

CLUB MILESTONE

ON THE TRAIL: The Warby Range Bushwalkers Club runs walks to many different North East destinations including Falls Creek.



Warby bushwalkers turn 40 but not over the hill yet

A local club whose members share an interest in bush walking and an appreciation of our region's extraordinary natural environment will celebrate its 40th birthday this year.

The Warby Range Bushwalking Club had planned a group walk to Pangerang Lookout and Pine Gully in September, which would mark the 40th anniversary of the club's first walk to that same destination.

Unfortunately due to COVID-19 it has had to be postponed until its approximately 120 members can get together again safely to celebrate the remarkable milestone.

Until recently the club had been successfully running activities in "pods" of less than 10 people to ensure adherence to pandemic regulations, before stage three restrictions were brought back.

But this year's events are just another interesting story to add to the history books.

One of the club's founders, Adrian Twitt, said the club has lasted so long because it offered a relaxed, relatively informal and inexpensive way for like-minded people to participate in physical exercise while enjoying the delights of the natural environment of our region.

"By providing a range of walks of varying degrees of difficulty, the club has been able to attract people from a wide variety of backgrounds," he said.

"It has also had the benefit of many good leaders over time, and a relatively undemanding committee structure."

When the club first began in 1980 it was a sub-committee of the Warby Range Protection Society, which had lobbied the State Government in the 1970s to declare the range a State Park.

Mr Twitt said the society thought a good way to publicise the park's values, was to start a walking program, and the committee eventually expanded its interest to promote walks elsewhere too.

He remembers that as the club's



BY ANITA McPHERSON
amcpherson@nemedi.com.au

popularity grew, six monthly programs were replaced by a quarterly program and a greater variety of walks, with regular newsletters keeping members in touch.

"One of the early and very popular changes was to introduce a 'week away', either interstate or in distant parts of Victoria," he said.

"Members now tend to prefer hostel-type accommodation at these week-long events, rather than camping, as was the accommodation of choice in earlier times."

According to Mr Twitt, the club has always provided a friendly environment for its members, and keeping it informal and inexpensive has meant most who "try before they buy" tend to join up.

"The activities of the club are especially attractive to the growing numbers of retirees in our community, though we also attract younger and many working people," he said.

"We are also attracting members from far afield, including Beechworth, Corowa, the wider North East, and Shepparton areas.

"The use of social media and the club's website has assisted greatly in promoting the club, though the *Wangaratta Chronicle* has been instrumental too."

This year's committee of the Warby Range Bushwalking Club Inc includes president Cecily Fletcher, secretary Peter Brian (who took over from Kerri Davenport after five years in the role), treasurer Bob Shaw, walks coordinators Jeanette Farquhar and Michael Braendler, with Chris McLaughlin in charge of website and communications and Anne Ford looking after social events.

Mr Twitt said the club was as strong as ever and he was



● **OUT AND ABOUT:** The club has about 120 members who can choose from a wide variety of walks on the program, from short local walks to spending a whole week away.



positive about its future.

"Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when possible, the club has continued to run a very successful program," he said.

"During the more severe lockdowns, pairs of members have been actively walking in nearby areas and the Warby Range National

Park has been a key destination at these times.

"Once the pandemic restrictions are lifted, the club will continue to be an attraction to all those wanting to explore the bush.

"We will be around for as long as people enjoy walking and exploring together."

● **HITTING THE HEIGHTS:**

Members including Ann Brain, Andy Kimber, Sandi Smith, Sonia Bihun, Jeanette Farquhar, Sandra Church, Angela O'Shaunessy, Anne Ford, Karen Adcock and Michael Braendler recently enjoyed a "pod" bushwalk (of 10 people) to Mt Stanley.