



PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Fire and Ice

It would be fair to say that for most people the image of a Park Ranger would be something straight from an afternoon kids show; Ranger Sally and her band of cute and cuddly animals.

For Parks Victoria Ranger and long time CPSU member Andy Gillham caring for the environment is only part of a complex career in the Victorian Public service.

Andy is based at Rawson, a small country town nestled in the foothills of the Baw Baw Ranges in Gippsland. His role as a Park Ranger is as diverse as the environment that he works in.

In fact Andy has been watching over the snowfields and the thousands of visitors that make the trip into the mountains for over 16 years.

Andy first became a Ranger in 1989 and joined the union within his first week on the job. "I've always been active in the union movement. I'd worked in the power industry for several years prior to joining the parks service, that was a very unionised workforce."

Managing Mt St Gwinear is a challenging task. Thousands of visitors make the trip up the mountain every year. Ensuring that the public have ready access to their national parks is just the start of the process. Clearing of snow, maintaining the road so that mum and dad's sedan can get up here safely, alpine traffic management, all this work and that's just to get here.

"It's great to see families making snowmen and having fun at lunchtime totally oblivious to the work that we've put in since 6 am to get them there."

But families playing in the snow are only about 50% of the visitors to Mt St Gwinear. The Baw Baw National Park offers over 8,000 hectares of snow covered plateau traversed by over 20 kilometres of marked Nordic trails.

"This is where our job can get pretty demanding" Andy told Public Perspective. "We are constantly checking and maintaining the condition of the trails to ensure that skiers get the best and safest experience possible".

Sadly this doesn't always happen. Around 80 people per season rely on Andy and his team to get them off the mountain safely.

"It's the nature of skiing, unfortunately people will injure themselves. Many are sprains and strains, some are injuries of a more serious nature requiring evacuation by Helimed 1."

"Sometimes young children get misplaced walking back from the Kiosk, or a skier may get totally bamboozled 20 kilometres away from the car park. In an alpine environment every incident must be treated with urgency."

"Thankfully we have a dedicated group of Volunteer Ski patrol that help by acting as the eyes and ears for our Rangers out on the trails."

During his career in the public service Andy has completed tertiary qualifications in Applied science, he has for 15 years been accredited with the Australian Ski Patrol Association's "Advanced Emergency Care" certificate (qualifying him to be a professional ski patroller anywhere in Australia) and he has also been trained in emergency management and search and rescue techniques by Victoria Police.

"You need to be prepared for all scenarios in the Alps. Once it gets cold nothing is easy, and it just gets harder as it gets colder. The conditions that we work in are demanding and it is only through strong union membership and activity that we have the tools, clothing and entitlements to get the job done for the people who visit us."

"It wasn't always this way; in the early nineties our employer didn't seem so concerned with our working environment. Often we worked 10 or 14 days straight, our days off were regularly refused. We even had to buy our own raincoats, thermals even shoelaces for our snow boots. Hard to believe but it's the awful truth."

"It was pretty hard to serve the people of Victoria with our spirits so low."

"These days it's a totally different story. We are well organised within the union. We have our own branch section with Reps in every district. We have a genuine feeling that our union is in every workplace and we have a sense of ownership over our working conditions and working life."

"It is vital that we remain ever vigilant with our EBA. Those of us that were around 10 years ago remember how hard it was. We know that what we have now needs to be protected, both for us and for the people that come to enjoy our national parks."

So what's on the horizon for Andy now that winter is winding up?



Parks Victoria rangers feel the heat

"Mt St Gwinear will probably operate through to mid October, perhaps November depending on the snow. Then once everything is packed up here it's time to prepare for the summer and our fire fighting commitments"

Parks Victoria Staff make up over 35% of Victoria's professional bush fire fighters. Along with his colleagues in the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries, Andy will be a first attack fire fighter over this summer, as he has over the previous 16.

Andy is one of the South East region's most experienced fire planning officers. He has worked on countless fires in Victoria and New South Wales often spending weeks at a time away from home.

"It's a diverse and challenging career. Our work is constantly changing and its impact on us and our families can be equally as challenging. We must continue to ensure that the importance of our roles never overshadows the importance of the workers doing the job."



Park Ranger Andy Gillham patrolling the slopes at Baw Baw National Park

Jenny calls on all her experience for McEwen

Jenny Beales is about to face one of the greatest challenges of her life. The Labor candidate for the federal seat of McEwen is aiming to win the seat at the forthcoming federal election, and needs to breach a 2.2% margin.

This CPSU member has knocked on 6000 doors in her own time, wearing out a pair of shoes in the process. Jenny's held street stalls almost every Saturday this year, and has spoken to countless McEwen constituents at community gatherings or by telephone.

"One evening I had 80 telephone calls to return," Jenny told Public Perspective.

Jenny has always been active in the community, and her candidacy for a federal seat is a natural extension.

"Like many women of my age, I've had lots of different jobs and I have been involved in local communities for most of my life."

"After our last candidate for McEwen took up a post at the United Nations, I was asked to consider standing as his replacement."

"As someone who has been involved in the community all my life, I strongly believe in the role of governments working in partnership with people, with local voluntary organisations and small business to build strong communities."

Jenny's husband, a former police officer, was posted to various parts of the state throughout his career and, as a teacher, Jenny was able to transfer between schools to keep the family together. Over ten years she taught full time at state schools in Oak Park and Whittlesea, and casually at Yea, Mirboo North and Korumburra and also spent some time at a private school on Phillip Island.

Besides teaching, Jenny worked for a short time at Warrnambool Base Hospital as a ward clerk and in nursing administration.

"I worked in every ward at the hospital and found it very interesting to see how a hospital worked."

Jenny also did a seven year stint with the Camping Association of Victoria (CAV), the industry body for large group accommodation, such as school camps, and was involved in the accreditation of facilities.

Jenny's love of outdoor activities such as bushwalking and camping was fostered during her 20 years as a leader with Guides Victoria.

Jenny has also managed a local government office at Kinglake, providing local government services and community health outreach. As part of this role she handled emergency relief for the southern part of the shire.

In 1996 Jenny got a taste of life as a small business operator, when she and her husband bought the General Store at Kinglake West.

"I worked a couple of days a week in the store as well as keeping my job with the CAV



Jenny Beales checks the mail

and I have always done the books. I've just finished our last BAS statement!"

The couple recently sold the General Store, which has enabled Jenny to devote more time to the McEwen campaign.

Jenny still works part time, as an electorate officer for state upper house member Robert Mitchell. Robert is not the first MP to benefit from Jenny's experience. She previously worked for Whittlesea MLA Max McDonald.

Jenny has been a Shire Councillor (Korumburra), a school councillor for 10 years, President of Diamond Valley College School Council for 4 years and was President of the Parents and Friends Association at Kinglake Primary School.

She's served on Neighbourhood House

Committees, volunteered for a community newspaper and managed the local community bus in Kinglake. The latter saw her doing everything from co-ordinating finances to driving the bus.

"It's just a little 12-seater but it is a very much-needed and well-used community resource."

Jenny also joined the committee lobbying for funding for long day care within the existing Kindergarten at Kinglake.

The decision to join Labor was an easy one.

"In Kinglake, every community facility built in the last 25 years has been built by Labor governments: the child care centre, the police station, sports stadium, our community centre, a new primary school and new buildings at another local school."

"These are important facilities for community cohesiveness."

Life on the campaign trail has had its moments. Jenny has been mistaken for the Avon Lady, doorknocked in Seymour and Broadford in 40 degree heat, and on one occasion knocked herself unconscious after a mishap with a meter box.

"In spite of one mishap, I enjoy doorknocking. Most people are polite, even if they don't want to talk to you for very long."

Listening to Jenny and a campaign volunteer go through some correspondence gave an idea of the issues in McEwen - access to affordable health care, after hours services and lack of dental services are major concerns. Many small businesses are struggling and youth unemployment is too high.

"The longer I do this, and the more people I talk to, the more concerned I am about these issues," Jenny remarked.

"I am the candidate, not the local member, but I do what I can to help. However, your hands are tied unless you're in government."

Until the election, if you live in McEwen, look for Jenny - pounding the pavement somewhere nearby.



Jenny looks over a map of the electorate



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A Helping Hand

For Victorian prison officer and CPSU member Richard Philpott, it wasn't the lure of some of the best scuba diving, snorkelling or fishing in the world but an interest in assisting in a developing country that drew him to the Solomon Islands.

In March this year, Richard joined a team of 25 Australian prison officers who travelled north to work on the Solomon Islands Law and Justice project of the Regions Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).

Back to spend some time with his family, Public Perspective caught up with Richard on the day before he was due to return to the posting he has grown to love.

Richard is based at Rove Prison in central Honiara, one of five provincial prisons in the capital.

At the 210 bed male prison, which also houses 4 female prisoners, Richard provides advice on prison procedure and he holds one of four specialist positions in the prison system, based on his expertise in prison officer training.

Richard not only develops appropriate training for officers but is assisting his Solomon Islands counterparts to establish and run a training unit, including setting up competencies.

"There was a desperate need to bring prisons up to standard following the coup in 2000, and although we're always scraping for money, it

has been a tremendous experience."

So much so that he is going back. Richard is particularly appreciative of the assistance his employer Corrections Victoria have provided.

"If I hadn't been granted Leave Without Pay I would have to resign to pursue this opportunity. Without a doubt I am enhancing my skill base, so my employer will also benefit," he said.

Richard's 22 year career in Australian prisons has seen him posted to many prisons on the east coast. He is currently employed at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, along with his partner and fellow CPSU member Tonia Marshall.

Although Tonia and the couple's children miss Richard terribly while he is away, the family are highly supportive.

"I'm glad Richard has the opportunity to expand his horizons. He's a more positive person for the experience." Tonia told Public Perspective.

"I'm really lucky," said Richard. "Without the support of family you can't focus on what you're doing. I haven't had to worry about that."

On a typical day at Rove Prison, Richard's day commences at 7.30 am and he finishes around 4.30 pm. There's no shift work, or weekend work.

To keep themselves occupied, and give something back to the local community who have welcomed them so warmly, Richard and



Richard Philpott

some of his colleagues have organised Auskick clinics on Saturday afternoons.

"About 50 kids come each Saturday and it's great fun. It helps to take the focus away from missing your family, and the kids get a lot out of it." Richard said.

Recently a Solomon Islands under 18's team took on the "oldies" team, comprising police and prison officers.

The program has been so popular that Queensland Auskick is setting up a committee to seek funding.

Richard and Tonia are experienced travellers who have visited almost every continent, counting trips to Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Cook Islands and Europe as highlights. They were married in Egypt in 2000.

Because of this experience, neither the climate nor the culture came as a shock to Richard.

"What is difficult is the fact that there are very few resources. Lack of equipment can be frustrating at times, and setting budgets is hard." said Richard.

"In spite of those challenges, it is very rewarding to see the effect of passing on experience and knowledge, and watching people pick up and run with it.

"It's terrific to work with people who are like sponges, trying to get as much information as they can. These things give you so much satisfaction."

"It's important to have a good working relationship and build trust with my Solomon Islands counterparts, and I think I've achieved that." Richard said.

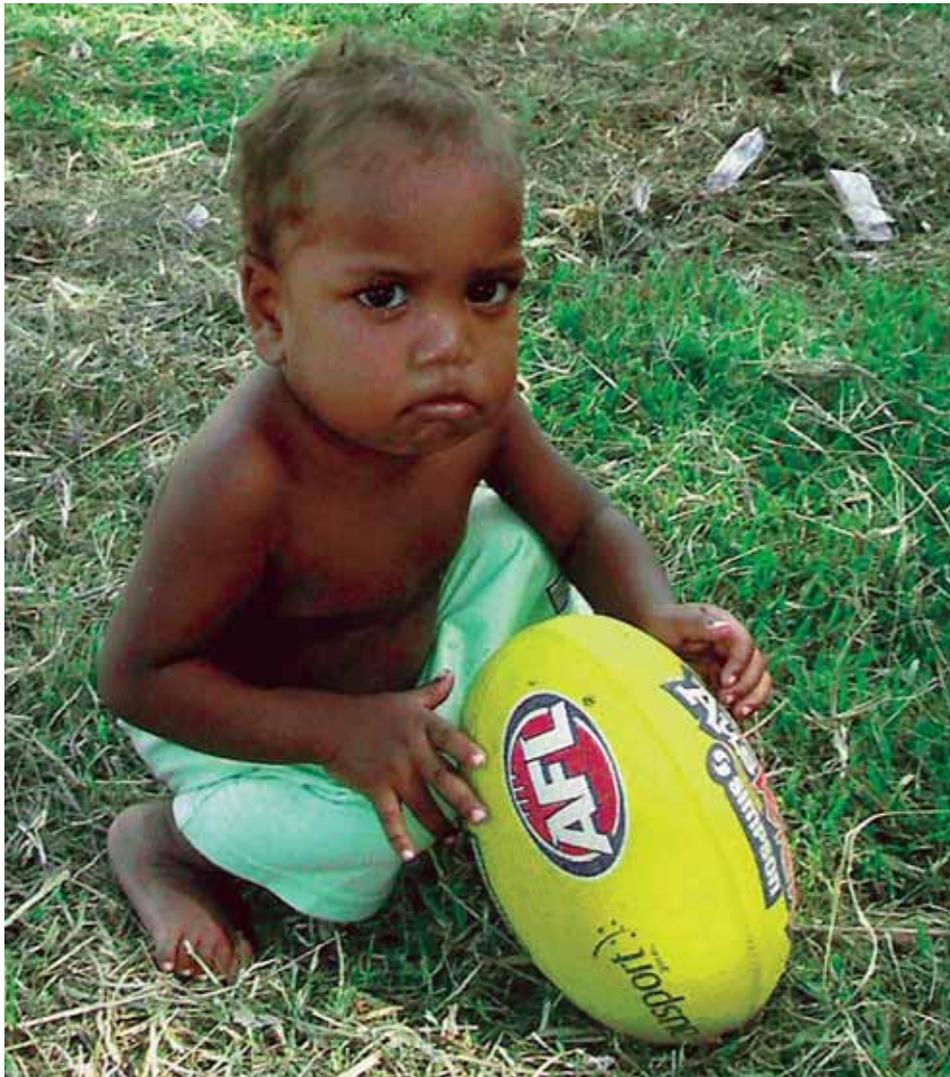
"It would be so easy for Richard to spend his spare time in the pub drinking, or holed up in his room reading, but wherever we've travelled we've always thought it important to immerse ourselves in the local culture. I'm really pleased he's getting involved in local community life and he's lucky to spend his time with such friendly, beautiful people." added Tonia.

"When I first arrived in the Solomon Islands there wasn't the money to build proper facilities."

"Now that there is some funding, and there are experienced officers on hand to help, the facilities are improving and stabilising."

"There's been a big international effort to shore up the legal, policing and corrections system in the Solomon Islands, and I'm really proud to have played a small part in that." said Richard.

Since this interview Richard's application for an extension of Leave Without Pay was rejected by Corrections Victoria. As he had already returned to the Solomon Islands he resigned from his position at Dame Phyllis Frost to continue his work at Rove Prison.



A Solomon Island child – a future AFL star?

OHS Reps Award for Excellence

Gayle Smith was a public servant and CPSU member and who was deeply committed to health and safety, and understood the importance of being a workers' representative, whether as a workplace delegate or a health and safety representative.

To honour Gayle's life, and to encourage other CPSU members to further their involvement in health and safety and worker representation, CPSU is proud to sponsor an award in her name.

Gayle worked in various government departments and agencies in a career that spanned 25 years. However, most of her working life was with WorkSafe Victoria and its predecessors, where she made important contributions to occupational health and safety and community safety.

Gayle was also committed to improving workplace conditions through her involvement in the trade union movement. For many years she was a workplace delegate and also filled the roles of secretary and treasurer on the local executive of CPSU at the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

Gayle was not only loyal and hardworking, she was courageous. She served her fellow

members well at a time of great difficulty for the union movement during the Kennett years, and remained steadfast in her commitment to CPSU between 1996 and 1999, when the union did not have Award coverage at WorkCover and was struggling to survive.

Gayle was widely respected for her willingness to work for a cause, to stand up for what she thought was right and just, even though there were risks involved in taking a stand, and for the time and energy she put into things without expectation of personal reward.

CPSU will present an annual award in Gayle's honour to a member nominated by their peers who meets the following criteria:

- has made a significant contribution to OHS in the workplace by contributing to the development of consultation in the workplace and/or effectively representing members with OHS issues
- has been a union member for at least 2 years, and
- is a current health & safety representative

CPSU will award a plaque and financial assistance for study in OHS to the member selected by a committee of OHS Officers



Gayle Smith

and CPSU Branch Councillors.

Nominations are open and nomination forms, signed by the nominee, should be faxed to CPSU on 9662 4591. Nominations will close on Friday 24th September, 2004.

CPSU will announce the award winner for 2004 during WorkSafe Week in October. For further information please contact the OHS Unit on 9639 1822.

Nothing Fishy about this Eureka Prize

Life hasn't been the same for CPSU member Ivor Stuart since he was named joint winner of the 2004 Land and Water Australia Eureka Prize for Water Research. "The phone hasn't stopped ringing" Ivor told Public Perspective from his office at the Arthur Rylah Institute.

Ivor and joint winner Alan Williams of Goulburn Murray Water were awarded \$10,000 for developing the Carp Cage, a device that separates carp from native fish, trapping the carp for easy removal from the river.

During the many hours spent watching the Murray River Alan, a weir keeper, noticed carp had a tendency to jump. Alan began thinking about ways to use this information to trap the carp, so they could be removed from the river.

On a visit north, Ivor spotted a cage Alan



Ivor Stuart, Alan Williams and Matt Jones inspect the Carp Cage

had been working on, in his shed. "Alan was on the right track, but he needed encouragement and more importantly, funding."

The Murray Darling Basin Commission provided the necessary funding, and over two years the team, including ARI's John MacKenzie, developed a prototype.

At the moment there are 2 or 3 cages in the middle reaches of the Murray, where carp numbers are relatively low. Ivor is looking forward to trying the cage in South Australia, where carp are abundant.

"We're deliberately going slow with the prototype, wanting feedback and tweaking the model if we need to. I estimate that over the next 5-10 years there will be 10 cages in place, covering 2000 km of the Murray," said Ivor.

Ivor has received strong inquiries from the United States and New Zealand, who are struggling with similar problems posed by introduced species of fish in their waterways, and there has been a lot of interest locally from groups caring for all manner of waterways, from rivers to wetlands.

"The Carp Cage is kind of like penicillin. It's practical and effective and everyone wants it,

as it's seen as a bit of a quick fix to deal with introduced fish species."

"We still encourage groups to take into account wider environmental concerns, rather than putting all their eggs in one cage. Reducing carp or other introduced species will help waterways, but there are other concerns, such as pollution, the Carp Cage doesn't address."

How does the Carp Cage work? Fish swim into the metal trap. The native fish head to the bottom of the trap looking for a way out, and the carp head to the surface. The carp actually jump out, landing in a second trap. The native species are then released into the river, and the carp is collected and provided to a commercial operator for processing.

The Murray Darling Basin Commission Chief Engineer was so impressed with the Carp Cage he encouraged Ivor to nominate for a Eureka Prize. Ivor and Alan have split the prize money, and Ivor is planning to use his portion of the prize to purchase equipment to aid his field research, such as a new GPS or a new laptop.

"Alan will probably spend his on power tools. Definitely something for his shed"

The field season for Ivor runs from September to May, so he's preparing to head out again to catch fish to gather data on natives and carp. He's also still working on the Carp Cage and participating in a tri-state project installing new fishways from the mouth of the Murray River to the Hume Weir.

"There are only a handful of people who do this sort of work, and we all get along really well. There's a lot of co-operation between the staff of the different organisations, including interstate colleagues."

"In the field season we usually spend 2 weeks away from home per month. You work long hours while you're away, in fairly remote areas, so you need to be very self sufficient and robust to the elements." Ivor told Public Perspective.

"It's hard sometimes, but I love it."



Dead carp trapped in the Carp Cage