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the **basin**
BULLET

the voice of desert channels queensland






desert
channels
QUEENSLAND

Do you mine?

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AS I SEE IT EDITORIAL

Humans have come a long way in a very short time. We view ourselves as a successful species but, on the geological timescale, we are but a grain of sand in the Sahara: dinosaurs ruled the world for 160 million years; we humans have been around for a mere 200,000 years.

We developed bipedalism, which freed our hands for unrivalled use of tools and manipulation, and our brains evolved to a size and capability (self-awareness, language, abstract reasoning, introspection) that sets us apart from other animals.

It could so easily have been a very different story: mitochondrial DNA evidence indicates that we went through a severe bottleneck about 70,000 years ago where the number of breeding pairs may have been as low as 1,000 or less.

But humans have bounced back with a vengeance ... to almost 7 billion. When these numbers, and their consequent demand for natural resources, are combined with an unprecedented ability to modify and effect our environment, it's easy to see how we can be compared to a plague of locusts. What field do we move to next?

Our species name, *Homo sapiens* (Latin for 'wise man' or 'knowing man'), is enough to fill the human breast with pride, superiority and arrogance. Hopefully, there are enough of our kind with the foresight and humility to think beyond ourselves, and perhaps ... just perhaps ... take a 'next century' view to the way we manage the natural resources by which we prosper.

Editor

For more on the work of Desert Channels Queensland, visit www.dcq.org.au, email info@dcq.org.au or call 4658 0600.



into this category.

Given that the rivers of the Lake Eyre Basin are globally important and, thus far, reasonably pollution free, there is a need for a rigorous approach to controlling mining if we are to achieve long term protection.

Unfortunately, the significant rain events of early 2009 around Mt Isa provided a classic case study of what can happen when the regulation of mining is inadequate. The Wilderness Society has obtained, under the Right to Information Act, nearly 2,000 pages of internal Queensland Government documents that reveal the extent of a failure to properly manage the Lady Annie copper mine west of Mt Isa.

In the six weeks from New Year's Day 2009, a metre of rain fell on and around the Lady Annie copper mine site. Whilst this sounds like a large rain event, it is not unusual for this region at this time of year. It is worth noting that Windorah received 280mm in 24 hours in March 2010

Lady Annie Mine at that time stored nearly two and a half million tonnes of crushed mineral ore, rich in sulphides and heavy metals.



Disaster beckons

As the mining behemoth grows over the boundaries of the Lake Eyre Basin, details of the worst toxic mine discharge in the Basin's history are beginning to emerge under Queensland's Right to Information Act. If lessons aren't learnt from this litany of shortcomings, expect more bad news as mines continue to take shortcuts and regulators turn a blind eye. The following report was drawn from information recently released by the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management ...

One of the objectives of the Western Rivers Alliance[†] is to achieve the proper regulation of mining in the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin. This protection is being sought under the Queensland Wild Rivers Act. Part of the Act's effectiveness is that it does not seek to wind back the clock on existing development or activities, but places strong control on developments that history tells us are significantly harmful to river health. Some types of mining in certain parts of a river's catchment fall

Australia's Lake Eyre Basin is recognised as one of the last desert rivers systems in the world in good condition. Due, in no small part, to the good management of current and historic land managers, this makes the Lake Eyre Basin globally important as other similar systems are heavily degraded, often by irrigation development. Additionally, these rivers have not been subject to major pollution events, though in January and February last year, this record was severely tested.

† The Western Rivers Alliance includes the Australian Floodplain Association, Pew Environment Group Australia, the Coopers Creek Protection Group, and the Wilderness Society. The AFA is a non-government organisation formed in 2005 to protect the rivers, floodplains and wetlands for the people who rely on them for their livelihood. The Association also links landholders (mainly dry land farmers and graziers) and their communities to scientists, politicians and conservation groups to sustainably manage riverine environments. The key aim of the AFA is to preserve and restore the ecological health and productivity of the floodplains of Australia.

Continued...

Weeks of heavy rain drenched this ore, creating highly contaminated runoff.

Poorly designed mine stormwater infrastructure allowed this runoff to leach through the tailings dam full of toxic mineral ores, and illegally discharge from the mine site into Saga and Inca creeks at the top of the Lake Eyre Basin's Georgina River. This caused the first major pollution event ever, in these waterways.

On 30 January and 7 February 2009, mine operators advised the Queensland State Government that contaminated stormwater was being discharged to local creeks. Attempts to warn local landholders failed in the first instance. Twelve cubic metres of water per second poured out of the mine site during and after the storm event. The water was found to be highly acidic, containing dangerous levels of lead, uranium, nickel, copper, cobalt and aluminium.



The acidity in the creeks was so strong, it dissolved metal fenceposts. There were numerous fish kills and normally turbid waters were turned strong-smelling, clear and blue.

On 21 February, a landholder 20 kilometres downstream of Lady Annie Mine identified poor water quality in Inca Creek and informed the State Government. Internal government documents subsequently confirmed that 50 kilometres of creeks were polluted.

Two consultant reports found within the internal Queensland Government documents both conclude that the initial mine site design was woefully inadequate. Some parts of the mine site did not have levees or bunds, and others had bunds that were only capable of dealing with runoff from one in ten year storm events. Despite this, the mine site design was approved.

As late as April 2009, there had been no risk assessment by the Queensland Government on the risk to stock and pastures by the contaminated water runoff incident.

Now in late April 2010, the Queensland Government has made no statement confirming whether the creeks and surrounding areas are safe, and there has been no initiative to redress costs imposed on affected landholders. During April 2010, Dr Gavin Mudd from Monash University and



Rupert Quinlan from the Pew Environment Group Australia took samples from Inca and Saga Creeks and will soon receive results on whether pollutants are still present.

The Western Rivers Alliance believes it is imperative that existing mines in the Lake Eyre Basin are audited to ensure that they are capable of dealing with the type of rain events often found in this region. This group also seeks to ensure that new mines are prohibited from being developed in riverine areas so that there is no risk of ruining intact and globally significant river systems, and the enterprises and communities that depend on them.

Written by Karen Tully of the Australian Floodplain Association. The Australian Floodplain Association (AFA) is a member of the Western Rivers Alliance.

GRASSHOPPER COUNTRY

Seemingly from nowhere they come, hordes that darken the sky and leave a trail of destruction in their wake. They are as much a part of the boom or bust cycle of the inland as the orgy of nesting birdlife, yet the voracious grasshopper is far from popular. Naturalist and photographer, Angus Emmott and his wife Karen write on the other side of these pesky creatures ...

"Grasshoppers are one of the more remarkable creatures of the Australian bush"

Following the best summer rains across the Desert Channels region in ten years, there has been an explosion of life. One of the more obvious manifestations of this burst of abundance across the usually arid interior has been the huge numbers of grasshoppers and locusts.

Defoliated trees and shrubs, and smeared windscreens signal their arrival following the rains. The large silvery brown waves of grasshoppers taking wing in front of cars and motorbikes confirm their presence in large numbers. Hawks and falcons sit, sated with this bountiful food supply.

Grasshoppers are one of the more remarkable creatures of the Australian bush.

There are approximately 800 different species discovered so far, more than half of which have yet to be scientifically described. This number is not allowing for the many species yet to be found.

Four of the main species in our region are responsible for the dramatic defoliation of trees. They are the Spur-throated Locust *Austracris guttulosa*, Gaudy Acacia Grasshopper *Macrolobalia ocellata*, Hairy Coryphistes *Coryphistes interioris*, and the



Pardillana limbata

Common Pardillana *Pardillana limbata*.

The Spur-throated Locust will be the species most people are familiar with, and they have achieved national notoriety for the extensive damage done to anything green in their path. Longreach residents and visitors would have noted the sad state of many of the trees around town, due to this creature's hearty appetite. Unlike the following three species, this animal's appetite is indiscriminating in its quest to reduce fire hazard in Western Queensland! Following big breeding events, this species swarms and flies south and east, causing major damage to cereal

Continued...

Images by Angus Emmott

GRASSHOPPER SPRAY

Like grasshoppers, recipes for their control seemingly come out of nowhere. Here is one that is claimed to be effective.

4 HOT chillies *

4 large onions *

2 whole clumps of garlic cloves *

1 tablespoon Epsom salts

A squirt of detergent

1 tablespoon Paraffin oil (or cooking oil)

Slice or crush * and cover with water and soak for 24 hours. Strain and add Epsom salts. Stir to dissolve the Epsom salts and add enough water to make up to 4 litres. Add oil and detergent. Place in spray bottle and spray plants thoroughly.



and grain crops. For this reason the Spur-throat is one of the locusts targeted by the Australian Plague Locust Commission.

Out in the Mulga, *Acacia aneura*, clinging tightly against the branches attempting to appear invisible to predators is the Gaudy Acacia Grasshopper. This is very much a species of the arid interior reaching the eastern edge of its range in the Desert Channels region. This insect is quite brightly and distinctively marked, living up to its common name. This species is the main defoliator of Mulga, *Acacia aneura* and Bendee, *Acacia brachystachya*.

Being a little more selective in its dining tastes, the Hairy Coryphistes tends to be primarily found

munching away on the foliage of Gidyea, *Acacia cambagei*. There are two other described, and at least six other undescribed species within this genus. The grasshoppers within this genus are mostly restricted to the arid interior of Australia. To spot these creatures, you must peer closely into the tree as they blend in beautifully, appearing to be a part of the foliage.

The Common Pardillana is found in the Eucalypts growing along watercourses and creek lines. This is a large and colourful species, growing up to 64mm in length. During daylight hours, they can be found perched on branches, moving out into leaves to eat

at night. There are three other described and at least thirteen undescribed species in this genus. This is the species that causes the most damage to River Gums, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, and Coolibahs *Eucalyptus coolabah*.

Although there are a number of species of grasshoppers that do cause damage, there are also many lesser known enigmatic and interesting creatures that combine with the known trouble makers to be a part of the amazing web of life in Western Queensland. Take the time to notice and admire these grasshoppers at your next opportunity.

Macrolobalia ocellata



Coryphistes interioris



Skilling for the Future

The Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation is currently offering training and skill-building to a limited number of young people from the grazing industry through an Australian Government funded project ...

An exciting initiative currently being provided by DEEDI is the 'Beef and Sheep Producers of the Future Unite to Tackle Climate Change' project which starts on 14th May.

They're looking for 30 young graziers who want to learn new skills to help them shape a healthy future for their industry.

DEEDI FutureBeef Industry Development Officer, Tim Emery, said participants would develop skills to help their businesses and communities grow and respond positively to future challenges.

"We're looking for people who are 18-30yrs of age, not necessarily property owners or managers, but who are actively involved in the grazing industry," he said.

"At least two project groups will be formed and participants will come away with the knowledge and confidence to be a driving force in their field.

"A range of DEEDI staff with a collection of skills will provide the groups with networking and learning opportunities and will coordinate a series of professional face-to-face and online training activities over the next 12 months.

Group members will also have the chance to play an active role in the Young Beef Producers forum at Roma in November this year. Numbers are limited, so please contact tim.emery@deedi.qld.gov.au 0408 707 155 or alex.stirton@deedi.qld.gov.au 0428 109 620 to register.

Hold that thought!



ARE WE OUT OF TOUCH?

There was a time when our diet comprised whatever fruit or vegetable was in season and on

hand at the time. Now we want everything available all the time and, when people are willing to pay, someone will supply, regardless of the real cost.

It's been calculated that the average plate of food in the US travels 2,400 kilometres to get there. It could be more in Australia. A good example is produce grown in the Northern Territory is transported interstate, sorted, and then sent back to Territory supermarkets.

And, as consumers, we expect every piece of fruit or vegetable to be picture perfect. Nature isn't like that and producers are tearing their hair out trying to meet an unrealistic market. Misshapen doesn't mean less nutritious or tasty – visit a local producers' market and sample one of those 'deformed' apples.

Have we become so disconnected from the land that we've lost touch with the reality of where our food comes from and what it takes to get it to us? See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/03/19/2850317.htm> for more.





TOWN COMMON MANAGEMENT

The draft plans for the Blackall and Tambo town commons are currently before the council and community and open for feedback. There has been great community involvement and commitment to good management of the assets with a wide range of issues being discussed. These plans are scheduled for finalisation in June.

SUSTAINABLE GRAZING

Well worth repeating from our previous issue is the Sustainable Grazing forum being held in Jundah on 26th and 27th May to look at local successful grazing management projects, best practice and issues. Sustainable grazing: doing the best for your land so it can do the best for you.

PROTECTING OUR ASSETS

The first of our input opportunities for the updating of our natural resource management plan has given a glimpse of the changing face of the region. In the face of mining development, new issues being raised are pressure on natural resources, infrastructure and labour. Everyone is welcome to participate so check <http://www.dcq.org.au/calendar> to find the venue nearest you. If you can't make it along, log onto <http://www.dcq.org.au> and take a few minutes to complete our online survey by the end of May.

Never a dull moment at the coal face

'PROTECTING OUR FUTURE' 2010

The latest round of Protecting our Future devolved grants has now closed with \$603,000 worth of applications for only \$410,000 of available funding. These will be assessed by our independent Technical Assessment Network against an assessment matrix that includes strategic value, alignment to investment objectives, technical feasibility and value for money. Our streamlining and efficiency drive saw this round done fully online; even the assessment process is electronic.

GROUND COVER

Almost 40 land managers came away from our two recent field days with more knowledge on increasing ground cover and improving the condition of the land. They saw, first-hand, the results of successful land management changes on the ground, backed up by speakers who got down to the roots of the practices adopted and benefits to the properties. In addition, they now have a broader network of people to share knowledge and ideas as they take the next steps on boosting the sustainability of their properties.

NATURALLY RESOURCEFUL WOMEN

Twenty women enjoyed the latest Naturally Resourceful women's workshop held in Tambo on 28th and 29th April. The highly cohesive and interactive group of motivated participants not only learnt how to write a grant application, they came away with an action plan to do just that. The Naturally Resourceful women's workshops are provided by our Landholder Support Services project which is funded the Department of Communities.

PARKY DIEBACK

Interest generated by the very successful Parkinsonia dieback workshops has been enormous. (Armraynald, Burketown and Donors Hill, Normanton have been postponed due to wet weather.) Spin-off workshops in other regions have already been held and there is talk of developing training material to augment the rollout of the dieback agent should the trials live up to expectations.

DC SOLUTIONS UPDATE

A major current project is the updating of the Lake Eyre Basin map on behalf of the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum. This involves refreshing the design, replacing outdated data layers and adding new images. The first week in June will see the opening of a new front in our commercial services with the laying of our first synthetic turf. We are laying a small area at three residences as part of low water use, low maintenance gardens that we designed; we are also setting off a community hall with green surrounds that the grasshoppers won't eat and the drought won't kill. Digital productions, signs, training and planning are also keeping the team busy.



Pajingo bola

'Pajingo bola' springs on you like a lotto win! The last thing you expect, driving through the dry, dusty Desert Uplands landscape to the north-east of Aramac, is a 'big fella waterhole'. And I mean a seriously pajingo bola. What first appears as a glimmer through the surrounding scrub, quickly becomes an expanse of fresh water with a span to be measured in kilometres.

Lake Dunn – or The Lake as the locals call it – sits in a sandy, 3 by 1.5 kilometre saucer,

70 kilometres from Aramac. Although not permanent, it has water in it most of the time and is home to a wide variety of birdlife from pelicans, swans and ducks to divers, dabchicks and gulls.

Although there is a smattering of huts hugging the shore, and the local council maintains basic facilities for campers, The Lake is private property and is wholly situated on the cattle station of the same name.

Owner, Bernie Dickson has lived at The Lake for all of his 86 years – his wife Marj for 60 of them – and it's their generosity that has seen it develop into a popular water-sport and camping area. The longest stretch without going dry in those 86 years was from 1972 to 1986.

Shallow and sandy, it's a great spot for the kids. You can bird-watch, go for a paddle, or just kick back under a coolabah and read a book.

EASY PEASY PEA AND HAM SOUP

500g split peas (washed)
2 onions
Half a bunch of celery dice
2 carrots diced
1 large bacon hock
3 tsp vegetable stock
5L of water

Throw everything into the pot and cook slowly for at least 4 hours – the longer the better. You can use other types of peas or dried beans, such as lima beans, if you wish. Serve with hot crusty bread or garlic bread (forks may be required).

Sometimes you want something that is really simple and will give you more taste than the time you've got. This is where the crock pot comes in handy. Take a couple of minutes to throw these ingredients into the pot in the morning and, when you get home, a hearty meal will be ready that the kids will love.

The Nose Bag



There and Gone

Mark Kleinschmidt recalls...



A mate, whose father developed Alzheimers Disease, said to me one day: 'We lost Dad two years ago ... now we're just waiting for him to die.' ...

*Grey, bent and bleary, and weary from toil,
Ten thousand times he trod this same soil,
Now he's bushed as can be, unsure of his name,
Each way he turns looks exactly the same.*

*Then a shape through the mist of a memory's haze
Comes ghosting, uncertain, of earlier days:
A young man on horseback, bold, proud and strong,
Dreaming big plans as he ambled along.*

*A big mob of bullocks, of life on the road,
Casting a shadow wherever he strode;
A wife and a son, a station out back –
Footprints of size on a once-travelled track.*

*With pride he recalled how his son followed on,
But the memory failed, and the vision was gone.
Then the fog settled thick; through confusion he stared;
He'd find his way home ... if he knew, ... or he cared.*

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