

## **Thank you to our Gardens of Stone champions**

The Colong Foundation wishes to thank the many volunteers who worked to protect the Gardens of Stone for over thirty years. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW has boosted its support over the last year and the recent arrival of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute is welcome to strengthen our research capabilities as reserve management becomes established. The following is not a complete list, nor it does not include all members of the Gardens of Stone Alliance, it is a short list of Gardens of Stone champions who are also members of the Colong Foundation:

Dr Haydn Washington, a long-serving member of the Colong Board, was instrumental in developing the concept of the Gardens of Stone, advancing the 1985 reserve proposal, as well as listing the swamps on Newnes Plateau as endangered and establishing that platey pagodas are of international significance.

Karen MacLaughlin drafted cadastrally correct maps of the reserve proposal, drew up a large tourist map to promote the area, and provided countless maps of the threats to the area, especially its coal mines.

Dr Brian Marshall convened the working committee that drew together talented members of the Colong Foundation, Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Lithgow Environment Group for over a decade.

John Robens as Colong Foundation chairperson for seven years, volunteered his considerable information technology skills to build website platforms for the campaign and developed unique electronic forms that enabled the Gardens of Stone photographic competition to operate run on-line with a photographic gallery.

Dr Stephen Allen a former Colong Board who produced two ten-metre-long banners and organised promotional days in the Gardens of Stone.

Henry Gold, Colong's Honorary Photographer, and former Board member, provided many excellent images of the area.

Yuri Bolotin, as a driving force behind Gardens of Stone *In Focus*, took thousands of people from all over the world, including artists, photographers and naturalists, to the Gardens of Stone, and by doing so established a large resource of images of the area to be used in promotions and on social media.

Janine Kitson, Deputy Chairperson who organised protest days for retired trade unionists, including Jack Mundy, and various celebration days including one in Lithgow's State Mine Museum.

Madi Maclean prepared countless submissions and provided invaluable advice on various aspects of the campaign.

Dr Richard Stiles funded independent research and gave critical input to many aspects of campaign strategy.

Julie Favell with her partner Chris Jonkers established the Lithgow Environment Group that monitored water quality of the Coxs River for decades and discovered several rare plants previously unknown to the region. Chris and Julie are on the ground naturalists advocated for better management and reported on the coal mining damage for decades.

Dr Ian Wright of the University of Western Sydney advanced Chris and Julie's initial stream survey work and produced detailed research papers on toxic water discharged by several coal mines.

Tara Cameron as President of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society supported legal action against water polluters and, as an excellent communicator and facilitator, empowered others to work effectively.

Joel Robinson, another former Colong Board member who as a videographer and producer developed an advertisement for the Gardens of Stone reserve proposal and a promotional video for Destination Pagoda.

Thomas Ebersoll, as manager of Newnes Cabins in the Wolgan Valley, Thomas provided vital insight into the tourism and visitor use future of the reserve proposal.

Ian Brown wrote a report on the possible visitor use of the area called Seeing the Gardens and then with Elizabeth Dudley-Bestow a more comprehensive visitor management report, Destination Pagoda. Ian also wrote a definitive report of the heritage values Gardens of Stone region.

And of course Wilson Harris who is the current convenor of the Gardens of Stone Alliance and has kept the wheels on this campaign turning during the last two years since I retired and moved to Katoomba.

This campaign is a testament to the dedication and determination of volunteers that make up the strength of the nature conservation movement. Volunteers who are integrated into the fabric of society and who speak to all people of all persuasions. People like Janine Kitson, who is now standing as an independent candidate for the Federal seat of Bradfield, and a Friend of the ABC for whom retirement is just an opportunity to do her bit to make Australia a better place.

So what did I do? I developed the successful reserve model in 1993 and a more detailed version in 2005. In my holidays and weekends, while working on wilderness campaigns, I wrote the initial text for the visitors map and a detailed report on the impact of coal mining. Like everyone on this campaign I was incensed that the mining industry continued to get away denial of the damage it continued to cause. This denial more or less stopped when the Coalpac open-cut proposal was refused consent and the tide of history swung towards protection of the Gardens of Stone, which is one of best natural areas in NSW.

Myles Dunphy's vision for the Greater Blue Mountains reserve system is now complete. This success marks the beginning of an even greater challenge, keeping this reserve system intact in the face of climate change. It will not only be volunteers, but all of us, who must now tackle the necessary climate change reforms head on, and with greater commitment every year. To misquote Gandhi; We must become the change we need to be. Part of this challenge is stopping the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall, which casts a long shadow over this wonderful success. One million tonnes of concrete would generate a powerful lot of carbon dioxide, as would urban sprawl on the floodplain and the concrete for the high-elevation escape freeways that would be needed to get tens of thousands of new home owners out of the way of floods that will still come.

Keith Muir