

NPA course encourages Third-ager action to protect nature

NPA ACT extended its education outreach recently by holding a short University of the Third Age (U3A) course – its first. Called 'Protecting the ACT's unique natural environment', the course was held over two sessions, on 29 March and 12 April.



Namadgi National Park manager Brett McNamara (right) discusses a map of Namadgi with U3A course members. Photos by Allan Sharp

The first session involved presentations at U3A's Cook rooms – by NPA president, Esther Gallant, Environment Subcommittee convener, Rod Griffiths, work party organiser, Martin Chalk, and head of the Rosenberg's Goanna study, Don Fletcher – followed a fortnight later by a trip to Namadgi Visitor Centre and to a nearby work site, at Glendale in Namadgi National Park.

The course was aimed at recent retirees interested in volunteer work to help the environment. Fourteen people attended the first session, which was introduced by the course organiser, Allan Sharp. Esther

led off with a brief history of the NPA and the creation of Namadgi National Park and talked about volunteering opportunities, including participation in local landcare groups.

Rod followed with a look at challenges to the natural environment, especially from climate change, and talked about several local environmental campaigns in which NPA is involved – to save the Lawson grasslands and Bluetts Block from encroaching urbanisation.

Martin's overview of the extensive work done by NPA volunteers in Namadgi and other reserves over his 20 years as work party organiser covered weed control and the removal of pine wildings and other trees and plants that are a threat to environmental values, and of old stock fencing.

The session concluded with Don's presentation on the fascinating habits of Rosenberg's Goanna and the valuable work being done by citizen scientists.

Eight participants made their way to Namadgi Visitor Centre a fortnight later for a presentation by Namadgi's manager, Brett McNamara, on how water catchment principles underpinned the location of the ACT as the site for the National Capital, and of the crucial role Namadgi plays in maintaining the quality of our water supply through its sphagnum moss marshes.

Brett outlined the major threats to the park, especially from climate change and feral animals like horses and deer. Two catastrophic fires in the park in 20 years, in 2003 and 2020, were stark examples of the influence of climate change. He stressed that protecting the park's environment was not about managing it, but about 'managing people', who have the greatest impact on it.

Then it was off to Glendale for a 'taste' of what some volunteering work entails. Led by Martin, the group visited a 1980s NPA work party site and the location of a more recent briar site, then on through a locked gate to look at remnant fencing, and the method used to preserve heritage values. The next stop was to look at recovery of an area where fences were removed in October 2021, and finally, to look at the site of briar infestations along Reedy Creek.

Feedback from course participants has generally been favourable with one participant commenting that she hoped the course was 'the first of many to be run by NPA'.

Allan Sharp



Martin Chalk (centre) with U3A course members near Glendale

Bumpy journey reveals Namadgi damage

A high-level group visits Namadgi to see a park in crisis. Allan Sharp reports

A five-vehicle convoy carrying MLAs, ACT Government officials and NPA ACT members spent a day on 22 April bumping along deeply furrowed roads, and through quagmire, creek crossings and a burnt-out but recovering Namadgi National Park.

The excursion, organised by president Esther Gallant with Namadgi Manager Brett McNamara, was to give MLAs and high-level government officials a first-hand view of the effects of the 2020 fires and climate change on infrastructure and vegetation in the park.

'We wanted to give MLAs in particular a clear picture of the damage to roads, creek crossings, and to the park overall since the fires and thought the best way to do this was to take them out to the park in person,' said Esther.

Joining the ride was opposition leader Elizabeth Lee, shadow environment minister Nicole Lawder, Parks spokesperson for the Greens Jo Clay, and Alisia Turner representing the office of the Minister for Planning and Land Management, Mick Gentleman. Minister Gentleman and two other ministers, Greens leader Shane Rattenbury, and Minister for the Environment and Heritage Rebecca Vassarotti, were to have accompanied the tour but were unable to because of other commitments.



Brett McNamara uses a map of Namadgi to make a point. Photo by Allan Sharp

Representing ACT Parks and Environment were Ian Walker, Executive Director, Environment Directorate, Bren Burkevics, Senior Director Land Strategy and Environment, Peter Cotsell, Regional Manager Southern Parks, and Justin Foley, A/Senior Director of the Fire Management Unit.

NPA was represented by Esther, Don Fletcher, John Brickhill, Isobel Crawford, Allan Sharp and Terrylea Reynolds, who is also president of the Canberra Bushwalking Club.

From the Namadgi Visitor Centre, the convoy travelled along severely eroded roads, navigable only by rugged 4-wheel drive vehicles, through the devastated Ororal Valley – seat of the 2020 fires that burnt through 85 per cent of the park – stopping occasionally for Brett McNamara to illustrate problems relating to the park's changing landscape from events



More on storm damage from Brett on the bridge over Cotter River. Photo by Don Fletcher

such as flooding and sedimentation, which are clogging creek beds, destroying culverts, widening crossings and altering the landscape.

Brett explained how extreme weather and fire caused by climate change were creating problems for engineers who were having to design structures to withstand the new conditions. 'We need better, bigger and stronger structures to deal with it, while minimising the impact on the environment,' he said, 'and we need time, capacity and money to deal with it.'

Brett spoke of the damage being done to the park by hoofed animals – ungulates – such as deer, goats, pigs and, potentially, feral horses, and how parks management was using infra-red sensors to track feral animals.

The group stopped on a bridge over a fast-flowing Cotter River, in the Upper Cotter Catchment, where Brett explained the significance of the catchment to the ACT's water supply and the importance of Namadgi's sphagnum bogs to maintaining water purity.

Then it was on for a brief look at a wash-away at Bimberi Creek where a torrent had swept away a culvert and scoured a deep channel, cutting access to the road beyond. For decades this was a simple, yet sustainable and reliable ford through Bimberi Creek. A few years ago the crossing was upgraded by installing culvert pipes and a large volume of road base but the upgrade did not survive the rain storms of 2020.

Lunch was at the historic, fibro-clad Cotter Hut, built in 1964 on the site of a previous hut and formerly used as a residence by rangers in the Cotter Catchment. Here the group was surprised by the arrival of a guitar-carrying, long-distance walker, Max Allan who, tiring of post-COVID-lockdown life in the city, has set out to walk around Australia. Max expects the journey to take 3 or 4 years, having started out from St Kilda in Melbourne on 1 March and almost finished the AAWT.

A stop while Brett McNamara talked about sedimentation. Photo by Allan Sharp

