

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

HEALING THE LAND, HEALING OURSELVES, TOGETHER



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NEWSLETTER



FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

JANE COLLOPY

Thank you so much to all of you for continuing to support Highways and Byways. Our 2024 Small Grants Program *Valuing Community Connections in an Ancient Land* has drawn great interest, and we look forward to announcing our successful applicants soon! Our longer-term programs are also all thriving through the strong leadership of Tani Langoulant, Megan Brown and Todd Dudley. Through these programs, we are so glad to be able to continue the legacy of the incredible Missionary Sisters of Service, as we celebrate their 80th anniversary this year!

Seeds of Connection

Megan facilitated the *Women's Earth and Healing Retreat* in December. The women who attended (see image above) had the opportunity to connect with each other, and find healing through the sharing of both their personal experiences and their work experiences.

Many of them work in support roles helping Indigenous women with mental health and wellbeing; an area in high demand for Indigenous people due to cultural intergenerational trauma. The relationships formed through the retreat will offer ongoing support for these women, and it is through this kind of community building that we see the great outcomes of our *Seeds of Connection* program.

Megan is currently planning another Indigenous women's gathering around the Roma/Mitchell area for *Seeds of Connection*, and is exploring opportunities to create a program further west.

The map below gives a sense of the distances Megan is traversing to make her Indigenous *Women's Cultural and Healing* programs accessible to women in remote South West Queensland.

SAVE THE DATE

**YARCK TO YEA WALK,
RIDE, RUN
SATURDAY 27 JULY**

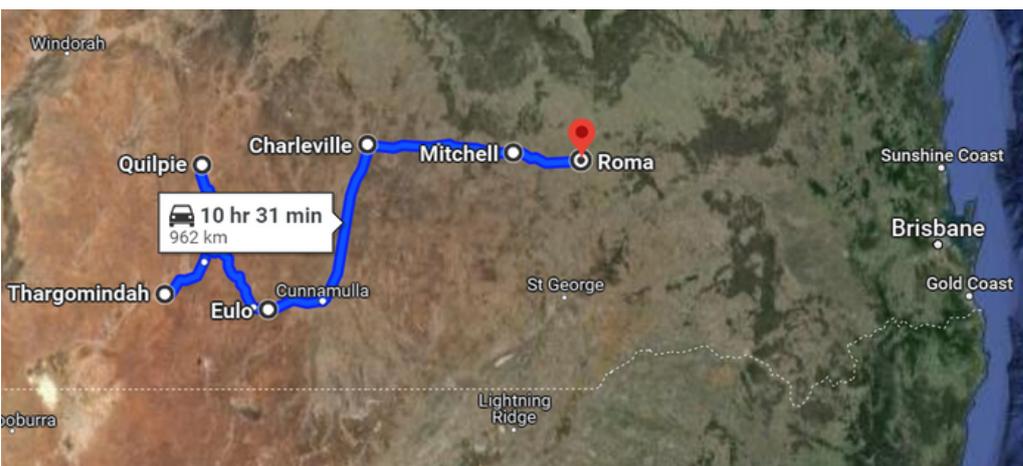
Together with the Missionary Sisters of Service (MSS), we will be hosting the 2024 Yarck to Yea Walk, Ride, Run on Saturday 27 July.

This is an annual event that aims to raise funds for the small grants and longer-term programs of Highways and Byways.

It's a wonderful opportunity to gather in a place of historical significance to the MSS, whose founder, Fr John Wallis, was born in Yea and grew up just outside this small country township in the north east of Victoria.

You can choose to walk, run or ride the full 27km, or a shorter distance of 9km or 5km. What's most important is the solidarity and friendships formed and strengthened between all those who gather for this special event.

More information will be posted closer to the event on our website: www.hb.org.au



FRRR
Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

Our longer-term programs are supported by Mary Mackillop Today and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. We thank them for their support.

Free2b Girls

Free2b Girls is going from strength to strength as they enable more local women to become facilitators and work with Free2b Girls. Late last year, Tani took some of the Free2b Girls to a local Council meeting, at which the Mayor invited the girls to always speak up if they needed to, and put proposals in. One of the youngest Free2b girls at 10 years old, Lily, did exactly that! You can read her letter to the council here: <https://hb.org.au/lilys-letter>

Lily organised an event for International Women's Day in St Helens because she believes it's so important to "get the community to listen to young people's voices!" You can read her story, printed in the local news, *The Coastal Column* here: <https://hb.org.au/coastal-column>

This is such a great example of the way Free2b Girls is supporting local girls and young women who otherwise are disconnected from their local community!

Restoring Nature and Communities

Todd's team have started the year with some great regeneration work on the Skyline Tier. They are continuing the work they started last year; where they regenerated over 100 hectares of land that was previously covered in radiata pine saplings and weeds.

Todd's team has also been working to gather support to

protect Skyline Tier from a change of plans by a logging company, which now intends to plant 300 hectares of radiata pine in previously harvested pine plantation areas that are already showing strong signs of native forest regeneration. The 10-30 year-old natives that were retained when the last plantation was harvested are now to be bulldozed by the company, and the land sprayed to wipe out the understory. More pines would then be planted and grown for 10-15 years, before being cut down and transported 200km to burn in a biomass power plant to generate "green" hydrogen. This is a great example of organisations who inadvertently damage the environment more than they help it, when they try to go "green". Todd has communicated to the company that it would be far more ecologically beneficial to gain carbon credits for doing native forest restoration on that same land, than creating green hydrogen. He also reached out to the local Break O'Day regional community, and on February 24th, 120 locals met to learn about what is planned, and how they can voice their concerns. The unanimous consensus from the meeting was strong support for ongoing native forest restoration and opposition to planting any more pines as articulated in the vision statement:

Healthy, fully restored coastal catchments, waterways and wetlands supporting diverse wildlife and flora, scenic beauty and local community wellbeing.

FRIENDS GRATEFUL FOR A FEW REGENERATION 'MIRACLES'

LINVILLE, QUEENSLAND (WAKA WAKA COUNTRY)

Carolita Fuentes says little miracles along the way have helped a small band of volunteers (image below) regenerate a 0.5 hectare patch of Greenhide Reserve Forest, near Linville in southeast Queensland. In recent years, heavy rains have washed invasive weeds away and cattle who wandered in, ate unwanted weeds, leaving the newly-planted native trees alone.

Friends of the Forest have spent the past five years regenerating the critically endangered remnant of subtropical rainforest through ongoing weed removal and planting. More recently they were able to buy essential equipment for their work with support from Highways and Byways.

Once power lines went through the area, the forest canopy was opened and created a haven for invasive weeds, including Lantana and tobacco plants, to grow and take over native vegetation. Friends of the Forest, a group of about 12, are vigilant about keeping these weeds away. They have planted more than 300 native trees and shrubs at Greenhide Reserve that now support native wildlife by creating a new area of habitat and food.

"A really important part of this works is that we have been able

to mitigate further major erosion because the trees will help stabilise the soil if there are future floods of the Brisbane River," Carolita said. Queensland Blue Gums were a popular choice for planting because their deep roots provide stability, and their leaves cater for the local koalas.

The group also work to encourage locals to join the regular working bees and to develop a sense of care for the area. While they have had mixed success at recruiting locals, their work led to great partnerships with the Somerset Regional Council, Traditional Custodians Jason Murphy (Jinibara) and Steve Marsh (Dungibara) and Conservation Volunteers Australia and caught the attention of several scientists. Native plant specialist Dr Andrew Pengelly, soil restoration microbiologist Dr Sandra Tuszynska and an invertebrate specialist Helen Schwencke, have all visited the site and provided invaluable advice.

"We are very lucky that the work to regenerate and maintain this special remnant of forest captured the attention of experts who wanted to help us. They travelled many hours to get here and we are grateful for all the help we get on this project, especially from Highways and Byways," Carolita said.



KIM SERVES UP A TREAT

MUDGEES, NSW (WIRADJURI COUNTRY)

Kim Spriggs is working desperately to sustain her Indigenous culture. She wants her people to know about their culture and she wants non-Indigenous people to appreciate her history and let go of fears and suspicions about Aboriginal people. One important step was the Warrabinga Sustainability Expo in Mudgee NSW last year. It showcased many aspects of Indigenous culture and left people with a hunger for more, especially the bush tucker Kim served.

The expo, run by the Warrabinga Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation with support from Highways and Byways, brought different cultures together in a shared aim – to understand more about Indigenous practices and history.

“We want people to better understand who we are. Lots of people just think Aboriginal organisations are about grabbing land, but that’s not true. We want to protect the land for future generations,” Kim said. “There are a lot of old cultural practices that continue today.”

One practice that is still used is the cutting of a Coolamon from a tree. Coolamons are used to hold babies and food and in ceremonies. The Coolamon-making workshop, which was one of the many events at the expo, was a sell-out. There was also art, tool making, weaving, and possum skin cloak workshops as well as language and dance demonstrations.

A focus of the expo was sustainable land management practices that organisers hope will be adopted more broadly.

Kim’s cooking was a highlight of the event, and she had trouble keeping up the kangaroo pies, emu sausage rolls and crocodile dumplings to people who travelled from as far away as Sydney to attend the expo.

The expo’s success has inspired the organisers to plan a

Cultural Sustainability Expo in Lithgow later this year. As well, the group has been invited to run a similar program as part of the Mudgee Field Day and locals are talking about the possibility of a regular yarning circle in the town and having the possum skin cloaks on display to create further awareness of the area’s rich history.

Kim said the highlight of the day was seeing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (pictured below) enjoying the same things together, “no one thinking they were more important than the other”.



FOREST REVEALS ITS SECRETS

GRETA, NSW (WONNARUA COUNTRY)

Standing on the ridge of the Hunter River Reserve, surrounded by beautiful spotted gums, with sandstone steps down to the river flats, it’s hard to imagine you’re in one of the last remaining strands of intact native vegetation along the lower Hunter River. And volunteers from the Hunter Region Landcare group, with support from Highways and Byways, are working to ensure it remains intact and thrives.

The group is regenerating and maintaining the 9ha parcel of Crown Land and are working hard to get the community involved so they understand its environmental significance so that the area can be enjoyed by future generations.

Stacy Mail, the local Landcare coordinator, said the area is ‘off the beaten track’ and used mostly by dog walkers and locals. Over the years it has been degraded and damaged by vehicles and many invasive species of weeds that choke native vegetation.

“We thought one of the important ways of preserving the area was to engage locals and show them what a beautiful area we have and offer insights into how it might be protected,” Stacy said.

Two important awareness-raising events were a nocturnal spotlighting tour (pictured right) and a bushtucker workshop. A highlight for Stacy was the bushtucker workshop, run by a local Indigenous person, which revealed an aspect of the reserve that few people knew about. “We were shown how to identify edible foods in this area as well as seeds and leaves that could be used to make tea. There were about 30 people, and most were surprised to learn about the usefulness of the

many local plants,” Stacy said.

Stacy said the awareness raising events, as well as inviting locals to participate in a national tree-planting day, had led to an increase in the number of volunteers at the Landcare group’s monthly working bees.

“We want to make sure the area, that was neglected, becomes more of a nature haven for locals and visitors alike.”



MOMENTS OF YARNING

ALICE SPRINGS, NT (ARRERENTE COUNTRY)

Fiona Green will always carry with her the profound image of a moment from the Mparntwe/Alice Springs section of last year's *Wellspring Care for Creation Listening Pilgrimage*. She was sitting amongst a circle of people (see image below). The circle of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, young and old, gathered on the sandy and dry Todd River under the dappled shade of gum trees. To Fiona, it symbolised much about the five-week pilgrimage that was supported by Highways and Byways.

"The circle was about being present and listening. We learned from retreat leader Celia Kemp and Arrerente woman Shirleen McLaughlin of the harm and abuse that happened in this place and of the hope for the future. We were also encouraged to wander and find a still, listening place to hear what this land had to teach us," Fiona said.

Celia said the week at Mparntwe/Alice Springs "... felt like many golden threads coming together and that something that mattered happened. It was a wildly diverse group and a wildly diverse range of input and so it crossed many of the fault lines of our time, but it held together,

and it was live, it was catalytic and very meaningful in so many ways."

Mparntwe/Alice Springs was one step along the way of the Pilgrimage, involving the Iona and Wellspring Communities that focused on listening to Indigenous and Celtic voices. The pilgrimage began in Western Australia and finished in Queensland and involved more than 1,000 people at 29 events along the way.

Joy Connor, a co-leader of the Wellspring Community, said different people attended various parts of the pilgrimage, but each had the same desire to listen to the voices of Indigenous people and to help care for creation.

Along the way, there were yarning circles, prayer gatherings, church services, campfires, and shared meals. A Creation Tree banner was developed with participants writing words on fabric leaves that described what creation meant for them and how they were taking steps to care for it. The leaves were sewn onto the banner and reflections were written into the roots and branches of the artwork. The banner will be touring at events in Australia in 2024.



NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES

Toowoomba

We give great thanks to Clare Smith who has stepped down as Chair of the Toowoomba Branch of Highways and Byways (and previously the John Wallis Foundation). Clare has been a generous and strong leader in guiding the Branch in their incredible activities over many years!

Hobart

Thank you also to Eva Dunn who has led the Hobart Branch of Highways and Byways (and previously the John Wallis Foundation). As Chair, Eva led the Branch in hosting many wonderful events to keep the spirit of Fr John and the Missionary Sisters of Service alive. We are also very grateful to Liz Jordan who has agreed to Chair the Hobart Branch into the future – thank you Liz!

LEAVING A BEQUEST TO HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

A gift in your Will is a simple way in which you can support the legacy of the Missionary Sisters of Service through the work of Highways and Byways.

You can make a bequest in various ways including specifying an amount of money or a percentage of your assets to pass on to Highways and Byways. You can consult with your solicitor when preparing your Will, or Highways and Byways is happy to assist you.

Please contact our office if you need advice or are considering a bequest.

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Highways and Byways is a national charity established by the Missionary Sisters of Service to support people and communities experiencing disadvantage and inequality across Australia.

We do this through our annual small grants and longer-term programs. Our programs are designed to strengthen community relationships and networks, develop local leadership, and empower people to meet the challenges confronting them.

Highways and Byways is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission.

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LET'S CONNECT

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