smallish built man, which enabled him to crawl into many normally inaccessible places, spurred on by his dedication to his work and his sheer Irish

determination not to give up until he had found what he was looking for.

Ernie's nature was friendly and helpful, somewhat frugal but not without humour which was exceptionally dry. I had the honour and pleasure to know Ernie for twenty five years, he was not only a mentor to me, but a personal friend. This is a tribute to a brave man, who I would say was one of the last of the 'old time plant collectors'.

Ernest Francis Constable was born on the 12th June, 1903 in Enniskerry, County Wicklow, Ireland. His mother died when he was two years old and he was cared for by a much-loved aunt. When he was ten, Ernie's father who had emigrated to Australia sent for him; he travelled in the care of an aunt and arrived in Australia in February 1914. Ernie once told me he was distantly related to the famous landscape artist, John Constable. In 1926 Ernie married Caroline Ament who was widowed with children. They had one son, David Constable who with his wife resides in Blackheath.

Ernie and Caroline came to live in Blackheath in 1927, staying there until 1935 when they moved to Bathurst, where Ernie was employed by the Dept. of Agriculture. Ernie enlisted and served with the A.I.F. during World War II. He was in Darwin and saw the first bomb fall on that city. He later arrived in New Guinea and was one of the fortunate soldiers not taken prisoner. After the war, Ernie and Caroline returned to live in Blackheath and Ernie gained employment again with the Dept. of Agriculture as Botanical, Seed and Plant Collector, with the National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. It was during 1961 that I first met Ernie at the Herbarium, myself being employed as a Junior Gardener with the Botanic Gardens, and we struck up a firm friendship, which lasted until his death in 1986. This was the time that Ernie had remarried, his wife Caroline having died in 1958. He married Thelma Hessey (nee Wyke) born 13th April 1908.

I was privileged to stay with Ernie and Thelma in their home at 14 Hat Hill Road, Blackheath on many occasions, which I always enjoyed. It was while on one such visit that Ernie took me to a large block of land that he owned in Wills Lane and Prince Edward Street, Blackheath. It was a

lovely Sylvan block set in a hollow, well protected by trees with natural springs and a small creek running through it. Part of the land had at one time been an orchard; several fruit trees were still growing there. Growing underneath these trees were the largest naturalised clumps of white violets I have ever seen. Ernie loved this block of land and told me that he had wanted to build a house on it, but the war interrupted his plans and this didn't eventuate. On this visit and on other occasions Ernie showed me how to divine water with a stick, at which he was very good. Opposite Ernie's land on a small block was a lovely little weatherboard shack called "The Glen". I fell in love with it and ended up buying it, spending many pleasant weekends there and my honeymoon in 1965. When I moved to live permanently at Leura in 1970 my parents bought "The Glen" from me and built a lovely new cottage, still keeping the name. When they both passed away I buried their ashes in the garden there. I have Ernie to thank for instilling in me a love for the Blue Mountains.

I was privileged to accompany Ernie on several plant collecting trips for the Herbarium, one such trip was to Kanangra and Craft Walls in the Jamison Valley, where he found and collected specimens of the lovely little pink flannel flower, *Actinotus forsythii*, uncommon in the Blue Mountains. On another occasion we went to Glen Davis, the deserted shale oil mining town in the Wolgan Valley. It was here under sheer cliff walls that Ernie, while on a previous trip had found and collected specimens of a plant he couldn't identify, nor could the Botanists at the Herbarium. So they sent him back to collect more of it. I was with Ernie on this second trip. After many hours of searching he was able to relocate the plant much to our delight and Ernie's thanking his creator. I carefully balled several of the plants, which we took back to the Botanic Gardens for further study. Specimens of this plant were sent to the National Herbarium, Kew, England for further identification, It turned out that this plant was totally unknown and had to be classified and named. It was named *Apatophyllum constablei* in Ernie's Honour. Another plant named after him is *Hakea constablei*, found growing at Blackheath, Bell

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and Mt Wilson. Ernie was also responsible for finding and re-finding many other native plants in the Blue Mountains and other areas which were uncommon or whose growing places were not known exactly.

On my trips with Ernie he would always take along his much-loved fox terrier dog Socks for company. These excursions with Ernie always filled me with great excitement; his knowledge of plants and botany was bountiful. I indeed learned much. I remember him showing me how the trigger plant *Stylidium* fertilized by springing its trigger-like part containing the pollen onto unsuspecting insects that landed on the flower and thus carried away pollen on their backs to other flowers. Also how the winged seeds of the Native Pear, *Xylomelum pyriforme* were distributed in a helicopter like action by the wind. He also told me that segmented stem parts and roots of the native grass tree, *Xanthorrhoea*, were used as a substitute for gunpowder. On these trips, at night in the tent Ernie would sit up late with the hurricane lamp writing his notes and pressing specimens. I would help with the pressings and we would talk about many aspects of mutual interests. Ernie told me how his interest in botany stemmed from his mentor and friend, Alfred Porter, a well-known identity of Blackheath. In his younger days Ernie would ride to and from Blackheath to Penrith on his pushbike and think nothing of it, Ernie also told me that his first wife, Caroline whom he affectionately called "Little Mum" would always on passing the Explorers' Tree, salute and say "Salute the brave".

My friendship with Ernie and Thelma was maintained over the years and we attended many Horticultural Shows at Blackheath together, winning many prizes for our exhibits. Ernie was both President and Vice-president of the Blackheath and District Horticultural Society and in 1985 was awarded Life-Membership. Thelma became a patron of the Society. Ernie was also very active in the local RSL, holding office, and was a regular churchgoer, attending the local Baptist Church.

Ernie retired from the Herbarium staff in 1968 after 22 years of invaluable field work, respected by his many colleagues, among them was Laurie Johnson, brother to Nancy Douglass, a well

known and respected member of the Blue Mountains Historical and Family History Societies. Laurie Johnson became Chief Botanist and Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1972. After retiring Ernie didn't down tools but kept working as a gardener in many of the larger well-known gardens in the district. He was a keen gardener growing many uncommon and better-known plants in his own garden. I remember he always had a good vegetable patch and kept chooks and beehives. The years, however, finally caught up with Ernie and he was confined to the house by osteoporosis. He did not take this kindly, as he was not able to do all he still felt he had to, nor could he work in his beloved garden. It was very sad to see him in this condition having known this very active man of former years. He still kept steadfast to his faith but I am sure his death, which occurred on 29th March 1986, came as a merciful release from his sufferings. Ernie was buried in the Blackheath Cemetery to the playing of the "last post". His funeral was well attended by many relatives, friends and former colleagues from all walks of life. Thelma died two years later on 7th December 1988 and was buried next to Ernie. I will always remember Ernie and Thelma with respect and hold dear the friendship we shared and the enjoyable times we spent together. To use Caroline's words in respect of Ernie,

"SALUTE THE BRAVE"

Acknowledgements:

Readers Digest for material on Vere Gordon Childe.

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Nancy Douglass, Gwen Silvery and John Low. This article was first published in Hobby's Outreach, Newsletter of the Blue Mountains Historical Society, Volume No 2. July 1990. Blue Mountains Wildplant Rescue Service (thanks to Colin Slade for permission to publish this article.)