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WildEndurance competitors Jo Holgate, Nadine Lucas and Michael O'Neil, from Coolamon Central School, pictured with past and present students of the Duke of Edinburgh program before their marathon event in May.

# Return to the wild

**Beau Greenway**

A TRIO of intrepid Coolamon teachers is preparing for a torturous 100-kilometre marathon. Now in its eighth year, WildEndurance is a challenge for teams of two to seven participants who walk or run either 50 or 100 kilometres through a four stage course within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The event will be held on May 2 and 3, with Coolamon Central School teachers Jo Holgate, Nadine Lucas and Michael O'Neill currently in training for the grueling 100 kilometre challenge.

Javelin Australia is assisting with an event which is operated by The Wilderness Society. All three competed in WildEndurance last year, saying they would never do it again, but have decided they will back up for another year. Holgate said she initially found out about the event from a newspaper and showed it to Lucas and they came to a decision to compete in it. "Michael has recently retired from teaching but is the Duke of Edinburgh co-ordinator at the school," she said. "We are all interested in the same stuff and we do a lot of our Duke of

Edinburgh activities in the Blue Mountains. "That was what sparked the interest because it is held in the Blue Mountains and we were familiar with it." She said it was something that they wanted to try but because they have taken a lot of students to the area for canyoning and abseiling. However, Mrs Holgate admitted the team hadn't had a lot of opportunity to

prepare for the event because of the lack of hills in the region. "Because we are so far away from the track we actually run a boot camp at school for ourselves and anyone else who wants to come along and get fit which has been the base for our training," she said. "We also run and swim during summer, but other than that, we haven't done a lot of hill training.

"A lot of people that do enter the event are from Sydney or around that area so they have a chance to go out and do one of the legs of the event. "The event is broken into four sections so there are three checkpoints and we have to have a support crew. She added that the event had run for seven years and it was the first time that it was held

under bad conditions. "It was raining, it was 3.3 degrees with a wind chill factor of minus 3.3, and gale force winds," Holgate said. "They were absolutely horrendous conditions, we were wearing skins, thermals and wet weather gear so we were sweating on the inside and wet on the outside. Despite knowing what the terrain is like and the likelihood that conditions will be much better, it will be far from easy for the team. "I don't think it will be a breeze this year, but we are certainly hoping to finish in better condition than last year," Holgate said.

Holgate paid special tribute to the hard work of Chris and Jodie Guthrie who supported them all the way and will be back to help again this year. "They were brilliant because we were ringing them at 3am saying we were five kilometres away from the checkpoint and they would be there," she said. This year, Holgate, Lucas, O'Neill and all other competitors will be raising funds to help track and save koalas in the Blue Mountains. Koalas in New South Wales were recently listed as a threatened species under the Federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) and koala sightings in the Blue Mountains are extremely rare. Before December 2013, there had been no koala sightings on record in the Upper Blue Mountains since the 1940's - nearly 70 years ago. WildEndurance has partnered with Science for Wildlife where a proportion of funds will be directed for the training of koala detection dogs, GPS equipment and koala collars.

**I don't think it will be a breeze this year, but we are certainly hoping to finish in better condition this year.**

— Jo Holgate, WildEndurance marathon competitor

**INSANITY STREAK** by Tony Lopes

