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In this issue

- A partnership in the Kimberley
- Monitoring climate change in Western Australia
- Conservation partnerships – the lowdown



A partnership in the Kimberley

Bush Heritage is collaborating with Wunambal Gaambera people on their traditional land in the Kimberley, a region of extraordinary diversity and cultural richness. **Stuart Cowell** reports

Travelling by Cessna, earplugs firmly in place to counter the din of the engine dragging us ever upward, I am eagerly looking for the evidence of yesterday's fire lighting. In the rugged and complex

country below, encouraged by dry grass and the midday sun, but thwarted by creeks, rainforests and wetlands, the first fires of the season are creating a healthy patchwork landscape.

A short dusty drive from the bush camp at Garmbemirri, in the far north-west of Australia, we take off from Munggalalu-Truscott airstrip, once home for over 1500 people during the Second World War, and now a busy transit facility for

crews heading to and from off-shore oil and gas platforms.

Garmbemirri is one of the main camps for the traditional owners of this landscape, the Wunambal Gaambera people. The fires we are looking at from our noisy perch represent a process of traditional owners regaining management control of their country, protecting its extraordinary values.

continues overleaf



Clockwise from top: The magnificent Wunambal Gaambera country in the Kimberley region, WA. A mangrove tree growing in rocks on the foreshore, which is part of the saltwater country of the Wunambal Gaambera country. The rocky coastline with saltwater vegetation growing down to the water.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE WUNAMBAL GAAMBERA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



For over three years Bush Heritage has been gradually building a partnership with the Wunambal Gaambera people to collaborate on ensuring that their country remains, in their terms, healthy, and in ours, protected. We are, collectively, developing a Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Plan to guide management actions into the future, including establishing an Indigenous Protected Area, and conducting field research to confirm the values of the country.

To date, Wunambal Gaambera country – 925 000 hectares of freshwater country (open-canopied eucalypt woodland interrupted by deep green riparian and rainforest zones) and 1.6 million hectares of saltwater country (diverse seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and sponge gardens with over 1000 islands) – has escaped the wave of extinction and landscape transformation that has swept across the Australian

continent in post-colonial times. It remains one of the few places on the Australian mainland that retains the environmental values of pre-European times, and the Aboriginal culture that shaped and lived with that ecology.

Wunambal Gaambera country is made up of a number of land parcels, and is recognised internationally and nationally for its natural values. Despite the presence of two national parks, a significant portion of its extraordinary conservation values (more than 500 000 hectares of freshwater and all the saltwater country) are poorly protected by tenure or management action.

The region is best known as the location of the Mitchell Falls (Punamii-Uunpuu), the Bougainville Peninsula – the largest single extent of rainforest in Western Australia – and a coastline recognised as one of the most pristine and ecologically diverse in the world.

It is a breathtaking region with an extraordinary biological diversity and cultural richness.

It includes three of the Global 200 priority eco-regions for global conservation, identified as being relatively stable or intact in status while similar systems around the world are under severe threat, and is recognised internationally and nationally as a biodiversity hotspot.

Wunambal Gaambera country also contains many endemic species (not found anywhere else), including at least 16 fish species, 10 frog species, 31 reptile species, two bird species, and six mammal species. Important animals include the golden bandicoot, scaly-tailed possum, monjon, nabarlek, golden-backed tree rat and Kimberley rock rat, and of course birds such as the Gouldian finch are regularly recorded.

Within this diversity, 44 plant species, five mammal species, three bird and six reptile species are rare or threatened, and a range of vegetation associations and ecosystems are officially at risk.

Rainforests and gorges embedded in the savannah landscape create a relatively high plant diversity (around 1627 plant species, with 102 species as strict endemics), with over 200 species traditionally used by Aboriginal people. Two of the major rivers, the Mitchell and Prince Regent, have been added to the Register of the National Estate, and the whole region is being considered for similar inclusion.

These natural values are part of and overlain by a rich, complex, and living cultural landscape. Wanjina and Wunggurr (the creator spirits) and gwion



Clockwise from top: Traditional owners Janet Oobagooma and Margaret Mangulu with Uunguu Rangers in the background at a Healthy Country Planning workshop in May 2009. PHOTO: LYNDALL MCLEAN A Brahminy kite (*Haliastur Indus*) that has taken up residence in the region. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE WUNAMBAL GAAMBERA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION Raphael Karadada and Sylvester Mangalamarra host the first steering group meeting for the Healthy Country Plan. PHOTO: LYNDALL MCLEAN The nabarlek is one of six important mammal species in the region. PHOTO: JIRI LOCHMAN/LOCHMAN TRANSPARENCIES

(the so-called Bradshaw paintings) are pervasive and dictate interactions with many places throughout Wunambal Gaambera country. Wunambal Gaambera spiritual knowledge and on-ground action guided by that knowledge breathes life into the country, enriching the biodiversity values with a perspective lost to many parts of Australia.

The region has become topical over recent months and years as the proposed location of on-shore gas processing facilities and possible bauxite mines. While gas processing is, for now, proposed elsewhere in the Kimberley, together with bauxite mining it remains a real threat to the region's natural and cultural values.

However, while significant, our collective focus on these big, bold, and obvious industrial threats is masking the pervasive threatening processes gradually insinuating their way into Wunambal Gaambera country. Now recognised as among the most critical threats to Australia's biota, introduced pest plants and animals, poor fire management, and the changes wrought by climate change will inevitably lead to the extinctions and loss of values seen elsewhere.

The Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country project has made significant progress with a series of field trips for research and land management, and joint 'on-country' planning workshops. Field work to date, with assistance of the Kimberley Land Council and WWF, has included plant and animal surveys confirming the abundance particularly of small mammals, a critical conservation

value; a trial of GPS-based monitoring techniques for protected and culturally important marine turtle and dugong; and the completion of a project started in the late 1990s, working with elders to record language names of plants and animals to be turned into field guides for rangers and others to use.

Our task now is to complete our joint planning and secure the resources required to support the Wunambal Gaambera Uunguu Rangers and Bush Heritage staff as they implement the critical actions required for protection of this country's important cultural and natural values. Our key activities are establishing an effective fire regime, managing feral animals, particularly cattle and increasingly pigs, and building an effective understanding of traditional use of landscape resources.

How you can help

Conservation in this globally significant region will only be sustainable if we get alongside the Wunambal Gaambera peoples and support their aspirations for their country. Our work today will establish a Healthy Country Plan and assist traditional owners to have an Indigenous Protected Area declared, and our ongoing partnership will then carry out active conservation management.

Given the remoteness of the area and the inaccessibility (no roads, broken stone country), the cost of doing business on Wunambal Gaambera country is high. However the cost of losing the values in this landscape is incalculable – our investment now is critical.

We believe that our investment now in partnership with Wunambal Gaambera

people will yield lasting environmental, economic and social benefits for future generations of Wunambal Gaambera people, and at the same time manage a national and international treasure.

Acknowledgments

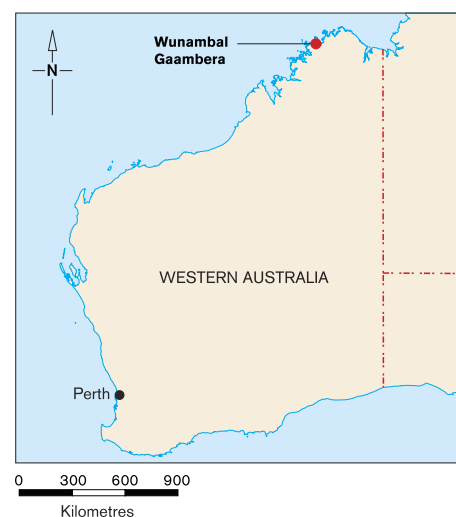
A number of other organisations are collaborating on this project, in particular the Kimberley Land Council, the North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance and WWF.

Bush Heritage would like to acknowledge Jean Hedges, The Nature Conservancy and The Nature Conservancy's David Thomas Challenge for their generous support of this work. We would particularly like to thank the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation and Uunguu Land and Sea Rangers for their support in making this work happen.



Establishing an effective fire management plan is one of the key activities of the partnership.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE WUNAMBAL GAAMBERA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION





Many plant and animal species found here, along with the communities they comprise, are at the edge of their distribution and are therefore particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Current modelling indicates that this area, at the northern edge of the South-West Botanical Province, will become hotter and drier.

As well as being accessible with good accommodation and facilities for volunteers and researchers, Charles Darwin Reserve has favourable conditions for the study. With external factors like weeds, feral animals and other threats to biodiversity minimised, we are more likely to see clearly the results of climate change.

Moreover, with over 90 monitoring sites already set up at the reserve, the CCWA is able to use some of these existing sites for their research and, as a sideline, help Bush Heritage with data collection. 'This is a great example of two NGOs coming together on a long-term project,' explains Nic Dunlop, adding that the CCWA biologists will share their findings with Bush Heritage and the community.

Monitoring climate change in Western Australia

The Conservation Council of Western Australia has set up a climate change observatory at Charles Darwin Reserve as part of a long-term monitoring project. **Charlotte Francis** explains how a partnership between two organisations is expected to provide information vital to the long-term management of this reserve

How do plant and animal populations respond to climate change and what are the implications for long-term biodiversity conservation? This is a complex question, but one which the newly established climate change observatory at Bush Heritage's Charles Darwin Reserve in Western Australia will help to answer.

The observatory itself consists of an automatic weather station which will monitor changes in temperature, rainfall and solar radiation over time; the project also includes ongoing biodiversity surveys at monitoring points across the reserve.

'Current conservation planning strategies around climate change are based purely on theory and modelling exercises due to the lack of actual data,' says Nic Dunlop, Biodiversity Conservation Officer at the Conservation Council of Western Australia (CCWA). 'That's how this innovative project came about; we need to establish how climate change will impact and how plants, animals and ecosystems are already responding.'

A joint venture between CCWA and Bush Heritage Australia, Charles Darwin Reserve was chosen as a suitable site for a long-term biodiversity and climate change observatory for a number of reasons.

Straddling the mulga-eucalypt line, the reserve lies on the bio-geographic boundary between the south-western wheat belt and the arid zone in Western Australia. Areas on the boundaries of a bioregion are best placed to show up the types of changes likely to occur under climate change.



'The exciting thing about the climate change observatory is that it will give us vital information on the capacity of different functional groups of plants and animals to adapt and how they might do it,' says Hugh Pringle, Bush Heritage ecologist. 'We can then target vulnerable plants and animals and finetune our management strategies to improve the overall resilience of the land to better withstand the effects of climate change.'

Over a series of six visits, the CCWA have carried out baseline surveys to find out what plants and animals are currently present in the habitats they have selected for monitoring at the reserve. These include five woodland monitoring sites with a focus on two vegetation types: the northernmost salmon gum and gimlet communities in the wheat belt, and the southernmost mulga communities in the arid zone. The next step is to develop a stable of viable climate change indicators.

'We are choosing indicator species where we have reasonably good information on their ecology, such as perennial plants, ant communities and the bat fauna,' says Nic Dunlop.

Next spring, CCWA botanists will commence in-depth monitoring of plant communities and their lifecycles to identify how they adapt to climate change. These indicators will then be monitored over the long term and any changes documented.

'Repeated monitoring over the long term will help to establish whether climate change is causing biodiversity changes at the bio-geographical boundaries and, if so, what are the key species that play an important role in maintaining their stability,' explains Hugh Pringle.

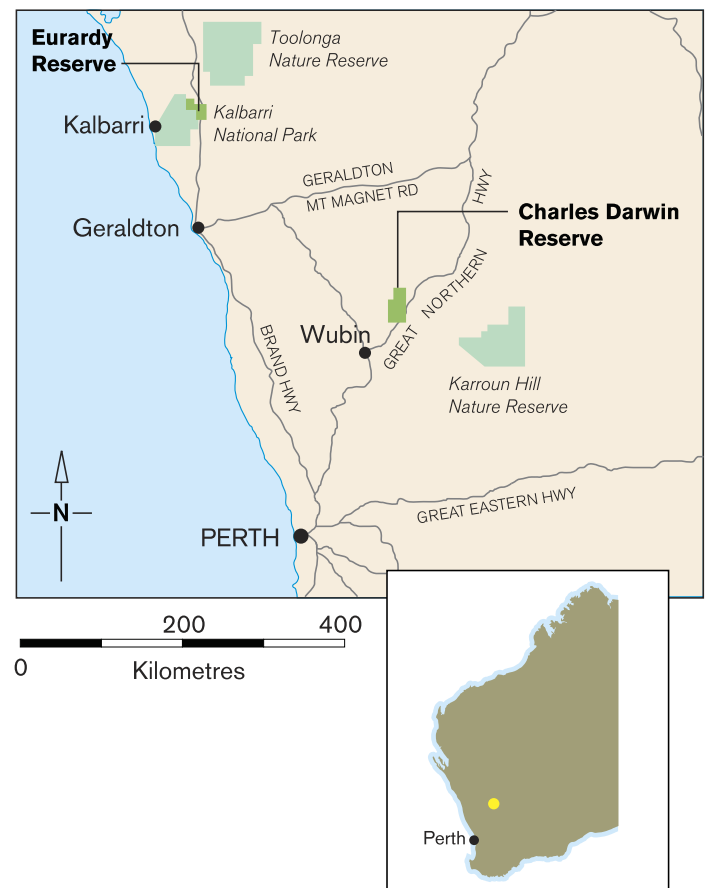
As the ecological studies relate to climate variables, an automatic weather station, the only meteorological station in this area, was set up at the observatory. As well as continuously measuring temperature, humidity, wind speed, wind direction and rainfall, the station is equipped with a radiometer to measure solar radiation.

At a global level, it is unusual to find such well-developed vegetation as the York and salmon gums and gimlet woodlands in such an arid environment. This may be due to the high water-use

efficiency of these large trees under frequent cloudy conditions. 'If cloud systems start to drift southwards under climate change, it may threaten the long-term viability of these vulnerable communities at their northernmost extent,' says Hugh Pringle.

With over 90 per cent of native vegetation cleared for agriculture to the south of the reserve, these eucalypt woodlands are one of the largest remnant areas of semi-arid woodland left anywhere in Western Australia, and many plants and animals rely on them for survival.

Working in partnership with researchers, volunteers and university students, this project will provide vital data on how plant and animal species respond in areas affected by rapid changes in climate. In the longer term, the findings will be shared with the wider scientific community and will help inform conservation planning strategies across the region if not beyond.



Left to right: Bat fauna are one of the indicator species being used in the climate change monitoring. Kurt Tschirner, Reserve Manager, and David Ball, Conservation Council of Western Australia volunteer meteorologist, with the climate change observatory. David Ball collecting data from the observatory. PHOTOS: KURT AND ANDREA TSCHIRNER



Conservation partnerships – the lowdown

Why is working with partners important for Bush Heritage, and what are the benefits? **Stuart Cowell**, Strategy, Policy and Evaluation Manager, explains.

Bush Heritage has traditionally been known as an organisation that 'buys back the bush' – or, to put it another way, we purchase land of high conservation value in order to manage the land for conservation, and to protect these values in the long term.

This is a good idea, and it has worked successfully to help us own and manage nearly 1 million hectares of land for conservation outcomes. But, for a couple of important reasons, it is not sufficient for us to rely on purchase alone – we have to use some different tools from the tool kit.

First, between them, farmers, pastoralists and Indigenous communities manage nearly 80 per cent of the continent, making them, and the land they manage, crucial to Australia's environmental future. Some of this land is available for purchase, but much is not. Importantly, some of the most critical areas remaining for conservation action are in those areas where purchase is not possible.

Second, the long-term threats to Australia's biodiversity require sustained and coordinated action at a scale

that matches the scale of the threat – typically across properties, catchments and regions. For example, at many reserves we need to manage threats with adjacent property owners because the threats also impact on them. So, even where a property is owned for conservation, the sustainability of its values can be dependent on what happens next door or up the river.

For these reasons, active partnerships that produce real conservation benefits are essential. Throughout the private land-holding conservation movement, most organisations recognise and act on this need.

A partnership approach has been pursued within Bush Heritage for many years to achieve conservation through working with others and to support our on-reserve activities. A number of partnerships have been established and maintained that will provide real and secure conservation into the future. Our work with many partners in projects such as Gondwana Link, the Tasmanian Midlands, Kosciuszko to Coast and Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country, to name a few that have featured in recent issues of *Bush Heritage News*, demonstrates the success that can be achieved.

Bush Heritage assesses potential partnership opportunities with the same rigour we do our property purchases, evaluating conservation gains to be made, financial sustainability, our capacity, and that of our partner, to manage any threats, and the sustainability of the relationship. As with our reserves, partnerships are secured through a variety of means, including formal agreements and covenant mechanisms.

A partnership approach brings many important benefits, for example: sharing scarce management resources to provide an overall level of commitment that would otherwise need to be found by each individual; sharing land management knowledge; sharing effort and responsibility; extending conservation action into areas where ownership cannot change; and creating community ownership of conservation values.

Creating Bush Heritage reserves through purchase is one way that we can use our resources – people, enthusiasm and expertise – to substantially contribute to meeting the challenges facing biodiversity in Australia. However, Australia's biodiversity conservation needs will only fully be met when those resources also actively support partnerships for conservation management. We hope that the work begun in this area by Bush Heritage will continue to grow, and the organisation's growth and success will be shared in the future by our partners.

With your ongoing support we can build these partnerships to create a lasting legacy for future generations. Through partnership – whether with pastoralists or traditional owners or with you, our supporters – we can achieve lasting conservation outcomes.



Clockwise from top: Uunguu Rangers at Garimbemirri Ranger Camp. PHOTO: HEATHER MOORCROFT Lochiel Wetland, part of the Tasmanian Midlands landscape project. PHOTO: DANIEL SPROD The launch of Scottsdale Reserve in NSW, 2007, part of the Kosciuszko to Coast partnership. PHOTO: TIM BOND AND PETER TAYLOR Looking over the Gondwana Link landscape. PHOTO: KEITH TUFFLEY

A fruitful partnership – Bush Heritage and Allens Arthur Robinson



Pictured left to right are David Robb, Phillip Toyne, Michael Rose and Doug Humann.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALLENS ARTHUR ROBINSON

Allens Arthur Robinson, our longest-standing corporate partner, advises Bush Heritage on legal issues on a pro bono basis. In 2008 alone, Allens Arthur Robinson provided pro bono legal support with a dollar value of \$299 000. In a relationship that has spanned some 14 years, Allens Arthur Robinson has assisted Bush Heritage with many legal matters. They have advised us on the acquisition of over 660 000 hectares of land, as well as offering advice on organisational structure and corporate governance and on contractual arrangements, for example in relation to fire management plans on our reserves.

Allens regularly hosts functions on Bush Heritage's behalf and provides meeting rooms and support for Bush Heritage staff at their offices throughout Australia. Many Allens staff also support Bush Heritage through their payroll-giving program. This range of support is invaluable.

To commemorate this special relationship, Bush Heritage CEO Doug Humann and President of the Board Phillip Toyne recently presented Allens Arthur Robinson's Michael Rose (Chief Executive Partner) and David Robb (Partner) with a photograph of Yourka Reserve in Queensland.

In celebration

Michael Jefferies donated in celebration of the birthday of **Nicholas Jefferies**, and Ruth McKenzie honoured the birth of **Lucy Gowers** with a gift to Bush Heritage. Peter Robertson donated in honour of **Mr and Mrs Geoff Heard**. Family and friends donated in celebration of **Duncan Cumming's** 83rd birthday, and Marc Sealey commemorated **Ron and Jo Payne's** kindness and generosity with a gift to Bush Heritage. Family and friends donated in celebration of the weddings of **Anna Richards and Mark Lackenby**, **Eric and Melissa Keidge** and **Susy Macqueen and Rohan Chandran**.

In memory

Family and friends donated in memory of **John Riddell**, dear late husband of Diana, and Bruce and Sandra Meldrum gave in memory of two dear friends, **Linda McIntosh** and **Peter Hartley**. Family and friends donated in loving memory of **Bill Hotchkiss**. Colin Jones made a gift in memory of **Jane Coveney**, Sue Carolane made a gift in memory of **Ron Morton**, and Susan Williams donated in memory of **Rob Lewis**. The memory of **Marjorie (Maggie) Toole** was honoured with donations from family and friends, and Roslyn Brooks donated in memory of **Wendy Skinner**.

If you would like to make a gift to Bush Heritage in memory of a friend or to celebrate a special occasion, visit www.bushheritage.org.au or call 1300 628 873.



Left to right: Eastern grey kangaroo, Yourka Reserve, Qld. Stony-creek frog, Yourka Reserve, Qld. Bustards in native grasslands, Edgbaston Reserve, Qld. PHOTOS: WAYNE LAWLER/ECOPIX

From the CEO

Our plan at Bush Heritage for the next 12–18 months is to ensure the conservation programs on our 31 existing reserves are successfully maintained, and to continue to develop our conservation partnerships. I have visited reserves and partners in every state in the last few months and it has been a thrill to see the level of activity from staff, supporters, partners and volunteers, all contributing to our conservation outcomes.

A recent highlight has been the seven-day 'species discovery blitz' held at Charles Darwin Reserve, WA, in May. Earthwatch Australia and BHP Billiton Iron Ore established a partnership which, with the support of the Federal Government through the Australian Biological Resources Study, enabled scientists from a range of institutions to scour the reserve to identify both rare and new species. Although Bush Heritage routinely conducts such 'blitzes' on new reserves, this trial enabled a more detailed survey than has previously been possible on any reserve. We acknowledge and thank each of these partners and especially the volunteers from BHP who participated. With 37 people present, never have so many people been on one reserve at one time in the name of a dedicated science program.

On the theme of partnerships, this newsletter reports on one particularly significant Indigenous partnership in the Kimberley. Bush Heritage believes that we can and should work closely with Indigenous people throughout Australia. We have important partnerships on and near reserves as well as in our five 'anchor' regions. In addition we have been invited by traditional owners to participate in a number of other places including the Kimberley. We join these activities where we can helpfully contribute and where our conservation objectives

will be met. These partnerships will contribute very significantly to our 2025 objective to protect 1 per cent of Australia.

Finally I am pleased to report that our Board is at full strength following two recent appointments. Louise Sylvan is a long-standing supporter of Bush Heritage, having donated two properties over the last 10 years, Burrin Burrin and 'Nameless'. Louise is currently a Commissioner with the Productivity Commission, is the former chief executive of the Australian Consumers Association and is a former deputy chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

Leanne Liddle is an Arrernte woman from Alice Springs. Leanne sits on the Arid Lands NRM Board, the NRM Aboriginal State Wide Advisory Committee and the NRM Volunteers Committee. She is currently the Parks and Wildlife Aboriginal Programs Coordinator for the Department for Environment and Heritage South Australia.

Further information on our new board members, our anchor regions, and reports on the findings from the blitz at Charles Darwin Reserve can be found on our website, www.bushheritage.org.au



Doug Humann

Billboards help spread the word

As part of an ongoing strategy to raise awareness of Bush Heritage Australia and the work we do to protect the land and its wildlife, we have taken our advertising to new heights over the last year. With a mix of different-sized billboards across strategic locations in Sydney and Melbourne as part of our integrated marketing strategy, we have been able to communicate our message to the wider community.

Special thanks are due to Melbourne-based company Independent Outdoor Media (IOM) who has generously helped us to secure prime advertising sites at much reduced rates. Supporters living in the Melbourne area may have noticed a bright-eyed mulgara or a western pygmy possum looking out from one of approximately 20 sites across the metropolitan area.

Thanks to IOM we have seen an increase in enquiries from prospective donors as well as a higher number of donations received. This is good news for Bush Heritage and good news for wildlife. The more we can increase our level of community support, the more we can do to restore land and protect our native species.

We would also like to thank Clemenger BBDO, who provided creative services pro bono for our new billboard campaign.



The IOM billboard for Bush Heritage in Melbourne. PHOTO: COURTESY OF IOM



Rediscovering Bon Bon's past

Earlier this year, Dr Keryn Walshe of the South Australian Museum and two of her staff visited Bush Heritage's Bon Bon Reserve in South Australia to carry out a cultural heritage survey.

The museum team turned up various fascinating items, including children's toys made from discarded items such as tin cans and wire. Another of the exciting discoveries was a cardboard box containing rolls of documents and letters tied with twine. This box, far from being junk, turned out to be part of the Bon Bon Station archives, providing a

fascinating insight into station life during the mid-twentieth century.

Requests for provision of goods, receipts for delivery, accounts, descriptions of well construction and maintenance and of rainfall and stock provide valuable information about the social and economic life of a pastoral station in the 1950s and 1960s. You can read Richard MacNeill's story about what the South Australian Museum team discovered at Bon Bon on our website. Go to 'Current newsletter' at www.bushheritage.org.au

Floods bring both good and bad news

Recent flooding at Yourka, Cravens Peak and Ethabuka reserves in Queensland has brought varied results. As Charlotte Francis explains, while the roads and access tracks at Yourka have been badly damaged, the story at

Cravens Peak and Ethabuka is one of abundant life after the rains. For more on the floods at Yourka, Cravens Peak and Ethabuka, go to 'Current newsletter' at www.bushheritage.org.au



A partnership with Gondwana Outdoor Clothing

A new initiative from one of our corporate partners, Gondwana Outdoor Clothing, will donate to Bush Heritage a percentage of profits from a new recycled fleece range.

'Gondwana is proud to announce that \$1.50 from the sale of each recycled fleece will be donated to Bush Heritage Australia, to help them continue with their important work. Gondwana is committed to the long-term and ongoing support of Bush Heritage', says Stephen Nowak of Gondwana Outdoor Clothing.

Gondwana's range of recycled fleece jackets and pullovers was launched in February this year. The fleeces are made from 30 per cent recycled product, mainly plastic consumer waste, that otherwise would have ended up in landfill. The campaign will run until July 2009.

A fully Australian-owned company, Gondwana is committed to eco-friendly and sustainable fabric manufacturing. Gondwana has supported Bush Heritage in the past by promoting our work in their catalogues, swing tags and e-newsletters.

Special offer for Bush Heritage supporters

Gondwana is offering a 10 per cent discount on the recycled fleece range to Bush Heritage donors. This offer is exclusively available online. To receive the discount, enter the promo code 'Bush Heritage' when ordering from the Gondwana website, www.gondwanaoutdoor.com.au.

For more information about the recycled fleece range and our partnership with Gondwana, go to www.bushheritage.org.au/gondwana_clothing.



Clockwise from top: Bon Bon Reserve archives found on the former station. Sorting through the fascinating items collected at Bon Bon Reserve, SA. PHOTOS: KERYN WALSH. Cravens Peak Reserve, Qld, in flood. PHOTO: MARK AND NELLA LITHGOW. Flooded road at Yourka Reserve, Qld. PHOTO: LEANNE HALES

