



Members

Alex Colley, Sydney Bush Walkers oldest member and the last of the revered original Tiger Walkers, has died at the age of 104.

He was also a renowned conservationist and was honoured with the Order of Australia Medal in 1984 for his outstanding contribution in helping to preserve our natural environment. We can thank him for his tireless work over many decades for his key role in establishing national parks including Wollemi and the Blue Mountains' Kanangra Boyd National Park, so saving the Colong area from limestone mining and the Boyd Pateau from logging.

Born in Lithgow in 1909, Alex joined the newly formed Sydney Bush Walkers in 1936. He went bush for the first time in his home town Lithgow at the tender age of 4 back in 1913. His last big walk was in Central Australia with Dot Butler in the 1990s. That is nine decades of walking. Alex said that growing up in Lithgow was great as the bush was so close. In those days the family's means of transport was the horse and buggy, the normal means of getting around for most. He would get up at 4am in the summer, meet his walking companions, go for a bush walk, get back for breakfast and then go to school. When the Depression came, Alex would disappear into the bush for weeks carrying only a bag of brown rice for sustenance.

Alex was elected SBW President in 1941 and 1942; he was editor of the magazine, Vice-President and Conservation Secretary for 20 years and mostly on the committee for more than 60 years, a feat never likely to be repeated. Alex put an indelible stamp on the character of the club, both in running the club and with his walks.

He explored bushland unlikely to have been trodden on by a white man before. This included Mt Currockbilly in Morton NP and a fair slice of Wollemi plus discovering many passes and negotiable routes in the Blue Mountains. He once walked from the Wolgan to Coricudgy and then to Putty through the heart of the Wollomi wilderness in 10 days armed only with the very rough sketch maps of the time. He was a member of the legendary Tigers whose walking feats were almost superhuman. The names of members of this group within the club are historic. Apart from Alex there was Hilma Galllott whom Alex married, Jack Debert (SBW's first president), Bill McCosker, Len Scotland, David Stead, Gordon Smith and Dorothy English (better known now as Dot Butler). Hilma was

no slouch. She once walked 50 miles (not kilometres) down the Grose River with Gordon Smith in 24 hours. She was the perfect partner for Alex. Their first walk together as a married couple was not a stroll in the park but an assault on Ti-Willa Plateau in the Gangerangs. He loved that part of the Blue Mountains. He also loved the Jamberoo area too where he built a cabin and called it Ti-Willa. This began a move by many bushwalking and SBW notables to establish cabins there including the family of Paddy Pallin, Jean and Ray Kirkby and Frank and Anice Duncan.

Being the pioneer and explorer that he was, Alex led many original walks on the walks program such as the first group climb of Carlon's head, and a weekend walk from Wentworth Falls to Katoomba via Kedumba, the Cox, Scotts Main Range, the Kowmung, the Gangerang traverse via Ti-Willa, to the Cox/Kanangra junction, up Breakfast Creek and on to Katoomba. That's a hell of a way of going between those two towns. Alex's contribution to the Club's walks program over half a century as a leader was huge. Here is just a taste of what he delivered:

- April 1939 – Katoomba – Nellies Glen – Carlons – Black Dog Track – Cox – Cedar Creek – Ruined Castle – Scenic Railway – Katoomba
- October 1941 - Mongarlowe Road - Currockbilly Mtn - Clyde River - Brooman Road.
- October 1943 – Nowra – Cambewarra – Barrier Grounds – Budderoo – Jamberoo – Kiama
- August 1947 - Canberra - Mt Franklin - Mt Gingera - Mt Franklin - Canberra. (Train. £6/2/6).
- May 1958 Route: Katoomba - Mt Solitary - Korowall Buttress – Cedar Creek - Katoomba.
- January 1991 Route: Batemans Bay - Tabourie via coast.

Alex was the complete bushman, always finding new routes through the bush and discovering water where others said there was none. He enjoyed cross-country skiing too.

The club would never have run as smoothly as it did without Alex's "behind the scenes" work. For years the magazine was collated and printed in his garage over a monthly gathering of helpers such as Dot Butler, Geoff Wagg, Spiro Hazinikitas and Ray Hookway.

Alex knew a bit about printing as he had worked part time in the publishing section at Sydney University where he was an undergraduate. Sitting his final economics exams he was also the clerk in the examination section of the Registrar's office so he may have been the first student ever to see his results before they were published.

As an economist and keen bushwalker, Alex had a life-long concern about global environmental issues and governments' focus on economic growth and profit at the expense of the environment.

He was also a published author. In his book "Sustainability", published in 2006, he argues that Australia, as the world's leading emitter of greenhouse gases per capita, should be a world leader in reducing them. He also wrote the glorious coffee table book

“Blue Mountains- World Heritage” published in 2004 with Henry Gold’s magnificent photos. In addition, he edited the SBW magazine for many years and wrote scores of articles on conservation and the importance of wilderness areas.

Alex Colley’s life spanned a period so long and in a world with so many changes that it is hard to imagine what that must have been like. He was born six years after the Wright Brothers’ first powered flight and died with the entire world on line via the Internet.

We are all the beneficiaries of Alex’s enduring work and his achievements. There is so much to say about the man and the scope of his influence both as a conservationist and as a bushwalker.

Alex was a conservationist decades before it was a mainstream issue. He was advocating the need for national parks and wilderness areas before World War 11 when such positions were considered radical. Influenced by Myles Dunphy’s talks at SBW meetings, Alex recognised the need for the Federation of Bushwalking Clubs to take a firm conservation stand. His experience with political parties and the Federation convinced him that rational argument backed by facts from experts in their field could win the day. With this approach Alex achieved so much. He joined the Colong Committee in 1968 when the Colong Caves and Boyd Plateau were threatened by a massive limestone mine proposal. Alex devised all sorts of strategies to frustrate the proposal, including street demonstrations to encourage a mass purchase of single shares in the developer’s company simply to bolster the share registry with conservationists and then stack the company’s AGM. The Committee’s 10-year campaign paid off, with the mine proposal defeated and the Kanangra area saved. He even persuaded his local Turramurra branch of the Liberal Party to unanimously support the conservation case.

Alex was secretary of the Colong Committee from 1972 to 2007, when he turned 95. In those years he wrote submission after submission to governments and actively campaigned to preserve a fair proportion of the north coast and tablelands for national parks. He went bushwalking with Neville Wran and Bob Carr and carried considerable influence with them leading to his crowning success of seeing the Blue Mountains National park proclaimed as a world heritage area. Bob Carr is on record as saying that when people take pride in knowing the Blue Mountains has that world status they can thank Alex Colley.

His energy for the cause seemed boundless. In 1992 he broke his neck in a fall and was hospitalised. Spiro Haginikitas, one of our long-time SBW members visited Alex in hospital lying in bed immobilised with a neck brace, clamps and screws. Despite these handicaps Spiro observed Alex busily writing. “What’ya up to Alex?” Spiro enquired. “Oh, I’m just writing up a Plan of Management for Lamington National Park,” Alex replied.

For all of his work Alex was showered with awards; the Catchment Leader of the Year in 1998, the Senior Achiever Award in 2000 the Lifetime of Conservation Award from Australian Geographic in 2009 and of course the Order of Australia medal.

Alex achieved so much, as a conservationist and legendary bushwalker. What an enduring legacy he leaves. He was truly a bushwalking “national treasure”.

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