

April 2026 Newsletter

From the President

The new committee

I am pleased to welcome the four new members to our committee – Brian Jordan, Joost Kroese, Jill Meredith, and David Rodgers. Each brings unique life experiences and expertise to our group, ensuring that we can look forward with confidence to the year ahead. Murray Allison, Neal Borrie, Dorothy Jordan and Lyn Minchington will continue to serve on the committee.

Our thanks go to retiring members Nancy Borrie and John Prendergast for their valuable contributions to U3A Ellesmere over the years. As vice-president, John has willingly stepped into the president's role when I have been unavailable, and has contributed wisely to our discussions. Nancy has steered the task of drafting our new constitution with diligence, and thankfully this work is now completed.

At our first committee meeting we elected Lyn Minchington to be our vice-president.

The annual subscription

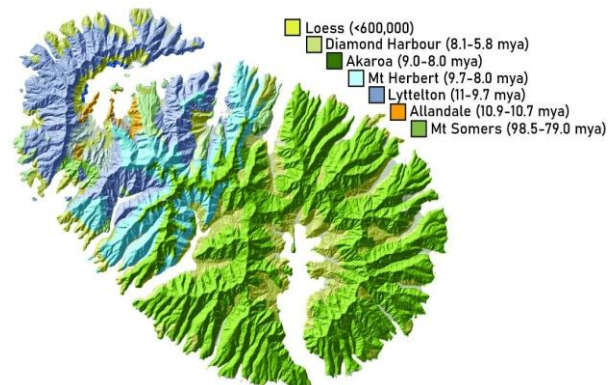
Subscription payments were due last month, and I have been advised by Neal that, to date, 20% of members have yet pay their subscription. If you intend continuing as a member of U3A Ellesmere but have yet to pay, please do this without delay. On the other hand, if you have decided to not continue to be a member, please notify us by emailing us at u3aellesmere@gmail.com as soon as possible.

We are continuing to receive applications from people who are keen to join our U3A, but their applications cannot proceed unless we are below our membership limit of 250. Resignations help us to manage this.

Instructions for payment by bank transfer were in the March newsletter. If you are unsure whether or not you had already paid, please check with Neal first.

Our March speaker

Dr Sam Hampton gave a very interesting talk on the volcanology of our near neighbour, Banks Peninsula. Sam used this map to explain the variation in rock types across the region. The rhyolite rock found in Akaroa Harbour is the same type as formed Mount Somers, over 100km away. On the other hand, the rock in the hills surrounding Lyttelton Harbour is primarily basalt.



Usually volcanoes are associated with moving tectonic plates, so the cause of the Banks Peninsula and Otago Peninsula volcanoes is still being debated.

In the future, on trips to Banks Peninsula, we can look out for the geological features such as lava flows, dykes and caves that Sam described. The web site <https://www.bpgeopark.com/> is worthwhile visiting.

Wikipedia also has a very informative article on the volcanology of Banks Peninsula.

This month's speaker

Wednesday 22nd April

Mark Rocket's talk will be "Building an Aerospace Nation". *

Mark is a New Zealand entrepreneur, aerospace executive, and the founder and CEO of Kea Aerospace. He was a seed investor and co-director of Rocket Lab from 2007 to 2011. He became the first New Zealander to reach space through a suborbital flight with Blue Origin on the New Shepard NS-32 mission in 2025.

(Mark's original surname was Stevens. Presumably he changed his name as a marketing strategy. Maybe I should have changed my name from "Wood" to "Wool"? Many times, while working in wool R&D, I received letters addressed to "Errol Wool".)*

Forthcoming speakers

May 27th – Joe Bennett, Press columnist – "What Happens to Happen"

June 24th – Wallace Woodley – eminent organist – "The Historical Development of the Piano"

July 22nd – Dick Sainsbury, retired Professor of Geriatrics – "Healthy Aging"

August 26th – Elsamari Botha, University of Canterbury – "Artificial Intelligence"

September 30th – Simon Lewis, President, Canterbury Astronomical Society - "Astronomy"

The Last Word(s)

The rise and risks of the smartphone

The ubiquitous smartphone was described in the January 14th issue of New Scientist as one of the "21 best ideas of the 21st century" (so far). Those of us who remember the good old days of phoning someone will recall the frustrating "party line" system, expensive toll calls, the rotary dial phone, and the red, coin-operated phone box at the end of the street. We have come a long way since then.

Nowadays, the ubiquitous mobile phone is used by people out walking, commuting on bus and train, restaurant dining, exercising at the gym, or just waiting. I wonder if a water-proof phone for the shower has been developed? It seems that the art of face-to-face conversation is disappearing, and people prefer to send a text rather than phoning up for a chat.

In 2007 Steve Jobs said at the launch of the first iPhone, "every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything". For once, this wasn't just marketing hype. The iPhone's release brought "apps" into our vocabulary, and placed a powerful personal computer into people's pockets. Today's smartphones possess millions of times more computing power, memory, and speed than the Apollo Guidance Computer (AGC) that guided the first moon landing!

Why has the smartphone changed our lives? They have moved us from using our phone as a simple communication tool to a rapid, essential "gateway to human knowledge" that act as an extension of ourselves. They have fundamentally reshaped how we navigate, socialise, work, and manage our daily lives.

How has the smartphone changed our lives?

- **Instant Access to Information:** The smartphone is essentially a portable encyclopedia. We can fact-check, learn a new skill, or even earn a degree on-line from anywhere at any time.
- **Consolidation of Devices:** It has replaced dozens of standalone items, including cameras, camcorders, GPS navigators, torches, calculators, and physical maps.
- **The "On-Demand" Economy:** Entire industries like the ride-sharing business Uber and food delivery rely on smartphone apps to function. We now book flights, manage bank accounts, and pay for groceries without physical cash or cards.
- **Constant Connectivity:** Social media and video calling (FaceTime, Messenger, WhatsApp, Zoom) have eliminated geographical barriers, allowing us to see and speak to anyone, almost anywhere, instantly.
- **Health and Safety:** They have apps that track our steps, monitor our sleep, and provide immediate access to emergency services with features like crash detection.

We can't ignore the broader impact of smartphones around the world. Today, seven in ten people worldwide own a smartphone. They have allowed people in many low-income countries to bypass the desktop computer completely. Furthermore, the influence of smartphones extends far below these devices. Electronic components such as camera sensors, transistors and motion sensors were rapidly shrunk in size to enable 21st century innovations such as drones, virtual-reality headsets, and tiny medical implants.

Recent research has found that younger people use their phones differently than older adults. It has been found that:

- Young adults send text messages much more often than older groups
- In over-50s, 80% sent or received fewer than 10 texts a day
- 90% of every age group makes less than 10 phone calls a day

This is because young adults rely on text messaging to be their primary way of communicating with friends. Younger people text more often, and in more situations. On the other hand, adults consider first whether text messaging is the right form of communication to say what they want to say.

What are the downsides?

While they offer immense convenience, smartphones have also introduced new challenges:

- **Digital Addiction:** Constant notifications create "dopamine hit cycles," leading many to struggle with resisting their screens.
- **Weakened Social Skills:** Research suggests that having a phone out during face-to-face interactions can decrease the quality of the conversation and reduce empathy.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Excessive use is linked to increased anxiety, sleep disruption (due to blue light), and a shorter attention span.
- **Privacy and Security:** Storing personal data, passwords, and banking info on one device increases the risk of identity theft and cyber-threats.

At any moment we can disappear inside our phones, like a snail retreating into its shell. This, combined with safety concerns, has led many countries to ban phones in schools. Australia has recently imposed a blanket ban on accessing social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok for children under 16.

The negative aspects of phone use has prompted experts to recommend a “digital detox” - even for just three days - to reset focus, improve sleep, and strengthen real-world connections.

Does limiting social media access help to protect our teens?

While New Zealand is considering following the Australian approach, the UK is launching a research trial involving 4,000 12-to-15 year-olds from 10 schools. Each student will install an app on their phone to track their social media use. For half of them the app will also restrict their time on selected social media apps such as YouTube, Tik-Tok, Facebook, and Instagram. They will be able to use these apps for a total of just one hour, and there will be a nighttime curfew between 9pm and 7am. The other half of the students will be able to continue to use social media as per normal.

The trial will also collect additional data on anxiety, sleep quality, time spent with friends and family, well-being, body image, school absences, and bullying.

The trial will run for six weeks around October, and it is anticipated that the first results will be published in mid-2027. These should provide more sound information to guide future decisions by governments in developing legislation to control the access to social media by our young people.

Postscript: The University of Waterloo in Canada has discovered that heavy mobile phone use is linked to lower intelligence. Here is the link:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/news/heavy-smartphone-use-linked-lower-intelligence>

Responsibilities for 2026/27:

President – Errol Wood, **Vice-President** – Lyn Minchington, **Secretary** – Murray Allison,

Treasurer – Neal Borrie **Interest Groups Coordinator** - Lyn Minchington

Membership Coordinator – Dorothy Jordan

Committee members: Brian Jordan, Joost Kroese, Jill Meredith, David Rodgers

Morning Tea Team Leader – Nola Sutherland

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