

LOWER BLUE MOUNTAINS
CONSERVATION SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER.

OCTOBER 1981.

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NEXT MEETING.

Annual General Meeting on Friday, October, 9th, at 8.00pm, at the Glenbrook Teachers Centre, in Ross Street, opposite the tennis courts. The election of officers for the next year will be followed by a business meeting, and supper.

Future Meeting.

November, 13th, at 8.00pm at the above address. It is hoped that Mrs. Patterson will be able to speak at this meeting on the role of the National Trust with particular emphasis on nature conservation. This talk will add an important dimension to the ways in which our society can go about conserving natural areas.

OUTINGS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11th, a walk is planned for St. Helena, a crater in the Glenbrook National Park. The walk will go into the crater from Blaxland, crossing Glenbrook Creek. Richard Phillipps is leading the walk, meeting at 6 Ross Crescent, Blaxland at 11.30 am.

NOVEMBER, 15th, a walk/visit to Lennox Bridge, in Mitchell's Pass, on the Sunday, meeting at the bridge at 10.30 am. We would like to look at the work that is being done to restore the bridge, and will invite a representative from Blue Mountains Council to explain the landscaping and general management of the area to attend. (This will be confirmed at the next meeting.) Mitchell's Pass is a vitally important area whose management is a great concern to the society.

CHRISTMAS PARTY.

SATURDAY, 12th December, at 20 Gwen Crescent, Warrimoo, at 6.30pm. Gwen Crescent is off Terrymont Road, which is the first road on the left off Railway Parade, coming from Springwood direction. No. 20 is a battle-axe block, so you could park in the Crescent, and walk down the driveway.

Depending on fire bans, we hope to have a barbeque. If not, bring along your picnic hampers, and a chair or cushion. The raffle for the oil painting of the white cockatoo will be drawn that night. Wendy Godfrey will be showing her slides of Fraser Island after dinner, and a song or two around the "campfire" will round off an enjoyable evening. Come along, with your family and friends and renew friendships. Don't forget to bring your tucker and liquid refreshments.

OTHER EVENTS.

S.G.A.P. is holding its annual open day exhibition on the long weekend in October, 3rd - 5th, at which this society will have a poster display on Hiroshima. If anyone would like to volunteer to man the display for some of the time, it would be greatly appreciated.

The Society for Growing Australian Plants will have its display at their centre on the Great Western Highway, Glenbrook. Here is a chance to see masses of our bushland flowers in bloom.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31st is the annual dinner of the Nature Conservation Council at the Australian Museum, at Senator Colin Mason, (Democrats) is the guest speaker for the evening. Cost is \$10 per head and bookings may be made from the Environment Centre, 399 Pitt Street, Sydney.

At the last meeting Philip Simpfendorfer talked about the Renewing of the Dreaming camps, particularly the most recent one held at a beautiful forest below Pigeonhouse Mountain, (Balgaan) and showed slides of those camps that began two years ago.

It is difficult to put into words or to show through slides the feelings experienced and wealth of understanding gained from the last camp held during the last weekend in Winter, and the dawning of the first day of Spring. Besse Bramsen read a poem to the meeting, one that she had composed atop Balgaan that morning as 50 members from the camp of some 100, watched the rising of the sun, and evoked the earth's renewing.

Balgaan, or "The Nipple", is shaped like a women's breast, and to the Aborigines is a "place of plenty tucker".

Balgaan is a power site, venerated by the Australian Aborigines who use the consciousness and energy from that site for the wellbeing of the tribes and the environment. That morning on top of the mountain the people were a vehicle for the release of that energy to flow out to renew the natural environment in Australia.

How important it is that white men "discover" and become attuned to the sites of power so that the earth will be able to withstand the onslaught it is facing from development. "Because mankind has wounded the Earth and weakened it, he must begin to nurture it, and allow its consciousness and energy to flow freely again. The Dreaming is thereby renewed and the Earth shudders and shakes off the evil that binds it"

This current renewal is worldwide in attitude, and Guboo Ted Thomas and Philip see a great and important contribution from Australia enriching the world consciousness towards a better caring and understanding of the Earth.

One can enumerate the aims of the Renewing of the Dreaming Camps, but to feel it personally, experience a growth in awareness, is something that transcends the words written here. It is an experience not to be missed, that one can partake in next Spring, or the other camps held during the year, organised through Philip Simpfendorfer and Jann Stewart. The harmony and sharing amongst the participants remain as something unique in today's world.

The aims of the Renewing of the Dreaming camps are:

- To bring into ourselves and into our culture the power latent within centres of consciousness and energy in the natural environment.
- To forge links with Aboriginal ancestors, people and culture.
- To encourage identification, recording, preservation and use of special sites
- To support land rights and reparations for Aboriginal people
- To develop an appreciation and understanding of the indigenous Australian Environment, and to support environmental protection.

Reference: "Journey to Earth's Dawning"
by P. Simpfendorfer 1981.

WALK TO LOCKLEYS PYLON

Sunday, September 13th was a perfect day for walking, clear and ideal for viewing the valley of the Grose and Govett's Leap creek. After gingerly traversing a few bad spots on the Mount Hay road, we arrived at the water tank where the cars were parked and the trek began. Besse set a mean pace out front, and it seemed she was going to be the first to the top of Lockley's Pylon. Wildflowers were blooming in profusion in the heathlands and swamp areas. Native Iris en masse, boronia in many delicate shades, and even the occasional small blue Glossodia orchid, to the backdrop of the Grose and Mt. Banks was something to behold. The track passed The Pinnacles, a series of strange weathered ironstone formations, and Mt. Hay in the distance. Lunch was enjoyed atop the Pylon taking in the 360° view and filling in the visitors book left in the stone cairn at the crest. One couple were lucky to have a fleeting visit from a 4ft. brown snake as they sat down to eat!

All were pleased with the walk and to be back at the cars that afternoon, but the trial was yet to come. One section of the road proved too steep, rocky and eroded for the cars. All piled out and pushed each car up the hill in a blaze of rocks, dust and rubber. There were visions of spending the night there as some cars refused to move. To everyone's relief, all cars finally made it, leaving us wondering if we would ever get back again to climb Mount Hay.

On Wednesday, 12th August, Besse Bramsen and myself represented the Society at an information day for conservationists arranged by Chris Pratten of the Nature Conservation Council at the Penrith Lakes Scheme Development Corporation Pty. Ltd. in Penrith. Those attending were Milo Dunphy, Christine Townend and another member from T.E.C., Chris Pratten from NCC, a student from New England University doing a study on conflicting land uses and the Lakes Scheme, two members from an ornithological group, two members from the Castlereagh Residents Action Group, David O'Keefe, general manager of the Corporation, John Bovard, Engineer for the company, and Stan Rees, landscape architect with the corporation.

Three hours were spent around the discussion table, during which a history of the scheme and more detailed developments recently were presented by Mr. O'Keefe and John Bovard. Questions were welcomed and answered candidly, showing that the Corporation had a good grasp of the problems involved with the development of such a scheme, on the Nepean River flood plain, close to the River. The Corporation welcomes public participation in its planning process, and will arrange for people to meet with or communicate with their variety of consultants in specialist areas to discuss perceived problems. At the moment, it is envisaged that the Plan and Regional E.I.S. will be displayed to the public in February 1982 for comment.

At this display, the options for rehabilitation of Castlereagh will be presented, including,

1. No more extraction
2. Lower the general level of the land
3. Low-level wetlands
4. "Pessimistic" plan, that allows for more non-commercial "quiet" recreation...camping, picnicing, wind surfing, swimming, small boat hire, wildlife lake...etc.
5. "Optimistic" plan, allowing far more commercial development, casino, motel/hotel, motor boats, sailing, theme park, boat hire, residential development. ..etc.
6. A combination of the above two.

The term "pessimistic" ("realistic" quoted Chris Pratten!) is used to describe an economic climate where there is continued unemployment, more leisure hours, but less money, less fuel at higher prices to preclude such a great use of motor oriented recreation. It was stressed that these "plans" may not be in the form of maps, but simply a list of options to allow for changing demands over time - dynamic planning in fact. Thus there will be no definite site for a particular land use. It may not even eventuate, given changing circumstances. However the option will be there, given its compatibility with surrounding land uses. (eg. motor boats could not be next to a wildlife lake.)

One wonders if dynamic planning might get out of control in the future. For instance, if a plan 4 - pessimistic plan was chosen, for environmental reasons, but allowed to accommodate changes in society in the future, would a more affluent society be able to press for the inclusion of motorised recreation requirements to be allowed in the scheme. This would destroy the original concept of a quiet recreation area.

How much notice will be taken of public comment in choosing a plan and will pressure groups be able to continue to maintain an active interest in the planning and final outcome? One becomes immediately aware that public participation in such a project is vitally important.

The Penrith Lakes Scheme Development Corporation is totally funded by the four gravel companies involved in mining, BMG, Pioneer, Ready Mix Concrete, and Farley and Lewers. The Corporation is there expressly to find a means to rehabilitate the region after extraction. If it is decided to discontinue mining after consideration of the Environmental Impact Statement,, the Corp. will clean up what has been done, and disband. If the Lakes Scheme goes ahead, the Corp. will continue until completion, then hand over management to Government bodies, preferably State, as it is a State recreation area, and then disband. Management costs will be recouped by charging to use the facilities of the lakes, both active and passive.

The Penrith Lakes Scheme Development Corporation has also been asked by the Dept. of Environment and Planning, to complete a Regional Environmental Impact Statement under a steering committee, made up from members of the Dept., Penrith City Council, the Dept. of Mineral Resources, Water Resources Commission, and the Penrith Lakes Scheme Corp. It was felt that the effects of noise, dust and water problems affect the region, rather than the immediate area being mined.

Water for these lakes for filling, flushing and replenishing from the effects of evaporation, was uppermost in the minds of those attending. The Corporation believes that, although the Nepean is "on its last legs", supplying water for irrigation and acting as a sewer, it will be able to take water from the Nepean in times of high flow. Erskines and Glenbrook Creeks were ruled out as a water source, as they are in a National Park, (Why were they ever mentioned??), and the Grose River also has been discounted as it is believed that eventually the water will become as polluted as the Nepean as development continues upstream. (Does this include coal mining?)

Will the Lakes require another source of water in times of drought, such as we've been experiencing? The holes already left by mining excavation, have filled with ground water, and one wonders what will be the effect of a much greater area (only 15% has been mined to date.) of excavations withholding ground water from the natural flow northwards to where farms tap this underground water source?

Regarding floods, the natural levee banks are able to withstand the 100 year flood. However, these banks have been tampered with by mining operations, such that flood waters will enter the flood plain on which the scheme rests. The engineer feels that flood waters will not destroy the Lakes Scheme, but will cause damage as would be caused elsewhere in Penrith. However, this influx of flood waters could change the course of the Nepean.

There will be about 300-400 metres of bank between the River and the proposed lake/s. Consultants are also looking into the stability of the Nepean maintaining its present course.

In the afternoon, we were taken around the huge area that will encompass the Lakes Scheme. Abandoned quarries were seen, where no rehabilitation had been enforced, as was past practice, and these were vertical sided holes, eroded and partly filled with water. We were then taken to a quarry where some rehabilitation work had only just begun. (The P.L.S.D.C. has only been in operation since April 1st, 1980.) Here, sides were sloped down to the water's edge, (1:6 - a 1:10 slope is preferred.) To prevent erosion, a contour channel was being graded, and it is planned to crop plant the slope with red clover, or couch, with some trees.

To help reduce the dust, water tanks travel the roads within the quarry working areas. It is hoped to restrict truck movements to within the excavation area, as much as possible, and conveyor belts are being looked into as an alternative, less dusty/noisy means of transport of material to the four crushing plants.

As there are four companies, each has its own crusher. We were told that the Trade Practices Act prevents the four combining to use one crusher, that would be more appropriate environmentally.

It is envisaged that the area will be towards the end of its productive mining life in 20-25 years, and that the scheme will come into operation then, providing that is the course of action to be taken. The grand Lakes Scheme will cost \$65 million and the Wetlands option will be in the vicinity of \$15 million.

There is much more that was covered at the meeting that would be too long to include here. I feel that the meeting did much to establish a ground of co-operation between Conservationists and the Penrith Lakes Scheme Corporation, in that the Corp. is aware of many of the problems that concern conservationists, and that they are prepared to listen to suggestions. The general feeling of the Conservationists was to go away, think about it, and come back with further problems, questions, recommendations and reports.

My feelings, however, go out to the beautiful rich countryside that will be lost to the Penrith district. Castlereagh is such a picturesque region, and to lose those green fields dotted with old homes, characteristic barns, dairy cattle, market gardens, orchards, horses and the irrigation hoses playing in the late afternoon sunlight, under the backdrop of the blue mountains, will take away much of the character that the district has to offer. Appreciate those farmlands now, while we still have them, 20 years hence will be too late.

(Correction; Penrith Lakes Development Corporation Pty. Ltd. is the correct title of the Company.)

DARKS COMMON

The meeting with Mr. Wran at the Lapstone Scout Hall on that windy August afternoon proved fruitful for Darks Common. Mick Dark spoke with Mr. Wran, who was quite convinced that no houses should be built on the site. The Submission prepared by the society has been sent to the various government departments involved, and in which it is asked that Darks Common be managed by a trust. To this end a number of people from the society were elected last meeting to be on a committee to make more detailed management requirements for the Common.

Next Year, 1982, will be the year of the tree, but it will also be the first year of the Decade of the Tree. Initiator, Dr. Richard St. Barbe Baker, who is 91, says that there is a need for a decade of the tree to enable people to become more involved and to allow enough trees to be planted. When the Year of the Tree was held in England some time ago, the nurseries did not have enough seedlings to cope with the demand, and he does not want this to happen in Australia. Dr. St. Barbe Baker wants people to get away from the concept of "Plant a Tree" to one of "Plant Acres of Trees".

Planting trees by the part acre is the common practice in China, where their unit of measurement is smaller than an acre. School children each year, at each school, determine amongst themselves how many "acres" of trees they will plant for that year. Once decided, they stick to that goal, for to do otherwise would let the community and school down. Perhaps here too, the answer lies in our schoolchildren.

In China, 45 million people are employed full time, just planting trees.

Australia is one of the worst countries for tree cover in the world. Only 4½% of Australia is under trees, compared with 26% in France, 29% in Germany, 57% in Sweden, and 85% in British Columbia. Dr. St. Barbe Baker believes 33% is the minimum for safety. Australia has been skinned alive, and we need to restore the skin of Australia.

Older residents of the Mountains would agree too, as they have seen the tall canopy of trees disappear from the Mountains, mainly through logging, in the past. With deserts on the march, Dr. St. Barbe Baker can remain an optimist, but one wonders about how the Mountains will fare the way man is treating them through development and fires. Perhaps in the Year of the Tree, again, we could work towards improvements in Council's Tree Preservation Order.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDER IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

The society has received some correspondence from the Council regarding the Tree Preservation Order and the Control of trees. The Council considers that the Order has been effective while admitting the difficulties of administering this area of Council's activities. "The effectiveness of any Tree Preservation Order is more dependent upon public education and awareness than on policing procedures". The society also believes that effectiveness depends on prosecution of offenders.

The criteria concerning lopping or removal of trees throughout the mountains is based on the following principles, writes the Council.

1. If tree is dead, dying or becoming dangerous for the following reasons:
 - (a) if struck by lightning
 - (b) if destroyed or excessively damaged by storm
 - (c) If root system makes tree unstable and poses danger to public or adjacent property, or Council asset.
 - (d) if tree is affected by termites or dry rot as to affect stability of tree.
 - (e) if lean of tree is such that the tree may fall
 - (f) if arrangement of branches exceeds the centre of gravity and brings about a turning movement that may make the tree fall.
2. If tree is considered an obstruction for following reasons;
 - (a) obstruction to traffic site distance
 - (b) if tree's location conflicts with construction work
The example given here by the Council refers to trees "placed in the centre of a designed road - Park Street, Glenbrook." Note; these trees were on the footpath, not in the roadway, and were taken down early on the morning before the Council opened, so that the residents nearby were powerless to stop the destruction, or to find out what was going on!
 - (c) obstruction of installation of services.
 - (d) if a tree is on a common boundary and obstructs the construction of a fence, etc.

The council states that its criteria for lopping and removal of trees is based on "common sense" with the aim for protection of life and property and securing the implementation of Council's resolutions regarding works programmes.

Regarding work's programmes, more thought should be given to design of such roadways, footpaths etc. so that trees will not need to be removed unless there is absolutely no other alternative. The above outline does not give one confidence in the saving of the trees along Glenbrook Road around the lagoon, should the Council decide to widen the road if the new shopping centre is built.

Valley Heights treatment works is at the head of a small creek, a tributary of Fitzgerald's Creek, that flows through some of the most beautiful bushland, tall blue/grey gums and ferns. It is a favourite walk of ours, offering a chance to see numerous birds; ducks, nesting pardelopes, and lyre birds to name a few. However, our most recent trips have not been quite so pleasant. The stench from the creek with its run-off from the treatment works was to the point of being unbearable, leaving us both feeling sick the rest of the day. The creek is filled with a thick grey sludge, bubbling away menacingly, and supporting a strange red algae. The creek's flow is slowed by the deposition of this sludge, and the little pools are filling in. This creek once formed a popular swimming hole for Warrimoo residents, but not any more.

The society has written to the Dept. of Health and The M.W.S.D.B. asking for this outflow to be checked. Other sewerage treatment works may also be causing similar problems in your area. If so, let the society know.

Yet another problem, in this beautiful valley is the removal of soil near the creek, exposing thick roots of the tall gums, and killing numerous native flowering shrubs.

The track continues on to Long Angle Gully, the source of so much contention recently with illegal clearing. Motor bikes roar through the area, gouging deep tracks in the creek banks. It seems more clearing could be going on, as tracks of a bulldozer were followed to a newly fenced area.

CONTROL BURNING.

Another Winter of discontent, as we are confronted with burnt bushland and smoke filled weekends. One wonders what is the use of these control burns in areas away from houses, where the sides of whole valleys are scorched with not a house in sight. If people refuse to take responsibility for fire hygiene around their homes, and rely on the bush fire brigades as their only hope of salvation from a wildfire, then let them burn a strip behind their land, a perimeter that does not need to extend the whole valley slope.

Meanwhile, while this useless policy continues, we watch the changing character of our bushland, and wonder how long it will be before grassland type vegetation become the dominant form in the Mountains. The 1978 fires burnt through areas that had been control burnt just as they did areas left untouched.

Some observations on control burning in the Lower Mountains:

- hibernating animals may be burnt, or die of shock from sudden awakening
- in areas where burnoffs have been done, there was minimal leaf litter. (Warrimoo)
- Burning hillsides exposes the sandy soil to erosion, especially if there were the spring rains that should be falling
- After scorching the under storey leaves, in the trees, these and others due to drying out with the heat of the fire, will fall to start building up the leaf litter almost immediately.
- Many trees, due to drying out by the heat were unable to withstand the latest winds, and snapped off half way along their trunks.
- Many birds nest in low branches from July onwards ..their habitat is gone
- Loss of pest control with the loss of insect eating birds in this habitat
- Many of the early flowering plants have not seeded before they were burnt, so their species is gradually wiped out of the area
- Later flowering plants were unable to flower and therefore were not able to form seeds.
- Debris from scorched shrubs forms more fuel for fires.
- In some areas only spots some few feet in diameter were burnt, while much of the bushland was untouched. Why these spot burns?
- The opened bushland after a burn is an open invitation to trail bikes to search for new tracks in the sandy soils.

While the bush fire brigades do the most wonderful job in times of wildfires in the Mountains, why is it necessary to continue with these control burns over large areas? Residents must be encouraged to protect their own homes and perhaps burn a perimeter around their homes if need be. Unless this wasteful practice that we see now is stopped, the environment of the Mountains will be irreparably harmed. It has been already, we should not let it continue.

NEWSLETTER

As this will probably be my last newsletter for some time, I would like to say how much I have enjoyed writing it and wish the new editor the same enjoyment amongst the hard work.