

CLOSERange



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Red Steers & Green Bogeymen

Humans brought chronic fire, inextinguishable fire; they were a uniquely a fire creature for whom fire was a universal tool. They all - Aborigines, Europeans, Australians - applied it universally in every conceivable landscape and for every conceivable purpose.....Australia's natural history moved irreversibly towards fire proness. Bushfire became inexpungable, compelling, pervasive.

*STEPHEN J. PYNE
Burning Bush*

**SPECIAL
CONGRESS
EDITION**

**Read all
about it on
pages 4 to 10**

*Did you buy a
piece of jigsaw?
The jigsaw
raised \$6000
and sponsored
two rangers
from Myanmar.*

I often return to the puzzle of how Aboriginal people managed the whole question of fire, armed only with the resource of a burning stick and the collective observations of 60,000 years. How were major fire catastrophes averted under Aboriginal management - or did they still happen? What was too little fire, what was too much? Did the mind shape the fire or did the fire shape the mind holding the firestick?

This year we experienced one of those pulses of El Nino muscle. Its features are something that we are becoming familiar with - the prolonged dry spell punctuated by extremely hot days with wild winds full of menace tearing at the fabric of the world. An essential nature of this country is revealed in these awesome moments of primal power, climaxes that are known as Victoria's 'Great Fires'. Black Thursday 1851. Red Tuesday 1898. Black Friday 1939. Ash Wednesday 1983. Great only in that it describes their awesome power to destroy.

Facing realities of our fragile tenure in this land, we may need to return to the basic elements themselves for a greater understanding. Rediscover the values of water, earth, air and fire. Explore the essential nature of all our land and resource use. The topical quest is to understand how we can run with the wild beast that is fire. It is a test of the flexibility of our management, to be able to merge the rhythms of fire with our social philosophy, budget and biological wisdom. It is a challenge to recognise fire's valid existence, accept the partnership with fire and converge with its power to shape the ecosystems and our life.

Our ability to respond to these problems challenges the very tribal nature of our society. During the recent fire crisis, many groups lacked grace under fire and used the opportunity to advance political agendas, often revealing a green boogeyman under the bed. Finger pointing and the politics of blame will reduce our ability to resolve our management issues.



The question of whether enough 'burning-off', was carried out prior to summer was often raised in public discussion. Without considerable increase in resources more fuel reduction burns cannot happen. With our knowledge of the pattern of drought and El Nino, it seems logical that if sufficient resources are created, then once an El Nino is declared and a dangerous year looms, that we re-direct more resources to burning off during the whole year prior to summer. Learning to recognise this pattern in nature, and being resolved to deal with it efficiently, we could achieve greater levels of fuel reduction burning - as much as ecological restraints permit. A new flexibility would need to be built into our bureaucracies and operational processes to take advantage of any day in a threatening year, when fire can be used to reduce fuel in an ecologically sustainable way. There are days right throughout the year when this can happen due to the El Nino dry winter rainfall and frosty conditions. Understanding the essentials of fire ecology and biological management would also need to accelerate.

This fire regime will not happen every year; just on those years that threaten catastrophes. We must accept that it will take time to predict and be able to mobilise our resources to capture these conditions. Climatic shifts may have already created a different beast. Private property owners and the Country Fire Authority need to join in a partnership of proactive and responsible fuel reduction on private land. We need not be fearful of our failure to manage fire, but fearful of the politics of blame and not learning when the opportunity presents itself to improve the system. This year presents a wonderful opportunity to advance our understanding of fire and to delve deeper into one of the major mysteries of the nature of Australia.

Blue Tongue

A Few Words From the President

In this, the last CloseRange prior to the AGM, I'd like to take the opportunity (as is customary at this time) to reflect on the past twelve months and to look to the future.

Wow! What an amazing year the VRA has had!

Since last year's AGM, the VRA has met on three occasions and produced three editions of CloseRange. For the first time that I can remember, the general meeting and CloseRange for February did not go ahead due to the worst fires in Victoria's recent history. At the annual social weekend at Dunkeld, held in early November 2002, VRA members, and their families, from as far apart as Bairnsdale and Yaapeet, gathered to meet and enjoy each other's company and the wonderful environment of the Grampians. An association fact sheet, as well as a first draft powerpoint presentation, have also been produced. Both of these will assist us in our efforts to promote the VRA and attract new members.

We continued to provide comments and feedback to Parks Victoria on a number of issues affecting field staff and how we do our job. In particular, we prepared a discussion paper on the placement of the 50 new rangers promised by the Labor government and a proposal for a workshop to discuss the philosophy of organisational structures (as a precursor to a discussion



of the 'super Ranger-in-Charge' issue). Both of these were presented to Mark Stone in December.

Unfortunately, due to the fires and the Congress, we have been unable to follow-up on both of these to date. Meetings with both Mark Stone and Michonne van Rees (in her role as General Manager of the statewide Regional Management Team) have been scheduled for May 20th, so stay tuned.

And, last, but by no means least, we organised and hosted the very successful International Ranger Federation 4th World Congress! For one week in March, over 200 people from 36 countries participated in over 70 workshops, took part in numerous field trips, talked, networked, sang, danced, drank and renewed their motivation and enthusiasm for the mission of protecting the world's special places.

During the week 65 VRA members contributed approximately 2000 hours to the running of the Congress. During this time, over 500 tasks were accomplished, including picking up, billeting and mentoring delegates, setting up the marquees and preparing the site, washing dishes and serving beers, writing newsletters, taking photos, guiding walks, answering questions and running errands. Even the Prom weather played its part! A big thank-you to all involved!



Rick Smith, the outgoing IRF President, has asked me to “express [his] sincere thanks ... to the many ... people who worked so hard to make the 4th World Congress the resounding success it was. ... My congratulations to ... your team. You were all

outstanding!” And Dave Zeller (South Africa), the new President, was also enthusiastic in his comments saying “what a great congress and a great success”. We have also received feedback from many of the delegates. Two of the best comments that I have seen are “... the overall experience was sensational. A great interaction of people, cultures and areas” and “a conference far above and beyond any I have ever attended”.

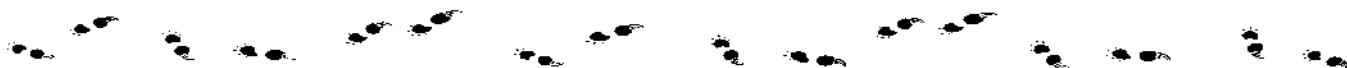
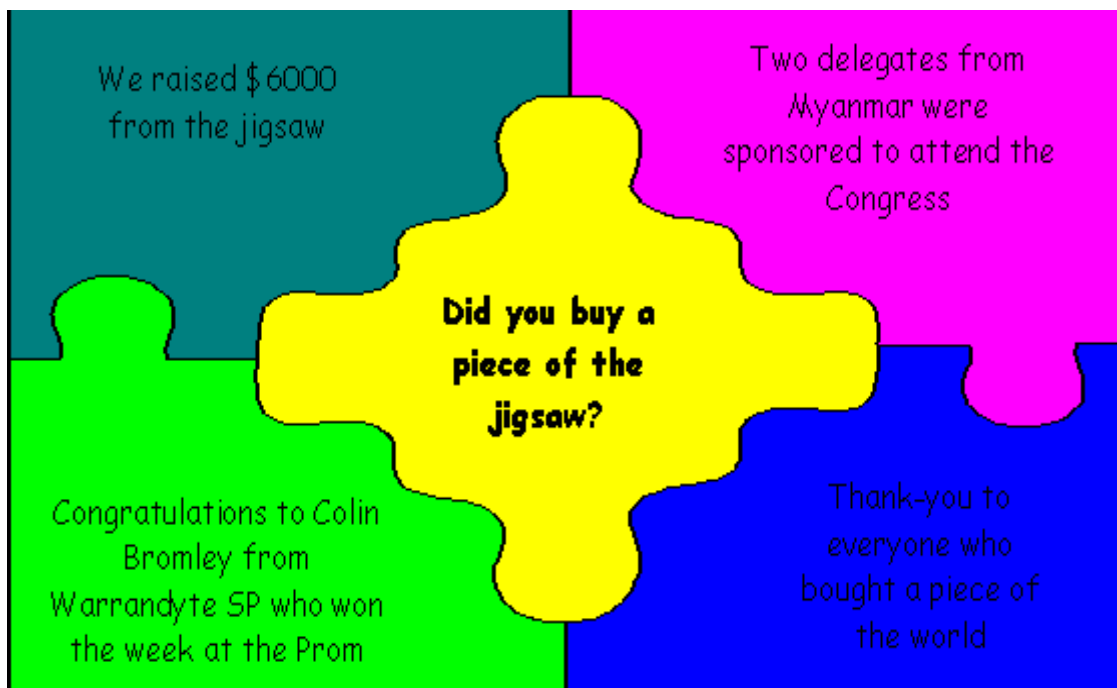
And finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the VRA Executive, John Kneebone, Iain Marshall, Maurice Hawkins, Annie Leschen, Glen Jameson and Cath Kent and all the Regional Reps for their support and efforts over the past twelve months.

So, what’s next?!

As a result of the Congress, the VRA has gained a momentum that must not be lost. There is a lot we can do, but we also need to be aware that a limited number of members cannot continue to carry all the responsibility and workload. Therefore I believe that the next twelve months must be spent on deciding where we want to be in 10 years time and how we will get there. At the AGM, I will be putting a proposal to VRA members that we prepare a strategic plan to give us a vision for the future and a road map for how to get there. We should all have a say in deciding what the organisation will look like and I will be looking forward to the participation of as many of us as possible in putting the VRA in a position to meet the challenges ahead.

Thanks to everyone for a great year. We all have a lot to look forward to.

Elaine Thomas



The Delegates View - 4th World IRF Congress, Wilsons Promontory

Firstly our sincere thanks must go to Parks Victoria for providing us with the means and opportunity to attend the congress and also to the VRA committee members for such an outstanding effort to organise and run this event. Further to this, the superlative achievements by all the VRA members (and their families!) that volunteered throughout the congress – well done to you all. Also our thanks must go to the ARF and IRF for their continued support, comradeship and leadership.

Where to start? Well, I suppose the beginning is as good a place as any. The first day saw the 'Carlton Crest Motel' buzzing with many new and some old familiar faces. Rangers from around Australia and the world were converging on Melbourne in great anticipation of the coming events...we would not be disappointed. The first night was to set the pace for the rest of the week, with fantastic and stimulating speakers, like Chris Artiemiew (ARF President), Rick Smith (IRF President) and John Landy (Governor of Victoria) and key note speaker Bob Brown. There was also the 'Welcome to Country' from an elder of the Wurundjeri people. Then onto more serious matters with a social event on the Yarra, hosted by the Melbourne City Council. After riding the tram down to the Yarra, (all 300 of us!) we had the opportunity to meet and talk with Rangers from many different countries and of course discuss the qualities of Australian beer and the odd Red!! All in all, it was a great start to what was to become a fantastic congress.

Next day we bussed it down to Wilsons Promontory passing through some beautiful countryside and coastline. However upon arrival to "The Prom", all that had gone before paled into insignificance...what a spectacular piece of paradise. Words cannot really do this 'True Icon' National Park justice, it is simply a majestically beautiful place, very fitting as a venue for the congress. I feel sure our international visitors would have been absolutely awe-struck with its natural splendour.

The next week was a blur of keynote speakers, like Trish Caswell, Simon Cubit and Tim Allen presenting a range of thought provoking lectures. Following these were a daily program of sessions and discussions about a diverse range of stimulating topics. The hardest thing was we had to choose which one to attend, when

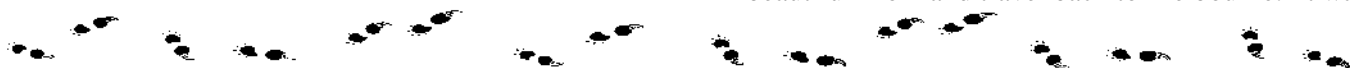
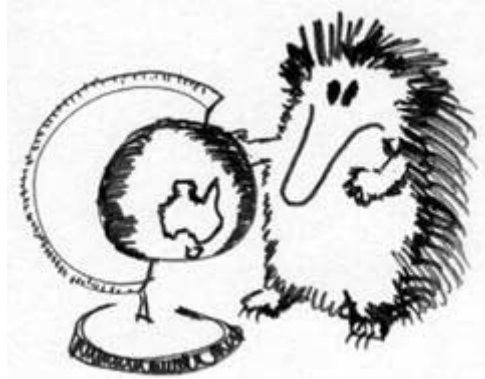
we wanted to go to them all. Life is full of tough decisions! The broad topics included – "Building Community Support", "Managing the Masses" and "Healthy Habitats". Related to these topics, delegates from the 'four corners of the earth' presented a more specific array of 20 sessions over three days, including

– "Strategies to build Community Support", "Managing Across Boundaries", "Cultural Site Management", "Signs", "To Be or Not To Be Sustainable", "Protecting The Protector", "Ecological Use of Fire" and "Healthy Habitats Around the World" Of course we all had our opportunity to present a topic of our own choosing and receive feedback from our global audience...without even leaving the country! It was great having that opportunity to discuss a broad range of issues that everyone there seemed to

all have in common...I wonder why that was? Also, a variety of field trips were on offer...to explore the park, the surrounding coast or even a historic coal mine. Now if that was not enough to keep us all busy, further to these well-coordinated events, there were the other side offerings. From a daily raffle and newsletter ("The Promulgate") to live music and a Karaoke night...it was all there. Apart from that there was the several hundred or so conversations that were going on in between times, at meals or over a cleansing ale or two at the end of the long, but pleasant days.

Speaking of the meals, they were superb...no weight loss happening that week!! Thanks once again to the continual efforts of all the fantastic volunteers...those bright green 'T'-shirts and surgical caps were constantly buzzing around doing a range of duties. All very much appreciated by every delegate, I feel sure. However we cannot let this opportunity go by without also showing our appreciation for those willing souls behind the bar...the busiest place in The Prom, after dark. Excellent work to keep up with all those thirsty Rangers!! So, well done to 'Mr. Bones' and his team. Finally the opportunity to trade all manner of Ranger or Parks memorabilia became the 'congress currency'...metal badges, cloth badges, fridge magnets, caps, even the shirt off your back...it was all legal tender!! The lengths that some will go to get a trade....?

The final day was one of great sadness, where we had to say farewell to our new found friends and the beautiful Prom and travel back to Melbourne. It was a



fantastic and memorable week, a life-changing event for some and an opportunity we are all so grateful that we had.

The following are just a few of the comments that the VRA delegates expressed about the congress, they certainly reflect many of my feelings and I believe all those who attended ...

Peter Duncan – Ranger, Alpine National Park, Heyfield

- *“The experience of being part of an international family of rangers with so many common goals, problems, challenges and passions. I often struggle to overcome feelings of isolation and powerlessness in my own patch, but the Congress made me realise that we are many isolated and powerless individuals all over the world all working hard at making a difference.*
- *Hearing outstanding examples of individual efforts in congress sessions and in outside conversations and realising that I am only hearing a small percentage of delegates’ stories. It didn’t matter whether they were German, Latin American, New Zealand, North American or Chinese; how good their grasp of English was; or how different the experiences were – everybody seemed to have a fascinating story to tell that gave an insight about my own protected area.*
- *Absolute pride in the manner that the VRA organisers and volunteers put the Congress together, and that I work for an organisation like Parks Victoria that can look beyond its individual charter to support such an event.”*

Cassie Wright – Ranger, Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne.

- *“The congress was an amazing experience...in a time of unpleasantness generally (war had just started), spending a week in a beautiful place, with 300 plus wonderful people who all cared about conservation, was fantastic. Everyone was so friendly, and there was a wonderful sense of camaraderie throughout the week.*
- *The social activities were fantastic, and provided a chance to get to know people in an informal way. They were also supremely entertaining, with the international karaoke and the cultural night providing opportunities for all of us to embarrass ourselves in one way or the other ...and the surfing was fantastic.*
- *The presentations were interesting. One of my favourites was given by Bernard Iyomi Iyatshi from the Democratic Republic of Congo, which he gave in French and was translated by Michael Howes (a volunteer). Essentially, it was about how traditional myths and legends help protect the Bonobos (Pygmy Chimpanzees). There was also a great session about working with traditional land owners (Protected area management and indigenous communities), with a couple of examples of where that’s starting to happen.*
- *I guess overall what I took from the congress was a wonderful feeling of unity with our colleagues from around the world – a realisation that although we work in different areas with different flora and fauna etc, we essentially all do the same thing. And that we all deal with similar problems. Nationality wasn’t important, what was important was that we were all rangers!*
- *The only disappointing bit is that it’ll be 3years until the next one!*



Delegates enjoying some Aussie-style refreshments - Jo Ceinaturaga, Fiji; Godfrid Solmu, PNG; Philip Ainie, PNG; Corina James, Australia



John Amor – Ranger for 20 years, now Coast Action/Coastcare Facilitator, Warrnambool

“Over 300 people from 35 countries and that was just the ones I had conversations with!

What an amazing experience. Two months after the event and I find myself constantly flashing back to a conversation or an image of the 4th World Ranger Congress.

Some personal highlights:

- *Being confronted with knowledge of the scope of problems that beset the natural world.*
- *Meeting many of the people that daily tackle these problems. The number of field Rangers present was a pleasant surprise.*
- *Living as a United Nations for 7 days and nights (we needed the French however!)*
- *Seeing Bob Brown speak (again)*
- *Seeing, hearing and feeling the honesty and passion of the traditional owners.*
- *Sharing a cabin with some fellas from Kakadu, a Canadian, a Swede, a Korean, a Dutchman and a Russian.*
- *Walking to breakfast with the fellas from Kakadu. They'd head to the shop for a pie instead, telling me that they don't have shops where they live.*
- *Having breakfast with a Dane who unsuccessfully attempted to convince me that disembowelling native wildlife with primary students was an interpretation tool, which should be utilised in Australia.*
- *Watching and listening in to total awe to presentations on pandas, vultures, pygmy chimpanzees and other fascinating subjects.*
- *The social evenings. I still don't believe some of the things seen and heard on those nights.*
- *Watching people, who in some cases had never swam in the sea, learning to surf.*
- *The Prom.*
- *Hanging out with Rangers again.”*

Frankie (David) Farrar – Ranger, Warrandyte State Park.

“How to see through binoculars”

“I was excited and humbled to be chosen as a delegate for the IRF 4th World Congress. At the Carlton Crest I met many Rangers from around the world, from the 43 countries represented and to see the differences in their uniforms was interesting. It was easy to meet and smile with a new ranger mate from another part of this great world we live on. Even the outbreak of war during the week, wasn't going to dampen proceedings; it's still a good time to be alive...”

I greeted Nelson Nunes Pereira from the Instituto da Conservacao da Natureza – Portugal. Nelson is from a country I have heard about but not visited yet! We met, shook hands and smiled and then tried with a few hand signals to communicate. I spoke slower and we seemed to make headway in discussion.

From the Carlton Crest we viewed Albert Park, the traffic that afternoon was invisible to our focus on natural things that were obvious to us as rangers. Nelson with a small pair of binoculars asked the names of the birds flying in the distance. I told him. The birds were Sacred Ibis, Ravens and a couple of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. I said “you will enjoy Wilsons Prom National Park for its birds”. I think that the new friendship I made with Nelson that afternoon and the connectivity between other fellow Rangers during the start and at the end of the congress, was a natural and passionate liaison for what Rangers love to do. “We are all passionate about nature and protected area management!”

The presentations were fantastic. One I especially liked was a presentation on Traditional laws as a management tool for conservation of Pygmy Chimpanzees “BONOBO” in the Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo by Bernard Iyomi Iyatshi. In short, your eyes were opened to other protected area management issues around the world. I felt at the time naive to other world problems. As Cassie said earlier Bernard spoke in French and Mike Howes (a Volunteer) translated in English, thus adding an interesting element to the congress.

Finally, because of the IRF-Congress, I have been inspired in a small way, to help other Rangers from lower socio-economic growth countries. During an IRF- meeting at the Congress Declan Keiley who is an IRF-Consultant from the UK explained how he helps with training and equipment for countries that are just starting to establish Rangers to manage their protected areas. He said that equipment like spare boots, binoculars and other good equipment could be utilised by these Rangers who are learning how to protect areas of biodiversity importance.

It was a spontaneous gesture to hand Declan my second pair of 10x40 binoculars after the meeting. Binoculars can help you see and understand more in your park and from this your knowledge grows and helps you appreciate, protect and preserve your park.

So, if you have a ‘spare pair of binoculars’ that you would like to donate, contact the VRA or me,...I feel sure that our not so well off Rangers from around the world would appreciate your generosity.”



Tracy Stolman – Project Officer, Central Region, Regional Environment Team.

“A week at the prom with hundreds of people who share the same ideas and enthusiasm, where do you begin. The prom is inspiring enough alone, but to share it with so many friends...The scene was set and all barriers broken on the first night with Vox Bandicoot leading the way with absolute silliness and absurdity. It takes a talented team to lead hundreds of non-Melbournites, let alone Rangers, on and off trams during Friday evening peak hour...one must agree. Even those who had walked eight days through war and civil unrest marvelled at their achievement.

The first of the keynote speakers Tricia Caswell I enjoyed the most. Highlighting the need to stay focussed and vigilant in contributing to the bigger picture. If small wins with global corporations with opposing ethics can be achieved then why is it not more possible locally and within our own organisations? My guess is that it is. (I am attempting to bury the cynic in me!) Sharing thought that provokes change can be a fundamental instrument and the congress is just one tool for achieving this.

Many things have stuck with me from that week:

- *How proud people were to share their stories whether they be good or bad, a reflection of the unity felt by all delegates.*
- *Many things improve over time – karaoke is not one of them!*
- *The magic of contagious laughter often led by one Austrian not easily forgotten.*
- *The amazing workmanship by Alex on the frame for the ranger dedication plaque that now rests at the Tidal River Overlook – where did he find the time!*
- *It has probably already been said, but Bob Brown is such a thought provoking speaker...he exudes much of what we strive for.*
- *The hard work and long hours put in by all the volunteers – you did us all proud.*
- *How badly Rangers can behave – you did us all proud!*

In a climate where it often feels like we are striving for the impossible the congress reinforced (or perhaps reminded) for me that not only do we work in a field that we love and are committed to, we can and do make a difference to the future of our planets natural areas. With inspiring stories of achievement under adverse conditions many of the delegates shared their triumphs and troubles and proved that we as individuals and organisations are not alone – in all corners of the world people are facing adversity in their chosen fields and triumphing over those issues.

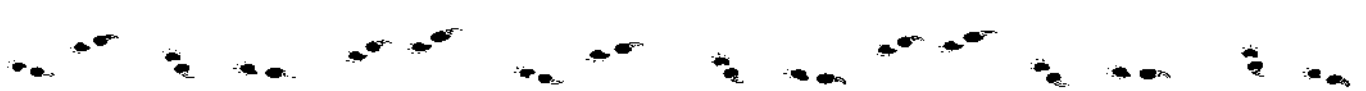
With every achievement in natural area management, comes the passage of time and the commitment and passion from people – not unlike you and I. The congress was about sharing and learning, that learning leads to awareness, awareness creates opportunity, opportunity leads to experience and experience is what is taken to the congress. The cycle continues....Scotland anyone?”

Peter Johnstone – Ranger, Mornington Peninsula National Park, Rosebud.

- *“New Zealander Tim Shaw’s wonderful presentation about pissed (Pest) fish.*
- *Danish Nature Interpreters motivating us to create a school activity based on the disembowelling, dissection and finally cooking a native animal for a classroom meal!*
- *Educative activities should use environmentally sustainable equipment and props.*
- *Sitting down at the meal table with 7 others from any of 30+ countries represented at the congress.*
- *Learning many new anagrams such as IRF, TOPAS, CMA, WCPA, ICUN, RASCAL etc.*
- *The commemorative plaque placed at Tidal River lookout in respect of Rangers worldwide who have died in the line of duty.*
- *Powerpoint presentations on amazing places: Krueger NP, Korea, Poland, Myanmar and Slovenia.*
- *Parks Victoria Rangers are not alone with issues such as politics, working conditions, senior management liaison, regulations verses environmental ethics etc.”*

So as you can clearly see, the congress was a sensational experience and all the delegates had a wonderful and richly rewarding time, to say the very least and we are now all itching to get to the next congress at Loch Lomond, Scotland in 2006. The Scots were offering samples of ‘Single-Malt’ at The Prom as ‘a taste of things to come’, so there is nothing left to be said but...’Become actively involved with VRA and Start Saving Now’...it will surely be an event not to be missed!!

Kym Schramm – Ranger In Charge, Wyperfeld NP and VRA Delegate, West Region



Dishwashers, drivers and dogsbodies

During the Congress, 65 people contributed as volunteers, assisting in 500 tasks for a total of approximately 2000 volunteer hours – a truly great job. Tasks were as varied as picking up, billeting and mentoring delegates, setting up the marquees and preparing the site, washing dishes and serving beers, writing newsletters, taking photos, guiding walks, answering questions and running errands. This tally does not include the billeting of delegates prior to or following the Congress or the various committee members when they were undertaking their own roles.

The feedback I received was that the delegates were very impressed with the efforts of the volunteers. The introduction of mentors was seen as an extremely positive initiative and will probably become a part of future congresses. The social activities were as well received as the formal component of the Congress and I believe the bar made a small profit! The Organising Committee has also indicated that they were very pleased with the efforts of all volunteers before, during and after the Prom week.

Elaine Thomas received an email from Rick Smith that reads in part:

'I want to express my sincere personal thanks to both of you (Elaine and Andy Nixon) and to the many Parks Victoria people who worked so hard to make the 4th World Congress the resounding success it was. I know from previous experience what a major job it is to organise and manage a congress. That you did it with unfailing good cheer and good humour says a lot for your ability to withstand the "crisis a minute" atmosphere that always seems to surround a congress. My congratulations to you and your team. You were all outstanding. Please pass on my thanks to all.'



Jo Hopkins

Those volunteers who were not able to attend the closing ceremony missed a very significant gesture. The IRFC offered two positions at the next Congress to volunteers who contributed to this Congress. A list of all volunteers who were involved in the Congress was provided, either at Wilsons Promontory or elsewhere, for inclusion in a raffle. The names drawn from a hat during the closing ceremony were Corina James and Anne Casey. Congratulations to Corina and Anne who will be flying to Scotland in three years time.

I would like to add the thanks of the Volunteer sub-group for the job done by all volunteers. Your patience in accepting numerous roster changes, last minute requests and your willingness to undertake a variety of tasks, some interesting and some menial, was much appreciated by the sub-group. The great success of the Congress was due in large part, to your enthusiasm and smiling faces.

Don Tunney and the Volunteer Sub Committee - Peter Hayes, Joe Stephens, Ion Maher, Tony Fitzgerald



From Poland to Palau

Those of you who were lucky enough to go to the congress would have been amazed at the number of delegates and the number of countries they hailed from.

What most of you probably don't know is the number of those delegates who were sponsored in some way or another.

One of the obligations of hosting the IRF congress is to attract and sponsor delegates from within the region of the host country, which in our case is the Asia-Pacific region. This was a pretty big task, given that there had only ever been 1 or 2 rangers from this area (other than Australians of course) attend previous congresses. So, we were basically starting from scratch.

We had to: identify countries, find out if these countries had National Parks or protected areas, determine who administered the parks, and, how we could contact the rangers. We pulled in any contacts we had, searched the internet, went to other organisations who worked in this region, in fact, asked anyone we could think of who might know how to get in contact with rangers in the field. At one point I was emailing a Vietnamese nurse in Australia to try and get contacts for rangers in Vietnam. (Ironically we had \$10,000 from the Australia-Vietnamese Association and no Vietnamese rangers to sponsor).

At the same time we were also searching for the dollars to sponsor all the rangers we hoped would respond. Again a lot of work was done through personal contacts, searching the internet, sending letters and filling out numerous application forms. John Senior became very good at adapting the congress aims and objectives to fit in with those of the potential sponsor.

There were a number of obstacles to get past before getting the delegates here. We had problems with Visa's, very last minute flight changes, late night phone calls to delegates on the other side of the world, emails in foreign languages and civil war. Unfortunately one of our sponsored delegates didn't get here, not due to the civil war in his country, but due to the Australian Embassy in Nairobi sending his Visa to the Congo instead of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The result of nearly 2 years of work (most of which fell together in the last 2 months) was that we sponsored 28 delegates from 16 countries. These included: Fiji, Myanmar, Palau, India, China, Malaysia, South Africa, Argentina, and Korea. Through some last minute UNESCO funding we were also able to sponsor rangers from Slovenia, DR Congo, Uganda, Poland, New Zealand, Australia and Indonesia.

Everyone on the ranger sponsorship committee worked hard to make it all happen. And ASN were wonderful with their help in all the stages of getting sponsored delegates and money, but particularly in the last few weeks when there was a lot of last minute rushing around. Annette was an inspiration in dealing with airlines and embassies (and in return was showered with gifts and invitations to India).

For the future we are planning to maintain links with a number of the countries from which we sponsored delegates. This may be through sponsorship to future congresses, exchanges or skill sharing. It is something the VRA will really need to think about over the next 2 years.

PS. Thank you to everyone who bought a jigsaw piece. We raised \$6000 and sponsored the delegates from Myanmar.

Fiona Smith



John Macombo, Uganda; Bernard Ivomi-Ivatshi, Democratic Republic of Congo; Elaine Thomas; DD Boro, India

The Road to Tidal River – Interview with Andy Nixon, Chair of the 4th IRF Congress Organising Committee

Were there any dark moments on the road to Tidal River when you thought it wasn't going to happen?

I always thought we were going to make it, always positive. There were others, especially on the sponsorship committee who were faced with - "How do we get someone from Mongolia here?" or "How do we get the Iranian Rangers here during the present Middle East crisis?"

When did the idea germinate for the Fourth International Rangers Congress to happen in Australia?

There were a number of Victorian Rangers Association members who were very interested in what was going on in the world today. They were aware of, and some attended, Zetopane and Costa Rica. A year before the Kruegar Congress it was the Australian Ranger Federation president, Kristen Appel who suggested Australia should host one. The Victorian Rangers Association was best placed to place a bid. Gordon Miller, the International Ranger Federation president, came to Australia a year before the Kruegar Congress. We arranged dinner with Gordon, Mark Stone and ourselves to discuss it, and the rest is history.

How crucial was Mark Stone's support to the bid?

It was a key link. Mark went to the 2000 Kruegar Congress and came back saying that it was fantastic seeing all these grass roots people from around the world passionate and enthusiastic with amazing stories about their work and determined to improve environmental conditions. He put his approval on the process for Parks Victoria to work with the V.R.A. to organise it.



The Fourth Congress has been three years in the making, how many hours and days went into organising this event?

The first meeting of the Coordinating Committee was on the 9 February 2001, although a few presentations had been organised prior to this. Altogether there has been around seven hundred plus working days which includes eight people on the main committee, twenty-five on sub-committees plus volunteers.

Did you have any idea on how long it would take? Any Blue Prints?

No! The Costa Rica Congress was run by the American National Parks Association who had twelve full time staff. Kruegar was run by the South African Game Rangers Association with an organising contractor. But essentially we have organised ourselves, in some ways a lot differently to the other Congresses.

Some Rangers like Chris Arthur and Kristen Appel have been to all three Congresses, what will they get out of this Congress that will be different?

There will be an unmistakable Australian flavour. It will be a unique focus on some down to earth Ranger work, looking at the skills we need and how we apply them in the field.

And the sponsorship Committee has had the most difficult job?

Altogether they have raised some \$60,000 plus from a range of sources, which is a particularly good effort for people not skilled in that area.

How many came?

Around one hundred and sixty international Rangers, plus the Australian delegates, the volunteers and thirty partners of overseas visitors. Each day we fed two hundred and sixty people. A few people dropped out due to the current world situation. The Congress costs were the same as Kruegar which had about the same numbers, but airfares are higher to come here.

What was Andy Nixon's favourite bit?

Maybe the opening at the Prom when we raised the flag, or the last night wind-up which was the Bush Dance or perhaps at ten o'clock Friday when everyone gets on the bus for home and there hasn't been any attempts to get refugee status.

Where to now for the IRF and what are you going to do with all your spare time that you will have now?

The next Congress will be on the bonnie banks of Loch Lomand in Scotland in 2006, and I will use my spare time getting back some family time and generally enjoying myself.

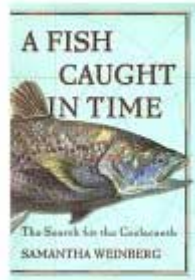


Blue Tongue Reviews

These two works reflect growing public interest and focus upon natural history. The stories produce biological information that is 'digestible' and available in easy to read formats. They are full of biological information and give a framework to the some of the events and thought patterns that have contributed to the development of natural history.

A Fish Caught in Time. The Search for the Coelacanth. Samantha Weinberg. (1999) Fourth Estate. London. 229 pages.

Just before Christmas 1938 a Coelacanth fish was caught off the southern coast of Africa. Luckily for science, the Curator of the East London Museum (South Africa), Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, had contacts amongst the fishermen who kept any unusual fish for her to inspect.



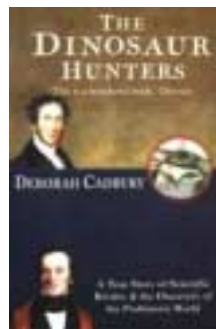
The fish they kept for her this particular time was special. Well known from the fossil records within the palaeontology community, it was thought to have become extinct some 70 million years ago during the last major crash in biodiversity. A relic from the Age of the Dinosaur, the Coelacanth had survived countless ages to become during the 20th century, the worlds most talked about fish. It also became the centre of international disputes, quarry of

scientific hunting expeditions and the claim to fame for all those who sought a piece of the action.

Samantha Weinberg has written a charming account of the discovery and subsequent scientific investigations into this intriguing fish. It is a story has everything; the eccentrically fish-absorbed Professor and his talented assistant / wife, swashbuckling adventurers, dedicated researchers, jealous Governments, international intrigue and public fascination with natural history. It is a story that continues right up to the present day with research into the fish's habitat and behaviour. Despite a lot of angling, the story was the closest I came to catching anything remotely fishy this summer.

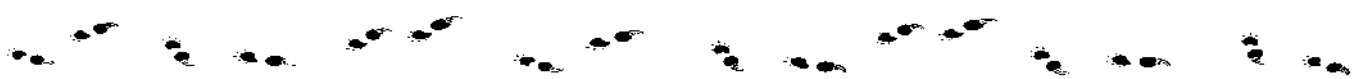
The Dinosaur Hunters. A True Story of Scientific Rivalry & the Discovery of the Prehistoric World. Deborah Cadbury (2000). Fourth Estate. London. 326 pages. \$22.95

It is difficult enough at this present junction in time to fit all the fragments of natural history into a cogent worldview despite the plethora of courses, videos and books available. Imagine then, to be living in the early 19th century, where universities are controlled by religious orders, the bible is the only accepted version of the history of the world, cleric intellectuals agree that God created the world on Sunday 23 October 4,004 BC and you have unearthed a series of fossilised bones of dinosaurs that suggests a radically different view of the world.



Such is the world described by Deborah Cadbury whose meticulous research permeates this work with authority and clarity. Cadbury draws on the rich assortment of characters involved in this chocolate play of immense importance to the development of natural history. It is a portrait full of intrigues, intellectually possessive institutions, competitive rivalry with careers shipwrecked by vindictive personal vendettas revealing a Victorian scientific community just as beset by human failings as is today's.

The hero of the story is the hard working country doctor, Gideon Mantell. The archenemy is the richly honoured, Sir Richard Owen. The plagiarists are well represented as they thief intellectual property. The French nation pursues its passion for natural history and England looks for heroes to match. There are dramatic turns of fortunes as each unearthing of the mysterious bones adds to the puzzle. Some went mad, some were broken in spirit, bone or both, but all relentlessly quested for explanations about the very nature of life. The ramifications of discoveries of what had passed on earth ran wildly into the future. Some scientists kept a foot in both camps and tried to reconcile biblical stories with the rapidly growing, scientific body of data. However the relentless digging into the rock of ages revealed new, present-day truths, each observation building on the last, only waiting for Darwin to timidly reveal his theory of evolution which finally tied the story together.



Membership Application ...

The Victorian Rangers Association is a non-profit professional organisation. Membership and travel costs to meetings and functions are a legitimate tax deduction. Members may attend up to two meetings (including the AGM) in work time.

Name:		Membership Category		
Address:		Full \$30.00 /annual	<input type="checkbox"/>	With VRA Badge
		Associate \$10.00 /annual	<input type="checkbox"/>	No Badge
Postcode:		Badge \$6.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Park Name:				

Contact details		(Please indicate preferred method for future contact by ticking the box alongside)		
Phone (BH):	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please make cheques/money orders payable to "Victorian Rangers Association" Send to: Victorian Rangers Association C/- PO Box 101 Castlemaine Vic. 3450		
(AH):	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Fax:	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Email (home):	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Postal:	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Signature:		Payment: \$ 30.00 \$ 10.00 \$ 6.00 (please circle)		

Executive Committee Contacts – 2002/03

Person	Position	Ph Work	Fax	Location
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John Kneebone	Vice President	5866 9906	5866 2859	Nathalia
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Maurice Hawkins	Treasurer	5472 5272	5472 4237	Castlemaine
Annie Leschen	Membership secretary	5866 9917	5866 2859	Nathalia
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Darrin Lynch	Vic East	5755 1466	5755 1802	Mt Buffalo NP
Gary Summers	Vic West	5237 6889	5237 7495	Apollo Bay; Otway N.P
Peter Hayes	Vic West	5333 6674	5333 6759	Ballarat
Glenn Mawson	Central Region	5962 6228	5962 6252	Maroondah
Fiona Smith	Central Region	9390 1082	9390 1607	Grasslands
David Farrar	Melb Metro	9844 2659	9844 3343	Warrandyte S.P
Anthony Nimbs	Melb Metro	9758 1342	9752 3032	Ferntree Gully
Rhianna Bell	City and Bays	9393 9253	9397 4652	Willimastown
Don Tumney	City and Bays	5986 8987	5981 2823	Rosebud
Paul Slinger	External liaison officer	5957 2807	5957 2870	Healesville Sanctuary



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