

# Protecting old forests

**While it may be an unconventional alliance, Gunaikurnai Elders, forest groups and High Plains graziers have united in a fight to protect the last old forests of East Gippsland.**

Last month, the groups explored the ranges, west of Swifts Creek in the Tambo Valley, to survey old growth forests and VicForests logging coupes.

Gunaikurnai Elders, Marjorie and Glenda Thorpe, accompanied Dargo High Plains cattle graziers, the Treasure family of Save the Little Dargo group, along with members of Gippsland Environment Group, and Friends of Bats and Habitat Gippsland, to Mt Delusion.

From the top of Cassillis Gap the group travelled along Mt Delusion Rd through montane forests under Mt Delusion, then on to Groves Gap at the head of the Livingstone River.

They returned via the historical Mt Delusion Hut and Grassy Ridge Track before descending through Brookville Valley to Swifts Creek.

Louise Crisp, of Gippsland Environment Group, says the Gunaikurnai Elders were “deeply shocked” by the extent of clear-fell logging, along the Delusion Range.

“This is our grandmother’s Country,” said Marjorie Thorpe, the Greens candidate for Gippsland in the upcoming federal election.

“I can’t believe what I’ve seen. Miles and miles of destroyed forest and not much of it regrowing at all. Just weedy hillsides or covered in wattles,” Ms Thorpe said.

“This is affecting everything – our water, our animals, and it’s making the country so much more fire prone.”

Dargo High Plains grazer, Christa Treasure, has been up to Mt Delusion many times with her partner Ray Anderson.

During the last drought they considered taking out a grazing lease between Delusion and Groves Gap but turned it down when they saw the vast amount of clear-fell logging.

“There’s no way we could keep cattle in, up here,” said Ms Treasure.

“The forest has been logged so much that cattle could end up anywhere.

“Before logging the grass was sweet between the huge old trees. Now it’s all coupes covered in thick logging debris or overgrown with blackberries and

wattles.”

Ray Anderson was keen to check out the old Mt Delusion Hut which is right on the edge of Mt Delusion Rd and is part of the High Country Back Roads 4WD route from Dargo to Swifts Creek.

The hut was constructed after the 1939 bushfires by Tom Carroll of Brookville to use as a base for summer grazing of stock.

The forest around the hut has now been clear-felled by VicForests.

“This is not how we should be treating our history,” said Mr Anderson.

“Why would any tourists want to drive up here now?”

“It’s a series of logging coupes not a scenic route.”

Down in Groves Gap among a remnant patch of very old tall trees the travellers gathered around a huge messmate tree, more than eight metres in circumference. (pictured)

“This is what all the montane forests were like just decades ago,” said Ms Crisp, who grew up in Swifts Creek.

“Mt Delusion is on the headwaters of three rivers; the Tambo, the Mitchell and the Mitta Mitta.

“We know logging dramatically reduces stream flow for decades.

“In the face of climate change, it is critically important that the mountain forest catchments are protected.”

Lisa Roberts of Friends of Bats and Habitat Gippsland claims “the unlogged areas around Groves Gap and Bayliss Spur Rd are dense with Greater Gliders, Yellow-bellied Gliders, large forest owls, and many other threatened species.”

“We have been mapping the logged areas. There is now very little of the old forest left.

“Where is the 90,000 hectares of old growth forest that the State Government promised to protect in 2019,” Ms Roberts questioned.

“We are seeing modelled old growth being logged right now along Delusion Range. By the time the Victorian government’s planned transition out of native forest logging occurs in 2030, these last remnants will be destroyed.

“It’s time for VicForests to get off Mt Delusion right now, before there’s nothing left.”



**An unconventional alliance has formed to fight for the old forests of East Gippsland. (PS)**