MANSFIELD RESERVE

History and Background

Mansfield Reserve was once part of the Retford Park Estate. The property belonged to the Hordern family who also owned the neighbouring property, Milton Park.

The Retford Park house and some land was subsequently sold to Mr James Fairfax but the land which now makes up Mansfield Reserve was retained by the US company King Ranch in which the Baillieu and Hordern families had an involvement. King Ranch ran a cattle stud on the land.

In 1991, at the time of the subdivision of the Mansfield Road and Kimberley Drive blocks from Milton Park, the owner, the late Mr Peter Baillieu, gave this 34.4 hectare parcel of land expressly “for recreation for the community in perpetuity”.

Mansfield Reserve was formally established as a Reserve by Wingecarribee Shire Council in 1993 after strong community demand that it be available to the public. Further recognition of Mansfield Reserve’s environmental values came with the mapping of its remnant vegetation as a mix of Southern Highlands Shale Woodland,
Mt Gibraltar Forest and Robertson Basalt Tall Open Forest, all Endangered Ecological Communities under the Threatened Species Conservation Act (NSW).

**Facilities**

There are mown walking tracks around the Reserve, as shown on the map at the car park. There is pedestrian access to the Reserve from Kimberley Drive. There is one picnic table. Because of fire risk, there are no barbeque facilities. There are no public toilets.

A Plan of Management drawn up for Wingecarribee Shire Council in 2007 reflected the wishes of the community that this area remains in its natural, undeveloped state as a native bushland site.

**Topography**

The Reserve covers almost 35 hectares of wooded areas and open grassland, some of which has been replanted with appropriate species. The Reserve is gently undulating, rising to 800 metres on the north eastern boundary.

The Mittagong Creek rises outside the eastern boundary of the Reserve, within Milton Park. It flows through the ferny gullies of the Reserve before crossing into the Retford Park property on its way through Bowral to join the Wingecarribee River at Burradoo, eventually becoming part of Sydney’s water supply. This protected watercourse varies from a bare trickle in the height of drought to a fierce torrent during floods and it is essential for the survival of the wildlife living within the Reserve.

**Flora**

Visitors to the Reserve will see the tree species included in the classification of Southern Highlands Shale Woodland at every stage of their life cycles. Some ancient trees stand as skeletons or have fallen over. Many of the younger trees have been planted by teams working under the supervision of Wingecarribee Shire Council staff. Others have established themselves by natural seed dispersal and regeneration, now that the land is no longer grazed or mown widely.

A few of the Eucalypt species found in the Reserve are Cabbage Gum (*E. amplifolia*), Mountain Grey Gum (*E. cypellocarpa*), Brown Barrel (*E. fastigata*), Narrow Leafed Peppermint (*E. radiata*) and Manna Gum (*E. viminalis*). Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) and Blackwood Wattle (*Acacia melanoxylon*) are found, as are Black She Oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*).

In the gullies of the Mittagong Creek at the eastern end of the Reserve, the Rough Tree Fern (*Cyathea australis*) can be seen. Numerous shrubs and ground plants are found, along with the pasture which remains from the land’s grazing history.
Fauna

Wombats, and wallabies and can be seen in the Reserve although they are very wary. Echidnas, kangaroos and tortoises have been seen very occasionally and possums, bats and gliders inhabit hollows in the trees. Reptiles, especially Copperhead snakes, also live in the Reserve. Rabbits, hares and foxes are commonly seen vertebrate pests.

The bird life of the Reserve is abundant and often spectacular. A large flock of Sulphur Crested Cockatoos is often seen and heard. The wooded areas in the eastern part of the Reserve are home to Rosellas, Lorikeets, King Parrots, Galahs, Corellas, Whip Birds, Kookaburras and Owls. Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos pass through the Reserve and a Wedge-Tailed Eagle has been seen.

The wooded, rocky hill in the north eastern corner of the Reserve is the site of a fascinating mutually beneficial relationship between diverse species. It is one of only a few specific habitats for the Silky Hairstreak butterfly (*Pseudalmenus chlorinda chloris*). This butterfly requires three essential elements to survive: one type of ant (*Iridomyrmex foetans*) and two types of trees.

The close proximity of *Eucalyptus viminalis* and *Acacia melanoxolon*, along with the particular ants, is crucial for the Silky Hairstreak butterfly. The ants live under the bark of the Eucalyptus trees and they obtain a sweet liquid from an organ on the backs of the butterfly larvae which feed on the leaves of the Acacia. The ants feed this liquid to their own larvae. The presence of the ants protects the butterfly larvae from attack by parasitic wasps and flies. This is a great example of the balance and interdependence of species.

Bushcare

Mansfield Reserve is cared for by Council’s Bushcare team, who monitor the reserve and control pest species. Local residents and ‘friends’ of the reserve have recently established a Mansfield Reserve Bushcare group and invite the participation of anyone who would like to help care for the reserve.

The Bushcare group held their inaugural working bee on 23 November 2016 and will hold monthly working bees on the 4th Wednesday of the month from February 2017.