

**Current status of the vegetation at the abandoned Agricola mine site,
Conondale National Park**

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The purpose of this article is to describe the current status of vegetation on the site of the abandoned Agricola gold mine within Conondale National Park. Approximately 20 years have elapsed since the site was subject to extensive remediation works commissioned by the State Government. Part of these remediation works involved de-toxifying contaminated water, dewatering the open cut mine, applying lime / crushed marble for acid mine drainage control and installing / modifying clay containment cell caps covering the open cut mine and tailings dump. Sections of the site were subject to replanting and / or direct seeding with sclerophyllous and, to a lesser extent, rainforest plant species.

The site can be broken down into three broad areas. The containment cell caps covering the open cut mine and the tailings dam; the mine benches; and the vegetation surrounding the mine site. The vegetation on the containment cell caps over the open cut mine and tailings dam include a thick ground cover layer consisting of native raspberry (*Rubus parvifolius*) or bracken fern (*Pteridium esculentum*). There is a thin mid-storey of native shrub species, *Acacia irrorata* as well as *Eucalyptus*, *Allocasuarina* some rainforest species saplings. The thin to medium canopy consists mainly of planted *Eucalyptus* and *Allocasuarina* trees with some *Acacia* (dead or dying back) trees.

Many of the originally planted black wattle (*Acacia melanoxylon*) trees have reached maturity and died. The fallen trunks increase the habitat complexity across the site. The planted *Eucalyptus* and *Allocasuarina* trees are growing

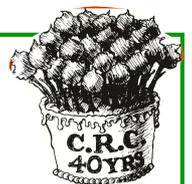
well and appear to have self-seeded in areas. There are also scattered rainforest plant species saplings across the site. Some have been naturally recruited from the surrounding forest and some may have been planted. Planted bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*) saplings can be found across the site.

The vegetation on the former mines' benches consists of sclerophyllous and rainforest plant species. The lushness of the vegetation depends on the bench aspect and the amount of soil present. In some of the more shaded areas of the benches, ferns grow on the rocks and trees pop up in gaps between the rocks. In the more exposed and less stable areas, the vegetation can be very open and consist of low ground-covering ferns and other vegetation.

The vegetation surrounding the mine site is in a very healthy condition and varies from sclerophyllous vegetation at the top of the site to rainforest vegetation that abuts Booloumba Creek. There appears to be minimal edge effects caused by the mine on the adjacent forest (no vine blanket etc) and in most areas the mine side access track marks the last visible impact of the mine on surrounding vegetation. deer activity. Currently, a soil sampling project is underway to determine if the pigs are the cause of the bare areas or are symptoms of it. Pig damage is sporadic across the site. There is very little incursion by introduced plant species across the site and lantana was not been detected during recent site investigations. There is a small population of non-local cypress (*Callitris sp.*) trees that were probably introduced with imported mulch some two decades ago. These will likely be subject to a control program in the near future. The Abandoned Mines Unit, Southern Region is developing a site management plan to address any areas of concern identified by ongoing monitoring.



CRC 40th Birthday Celebrations
Sunday Creek Environmental Ed Centre Weekend July 29/30/31

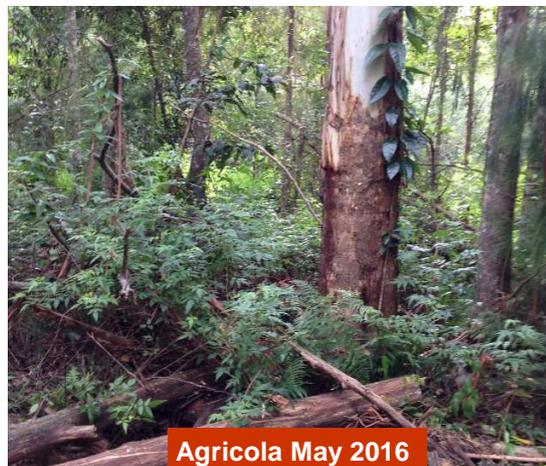


Forty years!

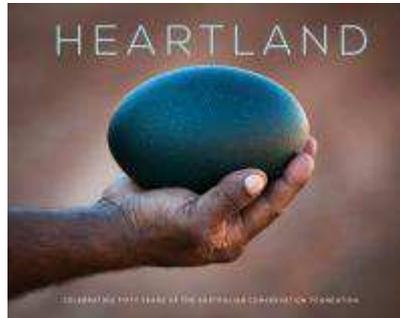
In 1976 when the 'Save the Conondale Range Committee' was formed, the campaign for an expanded national park had already been underway for 10 years. From Kenilworth scoutmaster Ross Scott's petition in 1966, from exploratory visits by a number of young uni students concerned at what would be lost if plans to clear vast swathes of the Conondales for pine plantations, the conservation history is well documented in our 2004 book "Walking on the Wilder Side... in the Conondales". When we celebrated the Conondale Range Consultative Process, a Goss-government initiative that saw two smaller national parks substantially increased, we celebrated in style at the Overflow area at Charlie Moreland park and we found ourselves back there to celebrate the South east Queensland Forest Agreement and our 25th. There was a time when we wondered whether the CRC shouldn't go into retirement, having seen its aim of a significant National Park realised, but we opted instead for a "watching brief" over the Conondales during which time we were instrumental in bringing about the clean-up of the Agricola minesite (see story elsewhere).

Mark Ricketts always hypothesised that the longevity of a conservation group was directly proportional to the amount of curries consumed at meetings and I'm pleased to say that the present CRC (which now stands for Conondale Range Conservation) has proudly and happily continued this practice.

So on the last weekend in July we'll again be in celebratory mode, this time in the delightful setting of the Sunday Creek Field Study Centre. The plan is for a



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– Michael Leunig

Heartland is a commemorative photographic book of around 200 photographs celebrating fifty years of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Australia's oldest and largest national environmental group. The uplifting and inspirational images capture the natural world across the continent and people interacting with nature in a myriad of ways, all original photography by the MAPgroup of documentary photographers. Heartland also features written pieces from various Australian writers.

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<http://www.fivemile.com.au/catalog/adult/heartland-celebrating-50-years-australian-conservation-foundation>

Saturday visit and working bee at the Agricola mine site; it's rather sobering to realise that the rehabilitation work was carried out 20 year ago, so we're keen to see how the site has progressed. Sunday will be a celebration and reflection time (complete with celebratory cake) and of course Saturday night will feature the ritual curries.

We'll be mindful of those, sadly, no longer with us but who've played important roles over the last 40 (well 50 really) years.

Do join us. More details elsewhere.

The Agricola Experience.. may it be a lesson

The Conondale Ranges are an area of high conservation value. Areas of it are listed on the National Estate and yet, right in the middle, lies an ugly scar – and a reminder. In the mid 1970's, a small mine operated at the site. When Astrik Resources took over in the eighties, a massive expansion took place with optimistic hopes that its Agricola mine would have an output of around 30,000 ounces a year.

The CRC formed in 1976, to press for a larger NP, suddenly found itself facing a threat of a totally different kind. The massive depredations involved in clearing and earthmoving, not to mention the toxic nature of the cyanide used in the treatment process, posed enormous problems.

At a cost of nearly 1 million dollars, an electricity line was taken in through the forest, the cyanide tailings dam built, the mine pit dug and a treatment plant built. All this in an area which had recorded the highest 24 hour rainfall in South-east Qld. It seemed nothing would stop this insidious venture – after all, Qld had been virtually founded on a series of gold-strikes and gold fever. This 'rush' seemed to reach into the speculative stock market as well.

There are times when the smallest of things brings down the greatest. The gold proved to be not quite as abundant as initially thought and high levels of copper made treatment more expensive. It became unviable to keep digging. Yet the plant had cost a lot to set up, and thus, in a desperate attempt to recoup some of the costs, a plan was proposed to truck in ore for processing.

It stretched credibility that ore from all over south-east Qld would be hauled up these narrow, winding roads to this de facto industrial zone high in top conservation value forest. Kenilworth Township faced the prospect of a 25 tonne ore truck passing through every quarter hour, the only respite being a few hours between midnight and dawn.

Then it happened. At Yednia, near Kilcoy, en route to the mine, six drums of cyanide fell off a truck and two burst open. It was downhill for the miners after that.

State Cabinet vetoed the trucking proposal and soon after, in 1989, Astrik was declared bankrupt and announced that it wouldn't be able to carry out the necessary rehabilitation. The eventual cost to decommission the site was \$1.3 million. In 1991, the Labour government put up a quarter of a million dollars to decontaminate the water and fill in the tailings dam. After five years of further agitation to complete the rehabilitation, an Agricola Consultative Committee was set up consisting of representatives of the various departments, and involved conservation interests. A budget allocation of over \$800,000 was eventually made and a committed Environmental Officer appointed. The acidified water in the open cut pit or "blue lagoon", contaminated with various heavy metals, was treated, filled and capped; major earthworks were carried out and the site seeded and planted. When we last visited in 2004, what was once a very hostile environment had become a totally different sight. Trees had grown so well that it would have been easy to your way on what had been a 16ha bare earth denuded site.

The green reclaiming the gold.

Agricola site

Over the years I have read various accounts of the Agricola Gold Mine and am surprised at the number of people who mistakenly think the Gold Mine Circuit on the Conondale Range Great Walk track is Agricola. This mine was not open-cut, like Agricola. It was worked in the 1900's and has a 60m length of drive. It is not accessible and is now inhabited by colonies of Eastern Horseshoe and Common Bentwing bats.

A well researched (in some areas) blog by ivoradventures has some interesting information but he makes a few mistakes including the actual site. I assume he has not walked the gold mine circuit otherwise he might reassess some of his information.

One interesting item, "*rumours abounded that the CRC bribed the truck driver to spill the drums*". I can assure you this was not true, we maintain it was divine intervention and I recall that was what the newspapers articles at the time had as headlines. (at Yednia, near Kilcoy, en route to the mine, six drums of cyanide fell off a truck and two burst open.

Some good moves from the state government

Integrity of national park system protected by new nature conservation legislation

The Palaszczuk Government has passed legislation that will ensure that the focus of our national park system is the conservation of nature, exactly as the community expects.

Minister for National Parks Dr Steven Miles said the *Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015* delivered on the government's commitment to provide proper management of the national park estate, providing permanent preservation of natural conditions and protection of cultural resources and values.

"The new law requires that the management of national parks is to be guided by the primary goal of conserving nature," Dr Miles said.

"That's quite unlike the previous government's open-slasher approach, which was inviting intolerable intrusions into our park estate."

(excerpts from Ministerial media release)

Laws passed to protect Queensland taxpayers against costly environmental clean-ups

On the morning of Friday 22 April 2016, after a marathon sitting, state government passed the "Environmental Protection (Chain of Responsibility)" laws to prevent mining and resources industry executives from leaving Queensland taxpayers with costly clean up bills for developments.

This Bill amends the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (Qld) to enhance environmental protections and give the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) more powers to help avoid State liability for environmental damage from sites operated by companies in financial difficulty.

While the heading suggests clean-ups are done at taxpayer expense, the sad truth is (as we found with Agricola) they are often simply not carried out unless there is substantial agitation. With some thousands

of abandoned mines in the state, the old practice of declaring bankrupt and walking away, or selling the site (an clean-up responsibility) for a nominal sum simply have to stop.

Reinstatement of Vegetation Management (land clearing) Laws

On 17 March 2016, the government introduced the [Vegetation Management \(Reinstatement\) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016](#) (Reinstatement Bill) which proposes to reinstate responsible vegetation management laws for Queensland.

The Reinstatement Bill is currently being considered through the [parliamentary committee process](#) and it is anticipated they will report back to parliament by 30 June 2016.

This legislation, if passed, will reverse many of the sweeping changes made by the Newman government which have seen sharp increases in land clearing rates in Queensland.

Conondale Range Conservation applauds all of these initiatives.

**Poets Breakfast Saturday 1st October
8am to 11am
Woodchop Arena Kenilworth Showgrounds**

CRC 40th Birthday Celebrations Weekend July 29/30/31

Sunday Creek Environmental Ed Centre,
Sunday Creek Road

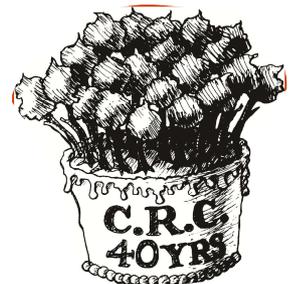
Directions: Turn off to Sunday Creek Road is 7km past Kenilworth or 13.5km past Conondale Then 24km from QPWS Office It is a rough gravel road most suitable for 4WD or 2WD if its not wet, drive carefully

Accommodation: 9 Rooms, 2 double bunks in each plus 2 rooms with 3 bunk beds.
Camping available

Program:
Friday night: BBQ
Saturday: Working Bee at Agricola
Saturday night: Curry
Sunday **Official Birthday Lunch**

admin@exploreconondales.com for more details

Conondale Range Conservation Issue Two



Sadly, Eric Glassop passed away on Sunday 6 December 2015. There was a "Farewell Gathering" for family and friends on Saturday 19 December at Yabbaloumba Retreat on Booloumba Creek Road. Below is Ian's 'personal reflection' kindly read by Liz Diggles.

Vale Eric Glassop... a personal reflection

I would've liked to have been with you in person to say these few words of farewell to Eric but alas I am in Rockhampton for a couple of weeks.

I really valued my friendship with Eric, one that at first glance may seem unlikely, given our rather different backgrounds and approaches to forest management. It was the late Mark Ricketts, at one of our celebrations at the Overflow, who pointed out that the Agricola mine episode made us conservationists and foresters realise we had a lot more in common than we thought. We at least had a respect for forests while would-be miners simply saw them as biomass standing in the way of an ore body.

I always threatened to write a book with Eric ... "The forester and the greenie" although he instantly corrected me, pointing out that he was just a forest ranger and a Forester is much loftier perch in the departmental food chain.

Alas I am a bad procrastinator, no actually I am an excellent procrastinator, and it got no further than a thought although I was very grateful of being able to sit with Eric and record a long interview as part of Hamish Sewell's Story Project a few years back.

One of my fondest memories though was meeting and sitting down with Mark Cody, Don Burgher (Sunshine Coast Bushwalkers) and Eric to start talking of a route that would become the Conondales Great Walk. The funding had been announced, a project driver, Mark, appointed, and we had the luxury of creating a walk that wasn't constrained by private property, major roads etc, as had been the case with the Hinterland walk around Mapleton.

The idea to use old logging trails as much as possible, rather than constructing new walking trails was Eric's, and his superb knowledge of these and of features to include in the walk were most important. It was left to others to carry out the actual



The late Mark Ricketts and Eric Glassop at the opening of The Conondale Range Great Walk in July 2010

construction, but to me it'll be always be a tribute to Eric, something that I'll always regard as his legacy, even though it was built after his time as Forest Ranger here. I really appreciated that when Eric had his retirement send-off, he insisted on having some of us "greenies" along too. Like us, like Mark Ricketts, Eric realised that perceived polarities were a convenient fiction and there was more in common between us than dividing us. It could all have been so

different, with hostility and aggression, as has been the case in parts of Tasmania and I believe it was in no small part attributable to Eric's management style that it was never thus in the Conondales.

There was this forestry era in Eric's life and then of course there was Ann's disappearance, as difficult and gruelling an experience as you could go through. I loved the way Eric bonded with Ann's mum Joan, also so tumbled through the same tragedy, a pair of wonderful kind people.

When I first heard Eric had been diagnosed with leukaemia, it seemed he didn't have long left. I bought him a card determined to write him a message thanking him that our paths had crossed.

But then I worried that might seem like I was signing off on him in the battle of his life. And I course I nursed this shy hope that maybe his race wasn't quite yet run.

I didn't send the card and now his passing has taken me by some surprise, that gratitude never expressed to him, except, rather clumsily in that Story Project interview.

But that's what procrastinators deserve; they get to express their gratitude, their admiration only when it's too late.

So be it.

A special bloke has enriched the lives of all of us, played different roles in all of our life journeys.

Thanks Eric, I know I shall always remember you, your humour, your good nature and your friendship, with affection and admiration.
Ian Mackay December 2015.





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- * Maple St Coop, Maleny
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- * Rosetta Books, Maleny
- * CRC Mail Order or on line

www.exploreconondales.com

A must for any visitor to the Conondales, this book includes history, a comprehensive bird list, description of walks, recreation and maps of the area.

Plus lots of great photos.

Membership CRC

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership

We haven't put the membership up for many years. Its \$20 to join and \$10 a year, postage has risen quite substantially but many members receive their newsletter by email making it more affordable. As some people are members of a few different groups this makes it financially viable.

Some members are generous with their donations and we sincerely appreciate their generosity. *Thank you!*