

# **BUSHWALKERS WILDERNESS RESCUE SQUAD Inc.**

## ***Keith Maxwell – President BWRS***

Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad (BWRS) was founded as the self-help and self-contained search and rescue section of the NSW Federation of Bushwalking Clubs in 1936 by Paddy Pallin and a number of prominent bushwalkers of the time. The past year has again been a busy but enjoyable year. As usual this report will cover from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014. BWRS is held in high regard with the NSW Police. BWRS is respected as a specialist remote area bush search and rescue squad of the VRA (Volunteer Rescue of NSW Inc.) Our several training events helped ensure and enhance our preparedness for rescue.

**CALLOUTS.** As usual, BWRS had long periods of inactivity but some busy times. The year started with a bang - the large search at Leura for Gary Tweddle. BWRS was present for eight (8) days in various numbers. BWRS members in February 2014 used their vertical rescue skills as part of a rescue for trapped cavers at Bungonia. Then in June BWRS assisted in the rescue of a bushwalking club trip caught overnight enroute to Walls Pass onto Narrow Neck. Later in June BWRS members assisted in a search for a possible suicide victim at Bell. (We had great bushwalks in local creeks)

**NAVSHIELD.** On the first weekend of July each year, BWRS runs NavShield as a major bush navigation training event for the Emergency Services and bushwalking club teams. Typical attendance is around 400+ personnel. Teams participate in either a one day or day event to find as many as possible checkpoints (within the allocated time) previously set by BWRS in a 100 square km area. Additional aims are to provide publicity and showcase the navigation and co-ordination skills of BWRS. NavShield 2013 was blessed with good weather at Dunns Swamp with its fabulous pagoda country. NavShield is a great training event for all concerned.

**TRAILWALKER.** BWRS provides first and second safety response teams over shifts for this event of 500 teams of four persons!! TrailWalker provides excellent member training along with practice in co-ordination of BWRS teams whilst being involved in community outreach with potential publicity for BWRS. TrailWalker is a 100km track / fire road walkathon held around Sydney over 48 hours (on the last weekend of August) as a major fundraiser for the Oxfam charity. The route starts from Brooklyn and winds around Cowan Creek / northern Sydney to eventually finish at George's Heights, Mosman. Once again there few injuries. The atmosphere at TrailWalker, like NavShield, is very friendly.

**VERTICAL RESCUE.** BWRS has a strong group of vertical rescue trained members. Vertical rescue personnel have good personal mobility skills including the ability to change from one rope to another rope / cross knots while either descending (abseiling) or ascending. During November 2013 over two weekends extra BWRS members accredited in a NSW State Rescue Board recognised competency for rigging, lifting and lowering patients in stretchers over cliffs.

**FIRST AID.** Bushwalkers can now become qualified in "Apply First Aid" (formerly known as "Senior First Aid") is just ONE DAY. Theory training is required prior to the one day of practical instruction. BWRS will continue to offer these courses to encourage members of

Bushwalking NSW Clubs to gain some skills in First Aid. We try to make getting First Aid qualified as bushwalker friendly (including a discount fee) and relevant as possible.

There were three Remote Area First Aid (RAFA) (4 day) courses in October, February and May. These RAFA courses are usually well attended due to our excellent Instructor. RAFA is the First Aid qualification for Operational Members of BWRS. The website booking system required for either course has proven to be very effective way to co-ordinate and plan these First Aid courses.

**EQUIPMENT.** Our squad headquarters, opened in 2012, has been a great asset in storing equipment. It has now been possible to replace damaged sponsor logos on our Toyota Land Cruiser and trailer. A replacement RAFA training trailer has been purchased. Our HF and UHF radio networks have been mostly been checked / updated.

**TRAINING.** Our principal training activity was Operation Wittenoom in October 2013 which was a major co-ordinated search over three days to locate a small plane missing in Barrington Tops since 1981. Members of the Toyota Land Cruiser Club transported our strong group of searchers close to their search areas.

Our aim is for BWRS personnel to be respected as the shock troops of bush search and rescue. I would also like bushwalkers to be proud of their BWRS training so that there would be a constant stream of new trainees. Operational members will be disciplined, experienced bushwalkers with additional skills in radio communication, observation, emergency management, First Aid and other bush search and rescue skills.

**PUBLICITY / OUTREACH.** BWRS must constantly work at publicity. The BWRS website gets many 'hits' with its detailed information on bush safety, distress beacons, recent callouts and links to other sites such as the VRA and Bushwalking NSW. BWRS is also active on FaceBook with many followers.

Many activities such as TrailWalker and NavShield also have a publicity component. Senior BWRS personnel regularly answer email requests for advice.

As a safety service BWRS provided safety teams to a number of major rogaine / endurance events during the year such as the Paddy Pallin Rogaine.

**RENEWAL.** At the 2012 BWRS AGM a revised Management Committee was appointed including a new Secretary. At the 2013 BWRS AGM the mix of our ordinary members changed.

**MEMBERSHIP.** I would like bushwalkers to consider joining BWRS. BWRS as part of Bushwalking NSW Inc. provides a valuable community service. Now the Bushwalking NSW motto is "Walk Safely - Walk with a Club" I trust that our clubs are encouraging safe bushwalking through their own internal training methods. BWRS encourages bushwalkers to train in wilderness safety and bush navigation via NavShield and First Aid through the weekend courses. We have tasks big and small to suit all levels of commitment. Be part of a great community asset!

**Please note that our strong bushwalker based bush search and rescue organisation has helped resist public pressure on government for controls on bushwalking!!**

**CONCLUSION.** BWRS with its great people and diverse events is held in high regard by NSW Police involved in bush rescue. In the past year BWRS has been active in a wide range of activities from community outreach to training events. NavShield 2013 was another good event. Our training exercises went from Winburndale to TrailWalker (around Sydney). Our bush search and rescue ability has been enhanced by training in additional skills. A number of BWRS personnel completed vertical (cliff) rescue training to a standard recognised by the State Rescue Board. There were successful Provide First Aid & Remote Area First Aid courses. The training program comprising internal and externally offered modules remains strong. Our training modules aim to meet national guidelines for recognition Australia wide. BWRS as the proud occupant of a great storage shed in western Sydney is better able to maintain and store its equipment. BWRS continues to be active in publicity and encouraging bush safety.

In conclusion, I trust that you will agree that BWRS has had another busy and successful year and is thus well placed to move forward into 2014 / 2015 with Bushwalking NSW to promote safe and enjoyable bushwalking. As always, for more information on BWRS, NavShield, bush safety, First Aid training etc see our website at [www.bwrs.org.au](http://www.bwrs.org.au)

**Keith Maxwell – President.**

